PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 389 (Part 1)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
15 July 2002—24 July 2002

£70

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15 July 2002

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 389**

TWENTIETH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001-2002

House of Commons

Monday 15 July 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Defence Spending

1. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What progress has been made in achieving an equitable sharing of the burden of defence spending among other allied European countries in the past 12 months. [66958]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The latest available data show that the defence expenditure of European NATO allies, in aggregate, has remained broadly stable, in real terms, over the past 12 months. However, most European allies are planning to make more of their forces useful and deployable for NATO's missions, to ensure that a better sharing of defence tasks is possible in future. That is why the United Kingdom has strongly supported the need to develop military capabilities through NATO and through the EU headline goal process.

Paul Flynn: Not since the battle of Omdurman has there been such a gulf between the ability of two sides to compete. We now have one superpower in the world with enormous power and superior technology. Is it sensible to put pressure on the new democracies in eastern Europe to spend more on defence in order to become full members of the European Community, when they should be spending far more on building their health services and on other useful services, such as housing and education?

Mr. Hoon: That pressure is, of course, entirely self-generated, as it applies only to those countries that want to become members of NATO. Having visited all the NATO aspirant members, that commitment is a very important part of their political profile at this stage. In those circumstances, we want them to spend more resources on defence. Equally, however, we want them to spend those resources effectively, and we want them to be able to make a successful contribution to NATO.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Whatever the outcome later this afternoon of the comprehensive spending review, I am sure that all Members will welcome any sensible rise in defence spending. Does the Secretary of State not agree that Europe already spends approximately half what the United States spends on defence, but gets nowhere near it in terms of the bangs for our bucks? The important thing is not how much one spends on defence, but what one spends it on. Will the Government therefore take a lead in ensuring that any increase in European defence expenditure is spent on the right things—along the lines of the strategic defence review that the Government initiated—and not on surplus things?

Mr. Hoon: That is precisely why the Government have strongly supported the improvement in European defence capabilities, both through the EU headline goal and through NATO's defence capabilities initiative. It is important that spending is complementary, and does not simply duplicate existing military capabilities. The Government will continue to set out our determination to see Europe improve its military capabilities so that we can participate effectively in operations led by the United States.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the comments made by the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) last week to the Royal United Services Institute. He said that the

> "EU has dreams of a role as a soft superpower".

Does he agree that improvement of the capabilities of our European allies will strengthen both European defence and NATO?

Mr. Hoon: I agree with my hon. Friend. I carefully read the speech of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). I was slightly surprised by some of his observations, but, generally speaking, I welcomed strongly his commitment to spend more on defence—although he did not say that specifically, I assume that I can reasonably infer it from his observations about the need to ensure that the United Kingdom has effective military capabilities. I assume that, in due course, perhaps after 3.30 pm, he will be in a position to make a statement that he wants to emulate Government spending on defence over the next three-year period. I am sure that Labour Members will want to give him every opportunity to match that commitment when it comes.

I entirely agree that one aspect of that defence spending is to ensure that it is effective. My concern about the Conservatives' defence policy is that they do not appear to commit themselves to improving European defence capabilities. Without that commitment, there is a clear risk that we will reproduce and duplicate defence capabilities that are already available to NATO and other allies.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does the Secretary of State agree that the United States is spending approximately twice as much as the rest of the NATO allies, but that its military output is about eight times as great as that of the continental allies because of the manner of that spending? Does he therefore agree that, although pressure should be brought to bear on some of the NATO allies, who, in the phrase of Senator Warner of the United States, have been "slacking off" in their defence expenditure, an increase in specialisation is inevitable if European allies are to remain relevant?

Mr. Hoon: I will not agree with the precise statistics, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman's general argument. If he is going to exert pressure, that pressure might be put on the Opposition Front Bench, as that has been precisely the purpose of the Government's efforts in NATO and as part of the EU headline goal process. The United States is capable of spending all its defence expenditure in one single, coherent direction; we must ensure that the same coherence applies to the defence spending of European nations. That is precisely the Government's policy; sadly, it is not the policy of his party.

Service Personnel

2. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What measures he is taking to improve support for service personnel on their return to civilian life. [66959]

9. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): What measures he is taking to improve support for service personnel on their return to civilian life. [66966]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The Ministry of Defence offers a wide range of support to those experiencing the transition between service and civilian life. For those service leavers eligible to receive standard career transition services, we will introduce on 1 September 2002 a tri-service resettlement manual to align resettlement procedures, policy and structures across the three services. We are also working on replacing the current system for funding resettlement training to allow service leavers greater flexibility for such training.

Mr. Bryant: Many people in Wales will be delighted that the Welsh Guards will now be based in Wales. That will make a significant difference to the resettlement programme for people who have been in the armed forces. May I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider extending the resettlement system to those who are compulsorily discharged so that everyone who is leaving the armed forces gets an equal chance of a job when they leave? Will he also consider the position in Wales, bearing in mind that nearly 10 per cent. of all those recruited to the Royal Air Force come from Wales, but that only one in five of the regiments that recruit in Wales will be based in Wales?

Dr. Moonie: I listened to what my hon. Friend said about Wales with great care. At present, those being compulsorily discharged are not eligible to receive standard career transition services, despite the fact that they may well make up a large percentage of those experiencing problems following their discharge. We are considering changing the current rules to allow such members of the armed forces to receive specialist advice about finding jobs and accommodation and accessing further support should the initial advice fail. A six-month trial to assess the feasibility of this initiative is under way.

Mr. Borrow: Surveys have shown that between 20 and 25 per cent. of rough sleepers have been in the services. What is the Ministry of Defence doing to ensure that those who have difficulty coping with civilian life are looked after when they leave the services?

Dr. Moonie: In addition to working very closely with the rough sleepers unit, we have two specific projects—the spaces programme in Catterick, which is run by the Church of England, and Shelter's project in Colchester—that aim to secure accommodation for people who are compulsorily discharged from the armed forces and who are likely to experience difficulties in civilian life.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is the Minister aware that fast-jet pilots are returning to civilian life with all too great alacrity? The challenge facing Her Majesty's Government is to offer them a career structure which will enable them to stay in the services and will match the remuneration that they receive outside. Has he any new initiatives to offer? Very few fast-jet Fleet Air Arm pilots are left, and the Royal Air Force is also all too short of them.

Dr. Moonie: We have a package that is aimed at retaining air crew. I am happy to say that it is beginning to have some effect.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): In January, the Minister said that he was going to introduce something called a veteran's identity card. I assume that it will now be a veteran's entitlement card, so what will it entitle veterans to?

Dr. Moonie: It is very dangerous to act on one's assumptions. I am sorry to tell the hon. Gentleman that we have not, at present, finalised our proposals for an identity card, which is an extremely difficult thing to introduce. He rightly identifies the fact that the card should be worth more than simply another card to keep in one's wallet.

Departmental Housing

3. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the sale of his Department's housing. [66960]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): As the hon. Gentleman will know, most of the families quarters estate in England and Wales was sold in 1996 to a private company, Annington Homes Ltd., under a sale and leaseback agreement. Under the agreement, houses that subsequently become surplus to defence requirements are released to Annington for disposal. The identification of surplus properties for release is a matter for the Department, but the method of subsequent disposal or usage by Annington is entirely a matter for the company based on its commercial judgment.

Dr. Cable: What estimate has the Department made of the cost to the Exchequer of this privatisation? The property was sold off before the current housing boom, but is now being leased back at market rates or new houses are having to be built. In my constituency, Ministry of Defence houses are in surplus, so they are being rented by the developer at commercial rates at no benefit to the taxpayer or to the armed forces? Is that not a scandal? What are the Government doing about it?

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Who is responsible? Who are the guilty men?

Dr. Moonie: I hesitate to point out yet again that that was a matter for the last Government. It was not the best deal that a Government have made, as I am sure we are all aware.

There is no action that I can take to affect the sale of houses in the constituency of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable). Those houses are the property of Annington Homes and our agreement with it must be obeyed. It imposes a considerable cost on our budget to maintain the leaseback arrangements, but I can see no alternative.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Before the Minister makes an irrevocable decision to sell off the houses owned by the Ministry of Defence at Dean Hill munitions depot, will he bear it in mind that by doing so he is destroying the heart of a rural community? Will he also have a word with Lockheed Martin, which said of the team that services our Paveway bombs at that establishment and is to be disbanded, that the work force at West Dean are quite simply the best?

Dr. Moonie: The decision to change the use of that establishment is not a matter for me, but the sale of the houses is. If houses are surplus to requirements, we have a duty to ensure that we receive the best financial deal when we sell them. However, we always take account of social need. Where possible, the houses are transferred to an appropriate agency outwith the Ministry of Defence.

Regular Army

4. **Sir Michael Spicer** (West Worcestershire): If he will make a statement on changes in the trained strength of the regular army between 1997 and 2001. [66961]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Army strength stood at 101,199 as at 31 December 1997 and 100,914 as at 31 December 2001.

Sir Michael Spicer: Given those figures, how can the Government plan a land war in Iraq?

Mr. Ingram: As we have shown time and again, when our armed forces are called on to defend the interests of this country, they do so.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): That is not an adequate response. There is widespread speculation in the papers and elsewhere that the United Kingdom's contribution to United States' action in Iraq will be one formed division of 20,000 to 25,000 soldiers. The Army is 6,000 under strength and the Government have not lived up to their SDR commitment to recruit 3,500 extras. When will the Army be fully recruited? How confident is the Minister about putting a formed division on the ground in Iraq or anywhere else?

Mr. Ingram: There are two parts to that question. Our recruitment and retention measures have started to turn around the 15-year downward trend. As of June 2002, the whole Army strength stood at 101,503, which is an increase of 1,356 in the past 12 months. We are confident that we will continue to reverse the downward trend of those years. We have put many measures in place to produce a more positive return and they are beginning to pay off.

Welbeck Army College

5. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw): What his plans are for Welbeck army college; and if he will make a statement. [66962]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Following the defence training review, the Ministry of Defence has invited tenders for a private finance initiative contract to provide facilities and to run a defence sixth form college, which will educate potential officer recruits for engineering and other branches requiring technical understanding in the three armed services, and for the Ministry of Defence civil service.

A final decision will not be made before December 2002, but if the decision is made to go ahead with the sixth form college contract it is likely to open on the site of the former Woodhouse barracks outside Loughborough in September 2005. The current Welbeck college would then be closed and the lease of Welbeck Abbey terminated.

John Mann: Bearing in mind the fact that we have a national defence service and the shortage of such facilities in my area, will the Minister exercise caution in making decisions to move a facility from the north of England to a site further south? In particular, will he bear in mind the history of Welbeck army college and the importance to the local economy of the jobs that it creates as the 10th largest employer in my constituency?

Dr. Moonie: I have to say that, as a Scot, I would always object to moving things further south if it could be avoided. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members have no sense of humour.

The move is only about 30 miles, and I can tell my hon. Friend that the Welbeck site is an excellent one, but its owner has indicated that he would like us to terminate the lease there, so we are faced with no option but to look for a development elsewhere. Given my hon. Friend's constituency interest, I should be happy to discuss the matter with him.

Deepcut Barracks (Deaths)

6. **Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): What inquiries he is making in conjunction with the police into the deaths of soldiers at Deepcut barracks in recent years; and if he will make a statement. [66963]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The deaths of Privates Geoff Gray, on 17 September 2001, and James Collinson, on 23 March 2002, at Deepcut, are the subject of ongoing investigations by Surrey police, who have retained jurisdiction in each case. In addition, Surrey police announced on 5 July their intention to reinvestigate the cases of Privates Sean Benton and Cheryl James, who died at Deepcut in 1995.

Those investigations are independent of the Ministry of Defence, although the Department, through the Army and Royal Military Police, is co-operating fully. Surrey police have been given full access to Army records, and the weapons involved in the incidents surrounding the deaths of Privates Gray and Collinson have been passed to the police for ballistic examination. Army boards of inquiry into the deaths of Privates Gray and Collinson will be held in due course, but cannot commence until the associated police investigations are complete. Boards of inquiry into the deaths of Privates Benton and James were carried out at the time and copies of the final inquiry reports were passed to the next of kin.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank the Minister for that answer. I echo the tributes that have already been paid by assistant chief constable Frank Clark and chief superintendent Gerry Kirby to Army officials, who are co-operating fully with Surrey police, as I learned from the police when I was briefed by them last week. I welcome the help that I have already had from the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), and his private office. I hope that I will be able to meet Brigadier Clive Elderton and Colonel Raydon, the Army points of contact for the police.

As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, this is a matter of grave concern in my constituency and more widely. When the police have completed their inquiries, will the Army continue to look into any further implications that there may be for military matters?

Mr. Ingram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. Recognising his interest in the tragic death of his constituents, we have facilitated his access to the proceedings as much as possible. Clearly, what follows will depend on the outcome of the police inquiries into the deaths of Privates Gray and Collinson and of Privates Benton and James. If the need for any change is highlighted by the police investigations or by the subsequent Army boards of inquiry, we will respond positively, just as we responded to the inquiries in 1995 by making changes.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I am grateful for the Minister's statement. Will the Ministry of Defence set up a confidential phoneline so that members of the armed forces who served at Deepcut can contact the MOD to give information? That hotline should be advertised both to veterans who may have served at the camp and to all serving personnel who have been through it since 1995.

Mr. Ingram: That is an interesting point, and I shall certainly consider it. However, given the public awareness of the matter and the existence of the ongoing police investigation, I should have thought that anyone with material information should inform the police in the first instance. Perhaps Surrey police, rather than the MOD, will want to take the hon. Gentleman's initiative on board.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): The Minister will know that we fully share the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) and other hon. Members, including the Minister himself, about the individual tragedies and their potential effect on morale at Deepcut and elsewhere. I am sure the Minister agrees that the quicker the inquiry is carried out by Surrey police, the better, but given the importance of maintaining confidence in military investigations, will he tell the House whether he has requested a copy of the report that will be produced by Surrey police; whether he will ensure that that report is published; and whether he will undertake to make a statement to the House when that report appears?

Mr. Ingram: It is for the police to decide what happens to their report. Following their report, the case goes to an Army board of inquiry; after that, if the families so request, and the offer is made to them, they can be given the full report. As I said, in 1995 some lessons were learned and new procedures were put in place, and if there are any new lessons to be learned from the recent tragic incidents, we will act quickly. As for the publication of the full report, the House should remember that it will have to deal with highly sensitive personal issues, and its publication might not be in the best interests of the family.

International Terrorism

7. **Mr. John MacDougall** (Central Fife): What recent discussions he has had with his US counterpart on international terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [66964]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I have regular discussions with my United States counterpart about international terrorism, including during our meeting in London on 5 June.

Mr. MacDougall: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. Does he agree that the international coalition in the Balkans has been a great success and that the United States of America's intention to reduce the number of troops could influence stability in the area? The three presidents are due to meet shortly to discuss the matter. Premature withdrawal from the area should avoided as it would put at risk the stability that has been achieved. Will he assure me that there will be no threat to stability in the area?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his observations, and agree with him that operations in the Balkans have been an outstanding success. However, he will be aware that NATO Defence Ministers—not only the United States—have approved a series of changes to SFOR and KFOR following the joint operational area review.

The review advocates a regional approach to NATO's peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. Both Bosnia and Kosovo will be treated as a single theatre for military planning purposes. That is because the security situation in the Balkans has changed since the initial deployment of SFOR and KFOR. NATO's operations will be restructured accordingly to provide a smaller, lighter and more flexible force that will be better able to meet current security challenges in the region. However, in no way does that reduction in troop numbers signal any reduction in NATO's commitment to the region. Rather, the changes are a sign of the alliance's achievements to date in bringing security and stability to the Balkans. The UK, with the rest of NATO, remains absolutely committed to the security and stability of the Balkans and will continue to play its full role in achieving the international community's objectives for the region.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): In his conversations with the US Secretary of Defence, has the right hon. Gentleman received information that convinces him of Iraqi involvement in support for international terrorism?

Mr. Hoon: There can be no doubt that Iraq has supported terrorism, or that Iraq has sought to undermine the stability of both its neighbours and the wider world. Equally, however, I have not seen any information directly linking Iraq to the appalling events of 11 September last year.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): In the light of mounting press speculation over the past few days, will the Secretary of State confirm that, under the guise of the war against terrorism, British troops are not being situated in the middle east in preparation for participation in a war against Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: May I make it clear to my hon. Friend and the House that absolutely no decisions have been taken by the British Government in relation to operations in Iraq or anywhere near Iraq in the middle east? It follows, therefore, that no decisions have been taken to deploy British forces in that region for that reason. I assure my hon. Friend and the House that any such decision would be properly reported to the House, as right hon. and hon. Members properly expect.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Has the Secretary of State, in his discussions with his United States counterpart, been made aware of evidence given to the Committee on International Relations—a congressional committee—that one terrorist organisation, FARC, has contributed $2 million since 1998 to the Provisional IRA in exchange for training FARC in urban terrorism? Will he co-operate with his American counterpart and the international policing and intelligence authorities so that if illegally laundered money is brought into the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland and filtered through to Sinn Fein-IRA, legal action is taken against those organisations?

Mr. Hoon: I am well aware of the material that has been made known in the United States. It is a matter of discussion between the United Kingdom and the United States as to how best to deal with that, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that as this obviously is a matter for other Departments and Government agencies, the UK Government, and not simply the Ministry of Defence, will certainly take appropriate and effective action to deal with the information and links that he rightly set out.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Will my right hon. Friend clarify whether, under United States influence, the Labour Government are abandoning the policy of the last Conservative Administration and all previous British Governments? During the Gulf war, John Major ruled out, explicitly and repeatedly in the House, the use of British nuclear weapons against Iraq, even in reply to a chemical or biological attack on our forces, on the grounds that a proportionate response could be made using conventional weapons and that Britain would never breach the nuclear non-proliferation treaty?

Mr. Hoon: May I make it clear, as I have made clear to my hon. Friend and the House on a number of occasions, that the British Government's policy in that respect has not changed? We remain committed to a range of international agreements that have been supported by successive Governments. That remains the position, but may I make it clear to him that that position has always been within the wider remit of international law? I have made it clear to him and the House that the British Government would only use nuclear weapons consistent with our obligations under international law.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): May I return to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) about the assessment agreed by the United States and the United Kingdom of links between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda? While there may be no hard and fast evidence of a direct connection, as the Secretary of State has put it, between the Iraqi regime and the events of 11 September last year, is there an agreed assessment of links between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda, and what exactly is it?

Mr. Hoon: We keep an open mind about the allegations of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda. I have made it quite clear previously that there is no direct evidence to link Saddam Hussein's regime and the appalling events of 11 September, but if and when new information comes to light, we shall certainly investigate it. Let us not be in any doubt about Iraq. We cannot ignore the threat that it poses to the international community. We have always made it clear that the world would be a much better and safer place without Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Jenkin: I certainly concur with the right hon. Gentleman's final comments. It is clear that, while no decision has been made about what form of military action, if any, may be taken, the United States and the United Kingdom are making preparations for the deployment of a major force for possible combat operations. In that regard, may I invite the right hon. Gentleman to give the House some reassurance about the latest information on the performance of the SA80A2 rifle, which will obviously be vital in any contribution that we make to a military coalition?

Mr. Hoon: I emphasise not only that no decisions have been taken as to form, but that no decisions have been taken about military operations against Iraq other than those that are properly conducted to protect the people of Iraq under the no-fly zones—our air crew continue to face real danger in carrying out a humanitarian operation.

With reference to the SA80A2, there has undoubtedly been a significant improvement in that rifle's capability as a result of the recent upgrade. Equally, as I found for myself on a very recent visit to Afghanistan, there are concerns among the Royal Marines, who face extremely difficult environmental conditions in Afghanistan, about the reliability of the rifle. That is being assessed. The week that I was in Afghanistan—the week before last—a team from the manufacturers and from the Ministry of Defence was there, specifically to put the rifle through still more exacting tests. The team has prepared a report, which the Ministry of Defence and I will examine carefully, to determine the best way forward as regards the rifle. I share the concern of the hon. Gentleman and of right hon. and hon. Members right across the House. We must ensure that our armed forces have a weapon upon which they can rely.

Mr. Jenkin: Again, I fully endorse the Secretary of State's last comments. If we are to make an effective contribution to the military coalition—if there is one—the soldiers whom we deploy must have 100 per cent. confidence in their rifle. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the exercise in Afghanistan involving a platoon of 30, firing 90 rounds each, resulted in 20 out of the 30 rifles jamming? Can he confirm that the concern is that the cleaning regime and the handling regime of the rifle may not have been correct? Will he also confirm that unless he can restore 100 per cent. confidence in the rifle, he does not rule out scrapping the SA80 and replacing it with an alternative?

Mr. Hoon: I will not go into the details of what is contained in a report that is still being analysed in the Ministry of Defence, but I assure the hon. Gentleman, as I assure the House, that those matters will be properly set out before the House in due course. I want to ensure that there is confidence in the weapon. The hon. Gentleman knows, as do other right hon. and hon. Members from their own military experience, that there is no such thing as a 100 per cent. successful rifle.

A member of my constituency party with military experience asked me at a recent meeting whether I could confirm that both kalashnikovs and M16s routinely jam. That is the position. In certain circumstances and certain environmental conditions, any rifle will be subject to jamming. We must ensure that our armed forces have confidence in their weapon, and that that weapon is properly tested, and properly used and prepared for the missions that they have to undertake.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): In the context of international terrorism, will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to congratulate Pakistan's authorities on having brought to justice those responsible and found guilty of the murder of the American journalist? Does my right hon. Friend recall the video that was made by the murderers, including the end of the journalist's life, with his head being cut off? Does that not illustrate how important it is to fight and campaign on an international scale against those vile, evil, racist murderers?

Mr. Hoon: I was recently in Islamabad, where I had the privilege of meeting the Pakistani President. We discussed the wide range of co-operation undertaken between Pakistan, the United Kingdom and other members of the international coalition against terrorism. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to pay tribute to Pakistan for the efforts that it has made to tackle terrorism. We want those efforts to continue and, along the border with Afghanistan, we want them to be redoubled.

Armed Forces (Recruitment)

8. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): How many people were recruited to the armed forces in 2001. [66965]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): In the last financial year, 23,578 people were recruited to the armed forces. That equates to 95 per cent. of the overall recruitment target. Although improvement is still needed, this figure represents a significant advance over the previous year's achievement, when intake levels reached 90 per cent. of the tri-service target.

Chris Grayling: A moment ago, the Minister was praising his own recruitment and retention initiatives for the armed forces, yet despite those new entrants, the number of people in the armed forces fell again in the year up to last February. What will the hon. Gentleman do to stop this haemorrhage of experienced, trained personnel from our armed forces?

Mr. Ingram: We will continue to ensure that we provide the best quality of life and conditions in the armed forces. Major improvements have been made in the past few years—a big step up on what happened when the hon. Gentleman's party was in government. We seek to give personnel the best equipment available, which is why we have a major series of procurement programmes; we value all that we ask them to do for us. Of course, we must recognise that recruitment and retention are difficult against the background of a successful economy. That is part of the issue that we are having to deal with. The Opposition may not want a successful economy, but I think that this country does.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): When considering recruitment to Her Majesty's forces, will my right hon. Friend have regard to the many people in Nepal who are anxious to serve in the Gurkha regiments? Will he explain the future of the Gurkha regiments?

Mr. Ingram: The Gurkhas have given us good and loyal service for many years, and we anticipate that they will continue to do so for many years to come. We have recently rebrigaded the Gurkhas and I know that that has gone down well in the regiments. I pay fulsome tribute to all that they have done and will do in future.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): With today's spending review setting new targets for the Ministry of Defence over the next three years, will the Minister explain why the Ministry has yet to meet the manning targets that were set for it three years ago?

Mr. Ingram: I think that I have explained some of the difficulties that we face. Every time Opposition Members say something negative about the armed forces—most of the negatives are based on press speculation—it can be a drag on recruitment and, indeed, retention. The language that is used must be chosen carefully. All of us must recognise that, with a successful economy, it is difficult to recruit and retain personnel in the armed forces. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that that is the reality. I hope that he will also accept that, because of all the initiatives that we have taken in recent years, the downward trend of the past 15 years is now being reversed. We are working against a difficult backcloth. Some of it is based on success, but it also includes problems that happened in the past, which we are now tackling successfully.

Racism

10. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What measures he will take to eliminate racism in the armed forces. [66967]

11. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What measures his Department is taking to increase the number of members of the armed forces from ethnic minorities. [66968]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The armed forces are committed to diversity in general and recruiting from ethnic minority communities in particular. All three services have established ethnic minority recruiting teams or diversity action teams and located them in areas of high ethnic minority population. The services undertake numerous initiatives aimed at encouraging ethnic minority personnel to join the armed forces. They have put in place a wide range of measures to promote equality and eliminate racism. Through strong leadership, education and training at all levels there is a determination to root out any form of unacceptable behaviour. While much has been achieved, it is recognised that there is still more to do.

Kevin Brennan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Three years ago to the day, the son of a constituent of mine was sentenced to 112 days' detention for being absent without leave from the Royal Welch Fusiliers, having been subjected to a catalogue of racist abuse in his platoon, including physical assault. This young man had been awarded an engraved tankard for being the finest of his group of recruits in the armed forces. What assurances can my right hon. Friend give me that institutionalised racism will not and is not being tolerated in today's armed forces?

Mr. Ingram: I do not know about the specific instance of which my hon. Friend speaks, but I can say that there is an absolute commitment to zero tolerance of racism in the armed forces. Indeed, since 1998, more than 4,000 senior officers and equal opportunities advisers have been trained in equal opportunities by the tri-service equal opportunities training centre at Shrivenham. Equal opportunities training is also undertaken widely across all three services. We clearly have to ensure proper education throughout all ranks of the armed forces. As I said, the best assurance that I can give him is that zero tolerance is the watchword.

Simon Hughes: Ministers will be aware that although the Army has recently done very well in increasing the numbers of people it recruits from ethnic minorities, the Navy and the Air Force are still on only about 1 per cent., and officer levels in respect of those with ethnic minority backgrounds are still just over 1 per cent. What is being done to ensure that the Navy and the Air Force move quickly to achieve their targets and to ensure that officers—as well as people in the lower ranks on lower pay and with less influence—represent all communities in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Ingram: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's general point, and more has to be done. The more commitment that right hon. and hon. Members bring to that through highlighting the issue and trying to encourage more people from the ethnic communities into the armed forces, the better served we will all be. That said, I point out to him that some 14 events have taken place in his constituency. We have particularly targeted not only his constituency, but London in its entirety, because of the large concentration of ethnic communities in the city and surrounding areas. I hope that we can play out to the RAF and the Navy the lessons that have been learned from the success of the Army, which has exceeded its targets. A lot of commitment is put into the matter. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can engage in the work that is done in his constituency, where we have been particularly active. I shall make sure that he is invited to some of those events.

Discharges

12. **Mr. Roger Williams** (Brecon and Radnorshire): How many soldiers under 18 were refused discharge as of right because they had completed their training in the last 12 months. [66969]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): None. Discharge as of right is exactly that—a right. No valid applications from soldiers seeking such discharge are refused, although commanding officers may seek to persuade individuals to stay if they feel that they have the potential for a good career.

Mr. Williams: I thank the Minister for that reply and for the help that he has given me in dealing with a case in my constituency whereby a young soldier committed criminal offences in an attempt to leave the Army because discharge as of right was not readily available to him.

Does the Minister agree that many young men and women join the Army with great enthusiasm, only to realise that it is not their career of choice? Would not it be better for the morale and effectiveness of the armed forces if discharge as of right was available to all young people up to the age of 18, regardless of whether they had completed their training?

Dr. Moonie: Up to the age of 18 no application is refused once it is clear that the alternative of trying to keep someone in will not succeed, although that is clearly a difficult step to take. The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Many people adjust very badly to leaving home and joining the armed forces, but many of those who leave subsequently rejoin.

Defence Fire Service

13. **Angus Robertson** (Moray): What representations he has received in favour of privatising the defence fire service. [66970]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): None.

Angus Robertson: I am certain that the Minister shares my concerns about matters of fire safety at RAF bases, especially bearing in mind last week's report by the Civil Aviation Authority into the near collision of three Tornadoes based in my constituency at RAF Lossiemouth. Given that he is unable to name one single supporter of the privatisation of the defence fire service—not even among Labour Members or from the trade union—will he reconsider what even the leader of the Conservative party described as "a privatisation too far"?

Mr. Ingram: We do not need to take any lessons from the leader of the Tory party on that matter. It is interesting to note the new collusion between the interests of the independent nationalist party and the previously self-proclaimed unionist party.

The hon. Gentleman uses terminology that I do not recognise—that is why I gave the answer that I did. We are considering the delivery of services across the whole of the air support services. Some areas already use private contractors. There is a mixed economy. The bids that are put in are subjected to in-depth analysis to ensure that we get best value for money and retain the integrity of the vital support that is required from the work force at those bases.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is campaigning for part of the airfield in his constituency to be used by private commercial operators. Who does he think would give support to those commercial operators—private companies or the RAF? He has to get his argument sorted out.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): When considering the matter, does the Minister differentiate between fire services in support of deployed forces and those that are based permanently in the United Kingdom? I have observed fire services at the secure site at Aldermaston acting effectively. With right my hon. Friend, I have also observed the fire service that was deployed at Kabul airport operating successfully, but clearly not in the private sector. Such differentiation is important.

Mr. Ingram: I assure my hon. Friend that that will form part of our overall consideration.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Before the Government proceed with that further privatisation, will they consider carefully the alarming anxiety caused in Shoeburyness by their decision to abolish the Ministry of Defence police in September and replace them with a civilian force? Is not it irresponsible and dangerous to place civilian police, who cannot provide an armed response to protect the public, in charge of a site where a lot of ammunition is stored?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman knows that we are consulting widely. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who has direct responsibility for the decision, has given all the assurances that he wants.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Has not my right hon. Friend been far too nice to the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson)? If he and his colleagues had their way and the Scottish people were foolish enough to vote for independence, there would be no RAF Lossiemouth.

Mr. Ingram: I was enjoying that question so much that I did not want to rise. I note that the leader of the nationalist Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), has just entered the Chamber. Perhaps he would like to intervene to explain his party's policy on NATO. Under it, Scotland would not be an aspirant country. Clearly, an independent Scotland would put at risk much of the defence footprint there, which is provided through the United Kingdom.

Royal Marine Commandos

14. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on the future role of Royal Marine commandos in the war against terrorism. [66971]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The Royal Marines of 45 Commando are returning from their successful deployment in Afghanistan and will be having a period of rest and recuperation. The vast majority will have returned by 19 July and the remainder, mostly logistics personnel, will return as soon as possible thereafter.

As I told the House on 16 October last year and most recently on 20 June, this is not a conventional campaign and it will vary in pace and intensity. Any future deployment of the Royal Marine commandos will depend on the situation at the time and the specific capabilities required.

Michael Fabricant: I am relieved that 45 Commando will soon enjoy some rest and relaxation. The Secretary of State knows that 40, 42 and 45 Commandos have been operational in the past few months. What consideration will he give to a change in the order of battle to create a fourth commando, given the current circumstances and the fight against terror?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is right. Elements of 40 Commando remain at Bagram to provide essential support to UK forces that remain in Afghanistan. However, its next role will be to act as the lead commando group for the joint rapid reaction force. The Ministry of Defence and I are always prepared to consider proposals for augmenting the excellent work of our Royal Marines. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion may be one way forward.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Surely a successful prosecution of the war against terrorism depends on more than the undoubted bravery of Royal Marine commandos. If the British Government support the US Government and engage in a pre-emptive strike against Iraq—an action that many of my constituents believe to be illegal and immoral—would not it shatter the international community's current response to the war against terrorism?

Mr. Hoon: I have already answered that question, not only today but at previous defence questions. To avoid doubt, I repeat that no decisions have been made about military operations against Iraq.

Russia and NATO

15. **Mr. David Atkinson** (Bournemouth, East): If he will make a statement on steps he is taking to improve the relationship between Russia and NATO. [66972]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The United Kingdom, especially my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, has taken a leading role in the recent historic transformation of NATO's relationship with Russia. The UK will continue to work to make the new partnership a success. Indeed, the fact that I am leaving for St. Petersburg this afternoon to meet my opposite number, Sergei Ivanov, shows the importance that I personally attach to developing the relationship with Russia. We are building on the existing range of successful bilateral contacts and initiatives, including ship visits, our military resettlement programme, and our contribution to Russia's chemical weapons disposal programme.

Mr. Atkinson: Does the Secretary of State recall that, less than three years ago, NATO was rightly condemning Russia for using disproportionate brutality in the second Chechen war? Does he agree that, for Russia's relations with NATO to become ideal, Russia must be required to hold to account those responsible for such war crimes, and to introduce a political solution that will restore peace, democracy and human rights to Chechnya?

Mr. Hoon: One of the advantages of having a mature and sophisticated relationship with Russia is that a range of issues, including the situation in Chechnya, can be properly and effectively discussed. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, with his knowledge of Russia, will recognise that it is much better to talk to Russia about these issues than simply to have the kind of stand-off that was characteristic of the cold war.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does my right hon. Friend know that, last week, a number of Members had the pleasure of hearing Mikhail Gorbachev speaking in Committee Room 10? Does he not agree that it is fantastic that the vision of a common European home that Gorbachev was putting forward in 1986 is at last beginning to be established through the good relations between NATO and Russia?

Mr. Hoon: I, too, had the privilege of meeting Mikhail Gorbachev, and it is certainly my view that he has never been given the credit that he deserves internationally for the efforts that he made at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. He is also a man who is not properly regarded in his home country, and perhaps he has had to come here to the United Kingdom to receive the recognition that he rightly deserves.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Before my right hon. Friend visits St. Petersburg, will he discuss with the Foreign Secretary the problems relating to Kaliningrad? What is being proposed by the European Union is equivalent to United States citizens travelling from Alaska to Oregon, and needing to have a visa to go through Canada. Does my right hon. Friend not realise that that is quite unacceptable, grossly unfair to the Russian federation, and needs to be addressed with some urgency if we are to promote good relations with our friend, the Russian federation?

Mr. Hoon: As I said earlier, I will be going to St. Petersburg this evening. The Foreign Secretary is somewhere in the far east—in India, I think—at the moment, so I cannot give my hon. Friend the assurance that he requires just at the moment. The Foreign Secretary and I discuss these matters, however, and I have certainly had the opportunity to discuss Kaliningrad during my visits to each of the Baltic states. I recognise that there are issues still to be resolved, not least in relation to whether the Baltic states may enjoy membership of the European Union.

Conflict Prevention

16. **Mr. Mark Hendrick** (Preston): If he will make a statement on the contribution of his Department to conflict prevention. [66973]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Ministry of Defence contributes to the Government's interdepartmental conflict prevention strategy, in collaboration with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development. We provide military training to support the reform of the armed forces of partner countries, and to develop their capacity to take part in peace support operations. We also provide training and education, and both military and civilian expertise, to support wider security sector reform. The Ministry of Defence also contributes forces to operations in support of conflict prevention and peace-building. In the past year, these have included deployments in Sierra Leone, Macedonia and Afghanistan, as well as continuing commitments in a wide range of locations, from Bosnia and Cyprus to the Congo and Georgia.

Mr. Hendrick: Given the devastation that conflict has caused the peoples of Africa, especially in Sierra Leone, is not it essential that we continue with the pooled arrangements for conflict prevention if we are to prevent a conflict in countries such as the Republic of the Congo?

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend makes a good point. He will be aware that there has been increased recognition of the extent of the problems in sub-Saharan Africa and in other parts of Africa. Considerable effort is being made. Sierra Leone was a good example of where we contributed to the stabilisation of the country. We must be conscious of our successes, and also of any other problems close to countries that we have helped to bring back to full stability. I thank my hon. Friend for that question.

Spending Review

3.30 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The long-term funding that we announce today for Britain's public services is possible because the bills of economic failure in unemployment and debt have been radically reduced; the state of our public finances is strong; and, despite uncertainties in the global economy, inflation is under control, interest rates have been low and stable, and employment and growth continue to rise.

In this period, with global financial markets of greater instability, our task and our determination, as always, is to remain vigilant and committed to sustaining monetary and fiscal stability, with the strength to take the right long-term decisions for Britain.

I can tell the House that, over the economic cycle, we will not only meet all our fiscal disciplines and rules, but we are on track to meet our fiscal disciplines and rules with a margin for prudence even on the most cautious case—*[Interruption.]*—and even on the most cautious assumptions. Indeed, it is so that we can steer a course of monetary and fiscal stability across the economic cycle that we have reduced net debt from 44 per cent. of national income in 1997 to 30.4 per cent. last year, which is in contrast to 41 per cent. in America, 53 per cent. in the euro area and almost 60 per cent. in Japan.

As we set out in the Budget, Britain's debt has been reduced to the lowest level of national income in the G7, and the lowest of all our major European competitors. Having last year paid off more debt in one year than all previous Governments in the last 50 years, I can report that this year debt interest payments will be lower as a share of national income than they have been at any time in the last century, since the first world war.

Twenty years ago, debt interest payments consumed 4 per cent. of our national income. Debt interest is now half that, at 2 per cent., which is a saving worth £20 billion a year. Those extra resources have made it possible to recruit more nurses, more doctors, more teachers and more police than at any time in the past two decades.

Twenty years ago—indeed, 10 years ago—1.6 per cent. of national income was spent on the costs of unemployment. Today, I can again report that this year we will spend just 0.4 per cent.—savings worth a further £10 billion a year.

It is through maintaining a steady hand on the public finances at all times that we are able to meet our fiscal rules and match our reforms with new resources, so that efficient, strong public services play their part in delivering a modern Britain of greater opportunity and greater security not just for some, but for everyone.

I can report to the House that, holding strictly to the total spending envelope I set out in the Budget, we are raising departmental spending from £240 billion this year to £263 billion next year, £280 billion in 2004–05, and £301 billion in 2005–06—in total, by 2006, there will be £61 billion a year more for improved public services.

Ten years ago, only 50p of every pound of additional expenditure—50 per cent.—went to the public services, the rest having to be spent on debt and social security, whereas in this review almost 80p in every additional pound is going directly to improving public services, and of the remaining 20p—20 per cent.—most is being spent not on debt interest and unemployment, but on improved pensioner and children's benefits.

In each area of service delivery, from housing to education, from policing to defence, we are tying new resources to reform and results, and developing a modern way for efficient public services, which includes setting demanding national targets; monitoring performance by independent and open audit and inspection; giving front-line staff the power and flexibility to deliver; extending choice; rewarding success; and turning round failing services.

I can also tell the House that over the next three years, as we reverse the backlog in investment, our projections from 2006—other than the commitments to health paid for by national insurance—are based on real-terms increases in spending on public services at $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. a year.

With this review's decisions we will not only continue to address past decades of chronic underinvestment in education, health, transport and housing, but rise to new challenges in a changed global environment—international challenges including the essential duty of fighting terrorism, and challenges here at home as global economic competition brings vastly increased opportunities but also increased insecurities. The role of Government is—by expanding educational, employment and economic opportunity, and by encouraging stronger communities—to enable and empower people to make globalisation work for their families and their future.

First, to respond to global insecurities and the new fight against terrorism, the Secretary of State for Defence is announcing that the budget for our armed forces, who have served our country overseas with courage and distinction not only in Afghanistan but recently in Kosovo, Macedonia and Sierra Leone, will rise from £29.3 billion this year to £32.8 billion by 2005–06. That rise of £$3\frac{1}{2}$ billion a year is the largest sustained real-terms increase in defence spending for 20 years.

Since the tragic events of 11 September, international co-operation and, led by the Prime Minister, Britain's international engagement have assumed a new importance, so the Foreign Office's and Foreign Secretary's budget will rise from £1.3 billion this year to £1.5 billion by 2005–06. Within that budget we will strengthen the work of the British Council, whose budget will rise from £157 million a year to £185 million by 2005–06. The budget for the BBC World Service, whose 160 million-a-week audience is now its largest ever, will be £38 million a year higher by 2005–06.

When it comes to meeting the urgent moral challenge of combating international poverty, the question for us is how a strengthened commitment by our country can inspire a step change in aid from all the richest countries so that we can fulfil the millennium development goals: to halve world poverty, cut child mortality by two thirds and deliver primary education for every child. The Secretary of State for International Development is announcing a rise in United Kingdom aid from the £2 billion that it was in 1997 and the £3.3 billion that it was last year to £4.9 billion by 2006. That is the biggest ever rise—a 35 per cent. real-terms increase since 2001, and a 93 per cent. real-terms increase since 1997. By raising the contribution figure of 0.26 per cent. of national income that we inherited and today's 0.32 per cent. figure

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

to 0.4 per cent. by 2006, and by untying aid and targeting aid on the poorest countries, we are ensuring that more money goes towards tackling poverty than has gone towards it at any time in the history of British aid.

Starting with our dialogue with churches and non-governmental organisations next week and proceeding to September's Johannesburg summit—at which the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister will be present—and the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings later in the month, we want this new finance from our country to be an engagement and a signal for a new $50 billion international financing facility involving all rich countries: a new alliance against poverty which recognises that by meeting our moral obligations to the poorest of the world we advance opportunity and security for all the world.

At the heart of our spending decisions this year is a set of major economic reforms that will expand our national wealth so that Britain can become more productive and prosperous, and we can make the most of the new opportunities of the global economy. Invention and innovation are the key to long-term national competitiveness, so in partnership with the Wellcome Trust—which I thank—we will create and fund a new national centre for excellence in science teaching. After a rigorous selection of priorities within the industry budget and a move away from the old loss-making subsidies of the past, I can announce a 10 per cent. real-terms annual rise in the science budget and, by 2005–06, an extra £1¼ billion a year for British science.

Britain must not make the mistakes in science education in the next generation that we made in the last, and so to fund a new generation of young British scientists, we will implement the Roberts report—which means on average, a £4,000 rise in science post-doctoral Research Council pay, with the average stipend for Research Council PhD students rising to more than £13,000 by 2005–06. Even after inflation, that figure is twice what it was in 1997.

We will encourage a third role for universities beyond teaching and research—the commercialisation of new discoveries. The higher education innovation fund will rise to £90 million a year by 2005–06, to ensure that more British inventions become British manufactured products, creating British jobs.

To remove barriers to productivity growth in the north and in the south of our country, the Deputy Prime Minister will this week announce reforms to our planning system, including new business planning zones to ensure development and to create jobs in high-unemployment areas. He will also announce new funds and plans for meeting housing needs south and north—throughout the country—ensuring that we make good use of the space in our existing towns and cities, while protecting valuable countryside around them.

Because a successful rural economy is vital both to rural areas and to our entire economy, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is announcing today that she will implement the core recommendations of the Curry report to promote sustainable farming. To make this possible, and to improve Britain's flood defences, her budget will rise from £2.5 billion this year to £2.9 billion in 2005–06—an annual average real rise of 2.7 per cent. a year after inflation.

To secure balanced development in every region—tackling regional weaknesses, and building on regional manufacturing and industrial strengths—we must decentralise decision making out of Whitehall. I can announce that our nine regional development agencies will now have a strengthened local role in transport, tourism and housing. To pilot further devolution from Whitehall for services to small businesses and adult skills, and to reverse decades of indifference and neglect of our regions in this country, the budgets for RDAs will rise from £1.6 billion a year to—by 2005–06—£2 billion a year, as local people make more of the decisions about meeting local needs.

Addressing the long-term underinvestment and neglect of transport is vital both to economic prosperity and to the quality of life. To deliver the 10-year transport plan, the transport budget will rise from £7.7 billion this year to £11.6 billion in 2005–06—in total, over the next three years, a 12 per cent. real-terms increase. The Transport Secretary will also consult on the long-term need to increase airport capacity in our country.

To secure a more competitive environment and to root out anti-competitive practices, the budget of the Office of Fair Trading will increase from £34 million this year to £55 million by 2005–06. We are determined that everything is done to ensure the highest corporate standards, and next week, in the light of Enron, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will put before the House the interim report on accounting and auditing reform.

There are now 1.5 million more men and women in work than there were in 1997. Unemployment in Britain is today lower than in Japan, lower than in America, and lower than in every other major European country, and for the first time for 50 years Britain has the lowest unemployment of any major industrialised nation. However, because we will never be complacent as long as people who can work are out of work, we need further reforms that match rights and responsibilities to help people acquire more flexible skills and new jobs, so that they can succeed in the changed global economy.

Having ensured in the last five years that 1,750,000 men and women have benefited from the new deal, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will roll out nationwide by 2006 the successful Jobcentre Plus one-stop service that will help young and adult unemployed, lone parents and the disabled who are seeking work to find the jobs that they need.

Having already raised further education student numbers to 4 million and raised modern apprenticeships from 75,000 in 1997 to 220,000 today, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills will announce new money and tough targets to reform further education, improve workplace skills and expand modern apprenticeships to more than 300,000 young people in 2004. To ensure that British business has the skills it urgently needs today, the Home Secretary will expand the work permit system for key workers from 50,000 in 1997 to an expected 175,000 next year.

While, overall, there are 60,000 more small businesses than there were in 1997, even more British people should have the opportunity to become self-employed and to start their own firm. So the corporate tax cuts in the Budget and the stamp duty exemptions for high unemployment areas are matched in this review with new help for start-up businesses by raising the Small Business Service budget and by extending and increasing the phoenix fund from £100 million to £150 million.

To meet our long-term aim that in every area of the country every school pupil is introduced not just to the world of work but to the world of business, we will fund an expansion of enterprise education from less than 1,000 schools today to all our 3,500 secondary schools.

One of the greatest challenges of the future is to protect and safeguard our environment through sustainable development and to advance towards the 2010 targets—20 per cent. less carbon dioxide emissions, 10 per cent. of electricity from renewable sources—the spending review will, in addition to financing the £100 million fund for the development of renewable technologies, provide in 2005–06 an additional £38 million for sustainable energy initiatives.

Let me now turn to the public service investments this spending review makes to help those who contribute through public service to build stronger, more secure communities. We know that an enterprising economy with opportunity for all requires a fair society where there is security for all. But we also know—those of us who believe in the importance of public services—that we have a special duty to ensure that public money is spent wisely and efficiently and we are as determined to secure value for money as we are to secure money for our services.

So, first, the Government are today publishing new public service agreements setting out agreed outcome targets and reforms for each Government Department. Secondly, with independent audit and statutory inspection, Departments and agencies will be fully accountable for performance against targets: so, in addition to the new police standards unit, we are creating the health and social care inspectorates and a reformed criminal justice inspection regime and a single housing inspectorate.

In each service area, the review's decisions promote choice and devolve responsibility, authority and flexibility from the centre out to local and regional decision making—down to primary care trusts, which this Labour Government created, to head teachers and governors in schools, to police commanders on the front line, and to local service providers. One essential feature of this year's spending decisions is that voluntary, charitable and community organisations will also receive significantly increased funding to support their chosen role in delivering local services. Just as sustained economic growth demands responsibility in setting private sector pay, so too a sustained commitment to better public services demands responsibility in setting public sector pay.

When a service is underfunded, or when it is underperforming, people are let down. So while public service providers who perform well will be given more resources and more authority to innovate, in this review Departments have set as a condition for more resources that failing institutions will be dealt with early and decisively. Poor-performing schools will be subject to takeover by new leadership or by a neighbouring school, or closed and reopened as a new school. Failing local education authorities will be subject to takeover by high performing authorities. Poorly performing colleges will be subject to loss of funding from learning and skills councils, with provisions for necessary college mergers. Poor-performing social services and housing departments will have new directorates and senior managers. Poor-performing local authorities will first be subject to a recovery plan to tackle bad performance and, if that is insufficient, subject to new managers or takeover of functions. Just as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is taking power for police reform, prisons that underperform will need to improve or face new management drafted in. However, in every case, at the same time, we will incentivise and reward success with high-performing institutions receiving new resources and greater autonomy—new freedoms and more flexibility.

So just as in the Budget resources for health were matched by reforms in health, so too behind each decision we are making today—from housing to crime, from urban renewal to education—the Government's standard is clear: for more given in resources more is required in results. This is the vision for public services, and on that basis I can announce new investments that will improve our services and strengthen our communities.

After long decades of persistent neglect that have left Britain's housing stock inadequate and substandard, since 1997 we have increased our investment in housing from £2.3 billion to £4.8 billion this year. And now, as the demand for new and better housing grows in a growing economy, it is time for a step change with the most sustained rise in housing investment for 25 years.

On Thursday, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will make a statement to the House on his reforms: new homes for social tenants and key workers—including low-cost home ownership in London and the south-east—and plans to tackle homelessness and upgrade old properties in all regions where housing need exists. To pay for this, we will by 2005–06 invest £5.9 billion a year in housing. Since 1997, this will mean a 105 per cent. real-terms increase in the housing budget over and above what the previous Government did.

Neighbourhood renewal is not just about bricks and mortar. It is about renewing community life, and this depends upon more economic activity, more businesses and more jobs. Having raised investment in economic and social regeneration in 88 hard-pressed neighbourhoods of our country to £300 million this year, we will increase the neighbourhood renewal fund to £525 million a year by 2005–06.

As we sign public service agreements with our local authorities to match resources to reform, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will set out details on Thursday of an annual real-terms rise for local government of 4.2 per cent. a year over and above inflation—well above the average settlements until 1997.

The mark of a decent society is the dignity that it accords to its elderly, so my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is announcing the extra resources necessary to deliver, from October next year, the pension credit to nearly half of all pensioner households. This will be worth up to £14 extra per week for single pensioners. It is a measure for which I hope there will soon be all-party support. Following the Pickering and Sandler reports, a consultative Green Paper on pensions will be published in the autumn, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

announce how the extra 6 per cent. real-terms growth in social services budgets will improve community care for the elderly.

Britain's disabled need and deserve a better deal too, so I can also announce that having created the Disability Rights Commission to oversee and enforce the rights of disabled men and women, we will raise its budget to 2006 by 14 per cent. in real terms.

I have said to the House in the past that our children are 20 per cent. of our population but 100 per cent. of our future. So, to realise our goals of nursery education, better child care and a sure start for the very young, we are announcing today, after a major interdepartmental review, details of a new integrated budget for children for child care and early years learning. It will be worth, by 2005–06, a total of £1½ billion a year. Following the review, there will be new ministerial arrangements for child care policy.

By October 2004, every three and four-year-old who needs it will have a nursery school place. We are also expanding the successful sure start experiment to meet the needs of up to 400,000 children. We will now increase investment in child care with funding for an additional 250,000 child care places.

Parents have said to us that communities are far stronger and children far more secure where there is a focal point in a community for a wide range of children's services, so I can announce that we will fund the creation of children's centres across the country, providing services for an additional 300,000 children by 2005–06.

At the heart of the next stage of children's services are voluntary and community partnerships, which are increasingly a vital link between the needs of children and the help that they receive. In each of our constituencies, there are hundreds of voluntary and community organisations. Throughout the country, hundreds of thousands of volunteers help millions of people, giving everyone in Britain, at different times in our lives, the chance to serve, and to get the balance right between what we can do for our country and what our country does for us.

To enable the vitality and independence of the charity, community and voluntary sector to grow and flourish, the Chief Secretary is announcing details of a new three-year fund of £125 million for voluntary organisations to draw on for their public service work. I can also confirm that the budget for the children's fund—helping volunteers and charities that assist vulnerable children—will be £200 million a year to 2006. There will be an additional £25 million over three years to support the growth of local parental support, and we are also extending the £20 million support to community amateur sports clubs, not just for one year, as we have announced previously, but for each year to 2006.

Since museums were opened free to the public, attendances have risen by 75 per cent. The Secretary of State is announcing a budget increase for culture, media and sport—including additional funds for tourism—and the budget will rise from £1.3 billion in total this year to £1.6 billion by 2005–06. With this increase, Britain will maintain free access to national museums, invest in regional museums, and expand local creative arts partnerships. To open up sport to all, not only will there be additional support for sports clubs but funds for much-needed investment in school sports facilities and new finance for extra sports coaching in the years up to 2006, in time for the next World cup. Similar allocations are necessary in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Stronger communities must be safer communities, where rights are matched by responsibilities. We are therefore committed to getting more police out on the streets and to making crime fighting more effective. With his new reforms in place, the Home Secretary will announce details of the rise in the Home Office budget from £10.7 billion this year to £13.5 billion by 2005–06—an increase of nearly £2.9 billion a year by 2005–06 to ensure that, in addition to police numbers rising next year to 130,000, reforms to speed up the asylum system can be made, internal security will be strengthened, and the criminal justice system can tackle both crime and the causes of crime. The long-term vision for the criminal justice system—how we match policies for opportunity with policies for security—will be set out by the Home Secretary when he publishes the criminal justice White Paper.

Ministers in the devolved Administrations will make separate announcements outlining their plans to allocate the additional £4.1 billion a year set aside by 2005–06 for all devolved functions in Scotland, the £2.3 billion a year more by 2005–06 for Wales, including continued funding to 2006 of objective 1, and the £1.2 billion a year more by 2005–06 for Northern Ireland, including funding of the European peace initiative.

Finally, I turn to education. What happens in our schools in this decade will shape our society and our economy for much of this century. We cannot equip children for the 21st century in classrooms built in the 19th century. Capital investment to modernise our schools, which was raised from £680 million in 1997 to £2¼ billion last year, will therefore be raised again—to £4½ billion a year by 2005–06. That represents a 400 per cent. real terms increase since 1997, backing up our additional 20,000 teachers in the classrooms.

The increased funds for investment, improved access and excellence in further and higher education—including our universities, and building on the 100,000 extra students since 1997—and the reforms essential to meet our targets will be announced by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, but we can achieve our goals for further and higher education only if we persuade more young people to stay on at school. Thirty years ago, the school-leaving age was raised to 16, but Britain cannot reach its full potential as long as nearly a quarter of 16 to 19-year-olds are not in education or training, and Britain, for decades, has suffered the worst drop-out rate from school of any industrialised country.

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills has set out her reforms to the curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds. We must ensure now that no one is prevented, through lack of income, from staying on for the qualifications that they undoubtedly need.

Already in a third of England, income-related education maintenance allowances have substantially raised staying-on rates at school. So I can announce that, from September 2004, we will extend this successful experiment to all the country, with education maintenance allowances worth up to £1,500 a year for those who stay on and study. We will fund this major advance in educational opportunity from savings that we have made from our success in reducing unemployment and debt.

Demanding the highest standards is the modern route to realising opportunity. Those of us seeking improvements in education are determined that the numbers in the education budget are matched by the reforms necessary to secure better results in schools all across the country. As we said in detail in our 1997 manifesto, resources and reform are equally important—one cannot be achieved without the other.

Having helped teachers and children achieve a step change in standards in our primary schools—today, we have 75 per cent. of children achieving the expected literacy standards at the age of 11 compared with just 57 per cent. five years ago—the Secretary of State for Education and Skills will tomorrow announce reforms to raise standards, enhance choice and diversity and to tackle poor pupil behaviour in our secondary schools so that schools can develop the talents of all. We will back these reforms with new resources.

In the 2000 Budget, the Government introduced a single payment direct to schools starting at £15,000 that year for primary schools. I can announce that to help deliver schools reforms, the details of which will be set out by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the typical primary school will receive £50,000 next April—£10,000 higher than this year—and will receive £50,000 each April for each of the next years to 2005–06.

Head teachers of the typical secondary school, who this April received a payment of £115,000, will receive next April a payment of £165,000. That is £50,000 more and it will rise to £180,000 in the next April and for each of the following years to 2006. Over three years, for the typical secondary school, a total of £500,000 in direct payments will be paid to every head teacher to be used for each school's priorities.

We must also back the good leadership that is raising achievement levels in the most challenging areas and we must help schools that are behind to catch up, as we set minimum targets for improved standards at 14 and 16. So, for 1,400 secondary schools, we will match demanding new performance targets with an extra annual payment of an additional £125,000 direct to each school and head teacher.

For these 1,400 schools, combining the leadership incentive grant and the direct payments that I have already announced means that the budget for head teachers will rise to £300,000 a year. Over three years, that is almost £1 million to allow our schools to replace weak leadership, to attract the best teachers and to improve their facilities.

For this Government, reform and resources go together, and we know that to demand reform when one would deny resources is a betrayal of our children. So I can announce the total new resources for education. Compared to growth of less than 2 per cent. a year in the 18 years to 1997, there will be a real-terms rise for education in England, even after inflation, of 6 per cent. a year for each of the next three years. That is the biggest sustained rise in education spending in a generation. The education budget for England, which was £29 billion in 1997 and is £45 billion this year, will rise year on year over the next three years to £49 billion, then £53 billion and then £58 billion: education, education, education. By 2005–06, this means £15 billion more a year for UK education; £13 billion more in England. Spending per pupil, which was just £2,700 a year in 1997 and £3,500, last year, will rise to £4,900 per pupil by 2005–06 which, after inflation, is 50 per cent. more per pupil than in 1997.

I challenge anyone in this House to claim that public services are their priority and then to say that £4,900 per pupil is too much to invest in our children and our country's future. We have presented a Budget for the health service and a spending review for education: as we promised, schools and hospitals first. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests and thank the Chancellor for advance sight of his statement.

I am delighted that relations between the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have improved so much since the pre-Budget report. So cordial have they become that they cancelled all their engagements at the end of last week to spend more time together. Indeed, they have not spent so much time with each other since the last time the Government were in turmoil. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the shadow Chancellor speak.

Mr. Howard: Britain's schools, hospitals and other public services can and must be improved, but to do that we need real reform. Is not it the lesson of the past five years that more money without real reform will not work? We read yesterday that the Chancellor himself had "been disturbed" by the Government's record on failing to deliver, and who could fail to sympathise with him? After all, he provided an increase of 23 per cent. in funding for education, but last year the proportion of children meeting numeracy standards actually fell; he spent 26 per cent. more on law and order, but crime is rising again, with street crime soaring by 31 per cent.; and he allocated almost 30 per cent. more to the NHS, but waiting lists are going up again.

How frustrating that must all be for the Chancellor. He even set in place a whole panoply of public service agreements, targets and monitoring arrangements so that all the extra money would deliver improvements in services. But what happened? The Government failed to meet their own targets: they failed on health care; they failed on violent crime; they failed on truancy; and our public services have been getting worse. The only mystery in all this is why the Chancellor does not realise that coming back to the House today and making exactly the same promises that he has made year after year, based on exactly the same approach, will lead to exactly the same results. Why has the Chancellor not learned the lessons of his past failures? After six Budgets, five years in office, three spending reviews and countless promises, is not it abundantly clear that the Chancellor and his colleagues simply do not know how to bring about real reform and the improvements in public services that we all want to see?

[Mr. Howard]

The Chancellor makes great promises about our public services. He says that the

"biggest ever investment in health and education"

will allow

"us to build modern public services to renew Britain",

but that is what he said in 1998. He says that the money will

"improve our schools, our health service and our transport system and make our streets safer",

but that is what he said two years ago.

Of course, he also promises change and modernisation in our public services. In fact, he promised reform no fewer than 21 times in his statement, but that was his statement four years ago. He has promised reform every year since. So where is the reform? Where is the modernisation? Where is the change?

Why did the Government last year send schools 17 pages of documents for every working day? Is that reform? How can teachers be expected to cope with that? Why does the Home Secretary now want police officers to fill in forms in duplicate every time they stop—stop, not search—someone in the street? Is that the kind of reform that the Chancellor had in mind? Why has productivity in the NHS fallen? Why are there now more bureaucrats than beds? Is that the reform that patients want?

Yet the Chancellor is at it again. Another year, another spending review. The same old promises, the same old failure, year after year. Does not he just deliver higher taxes? Has not he recently announced his rate tax increase? Then he preens himself and boasts about reducing public debt. One does not have to be a genius to reduce public debt if one taxes every man, woman and child in this country an extra £40 a week and imposes a £100 billion hit on pension funds. Is not it becoming clearer and clearer that money alone is not the answer?

What is the result of the Chancellor's failure? When public services fail, is not it those on the lowest incomes who get hit the hardest? Is not it those in the inner city who cannot escape from the failing school, the hard-pressed hospital or the crime-ridden estate? The Chancellor likes to talk about fairness, but what is fair? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members are far too noisy. It is unfair to the shadow Chancellor; he should be given a hearing.

Mr. Howard: What is fair about making promises to the most vulnerable sections of society and breaking them year after year? The Chancellor is at it again. Another year, another spending review. The same old promises, the same old failure.

May I ask the Chancellor about the assumptions underlying his plans, which he barely mentioned? Has he read the recent warnings of the newly appointed economic adviser to the Department of Trade and Industry, who said:

"The Government may be about to embark on too much spending which it will not be able to finance . . . The expectation is that taxes quite soon may have to go up again"?

In light of those comments, does he stand by the growth forecasts outlined in the Budget and the economy's performance since then? Indeed, what confidence can we have in any of his figures when he so casually cooks the books on borrowing and debt, as he has done, Enron-style, in the case of Network Rail?

The Chancellor has today barely mentioned something that he normally says a great deal about—productivity. Perhaps that is not altogether surprising as the latest figures show a fall in productivity in the first quarter of the year. Indeed, under five years of Labour government, Britain's productivity has grown less than half as fast as it did under the last five years of Conservative government.

On Britain's productivity gap with the United States, the Chancellor's own advisers now say, in typical new Labour phrasing, that recent years may have seen "increased room for catch-up". Does not that phrase just sum up new Labour? Will not that be the Government's epitaph? On health, on education, on transport and on law and order, are not they masters at producing increased room for catch-up? Are not they masters at promising the earth, at trying to spin their way out of failure and at substituting subterfuge for substance? Here the Chancellor is again. Another year, another spending review. The same old promises, the same old failure.

Of course there are some aspects of today's announcement that we welcome. We will support measures to defeat terrorism and the associated rises in spending on defence, and we welcome the increase in the budget for international development. We shall carefully study a number of the other proposals that the Chancellor announced, but there are some aspects of his statement about which we have specific concerns.

The Chancellor indicated how he intends to pay for the new education maintenance allowances. Will he confirm that he will retain child benefit in full for 16 to 18-year-olds? He makes promises about housing. Will he confirm that the amount of affordable housing has fallen under the Labour Government, and that the total number of houses being built in this country is the lowest in peacetime since 1924? Why did he not mention in his statement his latest proposal to redistribute council grants to favoured areas that the Labour party controls, eventually leaving the south-east of England with a £200 million shortfall?

Will not the new panoply of prescriptive controls that the Chancellor has announced today lead to the greatest increase in centralised bureaucracy for a generation? In providing better public services, there is a better way. That means learning the best lessons from other countries where there are no waiting lists, where crime is falling and where school standards are way above ours. It means moving decision making closer to the people, the families and the communities affected. It means trusting people to know what is best for their area—trusting the teachers, the police officers and the doctors to get on with their jobs without constant interference and meddling from Whitehall.

We will not endorse the Chancellor's failed approach to public services. We will not support the policy of money without change—but before the Chancellor launches another of his scare campaigns, let me point out that that does not mean that we are against spending more on education and other services. However, we are against his plans to spend more without real reform. As his record shows, that simply does not work.

When the Chancellor replies to questions and statements from the Opposition, he likes to start—he always does—by saying that he will answer all our points in full; then, he does not answer any of them. In his response today, let him answer only this one question. Why does he think that he can get away, year after year, with making the same old promises and proposing the same old failed answers? Why does he refuse to accept that if we are to give this country the services we deserve, it is time for real reform?

Mr. Brown: The shadow Chancellor says that he supports the increased funding for action against terrorism and for international development, but by his silence he has not supported the increased funding for education, health, housing, transport, the Home Office, policing and all the major public services in this country. When the Leader of the Opposition said on radio today that there would be not a penny more for public services, what he meant was that all talk of general reform is designed to obscure a policy of cutting public spending.

I defy Opposition Members to go back to their constituencies this weekend and explain why they do not support the additional payments for primary schools, the £165,000 for secondary schools, and the 6 per cent. real-terms increase in education spending. Let them explain why they do not support our health service reforms and our money, and why they are considering charges for visits to hospitals and GPs. After all the talk of concern about public services and poverty, a speech, a visit to a council estate and a night in a homeless shelter, what has happened is that compassionate conservatism has given way to the usual uncaring conservatism that everyone associates with the Conservative party.

The Conservatives will not match us on health and education, despite the fact that at the last election they said that throughout the following Parliament they would support our plans on health and education. Every Opposition Member must explain to their constituents why, having said in their manifesto at the last election they said that they would support our education and health plans, they are not doing so.

The shadow Chancellor raised the issue of the economy and what is happening to it. We stand comparison with his record as Employment Secretary. It is not simply the fact that interest rates at the moment are 4 per cent, but went up to 15 per cent. when he was Employment Secretary. It is not simply that inflation is 2 per cent, but when he was Employment Secretary he reported it at 10 per cent. If one is dealing with the ups and downs of the economic cycle, would one prefer to do so under a Government who have cut debt and debt interest payments to the lowest level for many years, as against a Government who were responsible, when he was in the Cabinet, for £50 billion of borrowing and a doubling of the national debt?

The shadow Chancellor said that we have come back to report that there is a need for more reform. Exactly—there is need for more reform, but the reforms that we have made—

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Five years of promises.

Mr. Brown: Is the Leader of the Opposition saying that we have not improved numeracy results for 11-year-olds? Is he saying that we have not met our literacy targets? Instead of 500,000 people in school classes of more than 30, there is none today. Is he saying that that is not an achievement? Is he opposing the fact that there are 20,000 more teachers in schools and 100,000 more students at university and that we are reforming secondary, further and higher education? In five years, we have made more reforms than the Conservatives made in their 18 years.

As for economic reform, we made the Bank of England independent, which the Conservatives opposed. We created the Financial Services Authority; they opposed it. We created an independent Competition Commission; they opposed it. We created the new deal of rights and responsibilities; they continue to oppose it. We will therefore not take any lectures about the conduct of economic policy from the Opposition.

On planning reforms, the Deputy Prime Minister will announce on Thursday—Opposition Members will, and should, welcome this—reforms to the planning system that will speed up planning and put more resources into making the planning system more effective. It is a tragedy that nothing was done during 18 years of Conservative government. As for housing, we are doubling the housing budget, having already doubled it. The housing reforms that we are making, which will be announced on Thursday, should be welcomed by Opposition Members as well Government Members.

Waiting lists, which the shadow Chancellor also raised, are down by 100,000 on 1997. There is no point in his trying to lecture us on the national health service—he would cut the NHS budget. He said that all of us in positions of responsibility should be judged on our performance. He, remember, had ministerial responsibility for financial services at the start of the pensions mis-selling. He was Minister for Local Government when the poll tax was introduced. He was Employment Secretary when unemployment went up by 1 million, and was Home Secretary when crime doubled.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Answer the question.

Mr. Brown: The question is whether the Conservatives can ever stand before the country again as a serious party if they are not prepared to finance education, health and decent public services. May I tell the shadow Chancellor that at the last election, to win his seat in Folkestone, he said that the Conservatives would spend more on education and health. He cannot face his electors with a policy of cuts in education and health. He should go back to the drawing board and think again.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Watching the Conservatives today is like watching the charge of the Light Brigade. Unlike them, we welcome the spending increase for hospitals and schools. We believe that the British people will do the same, and the polls suggest that even Conservative supporters will.

After two years of cuts and five years of phoney figures, no longer the same old failures: at last Labour is admitting the truth. Public services were failing because they were starved of funds, but why then did the Chancellor cut income tax just two years ago? Why did he allow the share of national income going to education to fall in the last Parliament as a whole? Why did Labour not tell the truth about its tax plans at the general election? No wonder people do not trust Labour.

[Matthew Taylor]

Conservatives voted against the tax rise; today they oppose the spending rises, so now we know for sure: Conservatives want fewer teachers, fewer doctors, fewer nurses. No wonder the British people do not—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is putting questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not to the Conservatives.

Matthew Taylor: On our side, the money is welcome. We had the courage to argue for it at the election. The question now is whether the Chancellor is spending it well, and there the signs are bad. There is not more reform but more control. Why is there more control from the centre, more red tape and more control freakery? What is the Chancellor afraid of? Why will he not trust local people with local school and hospital decisions, and trust communities with their hospitals and schools?

Here we have it—quangos for health, quangos for social services, quangos for police. The Chancellor may be able to control his Cabinet colleagues, but he cannot control every classroom and he cannot run every hospital ward. It is time to trust the teachers with their classes, the doctors with their patients and the nurses in their wards. The Chancellor has given them the money, and now he should give them the freedom to do their job, answerable to the patients and the community, not tied up in red tape and quangos answerable only to the Chancellor.

Mr. Brown: I am surprised at the Liberal shadow Chancellor saying those things. First, we are devolving power to primary care trusts. We are devolving power to schools. We have just announced the biggest payments direct to head teachers. Equally, we are devolving power to both regions and localities in terms of housing, social services and so on. I should have thought that he would welcome the inspectorates that we have set up to ensure that there is proper public information about how various organisations are meeting the standards expected of them.

Once again, while I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman supports the additional public spending, the Liberal party wants us to spend more—*[Interruption.]* Last week, the Leader of the Liberal party was standing in the House of Commons demanding that more money be spent on community care. The week before, more money was requested for other purposes. In comparison with what the Liberals promised at the last election, by 2006 we will be spending £9 billion more than they promised on education, £25 billion more than they promised on health, £6 billion more than they promised on transport, and £1 billion more than they promised on international development.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): May I commend the Chancellor for a huge boost to public services? In particular, I single out the education maintenance allowances, to which the shadow Chancellor referred and which will increase the incentives for young people in disadvantaged areas to stay on in education after 16. Can the Chancellor assure me that there will be no black holes down which the money will go, and that the reforms are essential for the benefit of the economy as a whole? Does he agree that those who govern or wish to govern must be clear, transparent and honest about the money that they will spend and where that money will come from?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Treasury Committee. I think that what he says is very important. I am rather surprised that the shadow Chancellor and shadow Chief Secretary have chosen to abandon the House of Commons at this very point, when it is not only our proposals that are under scrutiny, but theirs as far as public spending is concerned.

On the point made by my hon. Friend, yes, we will extend education maintenance allowances. I believe that there should be widespread support in all parts of the House for more people being able to stay on at school and for there being no financial barrier to their doing so. The condition of the education maintenance allowances—this relates to his point about value for money—is that this is not money given in return for nothing; it is given in return for young people staying on at school, studying for qualifications and making a go of it in their final years at school so that they can get college and university qualifications. I look forward to visiting the Treasury Committee to talk about this and other matters.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): I congratulate the Chancellor on his ability to use the word "prudence" at least once without an apparent blush of shame or regret, as he used to cite her more frequently. Will he confirm my understanding on two points: first, that this is the biggest rate of increase in public spending that has been announced since the early 1970s, or for 30 years, since pre-International Monetary Fund intervention days; and, secondly, that it is being announced at a time when the outlook for the real economy—indeed, the global economy—and its ability to create wealth and grow is probably more uncertain than it has been for a very long time?

Does the Chancellor justify that with his constant citing of the levels of national debt and the present levels of deficit, which I am sure he realises are the result of an American-led western boom that led to his under-forecasting revenues and finding that he was over-forecasting spending? Does he not agree that in three years' time, where he should be looking in prudence, debt will be higher, deficits will be growing and interest rates will probably not be as low as 4 per cent.? If we have had a period of low growth or worse, he will face tax increases or unhealthy public deficits, or both, and a difficult time for the real economy. This review is a gamble; it is spend, spend, spend. That is popular today—it always is and always was when it happened in the past—but those of us with a concern for the national interest must have our fingers crossed that at least some of it comes off.

Mr. Brown: That is exactly what the former shadow Chancellor and Chancellor said when we talked about the 2000 spending review—that it was unsustainable, that we would not be able to finance it, that it would cause inflation and that we would not be able to meet our commitments.

Mr. Clarke: I said that the Government would have to put up taxes.

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman said that it would be inflationary and unsustainable, and that has not been the case at all.

As far as taxation is concerned, we put it to the country a few months ago that, after the Wanless report, it was necessary if we were to finance proper health service spending up to 2008 and to make that new decision, that we had the national insurance rise in place. If the former Chancellor, who believes in the national health service, unlike so many of his colleagues on the Conservative Benches, looked at the figures, he would support what we are doing in relation to the NHS.

The problem about the former Chancellor's position is that he wants to return to the old annual Budgets of the 1990s and the annual spending rounds in which spending was set in November, but then had to be changed during the year as a result of all sorts of different events. We are taking a far more long-term approach, and the reason why we can do so is that we have reduced national debt to a realistic level. If debt were at 44 per cent., the level left by the former Chancellor when we came into power, we could not do what we are doing today, but debt is down to 30 per cent., not least because we used the proceeds of the spectrum sale to pay off large amounts of national debt. I may say to him that if Opposition Members complain that we have not been fast enough in delivering all the improvements in public services that we want, it is precisely because we had to deal with the record of the Conservative Government under whom debt was at 44 per cent. and the borrowing requirement was nearly £30 billion. Inflation was rising when we came in and interest rates had to be put up.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. However important the statement is, questions to the Chancellor cannot go on indefinitely. To get in as many as possible, I call on hon. Members to make their questions single and brief, and for equally crisp answers.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What contingency plans have been made for an attack on Iraq and rocketing oil prices?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is Father of the House and makes his points in his usual way. As regards the defence budget, we make very cautious assumptions at all times about what is likely to happen to oil prices.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Implicit in the Chancellor's statement was the decision to follow Germany, France and Italy in breaching the rules of the European growth and stability pact. Did he note last week's stern warnings from the president of the Bundesbank and the International Monetary Fund that these across-the-board increases in Government expenditure without the prospect of matching growth will bring the viability of the euro into serious question? Will he take that risk into account when he examines his five vague economic tests?

Mr. Brown: Trust the hon. Gentleman to make the public spending announcements on education, health, transport and public services generally into a question about Europe. On the stability and growth pact, he is well aware of our views about the fiscal rules that we believe are appropriate to a modern economy and the debate that is being held in Europe about that. It is interesting that at the last election, the hon. Gentleman's manifesto said:

> "Waiting times to see a consultant have lengthened. Secondary classes are larger. There is a growing shortage of teachers."

Surely he must support additional investment in health and education, as did his party at the last election, and should not he be telling his Front Benchers that the policy of opposing our investments in health and education is a road to electoral suicide?

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I thank the Chancellor for his statement and warmly welcome his assertion that housing and transport are particularly important parts of the infrastructure, especially in areas where there is a vibrant and healthy growing economy, as in Cambridge. Does he think it feasible for local authorities to set a target of 50 per cent. affordable housing in any new housing development, because that is what we desperately need in areas such as mine?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The interest that she has taken in science over many years has been a powerful influence on the Government's determination to get more resources into the science budget. On housing, she will know that I said that a statement was to be made by the Deputy Prime Minister on Thursday. He is committed to more affordable housing, especially in areas of great housing demand, of which my hon. Friend's is one. She will have to be patient and wait until he makes his statement on Thursday.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the Chancellor accept that although many Conservative Members and others welcome the increases in overseas aid and science, and some of those in education and health, my right hon. and learned Friend the Shadow Chancellor was right to say that the increases are not only unsustainable, but positively incontinent? Will the Chancellor tell the House precisely what have been the gains in productivity, especially emanating from the health service, since his last announcement of this type?

Mr. Brown: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that when he looks at the health service, he will see that waiting times are coming down. When he looks at in-patient and out-patient waiting lists, he will see that they are down on what they were in 1997. When he looks at the building of new hospitals, they are proceeding apace. When he looks at the recruitment of nurses and doctors, he will see that we are getting them into the key specialties. When he looks at the accident and emergency units in our hospitals, he will see that we have repaired and renovated 95 per cent. of them over the past few years. I agree with him about one thing—more investment is needed, in education as well as in health. I am grateful that he has distanced himself from the position of his Front Benchers, which is to oppose investment in health and education.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, which is designed to improve the quality of life of everyone in this country. On behalf of local government, may I ask him about the modernisation of housing? Will local authorities have some input into that modernisation programme? Will he consider carefully the authorities in the special interest group of municipal

[Mr. Bill O'Brien]

authorities—SIGOMA—where underachievement owing to poverty and deprivation is a major problem and crime hotspots need to be tackled.

Will my right hon. Friend consider giving funding to the hospice movement to ensure that there is no closure of hospice beds?

Mr. Brown: I will pass on to the Secretary of State for Health my hon. Friend's concern about support for the hospice movement. He rightly points to the neglect of housing over many years and the need for neighbourhood renewal as well as an attack on crime. We are a third of the way towards fulfilling our targets for decent housing. However, as my hon. Friend knows, considerably more remains to be done, and that is why we have provided the extra funding.

On improving the neighbourhoods in the areas that he described and their concerns about local government funding, we announced increases in the budget of the neighbourhood renewal fund. My hon. Friend also mentioned crime. The Home Secretary will make a statement on the criminal justice White Paper, and I believe that he will be able to show the extra resources that are going towards fighting crime.

My hon. Friend represents the interests of his constituency with great determination, and he pointed to some of the increases in investment, housing and policing that the White Paper includes.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The Chancellor announced an increase of £1.2 billion in three years' time in Northern Ireland. Although we naturally welcome that, I understand that it includes several adjustments, some of which are technical, and the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that we shall therefore suspend judgment on the detail until we have had an opportunity to study it.

The Chancellor knows that we inherited a pattern of expenditure in Northern Ireland that meant significant underinvestment in public utilities. We need and welcome his continued support for our efforts to achieve change and reform.

At the beginning of his speech, the Chancellor said that he hoped to provide for more doctors, nurses and police officers. He referred to funding for the Northern Ireland Office and said that the Government were providing resources for the ongoing recruitment programme of policemen and the establishment of a new training college. We are more than 500 officers short in the full-time establishment, and the number is dropping. Yet there is a serious problem of maintaining law and order and security in Northern Ireland. Will the resources that have been provided fully fund the additional officers that we need to reach the modest establishment targets that Patten set? Will the extra resources fully fund the new police training college?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the First Minister for his questions. We discussed some of those matters when we met last week, and I was delighted to visit Northern Ireland a few weeks ago when we launched the economic initiative. I applaud the right hon. Gentleman and his Ministers for all their efforts to achieve economic growth and modernisation in Northern Ireland. The settlement is based on the Barnett formula, and he knows that it is worked out carefully to fulfil the needs of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. There is extra funding for the European peace initiative in Northern Ireland. I shall raise the right hon. Gentleman's questions about the Northern Ireland Office with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and we shall be in touch with him.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): My right hon. Friend's statement will be enthusiastically welcomed in my constituency, which is the home of Daresbury laboratory, a world-leading scientific research facility. Will he consider the centre for accelerated science imaging project as soon as possible? Daresbury laboratory is designed to secure its future. Will he give it his backing?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend always makes a persuasive case for his constituency. He knows that such decisions are not for the Treasury but for others. However, my hon. Friend rightly said that the science budget had been increased. It will greatly help the north-west region that he represents so well, and other regions of the country. The 10 per cent. increase in the science budget and the extra £1¼ billion by 2005–06 in partnership with Wellcome Trust, which is contributing an extra £250 million, means that we can start to build for the next generation in science. What I have seen in the north-west offers great hope for the future. Science in the region will expand as a result of the measures.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Chancellor plagiarised a phrase that I used at Prime Minister's questions three weeks ago when he said that the mark of a civilised society was the way in which we treat our elderly. Why has he sanctioned a mechanism whereby taxation can be transferred from the south to the north? Why should an elderly person in Cheltenham have his funds transferred to someone in Cleveland? Why should parents in Gloucester have their funds transferred to a school in Gateshead? Surely everyone who pays taxes deserves equal treatment. Will the Chancellor ensure such equal treatment?

Mr. Brown: We are one United Kingdom, and I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome what we are doing for the elderly. We are raising the basic pension, and the winter allowance—which the Conservatives opposed—free television licences for the over-75s, and the new pension credit are among the other measures that we have taken to help today's pensioners. The hon. Gentleman should be in favour of what we are doing, and, so far as community care is concerned—I suspect that that is part of the issue that he is raising—the 6 per cent. increase in real terms of the social services budget in this three years' budgeting is far more than any Conservative Government ever did.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I certainly welcome the reforms of the national child care strategy proposed in my right hon. Friend's statement, and I hope to explore that matter further in my Adjournment debate on Wednesday. On the education maintenance allowance, which Doncaster has piloted, does he recognise and accept that this is not just about investment in 16 to 19-year-olds? By providing the allowance, we can help those who are socially excluded from university education to gain the qualifications necessary to apply. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that we not only monitor take-up at 16 but examine whether there is an effect on the numbers who then apply to university after staying on at school after 16?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I wish her well in her debate on child care. I hope that the figures we have announced for the additional investment in child care will be matched by the creation of child care businesses, and by more local authorities and other organisations getting involved in the business of providing child care. I also hope that the money available will be quickly converted into the child care places and the carers that we need.

Education maintenance allowances are an innovation that has worked in the third of the country in which they have been piloted. The staying-on rate at school has increased from 5 per cent. to 8 per cent. This has been proven to be a worthwhile experiment, and any barrier to staying on at school that can be removed is worth removing. What my hon. Friend says about further and higher education and the applicability of this measure is obviously something that she will persuade Education Ministers to look at.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Will the Chancellor tell us by how much debt interest will rise over the next five years, first in cash terms, and, secondly, in real terms? Will those figures include an estimate for interest on the increasing amount of off-balance-sheet debt that the Chancellor is accumulating?

Mr. Brown: On the hon. Gentleman's point about off-balance-sheet debt, we have done what no other country has done—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should be congratulating those who were Ministers in the previous Conservative Government, because we have consistently published—

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Cooking the books.

Mr. Brown: Well, if the right hon. Gentleman wants to accuse the previous Government, whose practices we have followed, of cooking the books, it shows how out of touch with that Government he was—as we thought. So far as contingent liabilities are concerned, we publish all the details on that matter and we have had discussions about it in the Select Committee on the Treasury. *[Interruption.]* It is all very well for the Conservatives to shout about contingent liabilities, but we are following the practices that have been pursued by previous Governments, and have done so over the last few years. The table on contingent liabilities is regularly published. So far as debt interest is concerned, it is a share of gross domestic product and will remain at around 2 per cent. over the next few years.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): On any test, this is a make-or-break statement for public services. If we do not begin to see world-class public services as a result of this kind of spending announcement, we are never going to see them. Much therefore hangs on what my right hon. Friend has said today. Will he say a little more about what he rightly described as the need to ensure that, when people see the money going in, they can connect it to the results coming out? That is the only way that we are going to get sustained support for this strategy. There is a difficulty if people cannot see the improvements in a measurable and demonstrable form, or if there is no independent evaluation of them.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has always taken an interest in the workings of government and in how we can improve them. In our first term, it was obviously crucial that we ensured that there was a proper framework [illegible] economic stability, and that we got people back to work and increased employment. The money that is now flowing [illegible] public services has been made possible by achieving that. The question is, how do we get best value for money? I insist that we need the independent and statutory inspection that my hon. Friend has described, so that people can see for themselves—through proper accountability—whether services are delivering.

Equally, in dealing with failing institutions, it is incumbent on us, as people who believe in the public services, to take early and pre-emptive action when organisations, institutions and services are not delivering as they should for the people. That is why I have read out to the House a number of measures proposed by individual Departments for dealing with failing institutions. I look forward to further discussions in the House about how all these reforms—the public service agreement targets, the devolution of responsibility, the independent audit and inspection, the proper rewards for success and the penalties for failure when institutions do not serve the public—can be pushed through. I should have thought that, instead of laughing at those reforms, the Conservatives would welcome them.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): May I ask the Chancellor the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), which he failed to answer? How much, in cash terms, will debt interest payments rise in the next five years?

Mr. Brown: It is estimated that debt interest payments in 2005–06 will be £22.8 billion. In rough terms, that is half what they would be if we had the debt levels that we had under the Conservative party 10 or 20 years ago.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I warmly thank my right hon. Friend for listening to those of us who were calling for increased investment in housing, especially given the atrocious legacy of housing need that we inherited from the previous Tory Government. By 1997, there was a £19 billion disrepair backlog, 2 million were in negative equity, homelessness had doubled and local authority housing investment had halved. Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in areas such as mine, there is no space for further new building of social housing? Would he consider ways in which we can ensure that local authorities bring back into use private long-term empty property? In Luton, there are seven private empty properties for every homeless family. That would be a productive way of tackling the housing need that was left by the previous Tory Government.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Since I first met her, she has been anxious to put forward the case

[Mr. Brown]

for proper housing policies. Representing that city, she has been active in pursuing the case for better housing. The suggestion that she has made is a matter for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, who is considering innovative ideas to tackle the shortage of houses in some parts of the country and the substandard housing in others. My hon. Friend should put her suggestions to him. There will be a statement to the House on this matter on Thursday.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Now that the Chancellor has abandoned double and treble counting, he has announced increases of 6 per cent. a year for English education and 7 per cent. for English health. Does he accept that the knock-on effect in Scotland and Wales will be increases in those vital budgets of little more than half those amounts? Will he tell us definitively whether he intends to accede to the demands of the Deputy Prime Minister and the other anti-Scottish forces in the Cabinet and on the Back Benches and scrap, review or revise the Barnett formula, or does he think that the restrictions on the rate of increase will do the job for him?

Mr. Brown: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is arguing for more public spending when his party has been going round the country telling us not to raise the oil taxation that is necessary to fund increased public spending. I would think more of the former leader of the Scottish National party if he matched the spending that he is demanding with an ability to support the necessary revenues. As for support for education in Scotland, the outstanding fact that he should never forget when he tries to throw percentages at us is that spending per head in Scotland is higher than spending per head in England.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Does the Chancellor acknowledge that, for public services to improve, public service workers' pay needs to improve? Some of them do a top job, but are very low paid. Will the Chancellor say what is in this settlement to enable fairer pay for public service workers?

Mr. Brown: Public service pay is a matter for local government management in negotiation with local government workers. My hon. Friend knows that a real-terms rise is proposed in the salary negotiations that have been taking place. When the issue of low pay is raised, everyone should remember that what we have done with the tax credit system since 1997 is to help low-paid workers—whether it be through the working families tax credit or now through the employment tax credit that is being introduced. Many low-paid workers are being told by their unions that they are worse off, but some of them are £50 a week better off.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): The Chancellor is announcing how he will spend future tax revenues, which are wholly dependent on the performance and growth of the economy. Can he confirm that he still forecasts that the British economy will grow by more than 3 per cent. next year? Given the pause in growth that we have had this year, is he happy with that? The executives at Worldcom and Enron overstated their revenues. Is the Chancellor guilty of the same crime?

Mr. Brown: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman, of all Conservative Members, should indulge in such short-termism: as he knows, and as happened when he was advising a Conservative Government, we publish forecasts twice a year. We have published our forecast in the Budget, and we will publish our forecast in November in the pre-Budget report.

The hon. Gentleman should also know—I find that the Conservatives are not willing to be up to date at all on this—that the fiscal rules we have set are set over a cycle, and will be met over the cycle. That means that borrowing for necessary investment can take place, but it also means that we must have a current balance. As I have said, there is a margin for prudence in the figures that I announced in the Budget, and we are uprating from today.

The hon. Gentleman—this Conservative Member—should be congratulating us on the fact that unemployment in his constituency is now 0.7 per cent. He should also remember, when he asks about public spending and whether we can afford it, that in his election commitments he said:

> "The UK spends just 5.8 per cent. of our national income on health care, compared to 9.8 per cent. in France. We need more public investment".

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcements on housing. Will they cover areas with substandard housing such as Hattersley in my constituency?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that a mantra of reform without investment is just code for cuts, and shows that the Conservatives are the party of spin and we are the party of delivery today?

Mr. Brown: The fact that the Conservatives talk of reform in general, while the shadow Chancellor gave no details of any single reform during the 20 minutes for which he spoke today, surely proves to anyone who is prepared to listen that talk about reform is simply camouflage for the real Conservative policy of public spending cuts. Back Benchers must be thinking twice about what the shadow Chancellor says. The Conservatives promised higher spending on health and education at the last election and said that they would match our plans during the Parliament. Now Conservative Members are being told by the shadow Chancellor and their leader that the policy of the Conservative party is cuts in health and cuts in education.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have time-restricted business to protect. I remind the House that there will be a debate on public expenditure next Tuesday.

Moorside Mining

4.56 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, to debate an important matter that requires specific and urgent consideration, namely,

the ending of underground working at Moorside Mining, Eckington, Derbyshire, owing to the refusal of brokers to renew statutory required insurance cover for small mines and that of the Department of Trade and Industry to provide a covering bond.

After receiving welcome state aid under the European Union programme, Moorside seemed set for a bright future. It is a reliable producer, providing high-quality coal, and has full order books. Owing to the ending of insurance cover, however, since this morning the underground work force of 27 have not been allowed to enter the mine for their normal shifts. The mine is now in a condition in which it could be flooded and destroyed.

To operate a mine it is necessary to meet statutory requirements, including the holding of employers' liability insurance. The limited number of brokers who have been willing to supply such cover pushed up payments considerably. Moorside's coverage, which has just run out, cost 350 per cent. more recently than it did a year ago. Moorside's insurers now refuse to renew the coverage at all. It has so far proved impossible to obtain alternative cover even with the help of the DTI.

One problem is that insurers fear that emphysema and vibration white finger claims will need to be met—claims from miners who, during their working lives, worked at Moorside only for short periods. That is an exaggerated fear.

We need to discuss the options available for Moorside's survival. They include the issuing of a DTI bond, and the DTI's facilitating an alternative solution involving, for instance, the Association of British Insurers. A sensible way forward would be a self-insured scheme similar to that of UK Coal: all mines would pay a reasonable fee, with Government cover, while the moneys in the scheme grew. The comprehensive spending review, which we have just heard, needs to find Government funding to handle such insurance problems. The problem that I have raised is beginning to affect other small mines and other businesses. Betwys colliery, in south Wales, is experiencing similar difficulties.

I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will agree to the Adjournment of business to allow us to discuss the ways and means of saving the last coal mine in Derbyshire—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. In the end, the hon. Gentleman's speech was well-timed, and I am sorry to interrupt him on his last word. I have listened carefully to what he said, and I must give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider the matter that he raises appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24, so I cannot submit his application to the House.

BILL PRESENTED

FIREARMS AMENDMENT (No. 2)

Mr. David Wilshire presented a Bill to make provision for the regulation of the purchase of air weapons. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed. [Bill 179]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AFFAIRS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 117(6) (Standing Committee on Regional Affairs),

"That—

(1) the matter of the White Paper 'Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions' (Cm 5511, May 2002), being a matter relating to regional affairs in England, be referred to the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs;

(2) the Committee meet at Five o'clock on Wednesday 17th July at Westminster to consider the matter referred to it under paragraph (1) above; and

(3) the proceedings at the meeting be brought to a conclusion at half-past Seven o'clock."—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

EDUCATION BILL (PROGRAMME) (No. 4)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001],

"That the following provisions shall apply to the Education Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 4th December 2001, 23rd January 2002 and 6th February 2002:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

2. The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order, namely, Nos. 12, 13, 14, 23, 27, 37, 1 to 11, 15 to 22, 24 to 26, 28 to 36 and 38 to 98.

Subsequent stages

3. Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

Education Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 10

POWERS OF GOVERNING BODIES TO FORM OR INVEST IN COMPANIES TO PROVIDE SERVICES ETC.

Lords amendment: No. 12.

5.1 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this we will consider Government amendments (a) and (aa) to the words so restored to the Bill, Lords amendment No. 13 and the Government motion to disagree thereto, and Government amendments (a) to (c) to the words so restored to the Bill.

Mr. Miliband: We believe that the new freedom for schools proposed in these clauses will be valuable in helping them to work together to raise standards. Labour Members stand for enterprise in, and by, schools. We want new partnerships between schools, and we want best practice to lead the rest—whether in relation to pedagogy, to the curriculum, or to information and communications technology. I am glad to say that in our endeavours, we have welcome support across the House for the measures that we are debating. As a member of the Education Bill Standing Committee, I sat in rapt attention, and was particularly struck by one impassioned speech. The Member in question said, in respect of these specific clauses, that

> "we may be on the verge of providing for an extremely exciting new environment that provides scope for new ideas for the benefit of education."—*[Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 18 December 2001; c. 191.]

I could not have put it better myself. The Committee member in question was the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), whom I am glad to quote in this regard. He was clearly taking his cue from a distinguished predecessor of his, Lord Baker of Dorking, who said in a House of Lords debate:

> "I welcome these clauses in the Bill."—*[Official Report, House of Lords*, 7 May 2002; Vol. 1874, c. 1055.]

Given my strong memory of the hon. Gentleman's impassioned speech, I was more than a little surprised to discover that the Opposition joined in the process of deleting the clauses in the other place.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Perhaps I can help to jog the Minister's memory. I am sure that he cannot recall his predecessor's giving any satisfactory reassurance in respect of the concerns that we raised in Committee about where liability would fall if such companies were set up. As he will learn, it is perfectly normal practice in this House that, if we are not given adequate reassurance, we seek to amend the Bill later on.

Mr. Miliband: I am grateful for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman's years of experience in this House, which are greater than mine. All I remember from our proceedings in Committee is the eloquence of my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), who was leading for the Government. He rebutted all manner of allegations and put a consistent and coherent view. I wonder whether there is a split on this issue, and whether this is a case of old Conservatives versus new Conservatives—or mods versus trads. I understand that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) will lead for the Conservatives on this issue. I can give him my categorical assurance that the European Union has no involvement in this measure, so I hope that he will join me in seeking to reverse the House of Lords' view.

There is a serious point. The Bill is about supporting schools in finding new ways to innovate and work together, so that they can raise standards. The power we are debating is a new freedom for schools. It will not be used by every school, but it will enable those schools that choose to use it to develop new partnerships, to share good practice and to support other schools.

We are widening the choices that schools already have. It is already possible under the law for a single school to form a company, if that is necessary for the conduct of the school. This power will enable schools to work together to form joint companies, or companies that will support other schools. I find it hard to see why that form of collaborative and innovative activity to benefit the wider community of schools should be opposed.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way while he is reading his notes. We want to be helpful this evening, but could he give us examples of how the new powers will be used? What sort of companies will be formed? What will their activities be? Why is it not possible under existing legislation for schools or local authorities to do that work, because they have been doing so ever since 1944?

Mr. Miliband: I know that the hon. Gentleman is always keen to be helpful. I assure him that this is the best that I can do in terms of a speech and I am not reading someone else's notes. I shall come to some examples of how this will be a beneficial measure in terms of pedagogy and curricula. If he feels that I have not addressed his concerns sufficiently, I hope that he will interrupt me again.

We have always been clear that the formation of a company is not an end in itself. It is valuable only as a means to an end. Forming a company is the simplest mechanism available for groups of schools to have joint legal identity. If a group of schools want to purchase their supplies together and so benefit from economies of scale, it will help them greatly if they can do so as a single legal entity. Because a company provides limited liability status, these clauses will also mean that schools can reduce the financial risk of collaborating. That will leave them free to take advantage of the opportunities offered to them. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) is not missing the key point that I am making. In relation to both purchase and provision of services, the opportunity to establish a company will stretch the possibilities for schools to share best practice beyond the current boundaries.

Through increased delegation of budgets by local education authorities, schools have the freedom and confidence to buy the services they need from those best placed to deliver them. If private sector providers can sell services to schools, I see no reason to prevent schools themselves, which may have some of the most expert people available, from providing services as well. The services offered by a school company may represent an opportunity for other schools to buy in real practical experience and expertise. A service delivery company may share a particular school improvement expertise, perhaps helping a weak school to become stronger, thereby giving pupils the quality of education that is their right.

We must make the best use of the talent and experience that is to be found in schools. The opportunities could be very wide; I shall give a couple of specific examples for the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members. A group of schools that has developed a software package or an anti-bullying training pack may join another partner to ease production and distribution of the service. The expertise of the different partners will help to give schools access to high-quality services from which they would otherwise be unable to benefit.

I am clear that the provisions will provide a worthwhile opportunity for schools. I emphasise that it will be an opportunity; there will be no compulsion on schools to enter into companies. Nor will there be any compulsion on other schools to purchase from companies. However, this will be an opportunity to lead the way.

In seeking to restore to the Bill the clauses removed by the other place, we are proposing some small changes that I should explain for the benefit of hon. Members. Two of the amendments will place in the Bill detail that was to be contained in regulations. The first is the requirement that school companies will be required to register under the Companies Acts as companies limited by shares or by guarantee. We may wish to consider that in more detail, given the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough. The second is that only those specified in regulations may join companies. Placing those details in the Bill will offer greater clarity and more visible protection to companies. The other two Government amendments tighten up the requirement for companies to operate only in accordance with the requirements set out in regulations.

We also wish to restore clause 11, which sets out the regulatory regime that we propose to introduce for service delivery and purchasing companies. It will create a necessary framework of safeguards for school companies to operate in. We are preparing regulations that we intend to be flexible and to avoid unnecessary constraint on the operational freedom of school companies. The regulations will include requirements about company operation and membership, and will create supervising authorities to oversee the school companies. The clause will also require governing bodies of maintained schools wishing to form or join companies established under clause 11 to obtain the consent of the LEA. As the House knows, we will consult relevant organisations in the education service on the draft regulations, taking careful note of the responses.

I hope that I have addressed some of the concerns felt by Opposition Members and that the House will join me in rejecting the Lords amendments and agreeing to the Government's substitutes.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): We have heard an extremely truncated version of what the Government propose. The Minister will be well aware that these matters received extensive consideration in the other place, in Committee, on Report and on Third Reading. I am sure that he did not mean any disrespect, but the manner in which he shot through the Government's explanation left me surprised, as I think it did other hon. Members. It appeared that he was not prepared to go into the serious issues that are involved.

The Minister may wonder why it is that the shadow Attorney-General would rise to deal with these matters. The reason is simple. There are a number of issues that relate to the interaction between company law and education legislation. Precisely for that reason, I have made criticisms of the Minister. He did not even attempt to deal with any of the issues, although he knows perfectly well what they are. When the Lords finished their consideration of the Bill, the relevant issues were left for further consideration. That is precisely why the Lords, by a substantial majority, proposed that clauses 10 and 11 should be deleted. That proposal allows amendments Nos. 12 and 13 to be considered in this place.

We have heard a great deal from the Chancellor of the Exchequer this afternoon about prospective increases in education spending. There was much about freedom and control this morning from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on "Today". We have been told that there will be no blank cheque. These are important matters because education has been given a certain priority by the Government, at any rate in the initial stages since the Labour party won the general election before last. The debate on school companies raises these issues. Specifically, they are at the heart of the system that the Government have adopted to implement their policy, especially in terms of education. This raises the question of companies limited by guarantee, although at the last minute in the other place the Government added arrangements for companies limited by shares, which the Liberal Democrats in their wisdom—we wait to hear what they have to say—seek to eliminate.

Questions arise that are not confined to education. They arise also in terms of health, not to mention Network Rail. These are matters that relate to the philosophy behind which the Government are hiding on public expenditure.

Similar serious questions and problems arise in many instances, and the debate gives us the opportunity to examine them in the context of education. Let us leave aside the spinning and weaving and examine the mechanics, the legislation and administration, the delivery and practice, the impact on schools, teachers, governing bodies, and local education authorities—and above all what it is all meant to be about, which is the education of our children.

We heard from the Prime Minister only a few years ago that the Government's watchwords were "education, education, education." What do we have? We have administration, administration, administration along with uncertainty, uncertainty, uncertainty. And under the proposed arrangements, we have litigation, litigation, litigation.

There was a protracted debate in the other place on the issue of school companies. I pay tribute to Baroness Blatch and also to Baroness Sharp, of the Liberal Democrats. Similarly, I pay tribute to other noble Lords across the board and to my hon. Friends who considered the Bill in its early stages both in Committee and

[Mr. William Cash]

on Report. I congratulate them on their tenacity and perspicacity in this difficult and opaque area of company law and education. The noble Lord McIntosh cannot be accused entirely of not seeking to alleviate their concerns, but we continue to have them. We do not believe that those concerns have been allayed, whether in the other place or by the absurdly short representations that the Minister has just given in respect of these matters.

The issues with which we are now concerned arise out of Lords amendments Nos. 12 and 13, which seek to reintroduce what were clauses 11 and 12 of the Lords Bill, which were defeated on Third Reading in the other place, with some amendments, by the combined vote of Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and others. I will set out the main features involved in those clauses and deal with our objections.

5.15 pm

First I shall raise a question, which, as far as I am aware, has not yet been dealt with in the Bill. It arises from the potential interaction of the implementation of these provisions within part 1, which is entitled, "Provision for new legal frameworks", and which also includes clause 2, which confers power to suspend statutory requirements. The interaction between those provisions is very important.

Clause 2 is very general, especially in its potential implications for the provisions with which we are dealing today. It provides that, on the application of one or more qualifying bodies—which are defined as including, among others, a local education authority, as well as a governing body of a qualifying school, which, in turn, is defined as including a community, foundation or voluntary school, a community or foundation special school, or a maintained nursery school—the Secretary of State can make an order exempting those bodies from any requirement imposed by the Education Acts, the Learning and Skills Act 2000 or any of the subordinate legislation. That will surprise hon. Members, as it is a very big shift.

Indeed, the clause provides that the Secretary of State can relax such requirements, enabling the applicant to exercise educational powers and duties or make modifications to education legislation. That is a very important and draconian measure. I raise that in connection with the clauses that the Government intend to reintroduce to the Bill simply because it relates to the question of ultimate liability were a school's company to fail, whether it is a company limited by guarantee or, in line with the Minister's amendments—which are disputed by the Liberal Democrats—a company limited by shares. In either case, there is only a minuscule, nominal amount of liability.

In a parliamentary answer given by Lord McIntosh on 25 March 2002, which was also given by Baroness Ashton, to which a letter to my noble Friend Baroness Blatch referred, it was stated that the ultimate liability would fall on the local education authority. In such a case, the local education authority will pick up the tab—that is the expression that is being put around. Will the Minister today reaffirm unequivocally whether that is so? If, by order, the Secretary of State has exempted a local education authority or a school of the kind mentioned above from its statutory functions, surely, the opportunity for the enforcement of those duties by judicial review could be taken away by such an order? That would have grave implications were a school's company to go bust, for the creditors and a whole chain of others affected, who would have no recourse in the last resort—on the face of it—to the Government and the Exchequer.

One of the few comments that the Minister made with regard to the Bill and these amendments when he opened the debate was that financial risk to the companies would be reduced. Surely he understands, however, that, although financial risk to the companies concerned is a matter for consideration, there is also financial risk to all the other people in the chain. I shall come to those others shortly.

The matter is also important given the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement about the sums of money that will be made available to education. Does the potential removal, under such orders, of the duties—we do not know what they are, because they are so vague—and hence the liabilities of local authorities and governing bodies create the possibility of a legal void? Would the liabilities be off balance sheet? It would be interesting to learn whether the Minister has anything to say about that. Will he address the question of school companies—whether they are limited by guarantee or by shares—as the provision for them was made only on Third Reading, in the dying moments of the Bill's consideration in the House of Lords?

Insurance is another issue that was not dealt with greatly, if at all, in the House of Lords. We all know that the compensation culture, as it so described, is growing. Some claims are entirely justified, but the sums of money involved are growing exponentially. For example, the case of Pamela Phelps is important for local education authorities. In 2000, this former pupil successfully sued the London borough of Hillingdon for more than £44,000 after it was proved that her teachers had failed to diagnose her dyslexia, leaving her with the reading age of a seven-year-old.

I could give many examples and I have no doubt that the Minister's advisers would be able to provide even more. A teacher, Carol Ellen Harper, is suing my county council of Staffordshire in the High Court for more than £50,000 after she slipped on food debris and broke her ankle. In Waltham Forest, the head teacher of the Norlington school for boys said:

> "Every day of the week, I am dealing with solicitors. This is taking a substantial amount of time which I and my teachers should be spending doing our jobs."

His school has faced six legal challenges in the past 18 months after legal firms operating on a no-win, no-fee basis targeted parents on surrounding estates, tempting them—so it is said—with the prospect of large compensation payments. Judith Waugh, the head of the John F. Kennedy lower school in Stratford, east London, won £119,000 in High Court damages after she was attacked by a 14-year-old boy in 1998.

There has been a flood of legal actions from pupils, who claim that schools have failed to protect them from bullies. Indeed, a High Court judge ruled that a school had to pay substantial compensation for not protecting a 17-year-old pupil from his own irresponsible behaviour on a school trip. We all know that serious problems can arise from the manner in which schools and education establishments are affected by serious accidents, such as those that have taken place on school outings recently.

The problem of teachers' liability has been discussed by Veronica Cowan, among others. A glance at *The Times Educational Supplement*, which is bulging with thousands of hard-to-fill teaching vacancies, gives a clue as to how difficult it will be for the Prime Minister to deliver on his promise of "education, education, education". Indeed, teachers could be forgiven for thinking that the more likely scenario will be litigation, litigation, litigation. It would be invidious of me to go through all the examples that I could give, but I will be more than happy to supply them to the Minister in case he has not come across them already.

Newcastle-under-Lyme abuts my constituency and many of my constituents go to school there. In a rugby game in 1997, a boy was lifted into the air and landed on his head. He decided to sue the boy who tackled him, and he was covered by the school's insurance. We are not, therefore, being difficult for the sake of it. I am not using graphic examples to raise questions that are irrelevant to the way in which schools are run. The point is this: we are interested in knowing whether regulations on schools companies will require adequate insurance provision to cover the enormous costs that could arise if a company fails.

There is also the related problem of the responsibility of directors. The Minister probably knows that a Government consultation paper outlines proposals to change the criminal law as it relates to the responsibilities of directors. Although I will not go into that in detail, I want to highlight the fact that the Government seem willing to introduce a proposed new offence of corporate killing, which is broadly equivalent to gross carelessness. Pupils are sometimes involved in desperately tragic accidents on school outings. Will the directors of schools companies be advised in advance, in the practice guidelines, that they could be caught up in serious criminal accusations and convictions if things go wrong?

The emphasis—the rationale of the offence—will be based largely on management failures. Although the offence of corporate killing would apply only to corporate bodies, it is important to take account of the fact that it may affect school companies. The consultation paper and the Law Commission's paper refer to the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and to new offences that are committed if people give undertakings. They say that that offence could apply to all employing organisations, including schools, hospital trusts, partnerships and unincorporated charities. Again, the Government need to give that careful consideration, because we need answers.

What will happen if a company goes bust? That is an important practical matter for those concerned—children, parents, teachers, governing bodies, local education authorities, creditors and local communities. The idea of greater local freedom to manage has its attractions, but has the legislation been properly thought through? We all remember the total failure in some schools and the arrangements for LEAs and/or the Government to step in. We demand to know what will happen under the new arrangements.

In law, if a company goes bust, perhaps because of overtrading or a massive insurance claim, the assets have to be sold. Staff have to be laid off, redundancy has to be paid and the debts must be paid off. If there is no money, insolvency will apply, under which the liquidators' remuneration and expenses take first call even before redundancy payments. Creditors, such as builders, those who provided furniture and other contractors, come way down the line. It will not just be the bankers who are involved; many small businesses will also be affected.

We are told that if a company is limited by guarantee or shares with only, say, a £10 liability, then that is all that will be available. We are also told, however, that the LEA will pick up the tab. How will the liability be enforced? How will the LEA be expected to pay up? If the regulations are implemented, an act which could remove the duties imposed by the Government, what effect would that have? In other words, is there a legal void? If not, will the Minister give us chapter and verse to reassure us that there is none, as I am sure he will want to?

The Government tell us that, under regulations, the company will be prohibited from admitting to its membership any person who is not of a prescribed description, and that regulations may impose requirements for the company's constitution and any other matter connected with its affairs. What exactly will that involve? That is not a theoretical but a practical question. The Minister knows perfectly well that all these matters were considered in the House of Lords and no satisfactory answer was given.

5.30 pm

I have a letter dated 28 May from Lord McIntosh to Baroness Blatch, which baldly states:

> "LEAs would ultimately be liable for the debts of purchasing companies, just as they are for those accrued by purchasing by individual schools."

What will happen if an order is made under clause 2 with the effect that I have just described?

The key question is whether the proposals will work. Lord McIntosh said that one reason

> "for using such companies is that schools may want to join together to deliver services to other schools in which they have real strength. That could result in benefits to company members and to other schools, which could receive good quality support."

He then made a brief point about distance learning and publishing skills, before going on to say:

> "They may therefore need to bring in outside organisations . . . perhaps a not-for-profit organisation . . . as members of the company on the basis that they will take a share of the profits. And why not?"

Lord McIntosh also said:

> "I cannot reconcile the opposition to that idea with what I understand to be the ethos of the Conservative party."

He could not understand why we would not want commercial freedom for the companies in question. The point to which I return is that if there is merit in the principle of giving further freedom, the key question—this is where the Labour party and the Government always fall down—is not whether the Government have bagged one of our ideas and are stealing our clothes to make it look as though they are giving schools freedom to manage, but whether the policy will work. We do not yet know the detail of the regulations. There are no magic wands to be waved in such matters. My questions concern matters that will have to be dealt with on the ground.

There is a further point. We are indeed in favour of innovation, but the amendments tabled in the other House would have allowed even more freedom, and there is a problem with that. It looks to us as though the issues have not been properly thought through, and there have been

[Mr. William Cash]

no proper answers about culpability, liability and the protection of governors. In the other place, Baroness Blatch asked:

> "How on earth will the extra time, money and effort be spent without any impact on the primary duty of a governing body, which is to manage its school?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 July 2002; Vol. 637, c. 252-3.]

Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords made specific points about that.

The key question here is whether the burden imposed on the companies by the proposals would interfere with the management of the schools. There is no doubt, as the Minister in the House of Lords admitted, that a considerable amount of time and effort would be spent in setting up arrangements of this kind. This would be a recipe for imposing administrative burdens on schools.

In a letter to Baroness Blatch, Lord McIntosh wrote, in respect of profits that may be made by such companies:

> "We do not propose that profit must be spent solely in the interests of education."

That raises an interesting question. Schools are, by definition, charities. They are almost entirely governed by the law relating to charities interacting with the state education system. Ultimately, they are run in the context of charitable purposes. It would be difficult to imagine that profits made from those schools should not be returned to the schools themselves.

There was some discussion of that question in the other place, but no explanation sufficient to warrant the arrangements now proposed was given. It seems clear to me that the clauses should be left out of the Bill, because there has been no clear indication of what will happen either under the regulations or in the circumstances that I have described.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): In the context of distribution of profits, my hon. Friend touches on the relationship with the charitable purposes of education. Does he know whether the Government have considered the point raised in Committee relating to the model of co-operatives, which are run for the benefit of members, especially where schools come together for common purposes? No answer—satisfactory or otherwise—to that question has been given. It strikes me that, of all Members of Parliament, it is Labour Members—especially those who stand to represent the Co-operative movement—who should have considered and answered that question.

Mr. Cash: Indeed, and as one of my forebears invented the Co-operative movement, I have a special interest in the answer. I hope that the Minister will now answer that question, which did not receive an answer either in the other place or in Committee of the House of Commons.

Another important question remains outstanding. It was taken seriously by the Minister in the other place, but has not yet been addressed by the Minister handling the Bill here today. It relates to the question of whether or not undesirable characters could become involved in schools, which they might regard as easy targets for involvement in commercial activities. Baroness Blatch gave an example of someone who was indeed undesirable, saying that,

> "Had the school been unwise enough to engage in any kind of commercial activity with that person, it would have ended in tears".

Extraordinarily, Lord McIntosh's reply to the noble Lady's question,

> "How can a set of regulations specify such undesirable or unsuitable people for the purposes of becoming a member of a company?",

was:

> "There are two lines of protection . . . First, there is the good sense of the schools concerned."

I hope that hon. Members take some satisfaction from that. The noble Lord continued:

> "We are talking about people from more than one school"—

as if that had any relevance—

> "so such a person could not be the friend of one of the governors or a friend of the head teacher of one of the schools unless the other schools involved in the company were convinced of the integrity of that friend."

Do hon. Members really regard that as a convincing answer to the question of how to keep out undesirable characters—that people will have to go chasing around, asking all the different schools whether they like this chap or that one? The very notion that that is the solution to the problem is utterly unconvincing.

Lord McIntosh went on:

> "However, we have the protection that more than one school will be involved and there will be an independent eye cast over any invitation to join."

On the question of leaving to regulations the matter of people who would be regarded as acceptable members of a company, he added:

> "Clearly, that will improve with experience."

We have to discover that undesirable people have, in fact, been running those schools or helping to run them before we learn that from experience.

Even more astonishingly, Lord McIntosh went on to say:

> "We can state in regulations that the person who becomes a member of a company shall have educational objectives"—

that is basically the point that I was making about charitable purposes—

> " . . . or that such a person has something to contribute to the company educationally which cannot otherwise be found."

Lord McIntosh was simply ducking the question. The Government cannot, in those regulations, prescribe which people will not be desirable, so they turn the problem the other way round. Lord McIntosh continued:

> "We can say all sorts of things of that kind, but there will always be crooks."

I hope that the Minister heard that. When asked how he would ensure that people in those companies would be fit to run schools, his noble Friend admitted that there will always be crooks.

So many questions have been asked by my noble Friends in the other place, and by my hon. Friends in

Committee, that the Government have a duty at least to attempt—so far, the Minister has not done so—to answer them. Baroness Blatch said:

> "We know that there will always be crooks. However, we should be in the business of protecting our governors of schools. They are there not to be company chairman, company members or board members, but to ensure that good education takes place in schools and that schools are managed well in the interests of the education of the children within them."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 July 2002; Vol. 637, c. 241-43.]

I made a similar point earlier.

We must also consider the burdens on company directors and on the people running the schools, as well as the question of costs. I am sure that the Minister accepts that, inevitably, there is a need for lawyers and accountants—no doubt a battery of them—to resolve the many questions in company law that may arise. Will that not increase substantially the cost of running those schools?

Finally, if a company goes into liquidation, there is the question of whether or not the local education authority will have to pick up the tab. We have been assured that the objective of the regulations and the Bill is to provide a light touch. However, there is no evidence whatever from their construction that that will be so—far from it. More likely than not, they will increase the administrative and legal burdens and—I hope that the Minister will deal with this later—the duties imposed by statute on local education authorities would be removed.

Many issues are involved, and as the debate progresses, no doubt we shall hear more about them. The bottom line, however, is that the proposal is not a recipe for good education. Regulations are constantly spilling out of the Government, and huge administrative costs are being imposed. The Minister, I hope, will be able to deal with some of those questions, but will have enormous difficulty discharging his responsibility, as he certainly did not succeed in doing so in his opening speech. He is fairly new to his post—I was astonished by his irresponsible handling of questions that were thoroughly canvassed in the House of Lords and considered carefully in Committee. He gave us about ten minutes of truncated explanation, but did not deal with any of our questions.

Mr. Willis: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). When I saw the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) appear on the Government Benches, I wondered whether he intended to enter the debate, and whether we would go back to old times.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stone for using his expertise in these matters to ask the Government some searching questions—I say that quite genuinely. As an opportunity for us to examine the Bill, the Committee stage was a travesty. The one thing that we failed to get was a clear explanation of the Government's proposal.

5.45 pm

For the Minister to come along and give a very brief exposé of what the Government are trying to achieve by restoring the two clauses does him and the House a disservice. I say that rather sadly. Either there is a great deal that the Government are trying to hide, or they do not know the answers to the questions. In either case, given the appalling record of private companies formed out of public sector organisations, it is important that we get it right in the case of schools, if we go down that road.

I shall not repeat all the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Stone. We hope that the Minister will respond to each of the points that he made. The question who will guarantee a company's debts is crucial. I shall speak to amendment (aa) in a moment, but first I shall deal with some of the other amendments, particularly the Government's insistence on restoring clause 10. I shall return to the question whether or not the companies are limited by shares; I have a particular reason for raising it.

Let us say, for argument's sake, that the company is a shareholding company and that the shares are, as the hon. Member for Stone said, as much as £10. The liabilities on the shareholders are therefore relatively small, compared with what could be the company's debts. What would happen to that liability in terms of the assets? As it is a school company, let us say that it is operating from a computer suite within the school, as it may well do—a computer suite that had been funded partly by capital provided as part of a joint company by shareholder capital from outside.

The Minister shakes his head. With respect, that has been the attitude of Ministers throughout the discussion. Every time we ask a question, they shake their head as if to say, "That is irrelevant." Let us say that the company goes bust. What happens to all the equipment in the suite that was used by the company? The shareholders may pay up to their limit. Does the local education authority then come in and pay out the debtors, or the creditors, whichever is the case? If an LEA must be responsible as a backstop for every company set up under the Bill, it will have to find funds from other schools to pay those debts. We need answers to all the important questions of liability that arise from the clause.

We never got a clear answer as to whether the school's assets would be involved in a company. Let me give the Minister another example. There is nothing to stop a group of governors setting up a company to manage the school and its assets—or even a group of schools—and transferring the assets into that company. For example, 3 E's in Guildford set up the new King's College campus. Why should not that company take over all the schools in Guildford as a single company, form a separate company limited by shares, and then be bought out by a major plc and traded on the stock market as part of that company's portfolio? What would happen at that time? What would happen to the assets if the company got into difficulties? If it wanted to realise some of its assets to fund new developments, would it be able to close the school and sell the land, buildings or whatever else? Lord McIntosh rather alarmingly said in another place that people could take profit out of the companies. The Government have made it clear that that is possible. If a company takes profit, it also needs to share the risk.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He will remember that many of those questions were asked in Committee, so it is hardly that the Government have not been given notice of them. Let us return to his example of the ICT suite, where there are assets, even though their value will be rapidly depreciating. What will happen if there is recourse to those assets, but no contract between those who are damaged and the LEA? Has the Minister discussed that

[Mr. Stephen O'Brien]

matter with the Chancellor, with a view to computing contingent liabilities on the Government, as the ultimate guarantor for the LEA? Those are the reasons for the hon. Gentleman's questions and why we are looking for answers. The matter is too uncertain for anybody to have certainty about entering into a contract.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. He and I know that most local authorities, especially shire local authorities, have fewer assets on their balance sheets than some individual schools. The £1.1 billion on school balance sheets exceeds significantly the assets of a number of LEAs. Recourse to the Chancellor might well be needed in such cases. In Committee, although the Minister was not present at the time—*[Interruption.]* I apologise; the hon. Gentleman was not a Minister at that time, so I do not hold him responsible for the answers that the then Minister gave. None the less, the Government can also invest in the companies. What will happen to that investment? Does the LEA have responsibility in that regard or is it ultimately part of the Government's liability? We need to know the answer to that question.

The hon. Member for Stone made a crucial point about the relationship between part 1 and the rest of the Bill. The Bill is to become the Education Act 2002, but part 1 is about innovation and the ability to disregard all other education legislation. There is a huge contradiction between part 1 and the intention to introduce school companies. We must be given an answer in that context.

My noble Friend Baroness Sharp of Guildford asked an important question in another place: what is the fundamental role of our schools? I do not think that she received an adequate answer. We have heard from the Chancellor today and I think that we shall hear from the Secretary of State tomorrow—

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Willis: The Secretary of State will make a major statement about investing significant resources in schools.

Mr. Miliband: Not enough?

Mr. Willis: The Minister must wait for my speech to find out the answer.

We have heard today about a raft of new controls that will be placed on schools in relation to accessing the new resources. That is the reality of what we heard today: it is not freedom for schools; it is greater centralisation. We shall debate that issue on another occasion, but it is ironic that one of the Conservative amendments from another place deals with cutting bureaucracy. I am sure that the Secretary of State agrees with the premise of innovation and autonomy, but greater controls and obligations are being imposed on schools at the same time. My party and I believe that the core business of a school and its management and governors is to run the school effectively for its youngsters. I do not want companies to take away from that core function and I think that we need some assurance about that.

It is interesting that neither of the head teacher associations supports that part of the Bill. Neither of them wants the greater levels of autonomy—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State chunters away from a sedentary position, but the private sector does not want those things either. In the private sector, which has the freedom to do all those things, there is no desire to set up companies as well.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. In relation to his argument about regulation, is he aware that significant expertise will be required around the board tables of the new school companies to ensure that there is sufficient knowledge about running a company and the associated liabilities and responsibilities? It is difficult to imagine that such expertise currently exists in schools and governing bodies. In support of his argument that, far from enhancing freedom, the regulations that underpin the provisions will be more burdensome, I suggest that that expertise will be needed somewhere to ensure compliance with all company law regulations.

Mr. Willis: That is what is so confusing. What is behind the provisions, and what is their objective? The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the bureaucracy, controls and financial investment that will be needed in order to achieve that objective are staggering, but the Government have yet to persuade us about the overall benefit.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point in conjunction with my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien). Does he also accept that one of the most difficult aspects of dealing with what is meant to be a standard arrangement with regard to company law, even allowing for the fact that a great deal of competence is needed, is fitting in the required knowledge with all the requirements laid down by model constitutions and regulations? Does he agree that it will be a field day for lawyers and accountants?

Mr. Willis: Yes—that is why I was asking why we were taking this particular route. If the Government were proposing wholesale privatisation of the education system, that would be another story. I would not agree with what they were doing, but one could understand why they would wish to take the proposed approach. I cannot understand from the Minister's examples, or indeed those given by colleagues in another place, what great advantages the provisions have that could not already be achieved. We already have examples of schools working together to provide, for example, grant maintenance contracts or schools meals contracts. There are marvellous examples of bodies such as the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation, which for 30 years has been providing joint purchasing arrangements for schools and local authorities. There are examples of airports, such as Manchester or Leeds-Bradford, in which local authorities are working together to provide a joint service. All the legislation is in place to enable those things to happen, yet we have had no explanation as to why we should proceed with the Bill.

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene. Does he recall from the Committee stage that one of the areas in which the Government were unable to give clear answers was the possibility of the governing body deciding to close down its educational operations and contract in its entire education service from another school—possibly an independent school? At the extreme, the provisions allow steps to be taken that, I suspect, do not accord with the Government's aspirations.

Mr. Willis: That might be a little too close to the bone, because I think that in many ways that is the Government's aspiration. It is difficult to know exactly what they are hiding behind as regards these provisions.

6 pm

We are concerned that the Government have not properly thought through the implications for schools and LEAs in relation to company law. We are particularly concerned that school companies should not be a means for individuals to make a profit. I ask the Minister this direct question: what is there in the Bill to prevent any individual, including a member of the governing body, from siphoning off profits? On Third Reading, Lord McIntosh of Haringey stated:

> "Let me make it clear that when talking about profits there is no question of governing bodies taking their share of the profits to use for anything other than the educational needs of their schools. There is no possibility of siphoning off profits".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 July 2002; Vol. 637, c. 252.]

In Committee, however, he was less emphatic about public funds being used for private profit when he said:

> "Preventing any profit being used for purposes other than education in participating schools may in practice mean that it cannot be paid to company members other than schools. That is an unnecessary interference. There is no reason why schools should not innovate in potentially profitable ways and there is no reason why they should not bring in outside partners to help them to achieve that. They will still benefit financially from it, but that may be achieved only if they have outside partners who can participate for a profit."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 7 May 2002; Vol. 634, c. 1108.]

There is a direct contradiction between the statements that were made in Committee and on Third Reading, and it is important that the Minister makes it clear which is right.

That brings me to my amendment concerning whether school companies should be limited by shares or by guarantee. I want to remove the possibility of the former option because that would remove the element of potential profiteering by individuals. If the Government are determined to get the Bill through—the Minister will have to give a very convincing argument when he winds up—they must give us a guarantee that any profit made out of a public investment of funds into a company returns to the school or schools for investment and does not go to private individuals or private organisations. The amendment would limit school companies by guarantee rather than shares to ensure that no individual profits. If the Minister does not agree with that—if he believes that outside agents can invest and take a profit—he must accept that governors and teachers should also be able to invest and make a profit. I am not debating whether that is an honourable position for the Minister to take, but he must make it absolutely clear whether it is the case. If so, he will not have the support of Liberal Democrats here or in another place.

Chris Grayling: We had a robust debate about the provisions in Committee, and it is clear that the concerns that were raised in the series of amendments tabled by my hon. Friends and Liberal Democrat Members, and the whole tone of the debate, have been reflected in the other place and back here again through the amendments containing noble Lords' recommendations.

Those concerns arise because the provisions are confused and unclear, and contain several significant weaknesses. I am at a loss, as are other hon. Members, to understand what they will really add to the Bill or what benefits they will bring to schools. There is no great demand for those steps to be taken. The Government seem to be opening up the education system to complexity and risk that it does not need. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) clearly set out many of the issues surrounding liability, especially financial liability, and the complexities of corporate law that schools will end up having to deal with.

The Government have failed to explain several matters. Indeed, some of the contributions made by Ministers in Committee were confused, to say the least. One such matter is LEA liability. The key question is how the LEA's ultimate liability is to be enforced in law. How is somebody who has suffered a loss as a result of mismanagement in a company established by a governing body to go through the process of getting their money back from the LEA? That is far from clear, as it is not stipulated in the Bill. We are on a wing and a prayer. The Government may be able to explain it—no doubt the Minister will say that "regulations may provide"—but there is no clear legal chain that would enable it to happen.

Nor has there been a clear explanation of the nature of the liability that will be built up. There is great confusion about that. The then Minister, the hon. Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), said in Committee that he envisaged two types of companies being set up:

> "One is formed to undertake procurement activities on behalf of several schools, and the other is a service provider company in which several schools come together to provide services to either themselves or other schools."

When he went on to talk about liability, he confused the matter considerably. He said:

> "There is a distinction between the two. Local education authorities will be liable for some of the debts of procurement companies, but not for those of the service provider companies."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 18 December 2001; c. 170.]

If those lending money to, and doing business with, service provider companies do not have the security of LEA guarantees, where do those companies stand in terms of liability? Who is responsible for debts? What happens if debts are secured against assets? As the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) said, the nature of those assets is a grey area between operational activities in the school and the activities of the company. How will liability be established in the event of the corporate failure of one of the service provider companies? When Ministers use the phrase, "It is envisaged that", as they frequently have in this context, how can anyone be clear about what the Government are trying to do?

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone referred to the complexities of dealing with company law. School governors already deal with huge amounts of complex rules and regulations. The days are long gone since governors could sit passively on the governing body,

[Chris Grayling]

listening to what the head had to say and chipping in a few words here and there. That may have been so a generation ago, but there is a world of difference today. Governing bodies need to be sharp, to be on the ball and to have substantial professional expertise. Yet we are now saying to the all-too-few volunteers willing to join school governing bodies, "Not only do you have to take on board the very considerable regulatory responsibilities that are being placed on your shoulders"—particularly, but not exclusively, by this Government—"but if your school is to move down the road towards implementing these provisions, you will have to learn company law as well."

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most extraordinary contributions made by Ministers in the other House when these arguments were being advanced was to suggest that it is just a voluntary arrangement that does not have to be complied with? That is to dismiss the whole complexity of the framework in the Bill as something that might just happen on the margins. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is an extraordinary position for the Government to find themselves in?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. From the point of view of any governor or anybody who is involved in the management of a school, there is no way in which any of these activities could be at the margins. If the school sets up a company, that person must have a duty of care and a detailed knowledge and understanding of what is going on. The provision could represent a huge diversion for governing bodies.

The implications for the work load in schools are substantial. The Government failed to respond adequately to a point that was made about that in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) tabled an amendment that would have provided for the head teacher of a school that set up a company to be on the company's board. The Government said that that was unnecessary, but how can governing bodies make decisions that can fundamentally affect the school's operation, assets, grounds, space, staff and resources without the head teacher having a say in them?

Let us consider the work load of other staff. That, too, was tackled in Committee, but again the Minister gave only vague responses. When we considered work load, he said:

> Any member of . . . a school who became involved with a company's activities would have to agree to do that. There is a variety of ways in which the member of staff could work for the company. For example, they could be on a temporary secondment, or part of the working week could be spent on company rather than school business. Different remuneration arrangements would be needed in different circumstances . . . In reality, arrangements would be best left to local discussion and agreement."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 13 December 2001; c. 157.]

How would that work practically in schools? When the governing body says that it has set up a company and needs the school to take specific action to contribute to it, how many members of staff will dare to say, "No"?

At a time when teachers' work load is already great, we risk placing on head teachers and staff considerable additional responsibilities for a measure that will provide no obvious benefits. As hon. Members have said, many schools are already undertaking the activities for which the Bill provides. The Minister mentioned common procurement; many schools do that. Many LEAs procure collectively on behalf of their schools. Schools already have the ability to work together. In Committee, the Minister suggested that schools might work together to provide common transport services. They do not need to set up a company and take on all the attendant responsibilities to do that.

As I said in my intervention on the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, the provisions' boundaries are unclear. A school could contract out its whole education system under the Bill. When I made that point in Committee, the Minister replied:

> "That does not sound like a likely scenario."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 13 December 2001; c. 157.]

In other words, it is possible in law; it is simply unlikely.

Let us consider the borrowing restrictions and the liabilities that the companies could accumulate. The Government are quick to say that the companies need the LEAs' permission to borrow and that everything is nicely covered. What about contingent liabilities? They are topical because the Government are keen on them and their non-appearance on national balance sheets. What happens if a company that a school set up accumulates substantial contingent liabilities that are not related to borrowing? Where is the watchdog control over that? Are we saying that LEAs are liable, regardless of what happens and of the financial steps taken by the directors? Can directors trade in the full knowledge that the LEA will ultimately pick up the bill if they do not succeed?

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that the National Audit Office is taking a diligent interest in off balance sheet activities and that we are considering another example that it will have to examine?

Chris Grayling: I hope that the National Audit Office never gets the opportunity because the House will accept the Lords amendment and reject the provisions. I do not believe that the measures will provide educational benefit or generate significant cost savings for schools. They risk being a distraction to those who run schools—a job that is already greatly burdened. I hope that hon. Members will come to their senses, support the Lords and accept that such provisions should not be included in the Bill.

Mr. Miliband: Our debate of the past hour and a half has been interesting. The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) said that he did not want to be considered difficult. I do not want to make any such accusation against him; his contributions are all part of the parliamentary scrutiny that the Government welcome because we hope that it will improve the Bill. However, I wish that he had shown a little more of the spirit of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), who so passionately supported the concept. The debate has covered a wide range of issues, and I shall try to deal with as many of them as possible.

6.15 pm

Many contributions focused on liability and I shall deal with that. I shall also try to cover the more basic issues that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) raised. He asked what the point of the provisions were. First, I want to make an important preliminary point. No school will be able to form a company unless it gets the LEA's agreement. The hon. Member for Stone gave an example of a failing school that, not content with failing its pupils, could create a company that would fail the pupils of other schools. Frankly, that will not happen. No LEA will agree to allow a failing school to set up a company.

Mr. Cash: The Minister knows about the exchanges that took place in another place. First, there is the question whether the LEA has the competence to handle questions on the matters that we have been discussing. Secondly, I am sure that he remembers that Lord McIntosh said that the LEA would intervene only when the companies had got into serious trouble. That is too late. We want to avoid companies getting into trouble in the first place. The Bill will not help with that problem.

Mr. Miliband: I look forward to lengthy discussions about the operation of local education authorities as part of the hon. Gentleman's new, roving brief. We will see whether his new alliance with the Liberal Democrats survives such scrutiny. We are now in the second round of Ofsted inspections of LEAs. That is a rigorous process, and it is inconceivable that any LEA, however poor its performance, will agree that a failing school should set up a company. The Bill contains a safeguard that LEAs can agree or disagree with any proposal.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Perhaps LEAs would not agree to allow a failing school to set up a company. However, some LEAs are surprised by the failure of schools. They may already have given such schools approval.

Mr. Miliband: We have rich data sets that explain the performance of different schools. They are based not only on raw scores but increasingly on value-added information. The identity of schools that are not performing as well as they might are clear to any LEA. Ofsted inspection increasingly focuses on making sure that LEAs are clear about that. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) missed the early part of the debate and I do not believe that his point was valid. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough twitching, and I am delighted to give way to him.

Mr. Willis: I am delighted that the Minister is delighted. However, there is a genuine contradiction in the provisions. It relates to part 1, which deals with innovation. In some of the so-called failing schools or schools in challenging circumstances, there may be a need to do exactly what the Minister supports. Is the Minister saying that we want the Bill only for so-called successful schools?

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Gentleman may be trying to have his cake and eat it. I am trying to make it clear that the provisions contain a safeguard to ensure that LEAs consider seriously any proposals for school companies.

Mr. Brady: Will the Minister confirm whether it would be possible for the LEA to contract out that function?

Mr. Miliband: It would not be possible for LEAs to do that. The Bill is clear that LEAs must give the school permission to set up a company. We focused on the financial management of companies.

It is important that companies, like schools, are well managed. That is why we proposed a supervising authority to provide a protective framework. If a school company fails financially, each company member's liability will be limited to a nominal figure of approximately £10 in the case of a company limited by guarantee, or the amount outstanding on the shares in the case of a company limited by shares. Company members would determine the value of the shares, which may be a nominal sum and the amount, if any, outstanding on the shares would always be comfortable with the liability.

Hon. Members asked what would happen if the company got into debt. It will be difficult for a company to get into debt through borrowing and be unable to repay the debts out of future income. We are including in the regulations the requirement for the company to seek the supervising authority's permission before it can borrow money. A company that gets into debt will have to arrange a schedule of repayments with its creditors.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Miliband: I want to make some progress, because I have taken five interventions and I am still on my first point. *[Interruption.]* I shall answer hon. Members' questions in my own way. I think that I am answering them pretty accurately, but it is hard to answer them if I am not allowed to make my case.

I shall carry on with my argument. Several hon. Members asked what would happen if a company were to fail. The delegated budget of individual member schools would not be at risk, and I shall explain why. Purchasing companies would be spending member schools' delegated budgets, and would therefore be deemed to be acting as agents of the LEA. The LEA would be liable for the company's debts, in the event of company failure, in the same way that the LEA would be liable for an individual school's debts when the school was acting as the LEA's agent. This would not be the case for service delivery companies, because such a company would not be acting as the LEA's agent. If a service delivery company became insolvent, its liabilities would not pass to its members, because it would be a limited liability company.

If a school company were unable to pay its debts, the normal route, which applies to all companies, of placing the company in administration or winding the company up, would be open to it and its creditors. I can see the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough twitching again. If he will let me proceed, I shall see whether I can answer his question.

Clause 2 has been mentioned by several hon. Members. Nothing in the power to innovate can affect company law. This provision will apply only to educational law, so it cannot affect liability in the way that has been suggested. School companies are not qualifying bodies under clause 2, so companies cannot be exempted from any law. All the examples, including that of sports injuries, raised by the hon. Member for Stone in his wide-ranging speech, are existing potential liabilities. The existence of companies will have no effect on them. Companies will not be running schools, so none of the issues raised in relation to the running of schools arises. The companies will not own schools' premises or employ their staff.

The hon. Member for Stone also asked whether a school company would be required, by regulations, to take out insurance to cover potential liabilities. These

[Mr. Miliband]

companies would not be able to take over the running of a school, so they would not be liable in the example that he gave, which related to negligence and causing injury during sports activities.

Mr. Cash: The Minister is obviously relying heavily on the notes with which he has been supplied. *[Interruption.]* That is a simple fact; he is just reading out what he has been given. I have the gravest doubt that what he is saying will turn out, in due course, to be the case. There is an interaction between the potential use of clause 2 and the removal of these education functions—if that is to happen. The Minister has not given the House an answer on whether it is intended to use those provisions in this context, and we take issue with the Government on that point.

Mr. Miliband: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is as well known for his generosity to other hon. Members as he is for his warnings about the dire consequences of various Government actions, but we shall see.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the question of assets, as did the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough. It will be up to a school to decide whether to transfer assets to a company, but there would be no reason for it to do so. A school would be no more likely to transfer assets to a school company in future than it is now. Schools do not do so now, and there will be no reason for them to do so in future.

Mr. Willis: The Minister said that I was twitching earlier. Is he saying that a school can use its budget share, or part of it, to set up a company and that, if it fails, it will be the LEA that will be subject to the liabilities under the new arrangements?

Mr. Miliband: Yes. That is why a safeguard has been set up for LEAs, in that they will need to approve the setting up of the companies.

Chris Grayling: The Minister did not answer a question I asked him a moment ago. Will a company have the right to enter into leasing agreements and other off balance sheet arrangements, and would the LEA ultimately be liable if the company failed, despite having had no sanction over whether it should be set up?

Mr. Miliband: I do not think that the off balance sheet question arises. Opposition Members are asking us to prescribe every conceivable detail of innovation that a school might exercise in relation to setting up a school company. We are saying that we have an exciting avenue for development here, and we want to give schools wide discretion to avail themselves of it, with safeguards built in.

The question of enforcement was raised by various hon. Members. This would involve an ordinary civil action in the courts, and recovery would be by debtors in the normal way, as is the position now for all purchasing by schools. The power to innovate, for which we are legislating, has no impact on that. The hon. Member for Stone also mentioned undesirable people being brought into schools to run the companies. The Government have made it clear that they will regulate to prevent undesirable people from being members of a company; we have said so in correspondence. All categories of persons who are prevented from being school governors will also be prevented from joining school companies.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough asked whether we would be distracting schools from their core function. The answer to that is no. These proposals are about encouraging co-operation between schools to help them to perform their roles more effectively, serving their own pupils and other pupils in the locality. Allowing teachers the professional development benefits of sharing their expertise with other schools can benefit both the providing and receiving schools. The hon. Gentleman asked whether that was not being done already. A certain amount of co-operation does already take place, but the power will provide clarity that the school's governing body can form a company to do more than it is able to do at the moment. Without such a power, there would be considerable doubt that a governing body could participate in a company that did more than oversee or carry out functions in relation to an individual school.

Mr. Andrew Turner *rose—*

Mr. Miliband: I have been extremely generous in giving way, and I think it is about time that we finished this debate. There are some big issues still to be debated, and I am sure that we should be attacked later for not giving enough time to them, if we did not get on and get through this part of the debate.

The amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough seeks to remove the option for companies to be limited by shares. I do not think he has made a strong case for that. When school companies choose to deliver services to other schools, they may well find being limited by shares rather than limited by guarantee a better, easier structure in which to work. I do not see why they should be denied that choice. For example, if a private sector body generated some innovative curriculum materials, it would make a profit from them. If one of our best schools did so, I see no reason why the school itself should not benefit. It is not true that a company limited by guarantee could not distribute any operating profit to its members. It is not the normal type of company structure adopted for paying profit to members, but there is scope for that to happen.

I hope that I have answered in full all the points that have been raised. This is an important provision and I urge the House to support the Government.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 320, Noes 168.

Division No. 307] **[6.27 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary

Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*

Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen

Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry

Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Rt Hon Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike

Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, [illegible]n *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas
(Macclesfield)
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Mr. Willis: I beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment (aa).

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Government amendment (a) to the words so restored to the Bill, agreed to.

*Lords amendment:*No. 13 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (c) to the words so restored to the Bill, agreed to.

Before Clause 18

Lords amendment: No. 14.

Mr. Miliband: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we will consider amendment (a) in lieu.

Mr. Miliband: I hope that we shall not lose the attendance of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), whose new-found interest in education has added a lot to our debate. I am disappointed that he does not perceive the legal aspects of the clauses with which we are about to deal.

I recognise that the amendment is well-intentioned *[Interruption.]*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt, but will Members who are not staying for the debate please leave quickly and quietly? Not to do so is a discourtesy to the Minister and to the House.

Mr. Miliband: I recognise that the amendment is well-intentioned, and the Government certainly support its underlying principle of reducing burdens on schools. However, as drafted it risks leaving schools in the dark about vital educational developments, and damaging the interests of pupils and those who work with them.

We all know that there are important matters in education about which schools require guidance and information. Unforeseen events can give rise to a need for such guidance. We must be able to move swiftly to protect the rights and needs of pupils and school staff. An important example has come to the fore during the passage of the Bill. I refer to the Government's response to pressure, not least from the Opposition in the House of Lords, to make statutory provision for the welfare of children. That will require more material to be sent to schools, something that would be jeopardised by the Lords amendment as it stands. That cannot be right. I think there was support for the Government's amendment throughout the House.

Such vital information is not the same as reams of red tape. Here we are in full agreement with the terms of the amendment: we are committed to removing bureaucratic burdens on our schools. Schools obviously exist to deliver high-quality education, and we wish to remove anything that frustrates them in performing that task. We have set out our programme for reducing burdens in the Government's regulatory reform action plan, and we have made radical changes to simplify the operation of the standards fund, making it easier for schools to gain access to a significant proportion of their budgets.

We said last year that we would implement this Bill according to best practice, aiming to reduce burdens on those in schools. We recognise that there must be some administration for schools to function properly, but teachers' paramount task is teaching. The greatly increased number of support staff in schools who can carry out administrative work—some 80,000 now—will help schools to ensure that teachers can focus on their core tasks.

However, the Lords amendment as it stands could be counter-productive. In the Bill we move significant detailed prescription out of primary legislation. In place of that, we will make regulations that will be less detailed and less prescriptive. That will reduce burdens on schools. The unintended effect of the amendment would be to prevent us from doing that, because of its narrow focus.

If we imposed illogical constraints on that system, as would be the case if we were to adopt the Lords amendment, we could face the bizarre situation of being severely hampered in introducing a lighter touch schools framework, with more devolution and more decision making at school level. Surely we do not want to do that.

There is, however, one aspect of this Lords amendment that we do think could be made workable. It is the subject of the Government amendment.

As I have said, we want to reduce burdens on schools. One aspect of that is reducing the flow of material from central Government. I believe, and the Government believe, that a requirement to report annually to Parliament listing the Department's direct communications with schools could reinforce our determination to do so. We would report at the end of each school year. The number of communications with different types of school will inevitably fluctuate from year to year according to policy needs. Since the school year 1999–2000, we have achieved a significant reduction—of about a third—in the number of documents sent to schools. We continue to monitor all proposed communications stringently so that schools receive only material necessary for legal or policy reasons.

6.45 pm

Chris Grayling: Does the reduction in the number of documents sent to schools to which the Minister has referred include the number of e-mails sent to head teachers by the Department?

Mr. Miliband: I used the word "documents" advisedly, but as the hon. Gentleman will know all documents we send to schools are also sent to them by e-mail so that they are available in electronic form if that is what schools want.

The Department has some internal controls allowing us to appraise critically what goes on in schools, how and when. The most important thing is for schools to receive the right information at the right time, and that it is easy to use. I believe, however, that an annual report to Parliament would establish the right incentives for both Ministers and civil servants, making them think not just twice or three times but perhaps four times about communications to schools. As I have said, we want to reduce the number of communications.

Mr. Willis: It is interesting that the Minister can now provide information that it has not been possible to provide in written answers in the past, and we welcome that. Does the Minister agree, however, that if the exercise is to be truly valuable there needs to be a way of debating the information that goes to schools in some forum in the House of Commons? We need to be able to decide objectively whether it has some value, or whether it is simply furthering the Government's political objectives.

Mr. Miliband: I am tempted to suggest that that is an uncharacteristically ungenerous response from the hon. Gentleman. Like him, I would like us to spend all our time debating education in the House, but there are many other matters to discuss, and I hesitate to trespass on the timetabling responsibilities of Members greatly senior to me. I think, however, that this is an indication of the Government's commitment to taking seriously the need to reduce the bureaucratic burdens imposed by communications. I think the establishment of an annual report is the right direction to take: it will provide much greater transparency in regard to the Government's communications with schools. We have proposed a new clause to achieve that.

I believe that the amendment meets the concerns expressed in the House of Lords, and I therefore invite the House to agree to it in lieu of the Lords amendment.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I hope that I can put the Minister's mind at rest. He was obviously concerned about the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) was no longer present. I am sure that the amendments have legal aspects, so perhaps if the Minister repeats his entreaties, my hon. Friend could be prevailed on to return and give the House the benefit of his legal knowledge.

The Minister mentioned in passing what happened in the other place with amendments relating to child protection. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the

[Mr. Graham Brady]

Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), who campaigned very effectively and established cross-party support in another place. She deserves enormous credit.

When speaking on the last group of amendments, the Minister made a little play of my enthusiasm for some of the Government's stated aims. I am not at all embarrassed by that: I stand by my support and enthusiasm for the Bill's aims of raising standards in education, increasing autonomy for schools and removing central control. Our concern throughout has been that what the Government have been doing is the opposite of what they have been saying.

Lords amendment No. 14 is another clear example of how it has been left to the Opposition to try to put into practice what the Government say they want to achieve. After many years of the Opposition's arguing that an intolerable burden of regulation and red tape is being placed on schools, the Government are increasingly prepared at least to echo our rhetoric. According to a Department for Education and Skills press release of 8 May, entitled "Tackling teacher workload and red tape will raise standards further", the Secretary of State said:

> "It is vital that teachers spend their time teaching, not doing tasks that can be done by others".

We wholeheartedly agree, but the acid test of whether the Government really mean what they say is found in the detail of the amendments.

Perhaps above anything else, Lords amendment No. 14 crystallises the divide over how we should best proceed. In the light of recent disturbing evidence about the impact of excessive red tape and bureaucracy on the teaching profession—and in particular on the Government's ability to attract and retain good people—I hope that Ministers will reflect on this issue. Last Friday's edition of *The Times Educational Supplement* made the following encouraging point:

> "New teachers are enthusiastic about the job, but most are unsure just how long they will stay given the workload and bureaucracy."

It continues by pointing out that, according to a new survey:

> "Only just over a third"

of new teachers

> "expect to be teaching after 10 years".

The blame for that is placed on work load and bureaucracy. Teachers whom I meet express concerns about work load not in the context of time spent teaching, but of time spent on the unnecessary diversions that the Government put in their way.

The extent to which our views are gaining currency, and to which the teaching profession is uniting behind the argument that we have advanced consistently in the past four or five years—Ministers may consider this an unholy alliance—is demonstrated by the latest edition of *NUT News*. That may not be an obvious source for me to quote, but I am pleased to do so because it gives credit to the splendid and noble Baronesses Blatch and Miller—a description with which the Under-Secretary would doubtless entirely agree. Under the heading, "The Lords protect us", *NUT News* states:

> "All teachers now look to the Government for measures to reduce workload and make their teaching more effective. The Government needs to show that it shares with the House of Lords the view that bureaucracy must be attacked and that teachers need protection from excessive workload, new regulations and initiatives."

That was a direct response to Lords amendment No. 14—a point that should give Ministers pause as they try to dismiss what is one of the most important Lords amendments.

I should briefly point out to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis)—I almost described him as my hon. Friend, as we worked together on the Bill rather well—that I am slightly disappointed that the amendment was passed in the Lords by Conservative and Cross-Bench peers without the support of the Liberal Democrats. Liberal Democrat peers—and, indeed, Government peers—said that they supported the amendment in principle and the spirit behind it, so I hope that we can persuade the hon. Gentleman that it would be preferable to support it in more than spirit.

Baroness Ashton said in the other place:

> "I wish to make clear that the Government wholeheartedly support the spirit of the amendment. We understand that head teachers and teachers are under pressure."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 July 2002; Vol. 637, c. 259.]

That gives rise to an important question. The Government say that they support the spirit of the amendment, and the view that something needs to be done about the pressure that head teachers and teachers are under. However, those involved in education throughout the country will want to see solid evidence that the Government really want to do something about the problem. The Government's response to the amendment shows that, unfortunately, they are prepared to be held only to the declaratory aspect of the amendment. They are prepared to publish an annual report to Parliament, setting out the progress made in controlling or reducing the volume of regulation.

In passing, we should note the short exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) and the Minister, in which the latter came clean and said that he was choosing his words advisedly, and that in counting documents, the Government do not include all directives, circulars and consultation papers that are submitted to schools by electronic means, for example. Such evidence—that the Government are already trying to get round some of these constraints—is not a sign of a Government acting entirely in good faith.

If the Government were to accept subsection (1) in Lords amendment No. 14, which states:

> "the Secretary of State and local education authorities shall have a duty to limit new regulation and to control the amount of material they send to governing bodies and head teachers",

all hon. Members and teachers throughout the country would heave a sigh of relief. For once, they would have concrete evidence that the Government really do intend to take some action, because the Government would be placing themselves under a statutory obligation to limit regulation, bureaucracy and work load.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): What do those words actually mean, because they seem extremely vague in the context of such legislation? Does the phrase

> "a duty to limit new regulation"

refer to less regulation than would otherwise have been the case? In other words, would the provision require that

50 new regulations be added, rather than 100? I suspect that that is not what the hon. Gentleman or the Lords were trying to achieve. The phrase

> "to control the amount of material they send to governing bodies and head teachers"

is not only incredibly vague but suggests that the Department has no control at all. Is that what the hon. Gentleman intended to suggest?

Mr. Brady: It sometimes seems to head teachers and teachers that the Government do indeed have no control, and that they simply spray out regulations, directives and circulars daily. In that regard, perhaps the hon. Gentleman has inadvertently put his finger on the matter. In describing the amendment as vague, he is probably trying to suggest that, if we had a duty to control the volume of paper pumped in the direction of schools—4,400 pages of documentation were produced last year, equivalent to some 17 pages a day—the danger is that useful regulations might go, rather than useless and unnecessary ones. It would be a useful discipline for Ministers to know that they had to limit the amount of dross and rubbish.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument carefully. In the light of his proposal to put a statutory limit on departmental circulars, how many pages and Government directives would be appropriate in a given year?

Mr. Brady: There is a very simple answer—an awful lot fewer than we have at the moment. The whole teaching profession would like such a reduction. The rhetoric from Ministers is that they want autonomy for schools and teachers to be given the freedom to teach, but in practice they are trying to micro-manage every minute of the school day in every school in the land.

7 pm

Rob Marris: I should declare an interest to the House, in that my partner is a primary schoolteacher. When the hon. Gentleman responded to my earlier intervention, he referred to lessening the volume of paper. Leaving aside the electronic issue that we mentioned earlier, that would appear to be more specific than the vague wording in subsection (1) in Lords amendment No. 14.

Mr. Brady: If the hon. Gentleman's partner is a primary schoolteacher, perhaps we should all wish that she were here to vote on the amendment tonight instead of him. I suspect that a primary schoolteacher would find the amendment irresistible, because it would be an opportunity to lighten the work load that is put unnecessarily on teachers. He says that the wording is too vague. I do not hold that against him because he was not in Committee with us, but if he considered the original wording, he would discover that the new subsection (1) would be one of the most precise and closely defined aspects of the Bill. The idea that the Bill should allow the exemption of schools or LEAs from any aspect of education legislation—

Rob Marris: It is very specific.

Mr. Brady: That tells the House a great deal. The Bill is specific about the huge powers that it seeks to give Ministers. Those who are interested in such matters know nothing, however, about Ministers' intentions once the Bill is enacted.

Mr. Willis: I am loth to help the hon. Gentleman, but will he also address the issue that the Minister mentioned in his opening remarks and which hon. Members who were not in Committee will not fully appreciate? One of the central aspects of the Bill is that it depends on secondary legislation at every step. It is the secondary legislation that will create a new raft of bureaucracy that we cannot even imagine, because the regulations have not been published.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman is right. The amendment is an opportunity to reduce the secondary legislation necessary and to provide clarity for those who need to get on with the running of schools. The Government believe that they have addressed the concerns of the teaching profession that were raised in the other place. I imagine that one or two Labour Members will have received the NUT briefing on this evening's proceedings. If they have not, it explicitly states:

> "the NUT would be extremely concerned about the message Government would be giving if it sought to simply overturn the amendment without replacing it with a similar duty.
>
> The Government's amendment does not go nearly far enough. Teachers and head teachers will see little point in an annual report which does nothing more than describe what has been sent to schools. The amendment does not commit the Government to reducing the amount of paperwork sent to schools and does not provide any indication that the Secretary of State is prepared to stop imposing centrally prescribed initiative after initiative on schools and to finally start 'trusting teachers'."

It is clear that the teaching profession wants that limitation on what Ministers can do to the nation's schools.

Teachers want the freedom to teach and to have a breathing space from the torrent of regulations that are placed on them. They want an explicit and clear statutory requirement that will give some relief from what has, admittedly, been the education practice of all Governments—although this Government are particularly bad—which is to over-regulate, over-control and centralise education provision, even as they claim that their objective is to deregulate, decentralise and allow greater autonomy.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that extra classroom assistants and administrative support are key to reducing the bureaucratic work load faced by teachers? Will he therefore support the extra funding announced today and will he argue with the shadow Chancellor that the Conservative party should also support it?

Mr. Brady: It is obviously excellent if we have classroom assistants in schools, but we do not want teachers to have to employ accountants and lawyers so that they can process the heaps of documentation that are thrown at schools by the Government. We want teachers and classroom assistants to be able to get on with the job of teaching. Lords amendment No. 14 would deliver that.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): In this afternoon's statement by the Chancellor, he talked about the joys of localisation and decentralising power. Is not that in stark

[Mr. Mark Hoban]

contrast to the Government's failure to embrace Lords amendment No. 14? They should welcome a statutory limit, because it would accord with the new localisation of which the Chancellor was so proud this afternoon.

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend has hit on the point that the Government do not want to be subject to controls on their interfering and meddling tendencies. The Government are happy to have extra levers of control over others, but they should accept that they are the worst offender. They are producing needless documentation, bureaucracy and regulation, and taking teachers away from the task of teaching. It is not schools that need to be regulated or from which teachers need to be protected: it is Ministers. If they want to be taken seriously when they say that their aim is to allow teachers the freedom to teach, Ministers would embrace Lords amendment No.14. I hope that the Minister will come to his senses and do so, especially on this most auspicious day. I understand that it is his birthday and I wish him the happiest day possible under the circumstances. I accept that this may not be the way in which he would have chosen to celebrate his birthday, but perhaps he will offer—in a spirit of friendship—a present to teachers and head teachers and signal a genuine commitment to reducing bureaucracy and red tape in our schools.

Mr. Willis: I support many of the comments made by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) and I, too, wish the Minister a happy birthday. The hon. Gentleman made some slightly barbed criticisms about the fact that Baroness Sharp and my other colleagues in the Lords did not support the amendment. They did not do so because of subsection (3), which states:

> "Each set of regulations, circular or code of practice issued by the Secretary of State shall include a statement by him of the time he expects it will take for governing bodies or head teachers of schools or nursery schools, as appropriate, to read, consider and implement the regulation, circular or code of practice concerned."

Much depends on the resources that schools have available, and it would be unreasonable to expect the Secretary of State to carry out what the amendment would require of him. That notwithstanding, the effect of the amendment, and the principle behind it, is right.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman said that the Liberal Democrats in the other place did not wish to support new subsection (3) of the new clause that is amendment No. 14. Is he prepared to confirm that the Liberal Democrats support the principle in new subsection (1), and may we hope to have the support of his colleagues on such an amendment in the future?

Mr. Willis: I never bind my colleagues in respect of what they will or will not do. The hon. Gentleman will know that he could not do that in respect of his own colleagues in the other place. However, the principle of having a statutory duty in the Bill to reduce bureaucracy and work load is fundamental to our view of developing secondary education in this country. More resources coming into schools will matter nought if the process is accompanied by endless amounts of regulation and red tape that tie up a great deal of those resources unproductively. I am with the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West on that point.

Rob Marris: I believe that the hon. Gentleman used to be a head teacher; indeed, I think he used to teach my niece. Will he refer to three pieces of regulation that he would get rid of?

Mr. Willis: That is a fair question, and one which the Secretary of State frequently throws at those of us who wish to see a reduction in bureaucracy. When we consider what is emerging from the Department for Education and Skills, and what emerged from its predecessor Department, we find that virtually everything has some value to somebody. The problem is that it does not have value to everybody. That is the great problem with this Government, especially in terms of education. To ascertain what is valuable to them, the individual has to read everything that comes through. When I meet head teachers—I am sure that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) has the same experience—I find that they do things and read things just in case. We would like to see discretion exercised in the initiative overload coming into schools, so that it is not necessary to follow every initiative.

One of the problems is the way in which the Government have set up their funding streams, especially through the massive expansion of the standards fund from £0.7 billion to more than £4 billion—the sum announced in the statement tomorrow will no doubt be even greater. So much of the resources in schools are dependent on their following a certain initiative, bidding for that money and obtaining the resources. That is the exercise that lies behind the amendment.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland recognised what the Opposition were trying to do in reducing bureaucracy: indeed, reducing it is the Government's stated aim. Yet the amendment before us is a mere sop. Anyone in this place should be able, as of right, to table a question to the Secretary of State to ask for the necessary information. The idea that it should be put together once a year as a huge concession to the bureaucracy and work load problem is insulting to the House; to right hon. and hon. Members who genuinely want to make progress; and to all head teachers and teachers. They face a huge problem, and I hope that the Minister will take this issue back rather than dismiss the Opposition's claims. When the Bill returns to another place, I hope that the Government will produce an amendment that genuinely satisfies the desire to see scrutiny of initiative and scrutiny of work load. There should also be sunset clauses for new initiatives.

7.15 pm

Let me refer to Baroness Blatch's amendment in another place, of which Baroness Ashton said that it

> "is lacking in that it does not address the issue of the quality of information issued."

That is the point that has been made. She continued:

> "I know from my own experience of being both responsible for issuing information and being on the receiving end as a chair of governors until last year that it is the quality equally as much as the quantity—indeed, more so—of the communication or regulation that is of paramount importance."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 July 2002; Vol. 637, c. 261.]

Yet the Government's amendment does not deal with that issue. Bringing forward a list of all the initiatives does not address the issue of what is important and what is not. I do not believe that every document issued by the Secretary of State is of equal importance.

We shall support the Conservative party's new clause and reject the Government's amendment should they press it to the vote. I trust that by the time it returns to another place we shall have a sensible amendment from the Government that addresses the entire issue of bureaucracy and work load.

Rob Marris: Lords amendment No. 14 is bemusing: subsection (1) is vague and subsection (2) could be recorded in a parliamentary question—the criticism that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) makes of the Government's amendment. That does not take us any further forward in the hon. Gentleman's frame of reference. Subsection (3) introduces more red tape, and that does not take anyone anywhere. Subsection (4) is extraordinary: it tells us that there shall be "no additional burden," which again is vague and would stop fresh initiatives of any sort. The hon. Gentleman talks about discretion—

Chris Grayling: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman rereads subsection (4), which is simply and specifically in relation to subsection (3). It does not preclude additional regulation on a broad basis.

Rob Marris: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but the amendment refers to "no additional burden" and to providing "with information". Under subsection (3), that would unreasonably fetter the discretion of any Secretary of State for Education and Skills in terms of new initiatives. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough talks about discretion, and I am not sure how it could be incorporated into Lords amendment No. 14. I take his point, but it is extremely difficult to read discretion into the amendment that he told the House he would be supporting.

Mr. Willis: I was trying to point out that neither of the two amendments is perfect. There is general agreement in the House that we need to reduce bureaucracy. Indeed, that is the Government's stated aim. We are trying to encourage the Government to frame an appropriate amendment that deals with the core issues rather than one that states that we shall have a long list in the Library.

Rob Marris: The issue of red tape has probably been before the House for 300 years. To suggest that right hon. and hon. Members have not got the message on that is extraordinary. We have had a considerable amount of regulation in schools over the past five years, but the Opposition seem to be suggesting that that was done to no end and for the sake of doing it. We have had a step change in education in schools given the results that have been produced. That has been positive. I will not bore the House with statistics that we all know. There have been improvements in education, especially in primary schools but also in secondary schools.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) mentioned that he had not heard teachers complaining about work load in the classroom. Perhaps that is a paraphrase, but that is broadly what he said. I am not surprised. We have 20,000 additional teachers. Class sizes have been reduced considerably, especially in primary schools. We have 80,000 classroom assistants. It is not surprising that teachers are not complaining about work load in the classroom, given the extra resources that have been put in. The extra resources will continue to be made available, as we heard in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's statement.

I will not bore the House with all the figures, but 1,400 secondary schools will receive £1 million over three years. That could be described as over-centralisation, and Opposition Members have spoken about that. But when I talk to head teachers, that kind of centralisation is what they like. They like that sort of money coming in.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell me on what basis the schools will be selected, and by whom.

Rob Marris: With respect, that is a question to put to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not me.

Mr. Turner: That is the problem.

Rob Marris: The hon. Gentleman can address his questions to my right hon. Friend. We have 1,400 schools with leadership incentive and grants. I do not profess to be an expert on those schools. A considerable amount of money has already gone into schools in the last five years, and a considerable amount more will go into them in the next three. If Conservative Members are decrying that kind of centralisation, it is incumbent on them to say what they would do instead.

Chris Grayling: The last few remarks have been extremely illuminating, and they highlight my biggest concern about many of the Government's actions, not only in education but across the board: they do not understand the consequences of what they are doing.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) showed a complete absence of understanding of the predicament that head teachers face and of the real resentment in the teaching profession about the extreme levels of bureaucracy and work load being imposed by unnecessary regulations from central Government. One merely has to talk to head teachers, as I do regularly, to understand the consequences of that. The most consistent message is that new, young teachers are not staying in the profession. That was amplified by the piece in *The Times Educational Supplement* read out by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady). The reality is that teachers are not staying in the profession.

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that he slips smoothly from observations about head teachers to observations about teachers, whereas, clearly, the majority of classroom teachers will not read every one of the circulars from the Department for Education and Skills or have every regulation impact on them as individuals. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) suggested that, as a matter of security, teachers would read everything. Surely,

[Mr. Chris Mole]

the heads read the executive summaries and decide which of them are appropriate for which of their teaching staff to examine in detail.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman should visit some of the head teachers in his constituency and ask the question that I recently asked a primary school head in my constituency: "Can you show me an example of the kind of bureaucracy that is causing teachers to resent the work load that they face at the moment?" She showed me the course planning required by Ofsted, which is set out in the frameworks and curricula provided by the Department. One example struck me as demonstrating the absurdity of what we ask of our teachers at the moment.

I was shown a course plan in which someone had planned physical education lessons for the term. It contained a detailed paragraph written at the start of term, weeks in advance, explaining a section of a PE lesson in which groups of pupils were doing star jumps. It contained phrases such as, "Divide into pairs. One child does star jumps while the other one counts, then we reverse. The other child does star jumps while the first one counts." Can the hon. Gentleman explain what possible benefit there is in expecting a primary teacher to sit down, probably in their own time, to work their way through the whole of a course plan for a term, setting out what each individual activity in an individual PE lesson will be? Do we not trust our teachers to take those decisions for themselves?

Is it any wonder that not only teachers but heads who have to supervise this convoluted process and deal with an in-box full of e-mails from the Department every day—and who have to recruit to replace younger teachers who are saying, "Enough, I'm leaving," after three or four years in the profession—are over-burdened? I was due to visit a primary school in my constituency, but the head was not able to see me because he was too busy interviewing potential recruits to fill the gaps in his staff over the summer. That is what heads across the profession face at the moment, and it is an unwelcome and unnecessary burden that does nothing to help the education of the children.

James Purnell: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the work being done by the School Teachers Review Body on cutting bureaucracy and freeing teachers up to teach? Does he agree that that is a proper, sensible way of reducing bureaucracy, instead of the spin to which this proposal amounts? Does he agree with the recommendation that administrative support should be provided for teachers, which will require money? Given that he is not under the vow of silence on spending pledges that applies on the Opposition Front Bench, will he welcome the extra money announced today?

Chris Grayling: This goes to the heart of the difference between the Opposition and the Government over the public spending review. This is the question that must be asked: is it sensible to tax the North sea oil industry, thereby reducing investment in the North sea, to generate money to pay for administrators in schools to help teachers to deal with the unnecessary bureaucracy—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman is speaking somewhat wide of the debate.

Chris Grayling: We must not spend money helping teachers deal with administration instead of simply cutting the burden of an unnecessary work load coming from central Government.

The Minister's comment was enlightening. I visited a special school in south London recently, and I talked to the head there about the flow of bureaucracy from the Department. She opened up her in-box, and it was absolutely full of documents, contacts and communications from the Department. We all receive large numbers of e-mails in our daily lives, so we know how long it takes us to go through them and deal with them effectively. It cannot be a sensible use of time to expect a head teacher to deal with a huge swathe of e-mails containing detailed information about their responsibilities on a daily basis.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) and the Liberal Democrats are going to back the proposal despite their reservations about subsection (3), as that subsection represents the nub of the problem: it is probably the most important subject of debate in relation to the Bill because it requires the Secretary of State before issuing a new regulation to pause for thought and try to understand the consequences for teachers and head teachers. On far too many occasions, the Government enforce new rules and regulations without the slightest understanding of the consequences of those measures in schools; of the time they will take; of the way in which they will disrupt the working life of the school; of the additional burden that they will place on individuals; and of how they will force people to give up their spare time, as many teachers do, to deal with the bureaucracy that they face in their daily lives. That is why the new clause deserves the backing of the House. We must take not just the window-dressing steps that the Minister's alternative amendment represents: we must take tangible steps to start reducing the work load and burden of bureaucracy that our teachers face.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West was asked earlier what "less" means in this regard. I question whether we need to increase the burden of regulation on our schools at all. Why do we not start to implement sunset clauses, examining rules and regulations that we no longer need and considering how we can simplify and streamline provisions? There is no need to add to the burden of regulations year by year and pass statutory instrument after statutory instrument. We need to cut, rather than increase, the overall burden.

Rob Marris: As the hon. Gentleman is talking about sunset clauses, will he tell the House which three regulations he would get rid of?

Chris Grayling: I am talking about the streamlining of provisions across the board. I shall not deal with specifics now—*[Interruption.]* In relation to the example of the Ofsted inquiry that I gave earlier, I would not require primary teachers to plan courses to such a high degree. I would not require teachers in the foundation stage to complete convoluted course plans for three-year-old kids in a nursery. Those are two examples, for starters.

I hope that the House will back the new clause. We must take a first step. The Minister's proposals are not adequate; we need to take real steps to cut the burden on our teachers.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I am pleased to support the new clause proposed by my noble Friends in another place. In particular, I want to refer to three points.

First, I want to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on his attribution to the Secretary of State of an understanding that there must be a reduction in bureaucracy, although I think that he is being a little generous. When the Secretary of State appeared before the Select Committee, she argued that the cloud of new paperwork did not amount to an unnecessary burden on head teachers because they did not have to read it. There may be several pieces of paper coming in daily from the Department—and doubtless many others from other quangos for which the Government are responsible—but the Secretary of State said, with great confidence, that that was not a burden on schools because heads did not have to read them. If so, I fear that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) was overworking himself, and that he has friends who have overworked themselves as head teachers. However, I suspect that the Secretary of State, and not the hon. Gentleman, was wrong. Head teachers want to know what additional regulations, codes of practice and responsibilities will bear down on them every day. If they do not know, they cannot direct the information to the correct teacher or administrator.

7.30 pm

My second point is about parliamentary questions. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to the possibility of extracting information through parliamentary questions. I fear that that is not so. I have tried unsuccessfully to extract from the Department information about the additional legislative requirements placed on head teachers, governing bodies and Ofsted. In some cases, the Department has been able to answer my questions, but it has not been able to answer those about schools and head teachers. So many additional burdens—not only in the form of paper, but in the form of legislation and regulation—tumble down on head teachers and schools that even the Department itself does not keep a record. It is unable to answer parliamentary questions without undue expense.

My third point relates to the comments of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris). Subsection (1) of the new clause is a masterpiece of clarity. It says that

> "the Secretary of State and local education authorities shall have a duty to limit new regulation."

They would have to do the limiting. They could decide on the target and they would then have to meet that target when they imposed a limit. What could be clearer than requiring them to do the limiting? We are not setting targets and we are not being unreasonable. We accept that it is sometimes necessary for the Secretary of State perhaps even to increase—I hope that she would not—the amount of material going before governing bodies and head teachers, but she would have a duty under the new clause to limit the amount of that material. Local authorities would have a similar responsibility, and that is one reason why I disagree so much with Government amendment (a), which does not refer to local education authorities at all.

Like the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, I would like there to be further improvements to the new clause, and that is why I want it to be returned to the other place. It should apply not only to the Secretary of State and to LEAs but to that host of quangos and other bureaucracies that are involved in education. From the Health and Safety Commission through to the Ofsted, let them all endeavour to reduce the burden on head teachers, schools and school governors.

Subsection (3) again sets out a perfectly sensible requirement that already applies to other legislation and regulation that comes before the House. It would provide for a regulatory impact assessment. One wonders what the Secretary of State is about if she cannot see the consequence on schools of additional codes of practice, circulars or regulations. Many primary schools in my constituency have fewer than 100 pupils, and some have fewer than 50. That means that, however well or badly the Chancellor funds education, they do not have a huge number of teaching and administrative staff to deal with additional codes of practice, regulations and circulars. That point needs to be assessed by the Secretary of State and her officials. In every case, she needs to be advised that some regulation is over the top for a small school. Perhaps such regulation should not even apply to small schools.

From time to time, we recognise that some regulations are too much for the smallest businesses, so we should also recognise that some regulations are too much for the smallest schools. That is why I will support the Lords amendment. Like the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, I recognise that the Government could improve it further when it returns to the other place. I hope that they will do that and accept the amendment in the spirit in which it was meant. I hope that they will try to improve the existing provision rather than pressing their amendment, which would quite unnecessarily water our proposals down.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I wish to speak because I was very disturbed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement earlier today. It makes it even more imperative that the Government take action on the over-regulation of the school sector and LEAs. I therefore welcome any initiative that will try to reduce the burden of circulars, advice notes, instructions and regulations that emanate from the Department for Education and Skills.

This has been a curious debate. The Government say that there is no problem, but all the head teachers to whom I and other Members speak confirm that there is a problem. The Government then say, "Trust us. Don't worry. We believe in deregulation too. It must not be overdone. We will get on with a little bit of deregulation, but not yet, not in this way, or in this clause, or this legislation."

I urge the Government to think again, because they have unleashed a dangerous set of ideas in the Chancellor's statement about how he wishes to get value for the larger sums of money that will be offered directly to schools and to LEAs. The regulations, the advice notes and codes of conduct will presumably be integral to that.

[Mr. John Redwood]

We are told that those schools that do not perform or live up to the expectations expressed in the advice notes and the circulars may be subject to all kinds of torture coming from the centre. There may be direct intervention at the school level. For example, the Government may wish to remove a head teacher or change or influence the board of governors.

Alternatively, the Government may wish to override local democracy if they judge a whole local education authority to be inadequate or non-performing. They will then start a process that will usurp the local democratic process, with a view to trying to take over the management of the authority itself. By that route, they will have influence over a school. That is why we must be ever more critical of and sceptical about the many centralising directives, codes of conduct and advice that come from the Government. They will probably be used as a stick with which to beat schools and LEAs if the Government do not like the way they are developing—whether they are good, bad or indifferent.

David Wright (Telford): Does the right hon. Gentleman therefore seriously support failing schools?

Mr. Redwood: Of course I do not support failing schools. However, there are two ways in which they can be dealt with. First, in the world that I like—it is partially available to the Government, and the provisions for this could be strengthened—parents would have a real choice. They would be able to send their children to a better performing school and the poor performing school might then get the message and would have to take action to correct itself. Secondly, a democratically elected LEA would either take action or, through the ballot box, local people would make their preferences clear. They would throw out the council that presided over the failing school or schools and would produce an alternative.

I do not like a Government who centralise so much by directive, instruction and code of conduct and who set up methods by which they will use those codes of conduct to judge or prejudge the schools and LEAs, with the possibility that local democracy and democratic boards of governors would be overridden—even when the local community might think that the school was good but the Government, for one reason or another, decided that it was bad. I therefore urge the House, particularly in the light of today's chilling words from the Chancellor—he does not seem to like local democracy or democratic school governors—to be even more wary of a Government who will not reduce the number of centralising directives. They say that they wish to decentralise, but every action that they take centralises. They say that they trust teachers, LEAs and schools, but we heard from the Chancellor today that they do not trust any of them and wish to challenge and judge them by all sorts of methods. It is therefore vital that the House express the clear wish that there must be much less regulation and central control.

Mr. Miliband: This has been a notable debate. I am grateful for the many congratulations on my birthday. However, I look forward to the day when, rather congratulating me on my birthday, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) will congratulate the Government on investing in our education system and on putting 24,000 more teachers into the system. I look forward to the day when he will say that he will defy his party, which is ready to cut the education budget. Until then, his professions of wholehearted support for the aims of improving standards in our schools will ring very hollow to all those Labour Members who have sat through the hour and a half of this debate. When he professes support for raising standards but offers no support for investment in information technology or for reforming the teaching profession, we will not believe him.

The debate ranged wide of the amendment and I want to pick up on two main points. We discussed at length the situation in the teaching profession. The latest figures suggest that 80-plus per cent. of newly qualified teachers are in the profession three years after entering it. So it is not true to suggest that over-regulation is causing a mass exodus. Hon. Members know that the Government are committed to the fundamental reform of the teaching profession. We want to reform the contact time that teachers have with children and to improve their productivity. We also want to improve the support of the teaching profession by expanding the classroom assistant scheme and by providing the learning mentors and learning support staff who do so much in our schools to support teachers. In addition, we want to improve school leadership so that teachers spend their time on teaching.

There is an issue about regulation; it is a matter on which all hon. Members should have some humility. Governments historically have not been good at limiting their tendency to over-regulate. I will not say that everything is fine. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) put his finger on an important point. There is a tendency to believe that because an initiative is right for some schools, it needs to be advertised and sent to all schools. His comment was constructive and we will take on board the idea that, in our desire to ensure that no one is left out, we sometimes overburden those who want to get on with their work.

The debate was noteworthy. A couple of hon. Members were asked to name regulations they would cut. The House has welcomed the increased regulation on child welfare introduced by the Bill. We know that the literacy and numeracy strategies have been hugely successful in raising standards in primary schools. We also know that the key stage 3 strategy, which involves regulation, gives many teachers much needed support in the critical middle years of secondary schooling. It would be folly to retract those regulations.

Mr. Brady: The Minister says that we have been unable to name regulations that should be removed. Can he name three of the 4,770 regulations issued by the Government in the past year which, on reflection, might not be necessary?

Mr. Miliband: Let us understand how the Opposition reach that figure. A document that is sent to primary schools and to secondary schools is counted twice even though it is one document. So one document counts twice in the Opposition's new mathematics. We should not fall for the hon. Gentleman's fuzzy maths.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The Government have seen fit to extend the scope of their amendment to the National Assembly for Wales. Did they seek the approval and consent of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in the National Assembly? If so, was it given? There is an appetite in the National Assembly to move much further on the issue. Surely that is a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Gentleman knows that Labour is committed to working closely with our partners in the devolved bodies, and I can reassure him that we consulted the relevant authorities in Wales.

The Government amendment is a serious step forward. I urge the House to welcome it.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Amendment proposed: (a), in lieu of the Lords amendment.—*[Mr. Miliband.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 154.

Division No. 308] [7.45 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Rt Hon Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie

Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Jim Murphy.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brake, Tom
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, J[illegible]an
Duncan, [illegible] *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas
(Macclesfield)
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 14 agreed to.

Clause 32

FEDERATIONS OF SCHOOLS

Lords amendment: No. 23.

Mr. Miliband: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Government amendment (a) in lieu of the Lords amendment.

Mr. Miliband: I know that the whole House will agree that there must be strong partnerships between parents and schools. That is important for children, for schools and for parents. A good and open relationship between home and school can make a huge difference to a child's progress. Annual parents meetings are one means to that end: a positive and productive partnership between parents and schools that contributes to raising standards. Of course, meetings can be particularly important where parents have concerns that they want to express.

Currently, governors are obliged to hold meetings once a year. They are intended to be an opportunity for all parents to influence the running of schools, and at present they are subject to considerable regulation. When we introduced the Bill, we proposed to re-enact the existing requirements essentially as they are. On reflection, however, we accept the Lords' view, expressed in amendment No. 23, that there is no need for detailed regulation of the meetings. Since they were introduced, they have been prescriptively regulated, but we agree that the detailed arrangements can perfectly well be left to schools.

We want to retain the current exceptions from the general duty to hold parents meetings, as I shall explain in due course. We are ready to go further and to consult on whether there are circumstances in which the requirement could be further relaxed, especially where schools can demonstrate that they have involved parents thoroughly in the life of the school throughout the year. Although we cannot accept the Lords amendment, because it would leave us with a clause that does not legally serve its purpose, we very much accept its thrust.

There is an important principle here that will be supported across the House. Governors should give parents the opportunity to hold them to account for what they are doing. The requirement left in the Bill by the Lords does not quite do that job, because it does not specify the purpose of the annual meeting. As it stands, there would be no requirement on governing bodies to allow parents to present their views on how their child's school was being run, or might be run in future. Schools would be able to claim that they had fulfilled the duty to hold an annual parents meeting by inviting parents to a party, a sports days or a school play. I hope that the House agrees that we need to tidy up the matter.

The removal of the regulation-making powers would also put some schools in a worse position than they are in now, because it would remove the possibility of exemption from that duty, to which I referred a moment ago. For example, at present special schools established in hospitals, or maintained schools where at least 50 per cent. of the pupils are boarders, do not have to hold annual parents meetings if the governing body of the school concerned does not think that it would be practicable to do so. Many of those schools would find it extremely difficult to persuade any parents to attend annual parents meetings. We do not believe that they should be required to do so in future.

8 pm

As we have said throughout, we believe that if schools have held a meeting to discuss an Ofsted report, they should be exempt from a requirement to hold a further meeting. We want to ensure that parents have an annual opportunity to hold the governors to account, but we do not want that requirement to be more burdensome than absolutely necessary. As I have said, we are prepared to look further to see whether there are other circumstances in which it would be right to relieve schools of that duty. We will invite suggestions on that when we come to consult on the draft regulations and guidance. I do not want to revisit a previous debate, but this issue might be one in which we can achieve a measure of deregulation that is welcomed by both sides of the House.

The Government amendment closes the unintended loophole created by the Lords amendment, so that only a meeting in which the governors can be held to account is counted as an annual parents meeting. It also ensures that there can be exemptions where it does not make sense to hold a meeting. The annual parents meeting is a backstop, and it is important that we keep it; but I hope that the House will join me in supporting the Government amendment, which accepts the thrust of the Lords amendment while ensuring that the basic principle of parents meetings and the current exemptions are retained.

Mr. Brady: Given the consensual tone in which the Minister has presented the Government's response to the Lords amendment, I do not want to be too strongly controversial or party political—the Minister knows that that is not in my character anyway. However, I am tempted to make the observation that if only the Government had not, at earlier stages of our consideration of the Bill, denied the House of Commons the chance properly to scrutinise the Bill, we might have saved both ourselves and another place considerable effort. The clauses relating to annual parents meetings were among those many clauses that, sadly, fell victim to an extremely arbitrary timetable and the use of so-called knives throughout the Bill's Committee stage. It is sad that on a matter on which, as the Minister has shown, there is room for agreement across the House, as well as room to make sensible improvements to legislation, the use of procedural devices should have prevented consideration that might have enabled those things to happen.

In Committee, I tabled an amendment that would have had a slightly different effect from the Lords amendment. The detail of that amendment was to provide that a school would not need to hold a parents meeting annually unless there was a requirement or demand to do so from a certain number—a small number—of parents. The objective was to provide the sort of backstop that the Minister rightly says is important. Unfortunately, because of the timetable and the use of the knife, the Committee was unable to debate not only my amendment but this entire part of the Bill. Had Members of Parliament been given an opportunity to do their job properly, we might already have arrived at the sensible agreement towards which we are now moving.

The Minister has spoken of a desirable removal of unnecessary regulation. On the previous group of amendments, we were seeking precisely such an example of where it might be possible to remove some elements of unnecessary regulation without damage. The other place has made a sensible proposal that is designed to remove unnecessary regulation of the way in which parents meetings are held—how they should be publicised and their precise format. I am sure that most hon. Members on both sides accept that that is unnecessary detail for primary legislation.

The Government amendment specifies the minimum regulation necessary for the meetings, providing only that they must take place and that they must be an opportunity to hold the governors and school to account, and stating that in certain circumstances exemption from the obligation to hold a meeting is possible. The Minister mentioned the circumstances in which a meeting to discuss an Ofsted report has already been held. As I read it, new subsection (3) would create the sort of regime that I sought at an earlier stage of consideration, but would do so by regulation.

I would welcome clarification of whether, under new subsection (3), the circumstances in which there is no need to hold an annual meeting could be extended to

[Mr. Brady]

include a presumption that an annual meeting may not be held unless certain circumstances prevail. I simply wonder how much latitude there is in the new subsection; it seems on the face of it that the provision could be interpreted quite broadly. I have no difficulty with that, so long as a backstop position remains—a guarantee that parents will have an opportunity to hold the school to account when there is a need to do so.

We want to avoid meetings being held unnecessarily—perhaps a meeting has already been held, or the school's experience is that when an annual meeting at which governors and the head teacher can be held to account is convened, no parents attend. It is a question of finding a sensible way forward.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that it is important that the Minister gives us a clue as to the likely nature of the regulations issued under new subsection (3), so that we have some idea of what he has in mind?

Mr. Brady: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and neighbour for his helpful intervention, in which he tries precisely to pin down the Minister on the key point. The Opposition have no difficulty in principle with the fairly broad provisions of the permissive new subsection (3), which states that regulations may specify

"the circumstances in which a governing body are to be exempt from the obligation imposed by subsection (1)."

However, if regulations are to be the instrument used, it is not only appropriate but, as my hon. Friend suggests, necessary and important that at this point the Minister puts a little flesh on the bones of what the Government envisage those circumstances being.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Does my hon. Friend agree that the provision on annual parents meetings was a necessary part of previous education legislation? It was part of either the 1986 or the 1988 Act—I cannot remember which—and was designed in an era in which parental choice was far more restricted than it is now and there was far less parental representation on governing bodies than there is now. None the less, it is necessary to provide that such meetings should be held until we reach that fortunate position in which there is total parental choice and schools that do not respond to their market as they should do not need to be prompted by means of meetings, but are instead prompted by means of the exercise of parental choice.

Mr. Brady: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as I was throughout Committee, for his helpful and knowledgeable contributions. He is right that the circumstances or ground rules have changed since the provision was introduced. I set out to be helpful and accommodating to the Government, but he brings me back to the formula which I sought to float in Committee: there should be a provision to allow parents to require an annual meeting to take place if one would not otherwise take place. I should be grateful for the Minister's elucidation on whether, in any regulations that he may introduce, if an exemption is granted, it would be appropriate to set out the circumstances and a mechanism by which parents could overturn it. If there has been a meeting with Ofsted to discuss an Ofsted report in general terms, it may not be necessary to hold a further parents meeting. There may be a material change in a year in which a meeting has already taken place, in which case parents should have the opportunity to require another meeting. I would be grateful for clarification from the Minister on that point.

No debate of the provisions of this unusual Bill would be complete without looking at the huge scope of powers to make exemptions under part 1, particularly the ability to make exemptions for the purposes of innovation. As we know, part 1 allows for exemption from any requirement in education legislation. In Committee, we clarified the fact that the provisions to make an exemption from the requirements of education legislation are self-embracing—they include measures in the Bill. I therefore urge the Minister to consider in what circumstances a school may seek to deviate from the regulations provided for under Government amendment (a). Is he prepared to give a clear and definite answer this evening about whether he would exclude exemptions for the purposes of innovation from measures on parents meetings, or are there circumstances in which he would be prepared to contemplate allowing a school to make its own amendments to the regulations?

Finally, throughout the progress of the Bill, there has been agreement between Members on both sides of the House about reducing the burden of regulation on schools. I welcome the fact that at this late stage in consideration of the Bill, Ministers are prepared to accept that there is room for movement and scope for relaxation of the law. We can therefore make progress on removing an irksome, if minor, aspect of regulation that impinges on schools. I welcome the extent to which the Government have changed their position, but I wish that the problem could have been dealt with earlier, as clearing it up would have saved us and another place time.

Mr. Mole: I, too, welcome the reduction in the prescriptive arrangements for annual parents meetings. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) asked whether I had met any head teachers recently. I was a governor until just after my election at the beginning of this year, which is pertinent to our debate because, like many governors up and down the country, I have spent many happy evenings sitting with my colleagues, consuming small mountains of peanuts, Twiglets and cheese and small lakes of wine and coffee as we waited for parents to come to meetings, the agendas for which were prescribed under the previous Government, as the Opposition pointed out.

8.15 pm

That was a dispiriting experience for my governor colleagues. We have talked about the challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers, but there also remains a challenge about recruiting and retaining school governors. Dry, prescriptive agendas for things like annual parents meetings tend to put governors off. Occasionally, however, it is right that there should be an opportunity for governors to hear parents' voices. When, under the previous Government, the school where I was last a governor wanted, for sensible budgetary reasons, to change the number of days of swimming that it could offer during the year, a sizeable number of parents managed to come and register their concerns.

Mr. George Osborne: The hon. Gentleman's experience as a governor is illuminating. Could he throw some light on his point about the retention of governors by explaining why he ceased to be a governor?

Mr. Mole: When I became MP for Ipswich, I did not believe that I would have enough time in my constituency to attend governors meetings. I should be interested to know how many Members retain such a role and believe that they do it justice.

The annual parents meeting provides an opportunity for parents to raise issues with governors. I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister has said that the framework introduced by the previous Government was carried over into the Bill, but accepts that it should be looked at again, thus giving schools a welcome flexibility on things like school plays, cheese and wine evenings and fairs or any opportunity that allows the schools to bring parents in and hear their views.

Mr. Brady: My understanding was that the Minister was concerned that schools should not count a school play, sports day or cheese and wine evening as the annual meeting.

Mr. Mole: I did not hear the Minister say that, nor was I suggesting that he did. We want such events to provide an opportunity for the annual parents meeting to be held at the same time. My understanding is that such an arrangement may have been prescriptively precluded by the previous framework.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that although the framework may preclude holding the annual parents meeting at the same time as a play, it does not preclude holding it before or after a play, or before or after a social event? Many governors, governing bodies and head teachers have exercised considerable ingenuity in trying to attract parents to annual meetings by running them alongside, or at the beginning or end of, other functions.

Mr. Mole: The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) asked what interests school governors in remaining school governors. I suggest that they are motivated by the chance to raise standards and improve opportunities for the children in the school, not by the challenge of finding creative ways of circumnavigating the prescriptive legislation introduced a number of years ago by the Government whom the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) and his hon. Friends supported.

I welcome the Minister's suggestion that he will look for ways of giving schools new flexibility to strengthen the partnership between parents and governors. We all know that the most successful schools are the ones where there is that tripartite, if not a quadripartite, partnership, primarily between heads, governors and parents, but also with the local education authority. I welcome the proposals.

Mr. Willis: We on the Liberal Democrat Benches wholeheartedly support the amendment. We consider it a sensible compromise that takes us forward. On the previous set of amendments, we discussed the need to get rid of bureaucracy. The current arrangements are a classic example; they clearly have not worked and need to go.

I had to organise a set of annual parents meetings, and I did so with great dread. I remember that in one round of parents meetings in 1996 in Leeds, the average number of parents who came was 10, and in some cases, we did not get a single parent attending the annual parents meeting, so I welcome the changes. However, they do not remove one of the great challenges facing all of us: how do we engage parents in the schools?

The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole) made a number of references to the prescriptive nature of the previous Conservative Government. I believe that the existing provisions were a genuine attempt to engage parents in what was happening in school, but it did not work. My worry is that we are in danger of saying, "Phew! That's that out of the way. Let's fall back and not engage our parents." One of the sadnesses, to me, is that whenever we have formal meetings with parents, it is usually because there is a crisis over the swimming or over something that has occurred because of an Ofsted report.

I am reminded that when I was recently in the United States, in North Carolina, the head of one school was talking about parents meetings and said about public meetings, "Few people ever come with affirmation in their minds." There is some truth in that. We need to encourage parents to come into school with affirmation and with questioning in their mind.

I support subsection (3) and we look forward to those regulations. Will the Minister give the House a guarantee that he will consider the annual report to parents? The requirements for that are incredibly prescriptive. I can remember the first year that I did an annual report to parents. I covered all that the Government said we had to do, and it ran to about 15 pages. When I started to condense it, it became a meaningless document, rather like an "In Touch" leaflet from the Conservatives. I ask the Minister to include—possibly when the matter returns to the House of Lords—a simple additional subsection deregulating the annual report to parents. We welcome the initiative.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I, too, support the broad thrust of the Government's proposal in respect of annual parents meetings. It is important not to allow the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) to fail to take credit where credit is due. In my experience, an annual parents meeting that is badly attended is a sign of a well run school, and a sign that parents in general are happy with the way in which the school is being managed, and with the way in which the governors and head teacher are conducting affairs.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): Not necessarily.

Mr. Turner: I notice that hon. Members on the Government Benches shake their heads at that assertion. I hope that they do not wish to condemn the performance of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough in his previous incarnation. I accept that on occasions it is

[Mr. Turner]

difficult to provide the open and welcoming atmosphere, or perhaps schools are less successful at providing the open and welcoming atmosphere that they should provide to encourage parents to attend the annual parents meeting. On those occasions, I am sure that a little lubrication of the kind referred to by the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole)—or even a lake of lubrication—may be helpful.

The thrust of the Government's amendment is right. However, I echo the remark of my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West about the possibility of a back-up. If the Government decided to remove all requirements for the governors to hold a parents meeting annually, perhaps they would consider a back-up provision enabling parents to require such a meeting to be held if they so wished. I can think of certain circumstances in which the Government might consider that appropriate, especially in the case of the exercise of powers to suspend the statutory requirements in clause 2.

If the governors were, for example, seeking the Secretary of State's approval to suspend the statutory requirement that prevents them from charging for certain school functions, that might be a matter on which parents should be empowered to call a meeting. Alternatively, the Government might set that down as an exemption of a governing body from the requirement to call an annual parents meeting.

It is important to recognise that we have a mixed economy of schools, not only in terms of the huge—and, indeed, burgeoning—number of different types of school that the Government propose, some of which reflect rather well on what went on between 1988 and 1997, but in terms of the amount of choice that parents have. Frequently, my suggestion that Government and local education authorities should allow parents greater choice has been countered by the assertion that if choice cannot be provided in rural areas, it is wrong for it to be provided in urban areas. That is tantamount to saying that because we cannot provide choice everywhere, we should provide choice nowhere.

I do not take that view at all. Indeed, I should have thought that where there is less choice, there needs to be marginally more safeguards and more prescription, but where there is great choice, that is exactly the sort of condition in which there needs to be less prescription and fewer safeguards, because parents have the safeguards in their own hands. They can choose schools of different ethos, different appearance—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman of the amendment that we are discussing? He seems to be going rather wide of it.

Mr. Turner: Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker; I am grateful for your guidance. One of the bases on which such choice may be exercised is whether a school decides of its own volition to hold an annual parents meeting.

I, too, support the broad thrust of the amendment, but I am interested to know whether a change of the sort that it proposes would have to lead to the promulgation of a new set of regulations or whether existing regulations could be cross-applied. In the context of the previous amendment, we might need to consider whether consultation on the new regulations would in itself place a new burden on teachers, heads and governors.

8.30 pm

Mr. Miliband: This has been rather a good debate and I shall put aside the voluminous facts and figures that I have been given to help me to rebut the outrageous claims of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) about the desultory nature of the Committee stage. I shall put them aside in the interests of the new co-operative spirit that is pervading our discussion.

What we are talking about is getting the right balance between encouraging all governing bodies to have a genuine partnership with their parent communities and regulation that is "irksome"—a word used by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West that I want to return to later. The Government have acknowledged that annual parents meetings have been over-regulated in the past and have genuinely listened to the concerns expressed about meetings. We think that we have come up with a workable solution by deregulating some processes and procedures and limiting the bureaucracy associated with the meetings.

The amendment is an example of where the Government's much-maligned approach in the Bill may serve a purpose, as it gives us scope to go further in future in relieving more schools of the duty to hold meetings where they have already given parents the opportunity to have their say. That will benefit schools, while ensuring that we retain the essential right of parents to question the governing body and the head teacher about the way in which their child's school is run. That is why I return to the notion of balance. We want to keep a situation in which parents have some weapons in their armoury to ensure that accountability is maintained.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West took us back to the happy days of his amendment that was never discussed in January and February and to his presumption of not having a meeting. Despite my new role, something in me thinks that introducing legislation not to do something or with a presumption that something will not be done is a rather backward way of doing things. We are trying to express our presumption that school governing bodies should have a genuine partnership with their parenting communities, and we want to give them different ways of giving effect to that intention. He may come to think that his use of the word "irksome" in relation to parental meetings may be slightly over the top. There are many examples of parental meetings that work well and we should not denigrate the efforts that go into making them a success and a useful part of parent-governor dialogue.

Mr. Brady: First, I am sure that the Minister will agree that a requirement to hold a parents meeting may appear irksome to a school in the circumstances to which the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) referred, in which no parent attends the meeting. The regulation may certainly be irksome in that context. Secondly, he dealt only with the first half of the amendment that was never moved—the presumption that there would not ordinarily be a parents meeting. May I ask him for his thoughts on the second part, however, and the idea of a positive mechanism in which a requisite number of parents would have to ask for such a meeting?

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Gentleman anticipates me. If he will forgive me, I shall come to that point in a few moments.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the criteria for exempting schools from the requirement to hold a parents meeting. The overriding criterion must be that there is evidence to show that a genuine partnership exists between the governing body and the parental community. There is a need to prove that that relationship exists. I am in danger of skiing off-piste, so I must be slightly careful, but I shall give some examples of what might count as evidence of genuine partnership. There might be year-group sessions in which parents from different years are brought together to discuss provision for a particular year group. When a school is trying to achieve serious dialogue with parents in different year groups, it would seem odd subsequently to force a great gathering of the whole school. That is just one example that springs to mind. Different schools may organise different patterns of meetings. There may be discussion forums in which parents are brought together to discuss different aspects of the school's policy.

It may also be worth our while to think about cases in which the governors' attempts to hold meetings have not been successful. Perhaps we need to think about whether that indicates that the governors are not trying hard enough or not offering the right sort of wine and cheese—or pie and peas in my part of the world—but it may also be evidence to suggest that such meetings are not an appropriate way of achieving the sort of discussion and dialogue that we want.

In terms of the overriding criterion of partnership, but a keenness to find ways of achieving it that are appropriate to the school, I should like to refer to the notion of the trigger mechanism mentioned by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West both today and in his amendment. If we are convinced that our overriding criterion of partnership is fulfilled—it must be evident before exemption is given—the trigger mechanism will not be necessary. If there is genuine partnership, it will be the reason why there does not have to be an annual meeting. Layering a new load of bureaucracy on top by introducing a trigger mechanism is over-egging the pudding.

Mr. Willis *rose—*

Mr. Miliband: I am about to come to the hon. Gentleman's point about annual reports, which I find very exciting.

Mr. Willis: I am delighted that I have been able to excite the Minister. Before he leaves the trigger mechanism, may I ask him to think very carefully before introducing such a provision? A trigger mechanism that can be invoked by 10 parents may cause a real problem, especially in schools where groups of militant parents have an axe to grind as regards a particular teacher.

Mr. Miliband: I apologise for not articulating my point clearly enough. We do not propose to introduce a trigger mechanism. *[Interruption.]* I assure the hon. Gentleman that when I say that we do not intend to do it, that means that we do not intend to do it. We are in happy agreement in that respect.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) urged us to trust markets rather than dialogue as the answer to the need for proper links between governing bodies and parents, but one cannot rely on parental choice alone to provide the sort of engagement that we are seeking to promote. It is an important part of the equation, but the right to exercise a voice, as well as a choice, is an important part of the schooling process, and we should welcome the chance for parents to have a serious and deep involvement in their children's education. I would be very wary of pretending that markets can substitute for that dialogue.

I conclude with the exciting point about annual reports. If the word "irksome" can be applied to parents meetings, for many schools the annual report requirements are indeed irksome. My hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole) hinted at that when he suggested using the provision and the regulations that will follow it to think broadly about how we can achieve the right sort of light-touch involvement from the centre. I have glad tidings for the House—the Bill already provides an opportunity to deregulate annual reports. That is not a birthday or Christmas present, but merely continuing evidence of the Government's serious commitment to deregulation for which the House affirmed its support only half an hour ago. That power to deregulate annual reports is the merit of the approach that we have taken in moving the detail of the Bill to regulations. I must provide some context for my glad tidings. Hon. Members will have to agree to pass regulations to achieve the deregulation of annual reports that has gained support across the House.

I assure the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough that we want to consider the structure of annual reports in terms of what is required, when it is required and how they are required to be written. We can try to ensure that that accountability operates without in any way undermining a school's accountability to its parent community.

Mr. Mole: If my hon. Friend were to take that path, it would be another factor that would aid the recruitment and retention of school governors.

Mr. Miliband: We all owe a debt to our school governors, and we want to make their contribution as productive as possible. Let us consider annual reports, but let us not, when the time comes, score points against each other about the regulation that may be required to achieve that important step forward.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu agreed to.

Clause 41

SCHOOLS FORUMS

Lords amendment: No. 27.

Mr. Miliband: I beg to move that this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments (b), (c) and (a) to the words so restored to the Bill.

Mr. Miliband: Collaboration between schools and LEAs is an integral part of the new funding system, and we want that partnership to be effective throughout the

[Mr. Miliband]

country. The forums that we are about to consider put that principle into practice. I hope hon. Members will forgive me if I dally slightly longer than normal to explain the Government's approach fully.

Our debates on the Bill have not shifted our perspective that forums have an important role under the new regime. We have always said that some LEAs have effective consultation arrangements on funding matters. However, that is by no means the case in every authority. Clause 41 provides a real opportunity to ensure that schools in every area have a voice on a range of matters that are directly relevant to school funding. We are in the era of the self-managed school, where the delegation of school funding has greatly increased. Given that landscape, it is only right that local schools have the opportunity to articulate views on financial matters that affect them, in partnership with their LEAs.

In considering the attempt to remove schools forums from the Bill, we have the benefit of the consultation exercise that we launched in May. It ended last month and we have been able to consider the results, which I should like to report. There were a little under 200 responses in the period for reply. They showed general support for the concept behind schools forums: partnership and consultation on managing the schools budget, which clause 39 would create. We therefore believe that we were right to include schools forums in the Bill and to persist with them. As one school said,

> "the establishment of a schools forum on a statutory basis is absolutely necessary as a part of the new framework of school funding and it would be a major breach of faith if the proposals were to be dropped."

Mr. Andrew Turner: The Minister said that 200 people responded. How many were consulted?

Mr. Miliband: I do not know the figure off the top of my head, but I shall intervene later to provide it or include it in my winding-up speech.

The National Assembly for Wales strongly backs schools forums. It set out its proposals for them in "The Learning Country", the policy paper that it published last year.

We have also received strong backing for forums from bodies such as the National Association of Head Teachers, the Secondary Heads Association, the National Governors Council and other schools organisations. I shall quote an extract from a letter that we recently received from the SHA. It states that

> "the overwhelming majority of our Council believes that the Schools Forum proposal should go ahead and we very much hope it does not get lost in the parliamentary process".

The Foundation and Voluntary Aided Schools Association wrote:

> "We do see these as a very significant step towards bringing informed professional judgements to bear on local LEA funding . . . we have tried to get across . . . how strongly we feel on this."

Debate on schools forums in the House and in another place has been about two main issues—the way in which forums are to be constituted, and their functions. We have tried to ensure that authorities are not required to change arrangements that work well and are designed to establish proper dialogue between schools and LEAs over the allocation of funding.

We want to tackle practice that does not work well and reinforce rather than disturb good practice. A dialogue between an LEA and its schools on the management of the schools budget is essential, and there will be different ways of achieving that. However, forums have been identified as an important factor in facilitating a mutual understanding of budget management. Examples that have been brought to our notice include the Bath and North-East Somerset LEA's school budget forum; Croydon LEA's leadership groups; Hampshire's standing conferences for head teachers, and the forum established by Telford and Wrekin LEA. We want such local arrangements to be able to continue with little or no change, and other LEAs to be able to design their schools forums to evolve out of bodies such as head teacher consultative groups.

Our amendments therefore propose much greater flexibility. There will be local flexibility about the balance between head teacher and governor representatives, and the size and method of selecting school members. Elected members of the LEA will be allowed to join forums. The Learning and Skills Council will have only observer status. The quorum requirement will be relaxed. Costs will be charged to the schools budget, but detailed provisions will be for local decisions.

We will give guidance on a range of issues, but this will be non-statutory and for each LEA to use as it wishes. Those significant changes introduce much greater flexibility and will enable many LEAs to turn existing local groups into statutory forums. We believe that those changes are a substantial and positive response to consultation and show that we have listened to the concerns expressed during the Bill's passage.

We have also listened to what has been said about the functions of the schools forums. There was substantial agreement in the consultation responses that the functions that we envisaged for the forums—mainly consultative and advisory, as we have consistently emphasised—are on the right lines. This has confirmed our belief that the forums will provide a valuable resource for education authorities.

8.45 pm

The consultation exercise also showed considerable support for a limited decision-taking function, although we recognise that many have expressed a fear that this function would be expanded over time. That was never our intention, but nor was the decision-making function ever the main point of school forums, which are intended primarily to strengthen local partnerships. We have, therefore, considered the matter further, and, in consequence, we have tabled the amendments now before the House, following extensive discussions in the House of Lords. The amendments emphasise the advisory and consultative role of the schools forums, and restrict the role of the forums so that advice and consultation will be the limit of their function. The forums' advisory role is much the same as before, involving the funding formula for schools, service contracts, specific issues such as the balance of special educational needs spending, and arrangements for education otherwise. There will, however, be no power to take financial decisions.

I have been passed a note giving me the answer to the question raised by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight. I am told that all LEAs were consulted, and about

90 responded. About 30 national organisations were consulted, 20 of which responded. The consultation was not sent specifically to schools. Perhaps my colleagues in the Department were worried about the bureaucracy that might be involved, and about the taunting that might come from Opposition Members about that. A summary of the consultation was placed on the Department for Education and Skills website.

I hope that the House will join me in rejecting the Lords amendment and agreeing to the Government amendments, which preserve the most important aspects of schools forums while limiting their role to advising LEAs.

Mr. Brady: I am pleased that the Government have taken some small steps to allay the fears that have been raised about the potential role of schools forums, although the Minister has not gone as far as we would wish. He spoke of the importance of collaboration and partnership between local education authorities and schools, but this is, in a sense, partnership by diktat. To move from a situation in which schools forums already operate perfectly successfully on a voluntary basis—as the Minister accepts—to one in which there is a statutory requirement to form and operate such forums, especially when there is a clearly recognised cost element to be borne, is to take a significant step.

If the Minister's interpretation of the Government amendments is accurate, and the role of the forums is to be purely advisory and consultative, it is even more surprising that we should need a measure to require their establishment. As the Minister knows, that was one of the principal bones of contention in another place. Less than a month ago, on 19 June, during an exchange on this issue in another place, the Minister, Baroness Ashton commented:

> "As will become clear when we reach Clause 41, the schools forums are primarily advisory bodies."

That led to a brief misunderstanding, in which some Members thought that she had said "purely advisory", and she was obliged to clarify her comment, saying:

> "My Lords, I am sorry; I said "primarily advisory" and not "purely advisory".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 June 2002; Vol. 636, c. 799.]

The Minister's statement that the forums are now to be purely advisory bodies is, therefore, an interesting and useful development. It sits ill, however, with the statutory nature of the forums.

The Minister's statement also sits ill with his remarks a few moments ago about the importance of deregulation, which he says that he accepts. This is clearly a regulatory measure that will increase the bureaucracy imposed on schools and local education authorities. It carries a cost, which is required by law, and according to statute will be placed squarely on the local education authority. The Minister prays in aid the consultation that ended in May. He says that the consultation largely supported the establishment of statutory schools forums in that there was support for consultation between LEAs and schools. It is easy for schools and LEAs to engage in such consultation at present, if there is support for it.

It is not surprising that many Members in the other place and in this House fear that the Government have other intentions that perhaps go beyond the limited aims that the Minister has set out. He spoke about the context of these proposals in the light of the self-managing nature of our schools. He said that the role of the forums would be mainly consultative, and that although the consultation showed that there was support for a limited decision-making power, the Government's amendments do not proceed in that direction.

The Government made some welcome concessions on Third Reading in the other place. They were prepared to set back the date of implementation of the schools forums provisions from 31 October to 15 January 2003. They allowed LEAs more discretion on how the schools forums should be constituted, and accepted that forums would have to include governors and head teachers, but the balance would be at the LEA's discretion and the method of election would be locally determined. The minimum size would be raised, but there would be no maximum. There would be a requirement to ensure exact proportionality between school phases. The Learning and Skills Council would have only observer status. The maximum percentage of non-schools members would be reduced from 25 to 20 per cent., and would include elected members of the LEA.

Even with those changes and concessions in the other place, there is still a nub of concern about the nature of schools forums. The reassurances that were given on the size of the forums and the balance between the different phases of education implicitly accept that there is a danger that schools forums may in practice not represent the interests of all schools or all phases of education in an area. There may be some room for the balance to be tilted between different schools or phases of education.

Many schools forums already operate successfully on a voluntary basis, and the Minister cited some of them. The Government say that their education policy is about shifting away from one-size-fits-all provision, so it is ironic that schools forums are moving in the other direction towards such a policy, with a new arrangement being imposed on schools and LEAs.

We also concerned about the constitutional implications of this provision with regard to responsibility for LEA expenditure. There is a wider debate about the best mechanism for funding schools, how much money should go directly to schools, whether that should be done through a formula or in the spending review, as has been discussed once again today, or whether it should be done on a direct payment basis, which cannot be relied on in the long term. Although the Chancellor today spoke about a three-year period, that is hardly a hard and fast guarantee of a funding stream that can be relied on and that enables schools to plan accordingly.

It is felt that bodies are being established which, even if they have no decision-making powers, will be there to advise Ministers on a massive power that they are taking to control local authority expenditure. Again, responsibility for the expenditure will rest with local education authorities, but control over it is being shifted—in the small matter of funding for the forums themselves, but more significantly in the context of the proposals to ring-fence schools budgets.

By what mechanism, and in what circumstances, will funds be moved from one budget to another? How do Ministers intend to exercise their sweeping new power over local authority budgets? How will it be decided whether schools budgets are inadequate or sufficient? What procedures will be used to assess the recommendations and advice given by schools forums?

[Mr. Brady]

They will be able to express concerns about the way in which money is disbursed, which will be passed to Ministers to interpret.

The massive central power that Ministers are taking is a thread that runs through the Bill. The forums could almost be seen as a cloak beneath which Ministers can hide their actions.

Rob Marris: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the balance of power between local education authorities and Government here in Westminster. Would he care to tell the House how he would organise that balance, and how his party would like it to be struck between the centralisation that he sees as a thread running through the Bill and powers for LEAs? I am thinking about what was said earlier about local democracy by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood).

Mr. Brady: I should be delighted to do as the hon. Gentleman asks, but I fear that I cannot. He will probably not be surprised to learn that I feel very comfortable with the system of allowing schools the maximum resources, power, independence and freedom. I hope that, when we are in a position to consider the details of what we will say before the next general election, that view will feature strongly.

It should be noted that the Government are themselves engaged in a profound redefinition of what LEAs should do. I am not necessarily suggesting that the Government are being sneaky in any way, or trying to hide their true motives. A genuine debate is probably taking place in Government about the exact role of LEAs.

I was not taking a shorthand note, and I am sure that the Minister will forgive me if I misquote him slightly, but I think that when he appeared before the Select Committee recently, he made it very clear that LEAs should not be running schools—that their role should be strategic, and that they should take an overview. My hon. Friends and I feel comfortable with that. I suspect, however, that over the next couple of years the local education authority will become a very different animal from the one that we see today, or the one that we saw a year or two ago.

9 pm

There is certainly potential for movement in a certain direction. We heard today about direct payments to schools. We are trying to be consensual and non-partisan this evening, but we could comment that those payments may only just cover employers' national insurance contributions, and that they may be eaten up by the funding for Curriculum 2000, which never reached many schools. We should also bear in mind the shortage of funds currently experienced by many schools with sixth forms because of the Learning and Skills Council settlements. None the less, there is an increasing tendency towards direct payment in the form of a cheque submitted to the head, thereby bypassing the LEA. At the same time, through the Bill, the Government are assuming the power directly to squeeze the LEA side of the budget.

We have various concerns, which in part relate to the point that was rightly raised about the exact role of LEAs and of individual schools, and about the extent to which we are moving in a particular direction. The Minister might want to add something to that debate. However, there is also the real constitutional concern about the divergence between where the responsibility lies for control and expenditure of public money through the local authority, and the increasing shift towards taking decisions about how that money is spent elsewhere—notably, by Ministers in the Department for Education and Skills.

Mr. Willis: This was an important issue for Liberal Democrats in Committee—in the Commons and in the Lords—and it remains important as we consider the amendment before us. When the Minister introduced this group of amendments, he referred to those who support the recommendations of schools forums. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) was right. I had intended to ask how many consultation documents were issued and how many replies were received. The Minister rightly pointed out that the organisations that were very supportive of schools forums—they supported them as described in the original Bill, not in its amended form—included the National Association of Head Teachers, the Secondary Heads Association and the National Association of Governors and Managers.

If I were still a practising head, I would be somewhat attracted to the concept of schools forums. I was often at odds with my local authority about my school's budget share, and during area meetings, local primary heads were at odds with me about how much money they were getting in comparison with the secondary school. In turn, the local special school argued that the primary and secondary schools were getting a greater share. It was very difficult to decide which of them was being disadvantaged. Of course, that is one reason why we elect local authorities, and why members of all political persuasions—and independents—put themselves up for election. Taking such decisions is a fundamental role of local authorities. I might disagree with certain of their decisions from time to time, but it is important that this House preserve local government's right to take decisions on matters for which it has a distinct responsibility—a point to which I shall return in due course.

The Minister mentioned Wales—an issue on which I, too, have been lobbied. The National Assembly for Wales's Green Paper, "The Learning Country", was a very good document. I urge the Minister to reconsider separating schools forums for Wales and for England, because under the legislation it is possible to do so.

I am pleased to see that the Welsh Minister is in his place to answer these deep questions, if he is still a Minister in that Department—*[Interruption.]* There have been so many changes recently that I did not know whether he was just sidling on to the Front Bench for a chat. One of the advantages of having an elected Assembly for Wales is that it has every right to say what it would like for its schools. The Minister is at leave to exclude schools forums for England and have them only for Wales. If that is what the Welsh Assembly wants, the Liberal Democrats would accept that, as is only right and proper.

I agree with the Minister and the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) about the need for better consultation with head teachers and governors about school budgets. That is said with due humility.

The examples that the Minister gave of forums that have been organised by local authorities and their schools are shining examples of what can be done within existing regulations. We do not need a raft of new regulations and organisations to achieve what the Minister wants. We—and probably the Conservatives, too—would be happy to make it a duty on local authorities to consult head teachers and governors about school budgets and to publish the arrangements for so doing. That can be done within existing arrangements without all the paraphernalia of schools forums. That would protect the position of head teachers and governors.

The schools forums proposed in the Bill now are very different from those originally intended by the Government. The original intention was for schools forums that would have considerable powers, if the Secretary of State decided to give them those powers. The forums would have had direct powers over local authority budgets and how they were devolved to schools. I am delighted that the Minister has agreed that those powers are not necessary. However, if the bodies will be merely consultative, why are we going to such great lengths?

I also agree with the Government that schools should have a right to petition the Secretary of State if they feel that they are being disadvantaged. That is right. Head teachers and governors have a duty to ensure that the resources that they get meet their school's needs, especially now that they will be held more and more responsible for what happens.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): They will get more money.

Mr. Willis: The Minister is so excited about the additional money. I am excited too, and I just wish that I was still leading my school as these resources were pouring in. However, I was in the House when the additional £19 billion was announced, but it turned out to be £6.1 billion.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Willis: I am sorry, but I do not want to be distracted on to that issue. I am sure that the hon. Lady is far too wise to lead me astray.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West made a telling point. *[Interruption.]* It is always sad when Ministers cannot even be bothered to listen to the argument, because if they did they might be able to engage properly in the debate. The issue that the hon. Gentleman introduced was the new funding arrangements that are being proposed for schools and local authorities. If the budget for schools—the annual grant from the centre—is to be ring-fenced, with a separate budget for local authorities for running the LEAs, we will have a very different beast from the one that we have now. We have major reservations about the new arrangement, and it will call into question the enormous top-up that local authorities give to schools over and above the standard spending assessment that the Government say that they should spend on their schools.

The Minister knows—he is a highly intelligent young man—*[Interruption.]* Oh, so he's 37. Wonderful! Heavens above! He knows that in the past financial year local government spent £370 million over and above Government grant on schools in local authorities. It was not heads or governors who raised that money. Those people did not go before the electorate to win seats to sit on the council and to make decisions to raise council tax accordingly.

If we want to go down the road where everything is centrally controlled, where everything is decided in London and is simply imposed on schools and local authorities, I question whether local authorities have any future. On that basis, why do the Government not devolve all the money directly from the centre to each individual school? If that is what they want, let them say so. It seems that that is where we are going on this issue.

The jibe "one size fits all" has been made at our comprehensive system. It is a jibe that the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and other Cabinet members constantly make at the public sector. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West is right to say that before us is an example of one size fits all that is being foisted on local authorities and schools irrespective of whether they want it.

Under the Learning and Skills Council arrangements and the Learning and Skills Act 2000, funding for 16 to 19-year-olds is now provided by the Learning and Skills Council—a wholly unelected quango. Yet there is no mention in the Bill, or in the 2000 Act, of the suggestion that there should be a schools forum for the Learning and Skills Council. It seems to me bizarre that a democratically elected body should have to have a schools forum to interject, but that a totally unelected quango can deal with £6 billion of taxpayers' money, without any say from elsewhere.

Mr. Brady: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is even more important a point given that the clear logic of the Government's position is to shift to a 14-to-19 phase of education and that the logical concomitant of that might be that the funding stream will go in the same direction, in which case even less of the money would go through the local authority route?

Mr. Willis: That is an area of genuine discussion with the Government and something that we need to have out with them. In an intervention during a recent debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), gave a definite no to the question. However, the issue remains on the table. I ask the Minister to explain why the Learning and Skills Council does not have to consult schools even though it is determining their budgets; nor, indeed, does it have to consult a further education college.

Rob Marris: Proposed section 47A(1) refers to a schools forum including other bodies if the authority—that is the local education authority—so determines. The words used are:

"representing such bodies as the authority may from time to time in accordance with regulations determine."

That means that there is an avenue available to address the real problem that the hon. Gentleman raises.

Mr. Willis: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that. If he reads the background notes, he will find that

[Mr. Willis]

we are talking about a member of the Learning and Skills Council being allowed on the schools forum not as a voting member but as an observer. No doubt he or she will have nothing better to do than observe. I am making the point that the reverse does not apply. We have an unelected body that is responsible for £6 billion of taxpayers' money, to which none of the regulations that we are discussing apply. At the same time, we apparently have to have a new organisation for the local education authority. I want the Minister to reply to that issue.

9.15 pm

The final point that I want to raise is the question of non-school members. That is an important issue on which the Minister can provide clarification. What was the reasoning, for instance, behind the reduction in the House of Lords from 25 per cent. to 20 per cent? It would be useful to put on record that rationale. Will the Minister explain why head teachers and governors are important school members, but teachers and support staff are non-school members? I find that insulting to teachers and non-teachers, who somehow do not even qualify, for the sake of the school forums, to be recognised as part of the school community. If a formula can be devised for the proportion of head teachers or governors on the school forum, surely the same courtesy can be extended to the very people who have an important interest in their schools—the teachers and support staff.

In an earlier debate, the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole), who has left his place, raised the issue of the burdens on governors. Most governors apply to join a governing body or—shall we say—are encouraged to do so because they want to become involved with that particular school. That is their real interest. When they get there, they find that they have all sorts of other duties as well. Representing other schools is difficult both for individual governors and for individual head teachers. Head teachers, by definition, as chairmen of governors, have a real interest in their own school and community and have a duty to fight for the best interests of their school and their school community. It is difficult for them to make objective decisions about budgets et al, across a whole authority, without having all the other information. If we want governors to play a key role, as the schools forum legislation clearly envisages, we are putting yet another huge burden on school governors.

At the end of the day, this is an issue of local democracy. As a party, we are fundamentally supportive of the whole principle of local democracy and local decision making. We believe that the balance is just about right between increased autonomy and increased ability to innovate for schools, and local authorities that have become light-touch authorities. They are absolutely essential, however, in terms of making sure that all the machinery fits together. They have key roles to play. All we are saying to the Government is this: why invent a whole area of bureaucracy that is totally unnecessary, when, by simple regulation, using existing provisions, the Minister can have exactly what he wants—advisory bodies including governors and head teachers?

Mr. Andrew Turner: The reason why I asked the Minister how many people had responded to the consultation was that the Government's consultation record on the Bill, and on a whole range of issues related to it, is excellent, but that the response has been tiny. The Minister kindly gave me the figures. Of the 200 or so responses to the consultation, 90 were from LEAs and 20 from other bodies. I therefore assume that about 110, being from neither LEAs nor other bodies, were from schools. Those 110, of course, represent 110 of 25,000. A provision that was designed originally to give schools a key role in determining their budgets was, therefore, sufficiently popular for only 110 of those schools to respond to the Government, let alone say yes—the Minister did not tell me how many said yes.

Rather like the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), I find it hard to understand what the clause's purpose is any more. I understood what its purpose was when the Bill left this House for the other place. The Government were then determined that schools should get it right when LEAs got it wrong, and that schools should be given the opportunity to get it wrong even if LEAs had got it right. The Government do not trust LEAs, and it does not matter what kind of LEAs they are. I am not a great fan of LEAs, but even the budgets for grant-maintained schools were set according to the formula—admittedly with knobs on—determined by LEAs.

When the Bill left this place, the clause enabled LEAs to be overtaken by schools in determining school budgets. As far as I can see from reading the proposed new section 45A in clause 39, schools could determine the size of the school budget as well as how it should be disposed. Schools could decide that money should be spent on schools rather than on old people's homes, transport or roads. That was the Government's absurd purpose, and their lordships rumbled it and got rid of clause 41.

The Government accepted the need to remove the worst bits of clause 41—the power of schools to override LEAs, which, for all their faults, are democratically elected—yet they still think it necessary to keep the rest of the absurd framework. They want to put into statute something that many LEAs do already and that many groups of schools could do even if their LEAs did not want them to. It is not unknown for head teachers and governors to meet outside the arrangement made by an LEA.

It is extraordinary that the Government think that the only things that happen are provided for by legislation or regulation. The Minister shakes his head, and I do not blame him. He is on the new side of the Labour party that does not believe that, but I regret to say that this clause confirms my belief that the Minister shares the Government's outlook that the only things that happen are determined by regulation and legislation. That is not the case, so there is no need for the statutory framework. Unlike the Government, I do not disagree to the Lords amendment.

Mr. Miliband: I begin with a matter of no significance. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), wants the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) to know that, although my hon. Friend may look like a year 12 in a suit, he is actually only a year 6. He is at least two years younger than me, so he does not want any aspersions cast in his direction. He is very much young Labour, and is coming up sharply alongside us.

I shall deal with three points in my response to this interesting debate: the purpose of the changes, the role of LEAs and the nature of the proposals. It is important to recognise that LEAs are already required to consult on the funding formula and on the scheme in the financial control document that they issue. The quality of the consultation that takes place as a result of the encouragement that is given to LEAs to form the partnership with schools that we want should be honoured in the breach as well as in the observance.

The amendment tries to remedy the problem that, in some LEAs, schools feel that they have insufficient chance to have a proper dialogue with the LEA about the organisation of a school's budget. The forums have received much support from organisations representing head teachers and schools. Notwithstanding what the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) said about the consultation, I was impressed by the seriousness of purpose demonstrated by the respondents. We are trying to solve the problem that some schools feel disempowered when the LEA formulates its plans.

On the role of the LEA, the Conservative party cannot decide whether it loves LEAs or loathes them. In the course of a single day, the hon. Member for Isle of Wight has gone from loving them to loathing them and back again. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) made a passionate plea to get rid of them completely. The Government believe that LEAs have an important role, but it is not one of running schools. Their role is to support schools in school improvement, to provide the services that cannot be provided by schools alone and to support the drive to rise standards.

I must tell the Liberal Democrats that the role that the Government have set for LEAs is standing the test of time. It is a proper role that is designed to enhance what schools do, not to replace it.

Mr. Redwood: The Minister misrepresents my view. I said nothing about the abolition of LEAs. However, how much will the forums cost? Why can he not find a better way to take account of the views of schools without creating more expensive bureaucracy?

Mr. Miliband: I am sorry if I misrepresented the right hon. Gentleman's views. They seemed clear to me, but I am happy to hear that he, too, loves LEAs.

Costs depend on how LEAs decide to develop the forums, which are the mechanisms for consultation. LEAs that already have meetings with head teachers and others can simply extend those to include the forum. We have designed clause 41 to encourage LEAs to exercise maximum flexibility on how they undertake their responsibilities.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough asked who should be represented on the forums. That is a matter for local authorities. We are not trying to create a schools parliament and I would hesitate before inviting a cavalcade of people to come along to the meetings. However, if LEAs think that members of the local schooling community have important points to make, they can invite them to the forums. Heads and governors are referred to as key players because they control school budgets, and it is the purpose of the forums to discuss school budgets.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the role of the learning and skills councils. It is significant that the Chancellor mentioned in his statement today the need to develop serious relationships at a local level between LSCs and the bodies with which they work. Part of that could involve discussing how the serious dialogue at LEA-school level can be extended to the LSC. The impression from my local experience is that in its first 18 months of operation, the LSC has made serious efforts to be a genuinely open and consultative body, although I take the hon. Gentleman's point that it is not democratically elected.

The Government amendments need to be set in the context of the arrangements that we are introducing to separate the budgets of schools and LEAs. Although LEAs will retain ultimate responsibility, it is time to give schools a sense of collective responsibility, in their partnership with an LEA, for the way in which their budgets are managed. What is the best way to dispose of resources? How are different priorities to be addressed and met? Is it better to spend money at school or LEA level to do best by pupils? Schools have an opinion on those questions and it should be heard clearly in LEAs.

We should not replace the mechanisms that work well, but we should put in place mechanisms if they are missing. The Lords amendment shows a distrust of schools, which is wrong. I hope that the House will vote against it and instead favour the Government amendments.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 169.

Division No. 309] **[9.29 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Jim Murphy.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*

Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Government amendments (b),(c) and (a) to the words so restored to the Bill, agreed to.

After Clause 62

ACADEMIES

Lords amendment: No. 37.

Mr. Miliband: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos 35 and 36.

Mr. Miliband: Lords amendment No. 37 gives effect to our intention to require academies, formerly known as city academies, to take part in statutory admission forums and have regard to their advice—an obligation that we have included in their funding agreements. We have already put in place robust arrangements to ensure that academies will be inclusive schools, and that they will agree their admission arrangements in partnership with local education authorities and other admissions authorities.

I shall spell out those arrangements for the benefit of the House. Academies are an integral part of the Government's wider programme to raise standards for all and transform secondary education, and are a new and distinctive kind of school. We are confident that they will offer great opportunities to pupils from some of the most disadvantaged communities in England. As independent schools, academies will have certain freedoms and will be different in certain ways from other maintained schools. We have ensured that they have the flexibility and the freedom that they need to respond to the demands and challenges that they will face. At the same time, we have made sure that, on certain key and fundamental points, they comply with requirements on maintained schools, most notably in relation to admissions.

First, on differences in freedom, academies will have the freedom to offer staff terms and conditions outside the teachers' pay and conditions document, and significant freedom to tailor the curriculum, its development and delivery to meet pupils' needs. There is also great flexibility in the make-up of the governing body of each academy.

Academies are part of the local schooling system, not separate from it, however. Let me explain. They must comply with admissions procedures and requirements as they apply to maintained schools. Their arrangements must be fair, transparent and objective. They have no more ability to select than do maintained schools. They must have independent panels to consider appeals against non-admission, in the same way as maintained schools. If they band by ability, those admitted must reflect the ability of those who apply.

9.45 pm

We want to make sure that academies' involvement in their local admissions networks is transparent and strengthened. That is why we have tabled the amendment. I have already said that academies will be required by their funding arrangements to participate in forums. However, the amendment will put a statutory duty on admissions forums to promulgate their advice to academies as well as maintained schools within the forum's area. It will also put a statutory duty on the governing body of an academy to have regard to such advice, which will be in addition to its contractual duty to have such regard through its funding agreement.

Mandatory admissions forums will enable us further to improve the admissions process for parents and pupils. They will consider how well local admissions arrangements are working and they will broker agreements on difficult local issues, such as arrangements relating to challenging and vulnerable children. Well run admissions forums already consider such issues.

A typical forum—for example, the one operating in west Sussex—meets three times a year. At its first meeting of the year, the west Sussex forum considers

[Mr. Miliband]

information to parents, assessing how user-friendly and helpful admissions prospectuses and forms are to local parents. The later meetings review the admissions round, considering what went well and where there are problems to be resolved. From that, the forum might make recommendations for improving the process. In the course of looking at those issues, the forum might identify other issues that it will also address—for example, issues relating to applications outside the admissions round or to applications from neighbouring authorities.

It has always been our intention that academies should have regard to the advice of local admissions forums. The amendment simply makes that position clear and unmistakable. It is important to understand that this is not an impediment to the success of the academies programme. In fact, the academies programme is proving extremely popular with sponsors, LEAs and local communities. In all cases, all parties have agreed that the academy should be a member of the admissions forum and should have regard to its advice.

We have recently awarded development funding to a further five partnerships of LEAs and sponsors working to establish academies to serve their areas. Those new partnerships are in Bradford, Leeds, Liverpool, Northampton and Sandwell. Letters have been sent to the hon. Members for the constituencies concerned.

I draw attention, by way of example, to one of those projects, not because it is more important than others, but because it illustrates an important point. The Sandwell academy is the second to be sponsored by the Mercers Company and Thomas Telford online, joining the existing project in Walsall; so one of the CTCs is sponsoring not one, but two academies. Those sponsors understand and accept entirely that academies are different from CTCs. They are perfectly happy with the position. Sir Kevin Satchwell, head of Thomas Telford school, is the project manager for the new academies sponsored by the Mercers and by Thomas Telford. He has said that he is happy for the academies to be part of the admissions forum. Thus there are CTCs that wish to take advantage of the provisions in the Bill to convert into an academy.

Mr. Redwood: Does the Minister think that grammar schools are a good thing or not?

Mr. Miliband: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we have always opposed the 11-plus. I am proud that I went to a comprehensive school. We should be proud of the success in doubling GCSE achievement at age 15 over the past 30 years. The Government are seeking to build on what comprehensive schools have achieved, not turn the clock back.

I was speaking about the wish of some CTCs to convert to academies. Djanogly CTC in Nottingham, for example, is making excellent progress with its plans to become an academy. At the same time, the new academy will replace the existing Forest school in Nottingham. I hope that these examples give some flavour of the popularity of the programme as it is, not as Opposition Members might wish it to be. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Brady: At the outset of this brief exchange, perhaps I should respond in kind and say that I am proud to have been educated at a grammar school. Even though the Minister was not prepared to pay tribute to the excellent work done in our remaining grammar schools throughout the country, I certainly will. They are a vital part of the fabric of education in our country. It is instructive that the Minister was prepared to congratulate comprehensive schools, even though some of his colleagues believe that they have failed over the past 20 or 30 years, but he was not prepared similarly to congratulate excellent schools that happen to be selective in intake.

The Government are clearly somewhat confused in that regard. In the past few days, the Prime Minister, in comments quoted in the *Daily Mail* of 13 July, said that it was the "core mission" of the Government's three-year spending plan being unveiled today to spell the end of what he described as the

"one-size-fits-all comprehensive".

It appears that the Minister is perhaps the last defender of the one-size-fits-all comprehensive. Perhaps, since he has not been so close to the Prime Minister, they have been starting to diverge in policy. We also heard on 30 June that the Secretary of State had referred, in relation to Labour's mission to consign the bog-standard comprehensive—a phrase used by Mr. Alastair Campbell, not the right hon. Lady—to history, to getting rid of a

"one-size-fits-all culture"

of failing schools and schools that she would not touch "with a barge pole".

Mr. Redwood: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a lamentable failure on the part of Ministers not to answer a reasonable question and name the schools that they do not think that people should touch with a barge pole?

Mr. Brady: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. We are waiting to hear a response from Ministers. I am sure that, in due course, they will supply a list in response to the questions tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green).

This is a classic case of our trying to help the Government to achieve what they say they want to do. They say that they believe in a more diverse schools sector, more autonomy for schools and less bureaucracy and red tape, but they are imposing a new statutory arrangement on all schools: the statutory admissions forum. In another place, my noble Friend Lady Blatch tried to amend the Bill to remove the whole paraphernalia of the admissions forums. She said:

> "If admission forums are thought to be a good idea by schools in an area and a majority of schools deem that there should be a forum, they should determine whether to have one."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 July 2002; Vol. 637, c. 292.]

That is a very clear and permissive approach, which does not burden schools with unnecessary regulation and red tape. The Government are now placing a new statutory duty on schools, however, which gives the lie to everything that they say about believing in diversity, using a light touch and allowing maximum autonomy to schools.

Will the Minister explain exactly what the new legislative requirement will mean in practice? What does the new duty to "have regard" to the forums mean? Is it a duty to follow the instructions of the forum, or merely a fig leaf to allow Ministers to claim that city academies are covered, or a meaningful legal requirement?

The Minister said that academies must be inclusive and that they are already required to be so. Indeed, in his opening remarks, he implied that the change was not necessary, before going on to advise the House to accept it. Is not the whole arrangement meaningless anyway, because the sweeping powers taken in part 1 give Ministers power to make exemptions from that legal requirement? Once again, even though city academies will be required to have regard to the views and advice of the admissions forum, that very requirement could be removed. The Minister is legislating to give himself power to remove the very restriction that he is trying to put in place.

The provision is a needless constraint on academies. The Opposition believe in city academies. We believe that they are an exciting opportunity and that they can be a new type of school that will free up innovation and autonomy in schools, provide a new direction, and act as a model that can be followed by other schools throughout the country. However, Ministers who claim to believe in the model of city academies and in freedom and autonomy for schools are contradicting everything they say that they believe by trying to restrict that freedom; they are obstructing schools that could go on to be beacons of excellence in our cities by trying to restrict them in a needless and counterproductive way.

We strongly urge the House to ensure that city academies are given the true freedom and autonomy that they need to go off and flourish in a thousand different ways that Ministers cannot even imagine. If Ministers really believe in autonomy for schools, this is the opportunity for them to prove it and to show that they are prepared to trust schools and give them the freedom to allow them to go out and succeed in our cities.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman protests too much. It is sad that people on the two Opposition Benches are finishing the evening on a discordant note. This is a key issue. We were delighted that Baroness Sharp was able to get the support of Baroness Ashton in getting the amendment through in another place, and I hope that it will be supported tonight.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) mixes up two matters. This is not about the future of academies, but about the future of who can go to those academies. The one thing that guarantees children of all backgrounds, creeds and colours fair access to our schools is a fair admissions policy. That is all we are trying to do, and that is why we support the Government. It may be true that CTCs flourished and were successful, and I do not want to decry their success at all. However, the reality is that Dixons city technology college in Bradford, which is a very successful school, has an arrangement for admitting children that differs from all the other schools in Bradford, and it therefore takes its pick before everybody else. Although it may have a fair and even distribution of students, that skews the whole process. If we are to have voluntary aided schools, more faith schools able to select their own admissions policies, and CTCs and academies with their own admissions policies—all with a different timetable—what is ultimately left for youngsters who had no one to advocate their case? I am delighted that an admissions forum is considering the admissions to all schools at the same time.

Mr. Redwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: No, I want to finish in the remaining three minutes. Most heads and governors are happy to engage in that process.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Willis: All right—how can I resist?

Mr. Redwood: Does the hon. Gentleman think that we should be able to select people who are better at, say, soccer or ballet to go to schools that specialise in those areas, or does he think that anyone should be able to go to those schools?

Mr. Willis: With respect, I do not want to re-run the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 argument. I agree that the process of selecting by aptitude is nonsense. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) made that point at the time. How do children at that stage display an aptitude, rather than an ability, in something? However, I do not want to go down that road. This is about fairness in the admissions system, and I hope that the Government will continue to support the amendment.

Mr. Miliband: It is revealing that in 10 minutes we can expose the fact that fair admissions is controversial even for the modern Conservative party. We are discussing the simple principle that we should have inclusive schooling in our communities and that the new city academies should take pupils from a wide range of abilities. Labour Members are happy to stand behind that principle.

Mr. Brady: One size fits all.

Mr. Miliband: City academies are an innovation in our schooling system, and I am pleased to say that they will admit pupils from a wide range of abilities. He may be obsessed with the future of 164 grammar schools, but we are not. We are obsessed with the future of 3,500 secondary schools, which are the heart of secondary education. Today we heard from the Chancellor about the investment that will go into our schools over the next three years. We have heard about investment that Conservative Members oppose.

Tomorrow, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West will hear about reforms to our secondary education system to improve teaching, the quality of leadership and school structures, and to establish the partnerships with local communities that will ensure that teachers and head teachers are not on their own in raising standards but are supported by the wider community, including parents, businesses and universities. I commend that vision of secondary education to the House.

It being Ten o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The House divided: Ayes 354, Noes 132.

Division No. 310] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
[illegible] Elfyn
Luca[illegible]
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris

Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Dan Norris.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas
(Macclesfield)
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 37 agreed to.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Remaining Lords amendments agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That at this day's sitting, the European Parliamentary Elections Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90(6) (Second reading committees), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Consolidation Bills),

That the Bill be not committed—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

WORKING CONDITIONS FOR TEMPORARY WORKERS

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 7430/02, draft Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on working conditions for temporary workers; and supports the Government's initial approach to negotiations.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

COMPANIES

That the draft Directors' Remuneration Report Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 1st July, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 102) (HC 943), on Children's Services (Quality Protects) Special Grants for 2001–02 and 2002–03, which was laid before this House on 19th June, be approved.

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 104) (HC 1005) on Children's Services Quality Protects Adoption and Permanence Taskforce Special Grant for 2002–03, which was laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

That the draft Caribbean Development Bank (Further Payments) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 27th June, be approved.

That the draft African Development Fund (Additional Subscriptions) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 27th June, be approved.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.

That the draft Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 27th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 23rd July, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any messages from the Lords shall have been received.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That the House shall not sit on Friday 18th October or any later Friday until the end of the present Session of Parliament; and the provisions of paragraphs (3) and (4) of Standing Order No. 12 (House not to sit on certain Fridays) shall apply to those days.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

PETITIONS

Pen Ponds Car Park

10.16 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I wish to present the first of two petitions condemning the Royal Parks Agency's plan to close Pen Ponds car park in Richmond park, which has facilitated popular access to the park for more than 70 years. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) is also presenting a petition, with signatures largely from her constituents.

This petition has been signed by many hundreds of people living outside the Richmond Park constituency, in areas including Putney and Roehampton, Kingston, Battersea, Tooting, Twickenham, Sutton, Cheltenham, West Sussex, Guildford, Portsmouth and indeed Christchurch. That shows that this is not just a local but, more important, a national issue.

To lie upon the Table.

Belgrave Avenue Surgery

10.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): I wish to present a petition on behalf of the residents of the Gidea park community in my constituency, where it is proposed to close the doctor's surgery in Belgrave avenue. The petition reads:

> The Petition of residents of the Gidea Park area, Romford.
>
> Declares that the Belgrave Avenue Surgery in Romford is an essential part of the local community, and that they are opposed to the proposed closure.
>
> The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Health to take all appropriate measures to ensure that the surgery is permitted to remain open and serve the residents of Gidea Park.

To lie upon the Table.

Pen Ponds Car Park

10.19 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The petition from my constituents and those of the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), and national users of Richmond park, has attracted 16,500 signatures. It declares that

> the Royal Parks Agency's plan to close Pen Ponds Car Park, the sole car park inside the perimeter road, removes the only safe and reasonable access to the heart of the park, and so to beautiful Pen Ponds for the most vulnerable groups, young families and the elderly alike . . . the Petitioners request the House of Commons to urge the Royal Parks Agency to reconsider the planned closure of Pen Ponds Car Park.

To lie upon the Table.

North-East Museums

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

10.20 pm

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): May I begin by saying how pleased I am to have secured tonight's debate? It allows me not only to highlight the excellent work of museums in the north-east, but to emphasise the fact that not all of our national treasures are located in London. A truly national policy on museums and galleries must recognise the immense value of regional museums and the contribution that they make to our country's historical and cultural life.

The north-east has a long, diverse and proud historical past—from the Roman settlement, through the early examples of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, to the 18th and 19th centuries, when industry in the north-east played a key role in Britain's earning the title of the "workshop of the world". Much has been written about the decline of the north-east in the past 30 years, and it is true that it has been through hard times. However, a strong part of the region's character is its proud sense of history, along with a willingness to change and to adapt to face future challenges.

Such cherishing of the past but adapting for the future is exemplified in the work of the region's museums. They are varied in terms of both size and subjects covered, and they contribute to the region's tourism industry, which the Northumbria Tourist Board estimates is worth some £738 million to the north-east's economy. Last year, more than 3 million people visited museums in the north-east. They directly employ more than 600 people, along with countless seasonal workers and an army of unpaid volunteers, who give of their time freely to help their local museum. Those individuals in particular should be thanked, and their hard work on behalf of museums not just in the north-east, but nationwide, should be recognised.

One strand of the north-east's rich web of museums is Beamish, the North of England Open Air Museum, which is in my constituency. A living and working museum that was created in the past 30 years, Beamish covers some 300 acres of a greenfield site, and depicts life in the north-east in the 1800s and 1900s. Last year, it attracted more than 320,000 visitors, 50,000 of whom were children. Children are allowed to wander freely across the site. They can walk down a 19th-century street, complete with trams, travel on a steam locomotive, or visit a coal mine to experience some of the harsher conditions of Victorian life.

What we see today is testimony to the foresight of Beamish's early advocates and the key role played by local authorities in its development. Such organisations worked together by pooling resources and, in doing so, they recognised that Beamish has a regional significance outside their own municipal boundaries. For that, they should be congratulated.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): My hon. Friend mentions the partnership work of local authorities in promoting the cultural sector. Will he join me in congratulating Gateshead and Sunderland councils on achieving beacon status through their work in the cultural sector to promote regeneration? The cultural sector is clearly a key area of our economy, and local authorities' work in promoting it is to be applauded.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention, and I add my congratulations to those councils. They are just two examples among many throughout the north-east of councils working not only with each other, but with the private and voluntary sectors. I also agree about the cultural sector's importance to the economy of the north-east—a point to which I shall return.

I wish to pay tribute to an individual from local government and his contribution to Beamish. John Mawston was a councillor for 48 years in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington, East (Mr. Kemp). My hon. Friend is in his place, and although he is unable to speak as his role as a Whip debars him from doing so, I know that he would endorse my comments. For the past 10 years until his retirement earlier this year, John Mawston was chairman of the Beamish joint museums committee. His dedication and commitment to, and enthusiasm for, Beamish were known throughout the region. We are all grateful for the tremendous hard work that he put in over many years to make Beamish the success that it is today. I wish him all the best in his retirement and trust that he will receive the recognition that his efforts deserve.

Beamish is an asset to the region, and we can be proud of it, not because it preserves the region's heritage in glass cases but because it allows young and old alike to experience living history, whether through riding on a steam locomotive from the 1800s or visiting the Co-operative store on the museum's main street. Education is also a key theme at Beamish, alongside research. I congratulate the museum on the work that it does with local schools throughout the region, which is vital if we are to make history relevant to a new generation.

Beamish is one of the larger museums in the region, but in demonstrating the variety of museums we have it would be remiss of me not to mention one of our smaller museums—it happens to be in my constituency—which is the Anker's House museum in Chester-le-Street. It is next to the parish church of St. Mary's and St. Cuthbert's and it tells the history of the founding of the church in 883 to house the body of St. Cuthbert. It also explores the early history of Christianity in the region.

The museum also tells the story of the ankers or anchorites who inhabited the site during the middle ages. Men and women were interned in small rooms with only a small window or squint through which to view the outside world. They led a life dedicated to prayer and contemplation, and their material needs were passed through a small hatch. For many, their ultimate resting place was their small room, the squint simply being sealed upon their death. That is a truly remarkable example of dedication to duty, and a practice that I know any Government Whip would envy as a way of controlling the more unruly among their flock.

I mentioned earlier the region's willingness to change and adapt, and another characteristic of the region is its willingness to co-operate across sectors to promote the region. That can be seen by the co-operation between museums in the region, and also in local authorities'

[Mr. Jones]

response to the report "Renaissance in the Regions". The proposed regional hub, bringing the Tyne and Wear museums service, Beamish, the Bowes museum—in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster)—and partner museums in Teesside into a strategic alliance, will help to promote and be a focal point for excellence in the region. It is a clear demonstration of what can be achieved when organisations think and work on a regional strategic level.

The hub is not about regional control of local museums; it is about co-operation in delivering local services and also ensuring that the museum service in the region secures the financial investment that the museums need and deserve. The north-east is well placed to show leadership in the museum sector by demonstrating what can be achieved by regional co-operation and cross-authority working. The business plan and the 10-year strategic plan being drawn up by the hub will draw on the service's existing strengths and also demonstrate how funding can enhance and promote museums across the region.

The north-east has changed a great deal over the past 20 years, and I have already highlighted the importance of the museum sector to the region's tourism economy. It is not just about preserving the past; it is about using our historical and cultural assets to promote and regenerate the region's future.

Last weekend saw the opening of the Baltic centre for contemporary arts in Gateshead, demonstrating not only the new vibrant face of the north-east but how culture can be a driving force in the regeneration of the region.

The region's museums and cultural heritage, whether it be the industrial and social heritage at Beamish and the Discovery museum in Newcastle, or the fine works of art at Bowes and the regional art galleries, make up a region with a rich cultural and historical tapestry. Newcastle and Gateshead are competing for the title of European city of culture in 2008. Although promoted by Newcastle and Gateshead, the bid is regional, and the museums throughout the region are an important part of it.

The cultural sector in the region is about demonstrating a richness, diversity and quality of world-class status. That is amply demonstrated in the region's museums. The concentration is on access for all and education for all. We are proud of the region's history and in demonstrating how it can be a central and important part of the renaissance of the north-east and its people.

I trust that my speech has highlighted the importance of museums to the north-east, not only in preserving the past but adding to the economic and cultural life of the region's future. I understand that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has in principle agreed to fund regional hubs. I stress to my right hon. Friend the Minister that museums in the north-east are ready to meet the challenges that the Government have set out and to act as a beacon for how museum services should be provided.

10.32 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) for the opportunity to take part in this brief debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend on seeking and securing the debate and on the powerful case that he has made for renaissance and for the funding of the hub structure within the region.

I think that it was Agatha Christie who said that it was wonderful having an archaeologist as a husband because the older she became the more interest he took in her. I feel a bit like that: the older I become, the more interested I become in museums. Perhaps that is because one day I might become a minor exhibit in one of them.

Beamish is wonderful. It celebrates everything that I love about the northern region, and certainly its recent industrial and social history. It does so in the most creative and educative way. I am immensely proud of what was achieved by Tyne and Wear and Durham county councils. It is now funded entirely by the county councils, and has been over many years.

The Bowes museum is in my constituency. It was founded by John Bowes, the Liberal Member for Barnard Castle, who was an ancestor of the Queen Mother, well over 100 years ago. He married a French woman and they collected many antiquities. They brought them over to this country and built what was almost a wonderful French chateau in the middle of some of the most beautiful English countryside. It is in a sense something of an anomaly, but it houses the most wonderful national collection—it has Canalletos, Rubens and Sèvres pottery. It is crucial to the rural recovery of Teesdale. It is crucial also to the market town initiative in which Barnard Castle is a participant. In addition, it is crucial to the development of tourism within Teesdale. I am delighted to hear that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of Exchequer has provided some extra funding, which will go towards funding the hub structure of which Bowes is a participant.

Let me mention in the second that remains that the Timothy Hackworth museum in Shildon is shortly to be transformed into a satellite of the national rail museum in York and is expected to attract some 35,000 plus visitors.

I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Minister in his place, and we look forward to his response to this short debate.

10.35 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) on giving me the opportunity to respond on what are important topics, especially for the north-east. I must mention one or two of the headlines that I saw in the press the other day. One was, "A picture of bold urban renaissance in the regions, led by art". The other, to which my hon. Friend referred at the start of his contribution, included the words, "challenge to London's grip on galleries", which, I think, appeared in *The Independent*. Clearly, therefore, even the national press are taking notice of what my hon. Friend and the other Members representing the north-east are saying.

I am sure that most if not all Members have heard about, if not visited, the cultural delights of the north-east, as I have done on a number of occasions. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, was in Newcastle on Tuesday last week, and she visited the Baltic centre for contemporary arts. She was extremely impressed by what she saw there. I want to acknowledge the splendid achievements of museums in the north-east, especially those of Tyne and Wear museums, which has a very important relationship with other museums in the area. The then director of Tyne and Wear museums was a member of the regional museums taskforce that produced what many people now say was a groundbreaking report, "Renaissance in the Regions". Clearly, therefore, the north-east had a major input into that report, to which I want to refer a little later.

Across the country, museums such as the Beamish and the Bowes, to which my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) have referred, can be crucial to attracting visitors. Tourist destinations develop through the museums and associated works, and they are an essential part of the economy, especially the local economy. That is particularly true in areas such as the north-east, which are building on their heritage and industrial past to create new economic benefits.

The quality of these museums does much to enhance Britain's reputation as a world-class tourist destination, attracting domestic and international visitors alike. My hon. Friend the Minister responsible for tourism is working with the north-east and other regions to make sure that we can capitalise much more systematically on the visitors coming to this country and going to other regions of the UK. The museums in the north-east that have been mentioned are very important in that.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and local authorities are supporting museums in the north-east and providing them with funding of about £12 million per annum. We see that as an important investment, collectively, by local authorities and central Government. The achievements of and major developments in museums and galleries in the north-east are substantial. The region has three museum services holding collections designated in recognition of their national and international importance: the Beamish museum and the Bowes museum, which have been mentioned, and Tyne and Wear museums. In addition to local authority support, the Department gives an annual grant of about £1 million to Tyne and Wear museums, of which it is a joint sponsor.

Over 10 years, Tyne and Wear has doubled the number of visits to its museums to its current level of around 1.5 million people, and has achieved a 20 to 52 per cent. increase in the proportion of visitors—this is very important—from lower income groups, achieving a very high level of satisfaction among local communities. That has been done through community outreach activities, but without weakening the museum service's traditional curatorial strengths. That is important. We have maintained standards while attracting many more people to museums. That is reflected across the whole country. Tyne and Wear's partnership working has been mentioned and it is often cited as a model for other regional hubs. The report "Renaissance in the Regions" used it as an example.

The Beamish museum attracted 320,000 visitors last year, and about 70 per cent. of them were from outside the region. That underlines my hon. Friend's point that the museum makes a substantial contribution to the local economy. The development and preservation of the Beamish valley as a resource to the community and for environmental study demonstrates an ongoing commitment to the regeneration of that former coalfield area. Since the Government came to power in 1997, our investment in coalfield areas has not only been well received, but plays a major part in those economies.

I wish to thank Councillor John Mawston who, like me, is a member of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union. I know that he is extremely proud of that fact. For 48 years, he has been on the council of the Beamish open air museum. He was chair for 10 years, and has remained there as a volunteer. That shows the real commitment that he has made. I thank him for all the work that he has done. In fact, I am grateful to all the volunteers who give their time free of charge to do something in which they believe. Without them, many activities could not continue.

Some 73 museums in the north-east are members of the Resource registration scheme and they attract 3 million visitors a year. A third of those visits are by children. In recognition of the value of museums to children's education and, indeed, to people of all ages and backgrounds, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport set up in 1999 an education challenge fund, managed by Resource, with the aim of building educational capacity in small museums. As a result of the North-East Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's bid to Resource, £64,000 in grants was matched with other funding sources to benefit 38 museums across the north-east, including volunteer-run, military, local authority and university museums.

Another important source of funding for the north-east region's museums has been the heritage lottery fund. In 1999–2000, the north-east's museums received heritage lottery fund awards totalling £7.6 million. Up to May 2002, the north-east received £91 million in such funding and, at 68 per cent., the north-east has the highest success rate of the English regions for heritage lottery fund applications.

In 2000–01, a major collaboration for Northumberland resulted in the award of £10 million by the heritage lottery fund to build a new records office as part of a major development of the Woodhorn colliery museum complex, Ashington. This will be a world-class building, bringing together archival, library and museum collections currently spread across four locations.

In welcoming the taskforce report "Renaissance in the Regions", my noble Friend the Minister for the Arts said at the Association of Independent Museums annual lecture in January this year that the regional museums taskforce had delivered an excellent diagnosis of the weaknesses of the sector and had set out an exciting vision of what could be achieved through concerted action to remove the barriers to progress. She endorsed, in principle, the key proposal for a new framework of hubs for regional museums and announced the timetable for the selection of regional hubs as part of the process of implementing the report's recommendations. The report said that the framework should be based on the principle of an integrated system. It identified leadership for the museum community in each region and defined roles for each element in the framework.

The regional hubs will respond to new agendas that put people and communities first, and they will invest in excellence. They will achieve the highest standards in exhibition content and presentation, in learning, education and outreach services, in collection management and in other key museum activities. At the launch of the museums and galleries month at the end of April, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport commented that "Renaissance in the Regions" had received a positive response from the museum community.

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

The report outlined clearly what regional museums can achieve in promoting education and learning, social inclusion and community empowerment, creativity, tourism and, importantly, regional economic development.

Resource has received a bid from a consortium of museums from each English region to create a hub in the region. We will announce the hubs later in the summer. As we heard today, the spending review is good for museums. Decisions on the funding of individual hubs will be made towards the end of the year when the review has been considered by the Department. Once the hubs have been announced, they will be expected to submit a strategic plan to demonstrate how they will use the money to support museums and will have to propose ways in which governance can be modernised.

During the transitional period, Resource will work closely with the hubs to support and monitor their progress. It has taken steps to implement the taskforce recommendations, and the last spending review increased Resource's grant-in-aid to support regional activity to £10 million per annum. Work is in progress to maintain the momentum initiated by the taskforce with a series of measures to put in place the first building blocks of the new framework.

As I said, the report criticised the lack of cohesion in the sector and stressed the need to find more effective ways of working from which all museums can benefit, from the largest nationals to the more modest, but no less valuable, regional museums. One way to do that is by ensuring that a partnership works, and the strong partnership in the north-east was mentioned. That will allow skills and experience to be shared, which will add a great deal of value to the work of museums. There are many examples of such partnerships working across the nation, which is to be welcomed.

Some of the measures to develop the hubs will be funded by the designation challenge fund which, as I said, will be announced very soon. In addition, Resource announced last week that £500,000 of funding will be administered by the new regional agencies, such as the North-East Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, for the development of all museums, not just those in the hubs. A new museum development fund will support initiatives such as the establishment of the post of museum development officer in the regions, whose task it will be to support groups of museums with common interests in improving the standards of what they deliver.

The taskforce report reveals three major problems in the museum sector: a lack of capacity, a leadership vacuum and a fragmented infrastructure. To address the last point, greater cohesion and partnership working are needed. To meet the need for more cross-sector work, Resource has been involved in setting up a strategic regional agency for museums, libraries and archives in each of the English regions. Those new agencies are building on the work of the area museums councils, and will provide strategic leadership for the whole sector.

That has already happened in the north-east with the creation of the first regional agency in England, the widely acclaimed North-East Museums, Libraries and Archives Council or NEMLAC. That supported the north-east museums' bid for heritage lottery funding, ensuring that the north-east had, as I said earlier, the highest success rate of all the English regions. To take account of the expanding role of the regional agencies, Resource has doubled their total budget from £4 million to £8 million. That will enable grants and other advisory services to museums in the English regions to be maintained.

In conclusion, and following the outcome of the current spending review, which was announced in the House—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, Mr. Deputy Speaker *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at ten minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 16 July 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HSBC INVESTMENT BANKING BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Tuesday 23 July.

BARCLAYS GROUP REORGANISATION BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Wednesday 24 July.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Consultants' Contract

1. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed consultants' contract on their productivity; and if he will make a statement. [67264]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): May I say how pleased I am to see the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) in his place after the terrible and tragic events of the weekend? I am sure that all our thoughts are with him and all concerned.

The framework agreement that we have reached with the British Medical Association will increase the time consultants spend on direct clinical care. There will be greater rewards for those consultants who contribute most to the national health service. In crude terms, the more they do, the more they will get, so contributing to increases in NHS productivity.

Mr. Mullin: May I put it to my right hon. Friend that, although there are many dedicated NHS consultants, the profession is notorious for its pursuit of self-interest and self-importance? What safeguards are in place to ensure that consultants deliver, and what will stop them pocketing the extra money and moving on seamlessly to their next demand?

Mr. Milburn: A good start! I listen carefully to my hon. Friend in these and all other matters, but I have a slight difference of view with him on this issue. Most NHS consultants do a very good job of work for the NHS, and I should assure him that the new NHS consultants' contract is, in essence, a something-for-something deal. Obviously NHS consultants will get more, and we are prepared to pay them more, providing they are prepared to do more for NHS patients.

The deal that we have negotiated means, for example, that in future, NHS consultants' pay will be tied to their performance against their job plans. Their job plans are part of their contract of employment and, for the first time in the history of the NHS, that means that the NHS employer will be able to define when the NHS consultant works, and that includes getting an increase in direct clinical care for patients. The more consultants are prepared to do, the more rewards they will get.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Is it not the case that the productivity of doctors in the hospital service will decline as shorter hours are introduced? Is it not also the case that costs will rise sharply as pay becomes more realistic? Can the Secretary of State give us some idea of how much of the extra money over the next three years will go in rising costs and lower productivity as shorter hours are introduced for all doctors?

Mr. Milburn: I do not think that that is the case. In fact, as the right hon. Gentleman is aware from the public service agreement that we published yesterday, we expect a 2 per cent. increase each year in both efficiency and quality in the NHS as we expand it. It is certainly true that there are problems with productivity, particularly if the NHS does not expand. However, it is expanding precisely because of the choices that the Labour Government have made.

The choice that we have made is to put extra investment into our key public services, including the NHS. It is therefore incredible that the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends should stand up and argue about productivity, efficiency or investment when they are committed to cutting that investment.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): What other group of workers wield as much power as consultants? Their so-called trade unions, the royal colleges, dictate how many consultants can be trained each year, where they can be trained and which hospitals can carry out what operations. They decide how many hours consultants work for the NHS and they keep waiting lists high so that people fork out money to jump the queue that they have created. Will my right hon. Friend tackle this closed shop, which makes Bob Crow and the RMT look like a set of woolly liberals?

Mr. Milburn: I think that that is what is known as a friendly question. As far as tackling the issue is concerned, my hon. Friend is aware of the terms of the framework agreement that we have reached with the BMA. Obviously that will now go out to consultation, and I presume that NHS consultants will have an opportunity to have a say on what they think about it. However, it will tackle many of the problems that he has outlined.

On my hon. Friend's point about closed shops, no one in the NHS has a right to prevent patients from receiving the sort of services that they require. We must ensure that we get more doctors into the NHS and get more use of the doctors who work in the NHS. He is aware that the issue of private practice has been unresolved for many years in the NHS, and the new consultants' contract of employment will resolve it once and for all by making it clear that the first call on their time and their first priority has got to be NHS patients.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the Secretary of State agree that the merit award system is one of the root causes for consultants developing the characteristics so beautifully described by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin)? What plans does he have for revising that system?

Mr. Milburn: The merit, or distinction, award system needs to be reformed, and we are planning to do that, as the hon. Lady well knows. It is the next element of the reform programme and is under discussion. I want the merit awards to be precisely that: rewarding merit, especially those NHS consultants who do most for NHS patients. We trained them to do that and they are skilled experts. We have too few of them, but that will change. In the meantime, we need to ensure that we get more of their valuable time and skills for the benefit of more NHS patients.

Mental Health

2. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): If will make a statement on the provision of in-patient beds for mental health patients in urban areas. [67265]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): Each mental health service user who is assessed as requiring a period of care away from their home should have timely access to an appropriate hospital bed or an alternative bed or place. In the NHS plan, we set down our commitment to create 500 extra secure beds and 320 extra 24-hour staffed beds. We have met this target.

Mr. Lloyd: I hope my hon. Friend will tell the House that mental health, always the Cinderella of the health service, will have a fair share of the huge increase in spending on the health service, because that is vital. On a specific problem, the number of patients in Manchester—the figure is typical of urban areas—who have been sectioned under the Mental Health Acts now accounts for 50 per cent. of the beds occupied compared with only 20 per cent. 10 years ago. The problem is that patients have to queue up for in-patient beds. Unless we provide more beds to get the balance right, people will be given a bed only when they have reached crisis point. Beds need to be available earlier, when it is cheaper and better for the patients.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the priority previously afforded to mental health services. With the publication of the mental health national service framework and the NHS plan, the Government have made mental health one of the top three clinical priorities.

My hon. Friend also outlines the problem that occurred because of the low priority given to mental health and, of course, the low investment in it, which meant that there was a reduction over many years in the number of acute beds available. The Government are determined to turn around the investment and to give mental health the priority it deserves. The Manchester mental health and social care trust has received additional investment of £1.4 million from its commissioners this year, specifically to open 10 additional NHS beds and to strengthen community mental health provision with the implementation of a crisis resolution service in the city, which experience elsewhere suggests can lift pressure on acute beds. I agree that for too long there has been a lack of investment in, and commitment to, our mental health services. We are determined to put that right.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): A month ago on 18 June I raised with the Secretary of State the crisis in the Avon and Wiltshire mental health partnership NHS trust. He said that it was all a matter of money. I wrote to the Minister on 29 April and she told me in a written answer that she would reply as soon as possible. Councillor Christine Reid, the Labour councillor who chairs that trust, has not replied to my correspondence. The matter is urgent. It is not party politics; it is process. In particular, it reflects a breakdown in the mental health system in south Wiltshire. If the Minister cannot answer, will she at least see me to explain why the trust has lost £60,000 for the alcohol and drug advisory service and how the Government expect the new trust to function with an initial deficit of £500,000?

Jacqui Smith: I apologise if I have failed to respond to the hon. Gentleman's letter. I will ensure that he gets an answer. I have discussed issues to do with that trust with its chair and I am willing to discuss progress in his constituency with him. However, part of that discussion may well concern the difference in our approaches to investment in mental health services. The Government have made it clear that we are investing more in those services and will continue to do so; but the hon. Gentleman, and in particular his Front-Bench colleagues, have opposed that investment. That would have to be part of any conversation that we had about how to improve our mental health services.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Will my hon. Friend pay particular attention to in-service provision for children who present with serious psychiatric problems? All too often, they are inappropriately placed either on general paediatric wards or in adult mental health provision; they need their own specialist services, and I hope that my hon. Friend will consider the provision of such in-service beds.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Mental health services for children and adolescents were perhaps treated even more poorly than adult services by the previous Government when it came to showing interest and making investment. The £105 million of investment in child and adolescent mental health services has begun to bring those services out of the shadows and enabled us to develop the specialist provision, including in-patient beds, for which my hon. Friend argues.

My hon. Friend made an important point also about the inappropriate placement of young people in adult services. Sometimes that happens because local services have failed to plan the transition of responsibility from child and adolescent services to adult services. In the children's national service framework we will consider carefully how to take forward the work towards higher standards in child and adolescent mental health services.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): According to recent guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the majority of studies show that the higher cost of purchasing atypical antipsychotics is more than offset by the reduction in in-patient stays. This morning, at a conference attended mainly by psychiatrists, more than two thirds of those present said that funding was a barrier to prescribing atypicals. How will the Minister ensure that adequate funding is provided to increase their prescription?

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Lady rightly points out, as do the NICE guidelines, the potential benefits for the service as a whole and for individuals of being able to prescribe atypical antipsychotics in the appropriate circumstances. It was to secure those benefits that we set up NICE to develop such guidelines and to involve users, which is another important way in which we develop our services. We are investing in our mental health services, and we have earmarked extra investment for service delivery and the development of new services.

Sandra Gidley *indicated dissent.*

Jacqui Smith: For Liberal Democrats the investment is never enough. The difference between sitting on the Opposition Benches and sitting on these Benches is that we make the decisions, we provide the investment and we set the priorities. We said that mental health was a priority; that is making a difference at a local level and I am confident that it will continue to do so.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Despite the excellent work that has already been done by the rough sleepers initiative, the condition of many mentally ill people in London is exacerbated by the fact that they are of no fixed abode. Given the peripatetic nature of their lives, it is not unusual for homeless people who are mentally ill to reach and pass the point of crisis and to find it impossible to gain any medical treatment. It is bad enough to be without a home, but surely to be denied access to the NHS is unacceptable. Will my hon. Friend please consult the Mayor's health commission to examine the additional needs for such services on a much broader than borough-by-borough basis?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the needs of the homeless. As we develop our mental health policies—in particular, the new community teams which, in parts of London, have been able to reach out to people in the community, even people without homes who have previously been unable to access services or have not be able to access those services early enough—I am happy to talk to anyone to make sure that they deliver improvements for the most vulnerable people cited by my hon. Friend.

NHS Dentists

3. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If he will make a statement about the number of people registered with NHS dentists in Gloucestershire. [67266]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): One hundred and twenty-one thousand adults and 78,000 children were registered with a general dental services dentist in the former Gloucestershire health authority area on 31 May 2002. Thanks to the extra investment that the Government are making available, we are continuing to take measures to improve access to NHS dentistry in Gloucestershire. A new dental access centre in Gloucester, including a satellite clinic in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, has already treated 14,000 patients in the 12 months to May of this year. I am glad that funding has now been made available for a second dental access centre in the county.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to the Minister for his considered response. He will be aware, however, that the number of people treated by NHS dentists in Gloucestershire has fallen in the past six years. I am not seeking to make a political point, as the issue is too serious for pensioners and the many other people who cannot afford dentists to make it political. Does the Minister see the future as one of private provision, or will the Government be able to ensure that there are sufficient NHS dentists for people in Gloucestershire who need that treatment?

Mr. Hutton: The hon. Gentleman was wise not to try to make a party political point. He will not mind my pointing out that he is in a slightly difficult position, because the Government whom he supported presided over a major contraction in access to NHS dentistry. He and his right hon. and hon. Friends are now opposed to the extra investment that will put that right. He asked specifically whether we see the future as being one of private practice. The answer is clearly no—that is the policy adopted by him and his right hon. Friends.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I do not want to disturb the unity of the Labour and Conservative parties, but the Minister will be aware that the number of people registered with a dentist in Gloucestershire has fallen from 44 per cent. to 36 per cent. under his Government, whereas under the Tories, the national figure did not fall by much more than 3 per cent—from 59 per cent. in 1992 to 54 per cent. in 1997. English coverage is now only 47 per cent. How, without more registrations, can holistic, preventive care be given to people with dental problems, rather than the emergency treatment-only provision which is the Government's one-club strategy?

Mr. Hutton: Uncharacteristically, the hon. Gentleman failed to paint an accurate picture of what is happening. He likes facts and figures, so he will be interested to know that 1 million more courses of NHS-funded dental treatment are provided now than in 1997, and that nearly 2,000 more NHS dentists are providing services to NHS patients. I am not saying for a second that all the problems have been solved—clearly, they have not—but we are getting the investment in and easing the problems that we inherited. To continue doing so, we shall carry on making investment available and I hope that we have the support of the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends for doing so.

NHS Direct

4. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): If he will make a statement on the cost to the NHS of an average call to NHS Direct. [67267]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): The average cost of a call to NHS Direct in 2001 to 2002 was about £17.92, although that is expected to fall significantly in the future as call volumes rise. The National Audit Office has found that half of callers are directed to forms of care that they would not have chosen, which tends to be care of a lower level and with a lower cost of intervention.

Mr. Bryant: My hon. Friend may have seen press speculation that the cost of calling NHS Direct is higher than the cost of going to an NHS GP. However, the people who are raising those issues are missing the point. Is it not true that NHS Direct is expanding access, improving the service to patients and making sure that they get the right care? Will my hon. Friend assure the House that he will be looking not only at extending NHS Direct but at using other forms of new technology to make sure that we are always at the cutting edge of innovation around the world? In particular, will he look at the experiments in broadband technology which might assist the NHS in many different ways?

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend is exactly right. NHS Direct is probably the best example in recent times of the use of information technology in Government. Yes, costs are higher than those of seeing a GP, but one would expect that with a new service. Costs are expected to fall over time. The important thing about NHS Direct is that satisfaction levels are between 90 and 97 per cent. One would have to look hard to find similar levels in private life, so to speak, and in other areas. Certainly, we will continue to look at ways of extending and expanding NHS Direct over the years ah[illegible].

Miss Anne McIntosh [illegible]ale of York): Can the Minister tell the House the num[illegible] of house calls that GPs have made, particularly to the [illegible]lerly infirm, since NHS Direct was introduced? Can h[illegible]ve me an assurance that NHS Direct will never ever b[illegible]me a substitute for house calls to the elderly and to [illegible]ose with particularly serious conditions?

Mr. Lammy: No, it will [illegible] I will write to the hon. Lady with the details in due co[illegible] The important thing is choice, diversity and access. NHS Direct, alongside GPs, increased use of paramedics, and reform in accident and emergency services, will bring about a reformed service. That is what we are working towards.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to a pilot seen by the Select Committee on Health at the West Yorkshire NHS Direct centre, where patients with chronic conditions are supplied with self-testing equipment and transmit data daily to the NHS Direct call centre, where the data are examined so that potential problems can be spotted? That service could have great benefit in an area such as mine, where there are high levels of chronic illness caused by industrial injury. If rolled out nationally, the service could unlock the full potential of NHS Direct.

Mr. Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that to the attention of the House. It is excellent practice and is an expansion of NHS Direct. By 2004, hopefully, people will be able to ring up the NHS Direct number and make 999 calls from home without complication. We hope to extend the service for people with chronic illnesses to diabetes and asthma. NHS Direct can continue to support the ambulance service and help to reduce waiting times in A and E.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Given the current delays with NHS Direct, there is obviously much work to be done before emergency calls can be routed by it. What assessment has the Minister made of the impact on nurse vacancy levels in hospitals caused by the large number of experienced nurses who have transferred to NHS Direct from those hospitals—about 900 out of 1,150? Why, with all the cost—£110 million in the current year—does one in five callers still have to wait for 30 minutes to get a response from NHS Direct, and why is there precious little evidence of success in taking pressure off GPs, who cost half as much?

Mr. Lammy: The numbers are coming down. The hon. Gentleman should be aware of two important facts. First, NHS Direct employs about 1,500 nurses out of a work force of about 350,000, so he is speaking of a very small number. He should also be aware that many of those nurses are disabled or work injured; many of them work part time; many of them work for NHS Direct and in other parts of the NHS.

Secondly, when the hon. Gentleman cites figures for call waiting times, he should be aware that the National Audit Office found that people were being called back within 20 minutes, and 82 per cent. of people were receiving calls within 30 minutes. Those numbers are improving all the time.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): As the Minister will be aware, there is no 24-hour carers' helpline, so NHS Direct doubles up as that service. Are we monitoring how many carers are using NHS Direct; if not, does the Minister agree that we should?

Mr. Lammy: More than 11 million people have used NHS Direct since it came into being, and more than 110,000 will use it this week alone. Two to 3 per cent. of those people become aware of the severity of their complaints through having rung NHS Direct, so it is saving lives. My hon. Friend is right to say that it is important, as the service expands, to examine ever more closely the profile of the people who call it, and to ensure that it is better integrated into the NHS as a whole. It represents the best example of the introduction of information technology in the NHS, and compares well with the failed Child Support Agency that Conservative Members introduced when they were in government.

Cancer Research

5. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): If he will make a statement on his plans to increase resources going to cancer research. [67268]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): In 2000–01, we invested £190 million in cancer research. By 2003, we will be investing an additional £20 million each year in the cancer research network and an extra £4 million in prostate cancer research. That new funding means that for the first time, Government—through the Department of Health, the Higher Education Funding Council and the research councils—will match the current investment of the voluntary sector.

Mr. Bellingham: I welcome the Minister's announcement of that investment. I was recently contacted by a constituent of mine, Robert Blunden, whose wife tragically died of cancer last year after a very long illness. Is the Minister aware that the oncologist who treated Mrs. Blunden, and 27 other cancer specialists, recently wrote to the press deploring the fact that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence had refused to permit the use of two new cancer drugs, despite the fact that there is no oncologist on the appraisal committee? We will never know whether those two drugs could have saved Mrs. Blunden's life or helped to alleviate her pain. However, given the Minister's and the Secretary of State's huge commitment to cancer care, does not she agree that there should be a cancer specialist on the appraisal committee; and why is she trusting her political judgment rather than the expertise of 27 specialists?

Ms Blears: If the hon. Gentleman really understood how NICE works he would know that the NICE body includes a range of specialists, but not a representative from every single disease specialty. Members of NICE go out to consult clinicians working on the ground, health professionals and patients groups, exactly as they did in the case of those vital cancer drugs. They consulted all those bodies before they reached their decisions.

As a result of the Government's introduction of NICE, some 31,000 patients are benefiting from cancer drugs who would not have benefited before. That is a symbol of the Government's investment and of our determination to ensure that there is not a postcode lottery in access to such drugs. It is right that clinicians are involved.

On the case that the hon. Gentleman highlighted, he has received a letter from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State giving him full information about all the oncologists and leading clinicians who were involved in the decision, and he knows full well that there was a deep and proper clinical examination.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the key agencies for helping cancer research and caring for cancer patients is the hospice movement? Does she recognise that the hospice movement, including the children's hospice movement, faces a serious problem as regards resources, which are required immediately? Will she do all she can to ensure that those services can continue?

Ms Blears: I am very aware of the excellent work that is done by the hospice movement and by children's hospices. We have made a commitment that, by 2004, an extra £50 million will be spent on specialist palliative care. We are world leaders in palliative care, mainly because of the excellent work that is done by the hospice movement. I know that concerns have been expressed about that money getting through to the front line, and I am looking forward to attending the all-party group on hospices tomorrow and having a good discussion with hon. Members in that forum. I can tell my hon. Friend that we can make the extra investment because we have made this vital area of palliative care a top priority for the Government.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Earlier this year, Professor Gordon McVie, the director of the Cancer Research Campaign, expressed his concern that the £570 million earmarked under the NHS cancer plan was running into the sand. What guarantee can the Minister give that the funds that she has just described will not similarly run into the sand?

Ms Blears: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government have decided to make cancer a top priority. In 2001–02, we put in an extra £280 million; we shall put in an extra £407 million this year, and an extra £570 million next year. Part of those funds was centrally allocated to ensure that they would be directed to specific issues, but a large part of the extra money was put into baselines, so that people at local level could decide—quite properly, under the shift in the balance of power—where they needed to spend the money to make improvements in the cancer plan.

I am delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman that we are on track to achieve the shorter waiting times, the investment in equipment, and the appointment of the extra 800 consultants set out in the cancer plan. All those outcomes are being achieved. It is clear that the extra money devoted by the Government to cancer care is delivering real returns for patients who need high-quality care. He needs to be aware that some courageous decisions must be taken about improving investment in the NHS to improve cancer services for patients, and that his party is not prepared to take them.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I welcome the Minister's comments on extra funding for palliative care. She may be aware of Derian House, and of St. Catherine's hospice, in Chorley—one a children's hospice, and the other a hospice for adults. They are experiencing severe problems in raising funds from the area and ensuring that the two hospices remain sustainable. I hope that she will give them some secure funding to ensure that both can continue to exist.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right to raise the excellent example of children's hospice care in his constituency. Children's hospices provide a relatively new form of care. Funding under the new opportunities scheme for those services is now open for bids, particularly from children's hospices, and I am sure that his local hospices will be preparing submissions to it. We have also increased carers grants and provision for respite care to provide breaks for families. The significant thing about children's hospice care is that it provides not only terminal care but respite care to enable children and the rest of their families—including their brothers and sisters—to have a break from what can be extremely trying circumstances.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I remind the hon. Lady of the unsurpassed work of the Gray cancer institute at Mount Vernon hospital in my constituency? May I urge her to get the Secretary of State to reply to the letters that he has received from Professor Wardman, the director of the institute, who is, rightly, deeply concerned that the hospital's cancer centre might move away from Mount Vernon and thereby prejudice the close co-operation that exists between researchers at the Gray cancer institute and those who work at the cancer centre? Will the Minister address those serious problems, which concern my constituents and the many thousands who are admirably served by the cancer centre at Mount Vernon?

Ms Blears: I cannot comment on the particular issue that the hon. Gentleman raised, but I shall certainly look into replying to the correspondence to which he referred. I would say, however, that the Government have set up translational cancer centres, which address exactly the issue that he raised: how we translate scientific research into clinical research that can make a difference to patients. We have now set up eight centres of excellence that are involved in the national translational cancer research network—NTRAC—process. They are bringing the benefits of scientific research to the clinical trials that matter for patients. It is because the Government have set up the cancer research networks that we are now seeing the benefit of the investment in that vital research.

Primary Care Trusts

6. **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of newly formed primary care trusts. [67269]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Three hundred and three primary care trusts have been established and are now operational. The trusts will be accountable to the new strategic health authorities, which will assess their performance. In addition, the Commission for Health Improvement will undertake routine assessments in every NHS trust, strategic health authority and primary care trust.

Laura Moffatt: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our primary care trusts will be judged on how well they work with other organisations in the community to improve people's health and well-being? Does he welcome plans such as those of Crawley PCT to commission partnership posts jointly with social services and the local borough council, to get the very best out of the jobs and ensure that people understand that there is now a cohesive health system in our communities and that the power has gone back right to where it belongs, with our GPs?

Mr. Hutton: Yes, I agree strongly. One of the key jobs of the new primary care trusts will be to bring about the closer integration between health and social care that my hon. Friend described. Most of our constituents see health and social care as one system, and they want them better integrated. We will do all that we can in the Department to encourage that. We have already changed the legislation and we are putting in the investment to ensure that we get that closer integration. I had the good fortune of visiting my hon. Friend's constituency recently and had the chance to discuss this and other developments with the leaders of her primary care trust. They are doing a brilliant job, and so is she.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I have no doubt that the Minister will wish to pay the same tribute to me. I endorse what the hon. Lady said. I had a very good meeting last Friday with the chairman and chief executive of the new Mid Sussex primary care trust. What guidance does the Minister give PCTs for the Olympian decisions that they have to take on funding very worthy organisations that approach them for help in preventive health care, for example, such as Homestart? PCTs do not seem to have the money available, and perhaps the new injection of funds will improve that. What guidance is offered on the help that should go to admirable outside organisations that badly need the funds?

Mr. Hutton: In his own way, the hon. Gentleman does do a brilliant job. He has a long association with Crawley, too, but let us not dwell on that. I agree with him strongly about the important role that primary care trusts will play—actively, we hope—in supporting voluntary organisations and helping to improve the delivery of front-line services. There may be some disagreement on this point. He and many others may make the argument for devolution to the front line, which is absolutely right, but then ask us to issue guidance on how the functions should be delivered. There is a balance to be struck. There are key responsibilities for primary care trusts on which it is perfectly appropriate for Ministers to issue guidance—commissioning and a range of other important services—but we trust PCTs to make the right decisions. Their resources are growing substantially, with a 10 per cent. cash increase this year alone. That will also benefit him and his constituents. We want to leave the PCTs free to make their own decisions.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Under the previous health authority, my constituency was one of the most underfunded in the entire country. Now that we have the Bolton primary care trust, and following the Chancellor's excellent announcement yesterday, will my right hon. Friend assure my constituents that he will look again at the most underfunded areas in the country and bring them up to target faster than hitherto?

Mr. Hutton: My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently reviewing the funding formula and the method of allocating resources across the NHS. I hope that we will be able to make appropriate announcements on that in the near future. Many hon. Members of all parties have raised this important issue with me. We must set ourselves the important objective of improving the health of the poorest members of our community at the fastest possible rate. That is the challenge for this Labour Government. We welcome that, and we will take it on—in stark contrast to the Conservative party, which could not even bring itself to mention health inequalities in the 18 years for which it had the stewardship of the national health service.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): First, I thank the Secretary of State for his comments, the sympathy expressed to the family of the road traffic accident victim, and for his support in the past few days. It is a pity that the friendship and courtesy that typifies the way we do business in this place most of the time is not the face that the public see.

Yesterday, the Chancellor reiterated the Government's target of 48-hour access to general practitioners by 2004. To achieve that, the Government themselves said that they had to recruit 4,000 extra GPs between 2000 and 2004, yet the net increase in 2000 across England and Wales was 18, and in 2001 it was also 18. How are PCTs supposed to reach that target by 2004?

Mr. Hutton: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the progress that has been made in recruiting new GP registrars, for example, he will see that a substantial number of GPs—nearly 7,000—are in training. From that figure, I think that we can meet our target of recruiting a minimum of 2,000 GPs by 2004. Key to that aim is the investment that we are putting into the national health service. The hon. Gentleman expresses concern about the rate of progress in recruiting GPs, but I should point out in the politest way that I can that we will take him and his colleagues seriously when they are prepared to match the investment that we are putting in.

Dr. Fox: Doctors should be recruited into general practice because it is a career that they want, not bought from a GP supermarket. In the past two quarters, there has been a huge increase in emergency admissions through accident and emergency, totalling almost 100,000 above trend. To what does the right hon. Gentleman attribute that increase, and what does it say about the current interaction between general practice and the acute sector, and particularly the burden on GPs?

Mr. Hutton: We are investing significantly in improving our accident and emergency departments, but is it clear that the hon. Gentleman cannot match that investment. I remind him of what I said a moment ago about the number of GPs who are already entering GP training. That is the cohort from which we will meet our target of recruiting additional GPs for the national health service. Across the various areas that he has drawn attention to, we are making progress.

I am glad that the British Medical Association has been able to announce the result of the ballot of GPs on the new general medical services contract. Some 75 per cent. of GPs consider that a sensible way to reform the GPs' contract. That will provide us with a sensible platform from which to continue to improve primary care services, particularly the relationship between primary care and accident and emergency departments.

Dr. Fox: Those answers smack more than a little of complacency. PCTs have staff shortages, they have failed to reach their IT targets, they must repay their deficits this year, and thus they say that little or no money will be available for primary care development. They also have to shoulder the inappropriate role of public health, and on top of that, they are concerned about the Government's plans to push ahead with foundation hospitals. How will the relationship between PCTs and foundation hospitals differ from current relationships?

Mr. Hutton: Basically, the hon. Gentleman is criticising the Government's reform agenda for the national health service—our attempts to improve its efficiency, productivity and effectiveness. I repeat that we will take his concerns seriously when he can outline for us his reform agenda. Until he does so, most Government Members will be forced to reach the only rational conclusion: the bogus rhetoric of the Conservatives is a smokescreen for what we all know will happen if we ever have the misfortune to experience a Tory Government again. It will be cuts, cuts and cuts again.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): As my right hon. Friend is aware, the primary care trust that serves Barnsley is the biggest in the country. Unfortunately, it started life in April 3 per cent. short of its funding target. That shortfall, which equates to about £6 million, has been compounded by a further £1.5 million debt, and by the shortage of GPs, which costs us money. Will he look again at Barnsley PCT's funding?

Mr. Hutton: I am afraid that I can only repeat what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon). I am aware of the issue to which my hon. Friend draws attention, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and all Ministers in the Department of Health are fully committed to addressing it. However, it is worth pointing out that, despite the problems to which my hon. Friend rightly draws attention, Barnsley PCT received a very significant increase in its resources this year. Our challenge and responsibility is to keep that investment coming through, and I can confirm that that is what this Government will always do.

Food Supplements

7. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): If he will make a statement on the future availability of food supplements and traditional herbal medicinal products to consumers. [67270]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): Our intention is to ensure continuing availability of a wide range of food supplements and traditional herbal remedies, within the European legislative framework. We aim to achieve that [illegible]ctive participation in the work required to follow up the recent food supplements directive, and through the continuing negotiations on the proposed directives on traditional herbal medicinal products, and on the review of medicines legislation.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I am grateful for that reply. The traditional herbal medicinal products directive threatens the availability of 70 per cent. of safe herbal products in the UK. The food supplements directive, to which the Minister referred, would ban 300 safe nutrients and many safe higher potency vitamins. I have considerable regard and affection for the Minister—*[Interruption.]* Will she listen to Consumers for Health Choice, the National Association of Health Stores and the Health Food Manufacturers Association? They speak positively and accurately for the industry and its many thousands of consumers.

Ms Blears: I will take the matter more slowly, and I urge the hon. Gentleman to do the same. There are proper and genuine concerns in this regard, which the Government take very seriously. Just last week, Lord Hunt and I met representatives from the industry as a whole. We talked particularly about the traditional herbal medicines directive. Some industry representatives welcome the quality and safety standards being applied to manufacturing, but people from the health food sector are worried about some of the products. We have extended the consultation period to the end of July, and are looking for areas of over-regulation or for instances of items that might be excluded.

We intend to continue the debate. It is important that people have access to the widest range of products, but that must be balanced by measures to protect public health and safety. It is a matter of getting that balance absolutely right.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): May I commend the Government's increasingly measured approach on this matter? Some hon. Members were critical of the haste with which the Government supported proposed European regulation in this area. I remind my hon. Friend of the important prize at the end of the process—a single European framework for the consumption of these products. That will be valuable to companies such as Peter Black and Surepharm in my constituency.

Ms Blears: Yes. I am conscious that the regulations have been welcomed in some respects because, if they provide a more secure regulatory framework, products such as herbal medicines will gain more respect in the market place and consumers will be able to rely on their quality. We must not take our eye off the ball: there is a prize to be won at the end, and that is getting the best deal for manufacturers and consumers, while at the same time protecting public health and safety. We are determined to be very active in the negotiations to achieve that.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Minister will recall that, when we debated this matter in European Standing Committee C, I queried the directive's loose wording. The Minister assured the Committee that no legal foodstuff products would be barred as a result of the directive. However, Lord Hunt admitted on 27 June that several products would be excluded. Will the Minister take this opportunity to correct the statement that she made to the Committee before it divided on the matter?

Ms Blears: Yes. I told the Committee that certain combination products were unlawful at present, and would remain so after the directive was implemented. The directive itself will not make those products unlawful. Some of those combination products are not covered by regulation, and we are looking at that. The hon. Gentleman is right that some ingredients are not on the permitted list, but that is a separate matter. The Government are pressing to get as many dossiers as possible approved for food supplements and traditional herbal medicines so that the list of permitted ingredients can be extended. I repeat, however, that some combination products are illegal now and will remain so after the implementation of the directive. That will not be a result of the directive, but we must be conscious of the need for a regulatory home for those products.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I thank my hon. Friend for her answers so far. As a Member of the European Scrutiny Committee that referred the matter for debate in the Standing Committee, may I point out that some of us still have concerns that it should not be dealt with at European level? Questions of subsidiarity and where we deal with such matters are for debate in the Convention on the Future of Europe. I hope that the Government of the United Kingdom will think seriously before allowing Europe to make decisions on matters that should really be between consumers and health authorities in the UK. The prime directive should be to give good advice and then to let the consumer decide what they want to use.

Ms Blears: Again, that is about finding the correct balance. Matters relating to medicines are regulated at European level because there are pharmaceutical safety issues. We are talking not merely about herbal products but herbal medicines that have a physiological effect and thus fall within a regulatory framework. It is important to get the safety issues absolutely right. The matter is not one of unaccountable European decision making: the directive is subject to co-decision and consideration and has been subjected to scrutiny in the House. However, it is important to recognise that, in the case of medicines, the regulatory framework is extremely important for the safety of consumers.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Will the Minister accept that there is considerable disquiet among users of these products about what is going on? Will she also accept that they can see no justification for interference in the exercise of their decision and their freedom to pick and choose? Will she give serious consideration to abandoning what is going on? Can she justify the Government persisting with something that is both unwanted and unpopular with the people most directly affected by their actions?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman must be careful; it is a matter of finding the right balance. I hope that he is aware of some of the ingredients of traditional medicines, such as aristolochia, which is found in some traditional Chinese medicines and has caused two cases of kidney failure in the UK. There is a question over kava kava which has caused three deaths abroad. There have also been interactions between St. John's wort and contraceptives where that medicine caused considerable harm.

There are public safety and public health issues. Many manufacturers welcome measures for quality standards, to ensure that the right quality ingredients are used and that the processes are transparent and open to inspection. It is important that we engage actively in the matter; we cannot simply leave it to the market and individual choice.

Suicides (Women)

8. **Sue Doughty** (Guildford): What his policy is on reducing the incidence of suicide among women. [67271]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): We published the national suicide prevention strategy for England for public consultation on 26 April 2002. It is a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy to prevent suicide. The strategy describes key actions already taken, and proposes further actions to be taken, to help meet the target set out in the White Paper, "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation". In addition, the Department is producing a strategy for women's mental health that will ensure that reformed mental health services meet the needs of women.

Sue Doughty: I thank the Minister for that answer. Is she aware that suicide is the main and rising cause of death among pregnant and perinatal women and new mothers? Different forms of suicide are occurring; there are many more violent methods and they are gender-specific. What is being done to increase awareness among health professionals of the risk to that particular group of women?

Jacqui Smith: I think that the hon. Lady refers to information in the confidential inquiry into maternal deaths. It is worth putting the deaths from suicide among that group of women into context: the report highlighted 28 deaths due to suicide in more than 2 million maternities. However, she is right—any suicide is serious. The confidential inquiry made several recommendations for the management of women who are at risk of serious mental illness following delivery. In May, the Department produced a supplement insert for the GP magazine *PrimaryCare*, which included the key issues from the inquiry, to help to raise awareness of the factors that can contribute to maternal deaths. We also produced a separate midwifery summary of the confidential inquiry, and the findings will of course feed into the development of the maternity module of the children's national service framework.

Education Spending

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor confirmed that education is this Government's No. 1 priority. Since 1997, we have broken the cycle of underfunding in education, but we have done more than that: we have demonstrated that our policies of resources for reform work.

In 1997, we took the tough decision to focus our extra resources and reforms on early years and primary schools, because we knew that we had to get the basics right, and the results are there to see: more nursery places; 500 sure start areas; the biggest ever expansion in child care; and every primary teacher has been retrained in the teaching of literacy and numeracy. The result has been a huge leap in the performance of our 11-year-olds.

We also laid the foundations for raising standards in secondary schools. Again, where we committed resources for reform, we delivered results. The number of specialist schools increased from 181 in 1997, to 982 by September this year, and GCSE results are rising more swiftly in those schools. In our excellence in cities areas, results are increasing faster than elsewhere. Our record is one of investment and reform, and thousands of pupils and parents have benefited from it.

We know that it works, so it is now time to step up the pace of investment, matched by a step up in the pace of reform. In England, education spending will rise by an average of 6 per cent. a year over the next three years—a £12.8 billion increase. Total investment in my Department will be nearly £58 billion a year by 2005–06—more than £1,000 per pupil more in real terms than we inherited in 1997.

In the time available to me today, I cannot possibly do justice to every issue covered by my responsibilities as Secretary of State. I therefore intend to focus on the reform of secondary education, but when we have completed our consultation on our reform document for further education I will make further announcements. I can confirm that, subject to agreement to that reform, core unit funding in FE will increase by 1 per cent. per annum in real terms over each of the next three years.

In the autumn, we will publish a 10-year strategy for our universities, setting out how we will deliver the twin goals of excellence in teaching and research and widening access and participation. However, I can announce today that, as part of the Government's commitment to research excellence, we will substantially increase recurrent funding for research, raising the additional investment by more than £200 million by 2005–06. Alongside the investment in the science budget announced by the Chancellor yesterday, that will enable our research to be truly world class.

To carry on now to raise standards in our secondary schools, we need to make a decisive break with those parts of the existing comprehensive system that still hold us back. In saying that, I want to be clear about one thing: this is not a return to the old, failed two-tier system. The comprehensive principle was right and remains right. Every child is of equal worth. Ability is not determined by the family or background into which people are born, and all children have a right to an education that meets their highest aspirations and helps them to achieve their individual potential. That is as true now as it has ever been.

Again, without doubt, the move to comprehensive education brought progress. It has given more people the qualifications for higher education and more children have gained good GCSEs. It has produced an entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum for all children. It has delivered huge progress in the achievement of girls. It has brought more life chances to so many of our young people.

Progress at secondary level has not been fast enough, however, and no one can say that what we have now is as good as we want it to be. Too many pupils are still going backwards between the ages of 11 and 14. Pupil behaviour often deteriorates at secondary level. Half of our 16-year-olds still leave school without five good GCSEs. The UK still has one of the greatest class divides in education. Too many schools are failing or coasting along without being able to stretch all their pupils.

We have not, therefore, achieved all for which we hoped. We need to be bolder and change our secondary system if we are to deliver high standards for all our children. We need radical reform in four key areas: in school structures; in school leadership; in teaching and learning; and in the link between rights and responsibilities both within schools and between schools and the broader community.

First, I shall deal with reform of school structures. In the past, the comprehensive system has been too uniform. There have been insufficient incentives for schools to improve, and excellence has been isolated and has not been used to raise standards across the school system as a whole. We therefore need a secondary system that instead promotes specialism and diversity, in which every school is honest about its strengths and weaknesses and is given clear incentives to improve, and in which our best schools are rewarded for levering up standards in the rest.

The new secondary system must have schools that are, in some respects, the same as each other. High aspirations, a broad and balanced curriculum, good-quality teaching and leadership, fair admissions and clear routes of progression are essential for every school. Every school also needs to be different, however, which is why specialist schools are central to our school reform. Their specialism is in addition to the national curriculum and encourages them to develop their own ethos and mission. Let me be clear: our aim is that, over time, every school that can be and wants to be a specialist school will be able to be one. I can announce today that we will increase the number of specialist schools to 2,000 by 2006. That will mean more than half our secondary schools will be specialist within the next four years.

It is not just a question of specialist schools. We will create at least 33 new city academies by 2006, and new extended schools. Each school will have its own mission and its own strengths, all contributing to raising standards. We also need a ladder of achievement to make sure that every school has clear incentives to improve—a system in which every school knows where it stands, is challenged to raise its level, and is incentivised and supported when it does so. Rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach, we need to acknowledge the truth that different schools are at different stages in school improvement and need different levels of challenge and support, freedoms and responsibilities.

On this ladder of improvement, weak and failing schools will be provided with extra resources, but those will be matched to tough improvement programmes. If schools do not improve, there will be quicker action to close them down, reopen them as academies, replace their leadership or enable them to be taken over by more successful schools. For coasting schools, there will be incentives to develop school improvement plans and work towards specialist status. For good schools, such as our specialist schools, training schools and extended schools, extra resources will be matched to the development of real centres of excellence in each school. For our best schools, there will be new resources and new freedom, but those will be matched to new responsibilities to improve the school system as a whole.

As a result of that ladder of improvement, a vital new principle for our new secondary system will be that, for the first time, we will use our best schools and head teachers to lever up standards in the rest. That is why we will encourage our best schools to expand. That is why we will promote our best schools to take over and run weak and failing schools. That is why we will provide incentives for our best schools to federate and improve standards in our weaker and coasting schools. That is why we will reward our best heads for taking on new roles as chief executives of clusters of schools.

Today, we are announcing that we will designate 300 advanced schools over the next four years. The schools will be charged with helping to lever up standards in our weaker schools and will have the resources to do so.

It is not only school structures, however, that we need to reform. Leadership is essential to the success of any school. We have already established the national college for school leadership as the world's first institution dedicated to identifying and training excellent leaders in our school system. The college will make sure that every new head is properly qualified, and that existing heads are properly supported and trained with access to mentors from outside education. The college will take on new roles in developing a new generation of transformational leaders.

We recognise that it is vital to secure the best possible leadership for the schools that face the toughest challenges. Next year we will introduce a leadership incentive grant to ensure that excellent leadership exists in our most challenged secondary schools. The grant—about £125,000 per school per year—will be paid to about 1,400 secondary schools in excellence in cities areas and excellence clusters, and to schools in challenging circumstances outside such areas. Where schools are well led, the grant will be paid directly with no strings attached; where leadership is weaker, heads and governors will need to agree a development plan with the directors of education in their local authorities. When necessary, and if it is in the best interests of a school and its pupils, the plan will include the replacement of the head teacher.

The third area needing reform is that of teaching and learning. The realisation of every child's potential is what all teachers want for their pupils and what all parents want for their children. Increasingly, the new specialist secondary school system will be able to tailor education to the needs of individual children; but that will require a radical change in the way in which teachers use their expertise and their time, in their professional development and in how they use technology—in fact, in how they do their job.

We have already been discussing with the profession how we can bring about those changes: now we can back up the discussions with resources. The money that schools receive through the standard spending assessment will rise by 3.5 per cent. in real terms in each of the next three years. On top of that record sum, the Chancellor has announced a substantial increase in the schools standard grants, paid directly to schools. The grant will increase by £325 million in 2003–04, and by £375 million in each of the following two years. That means that from next year direct payments will rise by £50,000 a year to at least £165,000 for a typical secondary school in England. Direct payments to a typical primary school will rise by £10,000 to at least £50,000.

That money, together with the increased general funding, can be used at head teachers' discretion. Let me make it absolutely clear, however, that the extra schools standard grant is conditional on reform of the way in which schools work. It must be matched by a commitment across the schools sector to a restructured teaching profession and a reformed school work force: more flexible, more diverse, and focused on raising standards.

We need commitment to new professional roles for teachers. We need commitment to new roles for school para-professionals, enabling them to take on new tasks in schools and to support teachers. We need commitment to an improved pay and performance management regime that rewards excellent teaching and eliminates poor teaching. In the autumn we will set out our more specific proposals, and the process for achieving the necessary agreement.

Finally, we must strengthen dramatically the link between rights and responsibilities. The new system needs to capture not only what schools can do for themselves, but how parents and the wider community can play their part. We must have zero tolerance of indiscipline in schools. Today I can announce a significant expansion of measures taken earlier this year to tackle poor behaviour and crack down on indiscipline. We have already seen the success of learning support units, on-site centres that can better deal with the small minority of pupils who cannot settle and who disrupt others in the classroom. As part of a national behaviour strategy to be launched in the autumn, we will provide learning support units for every school where they are needed. There will be more police on site at our toughest schools, if heads agree to that. Outside schools, truancy sweeps will be extended.

More broadly, however, I want to break down the walls and do more to help schools become a central part of their communities. We will therefore develop new extended schools that will provide a range of services, along with education, on the same site.

Moving to the new comprehensive ideal means higher standards, zero tolerance of bad behaviour and a greater choice of good schools for parents. The Government have made their choice. We have chosen to make education our No.1 priority, and we have backed that choice with sustained investment on an unprecedented scale, matched by reform involving unprecedented ambition. We have a proven model of reform, we have the best teachers ever

[Estelle Morris]

in our schools; we have the resources and the ambition to achieve the change. A world-class education system is what we aim for, and that is a prize well worth winning.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her characteristic courtesy in giving me advance sight of her statement. I welcome the extension of city academies and learning support units—two Conservative ideas that deserve to flourish under this Government.

The right hon. Lady said that she wanted to help schools, but we already know that she is flexible in her use of language. We read in today's newspapers that she deliberately used different language when she negotiated with the Prime Minister from the language that she used with the Chancellor of the Exchequer before yesterday's statement. I commend her ingenuity but, unfortunately for her, the British people are less easily fooled.

Today, the right hon. Lady has talked the language of believing in the comprehensive principle. Last week, she told the *Daily Mail* that the comprehensive school was a "worn out vehicle". Could she tell the House which is her real view? Her Back Benchers need to know whether to believe what she says to them in the House or what she says to the *Daily Mail*. It is this gap between rhetoric and reality that haunts the statement she has just made. She uses words and phrases such as "radical reform", but the reality is that she is travelling ever further down the path of central direction, second-guessing from the centre and nitpicking interference in our schools.

Today's statement will not promote any improvement in what parents worry about. It will not help to solve the crisis in discipline that has seen 130 teachers seriously injured in violent incidents in schools in the past year. The measures that she has announced will not compensate for the Government's consistent undermining of the authority of head teachers—an undermining that some of her announcements today will simply make worse.

The statement will not help teachers to spend more time in the classroom teaching; indeed, it will hinder them. The Secretary of State already sends 4,500 pages of guidance and advice to every school every year. Has she estimated how much extra paperwork will be generated by the changes that she has announced today? This is not the real reform that our schools need.

The Secretary of State talks tough about closing schools that miss their targets. She wants to sack teachers who miss their targets, so let me ask her about her targets. What about truancy? In 1998, the Department set a target to cut truancy, and the target was strengthened in 2000. However, this year, the old target was scrapped and replaced with a new one that aims to achieve a reduction 70 per cent. less than the original target. Does she accept that that is an appalling example of double standards? If teachers miss a target, the teacher gets sacked; if Ministers miss a target, the target gets sacked.

The centrepiece of the statement is the introduction of new types of school. Does the right hon. Lady accept that the fact that schools will seek to jump through these new hoops to get the extra money will inevitably lead to a further increase in red tape? What has she got to say to the head teacher. Janet Smith from Lealands high school in Luton? *[Interruption.]* Labour Back Benchers groan at the mention of head teachers; they do not want to hear things from the real world of education. What has she got to say to—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please allow the shadow spokesman to be heard.

Mr. Green: Labour Members never like to hear from head teachers, who know the truth of what is going on in schools. Janet Smith is quoted today as saying about the Chancellor's spending plans:

> "It's always been tied up, attached to this initiative or that scheme. I need to be trusted to decide what my school needs."

Is she not exactly right?

What about the practicalities of the Secretary of State's proposals to lever up the best? Many good heads are good precisely because they concentrate on every detail of what happens in their schools. Her proposals would take the best heads out of the school and make them strategic chief executives of half the schools in the area. What evidence does she have that that is the best way to improve all those schools that she would not touch with a bargepole? People will worry that the proposal is a gimmick that will do more harm than good. It will especially concern parents who have children in the schools with the good heads that she is taking away.

What is the logic behind concentrating on 300 schools out of 25,000 to solve the crisis? Would not it be better to focus directly on the failing schools, addressing their problems, rather than concocting this half-baked mess, which heads will not welcome? After the 300 advanced schools, the next tier is the 1,400 schools that will receive the leadership incentive grant. Will the right hon. Lady reassure the House that the distribution of the grant will not be manipulated for party political purposes in exactly the way that the distribution of grant to local education authorities will be?

For a statement that was billed as setting the course for education policy in this Parliament, there are several glaring gaps. There is nothing about reducing exam overload in secondary schools or slimming down the national curriculum. The Secretary of State accepts—indeed, she promotes—further delay in finding a policy for our universities, where morale is even lower than it is in the school sector among both students and teachers. Does she accept that her dithering over student funding, on which we were promised a decision early in the new year, has contributed to the collapse in morale? She said little about further education, where morale is even lower than it is in the universities. What has she done today to simplify the system in which colleges need to cope with 73 different funding streams? She said nothing about vocational education, which has been a key failure for generations of children in this country.

The statement is a sad waste of an opportunity by the Government. Instead of retreating from the path of dictating to our schools, they have chosen to go further down that route than ever before. When will they learn that micro-management from the centre is not the way to create world-class schools? The right hon. Lady talks about diversity, but it is an imposed diversity: "You can do what you want as long as the Secretary of State approves." That is a sham diversity.

I will disappoint Labour Members by saying that we are not in principle opposed to spending more on education. *[Laughter.]* Let me repeat that in case they did not hear the shadow Chancellor say it yesterday: we are not in principle opposed to spending more on education. But money without real reform will be wasted, as it has been over the past few years. There is an alternative vision for our schools, which the Government have rejected. In that alternative vision, heads control the discipline policy, teachers concentrate on teaching, not form filling, and parents know that the school is concerned with their children's needs, not the latest gimmick from the Government. Sadly, the Government have rejected that vision and chosen the dead hand of central control. This is not reform; it is a recipe for continued crisis in our schools.

Estelle Morris: Quite honestly, one is left wondering: if the Conservatives are not opposed to spending money in principle, where were their principles during 18 years of Tory Governments? They certainly did not turn that principle into the reality of spending.

I listened in vain to hear whether the Tories support the extra money for schools and are in favour of the direct grant that will provide an extra £50,000 for secondaries and an extra £10,000 for primaries. I listened in vain to find out whether they support the leadership grant, without strings attached, to 1,400 secondary schools. I listened in vain to find out whether they approve of a ladder of improvement, whereby every school is incentivised to achieve at high levels. The truth is that not only do they have no policies, but they have stopped believing in investing in education.

The hon. Gentleman is bothered about the number of pages sent to schools, but I can think of five pages that we could not send to schools that appear in "Conservative Education: Breaking the Link", which was published last week. The document seems to have taken five pages to conclude that there is no clear correlation between spending and results. In principle, the party is not opposed to spending money; in practice, it does not actually spend it; and in reality, it does not believe that it brings about improvements in results. That is what we have got from the hon. Gentleman, and that is why after 18 years of performing according to those rules, he and his party are no longer trusted to run this country's education system.

I turn to a few of the points that the hon. Gentleman made. He must listen carefully and understand a statement that says that the comprehensive principle is right in practice—the belief that every single child matters, that one's ability is not determined by family income and that every child has the right to the highest aspirations in a school system that is geared to meeting them. The hon. Gentleman repeated the view that comprehensive schools, as structured, do not sufficiently deliver that comprehensive principle, and they are a worn-out vehicle for doing so.

The difference between the Government and the Opposition is that we believe in the principle. We believe that every child matters, that every school should deliver and that every child, not just a few, should have the right to an education that can deliver for them. That is the challenge that we take on and that is the nature of our higher ambitions and our aspirations. It is also why in 1997 we were right to turn our back on a school system that had failed too many people and delivered for a few, at the expense of too many children and their families, in too many communities.

We have made significant progress, but we are honest enough to admit that we have not made as much progress as we wanted to. If we are to have a vehicle that can deliver even more reform and higher standards, we must improve it.

The hon. Gentleman talked about money with strings and about head teachers not having flexibility. The 3.5 per cent. extra increase in SSA goes to schools with no strings attached, to spend as they wish to meet their development plan. The leadership grant for those schools that are well led, which will be the vast majority, goes to schools to spend as they wish with no strings attached, as is also the case with the schools standards grants. We are not only putting more money into schools, but devolving it to the front line and ensuring that those schools with good leadership can play the accountability system and spend the money as they see fit.

We will work with those schools that do not have the leadership in place and that are not as strong as they should be to raise standards and to guarantee to every parent that money going to those schools will also bring about reform and high standards. The hon. Gentleman is right—money without reform does not work. In our good schools, we will put in the money and they can handle the reform. In our under-performing schools, we will put in the money and the support, so that together we can deliver reform.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): We, too, are grateful to the Secretary of State for allowing us sight of the statement half an hour before we came to listen. It was worth coming just to hear the latest Tory U-turn on spending—that makes four this week.

This package has all the hallmarks of a *Reader's Digest* prize draw: people think that they have won until they examine the small print. Yesterday, we had a proud statement about extra grants to primary and secondary schools; today, we have the small print, which says that the grants are conditional on schools meeting certain criteria. Similarly, leadership grants were announced, but today we have the small print, which sets out criteria.

The Secretary of State must recognise that although she is right to say that simply putting money into schools will not resolve all their problems, managing every school from her office is not the way to improve matters.

To rely on a Government policy of naming, shaming, controlling and sacking hardly unites the profession or makes it want to raise standards.

Why is there nothing in the statement about the two crucial issues affecting schools? Yes, there is a little bit about discipline, but there is nothing about any new policy initiative to tackle the problems facing our schools. Let us talk about the other big issue: the number of teachers going into our schools. Evidence produced this week by the Teacher Training Agency showed that the number of mathematics teachers entering the profession was down by 30 per cent. and that of science teachers by 25 per cent. There was not a single new proposal in the statement to deal with those key issues.

On ideas about specialist schools, I apologise sincerely to the Secretary of State for saying that she was setting up a two-tier system, because today it is a three-tier system, or perhaps even a four-tier system. How will super-specialist schools, as they will now be called, be chosen and funded? How will we guarantee that the

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[Mr. Phil Willis]

children who need extra resources and would benefit from the initiative can get into those schools? Can the Secretary of State tell the House why, at the end of the Labour Government's second term, 40 per cent. of our secondary schools will not come into any of those categories and will receive fewer resources, presumably because they are the bog standard schools that Alastair Campbell has talked about?

Why is there nothing about further education in the statement, apart from a 1 per cent. increase in funding? Fourteen to 19-year-olds have been identified as a key sector, yet FE, we are told, will get a 1 per cent. increase—we have not been told what strings are attached. We welcome the universal expansion of education maintenance allowances—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hurrah!"] He pauses. How will those allowances be paid for? Will the Secretary of State guarantee that they will not be paid for by removing the universal access to child benefit, as the Chancellor wanted to do two years ago, or by raising tuition fees and interest on grants? Will she make sure that both those things do not happen?

Finally, the Cassells report recommended a 28 per cent. target for the increase in modern apprenticeships, and we are delighted that the Secretary of State included that in her statement. Will she make it clear to the House that that target will not simply mean a re-badging of other provisions, but will be a genuine target to get 28 per cent. of young people into modern apprenticeships by 2004? There is a great deal in the statement and we welcome the extra resources, but please do not tell everybody how to do their job.

Estelle Morris: I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman acknowledged and welcomed the increase in resources. We have spent many more pennies than his party has promised at successive general elections, and have delivered our pledge.

I shall deal with FE and HE, which were mentioned by both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green). We are always faced with difficult decisions. My Department has a wide range of responsibilities and deals with education from the cradle to the grave. I decided that the statement should be about secondary education, because I wanted to do it justice and have said all along that it was one of the main priorities of the spending assessment. So that there is no misunderstanding, let me say that the statement was not intended not to value further or higher education. We have decided to make a separate announcement on further education once we have completed consultation on the reform document that we launched some weeks ago, in recognition of the importance of that document.

However, I wanted to send a clear signal to people in further education that extra funding is available as part of the comprehensive spending review, which is why I made an announcement about the 1 per cent. annual increase in real funding now and did not hold it back until the autumn. That was a tough decision—the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) will do as he wishes, but I hope that the FE sector will not regard it as diminishing its responsibilities. Equally, with higher education, I decided, rightly or wrongly, that I wanted to look at long-term funding for higher education, student finances and ways in which to extend participation and value research and excellence. To split it up would have been bitty. That is the decision that I took. Neither decision is meant to diminish the part that both play in our education system.

I want to go over two key points, but first I shall give the hon. Gentleman an assurance about modern apprenticeships. We were extremely grateful for the Cassells report. What has come out of that is a better modern apprenticeship than we had before. We are keen to promote and extend modern apprenticeships to encourage as many young and not-so-young people as possible to enter them. It is not our intention merely to badge something else to reach that target. In the months ahead, we shall say more about our ambitions for those who follow the vocational route. I know that the hon. Gentleman and I share at least the wish to improve that, and I hope that he will accept from me our commitment to improve modern apprenticeships and to retain the modern apprenticeship as a high-status vocational route.

The hon. Gentleman and I differ in two areas. He may not accept it, but if he looks at the grants that have been made available today, he will see that there are far fewer strings attached than in the Government's first term. I say that partly at my own expense. If he goes through the grants one by one, he will find that in the vast majority of cases, and in some cases at all times for some schools, the grant comes without strings attached.

I shall be clear about why I have made the two provisos. I see no point in putting extra money into a school that does not have a leadership that is geared up to spend it effectively. I shall defend that, otherwise at the end of my time in this post, people will say, "You put in the money, but you did not bring about the change." There is always a tension between giving the money to those who can spend it and letting them do it, and supporting those who cannot and making sure that they spend it effectively. I feel that we have got the balance right.

We might disagree on my decision to hold back some of the increase in the special grant until we get the work force agreement. The grant would not go out until next April anyway. I am hugely heartened by the approach of the trade unions and their representatives in the education service to the talks that we have been holding over the past few months. I have every confidence that we will come to an agreement, but make no mistake: I need to fund that work force reform, and that money has now been announced. I have no intention of letting it go to schools unless I am assured that it will bring about the biggest prize—a remodelled teaching work force.

On the advanced schools incentives for improvement, the hon. Gentleman says that there is no incentive for improvement, only strings, and he does not like advanced schools and specialist schools. He must accept that those are incentives for improvement. We are on a journey. I hope that in 10 years' time, we will have reached the point where every school that is able and wants it is a specialist school.

We must start somewhere, and at every opportunity that we have had as a Government, we have increased the number of specialist schools and we shall continue to do that. That is where the incentive for improvement is in the system. It is not a two-tier system, because it holds out that hope and ambition for every single one of our secondary schools.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on articulating so clearly the links between resources, reforms and results. There will be a warm welcome in North-West Leicestershire secondary schools—I am a governor of two: Ibstock community college and Ashby-de-la-Zouch grammar school—for the 3.5 per cent. increase in SSA funding year on year.

Will my right hon. Friend look closely at the review of the SSA formula? Three of the four options would leave Leicestershire worse off. The grant needs to bridge a gap of 6 or 7 per cent. relative to the average county and 13 per cent. relative to the most generously funded county. Will she make it clear to her colleagues in government that any review of the formula that leaves Leicestershire worse off will run entirely counter to the warmly welcomed statements that we heard yesterday and today?

Estelle Morris: I expect that my hon. Friend will make representations to the effect that the one option by which Leicestershire apparently does well is the one that he prefers. He is entirely within his rights to do that. The matter is out to consultation. If one makes the arguments about the SSA consultation document, one must make them about the formula, not about whether this area or that area is better or worse off. The formula must be fair. That is the key criterion. I understand my hon. Friend, and no doubt I would do the same on behalf of Birmingham, but the debate must be about the formula, as it is that which dictates the outcome. All that I would say is that the leadership grant and the increase in the schools standard grant are not weighted for any of the things for which the SSA formula is weighted. I remind my hon. Friend that, as ever under this Government, we are talking about a larger share of a larger cake. Under the previous Government it was always a larger share of a diminishing cake.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Following the point made by the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor), can the Secretary of State, as a Birmingham Member, explain why every year in her patch all the children in secondary schools get in excess of £500 more per pupil than those in my patch? Under the proposed SSA formula, that situation will become even more extreme. Why is that?

Estelle Morris: I shall let the hon. Lady into a big secret. People in my patch got more money than people in her patch when the Tories were in power as well. That's life. The difference between the two Governments is that we are trying to do something about it, whereas the Conservative Government did nothing about it. *[Interruption.]* Let me give a word of warning. There is life beyond the SSA formula. I have been talking about a new structure of secondary education—a lot of new money going into schools, wherever they are and whatever the funding formula. I understand the importance of the SSA formula in areas such as Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Worcestershire. The consultation is out, with four options for people to comment on. In due course, we shall receive their representations and arrive at a decision.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): My right hon. Friend rightly stressed the lack of progress made by many children in the early years of secondary education. Can she assure me that the flexible staffing that she wants to encourage would facilitate the use of expertise from the top end of primary schools in the early years of secondary school? That could be beneficial to many children and make the transition easier.

Will she tell me whether she envisages that schools in the middle of constituencies such as mine will qualify for the leadership grant? They do not qualify under many of the other categories that she mentioned, but they are nevertheless in challenging circumstances—although the authority as a whole might not show up in many of the deprivation indices.

Estelle Morris: I entirely support my hon. Friend in saying to heads that they should consider the option of linking with primary schools and using year 6 teachers for year 7. I say that because when I visit schools that have done that, staff speak highly of the results that have been achieved. It is the schools' decision, but we want to encourage them to work in partnership. Before 1997, the atmosphere was not such that schools would share their resources and good ideas. That is one of the major changes in climate that we have helped to bring about since 1997. I thank schools for their generosity of spirit in increasingly being prepared to share their good work and good ideas with others.

On my hon. Friend's second question, some schools in extremely challenging circumstances are outside local authorities that measure up in terms of free school meals. That is a dilemma, and we want to target that group. Without giving assurances about particular schools in the middle of her constituency, I can say that we have made allowance for some schools outside excellence in cities areas to be included for a leadership grant.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I welcome any extra money going directly without strings to schools in my area, and I welcome the idea of more specialist schools. Maiden Erlegh school in my area is developing as a centre of excellence in arts and St. Crispins school in Wokingham would like more Government support to develop in technology. Does the Secretary of State agree that in a secondary school it is important that a head teacher should have taught all the pupils in the school in at least one year in one subject, so that he or she knows the school better and is aware of the pupils' academic aptitudes?

Estelle Morris: I would not dare to be so prescriptive as to tell head teachers in which years they should teach. I have a genuine difference of opinion with the right hon. Gentleman about that, although I take his point seriously. If a school's governing body had decided what was right for the school in terms of a head teacher's background, of course I would value that opinion. I go to schools where the head teachers know the name of every pupil, and if they have taught in every year, of course that is a strength.

[Estelle Morris]

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that some governing bodies choose a different model of leadership and that they should have the freedom to follow that route.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Could we acknowledge the significantly excellent settlement for the science budget? Will the ministerial team also turn their minds, however, to the intractable and growing problem of the dependence on short-term contracts in both universities and scientific establishments? Scientists do not do their best work if they are for ever fussing, understandably, about their personal future in the short and medium terms.

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend is right. I know from my visits to universities and from people involved in research that part of the underfunding of recent decades has resulted in short-termism in relation to contracts. Some of the announcements made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor yesterday will go some way towards addressing that problem. We shall not be able to solve all the problems when the Department makes further announcements on the future of HE, because there is no magic wand to restore the funding that has been cut from universities over the past two decades, but I hope that we shall begin a journey of improvement towards increased sustained investment in our universities.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): According to the House of Commons Library, the increases in expenditure in England between 2002 and 2005–06 will be £12.8 billion—a 28.5 per cent. increase—whereas in Wales and Scotland, the increase will be £1.9 billion, a 21.6 per cent. rise. That is a 7 per cent. discrepancy. Will the right hon. Lady explain and justify that difference?

Estelle Morris: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the allocation to Wales is worked out by means of some historic Barnett formula. That is the nature of the system, and the explanation as to why the amounts of money going to Wales may seem somewhat different from those allocated to England.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): May I say how delighted I am with the huge investment in education? It is great news. I have to say, however, that I am a little sceptical about the principle of so many specialist schools. I want to put to my right hon. Friend two questions that I am asked virtually every time I am in my constituency. Does she agree with the teachers who tell me that the amount of bureaucracy that they have to deal with really affects their work load, and consequently prevents them from raising standards? What do we intend to do about that? The second question relates to university lecturers, as my right hon. Friend would probably expect, as Durham university is in my constituency. When does she intend to ensure that university lecturers receive a substantial pay increase, bearing it in mind that they have dropped back by some 40 per cent. in the past few years?

Estelle Morris: I tend to think that teachers use the term "bureaucracy"—as do I—as shorthand for extra work, extra demand and extra pressures. That does not always involve paperwork, although I accept that there is a lot of paperwork in the system now. I have always accepted that the Department has a responsibility to do better than we do, and constantly to strive to cut it back. Although we have put extra flexibility into the standards fund, we still have fairly complex reporting arrangements. That is why we have decided, only this week, to write to schools shortly to say that they will be required to report on expenditure from the standards fund only once a year. That will result in a sizeable cut in the amount of bureaucracy to which they are currently subjected. So, we must do better, but we do try, and we are doing better.

This is a huge and complex system. We want to invest money in reform and, because we have a responsibility to ensure that the money is spent well, we must have an accountability mechanism in place. I entirely accept, however, that we must do more to make that process leaner.

On university lecturers, we put extra resources into universities last year so that they could begin to reverse the trend of underfunding. For the first time, they saw an increase in their funding after the diminishing resources that they had received year after year. It will be up to the universities, but I hope that university lecturers' pay will benefit from the settlement that we have been able to award this year.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): While I understand where the money announced today will be spent, the Secretary of State will be aware that the Education Bill now going through Parliament contains provision for private companies limited by guarantee to provide educational services. Some of those companies will inevitably fail from time to time. Will she confirm definitively whether the taxpayer will be the ultimate guarantor in such arrangements, whether the companies will be indirectly guaranteed by the local education authority, or whether she will simply allow those companies to go to the wall?

Estelle Morris: There was a lengthy and very constructive debate on school companies during our consideration of the Lords amendments to the Education Bill yesterday. The assurance that the Minister for School Standards gave to the House was that schools wishing to set up such companies must obtain the LEA's permission. That will act as the safeguard. If we want to free up schools and encourage them to innovate, sometimes we have to allow them to have different structures in which to do so. I am on the side of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), who on Report welcomed companies as an innovative way of raising standards and devolving responsibility to schools.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Does my right hon. Friend remember hearing the Opposition spokesperson say that we do not particularly like listening to heads? The head teacher whose pupil, Fiona White, is doing work experience with me, tells me that he has already targeted the extra investment going to his school. The head teacher to whom I spoke last week confirmed that she now has a full staff for the coming year. The head teacher to whom I spoke the week before was delighted with the money that has gone into the capital programme. If the Opposition spokesperson does not want the money going to schools in his constituency, there are plenty of head teachers in mine who would be prepared to take it off his hands.

While my right hon. Friend is transferring that money to Lewisham, will she explain more about the excellent idea of extended schools and the help that they will give to the poorer communities in constituencies such as mine?

Estelle Morris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for taking on a year 10 student, I suspect, for work experience. Probably more of us should do that, as it is very important.

I, too, have found that head teachers have very much welcomed the grant. I do not want to sound complacent, because I know that some heads face great challenges in recruiting for September, but the excellent school that I was at in Chelsea this morning had also recruited to full complement. We need to get a balance in our discussions and acknowledge that there is much that is good in our schools and much that has improved. Many heads and teachers truly value the resources that we have put in, and have spent them to good effect.

Extended schools will gain approval from all parties. Schools are sometimes the only place in the community that offers professional advice and support and has the space and equipment to serve people. It is wrong that they should be available only from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm. We plan to make them centres of their communities in urban and rural areas. I have heard ideas ranging from having a health centre on site to having the local post office there. I know that a local police station in the north-east has an outpost at a school. Schools are part of the community. Their core job is teaching pupils, but there is no reason why we cannot have joined-up services that go beyond education, and extended schools will be funded to do that.

Ann Winterton (Congleton): I welcome the Secretary of State's emphasis on diversity in education. Will she give an undertaking to consider the particular circumstances of Sandbach school in my constituency, which I believe is unique in that it is an independent comprehensive school where all the pupils are paid for by the state? It wants to retain that status. Will she investigate whether we can resolve the problems that face it?

I welcome the extra expenditure on education, but what can the Secretary of State say to Cheshire parents about the share that they will get under the funding formula? Will they be worse off, or will they be considerably better off, and is it not time that the fair funding formula situation was resolved?

Estelle Morris: I am aware of Sandbach school, because it is an anomaly within the system. I think that the former Minister for School Standards visited it only earlier this year to have discussions with the head. Because I am not aware of the technicalities, may I resist answering the question from the Dispatch Box but promise to answer it in the near future?

Irrespective of the funding formula, Cheshire will get its extra share of the schools standard grant, which is not weighted, which is one of its benefits for areas that consider themselves underfunded through the formula. All the hon. Lady's schools will get an increase in revenue and capital, subject to our agreement on the release of the grant. It is well worth her looking at the consultation document, and I know she will, because she is an assiduous representative of her constituents on the matter of education, as I know from the many letters that I receive. I look forward to hearing her representations. Formulae cannot be the answer to everyone's problems, but it is important for us to have a thorough debate and come to the best conclusion we can.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): Will my right hon. Friend explain exactly what she means by one-size-fits-all schools? Perhaps a list of them could be made available in the Library, because I have never come across one. How does she propose to prevent the specialist school system, as she envisages it, from becoming progressively two tier or three tier—or perhaps even four tier—and increasingly selective?

Estelle Morris: On the one-size-fits-all issue, of course, teachers always think that their school is special; they know the ways in which it differs from neighbouring schools. No one is saying that such differences do not exist, but as I have always said, the perception of comprehensive schools is that of sameness and uniformity. The differences that exist are not celebrated; they are not outwardly visible to parents and to those in the wider community. My point has always been that—as I made clear in the statement—schools do indeed have different strengths, but we do not make the most of them. We do not incentivise schools to use those strengths, and we do not reward them for developing them. In terms of the difference of opinion between us, part of squaring the circle is acknowledging that schools do have different strengths, but that the comprehensive system seems to flatten and hide them, rather than raising and cherishing them, and incentivising more schools to celebrate their differences.

On the two-tier system, it is always difficult to get from where we are to where we want to be, but my hon. Friend should bear it in mind that, over time, every school that wants to become, and is capable of becoming, a specialist school will be able to do so. It is in order to get to that point that we have made more resources available every year. If we did not change—if we were not brave enough to take that risk—our school system would not deliver what my hon. Friend and I want. I should also point out that the ability to select by aptitude is available not only to specialist schools but to any secondary school that feels that it has a specialism.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the quality of teaching accommodation is important? If that is the case, will she hazard a guess as to how many temporary demountable classrooms will be replaced at the end of four years? After five years of a Labour Government, there are more demountable classrooms in my constituency than there were in 19[illegible]. I suggest that she start with the St. Andrews infant and junior school, which has 11 demountable classrooms.

Estelle Morris: I do not blame the hon. Gentleman for making representations about schools in his constituency—that is his responsibility and his right. However, I suspect that there are few—if any—Members of this House who cannot point to significant capital investment in schools in their constituencies, regardless of the political party that they represent. The figures show that £700 million was invested in capital in 1997, but by the end of this spending review that will have risen to £4.5 billion. Because we do not run such matters from the

[Estelle Morris]

centre, it is up to local education authorities to prioritise the schools that need repair. If the hon. Gentleman wants me to look particularly at the school that he mentions, I shall do so, but I suspect that his first port of call should be the local authority. That will explain why that school has not been prioritised in the past four years.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): A few years ago, under a Conservative Government, half of all secondary schools in the Tory flagship council of Westminster were failing in terms of special measures or serious weaknesses; now, none are. That is a tribute to many people, but certainly to the strategy and investment of this Government.

The key factor for the majority of pupils is to be taught in schools with a mixed intake, but inner-London schools rarely have such an intake. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that she is doing everything possible to direct the resources necessary towards meeting the needs of inner-London schools? In some cases, there is a 50 per cent. turnover between key stages, two thirds of all pupils receive free school dinners, and two thirds speak a language other than English. Indeed, up to 70 different languages are spoken in the home. Those schools need a mixed intake and additional resources. In welcoming the strategy and the resources outlined by my right hon. Friend, I ask her to guarantee that inner London will receive the attention that it deserves.

Estelle Morris: I take my hon. Friend's point about the difficulties caused by pupil mobility and by the presence of pupils with a range of challenges in one school. She will accept—as hon. Members from Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Worcestershire know already—that local authorities in inner London receive significantly more funding than those elsewhere. The Under-Secretary with responsibility for London schools—my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg)—and I have announced the beginning of a discussion on London strategy. We want to work with local authorities and London Members to raise standards.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) and I do not disagree about mixed intakes. I do not think that they guarantee good schools. Good-quality leadership and teaching do that, and I do not believe that using Machiavellian tactics to ensure that a school's intake is mixed is a way of guaranteeing high standards. However, some schools' intakes mean that they need significant extra resources and support. We need new ways to solve old problems, and I look forward to talking about that in the next few years.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): The shortfall in education funding has had a crippling effect on schools throughout the UK. I welcome the fact that the Government have made education their No. 1 priority. My colleagues and I in the Ulster Unionist party want every child to achieve his or her full potential. I welcome the measures being taken to eradicate poor behaviour and ill discipline in schools. I publicly thank Her Majesty's Government for the extra funding that has been made available to create additional pre-school places and to improve childcare provision, which we have always supported.

I am a former vice-principal of a secondary school that produces high achievers every year, and I am at present a trustee of my local grammar school. I have to challenge the Secretary of State's assertion that the comprehensive principle in education is right for the UK in general. I have much for which to thank Her Majesty's Government, since although I was not privileged to get the paper mill scholarship to the local grammar school in 1947, I did go to that school in 1948. I then managed to go to teacher training college between 1953 and 1957. I therefore believe that the system in Northern Ireland has kept doors open and afforded opportunities so that children can progress.

Are not the Government denying children's individual differences, rather than respecting them? Should we not encourage excellence by retaining the system that is in place in Northern Ireland, which provides the best opportunity for all our children?

Estelle Morris: That is clearly a devolved matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly. My responsibility is to make clear my principles, and the foundation of the Government's policies in respect of their responsibilities in England and elsewhere. However, I listened with interest to what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I also congratulate my right hon. Friend on her statement, on what is a tremendous and significant day for the most deprived areas in this country. However, does she agree that the real test is ensuring that specialist schools do not cream off the best teachers and the pupils who are most easiest to teach, with the result that non-specialist schools become the sink schools in our inner-city areas?

Will my right hon. Friend describe the mechanism that will put an end to the massive problem of teacher rotation? That problem—of better teachers moving on when they get the chance—particularly affects schools in inner-city areas. How will today's statement begin to stop that?

Estelle Morris: I agree with my hon. Friend about the real test with regard to specialist schools. However, those schools did not bring about a system in which some schools attract children with high prior attainment. That has always happened—there has always been a division between strong schools and weak schools. Some schools have found it easy to attract pupils while others have not. The challenge is to change that, and we see the specialist school as a means to that end. This is about trying to build a system with incentives for every school to improve.

In the city of Birmingham, where my constituency is located, many schools in the inner city have striven for specialist school status. They have a huge number of children on free school meals and who have special educational needs. I know that that is the same in my hon. Friend's constituency. Our measures act as an incentive not just for the schools serving affluent areas but for others as well. Is not the test of specialist schools that they are as open to schools that serve deprived areas as to those that do not? Secondly, it is important that we structure them so that, with their strengths, they lever up performance elsewhere in the school system. On those two aspects, which are fundamental to our reform, I pledge that that is the case.

On my hon. Friend's second question, if we put in more support so that teachers are free to teach and to do their job, I think that that will keep children in school. If teachers have classroom assistants, bursars, administrative assistants, laptop computers and good school leaders, the children may love it. It is the paraphernalia around teaching the kids that gets in the way. I hope that much of what we have announced today will make those schools better places to work and to teach.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Paying direct grants to schools was a very imaginative proposal by the Government, and the fact that it was built on by the Chancellor yesterday is to be welcomed. Would the Secretary of State care to go one stage further in her quest for diversity and reintroduce grant-maintained schools?

Estelle Morris: The main difference is that the previous Conservative Government paid the grants only to some schools, whereas we are paying it to all schools.

BILLS PRESENTED

Prime Minister (Office, Role and Functions) (No. 2)

Dr. Julian Lewis presented a Bill to define the office, role and functions of the Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury; to make arrangements for his appointment; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 180].

Criminal Evidence (Prohibition of Sale) (No. 2)

Dr. Julian Lewis presented a Bill to prohibit the sale of evidence gathered in criminal investigations or used during criminal proceedings: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 181].

Rape (Consent)

4.37 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law relating to consent in the crime of rape so as to provide that consent shall require the free agreement of the parties involved, that the parties take reasonable steps to ensure that consent has been given, and that the giving of consent on one occasion shall lead to no presumption about the giving of consent on any further occasion; and for related purposes.

It is clear to anyone who has studied this subject that every year hundreds of rapists walk free from our courts. The victims are generally women, but a significant proportion of those in reported cases are men, and the conviction rate is only a tiny fraction of all rapes that occur. Only 10 per cent. of rapes are reported and, of those, 7 per cent. result in a conviction. So less than 1 per cent. of all rapists are punished for their crime. This abysmally low level of conviction means that we are failing the victims of rape.

These conviction rates and the low sentences often handed out discourage rape victims from bringing their attacker to court. Rape victims say that they felt that it was they, rather than the accused, who was on trial. Despite the progress made by the Government in the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, many rape victims are still humiliated in court, particularly when irrelevant sexual history is paraded before the court. The 1999 Act set out to address these issues. As a result, rape victims can no longer be cross-examined by the accused. Victims can be screened from the accused or give evidence on a video link, thus minimising the potential for intimidation in court by the accused.

The 1999 Act also intended to limit sexual history being brought into cases. However, as women's organisations and I warned at the time, because the defence of an honest, even if unreasonable, belief in consent was left in law, many rapists have been able to walk free. Where the defence is that the accused believed that the victim consented, if the jury accept that he might, however irrationally and crazily, have believed that there was consent, they have to acquit. That defence of honest but unreasonable belief in consent also leaves a loophole for sexual history to be brought into court, since the safeguards to protect complainants in the 1999 Act do not apply to the defence of honest belief in consent.

It is well known at the criminal Bar that if claims about a woman's previous sexual history are brought up in court, the woman is likely to be humiliated and undermined and the calibre of her evidence is damaged. Canadian research shows that the jury's belief in the guilt of the accused diminishes in proportion to such claims, even if they are made up. We are expecting research to be published here on the sexual history protections that have been provided by sections 41 to 43 of the 1999 Act, but there is strong anecdotal evidence to suggest that protections have been undermined because the defence of belief in consent is run more often now to make use of the loophole.

The Government are aware that action is needed. Their sex offences review recommended a change in the law on consent in July 2000. It is abundantly clear that that is needed. The current definition of consent lets victims down. It is simply unacceptable in the 21st century that

[Ms Julia Drown]

defence counsels can say that a woman or man shouting, "No, no, no", should be disregarded and that, in fact, that person means "Yes." No means no. For that reason, we need to write into law that in cases where the victim is saying no, if the defendant is to use the defence of belief in consent, they have to be able to tell the jury what reasonable steps they took to ensure that there was free agreement to sex.

The Bill follows the model used in Canada—the system that was introduced there a decade ago. It would amend the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976 to define consent as involving free agreement between the people involved. Understood in that way, consent places a responsibility on people, where there is any doubt, to take reasonable steps to ensure that there is free agreement. If people having sex have not freely agreed to do so, that is rape, whether it is in the marital bed of 20 years, at a wild Saturday night party, or involves a prostitute being attacked in the street.

The Bill includes a non-exhaustive list of situations where free agreement could not be made. Those include: where a person submits or is unable to resist because of force or fear of force, or because of fear of serious harm to themselves or another person; where a person was asleep, unconscious or too affected by alcohol or drugs to give free agreement; where a person did not understand the nature of the act; or, where agreement is expressed by a third party, not the victim.

Some people have suggested that changing the law will lead to more false claims. There is no evidence for that. At present, the humiliation that so many rape victims have to go through makes it likely that there are fewer false claims in rape cases than in other cases. I am not denying that there might be false claims, but everything indicates that they will be so few that that should not be seen as a separate issue from claims associated with other sorts of criminal case.

We are all brought up with prejudices around sex. To counter those prejudices, the Bill also states that the judge on each and every rape case where it is relevant must direct members of the jury that they cannot assume that the complainant did freely agree just because they did not say anything, because they did not physically resist, because they were not physically injured or because on an earlier occasion they had consented to sex with the accused or another person.

On the latter point, people assume that consensual sex on one occasion can be used to indicate consent to sex on another, but that is the rapist's charter. Whether it is a husband, a gay lover, or someone met once before on a date, the fact that there has been consensual sex once or perhaps countless times before does not mean that there has been consent on the occasion when one partner forces themselves on the other.

No one is suggesting that if a husband is accused of raping his wife the fact that they have been married for 20 years should be concealed from the jury. Beyond that fact, however, except in very rare cases, it is irrelevant how often or what type of sex they had. On the rare occasions when previous sexual history is relevant, the full protections of sections 41 to 43 of the 1999 Act must apply. Circumstances where sexual history might be relevant should be exceptionally rare, however. In general, the court needs to consider only the occasion on which the rape is alleged to have taken place.

It is time that we did more to protect the victims of rape. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Julia Drown, Vera Baird, Julie Morgan, Joyce Quin, Judy Mallaber, Ms Oona King, Harry Cohen, Mr. Michael Clapham, Mr. Tom Cox, Margaret Moran, Ms Debra Shipley and Fiona Mactaggart.

RAPE (CONSENT)

Ms Julia Drown accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law relating to consent in the crime of rape so as to provide that consent shall require the free agreement of the parties involved, that the parties take reasonable steps to ensure that consent has been given, and that the giving of consent on one occasion shall lead to no presumption about the giving of consent on any further occasion; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 182].

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, at this day's sitting, the motion in the name of Mr. Iain Duncan Smith relating to the Peace Process in Northern Ireland shall, notwithstanding paragraph (2)(c)(ii) of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business), be entered upon at Seven o'clock or when proceedings on Lords Amendments to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill have been concluded, whichever is the later, and may then be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours; and the Order of 28th June 2001 relating to deferred Divisions shall not apply to it.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

JUSTICE (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL (PROGRAMME) (No. 2)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 21st January:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

2. Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Orders of the Day

Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

4.46 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I must draw the attention of the House to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendment No. 6 which is to be considered today. If the House agrees to the Lords amendment, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

Clause 3

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS COMMISSION

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 3, line 1, at end insert:—

"(6A) A person may not be appointed to be a lay member unless he has declared in writing his commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means."

Lady Hermon (North Down): I beg to move amendment (a) to the Lords amendment, after "he", insert

"does not have recorded against him in Northern Ireland or elsewhere a criminal conviction for which he has received a sentence of imprisonment whether suspended or otherwise and".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 23.

Lady Hermon: Amendment (a) relates to the new Judicial Appointments Commission for Northern Ireland which will have the hugely important task of appointing all future members of the judiciary in Northern Ireland, with the limited exceptions of the Lord Chief Justice and the three lords justices of appeal. As I am sure Members already know, the commission will consist of a chairman and 12 members, five of whom will be lay members.

According to Lords amendment No. 1:

"A person may not be appointed to be a lay member unless he has declared in writing his commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means."

With the greatest respect to those who proposed the amendment, it does not go far enough. For example, it does not specify the consequences of a breach of the declaration of the commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful means.

I invite the Minister to clarify the position, especially in respect of schedule 2, paragraph 2(4)(d), which provides that if the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister can agree to act jointly—a matter to which we shall return in due course—they may dismiss a non-judicial member if satisfied, for example, that he is unfit to exercise his functions. Will the Minister clarify whether, if a lay member of the commission fails to honour their written declaration, it would render them unfit to remain a member?

The Minister does not need to intervene now—he can reply to my question later. We are delighted to see him back with us in good form. We hope that he will be as generous as ever and accept some of our amendments, so that our work will not prove redundant.

The second reason why Lords amendment No. 1 is insufficient is that paragraph 2(4) of schedule 2 states:

"The First and deputy First Minister, acting jointly, may dismiss a non-judicial member if satisfied that . . .

(d) he has been convicted of criminal offence".

Of course that is written in the past tense. Under amendment (a), we are endeavouring to render people ineligible for appointment to the Judicial Appointments Commission from the very beginning, without waiting until there has been a criminal conviction. We want to say quite clearly that those with criminal convictions are simply ineligible for appointment to that hugely important body.

As hon. Members will know, under the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, we have already excluded from membership of district policing partnerships those with recorded criminal convictions, irrespective of whether those convictions are suspended. Those with criminal convictions are excluded from being independent members of the DPPs, so it seems ludicrous that we may now allow those with criminal convictions to be eligible for the Judicial Appointments Commission. Amendment (a) is simply intended to tidy up those provisions and to take them a little further than they stand at present under Lords amendment No. 1.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I shall briefly enter into this very difficult area—it is a legal minefield—and I do so with great trepidation, as I am probably the only lay person who will contribute to the debate today.

I find no fault with Lords amendment No. 1, which is acceptable to the Social Democratic and Labour party. However, I wish to address amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 1, moved by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) on behalf of the Ulster Unionist party. Under amendment (a), a criminal record would be an additional debarment from participating in the process.

I have one question to ask about human rights. If a person is justifiably convicted of a criminal offence, is the sentence of the court the totality of the punishment, or is an extension of that punishment a way to deprive a person of the totality of his or her human and civil rights, having served the sentence? That is not just a legal but a moral problem. I simply pose this question, to which perhaps the hon. Lady will reply: is a criminal conviction, even with a suspended sentence, for ever to be a debarment to a person's right to participate fully in society, having paid for his or her sins?

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): In speaking to this group of amendments and before returning to amendment (a), moved by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), may I say that, in outline, we welcome the way that things have progressed in the other place and generally accept and welcome the direction which the amendments have taken?

Following the Grand Committee debate in the other place, the Government proposed Lords amendment No. 1. Indeed, that amendment was tabled in response to a suggestion from my noble Friend Lord Glentoran, so it would certainly be churlish of us to do anything other than thank the Government for proposing it. However, amendment (a) is almost identical to one proposed by my noble Friend and then withdrawn during those proceedings.

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

It is worth returning to one or two elements of the debate in the other place. I refer the House to the comments of my noble Friend Lord Mayhew, who made an extremely important point about the confidence that we seek to achieve. He said:

> "One cannot legislate for such confidence but one can legislate for certain criteria that will lead to confidence being enjoyed. Similarly, one can legislate for certain matters if one is misguided, which will ensure that confidence is withheld.
>
> If we included in Clause 1—perhaps along the lines of the amendment that we discussed at the start of our proceedings—a statement that persons who have criminal convictions, notwithstanding the fact that they may extend to sentences of more than six months' imprisonment, shall none the less be entitled to be members of this commission, that would be a fairly unattractive beginning to the Bill."

He continued:

> "That is what one would hope the Government and anyone else with sense would have thought."—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 11 June 2002; Vol. 636, c. CWH 27.]

I agree with him.

Although we welcome the fact that, in bringing forward amendments in the other place, the Government have taken matters further with Lords amendment No. 1, it would be churlish were the Opposition not extremely sympathetic to the hon. Lady's amendment, as we had the idea in the first place. What I seek from the Government in relation to Lords amendment No. 1 and amendment (a) is further elucidation of exactly what the consequences will be if people are not prepared to sign up to Lords amendment No. 1.

My noble Friend Lord Tebbit drew attention in the other place to the fact that, in some instances, words might mean nothing. In the circumstances in Northern Ireland, however, I would venture to disagree slightly with him. Words are important here. We are looking for leadership, particularly from those in the republican movement, in sustaining the peace process. To a large extent, we are looking for them to use the right words, which is why the development that has occurred today will be referred to by my hon. Friend in the debate that will follow on the peace process.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in these circumstances, a little help from the Government would be of much more value than a lot of sympathy?

Mr. Blunt: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. In these circumstances, it would be infinitely better were the Government to come forward with proposals rather than the parties in Northern Ireland or the Opposition attempting to convince the Government of the merits of our case. What has happened in the other place, particularly in relation to Lords amendment No. 1, occurred through private discussion between the Government and the Opposition, which has enabled the Government to come forward with measures that are generally welcome to the Opposition. That is as it should be. That has characterised, to a large extent, the Minister's conduct in relation to this Bill, when that has been possible and when we have been able to discuss the matter in the House. Of course, a large chunk of the measures have not been discussed in the House, so we will touch on them only briefly today in the light of the Lords amendments. I shall come back to that later.

On Lords amendment No. 2, I am pleased that the debate that we had about the words "representative" and "reflective" has been reflected in the language that the Government have introduced. Again, Lords amendment No. 2 is a satisfactory solution. In the end, it emphasises that appointment to the judiciary must be on the basis of merit and merit alone, while making clear, in an improved way—compared with the Bill as it left this place the first time—that it is proper for the commission to have available to it candidates who are reflective, as far as is reasonably practicable, of the whole community in Northern Ireland. Her Majesty's Opposition therefore welcome Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 2.

Lady Hermon: Is there not now an inconsistency? One clause will state that lay members of the commission must be representative of the community in Northern Ireland, but Lords amendment No. 2, which the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) has welcomed, states that the commission must, as far as is practicable,

> "secure . . . a range of persons reflective of the community in Northern Ireland".

How will it help to have the word "representative" in one clause and the word "reflective" in another?

5 pm

Mr. Blunt: As the hon. Lady knows, I think that "reflective" would have been better in the clause that she mentions. As she says, that would have been consistent. I seem to recall that the Liberal Democrats first proposed it in Committee, and I give them credit for that. I am sorry that the Government have not seen fit to accept the proposal.

There was an interesting debate in the other place about the meaning of the terms "representative" and "reflective", which need not be repeated here. I still think that it would be better for the Bill to be consistent. I take on board the argument advanced in the other place that in a sense there is no real distinction between the two words in terms of meaning, apart from the fact that "representative" suggests a duty for people to represent their part of the community. That, however, is why I felt that "reflective" was a better word. Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 2 have the support of the Opposition, as does amendment (a).

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I apologise for not rising earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am still learning the procedures.

The Liberal Democrats support Lords amendment No. 1. We feel that to prevent someone from joining the commission because that person has been convicted of an offence is to fail to recognise that people can reform themselves and serve the community again. I was struck by what Lord Fitt said in the other place:

> "I stand here as a convict. In 1969, I took part in a Civil Rights demonstration in Derry and, later on, in Newry. Those Civil Rights

"demonstrations were banned by the Northern Ireland Government. Anyone who took part in them was sentenced to a mandatory six months' imprisonment. I was part of it, so were John Hume"—

the hon. Member for Foyle—

"and Seamus Mallon"—

the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh—

"and all the political figures who took part in the Civil Rights demonstrations."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 11 June 2002; Vol. 636, c. 26.]

Those people did not go to jail, but that is not the point. The point is that, despite their convictions, they have clearly managed to make a tremendous contribution to their community. Who would deny that they are eminently fit to take part in any activity for which they were qualified?

Like the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), I seized on the word "reflective" in Lords amendment No. 2, thinking that we had won a significant concession. I now realise that that is not entirely true. I still think that "reflective" is a better word to use throughout the Bill, but I am happy to accept it in this instance. I parted company with the hon. Gentleman, however, when he said that the amendment would ensure that the selection of a member of the commission would be, as the Bill says,

"solely on the basis of merit".

The point about the insertion of the words "reflective of the community" is to ensure that we achieve a better reflection of the community than we would if someone simply decided on the basis of merit. In my experience, the phrase

"solely on the basis of merit"

usually means the appointment of a white Anglo-Saxon male and leads to anything but appointments based on merit. We end up with gender and other imbalances. I have no comment to make about Lords amendment No. 23.

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): I followed the Bill's progress in the other place and, as so often, I and my colleagues in the Democratic Unionist party were reminded of the curate's egg. Lords amendment No. 1 creates a difficulty that people in Northern Ireland have whenever they read about a

"commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means".

It is very much a mum-and-apple-pie reference and it is continually used to differentiate between democrats or those who abide by the law and those who do not.

In that context, everyone would agree that the lay members appointed to the commission should have

"a commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means",

but what does that mean in practice? What will happen if someone committed to such a mum-and-apple-pie concept is subsequently proved to be far from committed to non-violence? Although we ask for something more than such a commitment, we agree to the concept in the amendment.

The hon. Members for North Down (Lady Hermon) and for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) referred to Lords amendment No. 2 and to the commission's representativeness. The issue was discussed in Committee in the House, and any commission that is reflective of the community in Northern Ireland is desirable. In the Grand Committee a few weeks ago, I alluded to other appointments that the Government have made and that they maintained were reflective, when a cursory examination demonstrates that they are not. Again, I agree with the concept that the commission should be reflective of the community of Northern Ireland in so far as that is reasonably practical, but what will that mean when it is appointed?

What will we do if we find that the commission is not reflective? The claims of the Unionist community are often glossed over or ignored when such posts are filled, so what will we be able to do to rectify any imbalance that may be created? Again, we support the concept, but we want to see how the practical outworking of the Bill will manifest itself when it becomes law.

The Parliament Under-Secretary for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): I welcome the support that the hon. Members for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) have expressed for the amendments. Other hon. Members who spoke also inferred that they supported them.

As the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) rightly pointed out, Lords amendment No. 1 states:

"A person may not be appointed to be a lay member"

of the Judicial Appointments Commission

"unless he has declared in writing his commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means."

In the interests of reflectiveness, the "he" in that sentence also encompasses "she". It appears that hon. Members welcome that provision. The hon. Member for North Down also raised a point specific to schedule 2, which I shall address in a moment.

Hon. Members will agree that it is right in principle that only those who are committed should have a role in the Judicial Appointments Commission. Making such a declaration also allows those with a past to give a positive affirmation that they are now working for the good of Northern Ireland. As the hon. Member for Reigate said, the amendment was tabled to meet the concerns expressed in the Lords Grand Committee. I welcome his recognition of the Government's efforts to have a constructive dialogue on the legislation, and I hope that that continues today.

By making the required declaration, lay members of the commission will give a positive affirmation that they are committed to exclusively peaceful means. It is right that the people of Northern Ireland should have that assurance. With respect to the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell), it is inappropriate to describe such expressions, which are important in the Northern Ireland context, as mum's apple pie. They are far from that. The declarations are important and those who are called on to make them will give them careful consideration.

The amendment sets out a better approach than that suggested in amendment (a). The idea of excluding people who have been sentenced to a period of imprisonment from serving as a lay member on the commission has been discussed extensively in both Houses. The Government have resisted the idea of excluding such people per se. We are confident that those responsible for making appointments to the Judicial Appointments Commission—the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister acting jointly—will take considerable care to ensure that only those persons who are well suited to the office will be appointed to serve on the commission. It is inconceivable that they would want to appoint disreputable candidates.

[The Parliament Under-Secretary for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne)]

We also need to bear it in mind that those who have been guilty of a criminal offence may genuinely wish to make a constructive contribution to the future of Northern Ireland. In the debate in the other place, it was not only Lord Fitt who recognised that he had been in prison; Lord Maginnis also suggested that he had been in prison at a particular time in the history of Northern Ireland, although he had to persuade people to prosecute him for, I think, failing to pay his road tax or television licence.

We do not automatically wish to preclude such people from making a constructive contribution to the future of Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) made a germane point that the Lord Privy Seal dealt with on the first day of proceedings on Report in the other place, and I could not put it better myself. In addressing the suggestion that such an exclusion should be included in the Bill, Lord Williams of Mostyn said:

> "The whole measure is, when one looks at it . . . quite nonsensical. It would disqualify people of the quality, for instance, of Nelson Mandela. It would nevertheless not necessarily disqualify those with convictions for which they had not received a custodial sentence, although we might rightly abominate them. It would cover every type of criminal offence . . . Therefore, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act would have no place here, nor the concept behind it."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 July 2002; Vol. 637, c. 60.]

The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Down is correct. We have a structure in place that recognises that people who have committed offences can be rehabilitated. Were we to accept the amendment, we would deny that concept.

5.15 pm

Mr. Blunt: In the debate in the other place, Lord Williams did not address the issue of confidence to which I referred. I apologise for trading quotes from the other place, but my noble Friend Lord Mayhew said:

> "We should not lose sight of what everyday people think. We should not lose sight of the distinction between persons, who, notwithstanding their record, are elected to a position in the legislature and those who are appointed on behalf of the Crown to choose the judges."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 11 June 2002; Vol. 636, c. CWH27.]

There is an issue with confidence and what everyday people think.

Mr. Browne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that important point. The issue of perception is always important in Northern Ireland and it must be addressed in these circumstances. However, as I said before, I am considering getting a notice for my desk that reads "Facts are more important than perceptions." At the moment, hardly a day goes by in Northern Ireland when people do not remind me that perceptions are more important than facts. There will be a prize for the person who comes into my office some day and says that facts are more important than perceptions. I stress that it must happen in the office—I do not encourage anybody to say it in the House to win the prize.

The issue raised by the hon. Gentleman may have been addressed by the point made by the hon. Member for North Down that there should be consequences for those who breach the undertaking. As the hon. Lady pointed out, there is no automatic provision in schedule 2 for the removal of a lay member in such circumstances. However, it would clearly be open to the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, in exercising the powers in paragraph 2(4)(d) of that schedule, to remove a member who acted in the way that she described after having given such an undertaking. I have no difficulty with putting that on public record because that is perfectly clear in the Bill, which goes a long way towards striking the right balance between allowing those who have a past to have a future and ensuring that those who give the undertakings now required for serving on the commission stick by them. The Bill ensures that there will be consequences if they do not.

Lady Hermon: I thank the Minister for giving way. He has been very generous this afternoon, which is consistent with his pattern of behaviour. Will he clarify a further point? Two years ago, the House passed the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. Schedule 3, paragraph (8)(2) states:

> "A person is disqualified from being an independent member of a DPP if he has at any time been convicted in Northern Ireland or elsewhere of any offence and has had passed on him a sentence of imprisonment (whether suspended or not)."

What has changed so much in two years that people who have a past are not accepted for DPPs, but are accepted for the Judicial Appointments Commission?

Mr. Browne: I thank the hon. Lady for that point, which she is right to press. However, the functions of DPPs are different from those of the Judicial Appointments Commission. Their composition is different. It would be inappropriate for the Government not to treat these issues on their merits. We seek to build on the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland and change the way in which judges are appointed. To move towards a new Northern Ireland, with the establishment of the Judicial Appointments Commission, we had to look specifically at the make-up of the commission and the requirements on those serving on it. The Government's view, as expressed in the Lords amendment, is that the requirement that lay members make the necessary declaration is sufficient. Schedule 2 covers the circumstances in which such a declaration would be breached. The Government believe that the reasons set out in the Lords debate, which I have sought to paraphrase, are sufficient in relation to the Judicial Appointments Commission.

Moving on to amendment No. 2, while I accept the point about reflectiveness which is consistently made by the hon. Member for East Londonderry, the amendment relates to the pool of people from whom the candidates for judicial appointment will emerge, rather than to the reflectiveness or representativeness of the Judicial Appointments Commission itself, which is dealt with in the Bill. However, I understand the point made by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): There is an absence of automatic sanctions if someone appointed to the commission is in breach of the written declaration, but the Minister said that there was a power for the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to take action. However, what is the position if, for whatever reason, the Deputy First Minister and the First Minister do not agree? As we have seen with breaches of written declarations and other declarations by Sinn Fein-IRA in other contexts, a clear difference of opinion between the First Minister's party and the Deputy First Minister's parties means that they cannot agree, thus causing a problem in the application of any sanctions. How will that be resolved in this context?

Mr. Browne: The resolution of disagreement between the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister is a matter for them acting together. It is not for me—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) finds that risible, but he may not have fully grasped the concept of devolution despite the fact that he has been a Minister in the Executive. I am sure that he would be the first to suggest that Ministers standing at the Dispatch Box should not tell Ministers in devolved Governments how to carry out their functions.

David Burnside (South Antrim) *rose—*

Mr. Browne: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself, it is for Ministers in Westminster to set out the context in which Ministers in devolved Parliaments will work. We are not planning for the failure of devolution, whether in Northern Ireland or any other part of the United Kingdom—we are planning for its success. In Northern Ireland, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister now have significant success in acting on a joint basis, although there have been difficulties. They recently had outstandingly successful discussions and negotiations with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about an economic package for Northern Ireland—that example may be less contentious than other things with which I have to deal at the Dispatch Box. While there may be division between the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister—I cannot think of any examples off the top of my head—there are as many, if not more, examples of them working together, which is what the devolution settlement in Northern Ireland is substantially about.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Belfast, North has looked at schedule 2, which gives the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister acting jointly the power to dismiss a non-judicial member if satisfied that

> "he is otherwise unable or unfit to exercise his functions."

Clearly, that covers circumstances in which someone makes a declaration but fails to live up to it. However, it is not for me to tell the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister how to resolve that together—they are both able politicians and very good Ministers and capable of working it out themselves.

David Burnside: Does the Minister agree that he is not seeing straight? Devolution is different in the three parts of the United Kingdom. The main difference in Northern Ireland, which contradicts the Minister's point, is that there is no collective Cabinet responsibility in the Northern Ireland Executive, so our institutions are not treated in the same way as Parliaments here and in Scotland, or the Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Browne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point, but if we stray too far down that road, the Deputy Speaker might pull me back, and rightly. I merely point out to the hon. Gentleman that the beauty of devolution is that there can be different models for different parts of the United Kingdom. I also remind him—he sometimes needs to be reminded, I think—that the people of Northern Ireland voted for this type of devolution in significant numbers, including some members of his party.

It may be that at some time in the future, a different form of devolved government may be appropriate for Northern Ireland, but that will be a matter again for the people of Northern Ireland. Just as the people of Wales and of Scotland voted for the devolution package that they have, in the majority the people of Northern Ireland voted for the devolution package that they have. If I remember the figures correctly, a majority of both communities in Northern Ireland voted for it.

Amendment No. 2 requires the Judicial Appointments Commission, so far as it is practicable, to ensure that a range of candidates reflective of the community are available for consideration for appointment to listed judicial offices. There is, however, strong competition for appointment to the judiciary, and any appointment must be made on merit. The Government have made it clear that it is desirable to have a reflective judiciary, but that is to be achieved without prejudice to each and every appointment being made on merit.

The new provision focuses on securing a pool of candidates which, so far as is reasonably practicable, is reflective of the community. Membership of the pool in itself gives rise to no expectation of appointment. I repeat: appointment is to be made solely on merit.

Together with the changes made by the Bill to the eligibility criteria and the commitment to a programme of outreach outlined in the review implementation plan, the amendment demonstrates the Government's commitment to a judiciary appointed solely on merit, while giving every encouragement to those eligible from across the whole of society to apply for judicial appointment.

Lady Hermon: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way to me on a second occasion. May I ask him to reflect upon something that he brought to the attention of the Standing Committee? He said—it is a wonderful quotation:

> "I get the sense from the Committee, and from my experience in Northern Ireland, that the growing practice of requiring such bodies to be representative is welcomed in all parts of the community. It generates hot debates about whether, when people are appointed, they are representative, but nobody attacks the principle."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 7 February 2002; c. 275.]

Nobody attacks the principle that bodies should be representative. Why has the language been changed to read "reflective of the community"? There is an inconsistency in the Bill that will have to be interpreted by the courts, and that will lead to difficulties.

Mr. Browne: I was about to come to the difference between "representative" and "reflective", but the hon. Lady brings me to it just as quickly. I do not necessarily agree that there will be a growing body of judicial interpretation distinguishing between "representative" and "reflective". My reading of the debates in which it has been considered suggests to me that there is very little between them, and that it is a nuance, rather than a serious distinction.

Perhaps I can do no better at this stage than to revert to what I did earlier—that is, to go back to Report in the Lords, where Baroness Scotland said:

> "The word 'reflective' best meets the needs of this part of the Bill. If one were to re-write other parts of the legislation"- -

[Mr. Browne]

I digress for a moment to recognise that the women who contributed to the debate contributed sense—

> "one would perhaps use 'reflective', as opposed to 'representative', because it is a much more sensitive word and indicates precisely what we mean. We do not mean that those appointed to other bodies will represent specific contingencies on that body; we mean that they will be reflective of the community. We use that word because it has the nuance that is absolutely essential. In relation to the judiciary, that needs to be underlined because of independence and other factors. To be honest, I believe that we probably would have used the word 'reflective' in the past, but language changes and we choose what is best for today."—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 1 July 2002; Vol. 637, c. 70.]

I think that the answer to the point raised by the hon. Members for North Down and for Cheadle is contained in that quotation. The dynamic of language moves on in Northern Ireland, partly because of the use of "representative" and, on other occasions, "reflective", and the attention that those words have received. That has allowed us to find a word that is better attuned to this part of the Bill.

5.30 pm

Amendment No. 23 is a minor technical amendment. The deleted words are unnecessary, as the First Minister and Deputy First Minister will only ever be able to acquire money appropriated through the Northern Ireland Act 1998. They crept into the Bill by error, although of course they do no harm. An amendment to clause 22—amendment No. 5, which we will debate later—was tabled in the Lords Grand Committee to make further provision regarding money being provided by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. That provision does not repeat the unnecessary words. The deletion of those words therefore seems right and sensible, so that the two provisions dealing with funding by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister are consistent.

Question negatived.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 2 agreed to.

Clause 10

TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS OF JUSTICES OF THE PEACE

Lords amendment No. 3.

Mr. Browne: I beg to move, That the House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 4, 25, 26 and 31.

Mr. Browne: The amendments are technical and relate to the role and functions of lay magistrates. As a result of a major trawl of Westminster and Northern Ireland legislation, we identified those functions which are to remain with justices of the peace, those which are to transfer to lay magistrates and those which will more appropriately lie with resident magistrates. The policy on assignment of the various functions was developed in line with the recommendations of the review report. I am thinking particularly of recommendations 116 and 117, which are to be found at paragraphs 7.53 and 7.54 of the report. The amendments make further technical changes to the Bill to give full effect to the recommendations of the report.

Lords amendment No. 3 explains the relevant subsections of the Treatment of Offenders Act (Northern Ireland) 1968 and the Treatment of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, which relate to the powers that are to be transferred to lay magistrates. It also identifies a further power to allow lay magistrates, when sitting as a magistrates court, to remand to the Crown court, on bail or in custody, a person who has been arrested on a warrant issued by the Crown court.

Lords amendment No. 4 defines the term "function" used in clause 10, which deals with functions transferred from justices of the peace, as a function conferred by legislation passed or made before clause 10 comes into force. The amendment ensures that in future we can confer functions on justices of the peace without those functions automatically transferring to lay magistrates under clause 10.

Lords amendment No. 25 adds article 45 of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 and refers to a list of functions that can be exercised by resident magistrates only. Under it, only a resident magistrate sitting as a magistrates court, not a lay magistrate, shall have the power to issue a warrant for further detention in police custody. That is consistent with the recommendations of the review report with regard to the powers exercisable by lay persons in the criminal justice system. In that regard, I point to recommendation 115 at paragraph 7.52 of the report.

Lords amendment No. 26 is concerned with the Lord Chancellor's power under paragraph 4 of schedule 4. That power allows the Lord Chancellor to make further amendments to legislation dealing with the transfer of functions currently performed by justices of the peace. The amendment provides that this power can be exercised only in relation to existing statutory provisions. The effect is that it will not be possible for the Lord Chancellor, using the power in the Bill, to transfer to other office-holders functions of justices of the peace conferred on them by the new legislation.

Lords amendment No. 31 is entirely technical, and simply removes reference to the advisory committee on juvenile court lay panel members from part 7 of schedule 1 to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The committee is a non-statutory body whose function is to advise the Lord Chancellor on appointments to the office of lay panellist. The functions of lay panellists are to transfer to lay magistrates under clause 11 of the Bill.

Post-devolution, lay magistrates will be appointed by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on the recommendation of the Judicial Appointments Commission. The advisory committee on juvenile lay panel members will, therefore, cease to exist once the new arrangements for the appointment of lay magistrates come into force. Consequently, it is no longer necessary to refer to the committee in the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The requirements of that Act will apply to the Judicial Appointments Commission by virtue of schedule 2(20) of this Bill.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 4 agreed to.

Clause 22

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Lords amendment: No. 5, in page 14, line 15, at end insert—

"(2A) The Attorney General for Northern Ireland is to be funded by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly.

(2B) The Attorney General for Northern Ireland may appoint staff, but subject to the approval of the First Minister and deputy First Minister as to—

(a) numbers,

(b) salary, and

(c) other conditions of service."

Lady Hermon: I beg to move amendment (a) to the Lords amendment, in line 3, leave out 'acting jointly'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 27 to 29.

Lady Hermon: I should explain to the House that we had our own Attorney General in Northern Ireland until direct rule in the 1970s, and clause 22 proposes the return of an Attorney General for Northern Ireland after justice functions have been devolved. That is a key commitment. I was unable to catch your eye earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in order to intervene when the Minister suggested that the people of Northern Ireland had voted for an agreement that contained the provision for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to make the appointment acting jointly. They certainly did not vote for that.

Mr. Blunt: May I invite the hon. Lady to clarify her statement that an Attorney General would return to Northern Ireland following the devolution of justice functions? I am not sure that that is entirely correct. I presume that the Attorney General could be appointed well in advance of many of the functions in the Bill being devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. It could, indeed, be appropriate for the Attorney General to be in place at the very beginning of this process, before many of the functions have been devolved under the powers that the Government are taking. This may be a matter more appropriate for the Minister to respond to, but if the hon. Lady can assist the understanding of the House, it would be helpful.

Lady Hermon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention. I am sure that the Minister will dutifully pick it up at the end of this debate, given the clarity with which he has just taken us through the Lords amendments on lay magistrates, which filled us all with such enthusiasm that none of us could comment afterwards. I am sure that he will be delighted to comment on whether the appointment of the Attorney General should take place before or after devolution.

It had been my understanding that, in accordance with the agreement, the British Government had given an undertaking that, in the context of ongoing implementation of relevant recommendations within the agreement, there would be devolution of responsibility for policing and justice issues, which I took to include the appointment of the Attorney General.

My difficulty with the Lords amendment will come as no surprise to those who served in Committee on the Bill—the words "acting jointly". The hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) and I do not always agree, but I am pleased that we agree that the difficulty will become increasingly apparent after the scheduled elections to the Assembly in May 2003, which could return a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister who could find it exceedingly difficult to act jointly or agree on anything.

I can save those hon. Members who may be rushing out to count the number of times the Bill refers to the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister acting jointly some time. I counted 28 references by the time I reached schedule 2. If we have a commitment to policing and justice issues being devolved to the people of Northern Ireland, it is not helpful to keep repeating that. In fact, it makes the prospect of devolving such issues more distant.

Mr. McGrady: I welcome the further clarification in the Lords amendments of the role of the First and Deputy First Minister in the appointment of the Attorney General. I note that the number of staff and their salaries and conditions of service are also part of their remit. Does the Minister intend to impose any conditions in respect of number, salary and conditions of service or is he content to leave it to the office of the First and Deputy First Minister? Hon. Members will note that I refer to the office—in the singular. There is only one office. The First and Deputy First Minister are elected jointly, and one cannot continue in office on the resignation of the other.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 states specifically that there is only one office, so the incumbents must act together willy-nilly in order to have legality in their decision making. They may find it difficult and be politically opposed in many ways, but it is one of the key points of the Good Friday agreement, with our communities and their representatives acting together for the good of all in Northern Ireland. This is but one expression of that very important principle.

I was surprised to see that the signatories to amendment (a) are David Trimble, Lady Hermon and Roy Beggs, as—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he should refer to hon. Members by their constituencies, not their names.

Mr. McGrady: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Two of the signatories are strong supporters of the Good Friday agreement, whereas the third is totally opposed to it. There seems to be some political incompatibility. I want to emphasise very strongly that to accept the amendment and say that the First and Deputy First Minister should act singly would send a difficult political message to the people of Northern Ireland.

I am aware that the office of the First and Deputy First Minister is a difficult one for the incumbents to engage in. However, to date, it has proved significantly successful in respect of many diametrically opposed policies, and social and economic issues. Those who hold the office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister have come to an agreement, and have been supported by the Assembly in an entire programme of government. They have reached certain agreements on the annual budgetary allocation of our finances, in order to implement that programme. So it

[Mr. McGrady]

is not proven that a great barrier exists to their acting jointly on very difficult matters; in fact, all examples to date prove that it is possible for them to act together, and to be elected together, to serve all the community in the best possible way.

5.45 pm

Although I accept Lords amendment No. 5, I am totally opposed to the amendment to—

Lady Hermon: The Belfast agreement—for which I definitely voted yes, and which I strongly support, as does my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)—explicitly states:

> "The First Minister and Deputy First Minister shall be jointly elected into office".

However, it does not thereafter require them to act jointly. Does not the hon. Gentleman see the incompatibility between proposed new subsection (2A) of Lords amendment No.5, which requires the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to act jointly, and proposed new subsection (2B), which contains no such requirement? I do want devolution to be a success; I simply think that the devolution of justice will be further delayed if we constantly use the phrase "acting jointly".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman replies, I should point out to the hon. Lady that she must learn more precisely the art of intervention. By making her interventions so long, she is in danger of getting round the rule that hon. Members may speak only once in consideration of Lords amendments.

Mr. McGrady: I take the points made by the hon. Lady, but would not the very act of deleting the phrase "acting jointly" suggest strongly that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister could, and perhaps even should, act separately? That would be greatly detrimental to the process. On the alleged disparity between proposed new subsections (2A) and (2B), as a lay person—if not a legalistic one—I would assume that the latter would be subject to the interpretation of the former, in that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister would also act jointly in respect of numbers, salary and other conditions of service. In terms of supporting the Good Friday agreement, the hon. Lady would doubtless agree that for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to act differently in a substantive matter such as this would send entirely the wrong signal.

In conclusion, I welcome Lords amendment No. 5, but I reject the amendment to it.

Mr. Blunt: I am afraid to say that I part company with the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) on this issue, but as I also did so in Committee, it will come as no surprise to her. I agree with the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) in respect of amendment (a), which would leave out the term "acting jointly". The Belfast agreement and the institutions rest on the relationship between the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, and if that relationship does not work, the entire agreement and the institutions will not work either. We are contemplating enacting legislation that will allow the devolution of policing and of justice, so perhaps the most important consideration is our need to rely on that relationship working. If it ceases to work and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister are unable to act jointly in the discharge of their functions, the peace agreement and the process—

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Strange to relate, this House paid tribute to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) when he resigned as Deputy First Minister, but the Conservative party did not then demand that the First Minister resign too. Instead, it supported the proposition that he stay in his post. The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) now argues, very adroitly, that everything is all right and the relationship must be maintained. However, that relationship is now under stress because the First Minister says that IRA-Sinn Fein should be removed, while the present Deputy First Minister says otherwise. That is a real and major issue.

Mr. Blunt: I certainly agree that the relationship is under stress. That stress has caused the institutions to be shaped as they have been. As a purist, I believe that the relationship set out in the legislation is far from ideal, but it stems from the history of the conflict between the two communities in Northern Ireland. I accept that the Democratic Unionist party did not support the Belfast agreement, and that it continues to want to have it renegotiated. It has been consistent in that respect, but supporters of the agreement acknowledge that at the heart of the relationship between the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister lies the necessity of co-operation in the practical discharge of administration in Northern Ireland.

I hope that the necessity that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister discharge those functions together will be part of the process by which the wounds that the two communities have inflicted on each other over the past seven or eight decades—or longer, in the case of the history of the whole island of Ireland—will be bound together. I therefore have much more sympathy with the argument of the hon. Member for South Down than with that of the hon. Member for North Down.

As for the other amendments in this group, I am glad that the Government have had the opportunity to trawl more carefully through the relevant legislation. I am pleased, too, that they have identified those matters of international law that properly will be for the Advocate General for Northern Ireland, and in respect of which he, and not the Attorney General, will be the appropriate Law Officer.

We welcome those improvements to the Bill. I hope that the Minister will assure the House that he has performed a full and comprehensive search and that there are no matters to which we shall have to return.

Mr. Gregory Campbell: I wish to make a few comments about the use of the term "acting jointly". I rarely agree with the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon)—for instance, she signed an early-day motion congratulating the Republic of Ireland football team on its success in the World cup, whereas I signed one congratulating the England team. That shows how far apart she and I are politically.

The term "acting jointly" is superfluous. The office of Attorney General for Northern Ireland will be fundamentally important in law. It should be funded by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, with no need for the term "acting jointly" to be used in the Bill—as it is, ad nauseam. The fact that the term appears again and again shows how weak the Government must feel the two Ministers can be at times.

The words "acting jointly" are unnecessary. One would not have thought that funding the Attorney General for Northern Ireland would require their inclusion in the Bill at all.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Following on from what the previous speaker said, I must tell the House that, on the ground of parity of esteem, I congratulated both the Republic of Ireland football team and the English team on their World cup success. I look forward to teams from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales achieving similar success, and to my having the opportunity to congratulate them as well. I take pride in what these islands achieve, and do not want to hold one island up against the other.

I do not appreciate the logic of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) in respect of the amendment. The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) has made most of the points that I was going to make, so I shall not delay the House. However, if we say that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, acting jointly, must appoint the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, it follows logically that both will have to agree to fund that position, acting jointly. We should therefore keep the phrase in the Bill.

Mr. Browne: Lords amendment No. 5 clarifies two matters in the Bill. In establishing the new Attorney General for Northern Ireland, it is important we should avoid, as far as possible, any potential ambiguities. The Lords amendment has been tabled with that aim in mind.

First, the Lords amendment clarifies that the funding for the new Attorney General is to be provided by the First and Deputy First Ministers. They, of course, will fund the Attorney General from money appropriated by Act of the Assembly.

Secondly, the Lords amendment clarifies that the Attorney General may appoint staff, subject to approval by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister as to numbers, salary and other terms of employment. Those members of staff will become civil servants on appointment.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) asked whether the Government intended to set out the amounts paid in salaries and any other terms and conditions of employment for such staff. I must tell him that the Government singularly do not intend to do that, as those are matters for the Attorney General, subject to any approval required from the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Lords amendment No. 5 was tabled in response to the Northern Ireland Executive's view that the new Attorney General will need such provision in order to carry out his functions. Amendment (a), moved by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), would remove the words "acting jointly". As I said in Standing Committee and on Report, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister must act jointly in exercising their functions in relation to the local Attorney General's office. Generally, they must do so, for the reasons set out by my hon. Friend the Member for South Down and supported by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt).

The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) said that the Bill's repeated use of the term "acting jointly" was otiose and a sign of weakness. I have taken the Bill through the House and have been asked, for purposes of clarity, to express in the Bill many things that I thought were implied by the Bill or that could reasonably be inferred from its wording. However, the Government consider that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister must act jointly, and we believe that it is preferable, therefore, that we make that clear in the Bill. That is why we state as many times as we do in the Bill that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister must act jointly.

Mr. Dodds: The Minister has stressed repeatedly that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister must act jointly, but does not that emphasise that Northern Ireland really has joint First Ministers as, in effect, the First and Deputy First Ministers cannot act separately?

6 pm

Mr. Browne: No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman; his point has no merit. The devolution settlement for Northern Ireland clearly provides for a process for electing a First Minister and a process for electing a Deputy First Minister. *[Interruption.]* It may well be one process, but there is a process for the election of a First Minister and for the election of a Deputy First Minister. In terms of the provisions of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, it may be technically one process. I have not been present when it happens. However, there is a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister and they are not joint First Ministers, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

A number of specific points were raised with regard to the amendments and their effects, which I shall deal with now. The hon. Member for North Down says that the requirement for the Attorney General and Advocate General to work jointly will delay devolution. It is not the Government's intention to devolve justice functions until the institutions of devolution are ready to receive them. An important aspect of whether the institutions of devolution are ready to receive those functions will be the confidence that the First and Deputy First Ministers will be able effectively to discharge the functions that will be imposed on them. It is a question not of delaying devolution but of a judgment having to be made that the institutions are ready to receive those important functions. Part of that judgment will be the ability of the First and Deputy First Ministers to carry out the statutory duties that are required of them, acting in the way that they are required to do.

Proposed subsection (2B) of clause 22 in Lords amendment No. 5 does not have the words "acting jointly" because they are clearly unnecessary there. The provision requires that the First and Deputy First Ministers approve the matters referred to. It makes no difference whether we say that they must approve such matters together or separately, because it amounts to the same thing. Obviously, both of them need to approve such matters before that provision can be satisfied.

[Mr. Browne]

In an intervention on the hon. Member for North Down, the hon. Member for Reigate suggested that the local Attorney General could be appointed at any time. I think that he is technically right, but the local Attorney General will be appointed on devolution. The Attorney General is appointed by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister under clause 22(2). There is no provision that precludes the commencement of this clause before devolution, but the working assumption is that it will commence after devolution.

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way on that point. I would appreciate some clarity. Clause 86 states:

> "The preceding provisions of this Act (with the Schedules) shall not come into force until such day as the Secretary of State may by order appoint."

It continues:

> "An order may appoint different days for different purposes."

In the process of the devolution of justice, I should have thought that the big bang theory would not be the right one. It might be better to put the individuals and posts of Advocate General and Attorney General in place before devolving certain functions. A progressive roll-out of different powers under the Bill might be appropriate.

Mr. Browne: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. Like many that he has made, it may have some merit and I shall consider it. It does not need to be addressed in this debate because, as he says, the flexibility in the Bill can deal with it. I had anticipated that his point would be somewhat different from a progressive roll-out of devolution, but we shall continue to consider it. The intention is not to have an Attorney General appointed other than in the context of devolution, but it may, in the fullness of time, prove more sanguine to appoint such a person in anticipation of the act of devolution so that offices and staff can be in place.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman sought assurance about all consent powers being transferred to the Advocate General where appropriate. We have the order-making power to transfer those powers under clause 28(2), and I shall take into account his observations about the exercise of that power.

Lords amendments Nos. 27, 28 and 29 are purely technical and add further offences to the list of those in relation to which the Advocate General for Northern Ireland must give consent before a prosecution can be undertaken. After devolution, the new local Attorney General will have no power to consent to prosecutions. The Director of Public Prosecutions will exercise most consent provisions, but a very few—in relation to national security and international relations, for example—will be exercised by the Advocate General for Northern Ireland. Schedule 7 lists the offences for which the Advocate General's consent will be required.

I ask the House to agree with the Lords in the said amendments and invite the hon. Member for North Down not to press her amendment.

Question negatived.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 29

PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE

Lords amendment: No. 6.

Mr. Browne: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 7 to 10 and 21.

Mr. Browne: Lords amendment No. 6 makes it clear in the Bill that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be responsible for the funding of the prosecution service prior to the devolution of justice functions. At the time of devolution, this provision will be amended to shift the responsibility for funding to the devolved Administration. Concerns have been expressed in the House that the Bill was not clear enough on the issue, and I hope that the amendment aids understanding of our intentions.

Lords amendment No. 7 is in keeping with the criminal justice review's recommendation that the public prosecution service should establish local offices from which the bulk of prosecutorial work in the respective areas would be conducted. We had originally thought it unnecessary to provide for this in the Bill. However, given that such a power exists in the Prosecution of Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 1972, we thought that we should replicate this in the Bill for the purposes of clarity.

Lords amendment No. 8 expands the existing definition of "police force" in clause 31(6) to include constables appointed under section 57 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. I am advised that there are no such constables in Northern Ireland, but as there is the potential for the appointment, it has to be covered. The Director of Public Prosecutions will be required to take over proceedings instituted by the police forces defined in the clause.

Lords amendments Nos. 9 and 10 are technical. The Bill makes some changes to the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 to add the Director of Public Prosecutions to the list of persons able to refer matters to the police ombudsman. When the Policing Board was established, the 1998 Act was amended so that references to the Police Authority were changed to the Policing Board. Inadvertently, in referring to the 1998 Act the Bill did not reflect those amendments. The amendments that we have tabled would correct that error.

Lords amendment No. 21 deals with the time scale for the establishment of a new public prosecution service for Northern Ireland. That proposal has been widely welcomed and work is already under way to provide for the expansion of the existing Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions. We are aware of the potential pitfalls and have learned from the difficulties experienced in setting up the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales.

Our priority is to ensure that standards in the administration of justice are maintained, that there is an orderly roll-out and that the new service is properly resourced. However, the time scale for establishing the new service should not be left open-ended. The Attorney General has agreed that we should include a sunset clause in the Bill, which would set a time limit of five years for this to happen, although we hope that the actual time scale will be shorter.

The updated implementation plan will, of course, provide further detail on the time scale for the piloting and full roll-out of the new service.

Mr. Blunt: On Lords amendments Nos. 6 to 10, I have nothing to add, other than to thank the Government for proposing them, having tabled them in another place in response to concerns expressed in Committee. They certainly make the position clearer.

I thoroughly welcome Lords amendment No. 21 and the fact that it contains a sunset clause. Again, I draw the attention of the House to a concern represented to me when I was preparing for the Bill, about the prosecution service taking over police prosecutions in Northern Ireland. It was said that there was a collapse in the confidence and enthusiasm of police inspectors who have been responsible for the conduct of prosecutions. I do not know whether those remarks are fair. I sincerely hope that they are not and that there will be a seamless transition within the next five years to the new service.

The Minister told the House that the Government are alive to the potential difficulties—difficulties that were experienced far too widely in England when this process was undertaken. It would be regrettable if we had not learned from that experience to ensure that we could avoid such a situation in Northern Ireland.

I caution the Minister that those concerns have been expressed to me and that it may be necessary to roll out the new prosecution service more quickly than would otherwise be the case, given that it is definitely going to happen. I advise the hon. Gentleman to keep an eye on that and to reassure the House that the new service will be up and running without the difficulties that attended the CPS in England.

Lady Hermon: First, I am delighted that Lords amendment No. 7 is to be included in the Bill, which makes it clear that the Director has the discretion to set up offices in such places in Northern Ireland as he considers appropriate. Hopefully, he will read the text of this debate. I encourage him to think about offices west of the Bann. As someone who comes from County Tyrone, I would be delighted if services were set up there instead of always being focused on Belfast.

Secondly, I am disappointed that the opportunity was not taken in Lords amendment No. 8 to clause 31 to amend the proper title of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to what should be the legal title—the Police Service of Northern Ireland incorporating the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The title was changed for operational purposes only. I regret that that amendment was not made in another place.

6.15 pm

Mr. Browne: With the leave of the House, I will deal with some of the issues raised in this short debate.

The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) rightly draws on his experience in talking to the people in Northern Ireland with whom he meets regularly, which—along with our own discussions with such people—is a valuable source of information to the Government. If concerns have been expressed to him about the confidence of officers who are conducting police prosecutions, he is right to bring them to our attention and I thank him for doing so. However, the police are playing a key role in the establishment of the new service and I am not aware of any lack of confidence or ability on their part. They are represented on the project board that has been set up to take forward the implementation of these provisions. There is ongoing and close co-operation between the police and the DPP's office on the practical outworkings of the changeover.

I will draw the hon. Gentleman's comments, which were made constructively, to the attention of the DPP to ensure that they are addressed in the context of the joint work that is under way with the police.

I welcome the welcome given by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) to the Lords amendments. Her argument about the necessity for the offices of the DPP to be spread across Northern Ireland, to reflect the work load and to ensure that the service is provided to communities locally was well made. I know from my conversations with the Director of Public Prosecutions that he is aware of and alert to the need to ensure that that service, which will be a valuable part of the modernisation of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland is seen to be serving local communities. Indeed, if the system is to meet the objectives set out in the Bill and in the recommendations of the review report, particularly with regard to victims, people in the communities will need to have a relationship with the DPP's office so that information can be communicated. I know that her arguments, which were well made, are part of the DPP's planning for the eventual roll-out.

Given the issues that have been raised, it is appropriate quickly to report on some of the progress that has been made on the programme for the DPP's office since the publication of the Bill. As I said, under the sponsorship of the Secretary of State and the Attorney General, an implementation board has been set up, with representatives not only of the police, but of the Northern Ireland Office and the DPP's office, as well as two independent representatives.

An implementation plan for the establishment of the new service has been approved by the board. It is intended to roll out the new service as quickly as possible and recruitment of professional staff and managers has commenced. People who have seen the Northern Ireland press in past weeks, will have seen the advertisements. Those staff will form the basis of the new service. I can assure the hon. Member for Reigate that I and other Ministers who share responsibility for that area will be keeping a close eye on developments to ensure that the speed with which the changes are made is commensurate with the best interests of justice.

Work is already under way on a revised implementation plan, which the Government hope to publish some time in the autumn. We expect that plan to be a fuller document than the plan that was published in November 2001. A number of respondents to the consultation exercise that followed publication of the original plan said that they would appreciate greater detail, particularly in regard to time scales, which have exercised a number of people, and we will take that on board.

I think that those comments deal with the issues raised and I urge the House to accept the Lords amendment.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 7 to 10 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No 11, insert the following new clause—*Equality and non-discrimination*—

(1) Section 75 (duty on public authorities to have regard to need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between different groups) and section 76 (discrimination by public authorities) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (c. 47) are amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (3) of section 75, after paragraph (cc) insert—

"(cd) the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland;".

(3) After subsection (4) of that section insert—

"(4A) The references in subsections (1) and (2) and Schedule 9 to the functions of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland do not include any of his functions relating to the prosecution of offences."

(4) In subsection (7) of section 76, after paragraph (e) insert—

"(ea) the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland;".

(5) After that subsection insert—

"(8) This section does not apply to a decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland not to institute, or to discontinue, criminal proceedings or, where such a decision has been made, to any act done for the purpose of enabling the decision whether to institute or continue the proceedings to be made or for securing that the proceedings are discontinued.

(9) No injunction may be granted in respect of a contravention of this section by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland unless the court is satisfied that it would not prejudice any decision to institute criminal proceedings or any criminal proceedings.

(10) Where a party to proceedings for a contravention of this section applies for a stay of those proceedings on the ground of prejudice to a decision to institute criminal proceedings, or of prejudice to particular criminal proceedings, the court must grant the stay unless it is satisfied that continuance of the proceedings for the contravention would not result in the prejudice alleged.""

Lady Hermon: I beg to move amendment (a) to the Lords amendment, after "functions of the" leave out "Director of Public Prosecutions" and insert "Public Prosecution Service".

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following: amendment (b), after "decision of the" leave out "Director of Public Prosecutions" and insert "Public Prosecution Service".

Lords amendment No. 30.

Lady Hermon: I preface my remarks by reminding the Minister that he has only a limited opportunity to show his generosity in accepting our amendments, but I hope that on this occasion he will take them on board.

Amendments (a) and (b) relate to the new public prosecution service for Northern Ireland. Members will see that clause 29 defines the new service as consisting of

"the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland . . . the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland, and the members of staff of the service appointed under subsection (3).

The service thus consists of three elements. What I dislike about the Lords amendment is the fact that the equality and non-discrimination duties under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 extend only to one of those elements—the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland. I am sure that Members are familiar with sections 75 and 76 of the Act, which place a duty on public authorities in Northern Ireland to ensure that they promote equality of opportunity among various communities and good relations between people of different political opinions and religious beliefs.

Those statutory obligations are important; they are a positive duty, not to stand still but actively to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. They are twin duties and are mutually compatible, and I can see no good reason why they should attach themselves only to the director and not also to the deputy director and to the members of staff appointed to the new prosecution service for Northern Ireland.

The tenor of amendments (a) and (b), tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and other members of my party, would make the provision more general so that it included all elements of the prosecution service.

Mr. McNamara: I was under the impression that a provision that applied to the Director of Public Prosecutions would include the whole of his department. If it does not, I support the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), but I think that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will show in his speech that my conclusion is correct.

I welcome the Lords amendment, which responds to concerns expressed by Labour Members, by members of the Social Democratic and Labour party and by many non-governmental associations. I welcome the Government's response, although I should have preferred them to table proposals whereby all in one go—in one Act—all the bodies and agencies associated with the criminal justice system were designated for the purposes of sections 75 and 76 of the Northern Ireland Act. That would have been the neatest solution.

Can the Minister tell us if and when other aspects of the criminal justice system will also be brought under sections 75 and 76? Those sections are extremely powerful; they go to the root of enforcing the spirit and philosophy of the Good Friday agreement.

I note that subsection (5) of the amendment is a response to fears expressed previously by the hon. Member for North Down when she raised the spectre that perhaps the DPP would have to fulfil a quota for the prosecution of Protestants or, conversely, of Catholics, in order to maintain parity. The provision would exempt him from that.

Not everyone in Northern Ireland—whether nationalist, republican, loyalist or Unionist—shares the rose-tinted view of some hon. Members that the DPP, judiciary and criminal justice system in Northern Ireland have a blameless past, free from the allegations of discrimination and sectarian practices that plagued the former Royal Ulster Constabulary. On the contrary, many fears exist and they will persist despite the Bill. One element of disquiet, for example, is that some people believe that judges employ differential sentencing policies for Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland convicted of similar offences in similar circumstances.

That is a serious allegation. How can we determine whether it is true or false? Can my hon. Friend the Minister reassure the House and all sections of the community that the system operates fairly? That could be done by careful monitoring.

Such allegations are not unique to Northern Ireland. Statistics show that the same practice is true for whites and non-whites in Britain. Despite the fact that there is provision for equality, the exercise of discretion by any administrative body must always be carefully examined. Will my hon. Friend ensure that those matters are monitored? It is not only in employment practices that discrimination can occur.

I give nine tenths of a wholehearted welcome to the amendment. I should have preferred it to cover all the institutions in the criminal justice system, but my hon. Friend has done that in part and he has listened to what we said.

Mr. Gregory Campbell: Like other Members, I welcome the amendment for the most part. However, in Northern Ireland during the past 15 to 20 years, there have been concerns about section 75 and predecessor legislation relating to the commitment to non-discrimination and the need to promote equality of opportunity for various groups. For example, there is deep concern in some local authorities that the flying of the Union flag acts, in effect, as a cold house for some people—that it is being used as a lever to try to engender complaints or action by public bodies under section 75. That is not only to be regretted, but should be resisted.

However, those public bodies appear not to be concerned that many people in various parts of Northern Ireland—whether in the west, to which the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) alluded earlier, or in the southern border areas—feel that section 75 has not protected their interests or their Britishness. They may endeavour to get local authorities to act under section 75, but because of Irish language groups or the maintenance and promotion of Irish republicanism in various areas, they feel that section 75 has not protected their interests in the way that it should.

6.30 pm

Lords amendment No. 11 is welcome, but future Governments should be prepared to take a very even-handed approach so that those in Northern Ireland, from any section of our society, who feel that they are actively discriminated against or that they are not afforded the same opportunity as others in Northern Ireland can have recourse either through section 75 or other aspects of the law, so that true equality will be offered not just to a section of Northern Ireland, but to everyone in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Browne: I am sure that hon. Members are aware that section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory duty on bodies to

> "have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity"

between groups in the nine categories of people set out in that Act. It also requires them to

> "have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group".

Section 76 makes it unlawful for a body to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion.

I listened with care to the hon. Gentleman's observations and I am glad that he welcomes Lords amendment No. 11. I was not surprised that his welcome was qualified; nor was I surprised that the qualification was that equality was for others than those whom he and his party feel they represent exclusively. Of course, part of the purpose of sections 75 and 76 is to set a statutory framework for just the sort of parity and equality requirements that he seeks for unidentified, generalised groups of people in various parts of Northern Ireland.

As an elected representative, it is for the hon. Gentleman, as it is for me as a Minister, to articulate the importance of such equality and, indeed, human rights to all people across the whole community in Northern Ireland and to help people to exercise their rights under the equality and human rights provisions.

If the hon. Gentleman has specific concerns about the equality requirements in Northern Ireland not being applied evenly to certain categories of people in particular locations, there is the Equality Commission. I am sure that he has brought all the concerns that he has articulated to the attention of the Equality Commission. If he has not, I recommend that he does so because those on the commission are the experts and can advise the individuals involved how to get redress and, where rights are judicable, to seek to enforce them if necessary.

If just the sort of people whom the hon. Gentleman mentions take advantage of the equality and human rights provisions in the settlement for Northern Ireland, in the Good Friday agreement—the Belfast agreement—and in other provisions, we will drive forward the new Northern Ireland. So he should not only identify the problems, but seek the legislative solutions that exist and take advantage of the support offered by the commission, particularly in relation to equality.

If the hon. Gentleman cannot do so and if he writes to me specifically about his concerns, I will seek to ensure that he and his constituents or others receive the advice that they need about how to take advantage of the statutory structure that we have put in place since coming to power to ensure that people are not treated in the way in which he says that they are being treated. However, I have limited responsibility for equality issues—much of the ministerial responsibility for such matters lies with Ministers in the devolved Administration, not with the Northern Ireland Office. Having been a Minister in the devolved Administration, the hon. Gentleman will know full well how to get the necessary advice from the Executive in Northern Ireland.

I am sorry that I have had to refer to those issues, but it seemed from the hon. Gentleman's contribution to the debate that he did not know how to seek redress in relation to them. If he does not, my office is open to give him the advice that he needs, although he may need to approach other Ministers as well.

I shall now come to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). Sections 75 and 76 cover the bodies created under the Bill, by virtue of Lords amendment No. 11. My understanding is that other criminal justice agencies are already covered, but he seemed to suggest that some in Northern Ireland were not covered. I am not sure to which organisations or agencies he was referring, but if he cares to intervene now to tell me, I shall try to give an answer. However, if he wants to write to me, I shall deal with the issue in detail.

Mr. McNamara: I refer to the judiciary apart from the justice system.

Mr. Browne: I think that my hon. Friend will find that those in the justiciary in Northern Ireland are more than adequately covered because of the oath that they take. I repudiate his suggestion that the criminal justice system—in particular, the judiciary and the Director of Public Prosecutions—act in a discriminatory fashion in prosecuting those involved in crime in Northern Ireland.

Indeed, I want to put on record, not in any rosy fashion, my and my fellow Ministers' appreciation of the significant bravery of prosecutors and other lawyers, including judges, in Northern Ireland in the face of significant danger for some 30 years. They have ensured that justice has been done and earned an enviable reputation for Northern Ireland in the face of significant dangers and problems for justice.

That is not to say that there have not been miscarriages of justice. Indeed, there have been in Scotland and England—and I suppose that there have been in Wales, although I cannot think of one off the top of my head now. There probably have been miscarriages of justice throughout Europe and the civilised world. However, the fact is that, in the United Kingdom, if judges act or are thought to have acted in a discriminatory fashion in the way that my hon. Friend suggests—although non-specifically—there is a review process that allows such issues to be raised on appeal. The same cannot be said for all parts of the world.

It may have taken too long for some miscarriages of justice to be corrected, but increasingly over the years the House and Parliament have sought to address those issues as they have become apparent. I am not saying that there have been no miscarriages of justice; I am saying that there has not been the discrimination in relation to prosecutions that my hon. Friend suggests has taken place. If he is suggesting that such discrimination is systemic in the judicial system of Northern Ireland, it behoves him not to refer in an airy-fairy way to some studies, but to suggest specifically where the evidence can be found.

Mr. Blunt: I simply want to thank the Minister for going to the trouble of making such a robust statement, with which I fully associate Her Majesty's loyal Opposition.

Mr. Browne: Finally, on this point—for the sake of completeness—the Northern Ireland court service is covered by section 75, which places an equality duty on all Government agencies. Clearly, it would not be appropriate for such provisions to cover the judiciary, as, of course, those issues are covered by the judicial oath.

Lords amendment No. 11 makes the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions subject to those duties. We have identified certain limited safeguards that will give the protections necessary to ensure the continuing independence of the DPP. As is clear from the amendment, we have exempted the prosecution process from this duty, for the reasons that I articulated on several occasions in Committee and perhaps even on Report. The exemption can be found at subsections (3) and (5) of the new clause introduced by the amendment. That means that prosecution decisions and policies relating to such decisions are exempted. I explained in Committee the sorts of difficulties that would arise if we attempted blanket coverage of the DPP's office, but we have assured ourselves that, with those safeguards in place, we can meet the duties that we have accepted. That explanation refers to some of the other remarks made by my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

The obligations under sections 75 and 76 will apply to the DPP, for example, in relation to the recruitment of public prosecutors, despite the exception for which we have provided in Lords amendment No. 11. Of course, they will continue to apply in the same manner once the new public prosecution service is established.

The purpose of amendment (a), tabled by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), is, as I understand it, to ensure that the DPP's entire organisation—the entire public prosecution service—is covered by these duties and not just the head of the organisation. To aid the House's understanding of the way in which the Act is structured, I should point out that sections 75 and 76 do not bite on individuals but on functions. That is why the functions are transferred, not the service. I hope that hon. Members will be reassured when I say that all of the functions of the prosecution service are, in fact, vested in the DPP. Without going into too much detail, that is done particularly in clauses 31 to 33 of the Bill, in which the functions are transferred, and conferred on the director.

We agree with hon. Members that the whole organisation should meet those duties. The duties are imposed on the functions, and the functions are conferred on the DPP, although they are carried out in a delegated fashion, in some cases by others. By the process of making the DPP subject to the provisions, the functions of the DPP are bitten on. I hope that hon. Members are satisfied that the Bill already provides for that.

The equality obligations under sections 75 and 76 will also apply to the criminal justice inspectorate and the Law Commission, which are designated by Lords amendment No. 30 in this group. We examine every new body created by the Government to see whether it should be designated under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 for equality purposes. I see no reason why any exception should be made in respect of those bodies. We intend them to operate in an open and transparent fashion.

Question negatived.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 55

CUSTODY CARE ORDERS

Lords amendment: No. 12, in page 38, line 3, at end insert

";but the appropriate authority may, with the consent of the Secretary of State, at any time discharge a child who is being so kept."

Mr. Browne: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 13 to 17.

6.45 pm

Mr. Browne: All the amendments in this group relate to part 4 of the Bill—the provisions dealing with youth justice—and all effect minor refinements to those provisions.

Lords amendments Nos. 12 to 14 amend the provisions dealing with the new form of disposal for children under 14—the custody care order. The relevant provisions are found in clause 55. Within clause 55, new article 44B provides for the legal regime under which a child subject to a custody care order will be detained. It does that by applying certain provisions of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 to such children and by excluding the application of all other provisions. Children held under a custody care order will be held in accommodation provided within the care system. We therefore think it right to draw on the provisions contained in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 in shaping the legal regime under which children should be held.

It was brought to our attention, however, that we had inadvertently excluded the application of certain provisions of the 1995 order that apply to all children, whether looked after by an authority or not. We did that by referring exclusively to certain provisions, and, because reference was not made to other provisions, those would be deemed not to apply. It is a principle of statutory interpretation that if one expresses some provisions and excludes others, one is deemed not to have wanted the others to apply to that situation.

On any view, those provisions should not have been excluded. That is addressed by Lords amendment No. 13, which has the effect that those provisions of the 1995 order which apply to children being looked after by an authority, and which we consider should be applied to children who will be held under a custody care order, are applied. However, the key difference between Lords amendment No. 13 and the provision in the Bill is that the amendment is predicated on the basis that all the other general provisions of the 1995 order will apply unless specifically disapplied. As a result, important wider protections, such as those contained in article 3 of the order—which provides that when a court determines any question with regard to the upbringing of a child or the administration of his property, the child's welfare will be the paramount consideration—continue to apply.

I should also draw the attention of hon. Members to two specific points. First, the amended article now applies the provisions of article 45 of the 1995 order. That will mean that the case of a child being held under a custody care order must be reviewed by the authority holding the child, and that the authority must have a procedure for considering representations by or about the child. That will help to strengthen the process of managing a child's period in secure accommodation and thus deserves to be included in the clause.

Secondly, hon. Members may notice that the recast article—new article 44B—does not contain provision relating to the discharge, at any time, of a child in secure accommodation by the appropriate authority, with the consent of the Secretary of State. That provision is currently in new article 44B(4). Hon. Members will be reassured that there has been no change of substance here, merely one of drafting. By virtue of Lords amendments Nos. 12 and 14, the provision has simply been moved to a more logical position, in new article 44A(6) and new article 44F(3)(b), where it is associated with the definition of periods to be spent in secure accommodation. Again, the meaning and purpose of the provision has not changed.

Let me now deal with the remaining amendments in the group, which address youth conferences. Again, the amendments do not change the substance of what the House has agreed to.

New article 3B(1) provides that the Secretary of State may make rules governing the procedure of youth conferences. It is expected that the rules will be used to set time limits for the various stages of the conference process, and for the performance of the various functions of the conference co-ordinator. Because of the way in which they are drafted, however, they cannot be used to make provision about youth conference plans—in particular, to set a time limit within which the person monitoring compliance with a plan arising from a diversionary conference must submit his final report to the director.

As the director may, on the basis of the report on compliance, still instigate proceedings against the child if he believes that the plan has not been complied with to a significant extent, we think it right to set a time limit for this stage of the process. Without it, the child may have the threat of prosecution hanging over him for an indefinite period. Lords amendment No. 15 therefore empowers the Secretary of State to make rules establishing a time limit for submission of the report to the director.

As we intend to specify a time limit, it is not appropriate for the Bill to require the making of the report

"as soon as is reasonably practicable",

as it does currently in new article 10D. Lords amendment No. 16 therefore seeks to delete those words from new article 10D.

New article 33C(1) provides that a child may be referred to a conference only if he lives in an area where the new system is in place. That will allow us to pilot the new arrangements and also, if necessary, to stagger the subsequent roll-out of the conferencing system.

The purpose of Lords amendment No. 17 is simply to clarify that this applies equally to both mandatory referrals to a conference, provided for in new article 33A(1), and discretionary referrals, provided for in new articles 33A(3) and 33A(4).

Mr. Blunt: What a treat is the opportunity to debate youth justice! Of course, we owe the privilege to the passing of amendments in another place, having failed so conspicuously—given the programming—to engage in substantive discussion of any youth justice provisions here.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Disgraceful.

Mr. Blunt: It was indeed disgraceful. The only good thing to be said as we begin our very brief and, sadly, tangential discussions is that this is an appropriate time at which to welcome the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) to the Government's Northern Ireland team. Unfortunately he is not present to hear this paean of praise, but I would like to tell him—he being a Whip—that things can only get better from our point of view, after the shocking way in which the first part of this process was managed.

It might not have been necessary to remedy the unintended results of the legislation if we had had a chance to consider here the matters put right by Lords

[Mr. Blunt]

amendments Nos. 12 to 14, but I am happy to accept the Government's view. I merely want to draw their attention to my slight anxiety about the timetables that would be introduced by the Secretary of State under the powers that Lords amendment No. 15 would confer on him.

The arguments in favour of the amendment have focused on the establishment of a set time within which a child who was, as it were, at the wrong end of the provisions would wait for the identification of non-compliance and of the reasons for it. It is just possible that if the Secretary of State lays down a timetable that is too tight, and the bureaucracy that will inevitably surround youth conference orders bogs down the limited number of people who will administer the system—thus preventing them from meeting the timetable—we will inadvertently let off offenders who have not complied.

In other respects I welcome the proposals. I am concerned only about the ability of the timetable to be consistent with administrative resources.

Mrs. Calton: I welcome the amendments, which go a long way towards meeting the concerns of, in particular, the Liberal Democrats. We tabled a series of amendments on youth justice. I am especially pleased to note the amending of clause 55 in Lords amendment No. 13(3)(g).

The introduction of article 45 deals with many of the issues that concerned me. It ensures that there will be an opportunity for review; it requires the views of the child to be taken into account; it provides for a review of the suitability of accommodation; it informs the child of his rights; it ensures that he is kept informed; it ensures that arrangements are monitored; and, most important, it requires the establishment of a complaints and representation procedure to include the child and others with an interest in his welfare. I am also pleased to note that an independent person will take part in the representations and follow up discussions.

Lords amendment No. 14 responds to some of the worries about children under 14 being given youth custody orders for up to 30 days. In some cases that may take them to the age of 14. I am glad that the amendment will allow the sentence to be varied.

As the Minister said, Lords amendment No. 15 allows the Secretary of State to make procedural rules for youth conferences. I am pleased that the Minister concerned will have an opportunity to ensure that young people's needs are full met. I am also pleased that Lords amendment No. 16 tightens the requirement for a report on compliance with the youth conference plan, and will ensure that there is no drift in procedures.

I think that we are closer to recognising that although young offenders should be given a chance to reform and make restoration, and while it may occasionally be necessary to protect the public from them, they will often be in need themselves—in need of the protections afforded to children in the care system generally. Their human rights must be protected.

Mr. Browne: I am glad that the hon. Members for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) welcome the proposals. As the hon. Member for Reigate probably knows, I share his regret that we could not debate the provisions relating to this part of the Bill, but I am buoyed by the scrutiny that they received in the other place.

The hon. Gentleman made a limited but, I think, important point about the timetable, suggesting that if it were too tight it might not be met. He said that that might be detrimental to the young person involved, because if there was not enough time for administration that would be taken to constitute his failure to comply.

I think that the hon. Gentleman accepts that it would be unfair to allow the threat of prosecution to hang over a child for an unspecified period. The establishment of a timetable is more consistent with our intentions in regard to the various stages of the conference process. In setting limits, however, we will bear in mind the issues that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. I will specifically ensure that as the programme is introduced progressively, with pilot schemes, we regularly take account of the inevitable tension caused by demands on administration, along with the need to ensure that young people are given enough time to carry out the requirements of an order.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 13 to 17 agreed to.

7 pm

Clause 71

LOCAL COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS

Lords amendment: No. 18.

Mr. Browne: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss the following:

Lords amendment No. 19

Lords amendment No. 20, in clause 82, page 67, line 2, at end insert—

"(za) in paragraph 9, after sub-paragraph (g) insert—

"(h) local community safety partnerships."."

and amendment (a) thereto, leave out line 3 and insert—

"(h) community safety.".".

Mr. Browne: Lords amendment No. 18 will make it absolutely clear that the membership of local community safety partnerships will be drawn from organisations exercising statutory functions. These organisations will be invited to nominate individuals from within their organisations to represent them on the partnerships.

The amendment is designed to clarify policy and to put our intentions in this regard beyond doubt. We have already taken steps to clarify the policy in discussion and in correspondence, and we have taken the opportunity of the amendment to set out the policy in statute. The amendment will allow the relevant organisations exercising statutory functions, such as district councils and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, to be included. Lords amendment No. 19 provides that the Secretary of State must publish or require a local community safety partnership to publish the plans and reports produced by the community safety partnerships.

Lords amendment No. 20 will add local community safety partnerships to the list of organisations set out in schedule 3 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This will pave the way for them to be devolved along with other criminal justice functions once a decision has been taken to transfer responsibility for such matters to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

A similar amendment was made in this House in respect of the other new bodies created under this Bill—the criminal justice inspectorate and the new Northern Ireland Law Commission. It makes sense to treat these partnerships similarly. It is essentially a technical amendment designed to facilitate the devolution of these bodies in due course and, as such, I trust that it will meet with the approval of the House.

Amendment (a) is in the name of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and it seeks to add the words "community safety", rather than "local community safety partnerships", to schedule 3 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which sets out the list of reserved functions. The term "community safety" covers a wide range of functions and activities. Many of them are already devolved to the Northern Ireland Administration. For example, the provision of street lighting and traffic-calming measures is the responsibility of the Department for Regional Development.

Social services have a statutory responsibility to divert young people from crime. It would therefore be inconsistent with the devolution of these functions to include a generic term such as "community safety" in the schedule. The local community safety partnerships are being added to the schedule to facilitate their being devolved when the time is right. I do not think that we need to extend the provision more widely, so I ask that amendment (a) be withdrawn.

Mr. Blunt: Her Majesty's Opposition welcome Lords amendments Nos. 18 and 19 as significant improvements to the Bill. We shall support them, as we understand that they were the product of informal discussions between the Government and the Opposition. They are a satisfactory way to proceed.

However, it is appropriate to remind the Government that their approach to community safety receives the support of only a minority of parties in Northern Ireland. We continue to have serious concerns about the continued overlap between district policing partnerships and community safety partnerships. That concern is shared by all parties to the Policing Board—they do not want separate partnerships established—and by the review that took place. I shall not delay the House by reading out paragraph 11.61 of the review, as the Minister will be familiar with its contents. The recommendation there is precisely the opposite of the Government's intended action. Indeed, recommendation 196 of the Government's implementation plan is put down for further consideration.

I invite the Government to continue to give the matter further consideration. The plethora of bodies in Northern Ireland and the different duties placed on district councils, in particular, and on the bodies to which the councils have to nominate people is a strong argument for the Government to find a way of simplifying the way in which they establish community safety. They should do that within a proper partnership for community safety and by using the institutions of the district policing partnerships. We hope that, in due course, the Government will make the position clearer and remove the overlapping responsibilities that currently exist.

Lady Hermon: The Minister is left with one opportunity—this is it—to be generous to me this evening. I hope that he will respond appropriately.

Amendment (a) specifically requests that the reserved matter should refer not just to "local community safety partnerships" but more broadly to "community safety". In fact, clause 70 refers to "community safety" and subsection (1) says:

> "The Secretary of State must devise a strategy for enhancing community safety in Northern Ireland."

Subsections (3) and (4) add:

> "The Secretary of State may from time to time devise a new strategy or make alterations to a strategy . . . Before devising or making alterations to a strategy the Secretary of State must consult . . . the First Minister and Deputy First Minister"

even when they are not acting jointly. With that in mind, we wished the reserved matters to be extended to include community safety per se and not just the narrow matter of local community safety partnerships.

We are delighted with Lords amendment No. 18. It is a huge improvement on the original provision in the Bill. Clause 70(3) originally left the membership of local community safety partnerships to be specified in an order made by the Secretary of State. We are pleased to see him in the Chamber and are in no way questioning his integrity, but the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 goes to great lengths—five pages in all—to set out the composition of district policing partnerships. The Bill, however, contains only one and a half lines on the composition of local community safety partnerships.

We wanted the Government to cast some light on what the proposal would mean in practice. We were therefore delighted that the Government listened to the representations made in the strongest terms by my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)—I am sure that we all recall that meeting—and accepted Lords amendment No. 18. We now know that a local community safety partnership

> "is to consist of such number of persons nominated by such organisations exercising statutory functions as the Secretary of State may by order specify".

That will include the new Police Service of Northern Ireland and organisations such as health boards, which we welcome. It closes the door to paramilitary infiltration into local community safety partnerships.

The one outstanding issue relates to the functions of the local community safety partnerships, and we would welcome further meetings and correspondence with the Minister on that. It arises from a concern that stems from the Patten report, which recommended that the district policing partnership boards, as they were then called, should have the power to buy in additional police facilities and services. However, that recommendation was omitted from the 2000 Act. It remains a live concern to party colleagues and the Unionist community that local community safety partnerships may be the vehicle by which the partnerships have that function.

The Secretary of State has the power to make grants to local community safety partnerships. Guidance and clarification has to be given on how the safety partnerships will spend that money. We need to know that

[Lady Hermon]

paramilitary organisations will not organise themselves into local security firms that take advantage of the grants. The issues are still relevant and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss them with the Minister.

Mr. Browne: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall respond to the debate.

A number of important issues have been raised. As I said, I am afraid that I cannot be generous and accept amendment (a). I know that that spoils my reputation for generosity, but the phrase that the hon. Lady wants to insert would put functions that are already devolved into the reserved category. I understand and agree with her arguments, but we cannot put the generic phrase "community safety" into the provision and consequently reserve everything to do with community safety because that would reverse the decision to devolve some functions.

I cited the specific examples of provisions relating to street lighting and traffic calming, which are important for community safety. Those are already the responsibility of the Department for Regional Development. I also explained that the work by social services to divert young people from crime is devolved and cannot be put back into the reserved category. My instincts are to be generous to the hon. Lady because I understand her concern, but what she wants cannot be achieved in the way she suggests.

7.15 pm

However, discussions about the issues in relation to community safety can continue. The hon. Lady will be aware from the meeting to which she referred that the Northern Ireland Office published a consultation document, "Creating a Safer Northern Ireland Through Partnership", that deals with the membership of community safety partnerships, operational matters relating to community safety partnerships and the functions of community safety partnerships.

Strictly speaking, that consultation period has concluded, but the door remains open if the hon. Lady's party wants to respond. In addition, if a party does not want to respond but has issues to raise, I will discuss those with it. Indeed, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss aspects to do with safety with any party.

It is not the Government's intention to create tension between DPPs and community safety partnerships. We want to create a sensible working partnership between DPPs, community safety partnerships and other organisations that exercise statutory functions. One problem in Northern Ireland is that there are 26 local councils to deal with, which is a significant amount for a comparatively small number of people.

Mr. Blunt: Twenty five oppose the Government.

Mr. Browne: I know where the hon. Gentleman got that figure from but, as the person who possesses the responses to the consultation document, I know that it is not correct.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): It is only 24.

Mr. Browne: I had the figure checked today and it is only one, but it is not a question of how many people are against or in favour of an argument. What matters is the strength of the argument. The Government do not intend to create an administrative structure for community safety partnerships that works against the grain of other structures. We are aware of the recommendation of the criminal justice review that the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) mentioned, and I have addressed the idea of creating a single body to undertake the role envisaged for DPPs and community safety.

The recommendation was considered carefully. At the time, DPPs had not been established, and they still have not been. The Government thought that it would be inappropriate to give the new body additional functions before it was established. There were also more fundamental reasons for not following the recommendation. It is essential that community safety partnerships are composed of those statutory organisations with responsibility for service delivery. The DPPs, however, will be made up of elected representatives and independent members, as the hon. Gentleman knows. The criminal justice review recognised that it is important not to disturb that balance and did not propose changing the membership. It suggested that the proposed body should work in partnership with statutory bodies.

In consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other Ministers, I concluded that that arrangement would not be as effective because it excluded the service delivery organisations from the partnership. Experience in England and Wales shows that crime and disorder partnerships are most effective when statutory organisations are engaged in the process. Legislative changes are being made in England and Wales to ensure that that happens, and I am sure that they will have the support of the hon. Gentleman and his party.

This point will not be lost on the hon. Gentleman: it is essential that the police are involved in community safety. They must be actively involved in community safety partnerships, but they are not members of the DPP. Those are the fundamental, logical and sensible reasons for the conclusion that the DPP, as envisaged under the Police (Northern Ireland) Act, is not the appropriate vehicle for the delivery of community safety, although it was considered by the review.

Mr. Blunt: We can change that.

Mr. Browne: Of course we can change it. That is why there is a Parliament—so that we can change the law. It can be changed, but not without consideration of the consequences for policing and the structure of the Policing Board and the DPP. It should not be changed to allow community safety to be the driver when there are many other policing considerations that relate to the structure of the Policing Board and the functioning of the DPPs—in fact, the DPPs have not yet been set up. Both of those organisations have a long way to go. No final decisions about functions have been made.

The Bill, as amended by the other place, contains enabling legislation for community safety partnerships. A structure is in place that allows a significant degree of flexibility, but the Bill, rightly, also includes the safeguards sought by hon. Members. It is not that we want to keep the bodies separate, it is just that the DPP was established for a particular purpose, with a particular membership and has a policing focus. Clearly many of the issues that are the responsibility of the DPP and the Policing Board impact on community safety. There are shared functions and responsibilities. To change the function now would require a completely different membership of the DPP.

We may need to return to those issues later. However, the current framework allows us the flexibility to respond, through the consultation, to the concerns that others share about how the process will work. The Government intend to have a process that will work sensibly and with the grain of other organisations, particularly DPPs. All that takes place in the context of the review of public administration undertaken by the Northern Ireland Executive. Many aspects of the structure of Northern Ireland society that are relevant to community safety are currently changing, and those changes must be taken into consideration. The dialogue continues. We now have provisions in the Bill that allow us the framework, but with the necessary safeguards sought by hon. Members. We can continue the dialogue in that context, as the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) requested.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments No. 19 to 21 agreed to.

Clause 89

STATUTORY RULES

Lords amendment: No. 22.

Mr. Browne: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 24 and 32.

Mr. Browne: I am delighted that we have come to the last group of amendments in the time allocated for the debate, which, on this Bill, is a significant achievement, and I am pleased that we have been able to debate the amendments to the extent desired by hon. Members.

The report of the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee accepted that the 16 powers in the Bill to amend it or other legislation were an appropriate delegation. However, it recommended four changes in favour of the affirmative procedure.

First, the Committee felt that the Assembly's power to omit an office from the list of those subject to the Judicial Appointments Commission under schedule 1 was of such constitutional importance that it should be subject to the affirmative procedure. Secondly, the Committee felt also that any order removing an office from the list of those for which the oath must be taken or affirmation made merited the affirmative procedure. The third change concerned orders adding or omitting organisations from the list of organisations within the criminal justice inspectorate's remit. Finally, the Committee also recommended that the affirmative procedure is appropriate for any decision to abolish the court service, as Parliament would also want to debate such a change.

Lords amendment No. 22 effects the changes recommended by the Committee, and Lords amendments Nos. 24 and 32 are consequential.

Lady Hermon: We are very pleased that the use of the affirmative resolution procedure has been extended. Lords amendment No. 22 caught my eye because it refers to clause 45(6)(a), which says that the Secretary of State may by order amend the list of bodies to be inspected by the chief inspector of criminal justice. It is with bitter regret that I find that the comprehensive list, which we understood would be with us before the Bill left the House, has not appeared this evening.

The Minister wrote to me about the matter on 18 March. I thought that it was more recent, but obviously time flies when I am enjoying myself. In that letter, he said,

> "I am using my best efforts to produce a comprehensive list of organisations to come within the remit of the Chief Inspector. I will aim to maintain this momentum, while providing for proper consultation with the organisations concerned before final decisions are taken."

I take it that the final decisions are to be taken this evening, and we will not have a comprehensive list.

I accept that the Minister uses his best endeavours, so I should like him to explain where the foot-dragging has occurred. Was it by the organisations that were consulted? Why has it taken so long to draw up a comprehensive list? Will he tell the House about four specific organisations that have been consulted for months? They are Consignia—that dreadful name will quickly be replaced by "Royal Mail" again, thank goodness—the police ombudsman for Northern Ireland, the Financial Services Authority and the Electoral Office. Specifically, how many meetings took place with those organisations, particularly the police ombudsman? It would have helped to restore confidence in her office if it had been included in the remit of the chief inspector of criminal justice.

7.30 pm

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) for giving me an opportunity to explain why I could not meet the target that I set myself in that list. I hope that I can reassure her that the list will be subject to affirmative procedure and must be debated, so we have not lost the opportunity to discuss it in the House.

I could not meet the target that I set myself despite the fact that I kept in close touch with the process and ensured that my officials kept in touch with our correspondents. The hon. Lady is right in her interpretation—certain organisations did not respond. Unfortunately, I do not have specific information with me, and do not wish to say which organisations did, or did not, respond in time, lest I make an error and wrongly list one as not having responded. Consignia's response, however, was not lost in the post, as was thought—I received it today. In Consignia's favour, my recollection is that it was almost unique in unequivocally welcoming inspection. I know that there has been a response from meetings with the police ombudsman. I cannot speak about the Financial Services Authority or the other organisation that the hon. Lady mentioned, as I do not have specific information to hand, but I will write to her.

A surprising number of organisations asked for more time to work out the implications of inspection. We granted an extension because if there was to be a consultation, that was the sensible thing to do. In another place, my noble Friend Lord Williams undertook to provide an update letter when Members return after the recess. I give the same undertaking to this House, and that

[Mr. Browne]

letter will be provided to hon. Members too. I shall write to the hon. Lady about all the organisations, giving her precise information about when they were written to, how many meetings have taken place and who has responded. I guarantee that over the recess I will ensure that that process is pursued with vigour.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments 23 to 32 agreed to.

Opposition Day

[17TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Northern Ireland Peace Process

7.33 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I beg to move,

> That this House regards the Belfast Agreement as representing the best hope for peace and normalisation available or likely to be achievable in Northern Ireland; is deeply concerned, therefore, at the failure by both Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries to implement essential aspects of it, including decommissioning, which should have been completed two years ago; welcomes recent conciliatory statements by the President of Sinn Fein and the Loyalist Commission; believes that continuing evidence of military activity by Sinn Fein-IRA makes it clear that this organisation has been in breach of its obligations under the ceasefire and the Agreement; regards as quite inconsistent with any declared adherence to democratic methods the failure by the chairman of Sinn Fein to condemn the attempted murder of a Catholic policeman in Ballymena; considers that no peace process can succeed unless rewards only follow performance, and that there is some penalty for breaches; and calls upon all parties to do all they can to contribute to the implementation of the Agreement, forbearance, mutual understanding and respect between the two communities in Northern Ireland, and avoidance of all forms of violence.

Our intention in tabling the motion and our decision to call this debate appears to have borne fruit already. It is significant and welcome that the IRA issued a statement of apology at 5 pm—presumably the time when it thought the debate would start, not knowing that it would be preceded by a statement in the House. A fundamental premise of the Opposition's policy on Northern Ireland and the peace process, to which I shall have occasion to return in the next few minutes, is that it should include an element of reciprocity or balance. Good behaviour should be rewarded, but bad behaviour should be penalised. People who fulfil their obligations should get their due reward, but people who break them should face sanctions.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: There is almost no other Member to whom I would give way so early in my speech. If the First Minister will allow me to finish the next few sentences, I shall give way to him then.

The IRA statement is clearly an exceptional event in Northern Ireland—apologies do not come easy to any of us, and are rare in the history of Northern Ireland and, I believe, unprecedented in the peace process and the troubles, which together have lasted for 30 years. It follows that we should be prepared to respond positively to what, after all, are only words, albeit important words. Deeds will and must follow, but it is right for us to take account in our deliberations of the positive aspects of the IRA statement. My recommendations to the Government will be influenced by this evening's event.

Mr. Trimble: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way so early in his speech. Does he agree that the apology from the IRA tonight may have been prompted by the investigative pieces on which some journalists have been working for the anniversary of bloody Friday in a few days' time and questions being asked about the complicity of certain individuals in those murders and bombings? He said that good actions should be rewarded and evil deeds punished. Does he not agree that it is significant that the statement says nothing at all about the recent violence in which the IRA has been involved and nothing about its future conduct? Consequently, it does not release the Prime Minister from the need to make clear what the Government will do in the event of breaches by the republican movement. If the Government use it as an excuse not to fulfil those undertakings, they will create a very dangerous situation indeed.

Mr. Davies: I very much agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Clearly an apology of that kind, as I said, is not a deed or act of decommissioning, or the winding-up of the IRA. We need dramatic deeds from all concerned if we are to make a success of the peace process. Nevertheless, what has been said this evening should not be ignored—it would be irresponsible to do so. People who have lost family members to terrorism in the past 20 to 30 years will not be minded to take seriously any statement from that quarter—I thoroughly understand that. However, we have a responsibility to determine policy for the nation as a whole, and must do so on the basis that I have set out. We must respond positively when there is clearly a will on the other side to take a positive step forward.

The reason for the IRA's decision to make a statement is a matter of speculation, and the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has given the House his interpretation. The fact that he and I in our different ways have been putting pressure on the Government to introduce more discipline in the process is probably not irrelevant to this evening's news. As for the timing, it looks as if the debate brought the statement forward. Clearly, however, there has been a careful rethink in the IRA, and we must think carefully about how to respond.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Did my hon. Friend note with regret that the IRA statement fails to make any absolute commitment that there will be no more violence? The absence of that commitment must be treated cautiously.

Mr. Davies: I thoroughly agree. That must indeed be treated cautiously, as I have suggested. As my hon. Friend said, the statement is far from adequate but, nevertheless, it is a remarkable and striking document. We should therefore proceed on the basis that I have already set out.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North) *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I shall not take any more interventions at the moment, but I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later, if he wishes to persist.

The motion was deliberately drafted to avoid any overt criticism of the Government, although it may well be that not only ourselves but others in the House may have occasion to make such criticism in this debate. We have an opportunity this evening to make criticism when we believe that that is both necessary and constructive. The motion has been drafted in the hope that it could form a broad basis for agreement across the House on the peace process.

I have discussed the motion with the Secretary of State. I understand that the Government do not feel able explicitly to support it, but the right hon. Gentleman and I have agreed that if the Government do not table an amendment to it, I will not press it to a Division, and on that basis it will, I hope, stand uncontested on the Order Paper. That agreement means that if there should nevertheless be votes at the end of the debate, I shall call on my right hon. and hon. Friends not to take part in them.

There are three reasons for holding the debate today. Each one forms a proper theme for the debate, and I shall deal with each in turn. First, the intention was to give Parliament a badly needed opportunity, which I fear would otherwise have been denied it, to discuss this vital issue. We shall listen open-mindedly to everything that is said from all parts of the House this evening, with particular attention to the views expressed by hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies. I hope that the Government will also listen open-mindedly to the points made by the official Opposition and Back Benchers on both sides.

Secondly, the purpose is to set out our own reading of events, and our own concerns, which remain considerable. Thirdly, since I fear that I have been, and continue to feel that I must often be, critical of the Government's tactics in handling the matter, although we are entirely united on the objective and on our commitment to the Belfast agreement, I think it right to set out in a little detail this evening our alternative view of the right tactics, and to try to influence the decisions that the Prime Minister this morning recommitted himself to take by the time the House rises for the summer recess.

On the need for the debate, I do not feel it necessary to apologise for that. One of the criticisms of the Stormont period that is often made in Northern Ireland—very legitimately, in my view, and it applies as much, I fear, to the period of the MacDonald or the Attlee Administrations as it does to times when the Conservative party had a majority in the House—is that we consistently ignored Northern Ireland. I am afraid that that mistake is in danger of being repeated.

The Government have not given us any opportunity for a debate this Session. They did not offer a statement on the Weston Park decisions last year, which went quite outside the Belfast agreement and considerably changed the agenda of the peace process—in my view, they unbalanced it. Our own attempts over the past two weeks to secure the promise of a debate or even a statement on the Hillsborough meeting and on the decisions that the Government have promised to take before the House rises have failed, although we have tried on many occasions.

Whether that reluctance to account to Parliament and to discuss the issue in the Chamber is a reflection of the Government's own unease with their policy on Northern Ireland, or whether it is simply a manifestation of their general attitude to Parliament, I do not know. In either case, it is regrettable.

On the situation in Northern Ireland as we see it, the Government like to repeat that everything is far, far better than it was during the 30 years of the troubles before 1998. That is most certainly correct, and a very welcome change it is. The institutions are undoubtedly working well, and there is far less violence than there was 10 or 20 years ago. However, there are dangers in reciting that

[Mr. Davies]

mantra too often, even if it is followed, as it usually is, by the statement that of course the Government are not complacent.

The fact that the situation is better does not mean that it is satisfactory. There have been 13 sectarian murders over the past year in Northern Ireland, instead of more than 100 a year, as was typical during the 1970s and 1980s, but that is still a hideous state of affairs. As the latest excellent Select Committee report makes clear, there is a terrorist beating almost every day; and we ought to be concerned with the direction of events, as well as with the present state of affairs. Although things are far better than 10 or 20 years ago, the Government's mantra tends to ignore the fact that things are a good deal worse than we were entitled to believe they would be at the time of the Belfast agreement four years ago. Very little progress has been made with IRA decommissioning, and none at all with loyalist decommissioning, though decommissioning was supposed to be completed two years ago.

No progress has been made at all in dismantling paramilitary organisations. The recent Select Committee report suggests that many of them have been considerably strengthened. Last month, for the first time in four years, there was shooting in the streets after vicious rioting in east Belfast, and five people were wounded. I dread to think what would have happened had one of them been killed.

I suppose that one good measure of progress—or perhaps I should say one bad measure of regress—is the walls. They are such an obvious, hideous symptom of the abnormality of life in Belfast and Londonderry. Since 1998, they have been considerably extended. The Government are extending them in east Belfast as this debate proceeds. I hardly think that anyone in the House would regard that as a measure of positive progress.

The truth is that confidence in the peace process in Northern Ireland, especially but not only in the Unionist community, is at an all-time low since the establishment of the process itself. That has many consequences. One is that the political parties that have invested most in the process—I pay tribute to their political courage in doing so—by accepting the agreement wholeheartedly and by implementing it, the Ulster Unionist party and the Social Democratic and Labour party, are currently on the defensive.

Given the recent course of events, there is every reason to suppose that after the Assembly elections next May, the two largest parties will be one that rejects the agreement in principle, and another which, while saying that it accepts the agreement, continues to fail to implement it, does not recognise the police force and continues to maintain a paramilitary organisation on an active footing, and cannot bring itself to condemn terrorist murder—a disgraceful failure by the chairman of Sinn Fein-IRA, to which we refer in our motion.

As I said earlier, we shall give full credit where credit is due for positive statements or positive moves, but we shall be ruthless in meeting statements and above all moves away from the agreement or breaches of it, of which there have been far too many.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Will the hon. Gentleman keep in mind that the man responsible for the Abercorn bombing was Mr. Gerry Adams? He was in charge of the IRA at that time. Is it not interesting that in the document that has been issued, the IRA offers apology to non-combatant families? Thus the police are viewed as a legitimate target, and those serving in all the forces of the Crown and in the other back-ups are looked upon as legitimate targets. Surely, in the light of that, the letter prompts the people of Northern Ireland to ask, "What will be the pay-off for the letter?"

Mr. Davies: I entirely agree with what the hon. Gentleman says, and I understand why he says it. As I said earlier, I do not believe that the statement is the last statement that needs to be made—far from it. It is not even the first of the deeds that we require to complete the process; it is a beginning and a positive move. We would be foolish, and we would be betraying the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, if we attempted simply to ignore it.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I will, but I shall not give way very much this evening, for the simple reason that we do not have long. This is an Opposition day. We had to get the time for the debate this evening. The Government did not want a debate. I hope that if the hon. Gentleman feels frustrated at not having opportunities to express his views on Northern Ireland—his views are always well thought through, and for many years he has played a distinguished role in the matter—he will add his own probably more convincing and persuasive pressure to mine on the Secretary of State to ensure that in future we get debates in Government time.

David Winnick: The hon. Gentleman may have a point, and I am grateful to him for giving way. He said that the chairman of Sinn Fein did not condemn a terrorist murder. He was right to refer to that, and it was wrong of the person concerned not to have condemned it. Where is the difference between the two sides?

Mr. Davies: I am not quite sure what the hon. Gentleman means by the two sides.

David Winnick: The hon. Gentleman condemns the chairman of Sinn Fein for not having condemned the terrorist murder. What is the difference between the hon. Gentleman's condemnation and ours?

Mr. Davies: I hope that there is none. If the hon. Gentleman tells me that there is none, and we can agree on that, I shall be delighted. I have already said that the whole purpose of our motion was to try to establish a basis for common agreement, and the motion includes that condemnation, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman is satisfied.

I mentioned a possible scenario at the elections next May. I suppose that one could devise a scenario in which, irrespective of the outcome in May, the peace process could go forward uninterrupted. However, one would have to be quite optimistic to do so, and positively Panglossian to assume that the peace process will go forward on that outcome of next May's elections. Good policy is never made on the assumption of a best-case scenario. That prospect should make us all consider very seriously the actions that we need to take now, rather than delaying the difficult decisions until we approach next May.

Of course the Government genuinely, and indeed desperately, want the peace process to succeed, as we all do. They are rightly proud of the Belfast agreement. It is not an ideal document, but it was never going to be, and we accept it with its imperfections as the best available basis for peace in Northern Ireland. What a terrible irony it would be if that achievement by the Government—I pay tribute to them for it—were eroded by their own inept actions, failures to act or abdications. But can they really escape responsibility for the failures of implementation thus far and for the decline in confidence to which I referred? After all, it was the prospect of a complete and permanent end to violence that persuaded many people to swallow their objections to measures such as the early release of terrorist prisoners and the inclusion of parties such as Sinn Fein in government before IRA weapons had even begun to be decommissioned.

All parties to the agreement are supposed to be committed to the Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence. They pledged in the agreement to use their influence to bring about

> "the complete disarmament of all paramilitary organisations"

by May 2000. We were told by no other a person than the Prime Minister that there would be effective sanctions against those parties that failed to deliver. As he put it in the House,

> "The only organisations that can qualify to take seats in the government of Northern Ireland and can expect the early release of prisoners are those that have given up violence for good . . . There must be an absolute giving up of violence, and it cannot be just a tactical ceasefire for a tactical reason."—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1998; Vol. 311, c. 711.]

Then there was the Prime Minister's speech at the Balmoral showgrounds, in which he set out the factors by which any ceasefire should be judged—a judgment which he said

> "will necessarily become more rigorous over time".

Then we had the Prime Minister's handwritten pledges. I quote:

> "prisoners kept in unless violence is given up for good".

I quote again:

> "those who use or threaten violence excluded from the Government of Northern Ireland".

Those were all fine assurances. Yet what happened in reality? Almost the exact opposite: the prisoners were all released, despite the fact that there had been no decommissioning whatever. That was a colossal error—we said so, and voted against it, at the time—and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), whose judgment, sadly, has been vindicated by events.

Why was it a colossal mistake, and could that have been anticipated at the time? Indeed it could, first because the Government abandoned their major instrument of leverage for nothing at all; and secondly because they deprived any member of the IRA army council who might have been willing to decommission of his major argument. We can all make mistakes, but the extraordinary thing is that, when no decommissioning had taken place and three years had passed, the Government made the same mistake again. At Weston Park they offered a whole new raft of concessions—including an amnesty to on-the-run terrorists and former terrorists allowed to sit as independent members of district police partnerships—that were not required by the Belfast agreement. Last December, the Government offered yet another concession: special status in the House for Sinn Fein-IRA Members of Parliament. In other words, they made full payment for no delivery, then, when there was still no delivery, they further rewarded the other party with an unanticipated bonus. Few people in the history of human affairs have found it very profitable to negotiate in that way.

How did the IRA respond? Two weeks after Weston Park, it showed its contempt by publicly tearing up the agreement on the methodology of decommissioning that it had signed with General de Chastelain. It looked as though decommissioning would never even begin. It certainly did not do so as a result of Weston Park. Then followed, fortuitously, the FARC incident and, tragically, 11 September, and American pressure produced the first act of decommissioning. The electoral imperatives of the Irish elections produced the second act. Now, the vital question is who or what will produce the third act. The IRA may be rethinking its strategy—we shall have to evaluate tonight's statement—but the fact remains, and it must be faced, that in its deeds the IRA has been going in the other direction. The Castlereagh break-in and the evidence of new targeting in March this year were evidence of that.

We cannot go on like this. The Government must appreciate that the peace process, like any peace process, must be based on two things. First, there must be a sense of balance and fairness. Both sides must be seen to be gaining benefits—all the dividends and bonuses cannot be paid only to one side. Secondly, there must be some proper structure of incentives, so that rewards follow performance and breaches result in penalties.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): To pursue the hon. Gentleman's list of criticisms of Government policy, the actions of the Conservative Administration in negotiating and having secret discussions with terrorists who had not declared a ceasefire were in the same category of strategic decision as the actions that the hon. Gentleman is describing. Why does he think that the previous Government's actions were acceptable, whereas those of the current Government are not?

Mr. Davies: There is no comparison at all to be made between opening negotiations with someone and actually making concessions. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not see the distinction between those two things.

So much for general analysis and principles, important as they are. In the rest of my remarks I shall be strictly pragmatic and practical, because that is what is called for. I shall answer this precise question: what should the Government do now? I urge them to do five things. First, to restore confidence in the communities, especially those in Belfast and Londonderry affected by the recent violence, the Government need to act to tackle the crisis of morale and numbers in policing. The regular force has already fallen below the levels envisaged by Patten—and Patten assumed an environment in which there had been a complete end to sectarian violence. That is why, in the

[Mr. Davies]

circumstances, it would be madness to get rid of the full-time reserve. Without the full-time reserve, the Police Service of Northern Ireland simply could not cope.

Thus the Government should give two commitments immediately: first, that they will not allow numbers to fall further; and, secondly, that the full-time reserve will be offered new contracts when they fall due for the foreseeable future, and until a new determination has been made by the Chief Constable that there is a qualitative and sustainable improvement in the security situation.

The second thing that the Government should do now is act on the vital issue of linkage, reciprocity and a proper structure of incentives to perform. The official Opposition have the greatest sympathy for the First Minister's demand that the Government take powers to exclude from the Executive parties that are in breach of their obligations. It may be a little late now to use those powers in respect of past breaches, but it had been my intention to urge the Government immediately to introduce legislation to take those powers so that it was clear that they could be used immediately and decisively if there were any further breaches. In the light of the IRA's statement this evening, it is perhaps not the right moment to introduce legislation of that kind, but I hope that the Government will take every opportunity to make it absolutely clear, in private or by whichever other means they feel is expedient, that they will not be taken for a ride for a third time—that no more free concessions will be available and that at last some element of reciprocity and discipline will be introduced into the peace process.

I also urge the Government to concert with our Irish partners and American allies to ensure that there are real financial and other penalties for organisations, be they loyalist or republican, that are specified as being in breach of the agreement. The Secretary of State will know that that is a technical term in relation to the peace agreement, and the present procedure, which he has already used once, is a complete paper tiger, a sword of clay. That is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs, and I hope that he will take action to remedy it.

Thirdly, the Government should make it clear that there can be no question of making the Weston Park concession of an amnesty for on-the-run terrorists at the present time, or at any time, except as part and parcel of a final settlement involving the winding-up of paramilitary organisations and the end of the armed struggle. That offer has, in any case, never been endorsed, ratified or even considered by Parliament, and any moral obligation on the Government has now surely been obliterated by the successive IRA breaches since it was formulated. Those breaches started with the IRA's involvement with FARC, which we now know was going on while the Weston Park negotiations were taking place.

Fourthly, the Government should have the courage explicitly to endorse the Taoiseach's demand that decommissioning be completed by next May. I taxed the right hon. Gentleman with this the other day at Question Time, and he again evaded the issue, offering a mealy-mouthed fudge to the effect that

> "the Government have no disagreement with the Taoiseach on the need for urgent decommissioning."

That was precisely the phrase used by the Prime Minister in his letter of two weeks ago to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, and more or less the wording used by the Secretary of State to me last week. That formula is simply not adequate. There is a devastating lack of conviction and credibility in a fudge of that kind, and I am surprised that the Government cannot see that.

The Government should make it clear that, whatever the result of next May's elections, no party can sit on the Executive if it has not fulfilled its undertakings under the agreement or remains tied to a paramilitary organisation that has not done so. The parties should know the score now, and the Northern Ireland electorate should know the score as soon as possible—certainly well in advance of the elections.

Finally, the Government should look again at the suggestion that I made last October, which they ignored, confident perhaps that their own approach would work. Since then, there have been successive serious IRA breaches. My suggestion was that the Government should attempt the negotiation of a comprehensive solution—what I called a programmed process leading to full decommissioning. I emphasise that that should involve not a renegotiation of the Belfast agreement, but simply a timetable for its implementation, for decommissioning by both republican and loyalist paramilitaries, and for recognition by Sinn Fein of the new police force. I urge the Government to accompany that with an attempt to negotiate an arrangement on other issues, including the Weston Park issues, provided that they are balanced by the disbanding of all paramilitary structures and the definitive ending of the armed struggle.

The negotiation of a comprehensive, timed or programmed global package such as this may seem ambitious. Of course it is. Perhaps the IRA's statement makes it clear that the time is more fertile for this than it has been up to now. In any event, I am convinced, after many months considering the problem and speaking to all sides in Northern Ireland, that no one there will make real concessions unless it is clear what proportion of the final price to be paid any particular move represents, and precisely what they will receive in return. Unless the package being negotiated is demonstrably final, everyone will hold back to keep something for the next round. On that basis, it will take until kingdom come to get to peace and genuine normalisation in Northern Ireland.

I know that the Secretary of State has been battling hard, and that he has been particularly active in recent days and weeks in trying to broker some de-escalation of the tension in the flashpoints of east and north Belfast, and in the context of the marching season. I want genuinely to congratulate him on that. He has already had considerable success, and of course he has our full support in continuing those efforts, as I have already told him privately.

The Secretary of State knows, however, as we all do, that violence such as this is more the symptom than the cause of the problem. The cause is a sense of unfairness, a sense that the other side is getting a much better deal, and a belief that the peace process is a failure or a fraud, or, if it was not a fraud at the outset, that it has now become one, and that people must look to their own sectarian groups or even paramilitary organisations to protect themselves and their interests.

No one in the House can or should rest content until the people of Northern Ireland can enjoy the same peaceful and normal life under the rule of law as exists elsewhere in the United Kingdom, or, indeed, in the

Republic of Ireland. I am convinced that the peace process is the only way of getting there. It is in genuine trouble, but the flame is still there and it needs to be fanned back into full and vigorous life. I hope that the signal that we have had from the IRA this afternoon is an indication that this is a good time to do that, and to negotiate the full and final completion of the peace process. That will require not only considerable effort but considerable toughness, but, if it succeeds, it will finally bring about the peace in Northern Ireland that its people have prayed for and dreamed of for so long.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Before I call the Secretary of State, I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a 12-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches in this debate.

8.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): I welcome this opportunity for the House to consider the peace process in Northern Ireland. This is a short debate in which to consider a subject that is immense both in its historic magnitude and in its complexity. Because of that complexity, it would be easy for any of us to grasp each or any passing event to justify the no doubt contrary opinions that will be expressed tonight.

Although there is no inevitability about the success or otherwise of any human endeavour, I have no doubt that some hon. Members who speak tonight will claim scientific—in some cases dogmatic—precision in relation to their predictions and prescriptions for the future. Those of us not blessed with such foresight recognise that, in the midst of any massive social or political transformation, it is often difficult to discern the broad sweep of historical change above the headline of the moment. It is all too easy to concentrate on the minutes, thereby losing some appreciation of the movement of the hours, especially when the minutes show up all the imperfections that we have inherited from an imperfect past.

Some of those complexities can be seen in the last few weeks' contrasting, contradictory, complex and, at times, seemingly incompatible series of events. For example, we have just seen an almost unprecedentedly peaceful few days over the 12 July period. I thank the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) for ascribing to me the efforts that I have made, but efforts have also been made by the people in the communities themselves. We have recently seen the apparent paradox of the Assistant chief constable warning against the potential for mobilisation of republicans into given communities one day, and, within 24 hours, the same officer congratulating not only republicans but leading members of the IRA for having helped to contain the violence.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The only reason why the police officer to whom the Secretary of State refers changed his mind was that spikes, bottles and weapons of terrorism that were being lined up in Ardoyne to attack a planned Orange parade were revealed by the good intelligence of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and people such as Gerry Kelly and others were put on the back foot because they had been denying that they were planning that kind of republican violence. Is the right hon. Gentleman not misrepresenting the facts of what happened over the weekend?

Dr. Reid: Not for the first time, the hon. Gentleman is factually wrong. The assistant chief constable said that he changed his mind because he saw that leading republicans—in his own words—helped to marshal and restrain some of the young people. The point that I was making was about the complex and contradictory nature of events that we have to assess, and the difficulty of distinguishing passing events from the greater movements of historical change.

As I said, we had an unprecedentedly peaceful 12 July weekend, and I was going on to say that it came at the end of a worrying few weeks in which we had ghastly reminders of just how far we have to go: the home of four young children gunned and petrol bombed in Coleraine; a house petrol bombed in Antrim; a funeral cortege insulted and assaulted in Londonderry; a Catholic church burned out—and so it goes on. Those are all testimony to the bigotry, sectarianism and mindless hatred that still exist with some people and in some areas of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): The Secretary of State mentioned a number of incidents. I am sure that he would want to add to that list the murder of my constituent William Morgan, who was buried today. He was a young man with a wife and family—his wife is pregnant—done to death by vicious sectarian thugs. The police have described it as a murder. I am sure that the Secretary of State will want to convey his condolences and those of the House to the wife and family.

Dr. Reid: Yes, indeed, I have no hesitation in doing just that. Tragically, what I was presenting to the House was not a comprehensive list of the ghastly reminders of which I spoke.

It should not surprise us, then, that a series of surveys—the most recent from the university of Ulster only last week—has illustrated the decline in the optimism generated by the first IRA ceasefire in 1994 and then by the Belfast agreement in 1998. In 1996, for instance, 44 per cent. of Protestants and 47 per cent. of Catholics thought that inter-community relationships were better than five years previously. By last year, the totals had dropped to only 25 per cent. and 33 per cent. respectively.

That drop in confidence has been particularly noted—and sometimes highlighted in the House—on the Protestant side, but that is not the whole story, because between 2000 and 2001 there was a significant increase among both Protestants and Catholics who viewed their own community as the underdog. Both sides see their own community as beleaguered or besieged. As someone remarked to me recently, sometimes the problem in Northern Ireland is the inability of either side to acknowledge the other side's victimhood.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford mentioned balance. It is important to get a balanced appreciation of exactly where we are. If we look at the broader canvas, despite some of the ghastly events that I mentioned, we can see a much more balanced picture. There have been real gains in the everyday life of the Province, and it does not contribute anything to our appreciation of where we are if we dismiss them too

[Dr. Reid]

lightly. Of course, we must not regard them as exclusively optimistic without taking into account the balancing factor of how far we have to go, but there has been real progress.

We now have a Northern Ireland which in the recent past has achieved the fastest economic growth of any region in the United Kingdom. For the first time in decades, more people are staying in or returning to the Province than are leaving it. Economic investment, tourism and commercial activity have been returning and accelerating. For the most part, young people and families can enjoy a night out. For all the imperfections and blemishes, normality is returning—perhaps more slowly than we would like, but we can still trace its advance.

Troop levels, at about 13,500, are the lowest since 1970, and routine military patrolling is down by about 50 per cent. over the past four years. Over the same period, employment has grown by almost 5 per cent., with 650,000 in work—more people than ever before. Unemployment is at an historic low, and the standard of living for the vast majority of people has been improving.

All those factors must be weighed in the balance in any discussion of the peace process. Above all, that terrible index, the total of the tragic loss of life, which has been the dreadful hallmark of three decades of conflict, is at an all-time low. None of that should be dismissed lightly. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the worst year of the troubles, as a direct result of which, in that single year alone, 470 people in Northern Ireland died. Twenty years ago—10 years later—there were still nearly 100 people who lost their lives in a single year. Even 10 years ago, there was almost the same total of people who died directly as a result of the troubles. Last year, 16 people were killed, and this year four people have lost their lives to date. That is four too many, and every single death is one too many, but it does no justice to how much we have achieved to pretend that it is not significantly different from the huge total that we lost even 10 years ago.

Let me give one figure that I have given before: in the three and a half years before the IRA ceasefire, no fewer than 350 lives were tragically lost in Northern Ireland, while in the three and a half years after the Belfast agreement, 50 lives were lost—a seventh of the earlier total. As I said, there are still huge problems and every death is one too many, but let us not embark on this debate without realising how far we have come.

This afternoon, to add to the complexity of the course of events in Northern Ireland, we had another statement from the Provisional Irish Republican Army, to which the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford referred. That IRA statement is, I believe, a welcome acknowledgment of the grief and loss that that organisation has caused over the years of pointless and tragic conflict, and the deaths for which it was responsible.

I especially welcome the fact that the statement includes an open apology to the families of many of those who died. Of course, actions speak louder than words, but the words that we have heard today are, I believe, more persuasive than those that the IRA had hitherto brought itself to utter. I strongly hope that it means that at last the IRA has turned its face unequivocally against violence. If it has, Northern Ireland has a bright future, but the real test is whether the transition from violence to democracy continues and gives confidence to the whole process.

To make a reality of the acknowledgement and the expression of regret, in terms that ordinary people, and especially those who have suffered, can appreciate, they need to be able to have the confidence that the events that caused that tragic misery, pain and loss will never return, that the conflict is in the past, and that the resolution of difficulties in the future will be carried out by democratic means.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): I fully accept that progress has been made, but the Secretary of State will also accept that the situation is far from satisfactory. If the IRA was truly sorry, would not the best way of showing that to the people of Northern Ireland be to agree to disarm totally and unequivocally?

Dr. Reid: I would not disagree with that sentiment, and that is what we want to see. We want all paramilitaries in Northern Ireland to disband completely, and I shall in due course comment on the other side of the coin, as it were. Here, I am merely trying to give the balance for which the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford asked, by saying that we have come a very long way indeed. Yet the risks, challenges and dangers are there for all to see. In a sense, if what has been achieved so far gives succour to those who hope for the best in Northern Ireland, the blemishes and the imperfections that remain are all too often a portent to those who fear the worst in Northern Ireland.

How is it, then, that we have come as far as we have, and yet still face a future clouded in uncertainty and in threat? One analysis argues that moving any long-standing conflict towards settlement requires at least four elements. First, there has to be leadership that is willing to compromise for peace. Secondly, that leadership has to be sufficiently courageous and strong enough politically to make the compromises, to make them stick and to sell that agreement. Thirdly, the outlines of the settlement have to enjoy wide support across the dispute. Fourthly, there has to be a process that people are willing to enter into—a process that is sufficiently robust and resilient to stand the setbacks. At times, there will be setbacks, violence and other backward steps, because of circumstances, or because there are opponents of the entire process itself.

That is not a synopsis of my analysis, but one written some time ago by ambassador Richard Haass, President Bush's envoy, who went on to say:

> "I think over time our ability to continue moving forward in Northern Ireland would depend on the political ability of leaders to make the kind of gestures and statements and compromises they are going to have to make. And they are only going to be able to do these things if they have prepared their own people and essentially made the case for compromising, saying yes, we are going to have to start doing this or stop doing that, but here's why, on balance, we are better off. And I think we need to see more of that".

The truth is that in Northern Ireland we have come as far as we have only because people on all sides have been prepared to give that leadership. Everyone has had to compromise, but there is still too much of a tendency to play down the compromises that others have made. It took guts as well as vision for the Ulster Unionist party to go into government with republicans. That was not easy, and it took courage. The UUP and everyone else knew that Sinn Fein continued to be linked with the IRA, but it accepted that a process of transition was under way, and that it would not be completed unless everyone was prepared to take some degree of risk.

The republican leadership took considerable risks by entering into and participating in a partitionist Government, moving into the arena of decommissioning, and taking responsibility for making Northern Ireland work, rather than simply destroying, or attempting to destroy, it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and his colleagues in the Social Democratic and Labour party showed great courage and leadership by opening up dialogue with republicans when others were not prepared to do so. I also pay tribute to the previous Prime Minister, John Major, who took tremendous risks and showed tremendous courage in opening discussions with the IRA not at a time when there were some imperfections or local orchestration of violence, but when that organisation was in the process of murdering innocent civilians through terrorist activity. John Major's action was heavily criticised in many quarters at the time, but I pay tribute to him for his courage and his leadership, for withstanding that criticism, and for recognising the historic immensity of the opportunity that had opened up to him and the then Conservative Government.

However, it was not easy to authorise secret contacts with the IRA in the course of an active terrorist campaign. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford made an emollient speech. I hope that, in recognising that we are perhaps taking risks and making judgments, he also recognises that we are at least doing so after a prolonged ceasefire. The courage required by his own former party leader some years ago to take such action in the midst of a terrorist campaign was even greater, but perhaps the criticisms of him would also have been even greater. It was not easy for John Major—and nor was it easy for this Government—to agree to the early release of prisoners, or to try to tackle the problem of the "on the runs".

None of this has been easy—especially, of course, in Northern Ireland. Leadership there has traditionally been of the exclusive type—speaking for one's own community—rather than the inclusive type that is demanded, almost by definition, by this peace process. However, in a very real sense this process will work only if one person's problem becomes everyone's problem.

Of course, it is not just Governments and party leaders who have had to show leadership; hundreds of thousands of people throughout Northern Ireland have done so in their own communities. I believe that the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford was in Londonderry yesterday, speaking about some of the problems, and I welcome his regular visits. The accommodation that the Apprentice Boys and the residents in Londonderry have reached in recent years has required real local leadership and a willingness to accommodate conflicting aspirations.

I understand the anxieties of those who express concern about a current imbalance in the process and about its underlying moral integrity. There are genuine and legitimate questions that the Government must answer in that regard. We have all faced some tough decisions, and I will continue to do so. On occasion, there is real anguish involved in making such judgments. However, it not good enough for serious politicians who wish to change history to will the ends without having the courage to confront the means of reaching them. Anyone who seriously wishes to change our country and the future in a major way must not merely pay lip service to outlining and supporting some beneficial objectives; they must have the guts to face up to the tough means that are sometimes required to achieve those objectives.

We will not change the course of history simply by wishful thinking or risk aversion; nor will we do so by being fastidious over every step required along the way. General de Gaulle once wrote that achieving the right outcome sometimes necessitates—*[Interruption.]* I am asked to read the quotation in French. It sometimes necessitates

"une certaine rudesse dans les procedures".

C'est très simple pour les ècossais parce qu'en Glasgow on parle dans la gorge.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the Secretary of State that if he is going to quote in a foreign language, it is imperative that he give the English translation immediately afterwards.

Dr. Reid: D'accord, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The rough translation of General de Gaulle's contribution is, "It is worth putting up with some imperfections and rough edges if it's the only way to achieve a worthwhile objective." Roughly translated too, my later comment was that it is very easy for Glaswegians to speak French because they also use the back of the throat when speaking.

The difficulty—and I freely admit that it is a difficulty—is determining how much it is legitimate to accept by way of imperfection. Let me say clearly that the Government do not believe that there can be peace at any price. I want to clear up some misconceptions. It is simply not true that the Government have been prepared to turn a blind eye to continuing illegality, or to regard any level of violence as somehow acceptable, depending on who carries it out. The police continue to pursue with vigour all those responsible for sectarian violence, on both sides of the community. Any imputation that the police in Northern Ireland would respond to political directives or persuasion and stop doing what they do best reflects badly not on the police, but on those who make it.

Since 4 May, there have been 30 arrests in connection with violence in north and east Belfast. It is not the case that no one is ever arrested. There has been a thorough investigation—and it is continuing—since the break-in at Castlereagh, and it will follow the truth wherever it leads, irrespective of the outcome. The police will be correct in acting in that way.

Our efforts against organised crime are overseen by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who has responsibility for security. Those efforts also cover organised crime linked to paramilitary groups, and they have been stepped up considerably over the past 12 months. They have achieved considerable success, and that will continue.

It is not true either that we apply a double standard to Sinn Fein, or that we will be content if the IRA's transition from violence to democracy for some reason gets stuck part way through. Ultimately, there can be no half-way stopping house or comfortable staging post between violence and democracy where people can rest indefinitely.

We recognise that there is a process involved, but it goes far beyond ending violence alone. It involves establishing institutions, liberties, rights and opportunities

[Dr. Reid]

in a context in which violence becomes ever more illegitimate, even for those who have used it before and tried to justify it.

Full rights carry full responsibilities, and participation in the Government of Northern Ireland carries particular responsibilities. I believe that the republican leadership understands that, and that it is committed to the completion of the transition. However, we accept that others—some of them are in this House—have concerns, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has indicated that he will say more on this issue before the House rises.

I wish to make it clear that neither the enemies of this process, nor our partners in it, should misjudge our motives or our resolve in completing that transition. They should not misjudge our commitment to the process. Some people portray the process as one of appeasement, and suggest that there is something weak-kneed, lily-livered and intrinsically appeasing about engaging in a process of talk, words and jaw-jaw. I remind them that the person who coined the phrase that jaw-jaw is better than war-war was no appeaser. People who have suffered from the conflict know more than anyone else what price has to be paid when politicians fail to solve problems through democratic means. Our security forces and armed forces have suffered more than anyone else, because they are the ones who have been asked to try to solve those problems with their lives.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I hope that the Secretary of State is not going to set up an Aunt Sally of his own invention and then attack that. No sensible person—certainly no Opposition Member—has ever suggested that entering into a dialogue or a negotiation constitutes appeasement. We have been concerned that the negotiation has not been balanced, and that there have not been clear demands that the other party in the negotiation fulfils its obligations under accepted agreements. It is essential that that balance and discipline be maintained, and that is what we are asking for. Under no circumstances would the Opposition suggest that we should not talk. We should talk to everybody.

Dr. Reid: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. However, let me say, in as non-partisan a manner as possible, that it does nothing to promote confidence in the peace process or our sincerity in it to characterise the process, in a misleading way, as a one-way series of concessions to republicans and to talk—inadvertently at times—in the language of the sweetie shop or the headmaster's study. A human rights commission is not a concession to republicans. Human rights are the rights of everyone in the United Kingdom and, indeed, wider.

Mr. Davies: I have no problem with that.

Dr. Reid: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees. An equality commission and equality of opportunity are not concessions to the republicans or gestures to a ghetto in west Belfast, but things to which every child and family in Northern Ireland should have access. A police service that the whole community can participate in and support is not a concession. *[Interruption.]* I am going through all the elements about which the hon. Gentleman appears to give the impression, perhaps inadvertently, that he regards as concessions to one side. I am glad if he agrees that these are not concessions but elementary rights that should be extended to all the people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Davies: I do not want this evening's debate to proceed in too controversial an atmosphere. However, we have always supported the Equality Commission and human rights—never have I characterised them as concessions. The right hon. Gentleman knows our concerns about concessions such as amnesties, but I hope that we will not spend our time in this debate criticising each other for something that we have not done.

Dr. Reid: Okay. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, but it is worth saying that we are dealing in this process largely with rights that should be extended to all the people in Northern Ireland.

David Burnside: Will the Secretary of State please explain why, for the first time since 1920, we have institutionalised sectarian discrimination in employment policy for the police in Northern Ireland? How can he define that as equality by any definition of the term? If he has an example of institutionalised Government discrimination from 1920, perhaps he will tell the House.

Dr. Reid: I would like to say that once again the hon. Gentleman speaks for the whole community in Northern Ireland, but I do not think that he would receive cross-community support for his assertion that there was previously no institutionalised discrimination in employment or any other field. Indeed, I would go further—we are trying to create a fair and just society in Northern Ireland. I agree with what the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford said earlier. Perhaps if we—by which I mean successive British Governments—had spent a little more time considering Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1972, we would have had a different past and perhaps a brighter future. However, we are now concerned with the establishment of a just and fair society in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hunter: Before the Secretary of State concludes his speech, will he address the specific point of my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) about the argument for legislation to facilitate expulsion if it is deemed necessary?

Dr. Reid: I think that the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford decided that he would not press the case for that tonight. In any case, there is provision in the existing legislation, should such a course of action be judged proper, in that a resolution can be placed before the Assembly on which it can make a decision. Despite the fact that the issue was not raised tonight—

Mr. Davies: Abdication.

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman says "abdication", but I suspect that we have an entirely different view both formally and in terms of our general attitude towards devolution. I believe that devolution means devolution—that if we create a police board, we do not dictate to it how it should deal with the full-time reserve, as he suggested that I should do tonight. If one creates a local authority, one does not dictate to it how it should do things. If one creates an Assembly to bring together the people of Northern Ireland then, for goodness' sake, give it some role in the major decisions. Incidentally, if one goes into an agreement with other parties, it is not as easy or as beneficial as he makes out unilaterally to rip up that agreement and start adding bits to it.

My argument is that there are already mechanisms to reach the objective that the hon. Gentleman appears to want to reach if it is decided that we have reached such a crisis in the peace process.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): If what the Secretary of State said is the case, why on 10 April 1998 did the Prime Minister say this in a letter to the leader of the Ulster Unionist party:

> "if . . . these provisions"—

meaning the provisions for exclusion—

> "have been shown to be ineffective,"—

as they have been on a number of occasions—

> "we will support changes to these provisions to enable them to be made properly effective in preventing such people from holding office"?

Dr. Reid: First, the provisions can hardly have been proved to be ineffective when they have never been tried.

Mr. Donaldson: They have.

Dr. Reid: The provision that I mentioned—the Secretary of State putting a resolution before the Assembly to exclude Sinn Fein—has not been tried, so the hon. Gentleman cannot assert that it has been found to be ineffective. Unless it has been tried and failed, there is no evidence for that.

The hon. Gentleman and I know each other well enough—I hope that that does not hinder his career—to get to the point. As he said when he was making a speech the other day, splendidly bedecked—I watched him on television—he wants Sinn Fein excluded. That is his judgment. Therefore, his complaint is not about the mechanism for exclusion; it is that the Government do not want to exclude Sinn Fein, and certainly not at this point in time. That is a genuine political difference and a political judgment. He need not be so modest as to hide that behind a deficiency in the mechanism that exists. It is a difference of agreement. He is absolutely plain that he wants to exclude Sinn Fein from government, on the basis, presumably, that that will help Sinn Fein move towards politics and away from violence. That is his judgment. To me, it is not instantly, entirely and intuitively a logical position, but I understand that it is a political position, and it is a credible one.

Mr. Davies: I think that the Secretary of State may be missing the point, which is purely practical—that one has no credibility in this life in threatening a sanction that one is not in a position to enforce. The right hon. Gentleman will get no leverage in the negotiations with Sinn Fein by suggesting that one day there might be a majority of Sinn Fein and Social Democratic and Labour Members who might like to exclude Sinn Fein from the Executive. If he wants to use that mechanism, he will have to take powers in this House. That was my point. However, he quoted me correctly. Due to the fact that the other circumstances have been changed by this evening's statement, I have not pressed him as I had intended to introduce that legislation immediately. If things deteriorate and there are further problems, we will do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That was a very long intervention. I remind the House once again that this is a very short debate.

Dr. Reid: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not want to ignore anyone who wanted to intervene. As the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford said, however, that is a debate for another day. Whatever the differences here, there is no disguising the fact that we face difficulties in the peace process and it is right that the House should have an opportunity to discuss those tonight. All I ask is that in so doing we try to measure up to the scale of the challenge. The British Government certainly recognise the role that we have to play during the coming days and weeks to try to re-create the trust and confidence that the process requires.

I hope that the Opposition and other hon. Members will do likewise and that they will clarify the ambiguity, or equivocation, about their support for bipartisanship. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford knows that, despite our differences, we have tried to facilitate matters and to work together when that was merited. I hope that we can continue to do that whatever our tactical differences, because the people of Britain and the people of Northern Ireland want to see us united in our determination to make the process succeed if it is humanly possible to do so. We cannot guarantee success; there is no preordained destination for the journey we are on.

All of us in these islands would do well to take to heart the words—I am glad that they are in English—of Abraham Lincoln at the end of another long and painful conflict. He said

> "let us strive . . . to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves".

Whatever differences the debate may reveal over tactics, I hope that I, too, can say, let us stand united in our shared objective of securing a peaceful and just end to an ancient conflict.

8.46 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): First, may I say how pleased I am that the Conservatives have abandoned what was bound to be a short-lived policy of pulling out of the cross-party agreement on Northern Ireland? I understand why they did so, although more than anything else, I suspect that their position was unsustainable.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I do not know how many times I have had to correct the hon. Gentleman on that point. The Conservative party never gave up on the Belfast agreement. It never gave up on the bipartisan approach in so far as the agreement was being followed. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will finally get off that tack.

Lembit Öpik: I apologise to the Conservatives for so profoundly misunderstanding their position in the past. I offer my complete and unequivocal apology. Goodness knows how I got that impression.

I shall take the hon. Gentleman at his word. It is great to hear the Conservatives reaffirming their commitment to the bipartisan agreement. I need say no more on the

[Lembit Öpik]

subject—the record is clear as to what the hon. Gentleman and I have said. That is a matter of celebration because some of us were confused—at the very least—as to the Conservative position.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): If the hon. Gentleman is confused, may I refer him to his remarks last week, as his words are becoming repetitive? He said:

> "I am pleased that his party has abandoned its short-lived withdrawal from the cross-party consensus on Northern Ireland. That always struck me as an unsustainable position, and it is to the Conservative party's credit that it is inside, rather than outside, that process."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 10 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 277WH.]

I hope that clarifies the hon. Gentleman's memory, if nothing else.

Lembit Öpik: The words are repetitive only because the hon. Gentleman has repeated them. He will of course be aware that they were spoken during an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall. The good news needs celebration in an even more public context because I am sure that I was not the only person in the United Kingdom who was unclear about the Conservative position. Let us put the matter to rest; it could not be clearer, from the exchanges of the past few minutes, that the Conservatives are expressly involved in the bipartisan agreement in a positive and strategic way. There can be no one in this place who is not pleased about that.

However, the Conservatives still paint a fairly gloomy picture of where we stand as regards the Northern Ireland peace process. Surely, no one can deny that things are better than they were 10 years ago, despite the underlying level of violence in the communities—a point that has already been mentioned.

No one can question the seminal importance of the work of former Prime Minister, John Major, as the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland rightly pointed out. As I have said in other speeches, there is no doubt that John Major kick-started the current peace process by taking significant risks as Prime Minister and straying beyond what might have been regarded as the safe path in respect of Northern Ireland. No one can question whether the Good Friday agreement, for all the strains on it, exists and was signed by the majority of parties in the Province.

Those unquestionable facts, which have come to pass in the past decade, have served considerably to reduce the level of conflict in the sense of an organised campaign of terror in Northern Ireland and, indeed, on the United Kingdom mainland. Nevertheless, the Conservatives have raised a number of concerns, as they are entitled to do, and I should like to explore two of them—their criticisms of past political activity by the Government and their predictions for the future.

As for the former, it strikes me as ironic that a number of activities, such as prisoner release and the apparent non-enforcement of the decommissioning conditions, are so heavily attacked by the official Opposition. It seems to me that the Conservatives have set a great many of the precedents with regard to Northern Ireland political decision making. Their past approach tends to imply that we must allow the flexibility for a Government to make those kinds of tough choices.

For example, the Conservative party decided to launch the Anglo-Irish agreement. We must remember that that agreement was tremendously controversial at the time, not least in the Province itself, yet if that decision not been taken then, it would have been much less likely that the south of Ireland would have renounced its constitutional claim on the north.

Hon. Members have already mentioned the secret talks between John Major and the active terrorist organisation, the IRA, at a time when there was no ceasefire at all. I heard what the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said in response to my intervention on that, but I take a different view. I feel that there is a great deal of similarity in making that kind of decision at the beginning of the 1990s and some of the decisions that have been taken to try to give the peace process momentum now. Obviously, I respect other hon. Members' right to differ on that issue.

Mr. McNamara: Does the hon. Gentleman recall of course that those three great steps forward were taken under Mrs. Thatcher?

Lembit Öpik: Indeed, some hon. Members may be even more surprised that Mrs. Thatcher, who was no friend of terrorism—no one would suggest that she was—presided over some comparably or perhaps even more controversial decisions in government than those that we have seen subsequently. There is no point in discussing in detail which decisions were more controversial; the crucial point is that successive Governments in the United Kingdom have found themselves operating in a way that one might regard as outside the norm of mainstream political activity in this country, but, at the same time, that seems to have delivered some results.

Of course another example is the introduction of an amnesty. Again, that concept was inspired by the Conservatives, not by the current Government. I do not say that to condemn the Conservatives in any way. In fact, I praise them for making those difficult decisions, and the only reason to discuss them in this context is that I believe that what we say in the House materially influences public opinion, not just on the United Kingdom mainland, but in Northern Ireland. To that extent, our self-restraint in accepting the risks that the Government are taking and not seeking to make it more difficult for those decisions to be played out in Northern Irish politics is an important aspect of what we can do to influence the process positively.

A responsible Government take difficult decisions, and a responsible Opposition reflect that. Certainly, speaking for the Liberal Democrats, we try to respect, from our position of opposition, what the Government are attempting to do. We make our concerns known publicly as well as privately, but we do so in the sense that, at heart, we are all trying to achieve the same thing and therefore that these are matters of judgment, rather than of principle, when we try to go in that direction.

I also heard the Conservatives' concerns about predictions of the future. Perhaps the most worrying predictions involve the 2003 Assembly elections in Northern Ireland.

If I understood correctly what the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford said, he would be implying that an anti-agreement party on the unionist side—a loyalist party—and Sinn Fein on the nationalist or republican side could, in their prediction, be the two largest parties in Northern Ireland. That may be possible, but who are we to predict aloud and to think that it will not have a material impact, to some extent, on the fortunes of parties in Northern Ireland? There is an interrelation in that sense.

Even more crucially, were that analysis correct, there is a contradiction in the argument that we heard. This is the contradiction: if we assume, for the sake of example, that Sinn Fein becomes the largest party on the nationalist or republican side, and if we impose further restrictions that prevent it from being able to function within the Executive, we are basically saying that we would be willing to disfranchise all the people in the community who chose to vote democratically for the voice of Sinn Fein. How could that benefit the process?

Much of the time we have sought to bring these organisations—the paramilitary background is intimately linked with an organisation such as Sinn Fein—into the peace process. In effect, we have tried to say that there is a better, peaceful, democratic way to achieve outcomes than the paramilitary way that has been tried previously. I do not feel that using the stick of excluding such organisations from the Executive will have any effect other than, first, strengthening support for them in the communities that they represent, and, secondly, providing a degree of pressure within those organisations that makes it even less likely that we will manage to resolve these issues.

Mr. Blunt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lembit Öpik: I shall do so in a moment, as I want to say one more thing.

There must be a limit. We cannot keep writing a blank cheque and retreating, allowing these organisations to do anything they want and to disrespect completely, in this case, the Good Friday agreement. I worry, however, that the threshold is being set rather low by those who feel that we should take the approach of wielding a very large stick and a relatively small carrot.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman is getting into the area of difficulty. Will he tell us exactly what threshold he has in mind? Plainly, it is not acceptable—whatever democratic mandate the party may have—for a party that advocates the use of illegal violence to achieve its objective to be part of any Executive under any system. Where does he want the threshold to be drawn?

Lembit Öpik: Surely this is the problem. When I am the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I will have to make decisions with all the information available to me in 2006. At this point, however, we cannot pretend that there is a table of figures and conditions determining what is and is not acceptable. There are too many variables in the system. The hon. Gentleman knows well that previous Conservative Secretaries of States continually made course corrections to Northern Ireland policy because that was the only way that they could operate. In the same sense, if the solution now were as simple as describing the particular threshold, we would not spend so much time discussing it, and I am absolutely certain that the Conservatives would not have chosen to devote their Opposition day debate today to this matter. The reason it was helpful that this subject was chosen is that we must discuss these matters and accept that there are grey areas on which we can disagree but on which, nevertheless, a Government must make decisions.

Were I to attempt to give a more specific answer to the hon. Gentleman, I would say that I would probably set the threshold rather higher than him. I would therefore guess that if, or when, the Liberal Democrats run Northern Ireland policy we will set the threshold in a slightly more flexible way than the Conservatives will do in 2090—*[Interruption.]* I shall leave it to the listening public to determine whether that is an optimistic or pessimistic assessment. We may be hit by an asteroid before then anyway.

Mr. Dodds: The Irish Prime Minister, Mr. Ahern, has made it clear—as did all the parties in the Republic during the recent general election—that the presence of Sinn Fein in their Government cannot be contemplated. Why is it so difficult for the hon. Gentleman to set a threshold in terms of part of the United Kingdom?

Lembit Öpik: I observed Sinn Fein's performance in the south of Ireland election with great interest. It is not for me to tell the Irish Government what to do.

Let me answer the hon. Gentleman's question. The reason why it is so difficult for me to set a threshold is that we have a peace process which is in part implementation and in part negotiation between the parties in Northern Ireland, and which takes place at the same time as interaction with Dublin and with Westminster. In my judgment—this is a crucial point—the process seems to be working: it seems to be taking us to a place where we have not been for three decades. I mean that in a positive sense. As I have said, the organised campaign of terrorism against the state has been, if not entirely removed, massively reduced. The troubles in the communities themselves—the levels of community violence—remain, but I think that on balance we are making progress.

I say this to the hon. Gentleman. If a process is to be judged on the basis of outcomes, it seems reasonable—to the Liberal Democrats, anyway—to say that the outcomes delivered justify the approach taken. I accept that others have different views—we have already heard them—but the Government are reasonable at least in making that calculation. Then we enter the grey area of thresholds, which we have now probably covered adequately.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I accept that the only outcomes the hon. Gentleman or anyone else can consider on the basis of knowledge are those that we have experienced already. Surely the problem here is considering future outcomes of which we are not certain.

Lembit Öpik: If that were not the challenge, and if there were not such difficult questions to answer, we would not have jobs, because there would be no such thing as politics. Essentially we are sharing our predictions of what we think we can achieve, probably agreeing by and large on the desired outcome of peace and normality in Northern Ireland, but differing in our identifications of the best way forward. That is the point made by the hon. Gentleman. This is a debate about process rather than outcomes, and I think the differences between the parties are based on our assessments of what is most likely to work.

[Lembit Öpik]

What the Liberal Democrats still think is most likely to work is the Good Friday agreement. It contains the conditions for power-sharing and devolution, for human rights legislation and for many other developments—including, obviously, decommissioning and reform of the police service. In itself it cannot deliver peace, but it provides the preconditions for the achievement of peace. It basically constitutes conflict management, but if the conflict is to be resolved it is necessary to address the underlying institutionalised sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

We agree, then, with the Good Friday agreement. My suggestions and observations relate partly to it, and partly to other ideas that we would like the Government to take seriously. First, let me point out that the Good Friday agreement itself institutionalises sectarianism. By referring repeatedly to two communities, it implies that the objective is to get those two communities to live in peace. I suggest that the objective is actually to get Northern Ireland to regard itself as one diverse community living in peace. That would be more productive—quite apart from the fact that talk of two communities tends to exclude those who do not see themselves as naturally falling into one camp or the other. There is certainly an opportunity for reform in that context, and I hope that the Minister will assure us that the Government will consider seriously how to take sectarianism out of the agreement.

Secondly, there is a great need for symmetry. The Government have sometimes been shaky on that. For democrats here who take the process seriously, one of the greatest strains is imposed when they feel that there has been a unilateral agreement with one side or the other. I would cite what looks like a unilateral agreement involving "on-the-runs" as a rather badly managed example. As far as I can tell, the Prime Minister probably exceeded his brief in terms of maintaining symmetry, thus creating a poisoned chalice that has been bouncing around in our debates over since word came out from Weston Park that there seemed to be some kind of agreement.

Symmetry works, but the apparent absence of symmetry does not and that simply makes it more difficult for those who feel hard done by to maintain support within their communities. That is one of the great strains on the Unionist side at the moment.

Transparency is important. When people say that there is no plan B, no one believes them. There is always a plan B in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dodds: There is always an alternative.

Lembit Öpik: There is always an alternative. Although we may disagree about the alternatives, it is naive of the Government to say that there is only one route forward, not least because that disfranchises those who, for perfectly respectable reasons, take a different view. The Government are more likely to include all sides if they acknowledge that there is more than one way forward and that we are discussing which is the best. Transparency will come if the Government acknowledge that and are willing to open the door even to those groups and individuals with whom they disagree. That takes place much of the time, but some groups, particularly those who are sceptical about the agreement, have been excluded. That has not helped the process as whole.

Decommissioning needs to occur, but the issue must be kept in context. It is easy to use decommissioning as a means of barring progress. Let us remember the symbolic importance of decommissioning and recognise that what has already happened is quite significant. To that extent, it is disingenuous for us always to call for full decommissioning as the precondition for progress. Full decommissioning must occur, but it is likely to take place in parallel with progress.

It is important that there is a greater flexibility in the Government's handling of legislation when everyone but a Minister agrees on something. On more than one occasion, time has been wasted in the House because the Government have not shown flexibility in a debate or taken on ideas that are evidently common sense and shared by a cross-section, from nationalist through to loyalist representatives.

I am an optimist with regard to Northern Ireland. The Orange Order deserves nothing but the highest praise for its handling of Drumcree this year. That is an example of responsible management in what could have been a very difficult and fractious occasion. By the same token, today's statement by the IRA is strategically important. It does not go all the way to saying that the war is over, but it goes a long way towards having the kind of tone that we need to hear from the IRA if people are to become more confident about its true intent.

It takes courage, cool judgment, symmetry and time to achieve peace in a region that has been troubled not for 30 but for hundreds of years. All of us want the same peace, but we argue about the process. Although I have criticisms of the Conservatives' position, I do not question the sincerity of their commitment to the peace process as a whole. I am glad that they have chosen to allocate their time to this debate, because all views need to be heard. We leave it to the public to draw conclusions about with whom they agree.

I pay credit to the many people on both sides of the House who take the peace process seriously. They have invested an enormous amount of time and resources and have taken personal risks. I would like to think that, in a couple of years, we will have a further debate in which we can celebrate the mutual contribution of all and move on to other matters with regard to Northern Ireland.

9.8 pm

David Winnick (Walsall, North): There are certain things on which we can agree. There remains in Northern Ireland far too much paramilitary violence, including punishment beatings and other acts of violence and hooliganism that are directed at both the majority and minority communities. When the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland spoke about such matters, I intervened to say that the chairman of Sinn Fein should certainly have condemned terrorist violence. I am not aware of any Labour Member—certainly not those on the Front Bench, or any Back Bencher—who would take a very different view. We can also agree that the IRA has not turned itself into a pacifist or semi-pacifist organisation. No less than the hon. Gentleman, I would like Sinn Fein to urge the IRA to disband. Although I welcome the decommissioning, which took place under pressure, further acts of decommissioning would be welcome, and that includes decommissioning by the loyalists. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford

(Mr. Davies) is right: we should recognise that there has been a lack of decommissioning by paramilitary loyalist groups and terror gangs.

It is easy to draw attention to what is wrong and what we condemn. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, who now plays a leading role in Northern Ireland affairs, recognises that what he condemns, we condemn—on that, there is no divide. However, when we consider what has been achieved, we should accept that substantial progress has indeed been made since the Good Friday agreement was signed in 1998.

For the first time since Northern Ireland came into existence as a separate state more than 80 years ago, a devolved Administration represents both communities. All the main political parties serve on the Executive, including the Democratic Unionist party, which has never accepted the Good Friday agreement. Surely it is progress that Northern Ireland is governed by elected representatives of both communities. That differs greatly from what happened there all those years before direct rule was imposed by the Heath Government in 1972.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was right to draw attention to the fact that far more people would undoubtedly have been murdered had the terrorist violence continued to the same extent. Surely that is progress. He mentioned what happened in 1972. Terrorist outrages, which did not occur only in Northern Ireland, took the lives of many innocent people, including members of the military and the police. They, too, were innocent, like the civilians who were killed. I have never questioned their innocence, and I have condemned IRA violence from the beginning, as hon. Members who have served in previous Parliaments know. There has been no ambiguity in my position, and I am not a lone voice; my party has always taken that position. The fact that lives have been saved from terrorist violence and murders cannot be ignored.

It has been argued—it is an unfortunate argument and not one that the Tory Front Bench makes—that only one side has won from the Good Friday agreement. We will hear it argued tonight that the nationalists and republicans have won and that the Unionists have lost out. That is a false argument, and it is not only the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and his colleagues in the Democratic Unionist party who employ it; too many people in the main Unionist party—including some hon. Members, although not the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, and constituency activists—argue that the Good Friday agreement has sold out the Unionist community. I see hon. Members nodding in agreement, but it is simply not true that only one side is a winner.

IRA and Sinn Fein had to recognise that terror would not force the United Kingdom to end partition. The IRA's standard argument was that terror upon terror would force a British Government to leave Northern Ireland. I am not aware that that has happened.

Before the agreement, Sinn Fein strenuously denied that Northern Ireland had any legitimacy. It said that Northern Ireland was a statelet, that it had no right to exist and that its existence as such should end. Now Sinn Fein Members sit, rightly, in an Executive in a devolved Administration. They have accepted the partition that they always refused to recognise. Is that in any way a sell-out of the Unionist community?

Sinn Fein has had to accept that there can be a change in Northern Ireland's status only with the support and agreement of a majority of the community. That is democracy. That has been the view of Members on both sides of the House and of Governments for over 30 years during the violence. There has been no sell-out on that principle. For years, the constant complaint of Unionist politicians was that it was unacceptable for articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution to lay claim to Northern Ireland. Following the Good Friday agreement and a necessary referendum in the Irish Republic, those parts of the constitution have been dropped.

I do not see how it can be argued with any logic that the Good Friday agreement has been of benefit only to one side of the community. Some Unionist politicians simply cannot accept the whole concept of power sharing in Northern Ireland, the changes in the police force, which were long overdue, or the legislation to outlaw all forms of sectarian discrimination.

The shadow Secretary of State was absolutely right to say that we neglected Northern Ireland for years on end. He complains that there are not enough debates on the subject, and he may well be right. We should, however, consider the sheer neglect of Northern Ireland. There had been no change since 1920—a Protestant state for a Protestant people. There was a great deal of discrimination, and the minority community was treated in a shabby and brutal manner. That was the position for years, and we all ignored it, including Labour Members and Labour Governments. That has changed, and it is absolutely right that it has done.

There are those on both sides of the sectarian divide who are totally opposed to the Good Friday agreement. We know from the horrifying tragedy at Omagh that there are those on the republican side who believe that there has been a sell-out by the IRA and Sinn Fein; and, unfortunately, as I have said, there are those on the Unionist side who do not accept the Good Friday agreement.

It is essential that the agreement is defended in every conceivable way by hon. Members on both sides of the House. When we combated terrorism over the years we had a united House. I understand the Opposition's view that their support for the agreement does not mean that they should not be willing to point out the difficulties, as they have done today, and to recognise that certain things need to be done. However, what needs to be recognised, not only by Unionists but by Conservatives, is that some Opposition Back Benchers have never accepted the agreement.

I make an appeal, with all the sincerity that I can command, to Conservative Members, and in particular to the shadow Secretary of State: if we believe that the agreement is the best way forward for Northern Ireland and that significant gains have been made, we should stand together in its defence despite all the blemishes that have been identified, many of which have yet to be tackled. We should form a united front against the wreckers, who have but one objective—to destroy the agreement that was signed four years ago..

9.19 pm

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): May I deal first with the statement from the IRA that has been referred to by a number of speakers? It has been

[Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson]

welcomed by a number of people, but as someone whose family have lost two members, murdered by the IRA, both police officers serving in Northern Ireland—Samuel Donaldson, who was murdered in Crossmaglen in 1970 and his brother Alexander who was murdered in the mortar attack on Newry police station in 1985—I cannot see anywhere in it an apology for their murder.

No one should lose sight of the fact that the IRA is still playing a game in which it regards police officers and soldiers as legitimate targets. Gerry Adams, I remind Members, recently said of recruits to the new Police Service of Northern Ireland from the Roman Catholic community:

> "I think that they will be accorded exactly the same treatment the republican movement accorded to the RUC. No more. No less."

Of course, there was recently an attempted murder of a police service recruit in Ballymena—an attack that Sinn Fein refused to condemn. None of us should fall into the trap of giving legitimacy to a statement that still plays the game of claiming that police officers or soldiers are legitimate targets. My family have not received an apology from the IRA, yet their grief and sense of loss is as deep as anyone's. More than 300 police officers have been murdered over the past 30 years—their families deserve an apology as well.

But apologies are not enough. We have heard words from the IRA before. Every time we get those statements, they receive the same welcome and the pressure is relaxed. Surely, that is precisely the time to keep the pressure on the paramilitaries. If we are to move towards the real and lasting peace that the people of Northern Ireland want, we cannot allow the paramilitaries to set the agenda. Let us be in no doubt that that is largely what has been happening in the peace process. The Prime Minister, before the referendum on the agreement, set out in detail the criteria by which he would judge whether ceasefires were genuine and whether the commitment of paramilitaries was for real. At Coleraine on 20 May 1998, for example, he said that those who use or threaten violence would be

> "excluded from the Government of Northern Ireland."

The Prime Minister went on to say:

> "And I say to you that is a reason for supporting this Agreement because in this Agreement we can provide that only those who renounce violence for good, once and for all, can take their place in the government of Northern Ireland or can get the benefit of the other arrangements under the Agreement."

Is not the reality, however, that the IRA, the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force have all committed acts of violence and continue to do so and to threaten violence, yet have benefited from the agreement? All their prisoners have been released and Sinn Fein is in the Government of Northern Ireland. Where is the Prime Minister's commitment now?

At Balmoral showgrounds on 14 May 1998, the Prime Minister went into even more detail, setting out a series of criteria by which he and the Government would judge whether the ceasefires were genuine. He talked about

> "a clear and unequivocal commitment that there is an end to violence for good"—

the words "for good" are underlined—

> "on the part of republicans and loyalists alike".

He went on to say:

> "as the Agreement expressly states, the ceasefires are indeed complete and unequivocal"

and that there is to be

> "an end to bombings, killings and beatings . . . to targeting and procurement of weapons; progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures"

and

> "full co-operation with the Independent Commission on decommissioning, to implement the provisions of the Agreement."

Then, crucially, he said:

> "These factors provide evidence upon which to base an overall judgement—a judgement which will necessarily become more rigorous over time."

But is it not the case that the judgment has become less rigorous over time, and that while the Secretary of State claims that there is no acceptable level of violence, violence today is at a higher level than it was when the agreement was signed? That is not my conclusion; it is the conclusion of the Police Service of Northern Ireland from its statistics, yet the Government say that the IRA ceasefire is still intact.

Using the same criteria, the Government announced that the UDA ceasefire had broken down. Is anyone suggesting that the UDA is guilty of a higher level of violence? Was it the UDA whose members were in Colombia developing new weapons? Was it the UDA that had three members convicted of running guns in a court in Florida? Was it the UDA that broke into Castlereagh police station? Was it the UDA that shot five Protestants in Belfast? Was it the UDA that was targeting me and other Unionist politicians in Northern Ireland?

Yet the IRA ceasefire, we are told, is still intact. I do not deem it to be intact, judging by the criteria laid down by the Prime Minister. Why do the Government differentiate between the UDA ceasefire and the IRA ceasefire? Of course, at the heart of the process are the Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence, to which all the political parties in Northern Ireland without exception signed up. Those principles have been demeaned and broken on numerous occasions by all the paramilitary organisations.

One cannot help but conclude, therefore, that there are occasions and circumstances when the Government are prepared to turn a blind eye to the breaches of the Mitchell principles and of the ceasefire. I believe that we have reached a moment when decisions must be taken about the process. The evidence is clear. The IRA has not made a commitment to peace and democracy, it is in breach of its ceasefire and of the Mitchell principles, and Sinn Fein has failed to deliver on the undertakings that it gave in the agreement.

On 22 April 1998 here in the House of Commons the Prime Minister told us:

> "it would obviously be a travesty of democracy if parties associated with paramilitary organisations held Executive office in the assembly while they continued to be engaged in or to threaten terrorism."—[*Official Report*, 22 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 811-2.]

We are entitled to ask the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State why Sinn Fein Ministers are still in the Government of Northern Ireland when there is incontrovertible evidence that the IRA is continuing to use and to threaten violence on the streets and to engage in re-arming and in international terrorism.

A deadline of 24 July has been set by the First Minister for the Government to act and to deal with those transgressions. Let us be clear that another form of words from the Prime Minister will not suffice. In my opinion, nothing short of the exclusion of the Sinn Fein-IRA Ministers from ministerial office will suffice. The promise to act in the future is not enough. We have had those promises before and they have been broken.

The Unionist community wants to see action taken against those who have transgressed. If we simply admonish them and do not follow that up with some kind of sanctions, what we are saying effectively is, "Colombia is okay. Castlereagh is okay. Florida is okay. What happened on the streets of Belfast is okay. Just don't do it again." But they will do it again. History has taught us that if we let the terrorists off the hook, they will come back to do it again. The idea that we can draw a line under Colombia, Castlereagh and the recent street violence in return for the paramilitaries making some kind of recommitment to the peace process is a non-starter. The agreement has been broken by the paramilitaries, and the Government must now act to hold them to account and to restore public confidence. That must mean altering the terms to ensure that we have effective exclusion mechanisms to deal with those who are in default. That is what the Prime Minister promised that he would do on 10 April 1998 and that is what he must now do. That is where I depart from those on the Government Front Bench. It is time for the Government to legislate to introduce powers for effective exclusion mechanisms. We have to send the signal that no level of violence will be tolerated and that the terrorists must adhere to the agreement, or there will be consequences. That has been the problem in the past. Terrorists on both sides believe that they can play fast and loose with the process and get away with it, and to date—let us face it—they have got away with it.

It is time for the Prime Minister and the Government to draw a clear line to create the circumstances and make provision for the exclusion of those who have failed to honour their commitments under the agreement. I am told that that is not workable; that the way to bring Sinn Fein-IRA and others along the path to peace is not to exclude them from government. So why did the Prime Minister say that he would do it in the first place? Why does the agreement make provision for it? Why does the legislation make provision for it? Sometimes, we have to deal with the terrorists by taking sanctions and action against them to make them realise that, as the Secretary of State said, there is no halfway house and that when we say that we will exclude, we will exclude. Otherwise, they call our bluff, and the Government's bluff has been called too many times in the past. It is time for the Government to act. The people of Northern Ireland expect them to do so.

9.32 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I, too, welcome the opportunity to debate the peace process in Northern Ireland. The positive statements made by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) in moving the motion and the eloquent response by the Secretary of State indicate the progress that has been made in the aftermath of the Good Friday agreement. I must say that I cannot completely agree with the Opposition spokesman's description of today's IRA statement as having been precipitated by the threat of the debate—that stretches credulity rather far. I would proffer the explanation mentioned by the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) as a more likely cause, but my favourite choice would be the imminent prime ministerial statement that is forecast to take place before 24 July, which is only next week.

No single Act of Parliament, no single event, no single speech, no single comment and no single tragedy sums up the peace process. It is an accumulation of all those things. In Northern Ireland, the peace process is the assimilation of the experiences that we all have while living in that community on a day-to-day basis. It is not surprising that our experiences vary, even from area to area, nor that all have not benefited equally from the peace process. But to argue that it is collapsing is a false argument indeed. Anyone who lives in our community knows quite well that even the most superficial comparison between the past four or eight years and today would indicate very clearly that the peace process is working. That is not to say that it is a complete or perfect peace. A physicist once explained to me that darkness is the absence of light, so I can parallel that by saying that peace is the absence of violence or of those things that are the antithesis of peace. So, our interpretation of peace is that it is a summation of all our experiences, but that is not to say that they are not important milestones for us to note and to gauge as retrograde or progressive.

The ceasefires and the decommissioning were significant events for both sets paramilitaries. Last weekend, it was terrible in certain areas of east and north Belfast, but, generally speaking, 12 July 2002 was the most peaceful 12 July for many years, and, as a community, we are thankful for that. I pay tribute, as have other hon. Members, to those responsible members of the Orange Order who did not besmirch their true tradition by engaging in violence, to the general good order and to the by and large non-political expressions from the various platforms throughout Northern Ireland.

Let us dwell for a moment on what we mean by peace. It will not simply involve another round of decommissioning—important and welcome though that will be—or the disbanding of the paramilitaries' apparatus and the cessation of their activities, essential though that will be. As I said earlier, peace will be the sum total of our experiences.

The Secretary of State described the enormous strides that Northern Ireland has made over the last eight to 10 years in terms of economic improvement, industrial growth, social betterment, the equality agenda, amendments to criminal jurisdiction, and the reform and re-organisation of the police, all of which have made a major contribution to pinning down the existing quality of peace.

Neither peace nor the prosperity to which the Secretary of State referred have been enjoyed equally throughout our community, however. In fact, one could generalise by saying that many of the areas that suffer sectarian strife are the very areas that have not benefited from the peace dividend of higher employment, permanent jobs, better social conditions and better housing. It is no coincidence that that should be the case.

One of the most difficult aspects of progressing the peace process in the months and years ahead will be the question not of whether there is another tranche of

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

decommissioning, nor of whether there will be evidence of complete demobilisation of the paramilitaries whom I abhor. It will be the question of whether we can create an atmosphere in which we can overcome the sectarian hatreds of centuries—not decades—that have been expressed by petrol bombs and pipe bombs, by the burning of houses, and by the eviction of one community by the other and vice versa.

Everything that we say contributes to the question of whether that problem can be resolved. Each of us, in the House and in Northern Ireland, has a responsibility to ensure that nothing that we say or do adds to the sense of injustice felt—correctly or incorrectly—by many. The reality is that injustices are felt, and we must do our best to alleviate them. That will eventually eradicate the hatred and sectarianism that are the root cause of all the inter-community strife that poses such a threat to the peace process.

I have no doubt that there are forces in Northern Ireland intent on destroying the peace process. There are others—we have heard expressions of this in tonight's debate—who, in some perverse way, would like to see the peace process falter, purely for political purposes. That would be a grave tragedy for the people of Northern Ireland, and I hope and pray that it will not happen.

It all depends on the approach that we take to these issues. Quite honestly, the 24 July deadline referred to by the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson)—I heard it said also by a Member of the Legislative Assembly, possibly for Belfast North—which threatens withdrawal from the Executive by the Ulster Unionist party, is an invitation to disaster. It is playing into the hands of those who want to wreck the entire process and the relative stability that our community has established with great difficulty and sacrifice.

Sacrifices have been made by all parts of our community. No one can claim the privilege of being alone in making sacrifices for the greater good. We should acknowledge those sacrifices and compromises for what they are: a massive contribution to the common good of our community. It is legitimate to make robust statements on the political platform, but not to the extent of jeopardising the peace process, which has been so tenderly nurtured.

Lest my remarks on decommissioning and paramilitaries be misunderstood, I stress that it is an anathema that we have bodies in Northern Ireland with access to illegal guns and bombs. It is a constant background threat to the peace and stability that we are discussing, and it must be eradicated.

It is imperative that, in the fullness of time, without putting a deadline on it, paramilitary trappings be done away with. The organisation of paramilitarism has been translated partly into a political machine and partly into a mafia-type machine. It is a disgrace that the sovereign Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland should tolerate the existence of unofficial armed, trained and active armies within their jurisdictions.

Unfortunately, however, we shall have to wear that anomaly for yet another short while. I hope that that stain will soon be removed from our community.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Has it struck my hon. Friend that many of those who urge the leaders of the community to destroy the current basis of the Northern Ireland Executive are those who did not support it in its current form right from the start?

Mr. McGrady: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. I agree entirely with the implication of what he said. Certainly, those who opposed the Good Friday agreement from its inception and those who oppose the concept of partnership, of working it out and living together, are the very ones who are now saying that the peace process is in danger, and exacerbating that danger by so doing.

I welcome some elements of the motion. It asks the House to regard the Belfast agreement

> "as representing the best hope for peace and normalisation available or likely to be achievable in Northern Ireland".

I subscribe fully to that. It then calls on "all parties"—I hope that that includes the Conservatives' sister party, the Ulster Unionist party—

> "to do all they can to contribute to the implementation of the Agreement, forbearance, mutual understanding and respect between the two communities in Northern Ireland, and avoidance of all forms of violence."

I support that.

9.45 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): In last Wednesday's Westminster Hall debate, the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) suggested that a better description of that debate, which was entitled "Northern Ireland Peace Process", would have been "Northern Ireland political process". In doing so, he made a fair point. As I said then, it is difficult to reconcile Northern Ireland's recent history with anything remotely resembling peace.

We have heard again today of the IRA's alleged involvement in the break-in at Castlereagh police station. There are also the revelations of IRA activity in Colombia and its links with the narco-terrorist FARC group. We still await the chairman of Sinn Fein's unequivocal condemnation of the attempted murder of a Catholic policeman in Ballymena. The personal details of more than 200 people have been discovered on IRA intelligence files—from senior Conservative Members of Parliament, to forensic scientists. A rural police station in Rosslea, County Fermanagh, was attacked by Sinn Fein-IRA youth wing members, and violence recently broke out in Drumcree and the Short Strand area of Belfast.

That is hardly the stuff of peace. One need only look at the statistics on the shootings and assaults carried out by so-called loyalist and republican groups to see the hard evidence. There is the cowardly and brutish behaviour of the thugs and gangsters who carry out so-called punishment beatings. A stench of fear and intimidation is created by people who are little more than criminals. They carve out their turf in order to extort, threaten, peddle their illicit wares, and contribute to the misery of thousands of decent, law-abiding British citizens. The behaviour of those groups—their members are not all paramilitaries; some are straightforward criminals—would not be tolerated on the mainland, and nor should it be tolerated in Northern Ireland.

The problem is that organised crime in Northern Ireland is becoming institutionalised. As the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's detailed report on the financing of terrorism in Northern Ireland states:

> "Nor is there any room for complaining that the problem is confined to Northern Ireland: these criminals are now turning their attention to the larger and potentially more profitable markets of Great Britain."

The report includes a chilling table that estimates the running costs and fund-raising capabilities of such groups, according to which the Provisional IRA's running costs are in the region of £1.5 million a year, and its fund-raising capabilities are between £5 million and £8 million. The Real IRA's running costs are estimated at £500,000 a year, and its fund-raising capabilities are between £500,000 and £1 million. The UDA's running costs are estimated at £500,000 a year, and its fund-raising capabilities are between £500,000 and £1 million.

It is clear that many of those organisations have money left over to invest—to launder—in perfectly respectable mainland businesses, as well as in Northern Ireland itself. Indeed, it is reported that the Provisional IRA has employed accountants. One can only hope that the firm was Andersen.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I agree entirely with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument, but does he none the less agree that the Bush Administration, who have taken on global terrorism, should also address Sinn Fein-IRA's funding of terrorism in Northern Ireland through their fund-raising activities in the United States?

Mr. Swire: I do agree, although there is some evidence that the sums raised in America have dropped substantially in the post-11 September environment. The problem is more endemic in Northern Ireland because paramilitaries and terrorists are finding other ways to institutionalise fund raising and criminality.

We are told that there have even been instances of paramilitaries from opposing traditions acting together to further their illegal business aims. I welcome the Government's attempts to tackle that ever-growing problem through the establishment of the Assets Recovery Agency. However, I regret that, in the Westminster Hall debate to which I referred, the Minister of State while rightly stating that the Government take the recommendations in the Select Committee's report seriously—chose not to respond to my request that they commit to providing the agency with the resources that it needs from day one. Can it really be true that only 10 officers in the police service are assigned to investigate general organised crime by the paramilitaries? As the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) said, the police ombudsman in Northern Ireland employs 103 staff. That is 10 times more people to investigate complaints against the police than are employed to investigate complaints against criminals.

Many aspects of the Belfast agreement are either not working, or not working as well as they should. The Prime Minister, Jonathan Powell, or whoever is still driving these matters from No. 10, seem so preoccupied with the concept of a peace process that they ignore the reality of what is going on under their noses. Paramilitaries are making a mockery of the Belfast agreement. Whenever the Government make a concession or turn a blind eye, it only serves to undermine the agreement.

If the Government are serious about saving the peace process—there is every reason to suppose that they are—they should remember what the process was all about originally. The Prime Minister should be reminded of his famous speeches at the Balmoral showground and at Coleraine in 1998, when he set out the tests against which any ceasefire had to be judged. He said that they had to be complete and unequivocal, and bring an end to targeting, shootings, beatings and the procurement of new weapons. He said that paramilitary organisations would have to be dismantled and that the tests would become more rigorous over time.

The Government must get their priorities right. They should concentrate on helping those people who have been driven out of their country by fear and intimidation—something about which the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) always argues so positively. The Government should not concentrate on locating and absolving on-the-run terrorists, as was discussed at Weston Park.

The Government must get tougher on decommissioning. More guns have come into Northern Ireland recently than have ever been decommissioned. The Minister of State said last week that the two acts of IRA decommissioning were of enormous symbolic significance. To whom are they symbolic? To whom are they significant? We need real, unequivocal decommissioning, not piecemeal decommissioning carried out at times of political advantage to the terrorist organisations

The Government must act firmly and fast. More importantly, they must commit whatever resources are needed to break the backs of the godfathers who are responsible for the misery in Northern Ireland, and to whom the peace process is a threat. If the police are given the resources to weed out the criminal gangs, the never-ending cycle of violence will be significantly reduced. The temperature in Northern Ireland will fall, and the peace process will have a chance of working. I cannot believe that there is one hon. Member in the Chamber tonight who does not want that, at least.

9.52 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I am sad to think that some people do not consider the statement made by the IRA today to be significant or important, and that they would disregard it. Such people talk of past pains as though they were suffered only by people on one side of the community, or by one family.

I believe that the IRA statement and its intentions must be tested. We must see where it leads us, but the statement contains an acknowledgement of the pain and grief suffered by the relatives of the people who the IRA consider to be combatants. It also makes apologies for the people who were viciously wounded or killed as a result of IRA activities. That makes it the most profound statement from the IRA that we have had, and we should recognise and welcome that.

We should welcome the statement, and then test it. The statement's penultimate sentence reads:

> "We remain totally committed to the peace process and to dealing with the challenges and difficulties which this presents"

Some of those challenges and difficulties are within the IRA. One problem for the IRA's political leadership is maintaining the movement's unity and leading the

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

movement through the peace process. That is part of the challenge facing IRA leaders, and we should understand that.

I am not making an apologia for the IRA. I regard it as responsible for the greatest setback in constitutional nationalism in Ireland and for the destruction of the civil rights movement there. It has caused attention to be turned away from the real grievances of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland, and towards the violence that it caused to take place on the streets. People should be in no doubt about where I stand with regard to the IRA, but we must recognise the importance of the IRA statement.

Among various speculation about the significance of the timing, Conservative Members claim that the IRA statement has been made in light of the statement that is to be made next week. That may be the case. However, the date that the IRA has chosen to commemorate in the statement is the anniversary of one of the most bloody events that has ever occurred in Belfast, as a result of its bombing. Not only did people die, as it says in the letter, but hoax calls were made and terrible casualties were caused. For those of us who were active at the time and who remember, it was a most horrific occasion, and the IRA has chosen the anniversary of that day to issue its statement. We should recognise that and understand what has happened.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I understand the hon. Gentleman's remarks, as I lost my message boy, paper boy and a member of my choir on that occasion. However, does not the IRA's "search for freedom" imply that the fight goes on until it ceases to be ruled by this Government?

Mr. McNamara: I think that the IRA is talking about its political wish to obtain a united Ireland, which was recognised in both the Good Friday and Hillsborough agreements. That is what its political fight seeks to achieve. I understand that. However, it has grasped the constitutional, political method of seeking to achieve it. Again, we must remember that.

In our debate last week, I welcomed the progress that had been made by the pro-agreement parties and the implementation plan to consider progress under the Good Friday agreement and keep it going. I argued then, as I argue now, that the greatest thing to be achieved is the communities' acceptance, through their political representatives, that the Good Friday agreement and all that has flowed from it is theirs. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) spelt out the political advantages for both parties and the material advantages for both communities. They said that it was not all give on one side and take on the other, but that both sides had to reach their communities. Powerful speeches were made.

Last week, I, along with many other colleagues in the House, received a delegation of women from Short Strand, who gave an account of what was happening in their community. They conveyed the nightmare that they, their families and neighbours experienced every day. That is no doubt repeated in other communities. They spoke with fear but not hate, and were confident of their own abilities and in the process of peace. They looked to their political leaders to promote political remedies.

I welcome the moves that have been made by all communities to address street violence in recent days. The Orange order has maintained a calming influence; in Derry, Sinn Fein stopped the persecution of people in the Fountain and the Waterside. I understand that Sinn Fein also took some of its young republicans to stay for a while in the Short Strand to understand what intimidation meant, so that they could understand what they were doing to the people in the Fountain. That was an extremely educative action.

I believe that in the year ahead, the institutions created by the Good Friday agreement must be made more robust and durable. That can be done only if the people operating the institutions reach out to others.

All eyes are focused on the Assembly elections, and all sorts of hypotheses are being put forward. The great thing is that everyone is concentrating on the election and what is going to happen. They are wondering about the results of a political process, which is something that did not happen to such a degree before. This is real politics. We should welcome and encourage that and do everything positive that we can to ensure that the arrangements that are established continue and flourish. The best way to achieve that is not to create new deadlines next week or new hurdles and obstacles to progress—hoops through which one particular party must jump.

Opponents of the Belfast agreement have pursued a relentless campaign to exclude Sinn Fein from the political process. The louder they shout for republican exclusion, the more disturbing is their silence over violence emanating from violent Unionism—from the loyalist paramilitaries. Conversely, the more they shout for the exclusion of Sinn Fein, the more they strengthen those elements within the republican movement who did not want the Good Friday agreement anyway and who say to their leadership, "There you are. You took these steps and everything that you have done is being thrown back in your face."

That is a dangerous attitude and one that I hope we will avoid in next week's statement. I hope that we will encourage the parties. Obviously, we cannot accept any degree of violence. There is no tolerable side to violence wherever it is—Sinn Fein, the UDA or anyone else.

We must also take steps to understand sectarianism better. One sad thing is that the police in Northern Ireland keep no record of sectarian attacks, whether those are balloon water bombs or pipe bombs. Sectarianism is not noted.

Macpherson's definition of a racist incident ought to be adapted for sectarian incidents in Northern Ireland. A sectarian incident should be any incident that is perceived by the victim or any other person to be sectarian. We should set about establishing the criteria laid down in the Macpherson report, adapting his definition of racist crime to sectarian crime. Such crime should be catalogued and followed through using the procedures suggested by Macpherson to try to root out sectarianism and hatred, in what will be difficult circumstances in Northern Ireland.

David Burnside *rose—*

Mr. McNamara: I will not give way as I only have a minute and I do not wish to take colleagues' time.

By adopting that sort of policy, we can achieve much. The process will be long and difficult, but we should accept it as a positive challenge.

10.3 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I shall dwell on matters that are relevant to my constituency, which I have represented in this House for more than 30 years.

At the heart of that constituency lies a middle town, Ballymena, where there is a mixed housing estate. A young man there—a Roman Catholic—desired to join the new police organisation. He applied and was accepted and appointed. IRA-Sinn Fein commenced a campaign in that estate with posters and leaflets to every house, depicting the new police service as another Royal Ulster Constabulary and branding it for murders, discrimination and other activities. The result was that the IRA came to destroy that young man. Its leaflets called on the people to treat new recruits of the Police Service of Northern Ireland in the same way that the police had treated the IRA. It was a miracle—an act of God—that the bomb did not go off and that that young life was not destroyed, and his father and mother as well.

How can any organisation say that it is for peace when its chairman was asked, "Do you condemn what happened in Ballymena", and he refused to condemn it? I have before me a statement from the IRA and I shall read from it in the light of that. Why should I not? It is an up-to-date reference to what has taken place. Indeed, in Rosslea, there was a vicious attack on the police station and Gildernew, a leading member of Sinn Fein-IRA, defended and justified it. She was elected to this place and has an office here, but does not take her seat. She refused to condemn that attack.

The statement includes condolences but they are limited only to the families of non-combatants. It states:

> "We offer our sincere apologies and condolences to their families . . . we address all of the deaths and injuries of non-combatants caused by us . . . There have been fatalities amongst combatants on all sides. We also"—

What? "Express our sincere apologies"? No. "Tender our condolences"? No. The sentence continues—

> "acknowledge the grief and pain of their relatives."

If ever there was a whitewash, that is it.

Do we really expect the people of Northern Ireland to believe as they listen to this debate that we are bearing some wonderful fruit? The statement concludes:

> "The IRA is unequivocally committed to the search for freedom, justice and peace in Northern Ireland. We remain totally committed to the peace process."

They tell us that they are committed to the peace process, but since they commenced their ceasefire they have murdered 14 people, shot 160 people and carried out paramilitary beatings on 250 people. They have run guns from Florida, carried out exercises in training narco-terrorists in Colombia and raided the special branch offices at Castlereagh to gather information better to target people. They have even targeted members of the Conservative party as well as all the Unionist Members of this place.

So this is peace. What do people in Northern Ireland with anguish in their hearts think of this House when it expresses defence of that statement? I leave it at that.

The Mitchell principles stated that there must be a total and absolute commitment to democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues. The IRA signed up to that but they do not keep it—they break it. There must be total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. I was amazed to hear people in this House say how terrible it was that we should think—how could we possibly?—that all decommissioning could take place and all beatings could finish overnight.

On 22 May 1998, the Prime Minister said:

> "Representatives of parties intimately linked to paramilitary groups can only be in a future Northern Ireland government if it is clear that there will be no more violence and the threat of violence has gone. That doesn't just mean decommissioning, but all bombings, killings, beatings and an end to targeting, recruiting, and all the structures of terrorism."

There are people in the House trying to pillory the people whom I represent and the view of those people because we have asked for what the Prime Minister promised. The time has come for the Prime Minister to deliver his promise. That is what the people of Northern Ireland want, and they have a right to do so. There is not an hon. Member from the rest of the United Kingdom who would have such things going on in their constituency and lie down about it—they would be up in arms about it, and they would protest in the House—yet the Northern Ireland people have endured great hardship.

The Mitchell recommendations call on the parties

> "To renounce for themselves, and to oppose any effort by others to use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the course or the outcome of all-party negotiations".

Is the IRA living up to that? The recommendations go on:

> "To agree to abide by the terms of any agreement reached at all-party negotiations and to resort to democratic and exclusively peaceful methods in trying to alter any aspect of that outcome with which they may disagree".

Does the IRA do that? The recommendations continue:

> "To urge that 'punishment' killings and beating stops, and to take effective steps to prevent such actions."

That is what the IRA said that it would do. All of us signed up to that, but only some have lived up to it.

We expect the Government to do what a Government are supposed to do: to make people subject to the law. All men equal under the law. All men equally subject to the law. That is what we are asking for tonight.

I must say that I take it rather hard from the Secretary of State because he read a statement by Ambassador Haass, who changes his attitude to terrorism when he leaves America. I am glad that I am telling the House tonight what I told him face to face. When he leaves America, he does not suggest war to the death against terrorism. America is not going to declare war against other countries because of terrorism—Oh, no!—and he told me and my party that he believes that IRA-Sinn Fein must be in the Government.

The idea that the Americans broadcast for the good of their people is that they cannot have terrorists about the place at all, but when they come to Northern Ireland they suddenly say that IRA-Sinn Fein must be in the Government. Why do they say that? They do so because they want to keep the Prime Minister of this country on their side.

What is the end of all this going to be? On 24 July, we will hear from the Prime Minister. I understand that there will be a question high up on the Order Paper in the name

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

of an official Unionist, and the Prime Minister will reply to that question. That is all we will have—a question and an answer—and then the House will adjourn.

I say in closing that no one was more relieved than the people of Northern Ireland about the comparative quiet that we had on 12 July. I was certainly very pleased when an SDLP Member of the Assembly congratulated the independent Orangemen in Ballycastle on the way they ordered their march. Although there was great antagonism at the beginning by people in the street, nothing happened to cause a breach of the peace. I am glad that even our opponents acknowledge that. Long may that continue in Northern Ireland.

10.14 pm

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I am aware that some of my colleagues wish to speak, so I hope that I will be forgiven if I speak a little faster than I would normally speak.

I want to give the House some background to my interest in Northern Ireland. It started in 1985 when I made a visit as a student journalist to Northern Ireland, along with half a dozen or so of my colleagues. We visited Connolly house in Belfast and spoke to Sinn Fein members who had served time for arms offences in the Maze prison. We visited Knock barracks and spoke to officers of the RUC. We spoke to members of the UUP and the DUP at their headquarters, to the SDLP and to trade unions.

Three things occurred to me at the time and shortly afterwards. First, everyone in Northern Ireland at the time had their own idea of how the troubles could be resolved if only everybody else would listen to them and be persuaded of their point of view. Secondly, everyone to whom we spoke was very keen to listen to our perspective on the troubles in Northern Ireland, coming from mainland Britain. They were just as keen to listen to us as we were to listen to them until we said something with which they did not agree, in which case they would say, "What do you know? You don't live here!" Thirdly, the metaphor of an immoveable object being acted on by an irresistible force was never more accurately used than when describing Northern Ireland politics.

One of the most moving tributes that I have ever seen to victims of violence in Northern Ireland was at Knock barracks. I do not know whether it is still there—Unionist Members may be able to tell me. There was a book encased in glass, and on each page of that book was the name of an officer of the RUC who had been killed by terrorism during the troubles. Every day, the glass is lifted, and one page is moved on. I found that a very simple but incredibly moving tribute, and the image has stayed with me. Whenever I show friends, relatives or constituents around the House of Commons, I am always careful to point out the shield above the main door as we enter the Chamber bearing the name of Airey Neave, a genuine world war two hero who was murdered by terrorists in 1979.

I have no intention of going through a long list of the many victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland over the past 35 years. What I believe is that the peace process is not simply about addressing long-held political grievances; it is primarily about ending the dreadful waste of life and restoring a degree of normality to Northern Ireland. No greater monument to the victims of violence could be imagined than long-term, secure peace for the people of Northern Ireland.

I understand completely why Members representing both Unionist parties have reservations about the way in which the peace process has developed. When I voted for Sinn Fein Members to have offices in this place, I did not do so with a spring in my step. I did not enjoy seeing convicted murderers being released from the Maze and being welcomed home as if they were conquering heroes. I am extremely worried by the fact that many terrorist organisations are still sitting on a stockpile of lethal weapons. Any assessment of the Good Friday agreement must go beyond a simplistic score chart, however, on which so-called concessions are listed in one column or another as a plus or a minus.

The question that we must answer tonight is this: is Northern Ireland today a better place to live? What are the poverty and unemployment levels? Do young people in Northern Ireland now have an opportunity to pursue a career, to thrive, to marry and to have a secure life in Northern Ireland instead of moving out? For the first time in 35 years, I think that we can answer yes to that.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned, in the three and a half years up to the IRA's first ceasefire in 1994, there were 343 killings. In the past three and a half years, there have been only 50. I will not adopt the position of Reginald Maudling, a former Home Secretary, who said that there was such a thing as an "acceptable level of violence", as, clearly, there is not. I will mention, however, this one factor: the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has seen a 22.8 per cent. drop in unemployment between May 1997 and May 2002; every one of the 11 constituencies represented by official Unionist and Democratic Unionist MPs in the House has seen a far greater reduction in unemployment. Surely that is something that we should value in this debate.

Time is pressing on me and I do not want to detain the House any longer, as colleagues want to speak. I want to make one comment, however, on something that the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) mentioned. He spoke of deadlines. I am not aware of a single occasion—I certainly know of no recent occasion—on which imposing a deadline helped. I do not believe that deadlines are helpful at all. Surely it is better to drive slowly and reach a destination than to drive fast and be unable to manoeuvre at the next bend.

10.20 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): One thing achieved by the vote by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) to give Sinn Fein MPs their peculiar and unique status here was our ability to receive an e-mail from Fisherj@parliament.uk containing an IRA statement 50 minutes before the embargo. That is at least one bonus.

I believe that the tone of the debate has entirely vindicated the Opposition's decision to devote our last Supply day before the recess to this important issue, and to a process that has now reached a serious stage. Let me briefly dispose of the least serious contribution, that of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik). He failed to deal with any of the hard questions, and continued his efforts to be misleading about the Conservative position. He really must become serious, and his party must address the hard questions without seeking to avoid them as its members did in voting for Sinn Fein membership of the House, when there were 14 votes in favour, 14 against and 24 abstentions. I will remind the hon. Gentleman of that for as long as he continues to misrepresent the Conservative position.

The Secretary of State was right to draw attention to the contradictory signals that are emerging in regard to events in Northern Ireland—some good, some bad. He also told us, however, that the real test lay in the fact that the transition must continue. He mentioned the four elements identified by Richard Haass. I particularly endorse what he said about the requirement for leadership, strength and courage on the part of all involved in the process, to condition their own communities and help take them towards peace.

The Secretary of State spoke of risk aversion. All too often, the tactics of Her Majesty's Government have seemed to be risk aversion—doing whatever is necessary to keep the process going. Now, however, we are hearing much more robust language from both the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, which I welcome. There should be no halfway house. The difficult questions must be faced now, and rights and responsibilities must be exercised in full.

Notwithstanding that language from the Secretary of State, there was equivocation when he hid behind the issue of devolved power. Ultimately, he cannot expect the SDLP to do the Government's work for them in delivering a cross-community vote—as the Assembly is currently made up—to take Sinn Fein out of the Executive, if that is what is required if Sinn Fein does not deliver on its obligations.

Both the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) and the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) quoted the Prime Minister. I think that we can be pleased with the words the Prime Minister used today when facing questions from my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), a Select Committee Chairman. He said "I do accept that we've reached a point where we say these things are unacceptable—that it is the right moment to reflect on this—and I hope we can do this." I have relied on my own notes rather than producing a transcript of what the Prime Minister said, but I wholeheartedly welcome the fact that his language today seemed to be entirely in line with the language that he used in 1998 at the Balmoral showground and in the House—language that has been quoted extensively by Unionist Members. The tone of the Government's approach to the debate is now correct. The seriousness with which all Members have contributed to it reflects that.

I have to say to the Secretary of State that there is now a requirement to take risks. That does not mean taking risks to court unpopularity in making further concessions. The Government may have to take a risk with the process itself, and test what Richard Haass has identified. He said that the process must be robust and resilient enough to withstand setbacks, violence and its opponents. The Government may now have to take those risks and test the words of the IRA. To use the language of the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), the IRA statement is welcome as far as it goes. However, Sinn Fein and the IRA are two sides of precisely the same coin, and we must take them at their word to see what their commitment to wholly peaceful means really is.

10.26 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): In the best traditions of the House, we have had a useful, lively and good-humoured debate. Several points have emerged that would command the agreement of all, or almost all, Members on both sides of the House. Given the time that I have, I hope that hon. Members will accept that I will not take interventions in my short contribution.

The first point of agreement is that the carrying forward of the peace process under the Belfast agreement must be about exclusively peaceful means. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said—hon. Members have referred to this—there is no acceptable level of violence. Indeed, the street violence of recent days is not acceptable. It is wrong, futile and must not go on if those concerned have any interest in the development of a happy and prosperous future for Northern Ireland. We will not see the development of a normal society while people resort to violence. All those involved—the rioter, the paramilitary delivering beatings and shootings to teenagers, the racketeer feathering his nest while claiming to "protect" his community—ruin lives and destroy hope.

Paramilitary violence, anything that appears to constitute preparation for such violence or the keeping of a war machine in existence are also unacceptable. There must be clear signs that the process of transition to exclusively peaceful means is advancing and is, indeed, irreversible. Anything else would be inimical to confidence. That brings me to the second point of agreement. The process must command the confidence of both communities. It was the essence of the underlying bargain embodied in the Belfast agreement that all sides would put down arms, work exclusively peacefully and work together in co-operation. All those elements must be present.

The third point that would command general agreement is that the leaderships of both communities must work for confidence and to address the concerns of the other community. The Government, and I believe the Irish Government, will do what we can, but delivering confidence is essentially within the control of the parties and their associates. I believe that the leaderships are working in that direction, but that work must go on. Recent events have caused serious questioning of the basis of trust on which the agreement depends, but the great majority of hon. Members would agree that there is no way forward other than the agreement. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) acknowledged that.

The benefits that the agreement has brought to the people of Northern Ireland have been rehearsed here and in a debate in Westminster Hall last week. I will not reiterate them, but they are fundamental. The difficulties that we face, serious as they are, must not be allowed to mask the enormous advances that have been made. We were in a much more serious position a few years ago. All those advances are at risk if the present process is not carried forward. It must therefore be for all us of to work to ensure that that happens.

There has been talk of sanctions. That is understandable. The Government realise that there must be consequences if those involved in the process are not

[Jane Kennedy]

all clearly set on the democratic and exclusively peaceful path. I take issue with the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson). The debate should not be about exclusion. We will have failed if anyone is excluded. We are about ensuring that the agreement works properly and that people complete the necessary transition from violence to exclusively peaceful means.

However, that is not to say that there will be no sanctions. Our approach is not passive. If violence continues, there are bound to be consequences. That is what we will consider in the coming days, but there is no point in being punitive for the sake of it. Our purpose has to be to change behaviour, building on the great advances that have been made.

I am aware of the sense of hopelessness in some areas. I see it regularly when I receive deputations not just from the Unionist community, but from people on all sides, especially those who live with and experience the difficulties in Northern Ireland. I acknowledge that in some instances there are poor material prospects, and that some people feel that their identity and place in the UK are under threat, but those fears are unfounded. However, it behoves us—the Government, the devolved authorities, the police, local politicians and community leaders—to redouble our efforts to reduce tensions, to improve conditions and to invest in peace. When we do so, the dividend will be a more harmonious and prosperous society for all in Northern Ireland.

I wish to take issue with something that the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) said. The Assets Recovery Agency will have the resources that it needs at the outset. His representation of my comments was inaccurate. Does he think that the amendments that his party supported in the House of Lords, which hamstring the Assets Recovery Agency—

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings, the debate stood adjourned.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 92) (HC 877) on Special Grant for Asylum Seekers Support (Adults and Families of Asylum Seekers) for 1999–2000, which was laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 92) (HC 877) on Special Grant for Asylum Seekers Support (Adults and Families of Asylum Seekers) for 1999–2000, which was laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.

CONTRACTING OUT

That the draft Contracting Out (Functions of Local Authorities: Income-Related Benefits) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.

PREVENTION AND SUPPRESSION OF TERRORISM

That the draft Schedule 7 to the Terrorism Act 2000 (Information) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 3rd July, be approved.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

That the draft Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 9th July, be approved.

That the draft Part-time workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 9th July, be approved.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

PARLIAMENTARY PENSIONS

Ordered,

That the Parliamentary Pensions (Amendment) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 1807) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

PETITIONS

Traffic Congestion

10.33 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): The petition, which has been signed by more than 25,000 local residents, states:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled

The humble petition of residents of South Bedfordshire showeth

That the traffic congestion in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, and the consequent rat-running in the surrounding villages, is appalling; that the people of South Bedfordshire have had to put up with the congestion for far too long; that plans for local bypasses, in place as long ago as 1936, have been repeatedly ignored; and that a proper bypass will enhance the quality of life for all who live and work in South Bedfordshire and is vital for their future.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House shall urge the Secretary of State for Transport to ensure that a northern bypass is built for Dunstable and Houghton Regis, extending the Leighton Buzzard southern relief road, the A505, from its junction with the A5 to the M1 and on to the A6 and that an HGV ban (other than for access requirements) is imposed through Dunstable and that the A5 through Dunstable is detrunked as a result; and that at the same time the Secretary of State shall undertake a detailed study into the most suitable way of achieving a link from the northern bypass to the Woodside Industrial Estate to relieve congestion in Houghton Regis and the Poynters Road and Luton Road areas of Dunstable and to provide uncongested access for businesses to the M1.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

International Trade

10.36 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I am pleased to present this petition, signed by 500 people, and I give them my support. The petition reads:

To the House of Commons,

The Petition of St Bonaventure's Parish, Bristol,

Declares that poorer countries should be able to lift themselves out of poverty.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to push for Fairer International Trading Rules,

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Driving Offences

10.37 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I support the petition and the 14,520 people who signed it. It states:

The petition of residents of Orchard Park, Greenwood and Hull North, and others,

Declares that they are concerned about the insufficient sentences imposed by magistrates for driving offences; that in a recent case in Hull, the court fined a driver £200 and disqualified him from driving for 12 months despite having established that he had no car insurance, no MOT, defective brakes, two defective tyres, defective lights, a defective windscreen washer and no registration plate and that, sadly, the driver in this case had hit a nine-year old boy, resulting in the boy's death, and that the driver had failed to report the incident to the police.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Home Department to review the range of sentences available to the courts in such cases, and to take such measures as lie within his power to ensure that magistrates use the full rigour of the law at their disposal.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Policing (Merseyside)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

10.38 pm

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): When I was standing at the taxi rank at Euston following my arrival in London on Monday, I noticed a sign saying, "You are safer in Merseyside than you are in London". I do not know what effect that sign is supposed to have—whether it is meant to make one get back on the train to Merseyside or to make people look over their shoulder while they stand at the taxi rank—but it is none the less a fact.

I want to engage the Minister in what I hope will be a constructive and thought-provoking dialogue about the position of Merseyside police. I apologise to him and to you, Mr. Speaker, for keeping us up so late, but I want to present a reasoned case for increased resources for Merseyside. I know that the Minister will probably say that under the comprehensive spending review, everyone will get increased resources. Increased resources are the order of the day. The Government's coffers are now open and largesse is pouring out.

There has, however, been a systematic failure by the Home Office to appreciate what policing Merseyside means. Historically, there has been a stand-off between the Home Office on the one hand and Merseyside police authority and the Merseyside police on the other. Merseyside police authority and the Merseyside police have repeatedly said that they want more resources, but the Home Office has remained firmly indifferent. I am a veteran of that process. Many years ago, I was a member of the Merseyside police authority when it was a truly democratic body, and went down to London with an all-party delegation to the Home Office. I saw the then Home Secretary—to give the House an idea of how long ago that was, the post was held by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). We complained about the cuts facing us, our problems and the lack of police manpower. We were given sympathy and, I think, tea, but not very much money. Part of the problem was that the Home Office was persuaded that demographic factors were against the Merseyside area. The population was falling so why, in the circumstances, should more police be required? Logically, I suppose, the Home Office could have argued that fewer police were required. I dare say that it was encouraged when subsequently some crime figures in the Merseyside conurbation went down, particularly in connection with burglary. When they did not go down, they did not necessarily go up at the same rate as in other conurbations.

The Home Office said one thing, the police authority another, and Merseyside police reiterated the views of the authority—that scenario has been repeated year after year. I want to dwell for a second on the reaction of Merseyside police, which is constructive, rather than negative. The force has progressed civilianisation throughout the force, so that front line officers are doing front line duties, and ancillary tasks not related to policing are taken on by civilians. That is commendable and desirable, and in line with Home Office policy.

Decriminalisation of parking offences has taken place in at least two authorities in the Merseyside police area. Consequently, the police are less preoccupied with those

[Dr. John Pugh]

chores. The business of school crossings has been transferred to local authorities. The police have therefore done what they can to cope with diminishing resources. There has also been much concentration on target hardening, making it difficult for burglars to gain access to domestic and business premises. Operation Bumblebee was successful in reducing substantially opportunities for burglars and the burglary figures on Merseyside. There has been a plethora of community partnerships, including the safer Merseyside partnership and satellite partnerships. The public has been consulted on ways of addressing the causes, effects and incidence of crime. There has been wholesale encouragement of home watch schemes and bids, successful and unsuccessful, for closed circuit television. All of that has made calls on the police less necessary because the causes of crime have been addressed.

The police have therefore done what they can to keep their house in order against a background of what they believe to be insubstantial resources. In turn, they have addressed some of their internal problems. In the early stages of the police authority's existence, there was a distinct tendency to save money by forcing expensive, highly paid officers into early retirement. That saved money one year but, of course, cost money in subsequent years. The police authority backed away from that strategy, and has since taken an intelligent approach to managing its resources. To be perfectly honest, absenteeism figures for Merseyside have not been the best in England. The police have paid attention to that and brought the figures down. They have done their best to resolve their problems against the background of the resources that they have, but the fundamental problem is that on Merseyside there is still a manifest fear of crime and a perceived and real shortage of police.

That registers as public concern, especially about public order offences—youths creating annoyance in local streets, and more substantial annoyance in town centres, where crime occurs. There is general public concern throughout the whole Merseyside area, and certainly in my constituency.

Something that worries, excites and energises the public is the reaction time of the police when dealing with crime. The fact is, if there are not enough police, few of them can reach the scene quickly.

Clearly, the public want the police not just to deal with crimes when they occur, but to be there so that crimes do not occur. They want a more visible and effective police presence. The entire Merseyside community wants a greater degree of neighbourhood security. That can be provided only by a proper number of uniformed, trained police. Although other strategies have been tried, such as community wardens—I do not in any way denigrate such a scheme—it is a fact that only a uniformed, trained bobby can have the impact on a scene of disorder that the public expect, want and legitimately look to the police force to provide.

Merseyside police have recognised the need for proper neighbourhood policing schemes and the need to be properly embodied in their community. They have done all they can to involve themselves in their community, to involve themselves with youth and to involve themselves in various sporting occasions where people who may be thought to cause annoyance can be occupied profitably. I pay due respect to those in the police force who have done their best along those lines.

That is all very good. It is entirely desirable and in line with Home Office policy, as I am sure the Minister would agree. However, it is against a background of a perceived fall of 500 in the police force in Merseyside. That is not a fabricated figure that I have produced for the occasion. It has been repeated by the chief constable on several occasions. He believes that there has been a historic fall in police numbers, and Merseyside has to live with that.

Last year, for the council tax payer of Merseyside, the facts were stark and not too encouraging. The precept for the police last year went up by 11 per cent. It would have gone up more, had it not been for the fact that £1.6 million of balances were used. It could conceivably be more next year. For that sum, there were no extra police. There was no contribution to the increasing number of police who are required by the Government across England. Worse still—this is a point on which I will press the Minister—there is the spectre of matters getting worse.

Last year Merseyside police managed by virtue of having a damping grant. The expectation is that that damping grant may not be there in future under the comprehensive spending review. Simply to make ends meet next year, therefore, there may need to be a higher rise in the council tax or a bigger problem for the police budget.

Other problems, which I am sure the Minister would recognise, although he is not prepared to do anything about them, because in a sense they are historic, are the substantial problems created by the burden of police pensions on the police budget. It may interest the Minister to know that last year it was calculated that more retired policemen were funded out of the police budget than active policemen. That is why the leader of the local city council, Councillor Mike Storey, asked for an investigation into how Merseyside was being policed.

I believe that the Home Office has not appreciated the reality of the situation facing Merseyside police, and I should like the Minister to comment on that. It is not just a matter of how many people there are to police; it is a matter of the policing task that the force has to perform. Merseyside police are doing not just a local job, but a national job, and some would say an international job. Liverpool is a port, it has an airport and it has all the problems associated with that.

I am reliably informed—the source is the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency—that 60 per cent. of all drugs consumed in Scotland, which I imagine to be a considerable amount, are routed through Merseyside. Fifty per cent. of all Customs and Excise seizures have Merseyside links. Merseyside is identified by criminal intelligence as the main distribution centre for class controlled drugs and increasingly is a major centre for black market cigarettes.

That is a national and an international problem. It draws substantial sums out of the mainstream budget available for ordinary policing in Liverpool. The police calculate that the figure could be about £14 million. That excludes any contribution to the national crime squad. In addition, following any attempt that the police make to address the issues of well organised crime, costs are incurred by schemes such as witness protection. There is some very high profile, very expensive crime in Liverpool, and my message to the Minister is that that is drawing resources from other budgets. There is, however, no apparent awareness of that reflected in the performance indicators presented to the Home Office.

To be fair, crime has fallen in Merseyside, which could now be said to be safer than other conurbations. I have seen statistics that appear to suggest that, and perhaps the claim on the poster outside Euston station is not too far from the truth. The invisible crime, however, is serious, and it is never far away. Last month, in my own constituency of Southport, which people might consider to be a safe, law-abiding place, two individuals were beaten to death with baseball bats in a drug-related crime. That crime, undoubtedly horrific in itself, will also be very costly to clear up, as all such crimes are.

On a parochial note, both my own constituency and Liverpool are developing tourist industries involving substantial amounts of European, private, Government and local government funding. That investment is pouring in, but with it come tens of thousands of extra visitors, who appear on a seasonal, nightly or occasional basis. No adjustment is made for the extra policing needs that that provokes. I hope that the Minister will give some thought to how the expansion of the tourist industry creates additional policing needs and requirements.

A big event in one part of the Merseyside conurbation seems to take resources from another. Even a simple event such as Liverpool playing at home can draw policemen out of Southport, St. Helens and other parts of the conurbation, because manpower is spread very thinly. That is particularly manifest at night, and Liverpool and Southport both have a thriving night life. There is clearly a need to control that environment and to provide a safe and secure environment in which young people—not just young people, all people—can enjoy themselves without fear of crime. That is not easy in a conurbation in which the police recognise that one third of security firms have criminal connections.

Correlated with the thriving night life must be a vast amount of unreported crime—some minor, some major, but an awful lot of it preventable. If I had a few extra policemen in Southport to stand at a taxi rank at pub closing or club closing time, I could almost certainly guarantee a significant reduction in incidents and a safer environment for all and sundry.

I am making a plea to the Minister to consider Merseyside a special case with regard to police resources and manpower. I have read with interest the comprehensive spending review, and I note that it speaks of technology. It is, however fairly unspecific—perhaps the Minister can be more specific—about people, bodies and police. That is what we require: human beings to staff the force. I have nothing against technology; it makes an important contribution to the fight against crime, but, so far as we are concerned, there is no substitute for manpower. In fact, any attempt to make it a substitute for manpower would really ruin matters.

To keep a presence on the streets, Merseyside police have been driven at times to evacuating the police stations. At such times, people call the police only to find that they are not there, or to be confronted by an exotic call-waiting system. The call-waiting system that the Merseyside police have is bizarre in the extreme; it seems to have been built for business, not for the needs of people who urgently require the police. I have genuinely been put in a calling queue after dialling 999, and I am told that, on certain such occasions, one can listen to Vivaldi. That is fair enough for people with only a trivial inquiry, but for people with a serious problem that they want immediately addressed, such as a burglar in their house, perhaps listening to Vivaldi is not altogether the right outcome.

I understand—perhaps the Minister can confirm this—that the police force on Merseyside is soon to be inspected. I welcome that, and I hope that there is nothing to hide. I know what we want, and I think I know what the Minister wants, namely a peaceable, active, economically vibrant Merseyside. That is what I want, too, and I hope that we agree on the ends and the means. The comprehensive spending review needs to offer some hope for the area's long-standing ambition to have more police. Does he accept that Merseyside has peculiar features that may require additional policing?

If earned autonomy is the Government's theme of the moment, we in Merseyside have surely earned something. We are hampered by organised crime and challenged by commercial expansion, and we have been discouraged by successive Home Secretaries, but still people have tried their best to make do with what resources we have, trying actively to develop a strategy of neighbourhood policing. I am sure that the population devoutly wishes that it will work, but we really need the police numbers to deliver, and I hope that the Minister will be able to give me some hope that we will get them.

10.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) on securing this debate, and on the measured way in which he presented his case. This will be a useful opportunity to air some of the concerns that have been raised about policing on Merseyside. As he will recognise, the Government are improving police resources so that they can play their key part in tackling crime and disorder and improving community safety. Resources for policing overall have increased by 6.1 per cent. in 2002–03, building on a 10 per cent. increase in 2001–02. We are currently considering the provisions made under the 2002 spending review, so I cannot tonight go into the detail that he requests.

Under the funding settlement for 2002–03, Merseyside police authority has been allocated grant of £229.1 million, an increase of £5.2 million, which is broadly in line with the average increase in the year in grant for forces in England and Wales.

Merseyside also receives £7.5 million through the crime fighting fund and £5.6 million in capital allocations. The overall increase in funding over 2001–02, including those elements, is £9.4 million. In addition, Merseyside will benefit from money for DNA profiling and extra money for Airwave, the new radio communications system. It can expect up to £9.1 million for Airwave this year.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the funding formula. He knows that the Government's consultation document covering reform of the system used to distribute grant to English local authorities was published on 8 July. The system covers all the key local government services, including education, personal social services, police, fire and a wide range of other responsibilities. The consultation paper draws together potential changes for

[Mr. Bob Ainsworth]

funding for all local government services. There is a 12-week consultation period before decisions will be taken. The aim is to provide a fairer, simpler and more stable formula as a basis on which to allocate grants. I am certain that the hon. Gentleman will make representations as an individual, and I will be interested to see his party's representations about any changes that should be made to the allocation formula.

With the help of the recruitment funded by the crime fighting fund, police strength is well on track for the Government's target of 130,000 police officers by spring 2003, which will be an all-time record for police numbers in England and Wales.

I fully accept what the hon. Gentleman says about areas with falling populations and the particular problems that that can cause for all local government services. However, I should point out that, excluding the Greater London area, Merseyside has the highest ratio of officers to population. In September 2001, there were 292 officers per 100,000 population, compared with the figure for England and Wales of 236. Police numbers in Merseyside fell by 484 between 1990 and 1997, and numbers continued to fall by a further 149 between 1997 and 2001. The position has been stabilised with the help of money from the crime fighting fund. Between March 2001 and January 2002, numbers rose by 28, to 4,113.

The CFF has helped to halt the decline in police strength in Merseyside. The force has been allocated 332 CFF recruits, over and above previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003. Merseyside police recruited 125 officers through the CFF, and in 2002–03 it recruited 94 officers through the CFF. It will be able to take on a further 114 recruits in 2002–03.

We sometimes felt that the contributions of the hon. Gentleman's party were a little stifling, but they were not entirely negative in respect of the Police Reform Bill's proposals. I hear what he says about numbers on the streets and the need for officers. By next year, there will be 130,000 officers on our streets—an all-time record—but there remains a need for reassurance. The measures in the Police Reform Bill have the potential to provide such reassurance through community safety officers—the extended police family.

The hon. Gentleman talked of Merseyside's contribution to the national crime squad as if it were entirely outgoing. For obvious reasons, we cannot discuss the detail of the squad's work with Merseyside police, but I should point out that extensive work is being undertaken in that regard. As he knows, in June a major drug supply network, based on Merseyside and with contacts throughout the world, was busted with the help of the national crime squad. So when we talk about the contribution being made, we should remember that Merseyside receives considerable support from the national crime squad. I hope that that point is appreciated.

In making his plea to me, the hon. Gentleman knows that the substantial organised crime that exists in Merseyside also exists in other big cities throughout the length and breadth of our country. Will he please consider his party's position on the Proceeds of Crime Bill, which is going through the House? That legislation has the potential to make a substantial hit against the profitability of organised crime in this country. With the greatest of respect, I should point out that his party is supporting amendments in another place that could do serious damage to that proposal. They could limit our ability to take the profit out of crime, and to dismantle the gangs that cause him and his constituents on Merseyside a potentially disproportionate problem, compared with some other places.

My research shows that, since 1986, we have been talking about adopting effective measures to take the proceeds of crime away from serious organised criminals. We have held out that possibility to the British people, and it is about time that we delivered effective legislation that makes a serious hit on the profitability of crime. If we are going to hedge our bets every time, we will, in effect, present people with a difficult tool to work with. It will not be operated effectively, and will not dismantle the sort of criminality on Merseyside that the hon. Gentleman described. The Merseyside police, with the help of the national crime squad, have put a great deal of effort into the fight against that criminality.

We are aware of some of the problems. We know that crime on Merseyside rose by 5.6 per cent. in the year ending March 2002, and that violent crime increased by 1.1 per cent. in that time. Vehicle crime fell by 1.3 per cent. in the period, but there remain two areas of particular concern—domestic burglary and robbery.

The rate of domestic burglary on Merseyside rose by 14.6 per cent. compared with the previous year. That is well out of line with the national figures, and we should be happy to hear any information that the hon. Gentleman may have about that problem. The number of robbery offences rose by 31.1 per cent. in the year to March 2002. That broadly reflects the national situation. It has been well reported that there has been an increase in the numbers of robberies, and that is why we have introduced the street crime initiative.

The street crime initiative represents a step change in cross-Government action to tackle street crime with a focused programme of action, in the 10 police force areas with the highest level of robbery and street crime. The street crime initiative money announced for the Merseyside force after the Budget amounts to £1.7 million. With the aid of that additional money, the Merseyside force are making a concerted effort to reduce street crime. We are beginning to see some results, as police and other criminal justice agencies—such as local authority health and education departments, and the drug action team—adopt a strong multi-agency approach.

The hon. Gentleman alluded to the problem of drugs and their impact on crime. I hope that I have made it clear that we are fully aware of the difficulties facing Merseyside, and that he will make a personal contribution to the consultation on the funding formula—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eight minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 17 July 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Health Services

1. **Adam Price** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): What recent discussions he has had with the National Assembly concerning the specialised health services commission for Wales consultation paper. [67872]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have frequent meetings with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales, and health is a matter that we regularly discuss.

Adam Price: The Secretary of State will be aware of the strength of feeling in west Wales about the proposal to centralise paediatric services in University hospital Cardiff. He will also be aware of the *South Wales Evening Post* petition, which has received more than 72,000 signatures. How has the specialised health service commission allocated its budget to date between the different regions of Wales? Does he agree that the Labour and Liberal Democrat Administration in Cardiff should base their health strategy on networks of excellence that are accessible to patients in all parts of Wales, not just to those in Cardiff and the south-east?

Mr. Murphy: Of course I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman the details of how the specialised health service commission for Wales operates because that is a matter for the National Assembly, not the Government. I agree that we need centres of excellence throughout Wales, but I am sure he is aware that the commission, which was established by the health authorities in Wales, is composed of specialists and they are giving the issues careful consideration. No doubt he is also aware that the matter is subject to public consultation. I am aware of the strength of feeling that he and other hon. Members have about the issue, but we must await the verdict of the consultation.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): My right hon. Friend will be aware that I have lobbied him on the deep anger that exists in Swansea and south-west Wales because of the threat to the paediatric neurosurgery unit at Morriston in my constituency. The anger is evidenced by the magnificent campaign of the local newspaper, the *South Wales Evening Post*, which has received more than 70,000 signatures. Does he realise that many local medics say that the consultation process is flawed? Does he agree with me and, I hope, the First Secretary that devolution should not mean centralisation in Cardiff? Centralisation was wrong in London; it is equally wrong in Wales.

Mr. Murphy: Devolution of health services to local communities is a main feature of the new reorganisation of the health service in Wales. That is what it is about, and I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend on that. I know he understands that we have to balance the importance of achieving excellence in the delivery of medical service, which is recommended by the experts in that sector, with the issues that he raises. I am sure that his concerns, together with those of other hon. Members, will be made clear to the First Minister and the Health Minister. However, I emphasise that the decision will be made by the commission rather than the Assembly.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The Secretary of State rightly says that the matter is subject to public consultation. As we heard, more than 70,000 people have signed the petition organised by the *South Wales Evening Post*. The unit is important not just for Swansea, but for the surrounding areas, including west Wales. We know that there is a good road network to Morriston hospital. It has a helipad, which Cardiff does not, and skilled staff whose commitment and dedication save lives. Will the right hon. Gentleman discuss the provision of that facility with the Health and Social Services Minister? Cardiff does excel in some specialities, as do other areas, but when paediatric neurological experts state that first-class care is needed within a two-hour period, the facility cannot be allowed to move on health grounds alone because the consequences will be grave.

Mr. Murphy: Of course I give an undertaking to talk about the issue with the First Minister and the Health Minister in Cardiff. The hon. Gentleman understands, as a native of Swansea, how important it is that medical services are of highest standards in west Wales. He can rest assured that I will take up the matter.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will my right hon. Friend make it clear to the health service commission that many of us in the House regard its approach as hypocritical? It holds it against Swansea that it does not have intensive care beds, but it refused to allow the hospital to have those beds despite a recommendation by the Welsh Office in 1998.

Mr. Murphy: The fact that my right hon. Friend has added his voice to the campaign is significant. He, too, can rest assured that I will raise his specific point with the Health Minister.

Regional Airports

2. **Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater): What discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly regarding assistance for regional airports. [67873]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have regular discussions with the First Minister about matters affecting Wales, including a wide range of transport issues.

I was delighted to hear the recent announcement that BMI is to use Cardiff International airport as a base for flights to the European mainland. That is a tribute to the airport operators as well as to the Assembly and its partners in marketing Wales as an attractive place to do business.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: Many people from Somerset use the airports at Bristol and at Cardiff, where BMI is now an operator, to go abroad, and one problem with getting to both those regional airports is the road system. Given that the regional consultation document will come out later this year, will the Minister do what he can, when the consultation is over, to make sure that people who want to use the airports, in an area that is not well known for easy access, will have the chance to do so?

Mr. Murphy: Obviously, I will do what I can. In the job that I hold I cannot promise that I can do much for Bristol, but I can probably do a little more for Cardiff. I take the hon. Gentleman's point that in south-west England, which includes his constituency, and south Wales there is a need for the road and rail system to integrate with the air transport system. He made valid points, and I shall certainly make sure that I raise them when I discuss the matter with the First Minister.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I agree with my right hon. Friend that the best way to boost regional airports is to attract low-cost airlines, such as bmibaby, which we have just secured as an operator at Cardiff International airport. That will mean an increase of up to 1 million passengers a year coming through Cardiff, but it could also mean 500,000 traffic movements on the road to the airport, so it will present challenges concerning access. Will my right hon. Friend look into that matter?

Mr. Murphy: The point made by the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) is exactly the one made by my hon. Friend. I agree with him about the numbers. He will know that about 1.5 million passengers a year use Cardiff International airport, and with BMI coming on board that figure will rise to 2.5 million. That is good news for Wales and for my hon. Friend's constituency.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): The experiences of the south of Ireland have shown that the economic development of regional airports directly stimulates economic development around them, and that has been very beneficial. Is the Secretary of State aware that Welshpool and other regional airports in Wales have strategic plans to, for example, extend runways and terminal facilities? Is he willing to lend Wales Office support to the inevitable consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority as those airports seek to extend their operations?

Mr. Murphy: I very much take the hon. Gentleman's point about regional airports as well as the other airports in Wales that I have mentioned, and I have been to Welshpool airport. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig), and the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), who deals with these matters, have been in discussion about the regional air services study, which will come out shortly. It will examine the need for road and rail links to airports in Wales, as well as their potential for economic growth. They are indeed magnets for such growth, and the hon. Gentleman can be assured that we will take up those matters.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): Will my right hon. Friend use his position to ask the management of BAe in Broughton in north-east Wales if it will open its runway to commercial private use for airlines in Wales? After all, BAe has received £250 million of public funds to help it to develop the airbus, and the least that it could do is open the runway.

Mr. Murphy: I will be in north Wales in a few weeks, and I shall certainly make sure that I raise the issue. It is important because although many people in north Wales use Manchester airport, a regional airport in north-east Wales would be a great advantage to my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. Evans: Will the Secretary of State congratulate Air Wales on its new routes from Cardiff to Edinburgh and Glasgow, which are a great boost to Cardiff in the light of British Airways's reduction and withdrawal of services from the airport? In recognising the importance of regional airports such as Swansea and Cardiff, will he set up and chair a working party including, for example, the Welsh Development Agency and local authority chief executives and development officers, who can drive forward and assist regional airports in Wales so that the whole of Wales, especially the outer-lying areas, can fully benefit from the extra business opportunities that this will bring?

Mr. Murphy: I know that the hon. Gentleman has taken a special interest in the airport at Swansea, and he is right to point out that Cardiff has new services to Glasgow and Edinburgh. I am aware of the aspirations to have a service from Swansea to Scotland, which would be good news for west Wales and indeed for Wales in general. As to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that I chair a working party, it would be a good idea for him and other hon. Members who are interested in these issues to meet me to discuss the way forward.

Policing (Cross-border Co-operation)

3. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): If he will make a statement on the effectiveness of cross-border co-operation between Welsh and English police forces. [67874]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): There is good co-operation between the Welsh and English police forces aimed at combating organised crime. The national services, including the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service, also provide valuable links across all police forces.

Mr. O'Brien: Given the 13 per cent. rise in overall recorded crime in north Wales, especially the 19 per cent.

rise in robbery, it will come as no surprise to the Minister that I have been told by the Cheshire constabulary that many of the criminals committing robberies in my constituency come over the border from north Wales. May I urge him to ensure that maximum co-operation is permitted and encouraged between police forces, and that no political and administrative boundaries or differences in accountability can possibly get in the way of that full co-operation?

Mr. Touhig: I certainly take on board the hon. Gentleman's point. Cross-border co-operation is important if we are to reduce crime. He mentions the crime figures for north Wales. I can tell him that overall crime has fallen by 22 per cent. since the Government came into office, which compares with the doubling in crime that occurred during the 18 years when his party was in government.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Can my hon. Friend assure us that there is full co-operation between the police forces of south Wales and of Bristol to stem the dreadful epidemic of cocaine, especially crack cocaine? It already has too strong a hold on Bristol and its dealers are now looking to expand their market into south Wales.

Mr. Touhig: On 5 July, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives of the three south Wales police forces in response to increased criminal activity, particularly in relation to drugs coming into Wales. The police forces have created a joint specialised drugs unit and are diverting resources into combating drug misuse. They are also working closely with their colleagues on the other side of the River Severn. To a certain extent, the supply of drugs in Wales is based on geographical factors. Supplies to the south come largely from drug dealers in Bristol and the west midlands, while those to the north come from Manchester and Liverpool. Cross-border co-operation is vital if we are to rid ourselves of that misery.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Many people who live in the Welsh marches live in very isolated communities, such as south Herefordshire, and when they dial 999 they want an immediate response, regardless of the badge on the emergency vehicle that comes. Given that fire brigades regularly cross borders to attend fires, should not police cars also do so, so that the closest patrol car responds to an incident?

Mr. Touhig: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. It is a difficult issue in some of the marches areas. I undertake to pass his point on to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Crime Reduction

4. **Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on measures to reduce crime in urban areas. [67875]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues about a number of issues affecting Wales, including measures aimed at reducing crime.

Mark Tami: I thank the Minister for that answer. Antisocial behaviour is a crime that blights many of our towns and cities in Wales. I recently met community leaders in Connahs Quay, where such activities are increasing. Does my hon. Friend agree that the appropriate authorities need to be far more rigorous in their use of antisocial behaviour orders if we are to counter that threat?

Mr. Touhig: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. Indeed, I believe that he recently hosted a conference in Connahs Quay to discuss issues arising from crime levels there. Several initiatives are being considered by members of the Flintshire crime reduction partnership to tackle underage drinking, including the introduction of proof-of-age cards. I agree with my hon. Friend that the use of antisocial behaviour orders could be greater. In my part of south-east Wales they have been used to some extent with some effect. I hope that police services and local authorities that can make an impact on such behaviour will use them much more than they have in the past.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I want to focus the Minister's attention on a specific recent urban crime: the defiling of the synagogue at Ffynone in my home city of Swansea. Does the Minister know that the previous synagogue was destroyed by the Nazis during the second world war? Is not it ironic that Nazis should be trying to destroy the current synagogue? Will he accept, through his office, the thanks of the Swansea Jewish community, including members of my family, who have lived there for more than 100 years, for the warmth and hospitality that the people of Swansea have traditionally shown to their Jewish residents?

Mr. Touhig: I can think of nothing more offensive than desecrating a place of worship. Like all decent Welsh men and women, I was outraged by the attack on the synagogue in Swansea. The Jewish community in Swansea has always played a vibrant and important part in the life of the city, as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) knows. We must condemn such actions; we should be ashamed of them in this day and age.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): My hon. Friend knows about the drugs problem in valleys communities in south Wales. Local police reckon that 90 to 95 per cent. of local crime relates to drugs. Has he had an opportunity to decide when the all-Wales drugs conference, for which hon. Members and Assembly Members have called, will take place?

Mr. Touhig: That matter was raised by chief constables when they met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently. I have also discussed it with colleagues, including Edwina Hart, the Assembly Minister responsible for anti-drugs policy, this morning. We take the view that such a conference should produce positive outcomes, and it should therefore have clearly defined objectives. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will raise the issue when he next meets the First Minister.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Given the undoubted benefits of closed-circuit television, will the Minister make representations for the next phase in next year's Budget allocation? Phase 1 was £3 million; phase 2 was half of that. That meant that only 13 out of 300 applications were granted in Wales. Will he make representations for an adequate budget, given the usefulness of CCTV in tackling crime?

Mr. Touhig: I share the hon. Gentleman's view about CCTV's contribution to reducing crime and antisocial behaviour, and I take his point on board. The Government have extensively supported initiatives and contributed a great deal of money so that we can have CCTV projects throughout Wales and the United Kingdom. I take the hon. Gentleman's point seriously, and I shall ensure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is made aware of it.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I, too, condemn the mindless and racist attack on the Swansea synagogue, which I shall visit on Friday.

The latest crime figures show a 16 per cent. increase in robberies in Wales, with Gwynedd experiencing a staggering 440 per cent. increase and Bridgend a 105 per cent. increase. Detection has fallen from 41 per cent. to 39 per cent. Part of the reason for that is the fall in the numbers of police and special constables who patrol in Wales, and the increase in form filling that the police have to undertake. The Prime Minister stated that street crime, which has shot up, will be brought under control by September. Does the Minister stick by that commitment for Wales? If so, what will change to achieve that?

Mr. Touhig: The Government have laid the foundations for the most co-ordinated attack on crime in a generation. Billions of pounds have been invested in fighting crime; there are 4,500 more policemen on the beat in England and Wales now than two years ago. There are 523 more policemen on the beat in Wales than there were when the Conservative party was last in government. Only investment and reform will tackle the menace of crime. The Tories do not understand that, which is why they have not supported our investment or reform. No wonder the Tories have no Members of Parliament in Wales; they are not credible as a political party.

NHS Dentists

5. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): What recent discussions he has had with the National Assembly for Wales about increasing access to NHS dentists in Wales. [67876]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have regular meetings with the First Minister and the Health and Social Services Minister to discuss the NHS and other health matters.

The Assembly aims to increase availability of NHS dental service provision in those parts of Wales where it is most needed, and in Wales overall, through the Welsh dental initiative scheme.

Ann Clwyd: As my right hon. Friend knows, there are fewer NHS dentists per head of the population in Wales than in any other country in the United Kingdom. Despite the Assembly's best efforts, access to NHS dentists and registering with an NHS dentist remain extremely difficult. That is directly linked to dental fees. The Conservative party was responsible for the growth of privatisation—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not responsible for the Conservative party.

Mr. Murphy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question, and she is of course right—whether she is responsible for the Conservative party or not, Mr. Speaker—about the reasons why the NHS dental system in Wales has been so poor. It will take a great deal of time and money to put it right. I know that she is aware that the enormously successful financial settlement that has gone to Wales from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer means that at last proper resources are going into the health service as well as the dental service in Wales.

I should also tell my hon. Friend that there are 42 new dental practices, 41 expanded practices, 15 new posts in community dental services, and five mobile units at each health authority that deals with these matters. She is of course right about fees, and I shall ensure that the First Minister and the Health and Social Services Minister are made aware of the points that she has made.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Owing to the unfortunate death of a dentist in Aberystwyth, the imminent retirement of a dentist in Lampeter, and the possible criminal conviction of a dentist in Cardigan, thousands of my constituents have been told to travel to Brecon, Ammanford, Milford Haven and areas outside Wales for such services—a two-day journey by public transport for pensioners in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State consider reforming NHS dental fees and talk with the Welsh Assembly about introducing salaried NHS dentists?

Mr. Murphy: Of course I shall ensure that those points are made to the appropriate Ministers in the National Assembly. The hon. Gentleman knows that about a decade ago there was a 7 per cent. cut in NHS dentists' fees, and they have not got over that. What is certain is that something like £71 million is now spent on dental services in Wales. I hope that some of that money goes to rural areas, because that is particularly where difficulties lie. I know that in his constituency only 23 dentists deal with the national health service. That is a problem, but I know it is one that the Assembly is tackling.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Does the Minister recall the statement made by the Welsh Assembly regarding the reorganisation of the NHS in Wales—made by the people who will be responsible for deciding many of the health issues that we have discussed today? Does he recall the Assembly giving a commitment that that reorganisation would be cost-neutral? Now we are told that it will cost £15.5 million. Does he believe that the people responsible for making that commitment should be subject to a compulsory numeracy hour, or was it another cheap public relations stunt by the Assembly?

Mr. Murphy: I understand my hon. Friend's point—of course I do—but I know that he understands that, although £10 million to £15 million will be involved in changing the system, in the first instance that will result in more locally provided services. Much more important than all that, however, is the fact that, between now and five years' time, nearly £2 billion extra will go to the health service in Wales because of the spending review of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is only the resources going into those services in Wales that will provide the insurance for our future.

Welsh Lamb

7. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will meet the First Secretary to discuss the sale and promotion of Welsh lamb in England. [67878]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has frequent discussions with the First Minister, and I regularly meet the Assembly Rural Affairs Minister. A wide range of issues related to agriculture are discussed, including the sale and promotion of Welsh meat beyond Wales. Next week, I am due to attend the Welsh lamb presentation at the Royal Welsh agricultural show. I invite the hon. Gentleman to join me there to promote Welsh lamb.

Michael Fabricant: The Minister makes a tempting offer; I might do just that if I can borrow his ministerial car. I invite him to visit David Trant in Welshpool. He belongs to the Waitrose Welsh assured lamb scheme, which promotes Welsh lamb. Will the Minister join me in congratulating department stores and supermarkets such as Waitrose and others which promote Welsh lamb? I invite him to read the John Lewis Partnership gazette of 1 June, which outlines the plan in considerable detail.

Mr. Touhig: I shall commend the hon. Gentleman for a job with the Welsh Tourist Board; he does a very good job, and I know that he is also a Welsh learner. Congratulations! I also congratulate the gentleman whom he mentioned. It is important that we should take every opportunity to promote the good produce that we have in Wales. Only last week, we had a very successful food fair in Cardiff, and there are about 40 events between now and October to promote Welsh food, including Welsh lamb. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members visit Wales, where they will receive a warm welcome and taste some wonderful food.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [67902] **Mr. Bob Laxton** (Derby, North): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 17 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

Mr. Laxton: Following the Chancellor's announcement on Monday of the huge investment in public services, which has been warmly welcomed throughout the country—the only lack of warmth coming, I suspect, from the Conservatives—may I tell my right hon. Friend how much I welcome the ongoing funding of £2 million for the new deal for communities, along with the increase in resources for the neighbourhood renewal fund? That will have a strong impact on local communities. May I ask the Prime Minister whether he would like to visit the Derwent new deal project in my constituency, and see the real partnership between local authorities that operates there? Does he agree with me—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is enough for the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I think I got the point, Mr. Speaker. Of course, it is not just about the money that is coming to the constituency of my hon. Friend and of other hon. Members; it is also about what the money that has gone in through the new deal has already delivered. To those who say that the extra investment delivers nothing, I would point to long-term youth unemployment in my hon. Friend's constituency being down by 75 per cent. through the new deal, to the best primary school results that we have ever had, and to in-patient and out-patient waiting lists being down. That is a result of the investment, which is why it is so right to put it in, and such folly to take it out. Talking of which—

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green):

> "It is what money is actually spent on that counts more than how much money is spent."

[Interruption.] I am surprised that Labour Members get so upset about that, because those were the words of the Prime Minister in 1997. So, while we are on the effect of what he is actually spending and whether it is delivering, will he tell us how much recorded street crime has risen over the last 12 months?

The Prime Minister: Recorded street crime has indeed risen over the last 12 months. I do not know the precise figure, but it has risen. However, it is as a result of that that we are taking the necessary measures, including investing in our police and increasing the number of police on the beat. Even for street crime, it would be folly to take that investment in the police out.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister for ever says that he will be judged on exactly how effective the measures are that he is taking, but street crime has actually increased by more than 30 per cent. over the last year, and doubled in the last three years. So, presumably, by his own measure, he must now be failing. In the spending review of 2000, the Home Office promised to cut recorded robberies by 14 per cent. Will the Prime Minister tell us whether the Government are now on track to achieve that as well?

The Prime Minister: What I can tell the right hon. Gentleman is that, as a result of the additional measures that we are taking on street crime, we will indeed—as I have said before—get street crime under control by the end of September, as we said we would. I think that he will see from the initiatives being taken, particularly the safer streets initiative in London, that we will do that.

Of course, overall, crime under this Government has fallen, not risen, whereas it doubled in the 18 years of Conservative government. However, if he is serious in his commitment to the fight against crime, there is the Proceeds of Crime Bill that is now before the other House. According to the police, that measure is essential to deal with drug dealers and others who can secret their assets. I ask him now to reverse the position of the Conservative party and to support what is an essential measure in the fight against crime.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister never lets the facts get in the way of a good bit of spin. He knows that we supported that legislation, and that we voted in favour of the confiscation of assets from criminals, particularly drug dealers. So instead of pretending the other case at the Dispatch Box, would he like to apologise and say that he was wrong?

The Prime Minister was asked a direct question. The answer to the question of whether the number of recorded robberies has risen is that it has increased by more than a quarter in the past year, so he is failing on that measure as well. He then referred to the pledge that he says he made in September. I have checked through the public service agreements and the comprehensive spending review, and I cannot find a single reference to the pledge that the Prime Minister made in April to reduce street crime to below its April levels by the end of September. Will he make that pledge again today?

The Prime Minister: I have just made it a moment ago, in the answer that I gave. *[Interruption.]* I did: I said that, as I indicated before, by the end of September we must have street crime under control. That is precisely why we are taking the initiatives that are necessary. That is why, for example, we are tightening up on bail, making sure that more police are on the streets and that magistrates courts work more effectively, and getting cases to court quicker. Let him now deal with this point. Each and every one of those initiatives—more police, better working of magistrates courts, better working of the criminal justice system—requires extra investment. Let the right hon. Gentleman come to the Dispatch Box and commit himself to supporting that investment.

Mr. Duncan Smith:

> "The level of public spending is no longer the best measure of the effectiveness of government".

That is what the Prime Minister said in 1997, so every time his figures go wrong, there is failure on the streets, and violent crime and robberies rise, it is no good his saying, "We're just going to spend a bit more money and it's all going to be all right." That is his problem.

Back in April, the Prime Minister said not just that street crime would be under control; in an interview with Mr. Paxman on "Newsnight", he said that he would reduce the levels of street crime to below the April level. Instead of fiddling figures that he does not even include in his publications, will he now pledge to do just that?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly repeat exactly what I said to Mr. Paxman. What is more, I agree that street crime has gone up—I admitted that in my first answer to the question. However, I then described what we were doing to get it back down again, and exactly those measures—particularly the extra money that we are putting into the police—are essential to that. Whether it is the police, education, health or transport, how on earth can it be that we make the problems in our public services better by cutting the vital investment that they depend on?

Q2. [67903] **Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): My right hon. Friend will recall that, following the Fairchild decision—and while we were awaiting the House of Lords judgment—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions initiated the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme to allow payments to be made to mesothelioma sufferers who had made claims against the company. Will he consider reopening or extending the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme to cover claimants who have made claims against Turner and Newall because the parent company, Federal Mogul, has gone to court in America to file for administration and it could be several years before the case is resolved? Will my right hon. Friend therefore consider advising that the scheme be extended to cover those claims?

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend knows that we are considering representations that he and others have made. I know that he and other hon. Members have met the company's administrators and a meeting with representatives of the Department of Trade and Industry and others has been arranged. The Government have also been in discussion with the administrators, and understand that they are actively looking at ways in which urgent claims can be dealt with prior to the conclusion of the administration of Turner and Newall.

The best that I can tell my hon. Friend at this moment in time is that we are listening carefully to what he says. He knows about the technical and legal problems involved in extending coverage of the scheme, but we are taking an active interest in negotiations, and I hope that they can be brought to a successful conclusion.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): The United States Administration are taking the view that further military action against Iraq would not require new United Nations security resolutions. Does the Prime Minister agree?

The Prime Minister: We must certainly take any action in accordance with international law, but as the Foreign Secretary made clear when he spoke about this is the House a few months ago, that does not necessarily mean that there will be a new United Nations resolution. However, we will make sure that whatever we do—as I say constantly, no decisions have yet been taken—should be in accordance with international law.

Mr. Kennedy: Turning to the role of the House, if in due course further military action is considered appropriate against Iraq and if British forces were involved, would that be subject both to the debate that the Prime Minister has pledged and to an affirmative supportive vote in the House of Commons?

The Prime Minister: As I said when I appeared before the Liaison Committee yesterday, at present we have no proposals to put before the House, but we will obviously consider how best to consult the House properly should any such action arise. However, I emphasise to the right hon. Gentleman and others that no decisions have yet been taken. I emphasise, too, that we have to deal with the issue of weapons of mass destruction and Iraq—it will not go away. There are many different ways of dealing with it, but we do have to deal with it.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): The Prime Minister will know that conditions such as leprosy and polio are generally treatable in a day clinic. The incidence of those diseases in south-east Asia, especially Laos, is increasing at an alarming rate due to the lack of power for vaccine fridges and medicine chests. Will my right hon. Friend use his considerable influence in international organisations to support a programme of supplying power from small-scale renewable energy to tackle that problem in certain locations?

The Prime Minister: I entirely understand and share my hon. Friend's concern about the issue, which, as he rightly points out, is a significant one in Asia. The global health fund of about $1.8 billion is available for use not just in Africa but elsewhere. I shall certainly look into the point that my hon. Friend made in the concluding part of his question.

Q3. [67904] **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): In reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), the Prime Minister admitted that robberies have increased substantially—they have actually gone up by about a quarter. He said that by September they would be under control. Could he tell the House by how much he expects robberies to have fallen by September?

The Prime Minister: Yes: instead of the trend being up, it should be down, with numbers coming down.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): The Prime Minister will be aware of the success of URCs—urban regeneration companies—which have been set up in towns and cities throughout the land and are helping to encourage regeneration. Will he join me in calling for a URC to be set up in my constituency of Gloucester, where we are trying to push through £0.5 billion of regeneration and where a URC could make all the difference?

The Prime Minister: URCs have certainly been very successful, but I think I should take some advice before giving my hon. Friend the commitment that he seeks.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): A fortnight ago, the Prime Minister rightly told the House that one of the biggest challenges facing the G8 countries was conflict resolution in Africa. Is it not unfortunate that his Government continue to sell arms to African states? In particular, does he regret the fact that his Government sanctioned the sale of arms to all five combatants in the Congo?

The Prime Minister: We actually have very strict rules on the sale of weapons to conflict areas, but I take exception to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. I think it important for this to be said clearly, and to be clearly on the record. The arms industry and related industries in this country employ about 100,000 people. There is nothing wrong with that industry's being successful and making sales to overseas Governments. What we must do, however, is ensure that they are not involved in the type of serious conflict that is happening in parts of Africa. That is precisely why we have such strict rules governing the export of arms. But if we were to do what the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues want and halt all arms sales by British companies around the world, that would have a devastating effect on many people's jobs.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): I am sure that my right hon. Friend and all other Members will want to join me in expressing sadness at yesterday evening's tragic helicopter crash off Great Yarmouth. Our thoughts are certainly with the families and friends of those involved. The oil and gas industry today is a much safer environment in which to work, but tragedies of this kind always bring home to us the danger faced by the many hundreds of thousands of men and women who try to bring our gas and oil reserves ashore.

Will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to the emergency services, which responded immediately, and to the rig and ship workers, which did so as well? Will he also ensure that during the investigation no stone is left unturned to find the reason for the crash?

The Prime Minister: First, I am sure that the whole House would want to express deep sympathy and condolences to the families of those who died in the helicopter crash. Secondly, I pay fulsome tribute to the emergency services, which responded—as they always do—in magnificent fashion. Thirdly, I know that an air accident investigation branch is looking carefully into the reasons for the accident. At present, obviously, we cannot speculate on the cause, but I assure my hon. Friend that we will leave no stone unturned.

Q4. [67905] **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): The number of recorded robberies in Hertfordshire has risen by 34 per cent.—by a third—in just one year. If the Prime Minister will not try to give a straight answer to my parliamentary colleagues, will he at least give a straight answer in response to the fears of my constituents? Will he tell them why crime is rising for them?

The Prime Minister: I can do that. First, let us be quite clear: crime overall has fallen, not risen. It is true that there is a particular problem with street crime and violent crime, which is precisely why we have been working on it for the past few months. We have been hiring more police officers, which is important. We have been ensuring that we tighten the conditions relating to bail. We have also been ensuring that we make extra investment in such things as CCTV—and, of course, there is the Proceeds of Crime Bill. The only unfortunate thing is that the Conservative party opposes each of the measures we take.

Q5. [67906] **Andy Burnham** (Leigh): According to the chief medical officer, death rates in some communities in the north-west and north-east have not improved since the 1950s. Does the Prime Minister agree that that shocking statistic results from underfunding over decades, not just of the health service but of all our public services? Will he also assure me that the new formula now being developed for the sharing out of the welcome new resources will take full account of health needs in communities such as Leigh?

The Prime Minister: The review of the formula used in the allocation of resources in the national health service will indeed take account of the need to reduce health inequalities. My hon. Friend's constituency has obviously accumulated severe problems over a long period. That is precisely why it is important for investment in the health service not to be taken out, but to be kept going year upon year upon year. As my hon. Friend knows, by 2007–08 health spending in this country will be above the EU average. It is important for us to ensure that the investment continues, because it is the only way in which to make a defined and sustainable difference to people's health.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Last month, the Prime Minister told the House that the stock market was "massively up" since the pensions tax was imposed in 1997. Will he tell the House how massively up it is now?

The Prime Minister: It will not have escaped the right hon. Gentleman's notice, nor anyone else's, that our stock market has fallen, as has every stock market around the world, including in America and Europe. The idea that that fall is unique to Britain is an indication only of the total opportunism of the Conservative party.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Early on, when he was first elected, the Prime Minister loved to take responsibility for a rising stock market. Strangely enough, it is now somebody else's fault—as ever. I notice that the Prime Minister has not turned to the Chancellor for advice this time, but perhaps he ought to. Since that period in 1997, stock markets in Europe and the US have risen by 8 per cent., whereas ours is now down by 15 per cent.

Not only did the Prime Minister get the matter wrong, he also said at the time that the pensions tax was justified because of

"the buoyancy of the stock market."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 285.]

Does he believe that the pensions tax is still justified by the buoyancy of the stock market?

The Prime Minister: I do believe that it is justified. What is more, when I read the debate on the subject the other day, I noted that the spokesman for the Conservative party was asked whether he would reverse the measure. He said that he would not, which renders the right hon. Gentleman's question slightly absurd. The idea that the stock market has fallen because of something to do with the British economy is incorrect, as stock markets all around Europe and America have fallen.

However, there are differences between the state of the UK economy now and a few years ago: we now have the lowest interest rates for about 30 years, the lowest unemployment for 25 years, and the lowest inflation rate in Europe. Another difference is the absence of that old Tory theme of boom and bust—and thank goodness for that.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Is my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister aware that there was a rocket attack in my constituency early this morning in an attempt to kill two officers of the Police Service of Northern Ireland? I am sure that he and the whole House will join me in condemning such a cowardly and dastardly attack, and in wishing those two officers a speedy recovery. Thankfully, they were not seriously injured.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that this morning's attack was an attack on the peace process in Northern Ireland? In this very difficult week, will he guarantee to use his best endeavours to ensure that all parties to the peace process make the necessary sacrifices to sustain peace and our democratic institutions?

The Prime Minister: My sympathy goes to the officers involved, of course, and I join my hon. Friend in wishing them a speedy recovery. He is entirely right: the attack's purpose was to undermine the peace process. There is no doubt that, as the process moves forward—whatever the difficulties involved—the people who want to return to the sectarianism and brutality of the past want to try to disrupt it. The Police Service of Northern Ireland, for all the difficulties, marks a new approach to policing in Northern Ireland. I hope that, in time, it will be supported by all the main political parties there. When people attack officers of that police force, they are attacking the agreement itself. They are also attacking a future for Northern Ireland that is based on mutual respect and prosperity. I assure my hon. Friend that we will do everything that we can to sustain the peace process, as it is right for the people of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Q6. [67907] **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): Does the Prime Minister recall telling the House on 15 October 1996 that the shortage of beds in the NHS was a "disgrace"? What word from his extensive repertoire would he now use to describe the fact that 131 beds in my local hospitals are currently affected by bed blocking?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, I am not familiar with the details of the hon. Gentleman's constituency. However, in the past year, there has been an increase in the number of NHS beds. Overall, the national figures show that bed blocking has fallen since 1997, and that is because last winter we put additional investment into the NHS. Whatever the problems in the hon. Gentleman's constituency—whether they are to do with the number of beds, nurses and doctors, or with local primary care—the answer, surely, is not to cut the investment going into his health care service. I suggest that he joins us in addressing those problems with the investment and reform programme and, in particular, supports the measures that the Chancellor announced on Monday. That might be a good idea not only for his constituents but for him.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): There are parts of my constituency where people cannot sit in their own home in peace because of crime and antisocial behaviour, which is fuelled by the illegal sale of alcohol to young people. What will the Prime Minister do to clamp down on the irresponsible retailers who sell alcohol to children who are clearly underage? Will he put pressure on the drinks industry to end the iniquitous practice of marketing alcoholic drinks that are clearly aimed at young people?

The Prime Minister: We are toughening the penalties on the sale of alcohol to young people. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the problems of antisocial behaviour. That is one of the reasons that we introduced measures such as antisocial behaviour orders. It is unfortunate that the Conservative party is still apparently opposed to them. My hon. Friend will know that one of the things that is most important in dealing with antisocial behaviour is having extra numbers of police on the street, and the Conservative party is opposed to that as well.

Q7. [67908] **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): The Prime Minister will know that the take-up of the MMR vaccination in London has now reached a record low, as instanced in my borough by the fact that only 70 per cent. of parents have given their children the jab. Is he aware that the number of cases of measles in our capital city has quadrupled over the past year? As those two events are not unconnected, will he take this opportunity of publicly dissociating himself from the remarks of the Mayor of London, who is advising London parents not to give their children the jab?

The Prime Minister: First, I do not agree with what was said by the Mayor and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not agree with some of what has been said by his hon. Friends. It should be made very clear that there is not a shred of evidence anywhere that the MMR jab is anything other than the right course to take. It is employed in 90 countries around the world—in America, in Europe and everywhere—and it is essential that we retain it, and retain it in its present form, since that is the best way to get the coverage to deal with these diseases. I take that view very strongly; I am glad that the hon. Gentleman does too and perhaps, jointly, we can make those views clear to everyone.

Q8. [67909] **Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): The Prime Minister will be aware that my constituency has seen a rising number of gunshot incidents, some of which have led to the murder of mainly young men. He is right to say that we need more police on the streets. However, will he join me in applauding the actions of Mothers Against Violence? Women whose children have been shot and killed have taken the very brave step of publicly standing up to condemn the violence in their communities; they are trying to change the culture where young men are prepared to use firearms. When my right hon. Friend is next in the city of Manchester, will he agree to meet that group of women to give them his support and that of the Government?

The Prime Minister: I would certainly be happy to do that. I congratulate Mothers Against Violence in Manchester on the work that they are doing. I hope, too, that they will see from the announcement that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will make shortly that it is necessary to strengthen the protection for victims and witnesses. One of the problems with this type of violent crime, and gun crime in particular, is people's reluctance to come forward and give evidence. It is precisely for that reason that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will shortly be announcing measures to strengthen our criminal justice system.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Could the Prime Minister tell us whether there are any circumstances in which he would consider sharing sovereignty over his own constituents in Sedgefield? If, as I suspect, the answer is no, why does he seek to do so over the people of Gibraltar, whose only crime is loyalty to the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: As usual, that is a typical piece of opportunism by the Conservative party. The process began—*[Interruption.]* The Brussels process was launched by the Conservative Government in 1984. The last time I was answering such a question, I did not have before me the full text of the 1984 communiqué, but I do now. This is what was signed up to by Mrs. Thatcher and the last Conservative Government:

> "Both sides accept that the issues of sovereignty will be discussed in that process."

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There will now be a statement by the Home Secretary. *[Interruption.]* Order. Will hon. Members leave the Chamber quietly?

Criminal Justice White Paper

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): For the third week running, Mr. Speaker, if it is Sheffield it is Wednesday and if it is Wednesday it is Sheffield. With permission, sir, I wish to make a statement on the reform of the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

Today, we are publishing a White Paper outlining an end-to-end reform of the service.

First, however, may I pay tribute to all those who have assisted in this tripartite paper, including the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General, and thank in particular Sir Robin Auld for his review of the criminal courts, and John Halliday for his sentencing review.

The people of this country deserve a criminal justice service that works in the interests of justice and puts the victim first. The White Paper is designed to rebalance the criminal justice system in favour of the victim and the delivery of justice for all. We are sending the strongest possible message to those who commit crime that action will be effective in detecting, convicting and properly punishing the perpetrator.

We have a tradition of justice in this country going back centuries. We have already embarked on reform of the police and an overhaul of youth justice, including a dramatic drop in the time it takes to bring young offenders to justice. The street crime initiative has already made a difference by bringing together the police, Crown Prosecution Service and the court administration.

I can announce today, following the Chancellor's statement on Monday, that over the next three years we will invest more than £600 million in information technology. That will help us in joining up the criminal justice service.

But root-and-branch reform across the board is still required. Delay, inefficiency and repeated adjournments are costing us dear. Through improved police investigation, case management and presentation, conviction of the guilty must be secured and acquittal of the innocent ensured. What we seek is not simply the process of justice but visible evidence that justice has been done.

Every time someone on bail offends, or a case collapses, or the wrong verdict is revealed, we compound the harm done to victims and to society as a whole. We will ensure that both victims and witnesses are protected. We will provide them with separate facilities from the accused. To ensure that their voice is heard, we will establish a victims' commissioner supported by a new advisory panel. Above all, we will deliver faster, more effective justice.

Our actions will be underpinned by the fundamental principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty and that the prosecution must prove its case beyond reasonable doubt. However, the one in eight defendants who fail to appear at court will be dealt with swiftly and summarily. We will bring in incentives for early guilty pleas, deal decisively with delays and improve the use and availability of forensic and technological expertise.

As soon as practicable, the Crown Prosecution Service will take over responsibility for determining the charge in the most serious cases, except where the police need to make a holding charge. We will allow the police to impose conditions on bail before charge to limit the chances of offending.

Disclosure of information is currently a battleground between defence and the prosecution. That leads to delay and to considerable cost. We will rebalance the rules of disclosure. Both prosecution and defence will be obliged to disclose all the material necessary. We will make the rules of evidence simpler and clearer. Relevant previous convictions will be admissible where the judge believes that that would be helpful to the jury, without prejudicing the defendant's right to a fair trial.

In time, we will integrate the management of the courts into a single organisation. We will extend the sentencing power of magistrates from six months to 12, and legislate to allow Parliament to extend this to 18 months.

I can tell the House today that the right of defendants to elect for jury trial will remain. However, in order to deliver justice in serious and complex fraud trials, we will seek Parliament's consent that such cases can be tried by a judge sitting alone. We will consult on whether a judge sitting alone should deal with trials where the danger of intimidation makes justice difficult to achieve. In addition, we will explore a similar option for complex financial or organised criminal cases.

We have a real problem when, in some parts of the country, around three quarters of jury trials result in acquittal. The Government will produce in the months ahead a joint paper on long-term prevention for children at risk. We will legislate in the next Session to increase the powers of youth courts to hear more serious offences.

Currently, no one can be tried more than once for the same offence. This is known as double jeopardy. We will allow for a retrial in cases where compelling new evidence such as DNA has come to light. This will cover murder and very serious offences such as rape.

As I said last year, we must put the sense back into sentencing. For the first time, we will set out in legislation the purpose of sentencing: to protect the public, punish the perpetrator and prevent reoffending.

We will establish a guidelines council to ensure greater consistency in sentencing and to ensure that Parliament has a role in considering and scrutinising draft guidelines.

We will introduce a new suspended sentence of "custody minus", which will provide automatic imprisonment for offenders who breach their sentence. We will reform short custodial sentences and introduce, once piloted, "custody plus", requiring offenders to serve the whole of their sentence, partly in custody and the remainder under strict supervision.

A new intermittent custodial sentence will mean that offenders spend part of the week in custody. Reparation and drug and alcohol treatment will help address offending behaviour. But in protecting the public, we are placing emphasis on dealing with dangerous violent and sexual offenders. Those not sentenced to life imprisonment but who are nevertheless a danger to society will remain in custody until they are considered safe for release. An indeterminate sentence will ensure that they will only be released under strict supervision when they are no longer assessed to be a threat to the public.

The House takes seriously its duty to protect the public, and we wish to ensure that democratically elected representatives retain the right to protect those whom we serve. A whole-life tariff should mean life.

The proposals that we have set out are far-reaching, radical and require a culture change. To achieve that, we will need to gain the support of those in the service and, of course, the wider public. We will also need a balanced and sensible debate, which, I hope, will be led by the House today. We need to reinforce trust and confidence in the criminal justice system as we seek to deliver justice for all our people.

I commend the statement to the House.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I thank the Home Secretary and his ministerial colleagues not only for their courtesy in providing, as usual, an early copy of the statement, but for briefing me on the White Paper itself.

There have been 12 Criminal Justice Bills since the inception of the present Government. That is quite a large number of pieces of legislation, but the Home Secretary feels, and we entirely agree, that that legislation has not given us an effective criminal justice system. The system needs reform. That is common ground. As the Lord Chief Justice recently and rightly said, there is much need for the codification of offences, sentencing, procedures and the rules of evidence. That is recommended by Lord Justice Auld, requested by judges and magistrates throughout England and Wales and supported by all parties in the House. Let us by all means get down to the job.

Let us find ways to enable the judiciary better to manage trials. Let us find ways to make the co-operation between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service more effective. The electronic exchange of case files between them, rather than paper in the post, would be a good start. Let us find ways to reduce the number of trials that crack late in the day, disillusioning witnesses and victims. Let us find ways to apply the lessons of the O'Dowd report to reduce the bureaucracy that massively impedes our front-line police officers.

On all those aims and more, we are agreed. Some of those aims can be fulfilled only by legislation. We offer our full co-operation in framing that legislation. Other aims will require administrative action. We wish the Home Secretary well in taking that action, but there is in all this a danger. The result of the last 12 Criminal Justice Bill and the other steps taken by the Government in the past five years has not been a success; it has been a failure.

The aim of the criminal justice system is to reduce crime. Crime in this country, and street crime in particular, remains at wholly unacceptable levels. No amount of statistical manipulation can mask the fact that we face a crisis of criminality in some of our inner cities. To tackle that crisis, we need better crime prevention. We need the police to be back in charge of our streets and neighbourhoods. We need to give serious attention to young people who are the casualties of dysfunctional families. We need thorough reform of the sentencing of persistent young offenders. And we need clear-minded effective measures to undermine the drug culture.

The danger is that in the absence of coherent and effectively implemented strategies of that kind, the Government may be tempted instead to convey the impression of effective action by changing features and principles of our criminal justice system in a way that will, in the long run, undermine, rather than strengthen, public confidence in that system.

The single most important phrase in the Auld report is the statement that justice is not a game. The purpose of a criminal trial is twofold: to convict the guilty and to acquit the innocent. Each of those is as important as the other. No one is more committed than the Conservative party to the detection, prosecution and conviction of the guilty, but we have in this country a precious inheritance in the widely held confidence that British justice is just, that British trials are fair and that the innocent will be acquitted.

In seeking rightly to enhance the likelihood of convicting the guilty, we must be sure that we do not decrease the likelihood of acquitting the innocent. I imagine that those twin aims are, in fact, common ground between myself and the Home Secretary. The issue that we face is one not of aim, but of practical result.

The Opposition will want to consider carefully the fine details of the proposals to adjust the rules on double jeopardy, on trial by jury and on the release of information about previous convictions to ensure that any such adjustments will both materially increase the chances of convicting the guilty and contain safeguards to protect the innocent. The presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial are a precious part of our birthright. In designing a system, as we must, that more effectively convicts the criminal, we must not abandon that birthright.

Mr. Blunkett: I appreciate the warm welcome that the right hon. Gentleman has given the White Paper this afternoon. We appear to disagree on only two things. The first is that crime rose by more than 100 per cent. while the Conservatives were in office, and it has fallen by more than 22 per cent. since we came into office. The second is that we need more money to achieve the process of case management and electronic interchange that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned. The £600 million that we are devoting to that would be cut by the Conservative party.

On everything else, we appear to be in agreement. A large number of reforms have been introduced but they have not yet achieved everything that we need. We are agreed on that. Codification over time is a valuable objective. We need to ensure that we overcome failure at every point in the system to reduce crime further, which, of course, involves the 4,500 extra police officers brought in during the last two years, who again had to be paid for by investment from public funds. We are all agreed that where the system breaks down, there is a crisis of criminality, particularly for the most disadvantaged. That affects many of the people whom we represent. That is why we are announcing end-to-end radical action this afternoon.

We also agree that the measures must have coherence, from detection and good policing all the way through to sensible correctional policies to avoid reoffending. That is precisely why we recognise another issue on which we may have a slight disagreement. We agree that the system must protect the innocent, and we also believe that it should more effectively convict the guilty. We must also recognise, however, that, whatever the view held in the past by the rest of the world—and by the population of Britain—of our criminal justice system, it is no longer held in the high esteem in which all of us would wish to see it being held in the future. It is no longer held in high esteem because the credibility of the system has been undermined as witnesses have been deterred from coming

[Mr. Blunkett]

forward; as those who have perpetrated crime do not even turn up to court; as 25 per cent. of those on bail reoffend; and as two out of five of under-18s reoffend.

We are introducing this radical reform not simply because we have dreamt it up, but because Lord Justice Auld, the Law Commission, and the reports over the last decade have told us that radical reform is required. If the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats are going to join us, I welcome that. I would also welcome further consultation with them to ensure that the system commands consensus and that it holds for decades to come, rather than being subject to change on change, which disrupts the system rather than putting it right. That is my offer to the Opposition this afternoon.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): First, I welcome the Home Secretary's offer, which we accept unreservedly. On behalf of my colleagues, I welcome the breadth of the White Paper and much of the specific detail. I hope that the Home Secretary will see that there are only a small number of matters on which we start from a different position.

We share with the Home Secretary the view that the victim must be much more at the centre of the whole criminal justice process, and that witnesses need much more support and protection. It is very welcome that the Government have returned to the position that the Labour party held before 1997, which many of us have held all along—that in serious cases people on trial should always have the right to choose to be tried by their peers.

However, if, like the Home Secretary, we are to be honest about the failures of the system, we must recognise the two biggest failures. They are not that a huge percentage of people plead not guilty when they get to court—most plead guilty—or that a huge percentage of trials do not result in a guilty verdict, because most of them do. Instead, the first failure is the terrible figures that the right hon. Gentleman had to report last week—I do not blame him for them historically—that only one in four of all crimes result in someone being arrested and proceeded against. In some areas of London, the figure is one in eight. Unless we improve the catching and clear-up rates, the rest of the system will have relatively very much less to do. Secondly, unless we allow witnesses to be so supported that they continue to give evidence and stay throughout a trial, we will never get many of the most serious cases to the point of conviction, which is where we all want them to be.

We disagree on only three main matters. First, many of us are far from persuaded that it is possible to have a fair trial if, in the normal course of events, previous convictions are known to the court before the verdict. I hope that the Home Secretary will be prepared to reconsider that issue. Secondly, on double jeopardy although I understand his argument, the case for keeping the rule against double jeopardy even in the most serious cases is this: if we were to legislate retrospectively, as a result of the proposals passing into law, every person alive acquitted after a full trial for a very serious offence would have that definitive decision turned into a provisional verdict that would be always open to challenge.

Thirdly, although it is of course right for Parliament to set a maximum sentence, including life imprisonment, I ask the Home Secretary to consider whether it is not always wrong for Parliament to set a mandatory sentence. Every case demands a specific and different consideration. Will he consider whether it is not always wrong for Ministers to decide the tariff at the end of a serious case? However much integrity they have, it is must be better that an independent judge makes that decision rather than someone who is seen as a party politician.

Mr. Blunkett: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's tone and approach. We agree about putting victims at the centre, and about the critical aim of protecting, encouraging and supporting witnesses.

We have a slight disagreement about the statistics on people pleading guilty. Some 57 per cent. of those who opted to go to Crown court instead of being heard in a magistrates court eventually pleaded guilty, so the decision was clearly a delaying tactic. There are very real issues here. *[Interruption.]* To plead guilty after months of prevarication—*[Interruption.]* The barracking can continue from the barrack-room lawyers, but it is simple fact that 57 per cent.—*[Interruption.]* Real lawyers represent real people, just as we represent the victims of crime and not those who earn their living out of crime. That is the point that I was making to the hon. Gentleman, who made some very sensible points in his contribution.

The prevention of wrongful convictions must be a key task, but the presentation of previous convictions in very limited circumstances can often be crucial. Let us take the issue of domestic violence. In such cases, a judge may well feel that someone who claimed vehemently that they had never been involved before in battering and destroying the life of a woman should have revealed to the court the fact that, three, four or more times in their relationship, they had done exactly the same. It is right that the jury should know that, especially as the defence lawyer knows it.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of double jeopardy. I simply put it to him that the transformation of science and the use of DNA has now made it possible for us to have some not simply evidence but compelling evidence that someone was guilty of a crime. For that person to walk around in our community, capable of murder and rape, is a disgrace. In limited circumstances, the Director of Public Prosecutions will authorise, first, the investigation and, secondly, the submission to the Appeal Court. The Court of Appeal will then decide whether there is sufficient evidence to take the matter further, to protect us all from those who escaped justice in the first place.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Anything that makes our courts more efficient, effective and victim-friendly will be welcomed by most sensible people, as most of the proposed measures will no doubt be. However, I remain to be persuaded that the disclosure of previous convictions will not merely encourage the rounding up of the usual suspects. The Home Secretary gave an example of circumstances in which disclosure might be permitted, but surely there is a danger that the judge will allow disclosure when the Crown case is so weak that it might otherwise collapse.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, there is a danger. There will be a right of appeal in such circumstances, to ensure that the defence can challenge that basis of presumption, which will be the responsibility of the judiciary.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): To want to protect victims and witnesses is not controversial. To require both parties to define the factual and legal issues should be as commonplace in the criminal process as it is in the civil process. That is accepted. However, I urge the right hon. Gentleman to accede to the request of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the shadow Home Secretary, to introduce legislation to codify the criminal law as quickly as possible. Had the law been codified, there would have been no need for the 12 criminal justice statutes introduced by this Government. We might have needed some of them, but not as many. We pass too many unnecessary laws dealing with criminal justice and I fear that the Home Secretary's statement will require us to pass more.

Does the Home Secretary accept that admitting previous convictions into evidence is likely to be more prejudicial than probative? Does he also accept that abolishing the double jeopardy rule is likely to lead to more miscarriages of justice rather than to an increase in public confidence in our justice system? I am not going to get hysterical about what the Home Secretary said because I, too, want to participate in the debate in a sensible and rational way. The right hon. Gentleman says that he will listen. Once he has done that, will he also perhaps change his mind?

Mr. Blunkett: Again, I welcome the tone of the hon. and learned Gentleman's contribution. I am prepared to listen to people's views on the safeguards that hon. Members and the public will require on the disclosure of previous convictions and in cases of double jeopardy. New compelling evidence will have to go through the triple locks that I described before a new case can be made and the previous verdict cancelled. Those provide a real safeguard for double jeopardy cases. We must take account of the knowledge that we now have, and we have the ability to convict the guilty, not the innocent. Justice is not only about protecting people from perpetrators, but about ensuring that those who we come to know are guilty are convicted as guilty.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): There has been a great deal of sound and fury in the media about the White Paper, signifying not very much. There is much in the document that hon. Members on both sides of the House and people throughout the criminal justice system will welcome. Before I ask three specific questions, may I point out that the test that my right hon. Friend adduced in deciding which criminal convictions should be relevant to the case and of assistance to the court is the test that we already have? It is not a new test. On the example that he gave, the previous convictions of a person who says that he has never violated a woman before would be considered relevant in any event. To enshrine the test in statute would not cause a great problem.

There are three matters that do and, I anticipate, will cause problems, and I ask for my right hon. Friend's assistance. The first is double jeopardy. He gave the example of DNA evidence, and I certainly would not be against a specific provision relating to that.

Hon. Members: This is a speech.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. and learned Gentleman is not in a courtroom. He asks only one question.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: May I therefore come to one question—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please have a seat. *[Interruption.]* Sit down. Secretary Blunkett, will you respond to the matters that have been put before you?

Mr. Blunkett: First, I can confirm that I am aware of the Law Commission's work on previous convictions and I know that some of the practice, which is variable across the country, is insecure. That requires us to refine and extend provision so that people are very clear about what previous convictions apply and in which circumstances they can be used. Secondly, I am aware that there is concern among all hon. Members about double jeopardy. I seek to make my case this afternoon, and I shall seek to do so when we bring legislation before the House.

Lady Hermon (North Down): On behalf of my colleagues in the Ulster Unionist party, I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's statement. He will be aware that, in the past two years, there has been a review of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, culminating in the final stages of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill in the House last night. Can he ensure, in consultation with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, that the good changes that he recommends in his statement are also introduced in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Blunkett: I would be very happy to talk to my right hon. Friend and I am grateful for the warm welcome that the hon. Lady has given my statement.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): As a non-lawyer, but as somebody who has supported a child victim through the criminal justice system, I believe that the most dreadful thing is that the process destroys any concept of justice at such a young age. The proposals should enshrine changes to the process which instil in young people the courage to pursue the high principles of justice.

Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the process makes as much common sense for ordinary non-legal people as possible? The process, rather than the end result, brutalises people—they understand the court system to a degree. It is often a matter of simple things such as prosecutors not being willing to talk to victims because they believe that victims play a minor role in the court process, rather than acknowledging that they play a central role, given that the crime happened to them.

Mr. Blunkett: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I believe that a previous statement to the House addressed the issue of tailoring the youth justice system and the handling of youth witnesses in a way that lessened the adversarial nature of the court system in England and Wales. We learned a great deal from the Scottish experience, and have tried to ensure that young people's experience of the court system will encourage them to come forward as witnesses and to play a part in the system in future. All too often, that does not happen.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I practise in the criminal courts, and, if that is an interest,

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

then I declare it. While it is true that it is highly objectionable when a guilty person is acquitted, it is much worse when an innocent person is convicted. Against that background, does the right hon. Gentleman understand that the real concern is that the reduction in the right to jury trial and increased disclosure of previous convictions could lead to more miscarriages of justice? Will he reflect further on those proposals? I also suggest that in murder cases the trial judge should have the option of imposing a determinate sentence.

Mr. Blunkett: On the latter point, we may well be close. However, the problem is that the judiciary and ourselves take slightly different views as to who is in charge of sentencing.

On the right hon. and learned Gentleman's earlier question, I have already made my position on previous convictions clear. I want to make clear my position on mode of trial. We are dealing with serious complex fraud cases, of which we believe there will be about 15 to 20 every year. There may well be more in terms of detailed network organised crime and intimidation. The right to opt for jury trial will remain in all the cases that are currently outside the parameters that I described, including the extension of magistrates courts' sentencing powers. The leak of the document that was handed to *The Independent* may have misled people into believing something different.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): In the light of what the Select Committee on Home Affairs said two years ago and what my right hon. Friend said today, is it not right that someone who has been acquitted of murder or another very serious offence should, if compelling evidence is produced, and if all the triple lock safeguards show that it should happen, be brought before the court again on the same charge? I ask my right hon. Friend this question. What sort of respect would it be to the memory of a loved one who has been murdered if a person has been acquitted, compelling evidence is found, and no further case can be brought, as is the position now? Surely justice demands, if only for the sake of the memory of that murdered person, that if there is such compelling evidence, and despite the earlier acquittal, the person concerned should be able to be charged accordingly.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is entirely wrong that such people should be allowed to go free while those whose lives were ruined by their child or other loved one being killed cannot get justice. It is a strange judicial system that can protect us from someone by putting them away for perjury, but not for the offence that they actually carried out.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): In view of the Home Secretary's proposal that the right to jury trial be ended in the case of serious fraud cases—in the apparent belief that juries are too bewildered by the complexity of fraud trials to convict, and that fraudsters exploit that—is he aware that over the past four years the Serious Fraud Office has had a 92 per cent. conviction rate in cases that it has brought? Does he expect the changes that he announced to result in an even higher conviction rate, a lower conviction rate or no change, and, if the latter, why bother?

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful for the notice of the right hon. Gentleman's question through this morning's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*. I adhere to three of his four principles, but I fall short on double jeopardy—we simply disagree on that. Yes, I do expect more fraud cases to be brought and to be successful, because the current enormous difficulties arising from persuading people to take up jury service for prolonged, complex fraud cases lasting up to a year and dealing with them under the current arrangements will be overcome. A very large body of information now backs up our proposals.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): On sentencing, my right hon. Friend may be aware of the conviction last year of a constituent of mine for causing six deaths in a road traffic accident while under the influence of drink. Recently, on appeal, his sentence was cut by one third. Does my right hon. Friend recognise the hurt that is felt not only by the families of the victims, but by many other people in my constituency who have had not only to suffer such an awful, terrible thing happening, but the reduction of the sentence on appeal?

Mr. Blunkett: I share the frustration and anger that is felt by my hon. Friend and by many people who have spoken and written about the case. Home Secretaries are not supposed to comment on individual cases, but I intend to say this: when the technicalities of justice override the imperative of justice, we must do something about it. This was not a hit and run or someone simply knocking down other people or running into a car—it was the most abominable disgrace imaginable. If murder is not the appropriate designation for such an incident, the House needs to examine what is. The case was and is a disgrace.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): The Home Office proposes to spend £600 million on computers; that is a lot of money. Given the dismal history of Home Office computer procurement—few of us would trust its representatives on a trip to PC World—what steps are being taken to ensure that the Government get value for money this time?

Mr. Blunkett: I am always willing to accompany the hon. Gentleman to PC World because I need a bit of expertise on such occasions, as hon. Members probably clocked about a month ago.

We have appointed an expert from the private sector as head of the division that is in charge of information technology in the criminal justice service. She is respected inside and outside government and will be able to lead us to better times and clearer waters.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): May I metaphorically hug my right hon. Friend for the excellent references in the White Paper to domestic violence, especially in view of repeat victimisation? I especially welcome proposals to place on a statutory basis reviews of deaths in circumstances involving domestic violence. The all-party group on domestic violence called for that. We have campaigned on the fact that 15 children—possibly many more—have been murdered in such circumstances. It is about time that we learned the lessons about prevention and minimising risks.

I welcome the proposal to make a breach of non-molestation orders a criminal rather than a civil offence to afford survivors the protection that they desperately need. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need specific legislation on domestic violence, given that the current legislation is 26 years old, to progress with some of the worthy measures in the consultation document?

Mr. Blunkett: I am tickled by the offer of a hug, which I shall have to consider.

This country has an enormous problem of domestic violence. I pay tribute to the Solicitor-General, who is working closely with the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety on that to enable us to get our act together. Breaching non-molestation orders will be made a criminal offence, and we will extend the restraining order to ensure that victims are protected in circumstances in which it is currently possible for further attacks to occur. As part of extending the police power on bail, we will also ensure that people cannot return to the immediate area where they are threatening their former partners or wives. It is important to remind ourselves that a third of all murdered women are killed in a domestic situation.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I agree with the Home Secretary's comments about justice not only being done but being seen to be done. A local criminal justice system has historically been one method of achieving that. Yet in my constituency and many others, under Governments of all persuasions, magistrates courts have closed. My Crown court now faces closure. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that is counter-productive and that an effective criminal justice system is rooted in the local community?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree that access to justice is important, and that that means that people can reach it reasonably and easily. The Lord Chancellor, the Attorney-General and I need to examine the best method of ensuring that combining the relevant parts of the court system facilitates that rather than makes matters worse.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I am sure that my right hon. Friend's statement has reassured many hon. Members of all parties about some of the controversial elements of the debate that will ensue. However, I declare an interest as a non-lawyer. Will he ensure that he gives equal weight to the voices of victims and those at the sharp end of the criminal justice system and the lawyers inside and outside this place, and not simply listen to the latter?

Mr. Blunkett: I certainly will. I want to make it clear that I am genuinely very fond of lawyers; I even have friends who are lawyers.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Does the Home Secretary agree that today public confidence in the criminal justice system is so dangerously low that this House needs to act urgently? To that end, does he understand that, providing that there are proper safeguards, the House should support his proposals first to end the double jeopardy rule, secondly in very special circumstances to allow previous convictions to be mentioned in court, and thirdly in very special cases—serious fraud and where there is gross intimidation—to have, rightly and properly, not a jury but a judge?

Mr. Blunkett: I strongly welcome those comments. I want to make it clear again that there are differing views among members of all parties in the House, and if we can accept that, we can consult and work together. The example of support given today reinforces the need for us to gain consensus and to find a lasting way forward—rather than, as we say in the White Paper and for which the shadow Home Secretary chided us, having layer on layer of legislation that ends up having to be re-amended.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Will the Home Secretary accept from me the assurance that the vast majority of my constituents and much of the population on Teesside will greet his announcement with the beginnings of relief and gratitude—not least Ann and Charlie Ming, the parents of Julie Hogg, who was brutally murdered some years ago and stuffed behind a panel at her home?

In pursuing the course of double jeopardy, I assure the Home Secretary of my continuing support, but I ask him to respond to one anxiety that I feel. If we make compelling new evidence a condition of a new trial—and we must do so; I understand that—how can we be certain that, in following the trial, the jury considering it will not find the fact that that evidence has been assessed as compelling new evidence some pre-judicial circumstance?

Mr. Blunkett: There is a genuine question about what assumptions may be made about the Appeal Court deciding to go ahead and about the information in relation to the case that is already in the public arena. There are genuine problems, but I think that we can overcome them; the parents of Julie Hogg would want all of us to find a way round them.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Will the Home Secretary please pass my thanks to the Attorney-General for having the courtesy to meet me and the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) yesterday to discuss the White Paper, and for sending me an early copy of it? I welcome the earlier Crown Prosecution Service involvement in the criminal process. It is for the Government to ensure that the CPS has sufficient personnel with expertise and sufficient equipment adequately to discharge that function. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will discuss with the Attorney-General the unacceptably high de minimis levels set for the Serious Fraud Office before it may investigate a matter.

Mr. Blunkett: Those welcome comments illustrate the difficulty raised in my reply to his hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) about the number of convictions achieved at the moment owing to the difficulties experienced by the Serious Fraud Office in reaching a position where it can take cases to trial. Any sensible suggestions from the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) will be welcome.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): May I congratulate the Home Secretary on resisting the siren voices who

[Fiona Mactaggart]

suggested that the best way to create an effective justice system was to withdraw rights from the accused, and on instead emphasising the protection of the rights of witnesses and improving efficiency and effectiveness through, for example, the proposals on domestic violence, which could save the lives of two women a week, as at present two women each week are murdered by their partner or ex-partner?

Will this House have an opportunity to discuss the guidance that will be given to judges about when they can decide whether prior convictions are relevant and will not prejudice a trial? Politicians may have a particular view to express to judges—who are the right people to take such decisions—about the circumstances in which they can allow previous convictions to be considered.

Mr. Blunkett: I hope that we will be able to debate that in a sensible and open fashion when the legislation is introduced. I also hope that we will be able to do so as part of a broader debate about sentencing guidelines, counsel, and the role of Parliament vis-à-vis the sentencing system, without interfering with or in any way undermining the role of the judiciary and its independence on these matters. It is a matter of great frustration to members of the public whom I meet that they expect us to have some influence and direction over policy, only to find that we really do not. If we can get the balance right without interfering with judicial independence, we will achieve a great deal more credibility for democracy as well as for the criminal justice system.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): May I join in the general welcome for the statement that we have just received, while echoing the concern of the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) in saying that there seems to be very little here for child witnesses in court? I urge the Home Secretary to look at the Scottish experience, and to consider introducing more training for judges in trials involving child witnesses, to discourage defence barristers from bullying the children, from confusing them by using double negatives in cross-examination, and from trying to undermine them by using points of order to create delays before the interrogation starts.

Mr. Blunkett: I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that we need to look at those issues, together with the way in which evidence can be presented. Although we cannot avoid cross-examination taking place in alternative ways, we can use simple technology to enable the presentation of the witness's case by very young children to be undertaken more effectively.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): As a member of the Magistrates Association, and a supplemental magistrate on the Ashby-de-la-Zouch petty sessional division in Leicestershire, may I give a warm welcome to the White Paper? It has taken the first non-lawyer Home Secretary for two decades to bring some sense to the judicial system, particularly in relation to the extension of the sentencing powers of magistrates courts from six to 12 months—and, perhaps, ultimately, 18 months. I also welcome the rejection of the Auld proposal for an intermediate tier of court. May I express a note of concern, however? In his statement, my right hon. Friend said, "In time, we will integrate the management of the courts into a single organisation." Is there not a risk that that single organisation might see greater attractions in fewer, more remote and centralised courts? Will my right hon. Friend give us an assurance that local magistrates courts are going to be safer under that new, integrated organisation?

Mr. Blunkett: As part of the integration, and as a result of the way in which the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General have been working with us to ensure that access to justice is sealed, we are considering the development of a new local board, which will integrate the work and also have a more powerful local voice to draw together the needs of a local community as well as improve the efficiency of the system.

I welcome what my hon. Friend said about being a magistrate. When I consulted on the Halliday sentencing proposals, there was great scepticism among the magistrates I met as to whether the Government would listen to them, or whether this was a fait accompli. We insisted, on these proposals and on Auld, that there would not be a fait accompli, and I think that we can now reassure those magistrates that we have genuinely listened and responded.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): May I also give a warm welcome to the Home Secretary's sensible proposals today? In particular, many of my constituents will be pleased to learn that he intends to ensure that some prisoners serving a life sentence will actually serve a whole life tariff, and that, in some circumstances in which prisoners would be a danger to the community, they will remain behind bars. There is concern, however, that the powers that he intends to take will be anathema to the European Court of Human Rights, which has so far shown a remarkable determination to remove from his office the right to determine the tariff served by prisoners serving life sentences. Will he explain to the House how he intends to make the proposals robust in those circumstances?

Mr. Blunkett: Let me be uncharacteristically cautious on this matter. There are cases, including Anderson and Taylor, on which considerable public comment has been made, including comment by people who have responsibility in this area, and I do not wish to match that. However, I think it very important that everyone should know that there will be, and I am determined that we find, ways around any blockage—whether a case is taken to Strasbourg or not—that precludes this Parliament from determining that those who have committed the most horrendous crimes should be locked away for ever, given that the sentence was seen as an alternative to putting people to death. I remind those who debate these issues—often, they are rather contemptuous of the more common language that some of us use—that we in this country are in a position not to put people to death, but to demand a punishment that is clear and decisive, and which protects us from the most horrendous murderers. In that respect, I agree entirely with the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I thank my right hon. Friend and his team for the attention devoted in his comments and in the White Paper to the horrendous issue of domestic violence. At the moment, I am dealing with one domestic violence case every two or three weeks.

Those women have had an horrendous time, and if it were not for the help of the Keighley Domestic Violence Service—a voluntary organisation—they would remain in a violent relationship or simply be dumped with no help. Thanks to the service, they are brought to my office for help, and brought to the attention of the police and the social services. I want to put on the record my grateful thanks to that service, which is doubtless replicated in other constituencies. The people who run it do a wonderful job, but they do not receive much thanks.

Mr. Blunkett: Those people deserve every thanks. I have been persuaded by my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General—I give her credit this afternoon—that we should return to this issue with vigour in the autumn. We have already taken steps, such as changing attitudes. Moreover, police throughout the country make the presumption of pro-arrest in relation to domestic violence. Those steps have already begun to make a difference, but voluntary groups and people who give of their time are a godsend to those who face horrendous attack.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Can the Home Secretary tell the House what he intends to do about the problem of retaining police officers in forces around London who transfer to the Metropolitan police? Anyone in Bedfordshire who joins the Metropolitan police is between £5,000 to £7,000 a year better off because of London housing allowances and the free travel provided within 70 miles of Charing Cross. This is a question of the allocation of the cake, not of its size.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, it is a real issue—one that the White Paper does not address—for places such as Bedfordshire and the Thames valley. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety and I will discuss with chief constables ways to avoid the problem spreading still further, with ring after ring facing a similar situation as we gradually alter the balance. Having put right the massive recruitment problem in the Met, we need to balance that through retention in the immediate non-Met areas.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): My right hon. Friend will know that I have deep reservations about the prospect of changing the double jeopardy rule, but in the spirit of today's statement, I am prepared to engage in the consultation and give him a chance to convince me otherwise. To start that process, I would like him to expand on two issues. First, how will we ensure that the trial jury at the second trial has not been prejudiced by the pre-trial process of deciding that the evidence is new and compelling? Secondly, what does he mean by new? Does he mean evidence that could not possibly have been submitted at the first trial, or evidence that would have come to light at that trial, had the investigation been extended for long enough?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend raises very reasonable questions, the first of which I referred to in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook). On the second question, I believe sincerely that we are, and should be, talking about new evidence that was not available originally. I gave the example of DNA because it has extended our ability to ascertain guilt in a way that was never envisaged 10 or 15 years ago. There are also people—my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North will be aware of this—who have written about their guilt afterwards and explained what they did. Changing the double jeopardy law makes all the difference to our capacity to follow through on that.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): May I raise with my right hon. Friend the problem of the high reoffending rates of young offenders when they leave prison or a young offenders institution? I have seen work done by the YMCA both in young offenders institutions and prisons and on release, and am convinced that a lot of the good work done in those institutions is wasted when young people leave them and return to the environment that put them in prison in the first place. There are schemes that can provide assistance, but unless we remove the need for young people to go back on release to the very environment that created the problems in the first place, we are simply not tackling the root of the problem. I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would introduce measures to improve the schemes already in place to help young offenders on release.

Mr. Blunkett: We are publishing today a second paper in response to a consultation on rehabilitation. There is a real need to join up prison and probation, rehabilitative and reparation services, and tackle the follow-through on things like drugs—work taking place in prison must continue on release. Alongside an independent review of all correctional services, the pressures on them and requirements for the future, we should take seriously the need to create a genuinely seamless service.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Without a shadow of a doubt, the White Paper will be welcomed throughout my constituency. However, will my right hon. Friend comment on a narrow point about the commissioner for victims, and confirm that his remit will include dealing with victims of death and serious injury on the road? May I tell my right hon. Friend how refreshing it has been to deal with Ministers and officials in all three arms of the criminal justice system who have taken a fresh look at that important area of crime?

Mr. Blunkett: I can give that assurance. The White Paper engages specifically with the support required for trauma involved in major catastrophes, but not catastrophes that affect just one family.

Vera Baird (Redcar): There is much to welcome in my right hon. Friend's statement. I note that many contentious issues are couched in conditional terms about consulting and so on, and I applaud that open-mindedness. I join colleagues who have praised the attention that will now be given to domestic violence. I hope that that will spell an end to the old notion that crime committed against the family at home is a private matter in which the state must not intervene.

May I ask three short questions? First, forgive me if this is my error, but I am unclear as to whether the abolition of the double jeopardy rule will be retrospective, and thus capable of giving satisfaction to the family close to the hearts of Teessiders to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) has referred. Secondly, what does my right hon. Friend mean in the White Paper

[Vera Baird]

when he talks about people accused of organised and serious crime not having the right to jury trial? It sounds as if the more serious the crime, the less the chance of a jury trial. Surely, trial by one's peers is the most important principle when the consequences are grave. Finally, will my right hon. Friend's review of the rules of evidence include a fresh look at the admission of previous sexual history in rape trials?

Mr. Blunkett: On the first question, yes, it will be retrospective. On the second question, it is critical that we get the definitions right, and once more I welcome my hon. and learned Friend's contribution to the debate. We are talking about networks of organised criminals, often with international links, who are engaged in subterranean financial activities. Our advice is that there are major problems with the present system. On the final question, the answer is yes.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I too warmly welcome the statement and, as one who has practised in the criminal courts, I agree about the need to rebalance the criminal justice system. May I, however, press my right hon. Friend on the question of disclosure of previous convictions? What criteria will be applied before such convictions are adduced in evidence?

Mr. Blunkett: We have deliberately made it clear not just that we need discussion about that, but that we need to provide some discretion for the judiciary. We cannot say that we need to respect the independence and professionalism of the judiciary, and in the next breath say that we are taking it away. I am mindful of the need to get the definition right, but we also need to ensure that there is enough leeway for account to be taken of individual circumstances.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I welcome the statement. I know from my contact with Dru Sharpling, the new head of the Crown Prosecution Service in London, and with Eric Packer, the clerk of Wimbledon magistrates court, that the reforms will be particularly welcome in London. People throughout London want to see a step change in the quality of the criminal justice system, and to have confidence in it. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that if the reforms are to be effective, appropriate financial commitments will be needed to back them up? Is it not the case that when we all come to be judged by the jury that is the electorate, this Government will not be accused of having willed the ends without willing the means, whereas the Conservative party is likely to be found guilty of that charge?

Mr. Blunkett: I entirely agree, but I am always circumspect when, as happened earlier, the Chancellor is present and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is at my elbow. It is important to recognise that this is a blueprint for the years ahead, not just for two years ahead.

As for my hon. Friend's main point, there is a real challenge for the criminal justice system, from the police through the Crown Prosecution Service through the courts to restorative justice in London. London is materially different from other parts of the country in this regard. We really do need the step change to which my hon. Friend referred if we are to deliver something materially different to Londoners who feel let down by the present system.

Points of Order

4.37 pm

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. At Prime Minister's Question Time, when discussing the Proceeds of Crime Bill, the Leader of the Opposition referred to a position not actually held by the Conservative party. He suggested that, during the passage of that Bill, his party had supported measures for the confiscation of—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. This cannot be an extension of Question Time.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. At 8 pm today, a 24-hour strike will begin on London Underground. It will close the network, causing travel chaos across London and havoc for the tube's 3 million users. Yet so far there has been a deafening silence on the issue from the Secretary of State for Transport.

Given that the Government's botched public-private partnership for London Underground has now been further delayed by legal challenge and by the wait for the European Commission's decision on state aid, the Government have an opportunity to try to introduce a no-strike deal. Have you, Madam Deputy Speaker, had any indication from the Secretary of State that he intends to make a statement to the House condemning tomorrow's strike and saying what action the Government will take to prevent further such disruption?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have had no indication from any Minister that he or she intends to come to the House.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am very concerned about the possibility that the Secretary of State for Defence has inadvertently misled the House, and I want to give him an opportunity to correct the wrong impression that he gave us.

On 9 July, the Secretary of State answered two questions—one from my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and one from me—simultaneously. Both concerned aspects of the sale of ships, in particular to the Government of Thailand. The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), told my hon. Friend that he had

> "received no formal expressions of interest from the Government of Thailand about the purchase of Royal Naval warships".—[*Official Report*, 9 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 852W.]

On the same day the Minister told me that the Secretary of State for Defence had discussions,

> "during his recent visit to Thailand, with his Thai counterpart and other senior Thai officials in support of proposals put forward"

to sell warships. It seems to me that those two answers are incompatible. One or the other must be inadvertently misleading to the House. Would not it be right for the Secretary of State to come to the Dispatch Box to correct the misinformation?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The main business before the House today is a debate on defence procurement. Perhaps it would be more appropriate for the hon. Gentleman to raise the matter then.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Further to the original point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The operation of the underground is important to my constituents, many of whom use it—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have ruled already that that is not a point of order for the Chair.

BILL PRESENTED

CHILD ABUSE DEATHS

Mr. Paul Burstow presented a Bill to place Area Child Protection Committees on a statutory footing; to make provision for appropriate resources to establish Child Death Review Teams; to provide child protection training for all professionals in contact with children; to provide independent counselling schemes; and to appoint a Children's Commissioner in all parts of the United Kingdom: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 183].

Respite Care (Children)

4.40 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Children Act 1989 to make it mandatory for local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need and to ensure that children with severe disabilities receive similar levels of respite care from local authorities as other vulnerable members of the community.

This Bill would substitute the word "may" with "must" in subsections (3) and (6) of clause 17 of the Children Act 1989, part III. The change would make it mandatory for local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their areas who are in need, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, and to facilitate the provision of these services by voluntary organisations to ensure that children with severe disabilities receive the same levels of respite care from local authorities as other vulnerable members of the community.

If hon. Members were asked whether their local authority was suffering a social services crisis, at least eight out of 10 should answer yes. Eight out of ten is not some random statistic: it is the number of local authorities where, as is the case with Oxfordshire county council, the demand for social services is clearly outstripping resources.

That shortfall of funding is no more evident than with respite care services for children with severe disabilities. Currently, the responsibility for local authorities to provide such discretionary services is a matter of "may" rather than "must". Thus, in the pecking order, those discretionary services come after statutory provision. Where money is tight, they simply fall off the edge.

I am sure that local authorities would welcome a Bill ensuring that the provision of respite care for children was a statutory responsibility that should be properly funded by the Government. In Oxfordshire, the number of respite care centres is likely to be reduced this year from five to three. Parents have managed to save Sycamore house in my constituency, but Chilterns house in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson), a sponsor of the Bill, has been lost.

The Bill would simply amend subsections (3) and (6) of section 17 of part III of the Children's Act 1989 by changing the word "may" in both subsections to "must". Of course, that would mean much more than simply a change of words for parents whose children have complex needs. It would help transform their lives by making the respite care arrangements for their children more secure and stable.

Stability is paramount. Initially, Oxfordshire county council thought that it would have to abandon children's respite care provision altogether. After a lot of heartache and lobbying, it has managed to put together a compromise scheme with the local health authority.

The law at present states:

"any service provided by an authority . . . may be provided for the family of a particular child in need or for any member of his family".

The House will note that the word "may" is used, not "must". I am not sure that every social services provider has such vocal and committed parent groups as Oxfordshire's Friends of Oxfordshire Respite Centres, known as FORCE, nor such a pragmatic county council. The Bill would ensure that all local authorities would have an obligation, not the discretion, to provide the stability of respite care centres that children with severe disabilities, and their parents, need.

Barnardos, which has helped fund respite care in Oxfordshire, has indicated that it will consider its financial contribution to the partnership in Oxfordshire further. It may at some stage be able to revise and enhance its contribution to the partnership, but that will depend on achieving the partnership that I have described. The proposed partnership to save the respite care centres can happen only if Oxfordshire county council has the funds in the future. Barnardos needs financial stability, which should come from the county council's own financial stability, to stabilise respite care provision for parents whose children have learning difficulties.

All too often, voluntary or charitable organisations commit money only to see the statutory foundation funding from social services withdrawn. The stability on which parents depend is dependent on the stability of social services spending and the money received from central Government for social services.

A letter that I recently received from a parent whose child benefits from Sycamore house said:

"I am asking for your help . . . surely the government can see the need of parents such as ours and sort out the financial situation so social services can help Barnardo's keep such a vital service for our disabled children and families, not only for the coming year, but for future children and families of disabled children".

The provision of such critical services depends on proper central Government funding, which offers stability for local authority social services budgets. Of course, county councils can raise council tax to cover shortfalls, as Oxfordshire did. It involved a hike this year of £86 on a band D council tax bill, and still left a proposal to close these homes.

The reason why Oxfordshire's social services have deteriorated to their current extent is that Oxfordshire receives considerably less funding than other neighbouring counties and unitary authorities. Nearby Milton Keynes, for example, gets nearly a fifth more investment than Oxfordshire from central Government. Hampshire and Hertfordshire, moreover, get twice the budget specific to respite care centres than Oxfordshire. Yet clearly the cost of living, the cost of staff and the cost of care are the same in all three areas. I am at a loss to understand why the Government believe that Oxfordshire should have the lowest allocation of funds under the grant system when its cost of living is among the highest in the country.

I am concerned that although several Departments recognise the problem, apparently the Department of Health does not. I and other Oxfordshire Members tabled an early-day motion on the issue before the last standard spending assessment round was allocated last year but, unfortunately, our warnings clearly fell on deaf ears.

If Oxfordshire's social services have to survive with less funding than they need until 2004, more vital services will almost certainly be withdrawn, so imagine my concern last week when the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister announced a review of local authority funding. The review will, we are promised, want new formulae that are fairer, simpler, more intelligible and more stable.

It sounds good, but then we get to the detail. Buried away in the Government's document is a sentence that rather alarmingly admits:

> "any system based on formulae cannot reflect all possible circumstances, so there will inevitably be an element of rough justice".

Then there is the caveat that such rough justice

> "tends to be increased as formulae are made simpler".

I have done some back-of-an-envelope calculations of what fairer and simpler funding will mean for Oxfordshire in the light of my Bill's proposals. Rough justice is an underestimate if ever there were one. Of the four basic options for an alternative to the present SSA advanced by the Government, the worst for Oxfordshire could leave a £43 million hole in the county council's budget. That is equivalent to 10 per cent. of the county council's resources. It would add a further £192 to council tax—a 25 per cent. increase—which is simply not sustainable.

Education would be the biggest loser for Oxfordshire. Education is an important part of the county council's plans for Oxfordshire's respite care centres with after school, play and leisure clubs for children with complex needs. How could those services continue under the Government's funding options?

Ministers have said that Oxfordshire local education authority has a good record on finding places in schools for children with severe disabilities. How will that be maintained? Although I might have more chance of developing post-Einsteinian unified theory than fully understanding the Government's proposal for local authority finance, my figures are supported by the Local Government Association.

No one should doubt the need for respite care centres. I, along with Oxfordshire parliamentary colleagues sponsoring the Bill, have spent a lot of time listening to parents with disabled children in need of respite care in the county. I close my comments by reading a letter, not from a councillor or a parent, but the 12-year-old sister of a child receiving respite care. She says:

> "I spend a lot of time on my own, upstairs in my room, even my friends won't come around because of my sister and only about twice a month for one night I get to do what a lot of regular young teens take for granted".

Further slashing of central Government funding for counties such as Oxfordshire will mean further cuts in social services, including respite care. Children with severe disabilities deserve protection; they deserve opportunities for respite care. This should be a "must" obligation for local authorities and the Government should ensure the funds for respite care services. That is what the Bill intends to achieve.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Tony Baldry, Mr. David Cameron, Dr. Evan Harris, Mr. Robert Jackson, and Mr. Boris Johnson.

RESPITE CARE (CHILDREN)

Tony Baldry accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Children Act 1989 to make it mandatory for local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need and to ensure that children with severe disabilities receive similar levels of respite care from local authorities as other vulnerable members of the community: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 184].

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

PRELIMINARY DRAFT BUDGET

That this House takes note of the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum from HM Treasury dated 5th July 2002 relating to the Preliminary Draft General Budget of the European Communities for the financial year 2003; and supports the Government's efforts to maintain budget discipline in the Community.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

TERRORISM

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Cessation of Effect of section 76) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 27th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

Defence Procurement

[Relevant document: The Fourth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2001–02, HC 779, on Major Procurement Projects.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

4.51 pm

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I welcome the official Opposition's support for the Government's announcement on defence spending. Monday's announcement by the Chancellor represents the biggest sustained real increase in defence spending plans for 20 years.

That is excellent news for defence. The 2000 spending review provided the first sustained growth in the defence budget since the end of the cold war: an annual average of about 0.3 per cent. over the three years. This year's spending review has gone further, providing for real annual growth of 1.2 per cent. over the next three years. In real terms, it represents new money: in year one—

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ingram: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me give the figures—he may not have heard them yet.

In year one, the amount will be £725 million. In year two, it will be £798 million and in year three, £1.047 billion. Unlike the years of Tory decline, when it comes to defence, Labour means business.

Mr. Laws: Is the Minister aware that Treasury officials, in evidence this morning to the Select Committee on Defence, confirmed that defence expenditure in real terms would be lower in every year of the spending review than it was last year?

Mr. Ingram: I should like to see the transcript of the evidence. It is certainly worth examining any advice given by Treasury officials, but we have to be cautious in interpreting it. I should rather take advice from Departments than from the hon. Gentleman.

I hope that the Opposition's support for our new budget extends to our programme of radical, realistic reform that underpins it. Based on our approach of maximising support to the front line, that has meant an extensive and ongoing overhaul of our delivery of support services to our Navy, Army and Air Force. Difficult decisions have had to be made, and there are more in the pipeline.

I want to make it clear from the outset that we will not flinch from those decisions, because it is important that we get it right. We must make best and efficient use of our newly increased budget; more money to spend does not mean less focus on effective delivery. Indeed, the very opposite applies. We need to get real value for our defence pound.

Against that background, I welcome this opportunity to outline our progress in delivering the programme of equipment modernisation set in hand after the strategic defence review to ensure that we have capable and effective armed forces, properly equipped for the tasks that we ask our service men and women to undertake.

The SDR set us firmly on the right track for making sure that our armed forces can meet the demands of today's and tomorrow's operations. It identified a range of improvements to our capabilities, especially to enhance the ability of the armed forces to conduct expeditionary operations.

Of course a great deal has happened since the SDR and since we last debated defence procurement in October 2000. The events of 11 September last year shocked us all. In response, we have looked afresh at our defence posture and plans. In doing that, we have not set aside the conclusions of the strategic defence review; rather, we have described this work as a new chapter building on the assumptions that we made and the conclusions that we reached during the SDR.

The new chapter work has considered the extent to which the strategic context has changed and how we might best engage in tackling both the symptoms and causes of terrorism. It has also focused on the balance between home defence and countering threats abroad, and on how to enhance the effectiveness of our military contribution to both.

Further conclusions on the wider aspects of the new chapter review will be published in a White Paper tomorrow and, clearly, I do not want to anticipate that now. But I can give some broad indications of the likely consequences for our forward equipment programme. It will not surprise the House that we are likely to see a continued emphasis on rapid deployment, intelligence gathering and precision strike capabilities. That is consistent with the conclusions of the SDR, although some further enhancements in those areas will be needed.

In particular, we are moving in the direction of what is called "network-centric capability", bringing together sensors and strike assets to enable the controlled, precise and rapid delivery of military effect. We will therefore want to look at enhancements to our capability to acquire and analyse information, get the information to those who need it and the precision strike capabilities to turn it into results. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will make a full statement tomorrow, setting out our conclusions on the new chapter work and the implications for defence capability.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): In the past, we have purchased nuclear weapons from the United States. In what situations would the Government be willing to use those weapons of mass destruction?

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend should be aware that we never set out the scenarios in which those weapons would be put to use, although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear time and time again, at this Dispatch Box and elsewhere, that, in the right circumstances, the weapons would be used. That is the purpose for their existence as part of our force capabilities.

Llew Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No, I have dealt with that point. The issue concerns the use of equipment rather than its capabilities. My hon. Friend has had the opportunity of hearing my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explaining time and time again about that part of our equipment capability.

The settlement for defence agreed as part of the 2002 spending review, and announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on Monday, will provide a firm foundation for moving forward with the new chapter. It will offer in particular an opportunity to make the further investment necessary to deliver the enhanced capabilities that the new chapter work tells us we need. The Government have made available £1 billion of new capital investment and £500 million of new resources to take the work forward. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will provide more details on this tomorrow, but it is clear that the settlement is very good news for defence.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: Given the sparse presence on the Conservative Benches behind him, the hon. Gentleman will have plenty of opportunity to take all the time that he wants to set forth his arguments. But I shall certainly give way to him.

Mr. Gray: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way so early in his speech. He is right that I may have a few moments to speak later, if I am lucky enough to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister has talked about the switch to resource accounting and, particularly, on 1 April 2003, he will have to take account of depreciation and carry-over costs of some £12.2 billion, in addition to current costs. Has he taken those figures into consideration in coming up with the figure of £3.5 billion to which he has referred?

Mr. Ingram: The answer is yes. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman look at the make-up of the figures for the three-year programme, which have been published by the Treasury, and the way in which those figures are affected by taking account of depreciation. It is important to take account of those non-cash items; doing otherwise would, in a sense, be false accounting. Those realistic aspects of the Budget settlement have to be taken into account.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: The debate is about procurement issues, and we should deal with them. Some hon. Members may have doubts about whether the settlement can meet the demands, but they have not yet heard what I have to say about our procurement programme. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman wants to rush away to get home, but if he cares to hold on, I may give way to him when he has, I hope, absorbed some of the other information that I will impart to him and his hon. Friends.

Since 11 September, British armed forces have been actively engaged in the war against terrorism in operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan. The challenges of mounting and sustaining operations at that range and in such a harsh environment should not be underestimated. It is a credit to our service men and women and their equipment that United Kingdom forces were able to make the contribution that they did, alongside American and other allies.

Some £155 million was made available to the Ministry of Defence to fund additional equipment and other urgent operational requirements. A number of significantly enhanced capabilities specifically needed for that campaign, such as lightweight hand-held thermal imagers, night vision goggles and additional secure communications equipment, were brought into service rapidly and deployed to good and powerful effect. I acknowledge, however, that all that has not been trouble-free. In the extreme conditions in Afghanistan, all weapon systems are at risk of developing problems. Hon. Members will be aware that, in particular, there have been reports of stoppages with the upgraded SA80 weapon.

Let me assure the House that Ministers take any reported shortcomings in the SA80 very seriously indeed. We attach considerable importance to making sure that our service personnel have reliable and effective equipment that is up to the job. Indeed, that was one reason why I insisted that troops deploying to Afghanistan should take the modified SA80 with them. Notwithstanding the problems encountered there, the SA80 A2 is a more capable and much more reliable weapon than its predecessor. The question is whether it is good enough.

The modified SA80 performed very well during the trials in highly demanding conditions, but, given the new reports, a full and thorough investigation has been set in hand. Specialists have been sent to Afghanistan to assess the problems at first hand with the Royal Marines and to conduct test firings under typical operational conditions. That team has now completed its work and is preparing, as a matter of urgency, a full report on its findings. It would be inappropriate for me to comment further until the investigation team's report has been received and its findings assessed.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I am reassured by my right hon. Friend's comments on the SA80's performance, but is that not a typical example of why we must get our procurement right? We inherited that gun from the previous Government with very severe problems, and we have had to invest a lot of money to get it absolutely right now. We need to avoid such problems in future.

Mr. Ingram: It is easy to apportion blame. It is true that the SA80 was procured under the previous Government. Notwithstanding the extensive upgrade programme—£90 million was spent on it—and the intensive testing, we must now analyse the concerns that have been raised and find a way forward. I take my hon. Friend's point, and hon. Members know that he makes his point well. He is apportioning blame, but I want to ensure that we get this right.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): The Minister is right, and I welcome the news that he has just given. Will he assure the House and, more importantly, the men and women who carry the SA80 that, if that report shows any doubt at all about that weapons's serviceability and record, the Government will be prepared to procure a different rifle, if not for the entire British armed forces, at least for those infantry, special forces, paratroops, Marines and so on who might use it in battle?

Mr. Ingram: That is perhaps a step too far. The hon. Gentleman should not use language that could somehow lead to a lack of confidence in what is a very sophisticated

[Mr. Ingram]

rifle, which, unfortunately, in some reports, has been shown not to have performed as well as we anticipated that it would in the extreme circumstances of Afghanistan.

David Burnside: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: Let me answer this question first. We must assess the problem, analyse it, and test the rifle against other potential rifles while remembering that not all of them may have been tested in those extreme conditions. It is easy to jump from one rifle to another, saying that the other is better, but all that testing must take place. Let me therefore judge the options once I have the analysis.

David Burnside: Will the Minister confirm that other weapons are already used by special forces, including in Afghanistan? The problem being raised is not relevant to many operational forces, at present, who are using a Heckler and Koch.

Mr. Ingram: I shall not comment on what special forces may or may not use in theatre. Clearly, as I said in my earlier response, we must carry out that detailed analysis. We must consider that rifle in connection with other equivalent weapon systems.

Mr. Hancock: I hope that I shall have the chance later to make the point on which I wanted to intervene earlier.

On this point, the Minister referred to the extensive testing of the weapon prior to and after its modification. What were the extreme conditions in Afghanistan that were not tested during the extensive testing and after the £92 million had been spent? Having spoken to troops who have recently returned from Afghanistan, they would say that the performance of the weapon was no better than it had been previously.

Mr. Ingram: Extensive testing was carried out in the whole range of extreme weather conditions—cold, hot and dusty. The weapon was tested not by politicians or civil servants, but by soldiers, in all those conditions. The hon. Gentleman may recollect the announcement at the conclusion of that extensive test programme and the launch of the SA80 A2. Evidence was adduced that showed the mean time in relation to failure of that rifle, which unquestionably showed a big improvement on what had occurred previously.

Part of the analysis that is now taking place must, of course, take into account the maintenance regime. Are orders and advice properly given so that they are well understood, or are there factors that come into play that take the rifle into a more extreme environment than all the other testing environments? I am not in a position at this point in time to say what the conclusion is. I must wait for the expert advice before I can respond. I ask hon. Gentlemen, however, not to be quick to make judgments and decisions, and not to make them on the back of speaking to one or two service men or women. They should take balanced advice on this matter.

I have set out the serious way in which we are dealing with this matter. I do not want any language to be used—obviously, hon. Gentlemen can use whatever language they want—that could somehow put uncertainty in the minds of soldiers. They must use this rifle, which is a substantial improvement on that which they had before, which was already a very sophisticated weapon that had been purchased and designed for specific sets of circumstances. It was found to have faults, modifications were made, and we are now dealing with and trying to analyse the reports on the failures. Caution should be our watchword in dealing with these matters.

I want to turn in more detail to the progress that we have made since the last procurement debate nearly two years ago in delivering some of the key projects that make up the defence equipment programme. Decisions taken during the strategic defence review have led to a broad range of powerful new equipment, some already in service with the armed forces and some in the pipeline to enhance our future capabilities.

The House will be aware that we have embarked on the most extensive warship-building programme for a generation. On 2 July, I announced the findings of the RAND study into alternative procurement strategies for our future warship programme over the next 15 to 20 years and it dealt, in particular, with acquisition options for the Type 45 destroyer. The initial results from the study were used last year to help to inform our decision to proceed with a revised procurement strategy for that ship. To increase productivity and to retain the potential for future competition, we have decided that blocks or modules of each ship will be built by BAE Systems Marine and Vosper Thornycroft. Final assembly will be carried out by BAE Systems Marine. We now have a total of six Type 45s on contract, and they are due to enter service from 2007. All that demonstrates our clear commitment to a modern and powerful Royal Navy while guaranteeing work for UK industry and providing better value for money.

The Royal Navy's ability to respond rapidly and flexibly to crises around the world will also be enhanced with the acquisition of the two next-generation aircraft carriers. Good progress is being made on their development. We expect to advise the potential prime contractors this autumn about the type of carrier design to take forward. We plan to announce the selection of our preferred prime contractor early in 2003, with the award of a build contract planned for early in 2004. The construction of the carriers will offer tremendous opportunities for UK shipyards—and I stress "UK shipyards".

An important element of that programme is the decision that I announced on 2 July that the future carriers will be base-ported at Portsmouth. As well as being good news for Portsmouth, that allows the relevant companies to construct their bids with that certainty in mind.

Work continues on the new Astute class of attack submarine and on the replacement landing platform dock ships. Progress on these projects has been too slow, largely owing to a range of design and project management difficulties on the part of the contractor. That is very disappointing, but the Ministry of Defence is actively engaged with BAE Systems on all these projects [illegible] ensure that the vessels are brought into service as quickly as practicable. The company is in no doubt about our expectations.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I am very reassured by my hon. Friend's comment that the aircraft carriers will be built in the UK and will support UK shipyards. However, is he aware of what has recently occurred on Tyneside? Swan Hunter shipbuilders sub-contracted work on its alternative landing ship logistics to Dutch yards while the yards on Teesside and elsewhere remained empty. Work that could be done in this country is not being done here. Will he therefore assure me that work that is given to a prime contractor will not be sub-contracted to Dutch or other European yards?

Mr. Ingram: We became aware of that development when my colleague in the other place was questioned by, and gave evidence to, the Scottish Affairs Committee. It was news to the Department, but it acted very quickly. It made clear to Swan Hunter our view of the build strategy. On the work that has been put out to tender, I understand that progress has been made to seek to have it done in the UK. However, we must recognise that there may be occasions when there is no capability for elements of a new build ship. It is not just a case of saying we have the skills base and the work should be done here. Sometimes sophisticated judgments have to be made and, when the work goes out to tender, European procurement rules may come into play.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful for that answer, but I raised the matter with the Ministry of Defence in a written question that I tabled last November. The Department assured me that it would keep a close eye on the sub-contracting work at Swan Hunter. Some sub-contractors in the region suspected in November that the problem would arise. If people in the north-east knew about it then, surely the Ministry should have known about it, too.

Mr. Ingram: I do not understand the allegation. Is my hon. Friend saying that we have let down the north-east? If so, the opposite is true. I have given a commitment to UK shipyards which he should welcome. I said that the specifics relating to that section of the hull, which involved specialist steel cutting, were made known when evidence was given to the Select Committee. We acted immediately and the company was left in no doubt about its approach to procurement. Rather than being negative about what we are doing for UK shipbuilding, my hon. Friend should rejoice in the fact that we have given a tremendous commitment to UK shipyards. There is an old saying in Glasgow: it was tears that made the Clyde. It seems to me that the Ministry of Defence saved the Clyde, and that would probably be reflected in shipyard footprints throughout the UK.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): As a Member who represents a Clydeside constituency, may I say how grateful we all are to the Minister and his colleagues for awarding the Type 45 and aircraft carrier contracts, which will require a tremendous amount of metal work, to our area? However, will he bear it in mind that competition and capacity for the future are also important, not only in terms of metal shaping, but in terms of the systems? The key to having future capacity to bid for major orders such as aircraft carriers will be the retention of a systems capacity. Given that one of the major bidders for the aircraft carrier is not British owned, is the Minister satisfied that if that company is awarded the status of prime contractor, the capacity for systems construction will remain in this country?

Mr. Ingram: If my hon. Friend holds on, I will set out a review of industrial policy as it relates to procurement policy. However, he makes an interesting point. He claims that one bidder is not British, but if both bidders are non-UK owned, what would that mean for his argument? Will we be unable to place the order with the other company if it is taken over by a foreign competitor? We have to be clear that our drive and intention is to get such vessels built within UK shipyards where there is capacity to do so. However, we may get better value for money elsewhere in many cases that involve specialist equipment. The important consideration is not necessarily that we get British equipment, but that we get the best equipment.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): My right hon. Friend mentioned the decision on basing the aircraft carriers. I read his statement and letter to me with great care and was disappointed that the Department could not make the brave decision to return the basing of the aircraft carriers to Portland. I was interested to read his comments on a temporary berthing for the carrier. Is the Department thinking exclusively of Southampton for that role, or will it consider other prime locations on the south coast?

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend, who always approaches such matters with great care and diligence, is right about his area not benefiting from that particular announcement. The announcement that applied to Southampton related to the unusual circumstances in which both aircraft carriers are in port at the same time. At some point in the future we will have to cater for those circumstances by providing additional berthing facilities. On the basis of an intensive study, I can say that Southampton offers the best facilities with the minimum investment. Depending on what facilities were provided, it could cost hundreds of millions of pounds to invest in a support berthing capability, and it might then never be used, so we have to exercise judgment in determining where to base ancillary support.

My hon. Friend is very active both as a member of the Defence Committee and in representing his area, and I know that he will continue to raise these matters with me, but I hope that he understands the background to this decision.

Before that exchange, I was commenting on specific matters relating to the aircraft carrier and the Astute class of submarine. I pointed out the delays to that programme and to the landing platform dock ship programme. It is worth repeating that the company is in no doubt as to our expectations for its performance on those ships.

Although new warship platforms are important, we must be able to support them as part of our overall capability to deploy world wide. We need to determine the best way of supplying and replenishing the modern Navy, following the retirement of our ageing Royal Fleet Auxiliary support vessels. It is vital that we get those crucial capabilities right.

Looking to the future, I can announce that we are establishing the military afloat reach and sustainability project team—or MARS, in MOD-speak—at the Defence Procurement Agency in Abbey Wood to determine the best way to meet those needs. That could include more new build, new design ships, more flexible than our current single-role support shipping, faster, and able to adapt to a number of different roles. I expect to see the solution being phased in over the latter half of the decade. As a first step, industry will shortly be briefed on that.

[Mr. Ingram]

We will welcome innovative proposals, which might include public-private partnership arrangements. I hope for an imaginative and enthusiastic response from British industry. The spending review has given us the scope to launch that important renewal of these key capabilities.

I have already set out where we are on the future aircraft carrier project. The aircraft selected as having the best potential to carry out strike, air defence and reconnaissance missions from the new carriers is the joint strike fighter. The JSF will be a supersonic aircraft, incorporating advanced stealth technology and capable of conducting multi-role operations from carriers and from land. It will be able to locate, monitor and attack targets with precision weapons while protecting itself from air or surface threats.

The project will bring major benefits to UK companies, including BAE and Rolls-Royce, which could gain work valued at £3 billion during the current phase of the programme, and at £24 billion for downstream production and support activities. That could sustain or create some 3,500 jobs in UK companies, rising to 8,500 or more for production and support work.

A detailed evaluation of the short take-off/vertical landing and carrier variant of the JSF is currently under way to establish which would best meet our needs. The House will, of course, be advised accordingly once we have reached a decision on that.

The JSF will replace the capabilities offered by the joint force Harrier. The decision to withdraw the Sea Harrier earlier than previously planned reflects the age of that aircraft—it is 20 years since the Falklands war. The major upgrade required to keep it viable would have been technically very risky and expensive, and the world has moved on. Our focus is now on expeditionary warfare, with carrier-based aircraft principally used for land attack operations. The Sea Harrier makes little contribution to that.

We will instead significantly increase our land attack offensive capability by upgrading the Harrier GR7 to GR9 standard, enabling it to use smart and precision weapons. The recent Defence Committee report on major procurement projects acknowledged the rationale behind that decision, and will no doubt make a further contribution on that.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: I was expecting some response to this point, but may I just finish it?

The Sea Harrier also lacks utility in countering the threat from sea-skimming missiles, whereas modern ship-borne systems have been designed for that purpose. I recognise that its drawdown removes a layer of air defence in the short term—there is no question about that. However, it is important to remember that there are other layers of defence—for example, Type 42 anti-air warfare destroyers armed with Sea Dart anti-aircraft missiles and Type 22 and 23 frigates with their point defence missile systems and close-in weapon systems.

Mr. Francois: I am glad not to have disappointed the Minister, and thank him for giving way. Can he confirm that when JSF comes into service on the new carrier in 2012, part of its mission will be air defence, including the air defence of the fleet?

Mr. Ingram: Part of it will be, but that is not its prime purpose. We have not walked away from or tried to hide the aspect of managed risk. It is interesting that the qualitative assessment in the Defence Committee's report recognised that it had been alleged that the decision was driven by a cost imperative and that it was about saving money. One of the Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen signed up to that report, so at least the official Opposition accepts that the decision was not driven by that, and that other factors come into play.

Mr. Francois: I see that the Chairman of the Defence Committee is in his place, and no doubt he, too, will want to comment. I have read the Committee's report, and there is no way in which the Minister can spin it into an endorsement of the Government's decision. The Committee expressed reservations about it, and he should be accurate about that to the House.

Mr. Ingram: I know that Opposition Members are told to use the word "spin" every time they speak to a Minister, so that eventually it will stick to us. There is no spin involved—it is an open explanation of the basis of the decision. The Committee accepted—or, to use a better word, acknowledged—the rationale behind the decision. It may have doubts, but ultimately the decision rests with the Ministry of Defence, not the Committee, and we have to take responsibility for any misjudgments. We welcome all reports on the Department, but we have to balance our original decisions against any questions that arise.

This was a sizeable, expensive, and indeed risky programme, and I have described the ingredients that had to come into play. The best advice came from those who were considering the issue of capability, not from civil servants and Ministers, who took advice on the military aspects. They asked two questions. Can the risk be managed? Is it the best way forward in terms of the spending profile both then and currently? The answer was yes.

Mr. Hancock: Will the Minister be kind enough to explain the judgment that he made, given that his chief military adviser, Air Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, said on 1 May in evidence to the Defence Committee:

> "No, forgive me, but I made clear that if I could I would have preferred to have retained a viable Sea Harrier in service because we will be without one of the layers of air defence".

The chief adviser to the Ministry of Defence and to the Minister was advising that he would have chosen to retain the Sea Harrier. What judgment did the Minister make in overruling that advice?

Mr. Ingram: There was no overruling of that advice: it was part of the advice that we were given. One side of the equation was based on taking an approach that could have retained it, but that would have had certain consequences, including the risky element of upgrading the engine and issues relating to the management of resources. Military people would probably say, as now seems to be the case with the Liberals, "Just give us everything that we ask for." Then they must step back and accept that we have to live in the real world. The advice was that there would be a reduction for a time in the layer of defences for any taskforce. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) should read all the evidence.

We are upgrading the support mechanisms on the ships. The Type 45 destroyers provided even more capability and that led to the position that we subsequently adopted.

Mr. Laws *rose—*

Mr. Ingram: The world has moved on, and we are not fighting the war of 20 years ago. We are fighting in a completely new context and in coalition. That is a new way forward; it is what interoperability means.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) *rose—*

Mr. Ingram: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) first. I assume that the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) will repudiate our position. I shall be interested to find out.

Mr. Laws: Does the Minister accept that he is replacing the technical risks in the upgrade project with actual military risks, which our forces will face without the Sea Harrier? Does he recall paragraph 93 of the Select Committee's recent report? It states:

> "There are, then, a lot of pieces that must all fall into place before the Sea Harrier's demise can be regarded with at least some confidence."

Is he not worried about that?

Mr. Ingram: Of course, we have a measure of anxiety about the programme's delivery. I have set out a range of other decisions. After the short period that I mentioned, the new Type 45s will be in service and the other support mechanisms on existing ships will be upgraded. We will thus have the capability. Hon. Members will understand that the probability of a single Royal Navy taskforce going to sea is not high.

International coalition of effort leads us to the conclusion that if we were deploying against a threat, we would have partners. *[Interruption.]* Where is the threat coming from? Perhaps the hon. Member for Yeovil can tell us the location of the new threat. Could the Sea Harriers tackle it? They cannot deal effectively with sea-skimming missiles. We have to equip ships to deal with them.

There is risk management in everything that we do in defence. We have to balance resources and capabilities and the technical implications of an upgrade. Opposition Members do not appear to understand that there are risks in the technical aspects of the upgrade. They must resolve the conundrum, as we have done. That is why we made the decision.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The Minister makes a great deal of the cost and technical difficulties of an upgrade of the Sea Harrier F/A2. He is right; I have spoken extensively to Rolls-Royce about the matter, and an upgrade would be expensive.

Mr. Ingram: What about risk?

Mr. Howarth: There would be some risk attached to the technical fit of the engine. However, if an aircraft that was introduced into service as recently as 1999 is so deficient, why not scrap it and save the money now?

Mr. Ingram: That is a ludicrous position. We have capability; the aircraft is not useless. However, it is not all-singing, all-dancing in the way in which Opposition Members appear to believe. As we move towards the expeditionary purpose, we need the capability to match. That is not compatible with Sea Harrier capabilities. Such judgments have to be made. Do we spend a lot of money, and risk not delivering the programme? The risk is not small. Indeed, we are considering a significant technical risk. The Sea Harrier is not designed to take the new engine. Conservative Members shake their heads. Have they got better advisers than the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Gray: Rolls-Royce.

Mr. Ingram: Well, okay. Since Rolls-Royce is in my constituency, I suggest that the hon. Gentleman get the company to put that in writing and send it to me. Has Rolls-Royce put it in writing to the hon. Gentleman? I hear silence.

Mr. Keetch: The Minister is a great student of history and will know that he is not the first Minister for the Armed Forces to say in the House that, effectively, we will never go to war by ourselves. Denis Healey said that in defence of the cancellation of CVA1; Sir John Nott said so in the 1980 defence review when he was planning to sell off HMS Invincible, which gave the wrong signal to the Argentines and led to the Falklands war, to which the Minister referred. If the Minister is saying that Britain will never need an air defence capability for the fleet again, why will the JSF have such an element? He cannot have it both ways. We either need an air defence capability—in which case it should be continued—or we do not.

Mr. Ingram: I do not think that I used the word "never"; I said "probability" and "slim". We would all love the benefit of hindsight or to be able to project ourselves months or years before making such decisions in order to meet the unknown, but that is simply not possible. No Minister or Government have had that wisdom. It has been a long time since there has been a Liberal Government, and although I am an amateur student of history, I do not recollect their getting everything right.

There must be a balanced judgment. We have made that judgment on the best advice and after considering all related elements. With the upgrade to the GR9 variant, we will have a tremendous force projection capability, which will enhance our strength and our ability to tackle what we believe on the probability of assessment to be the enemies of the future.

The word "never" never appeared in my explanation. At some point, I will be able to rely on the fact that I never said that. I would be able to take some solace from

[Mr. Ingram]

that, although I hope that I shall never have to do so. The probability of assessment and the management of risk are undoubtedly right. We have had a useful and informative debate on that rumbling issue. I have again tried to educate from the Dispatch Box and to point Opposition Members towards the right decision, but we will see what happens as the debate develops.

Operating alongside the JSF and complementing its capabilities will be Eurofighter. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House on 10 July, there has been no change in the Government's commitment to Eurofighter. The aircraft will serve as the cornerstone of the RAF's fighting capability from the second half of this decade. It will be a "state of the art" fighter aircraft with a formidable weapons suite, including the advanced short-range air-to-air missile, Meteor, Storm Shadow and Brimstone, and provide a true, adverse-weather, multi-role capability.

The programme remains important not only to the RAF but to the UK's defence industry and those working in it. The UK has made a contractual commitment to purchase 55 Eurofighter aircraft in the first of three envisaged production tranches. A memorandum of understanding with the partner nations covers the first tranche, and the balance of 232 aircraft to be purchased in two further tranches—89 in tranche 2 and 88 in tranche 3.

Mr. Gray: The Minister referred to the Prime Minister committing himself to the Eurofighter as is. Can we be plain about this? Is the Minister giving an undertaking that the Government will definitely purchase 232 airframes—and if so, how do they intend to pay for them?

Mr. Ingram: That is predicated on Labour remaining in power; I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for conceding that. His point is not silly. Clearly, we can make commitments only from where we stand at this point. Under most circumstances, it has never been possible for Governments to commit future Governments—certainly not those of a different hue.

I have set out our commitment in the memorandum of understanding, and there are many commitments associated with that. There will be a tremendous payback in UK industry terms; all those benefits will flow from this. I have set out the three tranches of purchasing, and the Prime Minister made all this clear on 10 July. Who am I to say anything different? I welcome his statement because it is consistent with what we have been saying all along.

Mr. Gray: Perhaps I can clarify the position. When the Conservatives return to power in three or four years' time, we shall be firmly committed to purchasing all 232 Eurofighter aircraft. Will the Government now match that commitment?

Mr. Ingram: Well, okay, let us match commitments. Let us go down the list. When I get to the end of my speech, I would like the hon. Gentleman to say that he will stand by every one of our commitments—*[Interruption.]* I have given the assurance, as has the Prime Minister. I do not think that that is at variance with what the hon. Gentleman has said on this. The words stand, and they are very clear. That commitment remains the same, and I have set out the tranche purchasing approach on this.

I mentioned the Meteor beyond visual range air-to-air missile. Good progress has been made on resolving complex technical and commercial issues, and a draft contract has been circulated to partners. The UK and partner nations remain committed to the project, but the contract is unlikely to be signed before the summer. The project still needs to gain the necessary approvals in the German system. The next opportunity for the Bundestag committees to discuss Meteor—and indeed A400M—will be in September. I very much hope that they will grasp this opportunity. Officials are discussing with partners and industry the implications of a delay until September. This delay is disappointing, but we continue to do all that we can to place the contract as soon as possible. As I have just said, the same time frame applies to decisions on A400M. We are working hard to ensure that this contract can also come into effect.

Having dealt with specific sea and air capabilities, let me now highlight three particular capability achievements that contribute directly to our forces' ability to deploy, engage and win on the battlefield. The first is the delivery of the Westland Apache attack helicopter, which entered service in January last year. The arrival of Apache illustrates how we are meeting our strategic defence review commitment to deliver world-class, highly capable equipment to the armed forces, which will help to transform the battlefield. *[Interruption.]* I think that the hon. Member for Hereford and I are on side on this one.

The second achievement involves the Maverick anti-armour missile, which entered service with the RAF in February 2001. Lessons learned from operations in Kosovo identified the need for improvements to our capability to attack armoured targets with precision and speed. We have acted quickly to fill that gap. Thirdly, I want to highlight the delivery of the Viking all-terrain vehicle platform to the Royal Marines, which has proved a great success. Looking forward to future equipment capabilities, the MOD has signed several key contracts, including that for the delivery of a heavy equipment transporter service, and one for the next generation light anti-armour weapon.

I am also pleased to inform the House that the Ministry of Defence has today announced its intention, subject to the satisfactory conclusion of final contract negotiations, to award a contract worth some £350 million to RO Defence for the demonstration, manufacture and support of 65 Terrier armoured engineer vehicles. Terrier will replace the in-service combat engineer tractor, enabling the British Army to retain and enhance a vital operational capability provided by the Royal Engineers. This new order is very welcome news for the company and for Alvis, which will have a significant role in manufacturing the vehicles. I am sure that the management and work force at both locations will be delighted with this news.

I have already mentioned that the development of a network-centric capability will transform the way in which the United Kingdom's armed forces are able to operate. This forms a key part of the work that we have been undertaking on the new chapter to the strategic defence review. This is not just an aspiration; things are happening now to deliver the reality, providing an essential foundation on which the new chapter will build.

The need for reliable, global military communications has been demonstrated in all recent conflicts, but especially in Afghanistan. The Skynet 5 satellite programme will ensure that we continue to have this important capability. We announced the Paradigm consortium as the preferred bidder in February and, subject to successful negotiation, we expect to place a private finance initiative contract by the end of the year.

Over the coming years, we will see great improvements in our ability to communicate, and to exchange information securely wherever we operate. A number of complementary systems will ensure that we continue to have effective command and control, whether operating independently or with our allies. Bowman will provide a secure communication and data transfer system, as well as the basis for the wider digitisation of land operations. We expect it to enter service in 2004.

We recognised the early need to improve communications, and we have introduced the personal role radio, which has proved extremely useful in Afghanistan. I can announce today that BAE Systems, in Christchurch, and Marconi Mobile, in Chelmsford, have been chosen as preferred bidders for the assessment phase of the first stage of the Falcon programme, which will provide a communication system at formation level. These two British companies have been chosen to enter the final stage of the competition for the armed forces' new, £430 million secure communication system. Successful communications are the key to success on the battlefield, and to our ability to deliver precision weapons rapidly and accurately—what we are calling network-centric capability.

Falcon's role in drawing this together, and connecting systems such as Skynet and Bowman, is key, giving senior commanders the ability to direct operations effectively on the battlefields of the future. Falcon will be able to carry a greater volume of voice and data traffic more effectively than existing equipment. It can be deployed on or off-vehicle, and moved rapidly by air into the operational theatre. It will also need less manpower to operate and to support.

Finally, Cormorant will provide a state-of-the-art, theatre-wide area communications network, and will enter service shortly.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): On talking to anybody involved in recent armed forces operations, it is clear that the key word is inter-operability—the ability to operate not only within our services, but with service men from other countries. Can the Minister guarantee today that, as the new equipment programmes come on-stream, they will be tested to ensure that they are fully inter-operable with American systems, given that, these days, we spend much more time operating with the Americans and, indeed, with our continental allies? Surely that is a key part of the programme.

Mr. Ingram: That is a very important point. Although inter-operability has been a watchword for some time, it has become the key approach in terms not only of our enhanced capabilities, but of how we encourage our European allies and aspirant NATO nations to improve their capabilities as well. We have very good relations with the United States, and if that interface is genuinely to deliver what we want in respect of NATO or any other partnership between allied nations, we must ensure that such inter-operability and compatibility exists. Otherwise, certain procurement decisions, such as those made by previous Governments, could well have to be scrapped.

On the projects that I have just outlined, performance in many key capability areas has been, and continues to be, impressive. However, in certain areas the rate of progress has been disappointing. Let me make it clear that, when contractors are unable to deliver equipment to agreed time frames, we do not just sit back in resignation. We are getting much smarter at dealing with the consequences of slippage.

The overall rate of slippage has reduced, as has the number of projects experiencing delay. New slippage during 2001—some 29 months across four projects—was less than half that in 2000. We are also much better at working with contractors to ensure that we get a useful capability into service at the earliest possible date, building on that initial operating capability through incremental acquisition to reach the full levels of required performance. Our approach to acceptance of the ASRAAM missile is a good example of this smart behaviour. The Ministry of Defence has taken delivery of a first batch of interim standard missiles, which offer a significant improvement over existing capability.

The Public Accounts Committee's recent report, "Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2001", provides further evidence that the Department is continuing to improve cost control, that we have slowed the rate of slippage on projects, and that new equipment continues to meet the vast majority of specified technical requirements. According to the Committee:

> "The Major Projects Report for 2001 shows encouraging signs that the Department's performance is improving under Smart Acquisition".

In an earlier report, published on 23 November 2001, the NAO welcomed

> "the signs that the Ministry of Defence is beginning to bring delays on major projects under control, and is continuing to control costs on major projects and to meet the vast majority of the technical requirements of the Armed Services."

We will respond formally to the PAC report—and to the Defence Committee's survey of major procurement projects—in the early autumn. It would be wrong to reply before the formal response process. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition complain that I have now been speaking for an hour, but I have tried to take all the interventions that would add value to the debate. We have an extensive debate on a key issue. *[Interruption.]* I am conscious that representation is sparse on the Benches behind the Opposition Whip—

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): And behind you.

Mr. Ingram: We are comfortable with our solution, but it is the Opposition's job to try to knock us down. I do not need a lot of allies behind me, although I welcome every contribution that will be made.

Smart acquisition is not just about buying new equipment; it is also about how we manage the equipment we own to maximise the capability available to front-line forces in a cost-effective manner. That means looking not only at how we acquire the equipment in the first place, but at how we support equipment through its in-service life and how we undertake its disposal.

[Mr. Ingram]

Being smarter in how we support equipment falls to the Defence Logistics Organisation, which as part of its drive to reduce costs and improve effectiveness is reviewing stock holdings and using innovative techniques to identify further reductions.

Mr. Hancock: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: Well, I hope that I will not get into trouble with Opposition Front Benchers for extending the debate.

Mr. Hancock: I congratulate the Minister on the robust way in which he has defended his position and thank him for his generosity in taking interventions. I sense that the Minister is easing to a conclusion, but before he does can he tell the House whether he is satisfied that the procurement that will be required under the new chapter can be achieved within the new money that has been allocated to the Ministry, or will some of the existing procurement schemes—those in the planning or development stage—be cut?

Mr. Ingram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but he must not have heard my earlier remarks. I said that a White Paper will be published tomorrow and the Secretary of State will then elaborate on its contents. I have pointed out the £1 billion of new capital investment and the £500 million of other money, but I suggest that the hon. Gentleman seek to explore his specific questions after the White Paper is published.

The Defence Logistic Organisation's non-project procurement office was set up on 1 April 2000 to manage general stores and has already generated significant savings. In its first year of operations, it rationalised the supplier base, making savings of some £40 million on new contracts valued at £350 million. Other partnering agreements with industry are helping the Department to manage its stocks more effectively, transferring stock-holding activities and risks to contractors. *[Interruption.]* I have a couple more points to make. We have had a good debate so far, and I look forward to further contributions.

Another important plank of our overall smart acquisition programme has been the drive to extend its benefits—previously confined mainly to the equipment programme—more vigorously into the acquisition of services, especially through private finance and new commercial partnering arrangements. Our public-private partnership and private finance initiative programmes continue to have an important role to play in making best use of defence resources and delivering improved services. We have the richest, most diverse and one of the most successful PFI programmes in Whitehall. PFI has enabled us to obtain new aircrew training simulators and other equipment-based services, but such schemes could go much further and that is the approach that we are taking.

The last issue that I wish to address is industrial policy and I see that my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) who intervened earlier on that point is still in his place. I am happy to exchange views with him if he has any further thoughts on the issue. All of the issues that I have set out are important in their own right, but clearly they have an impact on industry generally. The United Kingdom benefits from a strong and innovative defence industry that contributes to our overall economic wealth, science and technology base, and—importantly—to regional economies.

Competition remains the bedrock of our acquisition policy—when sensibly applied it consistently gives the taxpayer value for money. Competition works to encourage innovation. As our procurement requirements change, innovation will increasingly be the key to winning many contracts, something that I hope will benefit many of our smaller and medium-sized firms. Competition should be seen not as a threat but as an opportunity.

I would not suggest, however, that there is a single standard approach to that opportunity. We will use alternative procurement routes, such as partnering, where industry and Government can benefit from stable long-term relationships. Suggestions from some parts of industry that we should look only to privileged or monopoly suppliers are shortsighted: to do so would stifle innovation and we would end up paying inflated prices for probably inferior equipment.

Let there be no doubt. We want to buy the best. We want to buy British. So we must constantly look for ways to help British industry to be the best, but industry has to play its part. My Department's first responsibility is to spend the defence pound to achieve best value for money. That applies more widely than simply purchasing equipment. It has broadened from equipment acquisition to the purchase of services, and many defence companies now cross national borders. It is where the technology is created that is important and that means looking to see where the skills and the intellectual property reside, where the investment is made, and where the jobs are sustained and created.

We also support the UK defence industry with our efforts to improve access to foreign markets and through our research and technology strategy. Increased access to foreign defence markets will improve technology transfer across national boundaries and increase the opportunities for our companies to compete for export orders. That is important: UK defence companies cannot rely on MOD orders alone to keep them in business. That is not the MOD's job.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): Is the Minister aware that there should be much support for the Government's decision on head-up displays being sold on US aircraft? If we were to withdraw the right for manufactured equipment from this country to be sold abroad by our allies, we would never be able to enter partnership agreements for valuable equipment that will win markets all around the world.

Mr. Ingram: I agree entirely, and that has certainly been the Government's view in the case to which the right hon. Gentleman refers.

Jim Knight: My right hon. Friend mentioned research and development. Does he agree that having a geographical concentration of expertise, especially in research and development, is a good thing? In my area, we have expertise in sea systems technology, two QinetiQ operations that are based in the area, and many other private sector operations. However, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory proposes to remove its discrete sea systems expertise and place it elsewhere—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Will the hon. Gentleman now bring his intervention to a close?

Jim Knight: Certainly, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would be grateful for my right hon. Friend's comments.

Mr. Ingram: The concentration of science and technology cannot be a good thing, because we want to see a spread over the UK. However, industry has to stand by the decisions that it takes. We cannot second-guess companies or force them to do something else. However, we can encourage them and discuss the Government's future relationships with them. I have tried to set out what the Government can do, what we expect of industry and the possibilities for a partnership approach. That does not rest just with the MOD: it applies across Government delivery.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman must have been given leeway by his Whip to intervene. Only a few moments ago, the Opposition were complaining that I was speaking for too long.

Mr. Howarth: I regard the Minister as an extremely courteous man, and, along with others today, I am very grateful to him for giving way.

The point made by the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) is important, and it has come to light only in the last week. I had a letter from the Under-Secretary of State about the concentration of DSTL employees on three sites. The point made by the hon. Gentleman relates not to company decisions, but to a decision by the Government. I suspect that it is a very good point. Can the Minister—or perhaps the Under-Secretary of State when he winds up the debate—explain the rationale behind that concentration?

Mr. Ingram: As the hon. Gentleman says, the decision rests outside the Department, but my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State may explain the rationale later. Let me, however, say something about the near-company status conferred by some of our activities. Trading funds are one example. We must operate on the basis of best principle rather than mere dissemination for the sake of it. Quality decisions must be made to secure the maximum return on investment. We are no different from industry in that respect. As I have said, we expect a great deal from industry. We must deliver a great deal in return, and we must find solutions. Emotive decision-making is not the best way of delivering on any Government policy, but that applies particularly to the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Davidson: The Minister urged me earlier to await his utterances on industrial policy. I did so, but they were a trifle too delphic for me. In other words, I did'nae understand them completely.

I did of course understand what the Minister said about the merits of competition, and about the advantages of partnership and the disadvantages of monopoly supply. Perhaps, though, I can take him into the fourth dimension. Many of these matters cannot be seen in isolation here and now, because some of the decisions we make here and now have implications for our future capacity to tender for orders. What is the Government's industrial policy in relation to, in particular, the aircraft carrier, in the context of retaining intellectual property associated with systems design in this country so that we can bid for future orders?

Mr. Ingram: I am sorry if I was delphic. I did not intend to be. I thought I was being very clear about what we require from industry, what we will not accept from industry—which my hon. Friend now accepts—and how we can move forward together.

I spent some time talking about shipbuilding capacity. The MOD alone cannot save the shipbuilding industry. We can do a lot, but the industry must be much more forward-looking and much more commercially intensive. It must look for the opportunities that are out there so that it can spread its workload to secure the broad capacity and skills base that we need.

We must seek at all times to purchase the best possible equipment for our front line. That means that we cannot be a patsy to Government. There is no longer any sacred cow. It cannot be thought that we will roll over and accept things because of political pressure from one quarter or another.

I know that my hon. Friend engages with the company in his constituency. No doubt he will make its members aware of what is being said now, and has been said consistently, by defence Ministers, if they are not already aware of it. We want a lot from industry, and we are prepared to give a lot, but industry must produce the best equipment, and it must produce it at a good price. That must be the core of our approach.

Overall, I consider that we have the right resources, the right industrial policies, the right approach to smart acquisition, and a wide range of impressive equipment projects to help ensure that our armed forces have the capabilities that they need in order to deal with the complex challenges of the future. We ask a lot from the men and women in our armed forces, and they have the right to expect the best from us in return. That is this Government's objective, and I think we are on course to achieve it.

6.5 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I think the Minister has received general acclamation for what must be described as a marathon. He entered into the spirit that the House wanted by giving way and engaging in debate—a debate that will continue this evening.

This is a timely debate, occurring as it does on the eve of the Farnborough air show in my constituency. I hope the Minister and others will go to that: it is the greatest air show in the world, and the greatest showcase for an important component of British manufacturing industry. I am bound to add that it might have been better to hold the debate after the publication of the new chapter tomorrow, when we could have had the benefit of seeing it. No doubt its publication will give us another opportunity to question the Minister. I hope he will ensure that we have a proper debate about the new chapter.

I too pay tribute to the United Kingdom's defence industry. Notwithstanding the occasional criticism, British industry delivers some first-class equipment to Her

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

Majesty's forces. It gives employment to 345,000 people throughout the United Kingdom, and contributes significantly to our national prosperity. The British aerospace *industry alone has earned the United Kingdom* £100,000 million in exports in the past 10 years, with defence exports playing their part.

The Minister made an important point when he said that British companies must look overseas to ensure that they are not wholly dependent on the United Kingdom defence market. That means, however, that those companies must have the support of the British Government and of Parliament for their efforts to provide defence equipment to defend our allies overseas.

I welcome the Minister's announcement about the Terrier, and the £350 million order for Royal Ordnance. We are talking about a British company and a British order for the benefit of some first-class British Royal Engineers. I am particularly pleased because the Royal Engineers have a major base at Gibraltar barracks in my constituency, and I think they have demonstrated that when others are on exercise they are doing it for real. Exercise Saif Sareea proved that last November.

As we expected, the Minister made much of the Chancellor's financial largesse—although delivery of the largesse announced on Monday is not scheduled to start for nine months. Before the Minister gets too excited, let us examine the figures. On Monday the Chancellor told us that defence spending would increase by £3.5 billion over the next three years from today's base of £29.3 billion; but, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) implied, that figure refers to the new resource accounting standards recently introduced in all Departments, to which we shall all have to become accustomed.

On the old cash accounting basis, this year's figure would be £24.2 billion. Under that convention, and allowing for annual inflation of 2.5 per cent., the increase in spending over the next three years will amount to just £1.2 billion—about £400 million a year. Even on the Government's figures, there will only be a 1.2 per cent. real annual increase.

The Minister trumpeted the marvellous settlement that his Department had secured. I do not want to be too churlish, but I think it only fair to point out that his 1.2 per cent. compares with a three times greater increase for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which received 3.5 per cent. for each of the next three years. Some may of course regard sport as an extension of war, but I am afraid the fact remains that the Minister's Department did not do quite as well, in comparison with other Departments, as he tried to pretend to the House.

Mr. Kevan Jones: The Tory Government cut the defence budget by one third, although I accept that times were different then. It is interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman go through the figures, but can he give a commitment that a future Conservative Government would at least match the increase that has been announced? If not, will he say what increase such a Government would provide?

Mr. Howarth: That was a good try by the hon. Gentleman, who anticipates part of my speech. I had expected that he would ask that question, and he may rest assured that I will come back to it.

As a percentage of gross domestic product—a yardstick constantly applied to NATO applicant states—UK defence spending will fall to a post-1979 low of 2.2 per cent. That compares with 2.9 per cent. of GDP when the Conservative Government left office in 1997.

When the threat was high and real, as in 1982–83, the then Conservative Government found the resources to match it, and spending rose by 6.6 per cent. in that period. Even when that Government cut defence expenditure after the fall of the Berlin wall—I am sure the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) is old enough to remember that there was a great clamour then for a peace dividend—I do not recall that any member of the then Opposition said that the cuts were too great.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South) *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: All the argument was the other way—except, I suspect, from the right hon. Gentleman who is about to intervene.

Mr. George: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I hope that his highfalutin statistics were not the ones provided for him by the Defence Committee this morning, or we would get very angry. Does he accept that much of the increase in defence expenditure after the Falklands war was used to replace the ships that were sunk, of which there were too many? Also, in 1985 the Conservative Government broke the commitment given by Fred Mulley in response to a NATO request that the UK, like all NATO members, would increase defence expenditure by 3 per cent. in real terms. The decline in defence expenditure began in 1985, well into the cold war. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will look again at his brief, and be more careful. It is true that the Conservative Government left office with defence expenditure of around 2.8 or 2.9 per cent. of GDP, but it was 5.3 per cent. when—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The right hon. Gentleman is a very experienced Member of this House, and he must know that his remarks have gone well beyond the bounds of an intervention.

Mr. Howarth: I can safely conclude that, whichever party was in government, its defence expenditure would not be sufficient for the right hon. Gentleman, who has long been a stalwart supporter of defence expenditure.

The figures that I have came from the House of Commons Library, not the Defence Committee or the Government. The right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) is right that there was subsequently a reduction in expenditure, but in the years 1982–83, 1983–84 and 1984–85 there were increases of 6.6 per cent., 2.9 per cent. and 5.3 per cent. respectively. That shows that there were substantial increases, not just post-Falklands, but at a time when the UK faced a threat.

As I said, I doubt whether any Opposition Member at the time said that the then Conservative Government were cutting defence expenditure too much. Indeed, when I was resting between engagements in the period 1992–97, one Labour Member whose name I shall not reveal told me that a Labour Government on taking power would not have to worry about making cuts, as the Tories would have done all that for them.

Does the Minister of State wish to intervene?

Mr. Ingram: No.

Mr. Howarth: Fine.

I do not want to be churlish about the increase in defence expenditure. I assure the House that the Opposition welcome it—unlike the Labour Opposition in the 1980s, who rejected the Conservative Government's increase in defence expenditure. Given the range of military commitments that the Government have entered into, it was imperative that real increases were made.

Everyone—from previous Chief of the Defence Staff Lord Guthrie to Back-Bench Labour Members—has called for an increase in defence expenditure, but that has to be viewed in the perspective of the massive increase made in the US. This year alone, expenditure there has risen by $48 billion, as many hon. Members will know. The expenditure gap between European nations such as Britain and the US is widening. We understand that we cannot match US expenditure, so I shall say no more on the point, other than that we welcome the increase that has been announced.

I can tell the hon. Member for North Durham that the Opposition position on spending was made clear by my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, at the Royal United Services Institute meeting last week. He said:

> "It is still three years before the likely date of the next general election. We shall only be able to decide on the proper level of defence spending after consultation in Government with the Chiefs of Staff and our allies. We will fully fund the defence capabilities that are essential to safeguard national security and to fulfil our international obligations."

I suggest that that is a stronger commitment than any given by any Opposition in the post-war period. It is a very strong commitment and reflects the priority that the Conservative party accords to defence under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith).

Mr. Kevan Jones: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. The statement that he has just made may have been all-encompassing but as an explanation it was as clear as mud. If we are to enter into the expenditure that the Opposition clearly want, what other services such as education or health does the hon Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) think we should cut? Or does he think that the Government have an endless, elastic budget that fits all demands?

Mr. Howarth: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman, whom I happen to like, should choose to digress down the route of expenditure on other things. This debate is about defence, on which I have set out the Opposition's position. I have heard the hon. Gentleman question visitors to the Defence Committee, and I know that he often says that their perfectly clear assertions are "as clear as mud." So I do not consider that his remark amounts to a serious criticism of my explanation of the position taken by my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex, the shadow Secretary of State.

It is the Opposition's duty to hold the Government to account over their strategic defence review commitments. This is not a game: we have a duty to question the Government and to ensure that they are doing the right thing.

If the Chancellor's settlement is as generous as the Minister of State suggested, why did he not say that recent cuts would be restored? What about returning 5 Squadron Royal Air Force Tornadoes from mothballs? What about reinstating the three cancelled Nimrod MRA4s? What about engaging the 5,600 recruits needed to bring Britain's smallest Army since the time of Wellington to the Government's own target strength, and to restore the Territorial Army to its Tory strength of 59,000? Why do not the Government reverse their decision to scrap the Royal Navy's fleet protection force of Sea Harriers, which they said they could not afford to keep after 2004? Of that we heard nothing in the Minister's speech.

Mr. Ingram: I talked about Sea Harriers.

Mr. Howarth: The Minister did talk about Sea Harriers, but he said nothing about the cuts that we were told had to be made to save money. We did not hear that those Sea Harriers were to be restored as a result of what the Government call the substantial increase in defence expenditure accorded by the Chancellor.

What provision have the Government made for the cost of putting a division of up to 25,000 men into full battle order? The Secretary of State told us on Monday that

> "absolutely no decisions have been taken by the British Government in relation to operations in Iraq".—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 10.]

The right hon. Gentleman was right to make that clear. Yet the Prime Minister also made it clear in his cosy fireside chat yesterday that military action might be required because the threat posed by Iraq's weapons programme was growing, not diminishing. Either sensible and prudent preparations are now being made or our armed forces risk being called into action with inadequate preparation. Which is it? The Minister must answer that when he comes to the Dispatch Box—unless he would like to answer now, in which case I will give way.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Carry on.

Mr. Howarth: That says it all. There is a big hole in the Government's strategy on the issue.

Mr. John Smith: Surely the hon. Gentleman appreciates that force planning and preparations for various scenarios take place all the time. It would not be appropriate for a Minister to declare what planning is currently taking place inside our armed forces should we enter into military action, when the enemy would like to know what the hon. Gentleman wants to know.

Mr. Howarth: Of course the House should not be informed of every detail, but there is a policy issue here. If an operation is mounted, there will be a cost attributable thereto, and it is right for us to ask whether Ministers are putting that into their budget and making the necessary provisions.

Mr. Ingram: Am I right in assuming that the hon. Gentleman is asking about commitments to any future deployment and the costs associated with that, not just about a specific deployment?

Mr. Howarth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Ingram: I see that the hon. Gentleman is asking only about the specific. Whether specific or general,

[Mr. Ingram]

when the unplanned-for demand comes, the cost is then met, as happened under previous Governments. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the budget outturns on which he claims to be an expert, he will realise that the commitments that we have had to meet recently in Macedonia, Sierra Leone and, more important, in large-scale terms, Afghanistan, have all been met. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not asserting that we do not do that.

Mr. Howarth: No, I was not asserting that. I do not regard myself as an expert, but the House of Commons Library is reasonably expert in these matters, and I do not think that the Minister of State should query its integrity.

The point that I am making is clear: the Secretary of State said that absolutely no decisions have been made, but the Prime Minister is making it clear that there is a prospect of the Government undertaking some kind of operation. As yet, no decisions have been made, and we understand that. However, I repeat that either sensible and prudent preparations are being made or our armed forces risk being called into action without proper preparation.

Mr. Ingram: So that there is no doubt in the hon. Gentleman's mind, will he take it from me that all operational costs are met from contingency funds and not from planned expenditure? Does he understand that part of the process? To ask that is to call into question not anyone's analysis but the hon. Gentleman's capability of understanding the complexity of these issues.

Mr. Howarth: Of course not all expenditure comes from the contingency fund. Some will inevitably come from the Ministry of Defence, and we have not yet seen the full accounts relating to Afghanistan.

I should like to press the Minister on the SA80 rifle, which is causing so much concern. The SA80 would be the standard infantry weapon in any major ground operation in the middle east or elsewhere. I am not sure whether the House properly noted the point made by my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Defence on Monday, when he asked the Secretary of State to confirm that in a test of the weapon in Afghanistan, out of 30 rifles firing 90 rounds each, 20 jammed. We are pleased that the tests to which the Minister of State referred took place, but the House needs to know the outcome. We entirely accept that the right hon. Gentleman has not yet received the report, but the House is entitled to know the outcome of those tests and his response to the report. If the report fails to give the SA80 a clean bill of health, are the Government prepared to replace that weapon altogether, as the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), who is no longer in his place, asked? Can the Under-Secretary confirm that comparative tests are under way in Bagram, involving the SA80 and other comparable weapons such as the M16—which, incidentally, is the standard weapon for the United States army, and the weapon of choice for certain key elements of the British Army?

On some of the major procurement programmes, we welcome many of the projects under way. The Minister of State referred to the two substantial new 50,000 tonne aircraft carriers, which will provide the United Kingdom with a vital independent capability to launch operations without recourse to land bases. However, the project is inextricably bound up with the new joint strike fighter being built by Lockheed Martin and BAE Systems. The JSF, with its offensive and air defence capability, will be the vessels' essential partners. My hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) was right to point out that the JSF is not simply an offensive weapon with an air-to-ground capability but has an air defence capability. That is an important factor. However, the project is not yet assured, nor can anyone at this stage of the aircraft's development programme be entirely confident of an in-service target date of 2012 being met. The House will want to know exactly how the Government see the timetable for these two linked programmes working out. The two carriers and the joint strike fighter must both come on stream at the same time, which is quite a risk. We wish the Government well and hope that the projects will be achieved on time and together.

I hope that the Minister of State will be able to tell us soon when we can expect a decision on the joint strike fighter type to be procured. He said that he was not in a position to make a decision yet, but it is important to the whole design concept of the aircraft carrier whether the aircraft to be deployed from that carrier will be a short take-off vertical landing aircraft—STOVL—or whether it will be the carrier variant, which will be a steam catapult-launched variant. The design of the aircraft carrier depends on that decision. My personal preference, to which I know the Minister will attach enormous weight, is to find in favour of the STOVL variant rather than the catapult-launched carrier variant, as I believe that the STOVL variant will provide versatility as well as maintaining Britain's lead in this very important field of technology. There is an added advantage in that pilots operating off aircraft carriers using a STOVL aircraft need a lot less training than pilots on a catapult-launched system, which I am told takes up to six months to convert from a STOVL aircraft.

We have discussed the Sea Harrier already, but I wish to say a little more. With the F/A2 Sea Harrier being withdrawn from 2004, our existing carriers will be without an outer layer of air defence cover, as the Minister of State acknowledged. In our view, that will severely limit the UK's ability to deploy an expeditionary force.

Indeed, as Air Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff, Equipment Capability, told the Defence Committee on 1 May, official thinking was that

> "we envisage in most cases high intensity combat operations being with allies and partners".

That is entirely consistent with what the Minister said, but it means that we shall not have that independent capability should the need arise.

We hope that the need will not arise, but it may. My remarks are slightly tongue in cheek, but currently there are arguments relating to Gibraltar and we have just seen Spain reclaim an island that the Moroccans had claimed—*[Interruption.]* I am not suggesting that Spain is about to invade Gibraltar, and the Minister need not assume that I am. However, the important point is that no one predicted the Falklands. Being prepared for the unexpected is one of the key duties of the Government.

In a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex, the Government conceded that although they anticipate that they will not have to operate other than with the support of allies and partners, no consultations have taken place with allies and partners who could provide air defence cover. We are talking principally about the United States. The policy was not as well thought through as the Government suggested.

Mr. Kevan Jones: May I try to extract a commitment from the hon. Gentleman? The Conservative party's approach to defence expenditure seems to rely on an elastic cheque book. If we were in the nightmare situation that there was a Tory Government, would they take a gamble with money and technology and actually upgrade the Sea Harrier?

Mr. Howarth: There is no technical gamble in operating the Sea Harrier at present. As we speak, the Sea Harrier is on duty with Her Majesty's forces, performing the role for which it was designed—to defend the fleet and act as an interceptor. The aircraft is doing that at the moment, so there is no technical gamble to take.

The Government should acknowledge that the Select Committee, by consensus, was unhappy with their decision to scrap the Sea Harrier. Even Sir Jock conceded:

> "It is not . . . something that I would have chosen to do were it not for the fact that we have to make some hard choices in terms of balance of investment."

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) also referred to that point. In effect, Sir Jock was saying—he made no secret of it—"If we had the money, we'd like to keep the Sea Harriers". I have heard that from even higher authorities.

Mr. Hancock: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he still shares my opinion that no sustainable argument was made by anyone who gave evidence to the Committee for the early phasing out of the Sea Harrier? The life of the aircraft could be extended until the gap could be fully covered by the Type 45 and the upgraded equipment on the Type 42.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman is right. If the joint strike fighter is to have its air defence capability, it is conceded that that would be valuable for a maritime expeditionary force, but that is what will be removed.

The Government are relying on the Type 45 destroyer with its improved phased-array radar and new principal anti-air missile system to make up some of the air defence capability lost with the demise of the Sea Harrier. However, the first Type 45 is not due in service until at least 2007—as the Minister acknowledged—but we do not know whether that target in-service date will be achieved. Even that is a full 18 months after the last Sea Harrier will have disappeared—assuming that the programme will be on time and that its weapons system meets the specification.

Will the Minister confirm the Defence Procurement Agency's statement that the ship will have a potential ballistic missile defence capability, using the Sampson radar? In a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence denied that any Ministry of Defence studies had been made to assess the specific suitability of the Type 45 for a ballistic missile defence role. He also acknowledged:

> "As the design of the type 45 progresses, opportunities to upgrade the ship's capability are being identified and acted upon".—[*Official Report*, 16 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 158W.]

Will the Minister tell us what those opportunities are and whether studies will be carried out to assess the vessel's adaptability to a BMD role? However shy the Government may be on that point, we know that the capability exists, and Labour Members should reflect on the assurances—false or otherwise—that they may have been given.

Mr. Francois: Although the official in-service date for the Type 45 is late 2007, the vessel is a first of class. With such vessels there are often extra trials, so realistically the in-service date will be 2008 or even 2009. Can my hon. Friend therefore confirm that the gap between the Sea Harrier coming out and PAAMS—the principal anti-air missie systems—being available on the Type 45 could be two or even three years?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Type 45 is due at the end of 2007. Once it has been to sea, it will be withdrawn—as my hon. Friend rightly says—to—the principal anti-air missile systems—undergo further trials. It will thus not be available.

The Minister referred to the Eurofighter Typhoon. Obviously, we all welcome that aircraft. The right hon. Gentleman was entirely right to describe its virtues, although he forgot to remind the House that the Conservative Government were responsible for defining the aircraft in the first place. However, there is cross-party agreement; we are all in favour of the Eurofighter Typhoon, which will perform a valuable role.

The aircraft is costly, and there has been a delay in the programme, caused in part by collaboration with our European partners. There is a price to pay for such collaboration in terms of the difficulty of achieving partner agreements for complicated projects. However, the benefit of collaboration is that it makes it much more difficult to cancel the programme.

It is disappointing that the delivery of the first twin-seat aircraft to the Royal Air Force will I understand be in December this year and that the delivery of the first single-seat aircraft is not planned until the second half of next year. One of the problems that that creates is that those dates will run up against the introduction of the joint strike fighter.

Another example of the delays attributable to European collaboration is the A400M medium-lift transport. It is 10 years since I saw a wooden mock-up proudly displayed at the Farnborough international air show, yet we are currently little further forward. We are still in limbo as regards the engine. When will Airbus make a decision? It was due to do so at the end of this month, but our understanding from Rolls-Royce is that that is unlikely. There are technical difficulties with the 18-ft diameter propellers. The Minister will know of the difficulties encountered with the C-130J and the effects of the new propellers and engines on the aircraft's aerodynamics. What support are the Government giving for the TP400D6 engine that Rolls-Royce is developing with its European partners?

We await the outcome of a German election to know whether that project, too, will proceed. If Germany decides to pull out of the project, will it be rendered unviable? I think that the Germans are to order about 40 of the aircraft. What happens if they pull out? Will the project continue to stagger from one crisis to the next?

[Mr. Howarth]

It is just as well that the Chief of Defence Procurement, Sir Robert Walmsley has, as he put it,

> "in my back pocket a financial proposal that we could quickly convert at a known price for two C-17s".

Presumably, if the A400M project collapses the RAF will require more than an extra two C-17s. Although I accept that the Minister is reluctant to give a deadline for the A400M to proceed, will he tell us whether he is in negotiation with the United States to procure an adequate supply of C-17s? Is he looking to have part of the aircraft built in the United Kingdom, apart from the head-up display that is already standard equipment on every C-17 produced by the US, as it is also standard equipment on every F-16 and F-22 produced? More than 5,000 have been produced for the United States by the United Kingdom.

We welcome the decision to order Bowman, which was a good example of the Government making a hard decision when a procurement programme had run into difficulties. The Government cut their losses, demonstrating the value of not reinventing the wheel and, where appropriate, of buying something off the shelf that does the job. Bowman is a vital part of the communications system, replacing Clansman. Its secure voice service, secure data messaging and automatic position location navigation recording system should add significantly to command and control operations. As Sir Jock said to the Committee on 1 May, the prospects of getting it in service in 2004 are reasonable. The Minister is holding to that in-service date of 2004, which is good news.

On communications, the Minister referred to "network-centric" activities. I am not entirely clear what that is about, although the Minister gave a good explanation. Much has been made of that philosophy applying to modern military activity. In so far as I understand the term, it is right that proper weight should be applied to developing systems that will enhance the dissemination of information, enabling commanders to acquire information quickly, to make better-informed decisions equally speedily and to strike surgically.

The Ministry of Defence is looking at the application of unmanned aerial vehicles to contribute to that development under the Watchkeeper programme. We welcome that and urge the Government to move swiftly, and not repeat the long-drawn-out process by which its predecessor, Phoenix, arrived. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) said, we believe that it is imperative that the equipment is entirely compatible and interoperable with our partner nations, particularly the United States.

The Minister referred to the need to buy the best, and not necessarily British. All of us believe that we can buy British and best in nearly every case, but that will not always be so. *[Interruption.]* I am agreeing with the Minister; he does not need to worry. Actually, he probably does need to worry if I am agreeing with him. The Spike missile system—the new light forces anti-tank guided weapons system—is produced by Israel. If the British Government feel that that is the best system on offer, they should not withhold it from British troops.

Concern was expressed about sponsored reserves, a subject referred to in the Committee's Report. The Government need to take the good points made there into account. As a Conservative, I never cease to be staggered by the extent to which some Labour Ministers have embraced a philosophy that they have spent their entire political lives until now trying to destroy. We heard the Minister talking with enthusiasm about the private finance initiative. I remind him that we invented the PFI and it has delivered good results across the public sector. However, I would like the Minister to respond to the issue of sponsored reserves rather than wait for a reply to the Committee's report, which will not be forthcoming before the House rises.

Jim Knight: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: I will not, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. I have spoken for a long time, although not for as long as his right hon. Friend the Minister.

There are some good programmes in the Government's procurement plans. It is very important that we do not analyse projects to death. We must try to get equipment that is more readily available, and not necessarily equipment that meets requirements down to the last and finest detail. We need equipment to be robust and cost-effective. That is the better way to go. A company in Hampshire has told me that it would like the Government to introduce more technology demonstrators rather than trying to get everything right on paper, as technology demonstrators would allow us to see the technology in action.

Finally, the real question will be the extent to which this substantial bow-wave of procurement programmes is financed. The carriers, the joint strike fighter, the future strategic tanker aircraft and the various other projects that the Minister and I have mentioned will all have a substantial price tag attached. I hope that the Government are confident that they will be able to persuade the Chancellor to part with the money when the going gets tough—as it inevitably will—so that many of these worthwhile projects are not axed because of insufficient financial provision.

6.45 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will continue the remarks that I began to make earlier. I usually approach these debates wearing a Defence Committee hat and by being consensual. However, an Opposition Member will always deliberately provoke me into taking that hat off and being partisan. I will try hard to put that consensual hat back on.

It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). I do not know how he manages to combine the two onerous tasks of being a senior member of the Defence Committee and a member of the Conservative defence team. If he finds the tasks too difficult to bear, we will reluctantly wave him goodbye. I promise him a champagne reception, which the Minister will pay for—*[Interruption.]* Not out of the defence budget, but out of his own pocket.

The hon. Member for Aldershot's speech contained a few lapses about the SA80, for which his party must accept a degree of responsibility, and the famous Phoenix, which began its life in about 1977. Two decades later, it came into operation and is now effective. I shall not give my A to Z of Tory procurement failures.

This Government have not had time to rack up the failures of the Conservative party. After 17 years, we will be able to evaluate exactly how effective their procurement policies have been. I hope to be around long enough to say that the Government have done substantially better.

Unless provoked, I will not refer to the defence budget, but I can promise the hon. Member for Aldershot that the decline began in 1985. The Tories' great success was to achieve the Frank Allaun goal of bringing defence expenditure down almost to the average of our European partners. If Mr. Allaun knew that, he might have rushed out to vote Conservative because—here I go again, being partisan—the Tories delivered one of the principal policies of the left wing of the Labour party. Having got that out of the way, I will now get back to serious consensual politics.

Anyone listening tonight might have imagined that the debate would be fierce and the difference between the parties unbridgeable. In reality, it is not; the difference between the parties now is narrower than it has been in my many years here. Everyone hopes that it will remain that way.

Procurement is critically important. I have served on the Defence Committee since 1979, and those who have served on that Committee over the years have monitored the MOD's performance in procuring equipment and weapons systems. We have produced dozens and dozens of reports that, over the years, have been fairly consistent in indicating frequent delays, cost escalation and, in many cases, gross under-performance.

All Governments have tried to introduce a system in which the procurement of weapons systems is efficient and the equipment is produced to time and at a cost relatively close to the original estimate, so that our military personnel achieve most of their objectives when they fire the weapons or drive the vehicles. Smart procurement, or smart acquisition, is the latest in a long saga of attempts to do that, and I shall discuss later whether it has been successful so far or, indeed, whether there are signs of success.

When annual defence procurement debates were introduced in 1998, our predecessor members of the Defence Committee monitored equipment issues more systematically. The Committee instituted annual inquiries based on a survey of major procurement projects. The goal was to monitor and report progress on a selection of the operationally more significant procurement programmes. Those programmes were on what I call the at-risk register because they were most at risk from predators in the Treasury, trying to play silly games by elongating the procurement process.

We wanted to report regularly to the House on whether there were any signs of Treasury interference in programmes that were proceeding reasonably successfully. We also wanted to find out whether there were signs of cost escalation. I am grateful to the MOD for responding annually to our requests for all sorts of information. We have 14 separate procurement items on the list, from the future aircraft carrier to the Swiftsure and Trafalgar submarine updates and the private finance initiative projects. The MOD provides us with a great deal of information.

However, unlike previous Defence Committee reports on procurement, we have a rather different focus. In our first report in 1999, we evaluated the then recent, thankful withdrawal from the Horizon frigate programme and its replacement by the Type 45 destroyer programme. We considered PAAMS—the principal anti-air missile system—which is an integral part of the common new generation frigate, as the Type 45 destroyer was then called. In our second inquiry, we considered BVRAAM—the beyond visual range air-to-air missile—for the Eurofighter and the strategic lift programmes. In our third report, we considered the future aircraft carrier and the future joint combat aircraft programmes and all sorts of other things.

As I have said, our approach has been slightly different in this Parliament, and I am sure that many hon. Members will have read our report, so it would be superfluous to go into any detail. We did not duck the contentious subjects, such as the warship-building strategies, the warship support modernisation initiative, PFI schemes, the decommissioning of the Sea Harrier and information superiority capability. We followed up several of our earlier inquiries on ammunition supply, ASRAAM—the advanced short-range air-to-air missile—BVRAAM and the A400M. We made a list of other recommendations, and it is a very good report.

We have considered some quite contentious issues in the report, and I shall begin with warship procurement. The MOD has had to use the division of work on the Type 45 programme as the basis for steering the future of warship procurement in the United Kingdom more generally, because decisions on the Type 45 programme will have implications for future shipbuilding capacity and the extent of competition for other programmes.

I sympathise with the MOD; it had to find a solution in very difficult circumstances. We are all aware of those circumstances: too much capacity chasing too little naval work. The MOD commissioned a study by RAND Europe, which showed that there is an uncertain balance between the benefits of maintaining competition in the market and placing all the work with one shipyard to produce economies of scale. A compromise on the Type 45 programme is probably the best that can be achieved in what is a difficult balancing act.

BAE Systems's yards will assemble the vessels from blocks built by [illegible]ards at Barrow and on the Clyde and by Vosper Tho[illegible]croft. That will help to keep those yards in business, while allowing economies of scale because of the larger production runs of the same block for each vessel. However, I wish to highlight the risks in that approach. As RAND said, that approach might not stop BAE Systems becoming the only United Kingdom yard able to project manage and assemble warships, reducing the scope for future competition.

Another possible risk is that the MOD will have to play its part in ensuring that sufficient capacity remains to gear up for an unexpected increase in warship procurement activity, possibly at the end of the decade, as the future carrier and future surface combatants come on stream.

The MOD rejected the unsolicited bid from BAE Systems to build all the Type 45s because of concerns about, inter alia, the Astute submarine and Type 45 blocks tripping over each other in Barrow's Devonshire dock hall. However, RAND noted that there were similar dangers with the current plan in which it is envisaged that the second and subsequent Type 45s will be assembled at Barrow. Since our report was published, the MOD has announced that the construction of the Astute submarine

[Mr. Bruce George]

has been delayed by a year, and I would welcome the Minister's assurance that that will not threaten the Type 45 construction programme.

I shall refer to a further risk. Having decided on long production runs for the Type 45, there are sound financial reasons why the MOD should order all 12 vessels. I repeat that the Government should commit themselves to ordering all 12 vessels. Until they do so, they will not be able to suppress suspicion that the Treasury will sink some of them. None of that detracts from the fact that, at last, the MOD has begun to tackle a long-running problem in that sector. I should like such work and RAND's analysis to form the basis of a fundamental review of warship procurement strategies.

We also considered the warship support modernisation initiative—a highly contentious issue even on our Committee. As with warship construction, warship support and maintenance has long been beset with fundamental imbalances and ever-falling naval work loads as a result of new maintenance technologies and a shrinking fleet. I recall that, in the mid-1980s, there was a wonderful philosophical debate in the Defence Committee about whether 44 frigates and destroyers was "about 50", as the then Government said, or "about 40", as the Committee said. I can even remember back to the time when we had 75 frigates and destroyers. I am not quite certain exactly how many frigates and destroyers we now have available because of some directional difficulties that were encountered in the antipodes.

The warship support modernisation initiative is at least a positive step towards tackling the structural problems. I hope that it will produce the estimated savings of £327 million over five years and £48 million a year thereafter. Some of those savings will come from greater competition for refits negotiated as part of the initiative, and some from rationalising activities across dockyards and neighbouring naval bases.

Although much of that can and deserves to be applauded, regrettably, as the Minister knows, it comes at a cost. The MOD will have to be very prudent to minimise the adverse aspects of this policy and its impact. Some 1,000 jobs—some would say 750—will go. We have welcomed assurances during our inquiry that all three naval bases have a secure future. It remains a concern, however, that all of the current naval dockyards may not have a secure future as a result of the warship support modernisation initiative. It seems that Rosyth may have a difficult time without the existence of a co-located dockyard and naval base. What I—and, I suspect, most members of the Committee—want is a sensitive handling of job losses with minimum compulsory redundancies, the protection of essential facilities in the dockyards and naval bases, and care taken to avoid, as far as possible, disruption to sailors and sailors' families as refits are placed according to competition.

We are told that Sea Harrier is to be withdrawn between 2004 and 2006, six to eight years earlier than planned. First, that has not been an example of good forward planning because some aircraft will be less than 10 years old when phased out. Although part of the decision to withdraw them was based on a new post-cold war security environment, we should note that the latest aircraft were ordered in 1993. It seems fairly clear to me and the Committee that the upgrading of the Sea Harrier to make it effective flying off carriers in hot conditions has presented and will present real technical challenges. In a similar vein, its air defence system—its Blue Vixen radar and ASRAAM missiles—could not sensibly be shoehorned into the offensive support RAF Harriers.

The real question is whether the MOD should keep the Sea Harriers as they are with their imperfections. That, in turn, raises two other questions that our report examined: what other systems could cover Sea Harriers' air defence capability, and do we still need that capability anyway? We highlighted the things that would have to be done—or the assumptions that would have to be made—if a rationale for withdrawing the Sea Harrier were put forward. The Type 45 destroyer and its PAAMS would have to be delivered without delays to its 2007 in-service date. I have already spoken of my concerns in that regard. In the meantime, the improvements planned for the existing Type 42s and their Sea Dart missiles must be similarly pursued with the utmost vigour. The eight years of delays in putting an infrared fuse on Sea Dart must be a thing of the past.

More fundamentally, the rationale for withdrawing Sea Harrier depends on two all-important foundations. Future naval operations will be for the most part in the littoral environment, supporting land forces, for example, where hostile aircraft will not have to undertake the long run-in towards our ships, which makes them vulnerable to our air defence aircraft—missiles could be fired at us from ground-based launchers with little warning. In those littoral environments, effective air missile defences will be essential, and the Sea Harrier does not provide that. We will have to rely on allies for airborne air defence cover for our ships—that means the United States. If and when we do fight in the open ocean, for some as yet unforeseen reason, we will have to have the United States alongside us.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making a point that I made. Is he aware of other armed forces that have a significant capability in that sphere? He singled out the United States; is he aware of anybody else with that capability who could protect our carrier force?

Mr. George: If we look at the Russians, I am not certain about the extent to which they will be alongside us, although progress and reconciliation has been spectacular. When I think of the significant navies, I am not certain about the equipment or reliability even of some of our allies. The hon. Gentleman draws attention to a point that we need to consider.

At paragraph 93 of the Committee's report, we stated:

> "We recognise that there is a rationale for not upgrading the Sea Harrier, and withdrawing it early from service."

We talked about the caveats, and concluded:

> "There are, then, a lot of pieces that must all fall into place before the Sea Harrier's demise can be regarded with at least some confidence. The MoD must ensure that none are missing. We will be following this process very closely."

The House can draw its own conclusions from that.

Our report touched on all sorts of things, including the A400M, about which we all know the details. We concluded:

> "Currently, therefore, the MoD finds itself in an enviable position. But if the A400M continues to struggle the secret will be to know when it would be better to deal with someone else."

That is not elegant language, but it is very clear. I hope that everything will come right, but there are technical problems. Our allies will deliver their financial and technical support and expertise, but a point may be reached—although I hope that it is not reached—at which the MOD will have to take some very difficult decisions. Ultimately, it is in the business of delivering to our armed forces that which they want, and that which is affordable in the right numbers. The warning must be made clearly to our European partners that they must deliver or there are clear alternatives.

We talked about the MOD being beset with collaboration difficulties with both the BVRAAM and the A400M programme. We said:

> "It must continue to push its partners on both to show a stronger commitment and remind them that there are other options for the UK if the contract negotiations for these programmes continue to struggle."

I will not go into the debate about how much our defence budget is increasing. I have seen the briefing, and, although I am not particularly numerate—like my colleague the hon. Member for Aldershot, who is grinning at me as he knows that we are similarly bedevilled by lack of statistical competence—there is, of course, a rise in expenditure, the extent of which we will be anxious to evaluate when the time comes. The fact that there have been two increases in the last three years, after a period of unrelieved and stark decline, is very welcome. I hope that the evaluation that the Defence Committee will make will bear out more or less what the Government are arguing—that the increase has been reasonably substantial.

I mentioned at the beginning of my speech that, since the second world war, and, I am sure, since the days of procuring bows and arrows—*[Interruption.]* We procured very good bows and arrows to fight the French, and very good archers to fire them. That was one of the successes. As a fellow Welshman, my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) knows exactly what I am saying. Even the supply of swords in the 18th century was a disaster because they snapped. Procurement has persistently been a problem, so the strategic defence review of 1998 made another attempt to try to achieve what has hitherto eluded Governments—efficient procurement.

The Select Committee on Defence evaluated the smart procurement initiative and we said that the fact that there was such an initiative was a

> "tacit recognition of the failure of some of the past attempts to secure improvement through similar means."

We were reasonably sympathetic to the initiative, but we said:

> "The MoD will need to take deliberate steps to ensure its ability to detect in good time those projects going badly wrong under the more flexible and delegated regime envisaged under smart procurement."

We recognised that the initiative was designed to bring about improvements and reforms, and we wished the MOD well.

In 1999, in a report on the common new generation frigate programme, we commented on the problems of European collaboration. With an incredible lack of drama, we said of the Horizon programme that the

> "story of European collaborative ventures is not particularly inspiring".

We could have put it much more strongly.

In 2000, in our report entitled "Major Procurement Projects", we considered procurement equipment programmes and concluded:

> "There are . . . some early signs of a more imaginative and robust approach emerging, and these offer a glimpse of what improvements the initiative may be able to provide."

In 2001, our report on the MOD's annual reporting cycle said:

> "Despite the difficulty in reconciling the MoD's performance data, the results do indicate satisfactory performance against targets for cost overruns, if not on delays."

So there was some progress there.

The National Audit Office's "Major Projects Report 2001" was mentioned earlier. Paragraph 4 on page 2 states:

> "Our overall conclusions are that, there is evidence of continued improved cost control, that delays are beginning to be brought under control, and although the proportion has fallen slightly (from 98 per cent. to 93 per cent.), the Department is still expecting to meet the majority of the technical requirements of customers."

Therefore, there are early signs that progress is being made, but it is far too early to be absolutely certain that the system is becoming much more efficient. If that happens, it will take place over the next five to 10 years.

The debate has suggested that there is not much between us. A budget of 2.5 or 2.6 per cent. is realistic in the circumstances, and some welcome increases have been wrung out of the Treasury. Should the security environment deteriorate, I hope that the budget would increase in response. However, we must recognise that, among many other problems, it is difficult to procure anything in less than 15 years unless we are prepared to buy off the shelf. Even the United States does not have a limitless capacity to crank out aircraft and other equipment simply because its strongest ally wants that equipment suddenly because of a deteriorating environment.

The budget increase is welcome, and we will reflect on it. We should give a partial pat on the back to Ministers, the Defence Procurement Agency, the MOD and all concerned. A hearty pat on the back is better than the knife between the shoulder blades with which they are more cognisant. I hope that progress will continue, because the taxpayers requires weapons that are necessary and that can be delivered while the services want systems that work. There are good signs that the interests of Parliament, the taxpayer and the military can be reconciled. We must work towards that end.

We on the Defence Committee will continue to be frank and critical when necessary and supportive when we can. We hope that some of our recommendations will find their way through the labyrinth towards effective decision making. Perhaps the Select Committee system will come of age and will be seen not as a reluctant partner that must be tolerated but more constructively as something that can assist the MOD to undertake its tasks more effectively. As a former permanent secretary in the MOD and now, I am delighted to say, an adviser to the Committee has said, "The better you are as a Committee, the better we have to be." I hope that the Committee can improve its performance and that that, directly or indirectly, will help the MOD to improve its performance, so that people outside shout "Hallelujah".

7.16 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I begin with the issue that the Minister first mentioned—the MOD budget and the change that the spending review has made. Without that budget, there is no procurement. The tensions in the budget over the past 10 or 15 years have been behind the pressures on the procurement budget that have been experienced in that time and over the life of this Government.

We were led to believe by the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement on Monday that the MOD had received a rather generous settlement. Indeed, the MOD had an unusually early mention in his statement as if to flag up the priority that it had received in the spending review. Then we received confirmation of the importance that the Government put on the issue in the joint press release that was issued by the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Defence. It was headed, "Gordon Brown announces billions extra for defence", and it quoted the Secretary of State for Defence as saying:

> "This is an excellent settlement for defence."

I will not use the word "spin", because I do not identify the Minister as a spinner. However, the Chancellor has a reputation in his Budget and spending statements of not needing always to be taken at face value. We therefore need to compare the reality of the Government's announcement on Monday with the figures that have been released.

The right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) said that the Defence Committee would consider this issue, so perhaps I should draw his attention to the Government's document on the spending review that was published on Monday. Table 1.3 helpfully gives all the annual growth rates in real terms of every single Department over the period of the spending review. We would, of course, expect the big public service Departments—the Departments responsible for education, health, crime and transport—to be at the top. We would not necessarily expect the MOD to have a comparable budget increase. However, we discover that not only are those Departments doing better than the MOD but, as the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) pointed out, other Departments surprisingly outshine the MOD by a long way. They include the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chancellor's Department itself. In fact, only one of the Departments listed in the table—the Department for Work and Pensions—has an annual growth rate of expenditure less than that of the Ministry of Defence. If we add the changes to annually managed expenditure, which are not reflected in the table but will form part of the budget of the Department for Work and Pensions, we discover that the Ministry of Defence has had the smallest real increase in the spending review.

I do not ignore the fact that the background to the problem is a 15-year period in which we saw a sharp contraction of the defence budget. I do not fail to acknowledge that the Secretary of State has halted that decline in this and the last spending review. However, no one should be under any illusions, and the Government should not create the illusion, that that will create slack in the budget or that pressure on the procurement budget will ease. The settlement will lock in the decline in the defence budget and the decline in capability that went with it. Expenditure this year and over the period of the spending review will increase by 1.2 per cent. in real terms, but much of the Minister's budget is for pay as well as procurement. As those tend to increase above inflation, the extent of the challenge that the Ministry faces becomes clear.

When I intervened on the Minister, he was not surefooted in his response. I asked what he thought about today's evidence to the Treasury Committee from two distinguished Treasury officials, Mr. Sharples, a friend of the Prime Minister and head of public expenditure at the Treasury, and his colleague, Mr. Macpherson. They confirmed something that is clear if we flick to page 167 of the spending review document: expenditure by the Ministry of Defence will be less in real terms in every year of the spending review than its expenditure last year. I hope that that puts into context the nature of the budget challenges that face the Ministry and the fact that we still have difficult procurement issues to address.

I am not asking the Minister to rely only on the spending statement or on the Treasury officials to support my case. I have the same briefing document on expenditure as the hon. Member for Aldershot, which confirms the figures to which he drew our attention. It also shows that if we use the base year of 2001–02, the budget falls over the following four years by just over £300 million. The average annual real change is, therefore, a fall of 0.3 per cent.

Dr. Moonie: To save me from having to spend too long on that in my winding-up speech, there is a vast difference between outturn figures and budgets. The hon. Gentleman is comparing an outturn figure, which includes contingencies that are always paid by the Treasury, with the forecast budget figure, which underpins our regular spending. He is 100 per cent. wrong.

Mr. Laws: Although the Minister says that I am 100 per cent. wrong, I am, in fact, 100 per cent. right because the figures in the document bear out the claim that in every year of the spending review real expenditure will be lower than it was last year. Regardless of the contingency claims, that demonstrates that the Ministry of Defence budget remains under pressure.

I notice that the Minister did not challenge what I said about the Ministry having the lowest increase in real terms of any Department other than the Department for Work and Pensions and, when we include the change in annually managed expenditure, that it comes bottom of the list. I am sorry if the Minister does not like those comments, but he should look at the documents. Perhaps he is irritated and upset because the Chancellor managed to pull the wool over his Department's eyes. Perhaps he does not like the reality of the figures, which do not live up to the Chancellor's spin, but they are in his Department's documents.

We are grateful to the right hon. Member for Walsall, South for the excellent report that his Committee produced last week on major procurement projects. I shall focus on the four or five projects on which there are the most substantive concerns or the greatest differences of opinion. I accept his general point that there is, thank goodness, a great deal of unity among hon. Members on the overall approach taken by the Ministry of Defence, but we must concentrate on the matters that concern us.

The Minister gave the impression that the Select Committee's report was mildly supportive of the decision on the Sea Harrier. Having read the report and listened to the comments of the right hon. Member for Walsall, South, the Chairman of the Select Committee, I must say that they are a strange endorsement indeed. In paragraph 92 of the report, the Committee notes:

> "We are forced to conclude that . . . the UK has already decided that in another five years it will rely on others"—

other nations, that is—

> "for air-defence patrols for our naval task forces."

The hon. Member for Aldershot asked on whom we might rely to take over the vital role of air patrols at sea. The right hon. Gentleman said that the only alternative to the United States of America is Russia, a country on which no one would want to rely to secure our future defence needs.

I am sure that hon. Members agree that we must ensure that the strategy for the future of our defence is sufficiently flexible so that we can fight any reasonable campaign. We cannot be sure that the campaigns that we might have to fight over the next five to 10 years, when we might have no proper air cover for our fleet, will receive the support of the USA. If we cannot be sure of that, we cannot be sure of the support of any other nation either.

The Minister said that he is taking a decision on the balance of risks and that the technical upgrade of the Sea Harrier is risky. However, he should acknowledge that he is transferring one risk for another. He does not want to risk upgrading the Sea Harrier but, as a consequence, he is taking the risk either that our armed forces will not be able to engage in operations requiring that layer of air cover or that we will engage in those operations in circumstances that endanger our armed forces, which would be even worse.

There is deep non-party political concern among hon. Members—I certainly detected it in the Select Committee—about the Government's decision. I urge the Minister to reconsider it because, in a world of second best, it might be better to spend money prolonging the life of the Sea Harriers rather than losing the significant capability that allows us to deploy the Royal Navy with air cover. The experience of the Falklands war reinforced the fact that we cannot rely on ship-based missiles to defend our forces, especially at sea, because the ability of our enemies to deploy missile technology against us is changing and improving all the time. Defence Ministers and generals used to be criticised for always wanting to prepare to fight the last war. My concern is that we seem to be unable to fight even the last war, let alone the next one. I hope that the Government will re-examine that matter.

Mr. Francois: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Falklands. I am an Atlanticist by instinct. If anybody is likely to support us, it would probably be the United States. We now know that the United States provided us with assistance in the Falklands, but even they did not send us the USS Nimitz. That was a real scenario in which we could not rely even on the US for carrier-based air power. It is not fantasy to say that a problem exists.

Mr. Laws: I entirely agree. We simply cannot predict the type of environment that we will be in or the defence choices that we will have to make. We cannot be sure of future circumstances and the level of support that we will receive from our potential allies, even the United States. Over the next five to 10 years, the Government risk putting us in a position in which we cannot pursue our defence interests or have to take unacceptable risks to do so. I hope that the Minister and the Department will reconsider the issue.

Mr. Ingram: It is easy for the hon. Gentleman to throw around scenarios that have no bearing on reality. Will he accept that the period from the non-availability of the Harriers to the availability of the new fleet is about 18 months, not the five to 10 years that he has just quoted?

Mr. Laws: There are two points. First, if we are to rely on aircraft rather than simply on ship-based missiles, that period would be longer than the Minister has indicated. We all—not least the Minister and his Department—know about the potential for new orders to slip. What could start off as a two, three or five-year gap could easily slip into a much longer one. We would not only risk our flexibility in defence policy and our armed forces during that period, but run down the skills and abilities of the air crew who are currently involved in such operations. They are specialised and skilled and would be difficult to maintain without Sea Harriers.

Secondly, in responding to the hon. Member for Aldershot, the Minister said that, at the moment, the Government do not intend to change the number of Eurofighters to be ordered. We know how these things can change and that current Government policy is to order 232 Eurofighters. Are the Government considering not taking the later tranche of Eurofighters because of slippage of the programme, the pressures on the procurement budget and on the defence budget in general and the fact that the arrival of later tranches of Eurofighters will be close to the arrival of the joint strike fighter?

That matter is slightly unclear and I look forward to gaining some insight into it when the Under-Secretary replies. Are the Government considering transferring orders between the Eurofighter and the joint strike fighter? The Minister will know that regardless of what is said in the House, many people, including defence experts, those who have recent experience of such matters and perhaps those on the Defence Committee, are sceptical about the Government's willingness to deliver on the 232 Eurofighters and believe that, eventually, they will order a much lower number—perhaps even fewer than 150.

The third issue is lift capability, which has not been much discussed today. However, it is an extremely important issue in light of the fact that the Minister and his Department envisage that we will be engaged, not in the static warfare that we might have fought in western or eastern Europe, where we would be able to reinforce from Germany or our own shores, but in operations in which, typically, we might have to deploy all over the world. Has he evaluated our lift capability, including the capability of our helicopter fleet? He would be disappointed if I did not mention helicopters. Has he calculated whether our current lift capability matches the requirements that he and his Department believe we should have?

[Mr. Laws]

Does the Minister believe that we should consider bringing forward the Sabre project, which would look at a replacement for Puma and Sea King? Obviously, I am not going to try to influence the Minister by suggesting an ideal replacement. He knows that many excellent products come out of the west country, and this matter must be considered in the normal, rigorously competitive way. Without mentioning specific products, can he say whether lift capability has been evaluated and whether it is considered a problem?

My fourth point has been aired by a number of hon. Members: the SA80. Today, *The Sun* has a cartoon showing a typical battlefield of the future, with new unmanned aircraft using all sorts of sophisticated technology to scan information and pick up what is happening. It ends with a picture of the Prime Minister in Downing street following all the information as it comes in. All that sounds wonderful, and if we can get the technology right, it may be the way of the future.

While we are waiting for that fantastic new technology, however, there remains concern, as the Minister has acknowledged, over the most basic product on which our armed forces rely—the rifle. He said that he does not want to make irresponsible statements or raise fears unnecessarily and that he is conducting an investigation into the product to find out whether it is good enough. We understand all that, but he will understand that there is already great concern about that equipment which extends into the armed forces.

When the Under-Secretary winds up the debate, will he go a little further and say more about the time scale for the decision that will be made? Can he give us a firm commitment that if the Department concludes that the product is not reliable enough in the extreme conditions in which we may deploy our forces, it will be willing to make a potentially large investment to find a new piece of equipment to do the job? Does he agree that the issue is too important and basic to be subject to budgetary constraints and to be offset against other items in the procurement budget?

Finally, will the Under-Secretary shed some light on the matter of unmanned aerial vehicles, to which I just referred? The other day, the Minister of State answered several questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) about the Phoenix system and its possible replacement. That project has been long delayed and there has been much comment about the effectiveness, or potentially the ineffectiveness, of Phoenix. Does that project still have some life in it, or do Ministers consider it dead? Will it be replaced by the new Watchkeeper system that is being considered?

Those are some of the major issues on which we need answers today. I see from the Minister of State's reaction that I have hit on some of the right issues; I seem to have enlivened him. I look forward to enlightenment in the wind-up not only on the salient procurement issues but on the budgetary issues about which all hon. Members have expressed concern today.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have now to announce the result of the Division deferred from a previous day.

On the Question on Section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, the Ayes were 275, the Noes 179, so the Question was agreed to.

[The Division Lists are published at the end of today's debates.]

Defence Procurement

7.39 pm

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I shall touch on several issues. First, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) anticipated, I want to talk about defence procurement as it affects my constituency—namely, Rosyth dockyard—and secondly, I want to deal with some of the wider issues affecting defence procurement, British defence manufacturing and the interoperability of our forces with our United States and European allies, especially post-11 September.

I begin by saying how much I disagreed with the comments of the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) as regards the budget and the comprehensive spending review, and how much I welcomed the announcements on defence spending made earlier this week by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The debate has been given additional importance by the announcement of the largest increase in defence spending for 20 years, representing 1.2 per cent. growth per year in real terms for the next three years. I trust the Government to deliver, and I trust that in three years' time the hon. Member for Yeovil may be willing to acknowledge that his figures were not correct.

Mr. Laws: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's patience, given that she has only just started her speech. Surely she is aware that the figures that I quoted are from the Government's own document. Which of those figures does she disagree with?

Rachel Squire: I was aware that they were in the Government's own document but, as became clear during the Minister's speech, in this House the interpretation of any quoted figures is often very much subject to—shall we say?—political bias.

I trust that the extra defence spending that was announced on Monday will be delivered. The Government have already shown their commitment to, and acknowledged the importance of, additional defence expenditure post-11 September. The events of the past few months make it even more vital that we provide our armed forces with the equipment and technology that they need for effective operations anywhere in the world. I pay tribute to the British armed forces, who have excelled themselves, especially in the past 12 months. Whether they are engaged in war fighting or peacekeeping, there are none better. We owe it to them to provide the equipment, support and logistics that they need, when they need them. We also owe it to their families to give the troops guns that fire and communications systems that work. When we talk about procurement, we must recognise that the core ingredient of any decision is people, whether they are members of the armed forces, employees in our defence manufacturing base, or those providing the vital support services that are needed to keep our planes flying and our ships afloat.

That brings me to Rosyth dockyard. I want the Minister and hon. Members to recognise the major changes and challenges that Rosyth dockyard has dealt with in the past 10 years. Its core and secure area of work—submarine refitting—was removed by the disastrous, costly, and politically motivated decision of the previous Conservative Government. Rosyth naval base was closed, the entire dockyard was removed from the Ministry of Defence and sold to a private company, and the dockyard work force had to deal with thousands of redundancies and major changes to pay, conditions and working practices. I pay tribute to the dockyard work force not only for surviving the equivalent of a hurricane, but for achieving so much and looking to their future rather than the past.

A very effective partnership has been developed between Babcock Rosyth and the work force, and in recent years the dockyard has won additional work against fierce competition. It has reduced its costs and has delivered on cost and on time, and there has been high praise from the Navy, the Government and many parts of the MOD for Rosyth's skills and expertise, particularly as demonstrated by its recent refit of Ark Royal. It has delivered, to use the words of my right hon. Friend the Minister, real value for the defence pound. Given the recent unfortunate incident involving HMS Nottingham and the damage that she incurred, I would put in a bid for Rosyth dockyard being well equipped to help to mend that ship and to deliver her to full operational value. I should add that Babcock Rosyth has contacts in Australia and Babcock owns a dockyard in New Zealand.

As regards future procurement decisions, the reality for Rosyth is that, despite its present work load, in two years' time that allocated programme of work will have been reduced to virtually nothing. My right hon. Friend the Minister said today that industry must seek new work and not always rely on the Government to deliver it. I would make three points in response to that. First, Rosyth dockyard is providing the best, and at a good price. Secondly, it has vigorously sought other work and ventures elsewhere, with some success, but it is not sufficient to maintain a work force of 2,000. Thirdly, it is not competing with other dockyards on a level playing field, because the other two dockyards concerned have between them a guarantee of 10 to 20 years' work on submarines and the Type 45. Moreover, they have naval bases attached to them, with the admirals no doubt occasionally expressing their point of view.

I am worried by the trend in the thinking of the Defence Procurement Agency and the Ministry of Defence whereby all refit and maintenance work is to be located at the base port, because that would severely disadvantage the Rosyth dockyard work force. Given what Rosyth has delivered in cost savings and efficiency, combined with high standards of workmanship, I hope for a commitment from the Minister that it will have the same opportunities as the other two dockyards in obtaining naval work and competing on a level playing field. As the workers of Rosyth have told me, they have delivered on the demands made of them by Babcock and the MOD, and they would now like their efforts to be recognised and rewarded with some kind of secure future.

That brings me to one of the major procurement issues—the future aircraft carrier. Whichever company it is decided will be the prime contractor—Thales or BAE Systems—I urge it, the MOD and the Government seriously to consider bringing the assembly work to Rosyth. They would not regret it.

Rosyth has unrivalled experience in refitting and supporting the current aircraft carrier fleet and other types of warship. It has a deep water channel with unrivalled access to the sea. The Forth is not congested with a large volume of commercial shipping and leisure craft. Rosyth is adjacent to Royal Naval Armaments Depot Crombie, the only suitable deep-water berth in the UK for rearming a ship. It continues to have HMS Caledonia to support naval personnel and their families.

Rosyth has the largest non-tidal basin for ship repair in the UK—an ideal environment for assembly, outfitting and maintenance activities. By widening an existing dry dock and other modifications through a single investment, it could provide a facility suitable for assembly, outfitting, commissioning and maintenance as well as sufficient labour to undertake the work, drawing on a highly skilled work force from throughout Scotland and the north of England.

Before I conclude my comments on Rosyth dockyard and the possibility of a major share of the aircraft carrier work of the future, I want to emphasise that the dockyard work force acknowledges that work has been provided, and that without a change of Government in 1997, the yard would probably have closed by now. It welcomed the commitment that the Labour Government demonstrated to the biggest warship-building programme in more than 30 years.

I believe that the dockyard work force is also well aware that the defence procurement proposals of those who promote independence for Scotland, who are again notably absent, would mean, at best, a single, small warship. That is hardly sufficient to keep Rosyth, Faslane or the Clyde shipyards in operation.

Procurement is about delivering on cost and on time the equipment that our armed forces need to do the job that we ask of them to maximum effect. I want to make three points about that.

First, it is important to give all ranks, not only the most senior, the opportunity to comment on the design and type of equipment that they need to do the job. I understand from the Defence Procurement Agency and the integrated project teams that that is being done now. I hope that the opportunity to comment and influence will be increased.

Secondly, it is vital to have a quick fix process for pieces of equipment that clearly do not work. We have heard a great deal about the SA80s, so I shall not go over ground that has already been covered. I welcome the measures that the Government have put in place to try to ensure that we never repeat the saga of years of failure of equipment and of failure to tackle the problem properly. I look forward to ensuring that our armed forces have the equipment that gives them what they need when they need it.

Thirdly, we accept, especially after 11 September, that no nation's forces are likely to operate alone. It is therefore even more important to consider the interoperability of new equipment, especially with our NATO allies. However, although we try to achieve that, we do not want to rely totally on one other country—the United States—for our defence procurement and equipment. In defence procurement, like other aspects of defence policy, Britain must balance its European and its

[Rachel Squire]

US interests. The rationalisation of the defence industry in Britain, in the US and throughout Europe requires us to perform a tough balancing act.

Although our alliance with the US is close and important, it is not an equal partnership in defence manufacturing. The US admits that it should remove some of the needless bureaucratic and lengthy delays that its system currently imposes on British firms that are trying to compete in its market. However, there is little evidence of its acting on that yet. I would welcome hearing from the Minister whether any recent discussions have taken place between the MOD or the Department of Trade and Industry and the US on providing a more level playing field for British firms.

We cannot and do not want to go it alone in producing all the defence equipment we need or in tackling all the conflicts and challenges with which the world presents us. Britain is rightfully proud of its engineering skills and the reputation of the British armed forces. We must aim to ensure that our defence policy, especially our procurement policy, allows us to build on and maintain that reputation and to be described as "simply the best".

7.56 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) and to contribute to the debate. I acknowledge the Minister's courtesy in giving way on numerous occasions, including to me more than once. He or the Under-Secretary may want to return the compliment before I sit down because I shall focus on the proposed procurement and disposal of aircraft.

The Government's 1998 strategic defence review reoriented Britain's armed forces towards an essentially expeditionary strategy. In a press conference shortly after SDR was announced, the then Secretary of State for Defence, now Lord Robertson, Secretary General of NATO, summed up the change:

> "If the war is no longer going to come to us, then we may have to go to the war."

That realignment of Britain's armed forces had important implications for their associated equipment programme, with a renewed emphasis on equipment to facilitate expeditionary warfare such as transport aircraft, helicopters and amphibious shipping.

A centrepiece of the new force structure was the decision to replace the Royal Navy's three existing aircraft carriers of the Invincible class with two new, larger aircraft carriers, which would allow for a far larger complement of aircraft, including what has become the F-35 joint strike fighter. The new carriers are intended to enter service in 2012 and 2015. They will be escorted by the new Type 45 destroyer, equipped with the equally new principal anti-air missile system or PAAMS.

The first new ship is due to enter service in late 2007 to replace the Type 42 destroyers, which are armed with the increasingly obsolescent Sea Dart anti-air missile system. As I said earlier, the first Type 45 will be a first of class. That means a prolonged trials process. From past experience, that could extend the in-service date until the ship is declared operational into the fleet in 2008 or even 2009, especially if PAAMS does not perform as advertised, straight out of the box, first time around.

Those points are important because air superiority is crucial to 21st century military operations. As the strategic defence review White Paper pointed out in paragraph 87 on page 22:

> "Air power will be a crucial factor in maritime operations, on most battlefields and as part of the most demanding peace support operations, as in Bosnia in 1995. Air superiority and air defence will be essential for a wide range of deployed operations."

We should ask, therefore, what the implications are for our expeditionary warfare capability in the decade ahead before the first of the proposed new carriers becomes available. To begin with, there has been considerable speculation about whether the two new ships will still be delivered according to the original schedule. I hope that they will be, but even if they are, the Royal Navy will still in the meantime have to provide support for expeditionary operations with its existing assets, which would have to be run on until the carriers and their new aircraft join the fleet.

However, the Government have since taken the controversial decision to withdraw the Sea Harrier from Royal Navy service between 2004 and 2006. The Government allege that they have to do so because the aircraft suffers performance limitations in certain hot climates and they cannot afford an engine upgrade to address that. In seeking to justify this, the Government have also sought to stress that the carriers will still carry the GR7/9 variant, which is optimised for ground attack rather than for air defence.

As Ministers will recall, there was a very lively debate about the decision on 8 May in Westminster Hall. It would be charitable to say that the Government did not exactly win the argument that morning in seeking to justify their decision. We were told, for instance, that the Sea Harrier, which was combat-proven in the Falklands campaign, has to go because it is an old aircraft, being more than 20 years old. However, the Jaguar is nearly 30 years old and the Canberra has been in service for virtually half a century and is still going strong.

Moreover, the Sea Harriers have been significantly upgraded. Beginning in 1994, the then Government invested £466 million in upgrading the aircraft to the new F/A2 standard, with a more capable radar and associated electronics, and medium range air-to-air missiles—making the F/A2 one of the best air defence aircraft in Europe and considerably more capable than the aircraft that fought in the Falklands.

Jim Knight: I acknowledge comments in the Defence Committee's report about the weaknesses of abolishing the aircraft so quickly following the last upgrade, but does the right hon. Gentleman—sorry, the hon. Gentleman—acknowledge that even following that upgrade the aircraft is still no defence against sea-skimming missiles? Given that many of the savings from getting rid of the Sea Harriers are going into the upgrade of GR7s and GR9s, does he agree that on balance and on the cost-benefit analysis, the MOD's decision has considerable merit?

Mr. Francois: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for inadvertently promoting me; it is a burden that I shall live with. Exocet, which hit the Sheffield in 1982, was a sea-skimmer, but it was launched from an aircraft. Therefore, it is important that we keep any threat aircraft that can be armed with missiles designed to sea skim in the terminal phase as far away from friendly shipping as possible.

The last of the upgrades begun in 1994 was completed just a few years ago, so the considerable investment of almost £500 million of taxpayers' money will, effectively, be largely foregone if the aircraft are scrapped early before the new JSF is available. It makes very little sense to upgrade those aircraft and then scrap them just a few years later.

I believe that there are still powerful reasons why the Sea Harriers should not be retired early, as the Government envisage. First, doing so will seriously weaken the defence of our expeditionary forces. As Ministers have pointed out in this debate, the theory of naval air defence is based on a concept of layered defence—addressing the threat from as far out as possible. Sea Harrier, with its look-down, shoot-down radar and medium-range missiles, allows a fleet commander to do that considerably beyond the horizon. Without the Sea Harrier, that critical outer layer is removed, thus allowing threat aircraft that carry certain classes of air-to-surface missiles to get much closer to the target shipping and to threaten to saturate the ship-based defences—in other words to overwhelm the defence by getting close enough.

Jim Knight: I would be interested to know which potential adversaries the hon. Gentleman thinks have such technology, which would be a threat to us if we did not have the Sea Harrier.

Mr. Francois: First, as I understand it, a number of middle eastern states have air-to-surface missile technology, as indeed does China. I cite those two examples off the top of my head, but I am sure that I could come up with others.

Secondly, Sea Harriers should not be retired early because doing so threatens to denude offensive operations. In littoral operations of the kind often envisaged in the strategic defence review, the Sea Harriers might be needed to provide "top cover" for the GR7s against intercepting enemy aircraft—a role the land-attack Harriers are effectively unable to carry out for themselves.

In the debate on 8 May, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) used the good analogy of a shield, the Sea Harriers, and a spear, the GR7s. By this decision, we would not only remove the shield but blunt the spear wherever the enemy has air defence aircraft of its own that could threaten the GR7 Harriers as they went into attack.

Jim Knight: I am exceptionally grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way a third time. He talks of shields and spears, and he will be aware that occasionally people use a two-handed sword rather than a sword and a shield. He mentioned some possible adversaries who have the technology to threaten us if we do not have Sea Harriers. Does he envisage that we would ever go into combat with such nations on our own?

Mr. Francois: In early 1982, no one envisaged that we would go into combat to defend the Falkland Islands. History shows again and again that we must prepare as far as we practically can for the unexpected. The great problem with this decision is that it assumes that we will fight only in certain given scenarios. History shows that that is probably a mistake.

Thirdly, Sea Harriers should not be retired early because there are important implications for rules of engagement. I do not think that that has been mentioned. The Sea Harrier allows a fleet commander to identify visually a potential threat—that could turn out to be a civilian airliner—rather than rely just on the interpretation of a radar image. Without that capability, and even allowing for helicopter-borne airborne early warning, the fleet commander is partially blinded and can only take a "launch/don't launch" decision about his missiles when the contact is much closer in and he is under much greater time pressure to do so. Crucially, he cannot visually check until it is perhaps too late. All those important operational constraints could put a naval task force heading into harm's way at serious risk if it were attacked from the air.

Ministers have already conceded that the decision involves an element of risk. On 29 April the Minister told the House:

> "There is an associated risk attached to all of this, but it is without question a decision based on the balance of investment."—[*Official Report*, 29 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 660.]

My contention is that it is a greater risk than Ministers have been prepared to acknowledge, perhaps even to themselves. In short, it is not possible to maintain a credible commitment to an expeditionary strategy that lies at the heart of the SDR, and then to announce the abolition of carrier-based air defence for six years. If the Government wish to press ahead with the decision, they should acknowledge that the expeditionary strategy envisaged in the SDR will be largely in abeyance for six years between 2006 and 2012.

All that being so, the Sea Harriers should still be run on. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) argued from the Front Bench in Westminster Hall:

> "We can all agree that it is desirable to upgrade the Sea Harriers' engine and we know that it will be expensive. Even if the Government cannot afford the engine upgrade, I submit that Sea Harriers with the existing engine remaining in service as long as possible is much better than no Sea Harriers at all."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 8 May 2002; Vol. 385, c. 86WH.]

That sums up the situation in a nutshell. Moreover, in cold climates, there are few constraints, and even in tropical conditions the aircraft could still be deployed—perhaps operating with lighter loads if necessary in order still to provide some capability.

Ministers have already conceded that the decision was partly due to financial reasons—it was a balance of investment decision. Given the extra resources apparently announced for defence in the comprehensive spending review, is this not a suitable opportunity for the Government to concede that they have got this one wrong and that some of the additional resources could be directed to rectifying the mistake? That would maintain integral air defence cover for the Royal Navy until the new carriers and their associated aircraft were available. Furthermore, it would not expose the fleet and whomever it was assigned to protect to unacceptable risk for six years or more.

Ministers have been unable to carry the House on this subject today. I do not believe that they have won the argument. If they want to repent, this would be a very good time for them to do so, and I sincerely urge them to reconsider this dangerous decision while there is still time.

8.10 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): I would like to begin by joining other hon. Members in warmly welcoming the extra money for defence pledged by the Chancellor in the

[Mark Tami]

latest round of the comprehensive spending review. I am sure that Conservative Members will get tired of hearing that it is the Labour Government who have provided the largest increase in defence spending for more than 20 years, with resources growing by more than 1.2 per cent. a year in real terms to 2005–06. We should also remember that the Conservatives cut defence spending by a third in their last 10 years in government.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: As the hon. Gentleman is clearly critical of the last Conservative Government and the extent to which they cut defence spending, will he tell us by how much we should have cut it and how much more money we should have spent on defence than we did?

Mark Tami: I am not going to enter into a debate about how much the Conservatives should have cut. They talk a good fight on defence, but it is the Labour Government who are putting the investment in, when and where it is actually needed.

Jim Knight: We should talk about real spending.

Mark Tami: That is right. The Labour Government, in marked contrast to the Conservatives, have put the finances of this country on a sound footing and delivered a stable economy, low interest rates, low inflation and low business taxes, and that has enabled us to invest in the security that the people of the nation deserve.

The cold war is now something that is taught in history lessons at school, rather like the second world war was in my time at school. We now see more of the cold war in James Bond films than anywhere else in the media, and many teenagers have probably never heard of the Soviet Union. The world is vastly different from when the Berlin wall came down. The old days, when we planned for nuclear and conventional conflict in mainland Europe, with tanks rolling across the plains, have gone from our thinking.

The world is different now; it is far more complex and unpredictable and, therefore, potentially more insecure. In the United Kingdom, we are right to recognise, especially through NATO, that these new insecurities bring new responsibilities and a new role. Rapid reaction, conflict resolution, and maintaining a strong deterrent are the order of the day. Our commitments are as many as they are diverse. The Government were, therefore, right to recognise that our defence policy had to be brought up to date by the strategic defence review, on both procurement and equipment issues.

Nothing should compromise this country's ability to honour its international commitments and maintain its national security. That is why we must have value for money and, equally, a framework that can deliver what we really need. Value for money alone can never be a sufficient criterion. When we look at procurement policy, we should look at the whole picture. We should consider not only the purchasing of the equipment, but the way in which we maintain it once it is in service.

There is a growing trend in linking maintenance with a supplier as part of the purchase arrangements. In some cases, that clearly makes sense, but we must also consider the effect of such a policy on our in-house capability at the Ministry of Defence, and in particular, at the Defence Aviation Repair Agency—DARA. In my constituency, DARA, at RAF Sealand, provides vital support to our armed services. It has dramatically improved its efficiency and flexibility and is now gaining new contracts through greater commercial freedom.

We should not, however, lose sight of the principal role of the agency, which is to keep our defence forces in prime operating condition. This vital role was perfectly illustrated during the recent conflicts in Bosnia and, before that, in the Gulf, when the agency worked flat out to keep our front-line services at full fighting strength. If we had not had that capability, or that flexibility, I doubt that we would have achieved the success that we did. I certainly question whether normal contract arrangements would have delivered the level of support that was needed, or that was achieved. We cannot simply contract everything out. It is vital, now more than ever, that we maintain and expand this viable in-house capability.

No one would have predicted the events of 11 September or the international war on terrorism that has followed. But no one predicted the conflicts in the Falklands, in the Gulf or in Bosnia. We are not able to predict, but we must always do our level best to prepare and to plan for future challenges and changes in our global environment. We need to be smart in our buying, but also smart in our planning. That is why we need to place a strong emphasis on supporting British manufacturing.

If I may, I would like to pay tribute to those in the trade union movement, including those in my own union, Amicus, who have done so much to support British manufacturing and the immense contribution that it makes to the prosperity and success of our whole economy. Britain has long been one of the world's leading defence manufacturers, employing well over 100,000 people in good quality jobs. While we have a highly successful export market, the industry clearly also relies on domestic orders. Whenever it is possible and viable to do so, the MOD should look to British manufacturers—and certainly British-based manufacturers—when it is making its purchases.

I welcome and fully support the MOD's decision to purchase 25 A400M transport aircraft. I think that it should have bought more, but that is a start, and I hope, along with our European partners, that the project will be allowed to go ahead. The A400M demonstrates the difficulties often faced by British and European manufacturers in competing with America. The amount of research and development expenditure available in the US often results in American companies being in a better position to bring a finished product to the table.

Opting for American companies will often deliver jobs to this country. Indeed, Raytheon has brought many jobs to my own constituency through the Astor project, and they are certainly welcome. However, if we had opted for the C-17 transport aircraft, or an uprated Hercules, we would have had none of the associated intellectual property rights. So, while that would have created jobs in this country, we would not have been in a position to grow those jobs. The A400M, on the other hand, has great export potential, and we should be able to expect an expansion of jobs as orders for it increase. Intellectual property is therefore the key, and we must take that fully into account in our procurement policy.

Although we have, I hope, decided on a transport aircraft for the future, we have yet to decide on a replacement for our ageing air tanker fleet. The options are either to convert second-hand Boeing aircraft or to opt for the Airbus air tanker. As the wings for the Airbus would be built in Broughton in my constituency, I could be accused of being somewhat biased in relation to that choice. I would contend that the Airbus is a far better long-term choice and offers a good possibility of further export orders. It is therefore the smart choice.

We have a major job to do in promoting our own industry. The French Ministry of Defence rightly comes down on the side of the French defence industry. The French equivalent of the Department of Trade Industry believes that its role is to champion French industry, and our Government, Ministers and Whitehall officials must follow their example. We must support British manufacturing, the British defence industry and British jobs.

The strength of competition from the United States defence industry makes it vital that British companies continue to play a leading role in defence manufacturing exports. In particular, they must play the leading role in making essential projects a reality through European partnership. We must also ensure that this country's skills and intellectual property are valued and invested in. Our defence industries are often the most highly skilled and high-tech in the whole of manufacturing industry. The skills, knowledge and intellectual property that we have built into our defence and aerospace industries have proven time and again to benefit our entire manufacturing base.

In defence, we must not try to prop up lame ducks, but actively to support and encourage what are world-beating industries. Let us support smart procurement, but let us ensure also that we make the smart choice by supporting British manufacturers.

8.21 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami). I cannot claim that I agreed with everything that he said, but I agreed with the greater part of it. He argued his case very cogently, and his defence of his constituency interests was a model for us all. I should at this point draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests.

The sixth report of the Public Accounts Committee, which was published last November, recognised the impressive achievements of our armed forces. However, it also observed that:

> "Despite the considerable sums of money spent on defence equipment",

our armed forces are

> "still faced with using out-dated equipment and relying on other nations to provide elements of capability which should by now have been available to them."

The report continued by expressing the hope that the equipment capability customer organisation—which is responsible for deciding what is required, and for controlling the funding to deliver that capability—will offer a potentially significant step forward in providing the armed forces with the equipment that they need at the time that they need it.

However, the conclusion to the report observes that there was considerable confusion

> "between the Capability Customer and the Defence Procurement Agency over the fitting of a sonar to the first three Type 45 destroyers . . . The Committee finds it difficult to understand how the planning for these ships could exclude such vital pieces of kit and views with concern that such a possibility could have been seriously considered. The Committee therefore recommends that the Department should review the arrangements for communication between the Equipment Capability Customer and the Defence Procurement Agency to ensure that those arrangements can be relied on to convey exactly what is required."

I wonder whether the Minister can say in his winding-up speech what progress has been made in implementing that recommendation for much better communication between the capability customer and the Defence Procurement Agency. If he is unable to do so, perhaps he might write to me on the matter.

The report also states that, in the evidence presented to the Committee in compiling the report:

> "The Chief of Defence Procurement said that the sonar was being procured because of the headroom provided"

by achieving a rather better price on the prime contract. That seems to imply that the sonar would not have been acquired, had such headroom not appeared in the main contract. I find that rather odd, and it stretches credulity somewhat.

The Department has not always undertaken the right analyses at the right time. For example, it is generally agreed that the study on anti-armour weapons should have been carried out before committing the medium-range Trigat project to production, rather than after the project was withdrawn. In future, we would expect the equipment capability customer organisation to specify at the outset of such projects precisely when such studies should be undertaken.

The Department's strategy for meeting anti-armour weapons requirements seems to have evolved over time with a general lack of coherence, and as a result a certain cost penalty has been incurred. For example, in the second order to upgrade additional BL755 cluster bombs for the Kosovo campaign, the unit costs were almost double that of the first order. Also, although the order for Brimstone missiles was reduced, that reduction failed to secure a commensurate reduction in the total spend. Additional Maverick missiles were purchased, at a significantly greater cost. I would expect the equipment capability customer organisation to provide a more timely forecast of the mix of weapons required, so that such cost penalties can be avoided.

I have what the Minister might consider a dumb question about Eurofighter. It is perhaps dumb simply because I have no experience in these matters, but someone who lacks expertise in aviation matters should have such a question—which concerns the decision to remove the gun from Eurofighter, at a saving of £32 million—answered for him. I am sure that a plausible scenario exists as to why we do not need that capability, but it gives rise to the question of why our partners in the Eurofighter project are persisting with arming the aircraft with that weapon. It also gives rise to the further question of why other countries continue to arm their aircraft with such weapons. In order to allay the fear that this is simply a cost-cutting exercise, it would be interesting to hear the Minister rehearse precisely why we have decided to do without that capability, given that other countries have decided to persist with it.

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

I was always a fan of the SA80 weapon and a supporter of that project. As far as I was concerned, the greatest disappointment arising from it was the failure to deliver the weapon anywhere near the 1980 deadline that gave rise to its name. I have always regarded it as a sophisticated weapon and an amazing piece of engineering which, had we got it right at the start—it is interesting to note that much of the recent upgrade consists merely of the production of the original parts using better materials—would have sold in large numbers throughout the world.

I am concerned about the study that has just concluded of failures in Afghanistan. The Minister said that although the study has been concluded, he is awaiting the report. If the commercial organisation for which I worked before becoming a Member of Parliament had had a problem and dispatched a team to look into it, and if that team had returned and had a board meeting coming up, we would not have sat back twiddling our thumbs and waiting for the team to digest its findings and write its report; we would have ensured that we had a swift briefing, even if the report had yet to be written. The defence procurement debate is being held today and it would have been interesting to hear Ministers' comments about the problems in Afghanistan on the basis of their initial briefing on the issue.

Dr. Moonie: We do not have the information yet—otherwise I am sure we would have been able to share it with the hon. Gentleman and others.

Mr. Swayne: I accept that point, but had I been the Minister I would have taken steps to ensure that I had the information before the debate. I would not have waited for the gestation of the report but would have insisted on a verbal briefing straight away.

When the Minister winds up, will he address longer-term procurement and do a bit of blue-sky thinking? We know that our American allies are moving towards a capability for rapid deployment, which will involve very light, air-transportable armaments and armour. Are we intending to follow that lead? I understand that the rapid effects project was supposed to consider aspects of that technology. How is that requirement evolving? It seems to me that in any future conflict we will have to strike a balance between protection and deployability. That balance at the moment comes out at about 70 tonnes for armour. New technology will bring that down and enable a much more deployable armament that provides sufficient protection. Our American allies are considering that issue, but are we following their lead? Will we develop a procurement project along those lines in the future?

8.32 pm

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I wish to raise a specific point relating to defence procurement that was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and briefly mentioned in the two opening speeches. I was surprised that the mentions were so brief, because the area of procurement in question commands the biggest slice of the defence budget—almost £6 billion in procurement and procurement support. It is surprising that it has hardly been mentioned this evening.

As in all good debates among people who are passionate about and committed to defence, several points have been raised in this debate, and I shall respond generally to some of those before I turn to the main issue of my speech. The House may be surprised to learn that I think that tonight's debate is an historic one. Defence procurement does not excite everybody—it is not the sexiest subject for debate—but it has been proved tonight for the first time ever that the Labour party is the party of defence. If anyone was in any doubt about that, they can be sure of it after tonight's debate.

We have had an admission from both sides of the House that this week has seen the announcement of a substantial real-terms increase in defence expenditure that will help our procurement programme no end in the near future. It is the biggest increase in defence spending in 20 years, and it comes on top of at least three successive years' worth of increases in defence expenditure, after the haemorrhaging that we saw in the last 10 years of the Tory Government.

I remind the House that although the Tories cut the budget by a third in real terms, the way in which that was done is the real issue. There was a peace dividend after the cold war; but the way in which the Tory Government cut the defence budget left the country with enormous capability gaps. That is why I was a little worried when I heard the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) say that if—God forbid—the Tories ever returned to power, they would commit themselves to capabilities enabling us to fulfil our international responsibilities and defend the homeland. I would prefer to consider what they did, rather than what they say they are going to do. There were huge gaps. Heavy lift, for instance, was virtually non-existent by 1997—as were the provision of medical support for our service personnel in the front line, and second-line defence logistics.

Mr. Francois: Let me give the hon. Gentleman a chance to take a quick breather. I think it fair to say that because we are moving to a different system of MOD resource accounting and budgeting, we are to some extent comparing apples with pears. According to the analysis given by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), the figures are not as impressive as the Government suggest. I think we should wait for the Defence Committee to conduct a forensic analysis, as it does best. We shall then see whether the claims of the hon. Gentleman and his party are as impressive as they would have us all believe.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman would want to wait, wouldn't he? Anyone looking at the Conservatives' record would say, "You bet they want to dilute and undermine this Government's achievements in any way they can, because they contrast so well with their disastrous performance during their last 10 years in office". In those days, we were dangerously lacking in capability. We could not have met our NATO capability requirements by 1997 had we been called on to do so. If article 5 had been invoked, this country could not have delivered on that invocation. It was indeed a disastrous situation in which we found ourselves in 1997—which is why Labour, beyond any doubt, is now the party of defence.

As others will know, whenever Labour Members visit the officers mess, an officer will sidle up—in general, the more senior the military brass the more likely the occurrence—and say, "Of course you know, Mr. Smith, Labour has always been a great friend of defence. We will never forget what a brilliant Defence Secretary Denis Healey was." They always say that, even if they are 21 years old, and we sometimes wonder where they have got it from.

To be honest, in the past I have never been particularly convinced by all that. But since the publication of the strategic defence review a year after the election of a Labour Government in 1997, there has been no doubt about it. That document has stood the test of time. It has given us the increase that defence deserves and needs this year.

Mr. Gray: I am loth to interrupt the hon. Gentleman when we are all enjoying his speech so much, but the strategic defence review happened some five years ago. Even if he is right in his assertion, it has taken his party five years to fund that review properly. Can he explain why?

Mr. Smith: I do not think it has taken five years. There has been a year-on-year increase, albeit small, and there is a substantial increase for the next three years. That must be compared with the massive and dangerous cuts that were made previously. We were able to do what we did because not only was the review inclusive and transparent, but—Conservative Members may not like hearing this—by and large, it garnered, bipartisan support. The books were opened. We were told to look at the current defence resources and at the change in the security environment and decide what action was needed. The fact is that most Members of Parliament agreed with the conclusions.

I am a member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly: I represent this Parliament in that august organisation. I am also a member of a sub-committee considering the future military capabilities of NATO members and aspirant members. The British strategic defence review is used as a model throughout those countries. I happened to be present at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly summit in Edinburgh when General Wesley Clark, then Supreme Allied Commander Europe, held up the review as a future model for defence forces throughout the NATO countries.

We must not underestimate the strength and achievement of the SDR. Britain has put forward the money in the past, and we are still doing so. Tonight's debate is on procurement, and its emphasis in connection with the success of the SDR has focused on the reconfiguration of our forces to meet the changed security environment. Under the Tories, Britain was still defending itself against a non-existent enemy in the east, and we protected the plains of Germany with thousands of military personnel.

The Territorial Army was mentioned earlier. The previous Tory Government cut its numbers by some 20,000, but those who were left were given a job that they would never have to do in the foreseeable future. That was not good for them or for British defence, and it was a waste of taxpayers' money.

One of the most radical elements of the SDR often gets overlooked, and that has happened again even in this debate. That element is the review's proposals to improve procurement and defence logistics. As it happens, logistics takes up a bigger proportion of the defence budget than procurement. We tend to think of procurement in terms of fast jets, tanks and warships, but the real expenditure is devoted to lines of supply, servicing and keeping the bellies of soldiers on the front line full. I am not sure that the House spends enough time discussing that important matter.

The changes in procurement have been extremely radical. In some respects, they are more radical than the changes in our force structures. My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), the Chairman of the Defence Committee, was right to say that nothing will happen overnight. We will be lucky if the task is completed in a decade, but the Government have attempted to tackle it and at least the oil tanker is starting to move in the right direction.

The bureaucracy needed to cope with procurement and logistics is gigantic, as is the amount of money involved. The vested bureaucratic and military interests will take quite some time to change, but the indications are that things are changing. Reports from the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee and elsewhere show that we are starting to move in the right direction.

The Government have created the Defence Procurement Agency and the Defence Logistics Organisation, and have brought logistics together in tri-service provision. That may sound easy to do, but it is a different matter when one tries to tell the Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force and the rest that they will not act alone any more. That is a huge task even to consider taking on, which is why this important programme has been so radical.

The savings, in terms of the reduction of waste, inefficiency and duplication, should be astronomical. We have heard of the cost over-runs with previous defence projects. I would like to be able to blame all that on the previous Tory Government, but such things have gone on for a long time. Projects can take eight, 10 or even 15 years to complete. It is very difficult to keep them under control, which is why the new agencies have been created.

Smart procurement was introduced to speed up decision making, and that approach has now been extended to smart acquisition. The integrated project teams were introduced for the same reason. A concept borrowed from the Americans, they have proved very successful, not merely keeping an eye on a project as it comes on-stream, but throughout its entire life. The potential savings in that regard are huge.

The Government have introduced a series of radical changes whose benefits will become clear to hon. Members of all parties. All the money saved and resources released will be devoted to front-line services. Our soldiers are the best in the world, and they will have the best equipment and resources to do whatever job they are given, be it in Sierra Leone, Kosovo or Afghanistan. That was the challenge set up by the SDR, and we must take it forward.

The fact that we have only to write a new chapter to the SDR in the aftermath of what happened on 11 September last year shows how far-sighted the review was. Obviously, no one anticipated that there would be an international terrorist attack on that scale, and the tragedy will have to change our thinking. It is clear that we will have to be able to deploy rapidly and to carry out a

[Mr. Smith]

multiplicity of different missions, from peacekeeping to war fighting. We will also, probably, have to be able to deploy forces at much greater distances.

We must look once again at our homeland defence, because the threat could come from anywhere. It could come from an unstable country, rogue state or terrorist gang and could strike right at the heart of this country. We must be able to adjust to meet that challenge.

Jim Knight: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. Does he agree that such is the strength of the SDR process that our armed forces are very well placed in terms of projection overseas and certainly in comparison with most of our NATO partners? In many ways it is a shame that our homeland security and our civil response to the new security threat are not as well placed as our armed forces are following the SDR process.

Mr. Smith: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that we will revisit that issue during tomorrow's statement. I have to hand it to the Defence Committee, which warned of such an attack happening long before 11 September. However, we must be careful and distinguish between what we can realistically do to prevent such attacks and what we can do to manage their consequences. There is a difference between what we can realistically do and what we are seen to be doing. I am more interested in reshaping the footprint of British defence forces so that they can more readily identify with regions, local authorities and civil authorities—the police and fire services—and prevent something from happening or respond after it has happened. We would do far better to look at that use of our resources than to create a huge new force like the Territorial Army. Frankly, between 1989 and 1997, the territorials were not quite sure what job they had to do.

Mr. Francois: As a former Territorial Army officer, I should like to respond to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Rather a lot of Territorial Army soldiers knew exactly what they had to do. They did not need their numbers slashed and the infantry battalions did not need their back broken by a Labour Government.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman refers to the infantry battalions, the cap badges and the tradition. By and large, it is harder for Tories to take those tough decisions about reforming our military.

The hon. Gentleman is right—it was an error on my part to say that all the territorials had nothing to do. That was nonsense. They occupied key positions in some of the world's trouble spots, including Bosnia. However, the majority were effectively cannon fodder for a non-existent enemy. That was the reality.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I am also a former officer in the Territorial Army. I was in the Fusiliers, a northern regiment. I sat on a bridge on the River Weser month after month watching for Russian tanks. They may or may not have come, but we knew precisely what we were there to do and we knew how to do it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that Territorial Army soldiers did a job for all those years and that they continue to do a job by serving around the world with the regulars.

Mr. Smith: When the red army existed intact, that was an incredibly important and worthwhile job. Now that the red army has collapsed and could not possibly present a realistic threat in the next two or three decades, even if they started building up now, the job no longer exists. I am not casting aspersions on the role played by the territorials. However, the challenge in the SDR was to find them a realistic role for the future. Nobody wanted the territorials to have a valued and important role in the new defence structures, facing new and unpredictable enemies, more than they did.

Mr. Francois: We have to thank the hon. Gentleman for recanting part of what he said earlier.

Mr. Smith: If I gave that impression.

Mr. Francois: He did, and we have acknowledged that. However, part of the debate about the Territorial Army is how it could carry out an operational role in home defence in the aftermath of 11 September. We hope that that will be addressed in the new chapter of the SDR. These are very important issues. I thank the hon. Gentleman for withdrawing his remarks but ask him to think more carefully about what he says.

Mr. Smith: I am not withdrawing what I said—I want that on the record. My point did not appear to be made clearly enough. I am making exactly the same point, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman on future homeland defence requirements. However, there is no doubt that the traditional role of the Territorial Army has changed. There may be slight disagreement between the hon. Members for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) and for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) and me because I am an ex-regular and they are ex-territorials. That could account for our differences.

I want to focus on the Government's extremely innovative policies in the Defence Logistics Organisation. As I said earlier, that represents one of the biggest challenges because it has the biggest budget and the greatest potential for cost savings so that money can be spent where we need it—on the front line.

In his opening speech, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence referred to private finance initiatives and partnership agreements. That is exactly the right way to go forward. The difference between the Labour Government and the previous Conservative Government is that we are not Treasury-led and, most important, we are not ideologically led. We are looking for the most efficient output and the best way of delivering services—whether public, private or a combination of both. That is exactly what we should be doing. Other countries are doing that, especially the United States. We can learn lessons from their experience.

My right hon. Friend did not refer to the creation of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency, an innovative concept which was set up in 1999 to be given trading fund status as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Defence Logistics Organisation. The agency received that status on 1 April last year and by 1 April 2004 it will have a turnover of about £500,000 million. It will have a huge work force and will provide a one-stop shop for the entire deep repair and maintenance of almost all our military aircraft. In about two years, the agency will be a commercial organisation. It will receive money not from the defence vote but from clients who buy in its services. That was a courageous move for the Government and it is one of the ways forward.

The project provides the surge capacity referred to earlier, but without complete dependency on the private sector. It also gives the Ministry of Defence another option if it wants to buy in services other than from private companies. God forbid that a private company should have the monopoly for the supply of those services. If that were so, I agree with my right hon. Friend that we should be in serious trouble.

The agency offers several advantages. Although I have not offered uncritical support for some of the developments in that organisation, it has made enormous progress during the past two years. It has completely restructured the work force and removed whole tiers of management. It has changed the terms and conditions of employment and working practices. It has had to deal with unexpected reductions in demand, when it was not awarded contracts that it expected to receive. There have been unexpected cuts in DLO expenditure of which there was little or no notice.

We have already discussed the Sea Harrier, but one aspect of that debate was not covered: the impact of withdrawing the aircraft earlier than planned on the supply line that services them and on the jobs and skills base that are dependent on such work and that are vital to our future military provision. The agency is preparing to adjust to that.

As I noted, the agency was set up in April 1999; it was awarded trading fund status in April 2001 and will be a fully commercial organisation by April 2004, although it will still be owned by the Ministry of Defence. There are four sites in the United Kingdom, one of which is in my constituency at RAF St. Athan. It is vital to their success that the agency gets the go-ahead for a new purpose-built hangar at St. Athan, as part of one of the biggest aerospace projects in Wales—the red dragon project. The new hangar must be built before the organisation achieves full trading fund status in 2004 to allow it to compete on the open market with other private sector companies not only providing military service and repair but also offering a commercial service to civilian aircraft when possible. My concern is that if the go-ahead for the red dragon project is not given in time, we will not have the facilities to provide a modern manufacturing plant to compete with other players in the market.

I understand that there was a meeting of the ministerial advisory board a week ago, and the expectation was that the go-ahead would be given for the red dragon project. That would have given permission to raise the money; it will be a private sector initiative to provide a purpose-built hangar that will take 47 fighter jets, and multiples of other aircraft, under one roof. There are hundreds of buildings spread over miles of land, most of which were built during the second world war. We cannot expect people to compete in those circumstances. The decision was not taken and there was enormous dismay and anxiety in my constituency, especially among the work force, who have worked so hard to support Government policy. There is anger and uncertainty about the future.

If that hangar is not started by the end of this year, it will not be complete for April 2004, and the organisation that we created under a progressive procurement policy will not be able to compete in the open market; it will have one hand tied behind its back.

Another reason why the Minister should consider this matter carefully is that by unnecessarily delaying the project—if it is delayed; I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will say something tonight to convince me and the people who run the Defence Aviation Repair Agency that that is not the decision—there is a danger of playing into the hands of those people within defence procurement, the Ministry of Defence and the military who do not want that solution. They do not like to see so much use of PFI or private partnering, or the creation of new commercial agencies. Naturally, they want to retain their empires and, where they can, build on them.

The British military are the best in the world at fighting wars, but they are not very good at providing the back-up services, stores and support facilities—I speak as an ex-service man—that, frankly, can be provided more efficiently and more cost-effectively in other ways. There are no military benefits from the work reverting back to the military, but there would be a lot of extra resources to go to the front line. Ministers must beware that they do not play into the hands of those who do not want to see agencies such as DARA, or private partnering, succeed. They want to revert to a failed policy.

In many respects, the United States has led the world in new thinking and innovation in logistical support and procurement, but what the Americans say and what they do are often very different. The fact is that we have seen very little shift from military supply and support to private sector innovative provision in the US. The reason is that the lobby on Capitol Hill is so enormous that every time a President—whether Clinton or Bush—had to sign something off, he would not do it. We do not want a parallel situation in this country, caused by a possible delay in a decision that should be taken now to allow the organisation to improve its quality of service, reduce its costs and compete on the open market by 2004.

Red dragon will be one of the biggest aerospace projects in Wales, with an initial investment in excess of £100 million. The Minister may or may not be aware that the decision to delay the go-ahead for the red dragon project could blight that development and that site.

DARA tells me that it has people ready to enter into partnership agreements. Perhaps more importantly, the chief executive of the Welsh Development Agency tells me that he has a number of clients queueing up to move on to the aerospace park. They are ready to make the project work, but they will not wait indefinitely and they may be lost. My right hon. Friend the Minister is aware of the change that is taking place at RAF St. Athan. All the staff are worried and waiting for the decision.

Mr. Ingram: It is difficult in an intervention to deal with all the points that my hon. Friend makes, but I shall try to give him some assurance. He has been a very fierce campaigner for that project and has criticised some of the ways forward, and rightly so. The letter of intent has been signed. As the sole owner of DARA, I remain positive

[Mr. Ingram]

about the way forward. This is a question not of dithering, but of trying to obtain certainty. We are examining the best solutions. Rather than moving forward on the heads of agreement at the meeting last week, I thought it better to complete the internal examination, which is also taking place, of end-to-end support for the RAF, so that it can better advise me on my ultimate decision. I well understand the anxiety; it is a matter of regret, but I hope to be able to give an early answer, and the solution will not be long delayed.

Mr. Smith: I am absolutely delighted with my right hon. Friend's intervention. What he says not only reassures me, but, more importantly, it will reassure the work force at RAF St. Athan and, indeed, the people of Wales, who look forward to the success of the project.

This has been a good debate, and we have covered many procurement issues. I believe that the Government are moving in the right direction. In reality, if people scrape away at the surface, they will find that there is much more bipartisan support for what the Government are doing than Opposition Members will let on.

I am sure that we are on the right path in trying to improve our procurement and logistics because of my experience some years ago, when it was decided that Defence Estates would simply carry out an audit of what the MOD owned in this country. No one had ever done that before. No one had ever sat back and asked, "What exactly do we own and what is it worth? The audit was fascinating. I understand that it found 600 horses, but no one quite knew what they had been used for since the abolition of the cavalry. It found a string of diesel locomotives, rolling stock and land worth millions of pounds. All that money could be saved by a simple auditing initiative. I tell the Government to keep up the good work.

9.3 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): First, I must apologise to the House for my slight, forced absence in the middle of this debate.

I should like to talk about a very particular part of defence procurement—the procurement of explosives. There is one plant in this country that makes explosives to the standard and level that the British military needs—the old Royal Ordnance factory at Puriton in Bridgwater. It is important to consider this issue because procurement has not just begun but goes back over the ages. The point has been eloquently made that we are not very good at achieving some of our procurement aims.

The factory began work in 1939, and it was located in Bridgwater because there is lots of water—it happens to be below sea level. By the end of 1941, it had produced 20,000 tons of high explosive. It is best known for the bouncing bomb and many of the other explosives produced in the early part of the war. Since then, it has created some of the best quality explosives in the world. It cannot be beaten by anyone. Those explosives are required for our bombs, shells, missiles and so on.

The factory has been an exemplary employer and has done a phenomenal job. After privatisation in 1987 and because of the shrinkage in this country's defence capacity after the fall of the red army—the red peril—it had to change. However, it is now under threat, but not because of what the Government are doing—it was taken over by BAE Systems. If hon. Members want to boo and hiss now, they may. That is a company that has one aim: to maximise profits. It may sound as if I am speaking for the wrong side, but I agree that a company whose activities put the interests of a country at stake should not just aim for the largest profit that it can make. It is, so far, a British company, and the nation matters more.

Royal Ordnance has a 400-acre production site. It is a large factory capable of producing high-quality explosives on a site that could be a world-beater. It is a site that is out of the range of people. It is in a safe place: that is why it was put there. It is also away from prying eyes. As anyone who has been involved in the chemical industry knows, it is easier to mothball a chemical plant than to shut it down. If one shuts it down, the land clearing and sterilisation of the soil is a massive expense. I hope that Ministers will take that on board.

Puriton is now making RDX, TNT and HMX, which are explosives that we depend on for our military capacity. It also looks after other material that is vital to the defence of the nation, and that we cannot depend on the Americans to supply. Will the Minister address that point? Where will we get that extra material from if Puriton disappears? The United States Government have never said how we will obtain such material if it cannot be supplied from across the pond—I felt that I ought to repeat that to the House.

In terms of supply, from where will we get explosives for Sea Wolf, Spearfish, Sting Ray, BVRAAM and CASOM—I do not know what they stand for, but they all need a warhead that has something in the end that goes "Bang!"—*[Interruption.]* I am a Territorial Army soldier; I know what "out-of-date" means. We are here to try to save a plant that has done a great job over 60 years.

I received a letter from the Royal Ordnance trade unions—or from the Transport and General under Jack Dromey—which stated that the Defence Committee pointed out that

> "a long-term Partnering Agreement was concluded two years ago, which it hoped would provide the stability for Britain's Royal Ordnance factories"—

but—

> "the Agreement 'has only served to give the firm the foundation it needed to close further plants'".

That means all three remaining plants. It continued:

> "The Defence Committee then calls on the MOD to act, saying that Defence Ministers 'must continue to monitor more robustly the implications of ammunition plant closures, and indeed other Defence Industry rationalisation to be ready to protect re-supply routes for such essential support for our Armed Forces'".

It went on to refer to

> "the closure of the remaining factory manufacturing high explosives here in Britain . . . That vital and strategic capability should be preserved."

What is at issue? We are talking about the ability of our country to survive with our war stocks for up to 30 days—we need to be able to keep a division operational for 30 days. If the war stocks are not there, and they have to be bought from elsewhere, the defensive and offensive capacity of the nation—its ability to go to war and to protect itself or its citizens—is potentially undermined.

One of the biggest problems over the last few years has been the moving of explosive production out of this country to Germany, America and elsewhere. I shall deal with the American situation in a moment. One of our ammunition plants was closed to remove production to Germany. The Select Committee said that, unless we ensure that our war stocks are safely maintained at the necessary height, we will not be able to resupply in the short term. One can never set out what an emergency will be, as has been eloquently explained in the House by hon. Members. One can never foresee the unexpected—that goes without saying.

The three remaining plants are at Chorley, which does mostly civil work but makes the detonators and initiators, at Bridgwater, which produces high explosives, and at Birtley in the north-east, which assembles the shells and shell cases. We will lose all three plants if BAE Systems has its way.

One of the problems of the Bridgwater plant is that it has never had its own cost base. That may sound strange, but BAE Systems has always made it a part of other loss-making plants in this country. I refer not only to the ones that we know about, but to Glascoed and others. If a plant cannot prove to BAE Systems that it will make money, BAE will view it in a different way. If the plant was given the chance to be a cost-effective unit in its own right, it could prove that it could make money, as it continuously did when it stood on its own two feet for many years.

I asked the Under-Secretary what the Government's policy for ordnance production in the United Kingdom was. I was told that the MOD had

> "entered into a 10-year Framework Partnering Agreement with Royal Ordnance Defence, the United Kingdom's major producer of munitions. This agreement provides the company with a schedule of business and visibility of MOD's potential future requirements such that the company can provide the MOD with munitions at world benchmark prices."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 20W.]

I do not think that that is correct. If BAE Systems uses that benchmark, it can move production of ammunition to anywhere in the world. There would then be no guarantee that we could obtain ammunition from where we want it or when we want it in an emergency.

Lord Bach said that, if Royal Ordnance had not entered into such an agreement towards the end of 1999, the position would have been so bad that the future of the plants would have been under serious threat. I have raised this matter with the Under-Secretary before, and he rightly raises his eyebrows. However, I shall bang on about it until we go blue in the face.

The Holston military ammunition plant in Tennessee is on a site of 6,000 acres and it is the largest bomb-making factory in the world that is run by the British. It is now controlled by BAE Systems. Royal Ordnance has just been granted $163 million to run the plant, and it is looking to bring in world-beating products from all round the world. It has been given a 25-year extension to the contract to be able to do that, so this is its chance to use its muscle and the framework agreement set up with the MOD to move the production of ammunition to an American army plant in Tennessee.

The plant now has contracts worth $88 million for the production of the RDX and HMX explosives. That is strange, because those explosives are produced in this country. The different types produced at the American plant are now being used in British warheads. A further $75 million contract will give Royal Ordnance the right to a 25-year exclusive contract to bring in production from around the world.

Because we have signed the Ottawa convention, we have signed away our right to produce land mines. That is fine, but the American plant makes land mines. Does the Under-Secretary think that there is a contradiction if we buy ammunition, stores and facilities from a place that produces land mines? Are we not in breach of the convention that we signed? I ask the question, because I do not know the answer. I saw the effect of laying land mines when I sat by the Weser looking for the red peril.

I was a member of the Territorial Army, but now look at it from another point of view. It provides, and still provides, a battlefield replacement ability. It has been involved in the Gulf, Bosnia and most other places where the Regular Army has been. It will continue to do that. However, it has always faced the problem of obtaining the same equipment, training and back-up as the Regular Army. That creates problems, because the Territorial Army does not have the time to train soldiers unless there is a long run-in to an emergency. Emergencies tend to happen quickly these days and there is little or no preparation time to get our territorial soldiers up to a standard that allows them to replace units or participate as battlefield replacements. The same goes for replacements for engineers, doctors, nurses and any specialist. The majority of TA specialists look after 155 mm guns and many other things that the Army does not keep a corps to do. If we lose that capacity because people are not trained, that procurement system will disappear. We should encourage members of the TA to continue to perform that role.

I have just finished a book by Peter Hennessey, an academic, on the role of Whitehall from world war two to the end of the cold war. He argued eloquently that it is not possible to be over-prepared for civil defence. I suspect that we did not get it right in this country, but we never had to find out. We need to examine the future of home security much more closely. That means knowing about procurement and security and understanding where, say, ammunition comes from because we have only one chance to get it right.

I urge the Minister to defend the factory at Puriton. It is important to have a secure supply of ammunition. We must learn the lessons from the Gulf war when the Belgians would not give us ammunition. Those problems have not gone away. It only takes America to disapprove once and we will not get what we need to do the job of defending this nation.

9.16 pm

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I declare my membership of the GMB trade union and draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests on the support that it gives to my constituency party. Some of its members work in the defence industry.

I am proud of this country's defence industry and the number of jobs that it creates, not just in the north-east of England, but throughout the country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) said, those are high-quality jobs. The defence industry helps to ensure that technology is at the forefront of developments.

[Mr. Kevan Jones]

Like my hon. Friends the Members for Alyn and Deeside and for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire), I welcome last week's increase in defence expenditure. It will have a major impact on procurement by the Ministry of Defence. That is important to our defence industry, which is right to be proud of its exports record. We need to defend those exports because they are key to a vibrant and important sector.

Ministry of Defence procurement is crucial because it provides the bedrock business for a range of defence manufacturers. Defence manufacturing now operates across nations, as the Minister said. There are few sole suppliers from one country. Manufacturers work together to put sophisticated programmes in place which are important to us and our European allies. However, it is important to defend UK jobs, and the Ministry of Defence should ensure that jobs are retained within the UK defence industry. It is a matter not just of the number of jobs, but of the skills that they require. Skills cannot be turned on and off like a tap they need to be nurtured over a long time. The defence industry needs a continuous supply of work so that skills can be retained and nurtured.

On the procurement of warships, the Minister said that competition is a key part of defence procurement, including naval procurement, which I accept. It is also about getting value for money.

I refer to comments that Lord Bach made to the Scottish Affairs Committee during its investigation of employment in the shipbuilding industry on the Clyde. He stated:

> "All fighting vessels are built in the UK."

He continued:

> "it remains the policy of this Government that all warship construction will continue to be carried out in this country."

Therefore it gives me no pleasure to raise the issue of the advanced landing ship logistics at Swan Hunter, where a large amount of work that could have been carried out in this country has been subcontracted to Holland. Again, in evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee, an MSF full-time official said that he believed that up to 40 per cent. of the work on the ALSLs has been contracted abroad to Holland.

I raised the issue last November in a parliamentary question for written answer after defence contractors in the north-east told me about their difficulties in getting on tender lists for Swan Hunter. The Scottish Affairs Committee report states:

> "Lord Bach admitted that whilst there was no intention to contravene the Government's military shipbuilding policy, in this case the overseas fabrication of the hulls did raise questions about compliance. Following an agreement with Swan Hunter (Tyneside), a clause has now been placed in the ALSL contract which requires MoD sanction before fabrication or assembly can be sub-contracted overseas."

I would like to know why that was allowed to happen, given that there was a clear concern in the north-east, which I raised with the Ministry of Defence in November. Shipyard workers in the north-east who could have done that work to a high specification are very angry that they have not been given the opportunity to do so.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): The hon. Gentleman makes a brave and compelling point. Does he agree that the issue is not only subcontracting to companies in Holland, but the fact that those companies further "sub-subcontract" to countries such as Ukraine, which have no regulations on health and safety in the workplace and which, unlike our shipyards, have significant subsidies available to them?

Mr. Jones: I am not aware of such arrangements, but I view them with great concern. It is clear that when Mr. Yap Kroese tendered for the contract in the first place, he fully intended to subcontract the work to Holland. I feel that we in the north-east have been let down. I, and many others, have argued for procurement of warships in the north-east, but I am sorry to say that people will be left with a bitter taste in their mouths if every time we successfully persuade the Government to procure contracts for Swan Hunter shipbuilders, that work is subcontracted to Holland. The MOD and the north-east shipbuilding community must make a clear commitment to ensure that work that can be carried out in the north-east is carried out there. I understand that time is limited, so I shall finish. I look forward to the Minister's response.

9.23 am

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I gather that I have only a brief period in which to speak, so I shall keep my remarks exceptionally short. I shall pass over my strong support for the increase in defence spending that was announced on Monday and go straight to key issues for my constituency.

As I mentioned in an intervention, those issues include the consolidation of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory in Hampshire, with a move away from its current site in Windfrith, where sea-systems expertise sits alongside a great concentration of expertise in the commercial sector. Although I appreciate that DSTL wants to keep some distance between itself and the other half of what used to be the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, the discrete nature of sea-systems expertise means that the DSTL's continued presence in Windfrith would be a gain for the country as a whole.

While I am talking about my constituency interests, I should say how enthusiastic people in Dorset are about the idea that when the next set of Type 45s are named, HMS Dorsetshire might be revived, following its excellent record over many incarnations. Last time we lost HMS Dorsetshire, the public in Dorset raised the money for its replacement, but unfortunately it was not built and the money had to be returned.

The other point that I want to make relates to international partnerships in procurement. My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) mentioned the A400M, and I have been privileged to visit the factory in Filton to discuss its importance with the trade union and management sides. I am therefore less than impressed by the fact that our colleagues in the Bundestag are delaying the procurement of the A400M and the Meteor, and I should be interested to learn what efforts the Government are making to put pressure on the German Parliament to make that decision. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) that we should not rely solely on the United States as regards the future of our defence industry. It is very important that we have a successful European industry, so we have to make such projects work. We must also encourage our partners in Europe to give us the same access to their markets as we allow them to ours. I am sure that Ministers will do that.

I support a strong defence industry with properly regulated exports. I look forward to seeing the recommendations of the Quadripartite Committee in its report to be published tomorrow, but I am confident that a strong defence industry is getting stronger thanks to the policies of the Government.

9.26 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) is very understanding towards one or two hon. Members who squeezed his time. I agree that it would be nice for an HMS Dorsetshire to be reinvented—and an HMS Wiltshire come to that. Perhaps he and I will live to see it. That said, Wiltshire is one of the most inland counties, so HMS Wiltshire is less likely than HMS Dorsetshire.

We all welcome this annual opportunity to examine in detail Defence Ministers' brave efforts to demonstrate that they have won the battle with their colleagues at the Treasury and their brazen claims that they are ready to supply, in plentiful quantity, the matériel necessary to carry out their ever more grandiose military ambitions. Unfortunately, they have once again singularly failed to persuade us that they are ready and able to do so. It is true that this week the Chancellor of the Exchequer sought to correct the impression that defence is the lowest of his personal priorities. In six years of speeches—one can check it on the internet—he has rarely mentioned the word "defence", and he gave it no priority until now. He says that he has made a generous contribution towards defence, and we welcome that gesture.

As the Chancellor's neighbour, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire), rightly and memorably said, however, figures are subject to political bias. We fear that in this case the figures may well be biased against defence, and we will examine them very carefully indeed. It has been said that only one person understands defence budgets, and he died some years ago, and it will take us some time to determine exactly what they mean. In his contribution, the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) amply demonstrated that he does not know what they mean at all. We will look carefully at the figures and examine the bold claims that the Chancellor made, which were echoed by many hon. Members this evening. As is so often the case with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I am afraid that the outcome will prove to be a great deal less beneficial to defence than he would have us believe.

The Minister may like to clarify an important point that was touched on earlier—namely, that as of April 2003 he will have to include in the budgets figures of £6 billion for depreciation and of £4 billion for carrying costs. He must tell us which Ministry of Defence budget that will come from and how it was taken account of in the comprehensive spending review. I understand from several people who know about such matters that that detail has not been thought through at all carefully. I challenge the Minister to explain, in very simple terms so that even I can understand them, exactly how depreciation and carrying costs were taken account of in the CSR. Defence accounting is a murky area, but we can be pretty certain that the Chancellor has been less generous than he would have us believe. The reality remains that the procurement bow wave is bearing down on us even more threateningly, and the CSR has done nothing whatsoever to reassure us about that.

The hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) made the bold assertion that Labour is now the party of defence. I fear he may have undermined that by his absurd and ignorant attack on the Territorial Army. I suspect that the TA will not accept his assertion; we shall ensure that Territorial Army volunteer reserves throughout the nation are aware of his precise words.

Mr. John Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: I do not have time. The hon. Gentleman had 40 minutes, which meant that several Labour Members could not contribute to the debate. I shall not therefore take an intervention from him.

A well-known company of Scottish lawyers, McLay, Murray and Spens, who have offices down here, are known colloquially in Scotland as "Delay, Worry and Expense". I fear that that epithet characterises the Government's defence procurement programmes. That is shown in a variety of current programmes for the Navy, the Air Force and the Army.

Let me begin with some of the RAF procurement programmes. Several anxieties were expressed—for example, by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne). We are disappointed by the delay in Eurofighter and concerned that the Government cannot manage more than a general commitment to it. As the hon. Member for Yeovil pointed out, we need to be sure about the third tranche of Eurofighter if we are to maintain our reputation as worthwhile designers and a leading force in fighter aircraft development. The third tranche will be different from the first tranche, and we need to be sure of the former.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) pointed out, the other great European project, the A400M, may be in difficulties if German constitutional law means that Germany cannot sign up to the 73 aircraft at least until after the general election. How long will Ministers stick with the deal? Seven thousand jobs depend on it. Many are in the west of England, and my constituency is affected.

Perhaps more importantly, what thought have the Government given to an alternative stratagem if the A400M fails? Have they considered, for example, a C-17 with British engines? It would be interesting to know about discussions that Ministers have held with manufacturers about an alternative to the A400M. My constituents in Lyneham need to know urgently where the A400M or its replacement will be based, and what constitutes the future for Lyneham. Two thousand five hundred military jobs, 750 civilian jobs and £75 million depend on it. We look forward to the Minister's early response to the current studies.

The future of strategic air tankers is also the subject of delay, worry and expense. When will the Minister announce which of the two remaining tenderers will be given the contract? Will he make a commitment about the in-service date? We are excellent at air-to-air refuelling, as the Afghanistan experience showed. We need to know that we can continue to offer that capability to the world. We cannot afford further slippage.

[Mr. Gray]

Delay, worry and expense apply to the Royal Navy in the context of procurement. It would be useful if the Minister scotched the rumours that the operational fleet is to be cut further. He could begin by allaying our fears about Astute class submarines. In a reply on 9 July to my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the Under-Secretary said that HMS Astute was not scheduled until late 2006 instead of the original date of 2005, and that that would be followed by extensive work-ups.

When the programme was set out in 2001, the MOD said that the Astute class would be built in 69 months. Does the Under-Secretary's reply mean that the target will not be achieved for the other boats? If so, does the Minister accept that Artful and Ambush are likely to be similarly delayed? Will he therefore reconsider the decommissioning date for S and T class boats, which they replace? If not, we will face a cut in our submarine fleet, from 12 to six boats. That is unacceptable, and would prove devastating for our defence capabilities.

My hon. Friends the Members for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) and for New Forest, West, and the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), said that there was genuine anxiety about the Type 45 programme, which is showing signs of slippage. Will the Minister give us an absolute assurance that there will be no further slippage in the programme, and that the six vessels will meet the in-service date of 2007? If not, will he accept that he leaves the fleet bare of air defence for an unreasonable time because of the Government's demonstrably foolish decision to withdraw the Sea Harriers prematurely—a decision to which so many hon. Members referred?

Incidentally, we hear that an American committee is to visit the UK shortly to assess what help we are to give the Americans with regard to ballistic missile defence. They view the Type 45 as a possibly suitable platform for our contribution to BMD. I know that that would not be popular on the Government Benches, but none the less it sounds as if it is being talked about.

I asked the Minister about the matter in a written question, and the reply that he gave was quite interesting:

> "The type 45 destroyer has been designed with substantial weight and space margins to enable its capability to be upgraded through life."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 158W.]

I asked whether the Government were thinking about it for BMD, and he signally refused to say that they were not doing so. I therefore ask the Minister today to tell us if he is discussing with his American counterparts whether Type 45s might be used for BMD.

Before the Minister says that no decisions have been taken on BMD, I draw his attention to an interesting brochure that I received this week for a conference about ballistic missile defence. The first speaker is to be none other than Group Captain Adrian Parrish, the ballistic missile defence capability working party chairman in the MOD. He is to be helped by a Mr. Philip Price, the BMD capability working group secretary in the MOD. So there is plainly a substantial part of the Department working on BMD. We need to know whether the Type 45s will be used for that defence programme.

A further programme that it seems is to be delayed—possibly damagingly—is the one for the landing platform docks. I have even heard rumours—I am sure that they are incorrect—that Fearless may have to be brought back into service in order to make up for the delay. Will the Minister take this opportunity to reassure us about the future of Fearless?

Dr. Moonie: Scrap.

Mr. Gray: I think that the Minister will find that he is quite incorrect in saying that. I have it on very good authority that the Brazilians have been crawling all over the ship for some time with a view to buying it for the Brazilian fleet. It is widely rumoured that the Brazilians do not need any LPDs and that the nation that does is Argentina. Will the Minister make plain today that he will put into any contract with the Brazilians a clause that states that the ship may under no circumstances, and at no time ever, be sold to Argentina? It would be an insult to the memory of the 225 service men who died in the Falklands campaign if Fearless were to land up in Argentina. We demand of the Minister an absolute assurance that he will take steps to ensure that that does not happen.

We could go on endlessly about the threats to our naval capabilities, but I would rather rest my case on a quotation from none other than *Warship World*, an outstanding magazine which most Members present will know well. This week's editorial states that the Royal Navy

> "stands poised on the brink of fundamental change, which if embraced, we feel will be the beginning of the end of the RN—as we all know it . . . How many old salts turned in their graves to see Her Majesty sail in a Minehunter from Whale Island to the Old Vernon site (now a shopping centre) reviewing the handful of available ships? Does anyone really believe that no Fleet Review was planned as HM 'didn't want a fuss'. Let's be clear about it—there were insufficient ships to review . . . The writing is on the wall. The equation of commitments, assets, cash and manpower is always hard to juggle but it must be addressed if this island nation is to continue to operate an independent navy."

It has been interesting to hear several Members trying in this debate to justify the withdrawal of Sea Harriers by saying that we will never go to war on our own. That argument could be used for any capability or any procurement programme. One could say, "Don't worry, chaps. We'll rely on the Americans." We on the Opposition Benches believe that the Falklands and a number of other wars demonstrate that we need to be ready and able to go to war if necessary. The withdrawal of the Sea Harriers makes it extraordinarily difficult to be so. *Warship World* seems to be saying that unless this Government get their procurement act in order, we will not have a Royal Navy as we have come to know it and love it.

The same problems of delay, worry and expense apply to the Army. We have heard a lot about the SA80 that is disturbing. Will the Minister clarify the tests conducted recently in Bagram on other rifles, and say whether, if they show that they are better, he will undertake to scrap the SA80 and replace it with something else? He is right to say that we must not allow our rhetoric to undermine the reliability of the main weapon that our soldiers use.

Mr. Ingram: You have done a good job of that.

Mr. Gray: The Secretary of State is quite wrong. I have always been a great supporter of the SA80; I have used it quite extensively. None the less, if his Government choose to take us into Iraq—it appears that they are talking about 20,000 or 25,000 soldiers—we need to be certain that the tests conducted in Bagram have demonstrated that the SA80 is a serviceable and useful weapon. The Minister must come to the Dispatch Box this evening and tell us what he is going to do about the outcome of that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) highlighted some very worrying issues relating to the rundown of the Royal Ordnance factories, and to the problem with the accounting systems which means that we cannot now keep as large ammunition stocks as we used to. If we are to face any kind of major conflict—I have mentioned Iraq, but there could be all sorts of others—we ought, at the very least, to have a decent quantity of usable ammunition in this country, and to be able to keep some kind of capability to manufacture the stuff here. We have handed that capability over predominantly to Belgium and South Africa, and that is a disgrace. What are the Government going to do to ensure that Royal Ordnance is able to continue to manufacture ammunition, against the eventuality that we may go to war against somebody with whom Belgium and South Africa do not agree that we should go to war? It is important that we should be able to say to our people, "You can have the ammunition that you need."

Delay, worry and expense seem to typify the Government's occasionally haphazard and sometimes incompetent approach to some aspects of the procurement of the matériel that our service men need to carry out the ever more demanding tasks being asked of them. Like the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West, I pay tribute to the superb engineering skills that we have in this country, and to the great ability that we have to produce the matériel that we need. I suspect, however, that the Government are not taking the best advantage of those skills and abilities, or doing what they could be doing to promote them or to ensure that we keep them. Indeed, in some areas—we have mentioned ammunition—they are allowing them to be run down.

Despite the Government's brave words about the comprehensive spending review, the fact remains that they are not spending enough money to avoid the awful procurement bow wave that is approaching us. This week's announcement, although welcome, will do little to address the problem if, as is widely predicted, the Prime Minister moves inexorably, despite his own party, towards some kind of conflict with Iraq. The truth is that it is the Treasury that is running the defence of the realm, not Ministry of Defence Ministers. They are not even clever enough to make a decent fist of the inadequate resources with which they are provided. That is not a sensible way of running the nation. There is an eerie echo of the 1930s here, in that the Government are ostrich-like in their determination to do little about our defence capabilities, despite the ever-gathering clouds of war. Let us hope that that is where the similarities end.

9.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Just before the start of this debate, the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) accused my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, presumably unintentionally, of having misled the House. I would like to set the record straight. There was no contradiction between the two answers that my right hon. Friend gave. The first referred to his support for company proposals to supply new warships to Thailand. The second quite rightly stated that the Government of Thailand had expressed no formal interest in the purchase of ex-Royal Navy warships. Those two answers, while difficult to understand for a bear of very small brain, are not incompatible at all.

I shall try, in the time remaining to me, to get through as many of the points that have been raised tonight, some of which are, I have to say, rather old chestnuts. Let me start with the budget. I accept that budget figures are difficult for people to understand. I find them difficult to understand myself, but I was helped by spending two and a half years running the finances of the House of Commons, when I was Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee, during which time I learned to read a budget.

The spokesmen for the Liberals and for the Conservatives both made the mistake of comparing outturn figures with budget figures; the two are quite different. They are different in defence—as opposed to virtually any other Department—for one special reason, namely the operational requirements that the Ministry of Defence has, over and above the fixed costs that we have to bear anyway in terms of paying our people their normal income.

Operational needs are paid for out of the contingency fund, so the outturn figure rightly indicates what we have spent during the year. It does not express what our budget was. For example, last year, something over £1 billion was added into our budget figure. I cannot remember the exact figure, but if any hon. Members wish to know it, I would be happy to write to them. That figure must be stripped out before comparing last year's budget with a future budget. I am not trying to make an "I'm clever and you're dumb" point; indeed, I did not understand the matter myself until it was properly explained to me. However, the fact is that the money in question is real money that will be coming into the budget over the next three years.

I should point out in passing that it is also important to recognise that, because so much of our budget is spent on capital requirement—on procurement, the subject of today's debate—the sum is a real sum that is available each year. Obviously, if something is bought in one year, it has been paid for; it is not necessary to pay for it in the second year as well.

Mr. Laws: I accept entirely the point that the Under-Secretary makes. He was correct in saying that the 2001–02 figure was inflated by a transfer from the reserve. However, he seemed also to accept the simple statistical point that I was making, and which emphasises how tight his budget is: it remains true that, in real terms, his Department's planned spending figures for the whole of the period of the spending review are lower than his Department's spending for last year. Is that correct?

Dr. Moonie: The planned total does not include unforseen items. *[Interruption.]* Of course it does not. If one strips out the £1 billion, a fair comparison can be made.

It is an old trick on the part of people who think that they know a wee bit about statistics to use percentage terms when it suits them, instead of real figures. Speaking

[Dr. Moonie]

as a statistician of some merit, I should point out that using percentage figures to argue that the Department of Trade and Industry is getting more money than us is of course incorrect, given that its relatively small budget is some 5 per cent. of ours. I have not got the figures in front of me, but from memory the DTI's real increase is about £175 million a year. Our real increase, however, is £725 million for the first year. In real terms, that is four times as much, and of course, it buys four times as much.

Mr. Laws: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Dr. Moonie: No, sorry, there is no time; I have given the hon. Gentleman his chance. We will see how much that money can buy as we develop our spending plans over the next few years. In his statement tomorrow, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may well give some indication of the direction in which we will go.

I shall try to dispose of a couple of old chestnuts, the first of which concerns the SA80. Let us be clear: every rifle misfires at one time or another, and in difficult conditions all rifles misfire more often than they would otherwise. I happily admit that the SA80 took a long time to introduce. There is no doubt that it is a very high-tech, excellent rifle. Any decent marksman will say that they would as soon use the SA80 as any other rifle in service, because they know what the result will be when they fire it. Those who are not interested in achieving a specific effect can use any rifle, no matter how poor its tolerances, to spray bullets all over the place. However, that is not what we use the SA80 for.

As anybody who has served in our armed forces knows only too well, the SA80 is an extremely accurate rifle that is reliable in all conditions. The modifications were tested in Kuwait, which has very similar—if not identical—conditions of heat and dust as those in Afghanistan. The rifle performed admirably under those conditions, which is why we have such difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that it failed to work in Afghanistan. For that reason, I will not make a premature announcement about the findings; we must wait until we have them at our disposal, and until a full and proper examination has taken place. We want to get to the bottom of the matter—after all, we have spent extra money on the SA80. We have what appears to be an excellent weapon at our disposal, and, we hope that that will continue to be the case. However, I cannot make any predictions as to its future. Let us wait and see.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Dr. Moonie: No, I really do not have time to give way.

The question of the Sea Harrier comes up time and again, so let me deal with it briefly. We must remember that the risk involved in upgrading the Sea Harrier is high, by which I mean that the risk of not being able to upgrade it is high. We must remember the need, under the strategic defence review, to retain an offensive capability. Nowadays, carriers are used for projecting force. We must also remember that every spending decision involves an opportunity cost: if the money is spent on one thing, it cannot be spent on another. We must further consider the very wide range of threats to which a carrier and any other surface vessel is subjected, only one of which is air attack. As has been pointed out, the Sea Harrier is of absolutely no use against sea-skimming missiles, which are the main threat to a ship. Of course, the Phalanx system with which carriers are equipped is specifically designed to allow for that threat.

Mr. Howarth: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Dr. Moonie: I am afraid that I have no time to do so—I am trying to cover all the points.

We are concentrating on force projections and the advice from the services has been that, on balance, we should phase out the Sea Harrier. We must remember that the choice is not between upgrading the Sea Harrier successfully or getting rid of it. The chances are that any upgrade would fail. Not only would we then have to phase out the Sea Harrier anyway, but we would also have wasted money on the upgrade. The services are right in their advice that, on balance, it was better to carry the small additional risk of operating without the Sea Harrier for whatever period that was necessary. That was their advice: they are the professionals. I am more inclined to take their advice than that of Opposition Members or, for that matter, of my hon. Friends.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Moonie: I really cannot give way. I do not have time. *[Interruption.]* That is a silly thing to say.

Let us dispose of the argument about the cannon once and for all. The minimal operational utility of the Eurofighter gun is outweighed by its support, fatigue and training cost implications, especially bearing in mind the historical pattern of operations over the last decade and the improved capability of the advanced short-range air-to-air missile with which the aircraft will be armed. There is no need for a cannon. The ASRAAM will perform adequately in close combat.

On the issue of sonar, it is true that in 2001 the PAC questioned the chief of defence procurement and the deputy Chief of the Defence Staff about the logic of sending the first Type 45 to sea without a sonar, as that would limit the deployability of ships. At that hearing, they stated that it had already been decided shortly before that the sonar would be fitted on build to all Type 45s. The prime contractor announced on 18 January this year that it had selected Ultra UK as the preferred supplier of the medium frequency sonar. Ultra will build the sonar and take full responsibility for integrating it on to Type 45s. The contract has been let and the sonar will be fitted to the ships.

The issue of Swan Hunter was raised on a couple of occasions. Our policy that warship building should be conducted in the UK remains in place. It follows that we would have preferred Swan Hunter not to subcontract the build of the bow sections abroad, but we should put that into context. The work constitutes some 4.5 per cent. by weight of the hull. We have now incorporated a clause into the ALSL contract that prohibits the company from awarding subcontracts for fabrication or assembly work on the hulls without the prior consent of the MOD. That clause will also be incorporated into all future shipbuilding contracts. We would allow fabrication or assembly work on hulls to be subcontracted abroad only in exceptional circumstances—for example, if no domestic supplier were physically able to carry out the work.

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory rationalisation is an important issue, and the organisation forms part of my departmental responsibilities. It is an MOD-owned agency whose purpose is to provide world-class scientific and technical advice to us. I have accepted the arguments from management at DSTL that considerable benefits will accrue, both in the quality of research done and in cost—that is important, because if we spend money on maintaining more sites we have less to spend on research. If we concentrate on three main sites, clear benefits will be felt from bringing our scientists together, in terms of creating new synergies, and from operating efficiency. The proposals have been the subject of consultation with staff at all stages and are now under consideration by the trade unions. We believe that the proposals will ensure the long-term future of DSTL and the best value for defence.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) suggested that the Conservatives were following Frank Allaun's defence policy, and I found that amusing. To be honest, on probably every occasion that they cut the defence budget a Labour Member could be found to say that it had not been cut enough, so we should not go too far down that road. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) made the point that some of the Tory cuts might have been made more cleverly.

Hon. Members mentioned delays with Astute. We are deeply concerned about those. We have continually moved from one pattern of submarine design to another, and design problems have caused these delays. We will do all that we can to return the programme to schedule, but it is only fair to say at this stage that Astute's entry into service may well take place later than the time indicated. We have left the manufacturers in no doubt about our concern, and I know that they are working hard to remedy some of the damage. Presumably if there is a gap in capability, we will have to see what can be kept going. It is difficult to envisage keeping the S class of submarines going much beyond their present lifetime, but there is capacity in the T class.

Mr. Francois: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Moonie: Very briefly.

Mr. Francois: The Minister said that if there was a gap in capability, we would keep capability running. If that applies to submarines, why does it not apply to Sea Harriers?

Dr. Moonie: Again, I suppose that the reason is the balance of risk, and we must consider the balance of risk when making decisions such as this. We three Ministers—four if I include Lord Bach—are not perverse people who sit down and say "Just how are we going to cock up the armed forces today?". I apologise for the language, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In fact, we act on the advice of some very senior people, and I have yet to leave a meeting with the feeling that that advice has been wrong. We must not assume that upgrades will succeed; they may fail, and that is the great problem with the Sea Harrier. We might end up spending a great deal of extra money without having an aircraft available.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) rightly pointed out that we need equipment that works. I assure her that any defence Minister would heartily agree. She gave the example of Bowman, which, as everyone knows, has a long and sorry history but now appears to be on target—a very challenging target. I acknowledge that that was welcomed by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). We have introduced personal role radios. We have shown that we can be flexible and make very little of procurement of this kind, provided that we are sensible and seek upgrades in the future. That will enable all capability requirements to be met very satisfactorily.

Like my hon. Friend, I pay tribute to the first-class facilities at Rosyth. Let me say in passing that a branch of the Defence Diversification Agency is located there, and is paying off very well in terms of interaction with local companies, technology exchange being its function.

I was interested by what my hon. Friend said about the Babcock facilities in Australia and New Zealand for the repair of HMS Nottingham. We have not yet reached a decision, but I am sure that we are keeping Babcock in mind. I noted her concern about the future of the yard. Let me stress that it has proved itself to be extremely competitive, which should stand it in good stead when it is competing for work.

My hon. Friend drew attention to the particular difficulties of making quick decisions about the cancelling of equipment that does not work and will not work. Long lead times apply to much of the equipment that we need. When a lot of capital has been invested and a project has been worked on for a long time, cancellation is very difficult to stop. I know that, because I had to cancel projects myself when I worked in the pharmaceutical industry.

I do not need to spend much time on the A400M. As Members know, the problem is having to wait for a signature from the Germans, but we are convinced that it will come and that the programme will be finished on time. The German election is in September, and I do not think it will be delayed much beyond that.

I think the points made about St. Athan by my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) were answered by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. If they were not, I shall be happy to deal with them.

I have answered questions about Royal Ordnance in some detail in other Adjournment debates. We cannot discuss such matters as the level of stocks that we keep, because that is an operational matter, but I can say that we keep adequate levels to maintain any foreseeable operation. We are convinced that in different circumstances British Aerospace would be able to resupply.

There is also the matter of developing insensitive munitions. New products are more difficult to introduce, but I pay tribute to the concern—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

TAX CREDITS

That the draft Working Tax Credit (Entitlement and Maximum Rate) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 9th July, be approved.

TAX CREDITS

That the draft Child Tax Credit Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 9th July, be approved.

TAX CREDITS

That the draft Tax Credits (Definition and Calculation of Income) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 9th July, be approved.

TAX CREDITS

That the draft Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determination of Rates) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 9th July, be approved.

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities) (Adaptation of Functions, etc.) (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 27th June, be approved.

TREASURE

That the draft Treasure (Designation) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 3rd July, be approved.

TREASURE

That the revised Treasure Act 1996 Code of Practice (England and Wales), a copy of which was laid before this House on 3rd July, be approved.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Endometriosis

10 pm

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I beg leave to present a petition organised by the Simply Holistic Endometriosis trust, a charity working to help women who suffer from endometriosis. It has been signed by more than 3,000 people.

The petition was presented to me, in my role as chair of the all-party endometriosis group, by Diane Carlton, the chair of the SHE trust, during the recent lobby of Parliament held to raise awareness of endometriosis, which affects 2 million women in the UK. At present, there is very little public awareness of this devastating disease, and there is not enough funding available to raise knowledge among the medical community to improve early diagnosis.

The petition states:

> "The petition of the SHE trust, and others, declares
>
> That endometriosis is the only long-term chronic cyclical condition suffered by women, and that this devastating disease should receive higher priority for funding and treatment.
>
> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Health to review the Government's policy on the care and treatment of endometriosis sufferers."

To lie upon the Table.

National Childcare Strategy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

10.1 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I begin by declaring an interest, as I am chair of the all-party childcare group. Before I entered Parliament, I was chair of the national campaign Working for Childcare, which used to be known as the workplace nurseries campaign. I was involved in that for 10 years.

I have been trying to secure this Adjournment debate for some months, and I wondered whether my pitch had been spoiled by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's wonderful statement this week on the comprehensive spending review. My scream of delight was apparently audible to a number of people when my right hon. Friend spoke of a radical extension of the national child care strategy in England.

Why is child care important? It has a key role to play in the delivery of wider Government policy ends. The child care issue is about giving children a good start in life, helping to tackle child poverty, raising educational attainment and promoting better health. It is about helping parents into work, study and training. It is about meeting our welfare-to-work targets and helping with the family-friendly issue of work-life balance, which will increasingly become crucial to this country's economy and social life. The issue is also about raising qualifications and—importantly—raising family income.

The question of child care goes wider than the family unit, however that unit is comprised. Whether two parents are involved or one, the child care issue is about supporting neighbourhood renewal and community development. It is also about tackling crime and creating healthy communities. Without child care, policies in those areas will not succeed.

The national child care strategy was launched in 1998. It is the first such strategy ever to be undertaken by any Government, and I am proud, as a Labour MP, that it was a Labour Government who delivered on that. The aim was to create more affordable, quality child care, backed by significant new investment.

There is no doubt that investment was put in, but some of the progress has been mixed. In terms of accessibility, there are now part-time nursery education places for all four-year-olds and, by 2004, there will be such places for all three-year-olds. However, they are part time, whereas working parents need the help provided by wrap-around care.

The neighbourhood child care initiative aims to create 900 new nurseries in the most disadvantaged areas by 2004, along with more child minding and out-of-school places. However, progress in developing new nurseries that will be sustainable once funding runs out has been slow. There has been a growth in private day nurseries in response to a growing demand—58 per cent. of women with children under five now work—and out-of-school clubs, funded by the new opportunities fund, but there has been a fall in the number of child minders and pre-school playgroups. There are still significant gaps for parents with children under three.

In terms of affordability, the child care tax credit is providing help with the cost of child care to 160,000 families. The average award is about £39 a week, and eligible families must find at least 30 per cent. of child care costs. Childcare fees went up by 10 per cent. in the last year, and a typical nursery place costs £6,200 a year. Some families, particularly lone parents who work less than 16 hours a week or use informal child care such as a grandmother or other family member, are not eligible.

Ofsted took over the regulation of child care in September 2001 to provide consistent national standards. I do not think that anyone would disagree with that. However, the transition has held up registration and inspection of new providers at a time of growth.

The inter-departmental review of the national child care strategy that the Government started at Christmas was both wise and warranted. We have seen some of the results this week. The review recognised that although so much has been achieved, it is sensible of any Government to review their policies to see where the gaps are and how they could be filled.

The child care market is failing families and society. The market alone will not deliver affordable services to the majority of families without significant new investment on the supply side. Demand-side measures have not succeeded in creating new child care services. Funding and delivery mechanisms have often been criticised as too complex. There are too many unco-ordinated programmes with too many different short-term funding streams and, despite all the wonderful work that they do, expectations of what can be delivered by early-years development and child care partnerships are often unrealistic. Some 150,000 new staff are needed to expand services by 2004, but recruitment and retention are hampered by low pay, poor training and limited opportunities.

The review of child care has been addressing some of these problems. I have included some of them in the review, as have other organisations. I am sure that Ministers involved in these issues have raised these problems as well. I am pleased and proud to say that the Chancellor's statement this week—much of which I am sure was linked to that review—was another step forward in the nation's child care and family agenda. This Government are the first ever to have a national child care strategy. It was particularly welcome after 18 barren years of Tory rule.

This week the Chancellor announced the doubling of the child care budget to £1.5 billion by 2006, guaranteeing a nursery place for every three and four-year-old; 400,000 new sure start places; 250,000 new child care places; greater support for voluntary partnerships, which often underpin much of the growth at a local level; and a £200 million children's fund. In addition, 300,000 children will have access to children's centres. I congratulate the Daycare Trust, which has been pushing forward the agenda of children's centres.

As a Member of Parliament, a child care campaigner and a parent, I believe that one problem is how we make the services that we provide visible and obvious to those who want to access them. If there has been a problem with the growth of services so far, it is how parents find the services they need. Parents do not fall into nice neat categories, all with children under five. They can have a baby, a toddler, an eight-year-old and a teenager. Anything that the Government can do to make it easier for them to know where to go for their child care, advice

[Caroline Flint]

and health needs is to be welcomed. The children's centres will operate as a catalyst to bring these services together so that parents have greater access.

The Government have listened to the problems faced in driving forward an agenda that has a role in different Departments. That is why I welcome the integrated budget, which will bring together child care, early-years learning and sure start. As a member of the Denaby and Conisbrough sure start, one of the trailblazers, it was obvious to me from the outset that sure start was not merely about health issues. I am proud that my local sure start scheme sees child care as part of the whole shape of its provision. More schemes are coming on-stream in Doncaster. We have a full-time day nursery as well as creche facilities and a pre-school toddlers group.

I know that sure start is meant to cater for pre-school children, but some of the parents have older kids. Furthermore, in our community, unless we can engage some of the older children in what we are doing, they may take against us. They may make the building to which they cannot have access a target for petty vandalism. Our primary aim is to serve families with pre-school children, but we also want to engage with older children and with other young people in the community. I am pleased that those initiatives have come together. That is a sign that the Government are listening.

I am also pleased that a new unit will be established in the civil service to drive forward child care policy. Such a unit is crucial to give advice to Ministers and to give an overview so that it can drive the agenda forward. It is definitely needed.

I am a member of the local Doncaster early-years development and child care partnership which does much good work. During the past few years, I have been happy to speak to partnership groups at conferences organised by the Department for Education and Skills and the Daycare Trust.

I was also glad to hear from the announcement that local authorities will be expected to have a greater role in delivering the targets that we need. That is right. Although there may be local authority representatives in the partnerships, authorities sometimes do not seem to know how to proceed and may leave things to the partnership. They have a key role in the community, not only as one of the largest employers but as an important agent for local change and delivery.

The child care review clearly had some influence on the comprehensive spending review statement this week. I understand that the review will be published in the autumn. Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions confirm that? Will we have an opportunity to discuss the review in the House?

I want to raise a few points that we should consider when drawing up future strategy and development. We need to flag up the fact that child care is as much an economic agent as a social provision. For some time, I have been putting questions about the role of regional development agencies and other bodies that have a remit to deliver economic regeneration and employment.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry agrees that those agencies should realise that child care is as important a part of the infrastructure for a newly growing economy as the transport that gets people to work. Childcare is as much a part of the supply chain as the providers of materials to factories or businesses or the catering firms who supply the restaurant facilities. It is an important part of the whole picture.

If we want to reinvent ourselves in my region of Yorkshire and Humberside—certainly, in respect of objective 1 in South Yorkshire—what better way is there than to say, "Come to South Yorkshire where you will find one of the best environments to raise your children, with the right services and the right jobs to support your work-life balance"?

I offer two local examples. Finningley is an RAF base in my constituency which we hope will become a regional airport in the future. My hon. Friend the Minister is nodding because Peel Holdings also runs Speke airport, which she knows well. Despite the fact that we do not yet have the go-ahead for the airport, almost 70 companies are working on the brownfield site. I am pleased to say that we also have a full-time day nursery.

However, I am not pleased to say that when the developers of the site sought help from several agencies for start-up for the nursery provider and for refurbishment costs, they were fobbed off and told, "You don't fit into this priority because you are not creating employment".

I do not quite see how providing childcare jobs is not creating employment, or how sustaining people in employment through providing child care cannot count.

Another problem was that because the brownfield site was not in a deprived community—as defined under the heading "deprived communities" in terms of funding—those involved were told that they could not access the funding. That was the case despite the fact that, just down the road, is a defined "deprived community", which would be the obvious source of much of the employment for the brownfield site. That issue must be looked at; brownfield sites sometimes are in deprived communities, but sometimes they are not. However, if jobs can be provided for people from such communities, I do not see why child care cannot be funded.

The problems are not insurmountable. The problem is the mindset of those who work in economic regeneration, who see child care as a rather soft issue, rather than a crucial plank—as I see it—in our regeneration policies.

Another example is the transport interchange for Doncaster, for which we were pleased to get Government support. I have been working for a number of years to get an understanding from the developers and others that if we are bringing together the train and bus stations in Doncaster, it would be a wonderful opportunity to create nursery provision near the site for those parents who might be commuting into Doncaster. That would be just like the facilities at Brighton and at Victoria, and a shoppers' creche could be provided for consumers. I am pleased to say that, only last week, the developers said that they were committed to making that happen.

Is there a possibility that when the Government give the green light to very big infrastructure projects involving communities and creating employment, we could ask how they fit in with providing child care or other support to workers or consumers, whether they are public transport passengers or shoppers at a development? The Government can ask the question to see the answers that flow from it.

We must do a lot more in terms of engaging employers. Some employers have done fantastic work; others are not sure how to get involved. That is where the RDAs, the trade unions, employers and chambers of commerce could be encouraged to play more of a role. Only one in 10 employers helps their staff with child care; only 5 per cent. of workplaces offer nursery places; only 5 per cent. of employers help towards child care costs.

I want to raise a problem affecting low-income communities, and lone parents in particular; the use of informal child care. Despite everything, 50 per cent. of child care is informal. It is unregistered and can involve shift parenting, or the use of a family friend or other relative. We should look at the impact of that on the take-up of other services and at whether we should address this by bridging the gap between informal and formal care with some support.

Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary look at the scheme in Northern Ireland that is run under the new deal programme for lone parents there—I know that that is a devolved function—in which lone parents on training or a work placement are allowed vouchers or money to be provided for registered child care and informal child care, if that is provided by a very close relative, usually the grandmother?

Another scheme that I would bring to my hon. Friend's attention is run by Nottinghamshire county council where, again, for a limited period and in specific circumstances—I stress that these are targeted schemes—some financial support is provided for families, some lone-parent, some two-parent, to enable them to engage in training or a work placement. Parents, particularly lone parents, who may be working less than 16 hours week and are not covered by the Government tax credits also receive help. It is worth looking into these schemes because some of our most needy families, through no fault of their own, might be missing a trick in terms of the Government not supporting them. I do not see that as a permanent measure, but we could consider it as part of our new deal for lone parents and support for low-income families.

Finally, we have done an awful lot, and we should be proud of it. Given the different ways that we are delivering in England and how the issue is dealt with in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it should be clear to families throughout Britain that a Labour Government have spearheaded this agenda and made it such an exciting part of our work today in rebuilding our communities. In 10 years, I should like our targeted support to spread out like the ripples when a pebble is thrown into a pond, so that every family can recognise in different ways that Labour has delivered for families, whatever their status, background or needs.

10.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on securing this debate. She is well known in the House—not only among Labour Members—for being a tenacious and knowledgeable supporter of improvements in child care, and her speech this evening demonstrates that very well. She has secured the debate at an auspicious moment, given the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Monday. Indeed, she made that point in her speech. Of course I agree with her that the debate is very timely.

As my hon. Friend said so eloquently at the beginning of her remarks, child care is an incredibly important part of what the Government are trying to achieve. Quality child care gives parents choice and opportunity. It enables them to work and contribute to the economy confident in the knowledge that their children are in a safe and stimulating environment. So access to affordable child care also helps to reduce poverty and end the cycle of deprivation that we see in too many locations in her constituency and in mine. We know that getting a job is the best route out of poverty, and we need more child care in the most disadvantaged areas to help people to do that. Of course we all know that quality child care also supports children's development, which is equally important.

The Government are therefore making the investment required. Since 1997, we have created nearly 500,000 new child care places, for more than 900,000 children. We have set national standards for the quality of child care provision, and Ofsted is now ensuring that all providers meet those standards. The neighbourhood nurseries programme will create 45,000 new day-care places in up to 900 state of the art nurseries by 2004. That is the biggest single investment in child care provision, and it amounts to £300 million in the three years to 2004.

We have made a good start, but, as my hon. Friend clearly said, we recognise that we are not there yet; more needs to be done. The Government believe quality child care is a basic building block of modern society, so our aim is indeed to create affordable, accessible quality child care for all those who need it.

The Chancellor made it clear in his announcement on Monday that, by 2005–06, the Government will be investing more than £1.5 billion jointly in child care, early-years provision and sure start, so funding for child care alone will more than double in real terms in that period. That will allow at least 250,000 new child care places to be created by 2006, including child care provided directly in new children's centres.

New funding will be directed towards sustaining provision. As my hon. Friend said, provision is all very well, but it needs to be sustained. We want sustained provision in the most disadvantaged areas to support the growth of full day-care and out of school clubs and to provide grants for new child minders.

We are aware that the Government need to make some changes to support this agenda, so we have decided to bring together sure start, child care and early-years provision into a single interdepartmental unit. Linked to that, we will devolve greater responsibility for funding and delivery of child care services to local authorities, and I was glad to hear my hon. Friend welcome that. Together, those steps will greatly improve delivery of that crucial agenda, out there on the ground where it matters.

My hon. Friend referred to the child care review, and she is right that the interdepartmental review of child care, chaired by Baroness Ashton, has been working since last October. That clearly demonstrates the Government's commitment to taking a longer-term view of child care provision, to assessing our current position, and to examining the direction in which we need to move over the next 10 years. We will make sure that provision will be able to meet the changing needs of families over that period.

The findings of that review were used, as intended, to inform the spending review announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Monday.

[Maria Eagle]

My hon. Friend is correct that the findings will be published in the autumn. In relation to her points about whether the House will have an opportunity to discuss them, that is not for me to say. I am sure, however, that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will take note of her comments. I am sure, too, that she has many ideas about how she might raise this issue on the Floor of the House and in other ways to give the House an opportunity to discuss it.

One of the key recommendations of the review of child care was that children's centres should be established in all the most disadvantaged areas. Those centres will provide good-quality child care delivered alongside effective early-years education, family support and health services. They will thus be a part of transforming the way in which those services are delivered, to ensure that the needs of children, particularly the most vulnerable and their parents, are better met. They will reflect the early lessons that we have learned from the operation of sure start.

The Government's longer term aim is to establish a children's centre in every one of the 20 per cent. most disadvantaged wards in the country. They will act as hubs within the community for parents and providers of child care services for all ages. The children's centre programme will build, where possible, on sure start facilities that already exist, and on other existing provision such as neighbourhood nurseries, to which I have already referred. By March 2006, we intend that an additional 300,000 children will have this improved access to health, education and other services.

That will complement the greater role that schools will be able to play, following the enactment of the Education Bill, as bases of wider community and family services, including child care for older children. Schools, of course, can make a considerable contribution to child care. That sounds an obvious point, but they have great potential as a community resource, which we want to use more fully. Parents trust schools, and schools are good places to have child care provision. We want to build on the pilots and supported demonstration projects that we have seen in Brighton, Cambridgeshire and Durham.

We want schools to see the contribution that they can make by offering access to services such as child care, family learning programmes and health care and how that can help the school deliver its own education agenda. That is why we are currently amending legislation to give school governors the power to provide those extra services.

The vision is about much more, however, than centres and schools. Parents have a crucial role to play. Working with parents is at the heart of the Government's early-years education and child care policies. We are developing evidence of best practice to help early education and child care providers and their staff work well with parents. We are encouraging, too, the growth of positive links between parents and the professionals to whom they entrust their children.

The Government want to get parents even more actively involved in their children's early education, whether that is volunteering to run after-school clubs, sitting on governing bodies, or attending training at local community centres. We also want to mainstream the acclaimed approach of sure start in actively encouraging parental involvement in all its programmes.

My hon. Friend talked about informal care, and the Government recognise that parents, particularly lone parents, as she said, often have a preference for using informal, family-based child care. The child care review considered whether it might be possible to supplement what can be done within the formal child care sector with measures to support such informal care. I cannot be more specific at the moment, but I can assure my hon. Friend that that is an area that we are considering. Indeed, we have noted with interest the child care voucher scheme in Nottinghamshire, to which she referred, which has been running since 1992, and the support for family-based care provided within the new deal in Northern Ireland. Those provide helpful models when considering policy in this area, but they have not yet provided evidence of the impact of such measures on labour market or child development outcomes.

There is, however, a simple answer to why the Government have not provided funding for informal child care so far. When we introduced the working families tax credit, we decided that assistance would be given for child care that had either been registered under the Children Act 1989 or accredited. That was to safeguard the quality of care.

My hon. Friend made telling points about economic regeneration. We must ensure that child care is firmly on the agenda for all the agencies involved in regeneration. Child care is central to the process. It releases parents to work and to train, benefiting them, their children and their employers.

Many early-years development and child care partnerships are working actively with the regeneration agencies in their areas and regions. There are good examples around the country—in Cambridgeshire, for example, where the local partnerships have been working actively with their regional development agency on the development of neighbourhood nurseries. There is awareness to build on. We are actively spreading good practice and working at a national level to move child care up the agenda.

The Government's vision for child care is one in which every parent can access affordable, good-quality child care. We have made good progress towards that over the past five years. The child care review has allowed us to take stock and to look forward for the next 10 years. I am very pleased, indeed, to be able to confirm to the House that the spending review announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of Exchequer on Monday has secured the resources needed for the next three years to take the process forward. We have charted the way ahead for transforming child care. I know that those hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend, who are interested in the subject will be watching and making suggestions about how we proceed. We are determined to go forward, and we are setting out to implement the plans that she mentioned. I congratulate her again on raising this important issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

Deferred Divisions

Section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2002–03 and the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 2002–03 for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 179.

Division No. 311]

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick (Bedford)
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Question accordingly agreed to.

House of Commons

Thursday 18 July 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Pension Funds

1. **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh): What recent representations he has received from pension funds on the effect of his policies on the value of their investments. [68397]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): The Treasury receives representations from a range of financial services organisations, including pension funds. The Government have introduced reforms that have delivered, and will continue to deliver, a stable economic environment based on low levels of inflation and sustainable growth. This environment is designed to benefit all investors, including pension providers, because it supports longer-term investment and planning.

Mr. Francois: I thank the Minister for that reply. We know that she and the Chancellor take a keen interest in the subject of pensions and of early retirement. Is she aware that the Government's changes to the taxation of pensions are now costing each individual contributing to a pension scheme about £500 a year in tax?

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman is talking absolute nonsense. The changes in the tax credit system were an essential part of a wider range of corporation tax reforms that included cutting both main and small companies' corporation tax rates. They removed a major distortion in the tax system, and were designed to encourage long-term investment.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Does my hon. Friend agree that the trend towards ending final salary pension schemes, which I assume the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) was hinting at, started long before Labour came into office, about 30 or 40 years ago? The trend has a lot more to do with corporate greed and the pension contribution holidays that were taken in the 1980s during the casino boom that was assisted and encouraged by the then Conservative Government.

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend makes some interesting points. The shift from final salary schemes to defined contribution schemes has been going on since the 1960s. There are several reasons for that, including increasing life expectancy. It is not the shift itself which is a disaster, but the fact that companies can use the shift as an excuse to cut contribution rates. Clearly we must establish a consensus. It is the responsibility of employers to provide for their employees. They should not enter into such a shift without giving it very careful consideration.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): My hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) was absolutely accurate in his figure. It is a great shame that the Financial Secretary cannot bring herself to accept what are entirely factual and accurate figures concerning the damage caused by the Government's policies. Will she now accept what everyone knows—that, quite apart from the pensions tax, the disproportionate fall in the London stock market, contributed to by the policies of the Chancellor, has hit pension funds hard?

A month ago, to help the Prime Minister defend the pensions tax at Question Time, the Chancellor whispered some advice in his right hon. Friend's ear. Can the Financial Secretary shed light on whether it was on the basis of that advice that the Prime Minister told the House that the stock market was "massively up" on where it was five years ago, or had he misheard the Chancellor?

Ruth Kelly: I find it incredible that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should attempt to blame the Government for a global fall in stock markets. Nor would he expect me, as a responsible financial services Minister, to comment on day-to-day or even month-to-month movements in the stock market. The point is that the economy is fundamentally sound. We, as a Government, are taking the action necessary to make it easier and simpler for people to save and to raise the overall level of saving in the economy.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I am concerned that a number of companies are closing their pension schemes, forgetting that they had the good times and forgetting that they have taken pensions holidays. Does my hon. Friend agree that they are using the downturn in the stock market and supposed Government policies as an excuse to end final salary schemes? We must be more honest. Companies are using those things purely as an excuse. The mark of a good employer should be to have a good pension scheme and ensure that employees are well protected in their old age.

Ruth Kelly: I completely agree with my hon. Friend's point. Employers have a responsibility to their employees to provide reasonable terms and conditions and a package that is attractive both from day to day and in the longer term. We are taking these issues extremely seriously. We have recently had two reviews. One—the Pickering review—considered occupational schemes. The other considered private sector personal provision. Key to this is making the system as simple as possible to administer, making it as easy to save as possible. The Government will be responding to those reviews, together with the Inland Revenue review of tax, in the autumn.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Is the Government's primary concern at present to encourage savings for pensions and long-term investment, or to encourage dis-saving to sustain spending and economic activity?

Ruth Kelly: Of course the Government are committed to increasing long-term levels of saving. I should point out to the House that real gross household savings have been robust in recent years, particularly in long-term retail savings products. Clearly, however, there are issues that we must address. Ron Sandler, when analysing the issues in his recent report, pointed out that long-term savings have been robust, but that there is a problem with middle and lower-income families and their ability to save. That is why he proposed a new range of stakeholder products that will make it easier and simpler for them to do so.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is it not a sad fact that pensions unfortunately have to suffer the vagaries of what happens on the stock exchange, which is nothing more than a glorified betting shop? During the pit strike, for instance, the index fell to below 1,000 points. Yesterday, after the Leader of the Opposition spoke about the vagaries of the stock exchange and falls in the stock market, I went outside and looked at the figures; the index was up by 160 points half an hour after he spoke.

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for those interesting observations. The important point here is that we have the right framework for pensions, based on a partnership between the state, the individual and industry. It is this Government who have tackled pensioner poverty, bringing in the minimum income guarantee. It is this Government who have enabled all pensioners to share in the country's rising prosperity, and it is this Government who next year will bring in pensioner credit, which will make pensioner households significantly better off.

Economic Growth

2. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What his most recent estimate is of the rate of growth in gross domestic product. [68398]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Despite there being no growth at all in world trade last year, the UK grew by just under 2 per cent., the fastest growth rate of the G7. The growth forecast for 2002 of 2 to 2½ per cent. was set out in the Budget. I shall report again to the House in the autumn when the pre-Budget report is delivered.

Mr. Swayne: Ministers may discount warnings about the deteriorating fiscal position and the need for tax increases from Schroder Salomon Smith Barney and PricewaterhouseCoopers on the grounds that they are, after all, accountants. But when Vicky Price, the new adviser to the Department of Trade and Industry, adds exactly the same warning, is it not time that the estimates were reviewed?

Mr. Brown: The fiscal rules that we set down in 1997 give a stability to the British economy. We have met those fiscal rules every year, despite the Opposition saying every year that they would never be met. We will continue to meet our fiscal rules and disciplines; we will do that so we can finance higher levels of public expenditure while having the fiscal discipline that is necessary.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one factor that would have an adverse effect on growth in GDP would be if the very low levels of inflation—which, of course, are welcome—were to slide into deflation? Given that over a range of manufacturing goods prices seem to be falling, will the Treasury start thinking about how to avoid deflation, since at times of deflation central banks are usually superfluous?

Mr. Brown: We made the Bank of England independent and set it an inflation target of 2½ per cent. It is the duty of the Bank to meet that target and it has done so for the past three to four years. It is a symmetrical inflation target; because of that, problems that may arise from deflation are as important as problems that arise from inflation.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Was it a lack of confidence in his growth forecast or an uncharacteristic coyness that caused the Chancellor to duck no fewer than six requests from James Naughtie on the "Today" programme on Tuesday to say whether he envisaged further tax rises in this Parliament?

Mr. Brown: I said to Mr. Naughtie—I repeat it to the shadow Chief Secretary—that our spending plans until 2006 are financed by the measures that we announced in the Budget. Indeed, our spending plans for the national health service until 2008 were financed by the measures that we put forward in the Budget. It is now up to the Conservatives to tell us whether they support spending on education and health, which is in the national interest.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): My right hon. Friend will be interested to know that the experts who appeared before my Committee yesterday said that the spending plans were eminently prudent and that the figures were in the books. That is welcome news in terms of spending for the whole country. However, does my right hon. Friend agree that the question of targets needs to be addressed? There is a proliferation of targets and we must ensure that they do not get in the way of delivery on the ground.

Mr. Brown: First, targets are important because they set objectives for Departments and services. It is by setting targets and objectives that we are making progress in reducing health service waiting lists; getting up literacy and numeracy standards in our schools; getting more young people to stay on in school; and meeting all our objectives, as we will do during this Parliament and beyond, for health and education. As far as the fiscal position is concerned, my hon. Friend knows from the expert advice that he has been given that not only have we met our fiscal rules but those rules are drawn on a cautious basis with a margin. As far as the current balances are concerned, they will be £3 billion, £9 billion, £7 billion, £9 billion and £7 billion; those are several billions, which is the margin for prudence that I set out in the Budget statement. Again, the issue, which has been being raised all this week, is that we want to spend money on health and education, while the Opposition oppose such spending.

Business Activity

3. **Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): What recent discussions he has had with the Governor of the Bank of England regarding trends in levels of business activity in the United Kingdom. [68399]

4. **Dr. Andrew Murrison** (Westbury): What recent discussions he has had with the Governor of the Bank of England regarding patterns of business activity with specific reference to *(a)* region and *(b)* sector. [68400]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): I last met the Governor of the Bank of England yesterday for the Standing Committee on Euro Preparations, and I am today publishing the sixth progress report on euro preparations. Copies of the report are available in the Vote Office and the Library.

On business activity by sector and by region, I regularly discuss those matters with the Governor, and hon. Members will wish to know that the Government today accepted undertakings from the four main clearing banks that, from no later than 1 January next year, they will pay interest of no less than 2.5 per cent. below the base rate on current accounts or offer free banking services to their small business customers in England and Wales. That will be of great help to many of the 3.5 million small businesses throughout the country.

Mr. Hammond: Would the Chancellor nevertheless agree that the level of business activity tomorrow depends critically on the level of investment today, and that that investment depends on business confidence, which has been severely damaged over the past five years by the Government's imposition of £12 billion a year in extra taxes and regulatory burdens on business? It was further damaged by the lack of consultation before the Budget announcement of increases in national insurance contributions and North sea taxes, and will it not be damaged again by this morning's revelation that the Government's union paymasters are demanding a massive expansion of trade union powers and rights in exchange for the continued funding of the Labour party?

Mr. Brown: What business wants and needs is economic stability. Under the Conservatives, inflation averaged 6 per cent.; under Labour it has averaged 2 per cent. Under the Conservatives, unemployment averaged more than 10 per cent.; under Labour it is averaging 5 per cent.—indeed, it is the lowest it has been since 1975.

As far as business investment is concerned—this is perhaps an answer to those who talk about the dividend tax credit, as well—the share of business investment as a percentage of gross domestic product has risen significantly under this Labour Government. It was 10 per cent. and 11 per cent. in 1995–96, 14 per cent. by 1998, 13.9 per cent. in 1999, 13.7 per cent. in 2000 and 13.4 per cent. in 2001. So we have raised significantly the share of business investment in national income, and the hon. Gentleman should welcome that, not criticise it.

Dr. Murrison: Earlier this year, Mr. Michael Large, a small business man, reported in *Small Business News:*

> "I sit here sometimes and think: I am not the managing director of a company, but an unpaid tax collector or filler of forms."

No doubt small businesses will welcome the Chancellor's words and look to see what they mean in practice, but the CBI is warning that business confidence is falling, and that is particularly worrying in the south-west and in the service sector. Does the Chancellor accept that the bureaucracy and red tape that his Government have introduced have hampered small businesses, especially in the south-west and in the service sector, and what is he doing about it?

Mr. Brown: As regards regulation, the shadow Chancellor said about his own Government:

> "Conservatives too were less responsive to these concerns, and less effective in deregulating, than we should have been."

So the verdict on the last Conservative Government is very clear.

On the other concerns of small business, 700,000 businesses will benefit from the new VAT simplification scheme that we are introducing as a result of consultation with small business. That will cut the amount of paper forms and form filling and will be a major reason why there will be less red tape for small businesses.

On the small business corporation tax rate, this Government cut it from 23p to 20p, then, in the last Budget, to 19p. This Government introduced a 10p corporation tax lower rate, then abolished it in the Budget, meaning that 150,000 businesses will pay no corporation tax whatsoever. Again, the hon. Gentleman should welcome our measures for business.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Does my right hon. Friend accept that with 28.5 million people with jobs, there are more people in work than ever; that inflation is at its lowest for 27 years at 1.5 per cent.; that interest rates are at their lowest for 38 years; and that wage increases are modest at less than 4 per cent. Does he accept that those are the conditions for business to invest and succeed, and that it will do that under his leadership?

Mr. Brown: Proportionately, the organisation that has suffered most job losses in the past five years is the Conservative party, [illegible] lost so many Members of Parliament in 1997 and was unable to recover in 2001. The Opposition should welcome our actions: 1.5 million more people are in jobs; our measures have led to a 70 per cent. cut in youth and long-term unemployment, and unemployment is lower than in America, Japan and the euro area.

If we had taken the advice of the Conservative party, we would have made the wrong decisions. We made the Bank of England independent, and the Conservatives opposed that; we created the Financial Services Authority, but the Conservatives opposed it; we created the new deal, and they opposed that, too. They advised us not to implement the minimum wage; the shadow Chancellor went around the country saying that it would cost 1 million jobs. However, we introduced the minimum wage and created 1 million jobs.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I welcome the Chancellor's statement that the Government have managed to persuade the arrogant four major banks to end the monopoly position on small businesses. As my right hon. Friend knows, that cost small businesses £750 million over three years. Will he assure hon. Members that he will maintain the pressure on the four banks to accept the Competition Commission's other recommendations on their position so that the monopoly that has harmed small businesses and consumers is broken?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who, as a member of the Select Committee on the Treasury, takes an interest in such matters. The shadow Chancellor should be on his feet welcoming the fact that the four large banks have accepted the Competition Commission's recommendations and that, therefore, either interest rate charges for many thousands of businesses will be reduced in the next few months, or they will get a free service from the banks. That is the result of a Competition Commission referral that was made under the Labour Government and of recommendations to improve competition in the banking market. I wish that there were all-party support for that, and I hope that Conservative Members will recognise that the 3,000 or 4,000 small businesses in their constituencies will welcome it. Conservative Members should also welcome it instead of opposing it.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): The Chancellor is proud of the current very low rate of inflation, but what does it signal? Did he point out to the Governor that the current rate of inflation, whether asymmetrical or not, is considerably below the Bank of England's target? Does he recall that after the 1929 stock market crash, public service index-linked pensions fell year by year until 1936? Does he have any fears that we may move into negative inflation? That would be extremely damaging, as it was in the 1930s, to business activity.

Mr. Brown: This is the first time that the hon. Gentleman has asked me a question without mentioning the word "Europe". The Opposition cannot have it both ways. When we introduced our spending review in 2000, they said that it was unsustainable and would cause galloping inflation. The Opposition should welcome the current low rate of inflation. However, the shadow Chancellor presided over 10 per cent. inflation, whereas we have 2 per cent. inflation.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, after hard times, it is good that the manufacturing sector has flipped back into life in the past two quarters? However, does he also agree that, although the news about extra resources and a broader remit for regional development agencies is good, regions that were much more dependent on manufacturing will need even more help? Only this week, we had bad news about a pit closure in Yorkshire. We will need help with jobs, reinvestment and new wealth.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and recognise the interest that he takes in these matters. The closure over the next two years of the Selby coalfield is something that we all regret. I hope that the measures that have been put in place—there will be a taskforce to create new job opportunities in the area and additional redundancy payments for the miners, including those who have lost their jobs recently—will at least do something to mitigate the blow of the very sad announcement earlier this week.

On manufacturing and the general industrial economy, the research and development tax credit that we announced in the Budget, which will now be for large firms as well as small ones, the measures that we announced in the spending review to boost science—this is especially important in respect of the technological products that could lead to manufacturing successes in future—and the rise in regional development agency budgets from £1.6 billion to £2 billion over the next few years are a means by which we can build modern manufacturing strength in every region and nation of the United Kingdom. I hope that there will be a general welcome for what the regional development agencies, the research and development tax credit and the investment in science can do.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The Chancellor made no mention of our productivity performance. Back in 1997, he asserted that the first challenge was to increase our productivity, and I agree with him: productivity is the ultimate measure of our economic success or failure. Why, then, has Britain's productivity growth rate over the past five years been half that for the last five years of Conservative government? Why have the figures for the first quarter of this year shown not only lower growth, but an actual fall in productivity?

Mr. Brown: When we came to power, we inherited a situation in which manufacturing productivity had fallen in 1995 and 1996. We had to rebuild with a number of very difficult measures the conditions for business investment and productivity growth in this country. If the hon. Gentleman considers the situation in 2001, for example, he will see that what happened in the manufacturing sector was this: textiles, footwear and clothing were up by almost 4 per cent.; food, drink and tobacco productivity were up by 4 per cent.; paper, pulp and printing were up; chemicals were up by 7.1 per cent; and rubbers and plastic were up by 3.1 per cent.

What happened in the manufacturing sector last year is that, because of what was happening throughout the world in information and technology, there was a drastic fall in productivity as a result of a major fall in output—in some cases, it was 50 per cent.—in the telecommunications industry. That was happening in America, the rest of Europe and Britain, but the general gains being made in manufacturing industry are again something that the hon. Gentleman could welcome. I repeat that the only Governments in the past 25 years under whom productivity and manufacturing productivity have fallen have been Conservative Governments.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that business investment growth in the past five years has been at 6.2 per cent., in comparison with long-term business investment growth of 3.5 per cent.?

Of course, that long-term 3.5 per cent. rate was 0.2 per cent. up on the 18 years of Conservative Government, when business investment growth was at 3.3 per cent.

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who is waiting to pounce on the shadow Chancellor, must despair of those on the Conservative Front Bench and the way in which they put their case about the national economy. We have created greater stability by making the Bank of England independent—but initially the shadow Chancellor opposed that. We have created a better competitive framework by making the Competition Commission independent—and originally the Conservatives opposed it. We have created a new deal that gives people, through responsibilities and rights, the opportunity to get back to work—and the Conservative still oppose the new deal. We are creating the conditions for both stability and growth. It is a pity that on all the major decisions made in the past five years, the shadow Chancellor and the Conservative Opposition were generally against them.

Department of Health (Public Service Agreement)

5. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): If he will make a statement on the progress of public service agreement targets for the Department of Health. [68401]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): A progress report is included in the 2002 Department of Health departmental report, which is published today. Since 1997, more than 100,000 fewer people are on the waiting lists; there are 39,000 more nurses, more than 10,000 more doctors and 37 per cent. more heart operations; more than 90 per cent. of people urgently referred by their GP with suspected cancer now see a specialist within two weeks; and there are 50 per cent. more CT scanners and 80 per cent. more MRI scanners; and last year, for the first time in 30 years, there was an increase in the number of NHS beds.

Mr. O'Brien: We all know that the Government favour target setting over reform, and, as the Chancellor said earlier in his answer to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), the choice of public service agreement objectives reflects the Government's priorities. In that case, is the absence of a target for the number of care home beds a fair and true reflection of the Government's refusal to acknowledge that there is a real crisis in our care homes today?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should wait for the statement by the Secretary of State for Health about the 6 per cent. real-terms increase in social services expenditure that I announced last Monday, and for the announcements in that statement about new measures that will be introduced. The fact is that, if we want to increase the number of care home beds and to improve social services for the elderly, we are faced with a choice: do we spend more money or less? We will spend the money; the Conservatives would make more charges.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): Under the public service agreement, some specific targets have been set for this year. One is that in-patients should not have to wait more than 12 weeks; another is that out-patients should not have to wait more than 26 weeks. May I tell my right hon. Friend that both those targets have been met in full at Warwick hospital in my constituency? Is not this a case of service agreements providing precise targets that are being delivered thanks to the increased investment that the Government are putting in?

Mr. Brown: There are 300,000 more operations taking place in the national health service, and 100,000 fewer people on the waiting list. The maximum waiting time—which was more than 18 months when we came to power—is gradually being reduced to 15, then 12, nine and six months. Those are the aims that are being pursued in the targets that we have set the national health service. The question is, however, when making the reforms and setting the objectives—including giving more power to the primary care trusts—are we prepared to put the necessary money in to finance the expansion of health care? Everybody agrees—in any report that is produced—that the health service needs more money, except one group of people: the Conservatives, who want charges and cuts instead of spending.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Since about half of all the Government's 1998 and 2000 departmental targets appear to have been unmet, changed, failed or dropped, will the Chancellor oblige us by giving a single example of a Department that has been penalised, and telling us what penalty followed?

Mr. Brown: The issue about targets is that, when they are not met—

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Agriculture.

Mr. Brown: The Agriculture Department has been completely reorganised—

Mr. Bacon: Fat lot of good it has done. It has got worse, much worse.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman now says that he opposes what we are doing to give more money to sustainable farming, and the public expenditure announcement that we will give more money to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The important thing is that, when a Department goes wrong, action is taken. Why did the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor)—who now calls himself the shadow Chancellor; he is the shadow Chancellor who resides in Truro, as opposed to the one who resides in Folkestone—not welcome the action that we proposed on Monday to tackle failing institutions, including hospitals, schools, colleges, prisons and the probation service? In all those areas, we take action if there are failing institutions, and we also take action if permanent secretaries or Departments fail.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Does my right hon. Friend think that new charges for GP visits should be introduced to finance the NHS, or indeed that it is a Stalinist creation?

Mr. Brown: At the last general election, the Conservative party stood on a policy that the national health service would be free at the point of need. [Hon. Members: "Order."] Since then, a policy of charging, which the Conservatives are now proposing, has been put forward by the shadow Chancellor. The policy of charging is wrong. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Sometimes I cannot hear what is being said because so many people are shouting. I call the shadow Chancellor.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): May I say how greatly I am looking forward to debating the Chancellor's spending plans with him next Tuesday? Meanwhile, will he explain why, in his panoply of new targets set on Monday, that that for NHS efficiency savings has been reduced from 3 to 2 per cent. and that for ensuring that everyone should be expected to achieve the level of the best over five years has been dropped completely?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the Chancellor answers, I ask him not to talk about Conservative party policy.

Mr. Brown: It does not bear talking about.

We set targets in 1998, which have generally been met. We set targets in 2000, which run through to 2004. On the basis of the assessment that we made, we are setting new targets to 2006. The NHS is becoming more efficient. That is why the efficiency target is as it is for the next round. Equally so, we have set new targets, both for waiting times and waiting lists, and, of course, for the efficiency of hospitals.

Mr. Howard: It is a great pity that the Chancellor could not give a direct answer to that direct question. It is an even greater pity that he introduced yet more fiction to his answer. The Government said in their progress report on the efficiency target that they set four years ago, "There has been slippage." Perhaps it would have been better if the Chancellor had stuck with his adviser's phrase of "increased room for catch-up". What happens when there is increased room for catch-up? Instead of trying harder to catch up, the Government drop the target. Does not that expose as a complete sham all the Chancellor's fine words on Monday about matching resources with reforms and results for patients?

Mr. Brown: Absolutely not, because we have reduced waiting times and waiting lists. We have also secured a massive devolution of funding to local health authorities, all of which the Conservatives should have done but never did.

The number of operations carried out in hospitals has risen by several hundred thousand and we have provided repair and renovation for 96 per cent. of accident and emergency units. On training in medical schools, the numbers will go up from 3,700 entering every year to 5,900. On new equipment in the health service, the number of CT scanners is up 50 per cent. and that of MRI scanners is up 60 per cent. The number of people getting cancer operations and help from heart specialists has gone up as well. In those areas, we have been meeting the demands, but the question is, "Are you prepared to spend the money on the health service?" We are.

Inward Investment

6. **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): What further incentives the Treasury will provide to encourage inward investment into the United Kingdom. [68403]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): Announcements made in this year's Budget will further serve to consolidate improvements in the UK's performance relating to inward investment. The extension of R&D tax credits to large companies and the move to exempt corporation tax for capital gains and losses on the most substantial shareholdings in trading companies will make the UK an even more attractive location for foreign investors.

Mr. Luke: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the extended R&D tax credit introduced for larger companies in this year's Budget will not only help to sustain high inward investment in this country, but encourage foreign companies already located here to follow the example of NCR in my own city and locate more R&D facilities in the UK, thereby strengthening the likelihood that their corporate presence here will continue?

Mr. Boateng: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the interest that he takes in inward investment generally and the work that he has done in his constituency to promote it. He makes an absolutely accurate point on the impact of the R&D tax credit, but, importantly, linked to Dundee's success in inviting and securing high-tech investment in that constituency are the announcements on science made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the spending review. They will further enhance the competitiveness and success of our efforts to secure inward investment into the UK.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Chief Secretary tell me what the level of inward investment in this country was on 1 May 1997 and what it was on 1 May this year? If it has gone down, to what extent is that attributable to the £25 billion raid on pension tax credits?

Mr. Boateng: It has no connection whatever with the so-called £25 million raid on pensions. What the hon. Lady must understand—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady wants figures. Let me give her the figures. Direct investment flows to the United Kingdom increased threefold in the four years to the third quarter of 2001, and by 9 per cent. in the four years to the second quarter of 1997. That is the difference between our record of success in government, and the record of failure of the hon. Lady's party.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I welcome the measures that are being taken, but does my right hon. Friend accept that China in particular is attractive to multinational companies at present, and that investment has flowed out of this country and into China? Does he accept the need for analysis of the trading conditions that China is allowing for multinationals, to ensure that we are on a level playing field?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. China's accession to the World Trade Organisation will no doubt assist that process, but it should be stressed that we in the United Kingdom offer a high skills base in terms of employment. What we offer, and what has been enhanced by the Government's decisions, is a stable economic framework and investment in education and skills. As a result, in a recent survey of developed and developing economies by UNCTAD—the United Nations conference on trade and development—the United Kingdom came second only to the United States in terms of its attractiveness to inward investment. That is a good-news story for UK plc.

Exchange Rate

7. **Mr. John Burnett** (Torridge and West Devon): If he will make a statement on the impact of recent exchange rate fluctuations on British business. [68404]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Government publish two assessments of economic developments and prospects each year, one at Budget time and the other in the pre-Budget report. The forecast published in the April Budget was based on all the relevant information available at that time. We will update our assessment of the economy as usual in the autumn pre-Budget report, taking account of all the relevant factors.

Mr. Burnett: In the unlikely event that the Chancellor can declare his five tests for euro entry to have been met, what will concern British business and the rest of the country is the proposed sterling-euro exchange rate at entry. At what stage will the Chancellor declare that rate? Will the Paymaster General confirm that it will be before any referendum, and also that there will be just one assessment during the present Parliament?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman will have to be patient, and wait for the assessment of the five economic tests in the Government's announcement.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to an article by Roger Clews of the Bank of England's monetary instruments and markets division? On page 182 of the current "Quarterly Bulletin", he reminds us that the United Kingdom is part of the wider world economy, and furthermore that

> "the strength of international influences on domestic financial markets varies over time, being especially high at times of financial market stress."

Is it not the case that the platform of economic stability that the Chancellor has established is the best protection in the long term from shocks emanating from the world economy—to the extent that the greatest risk of a shock to the UK's financial markets in the future would be a return of the Conservative Government and their discredited policies of boom and bust?

Dawn Primarolo: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has repeatedly told the House, what is essential is that the economic fundamentals are sound—which means low inflation, low interest rates, sound public finances and stable growth.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): In recent years, the pound has moved much more dramatically against the euro than against the dollar. Does that not show that we are if anything converging with America and not with euroland? Does the Minister agree that there is no point in assessing other convergence criteria while the exchange rate is gyrating so wildly in terms of the euro? Does that not show that we are nowhere near having converged?

Dawn Primarolo: The right hon. Gentleman is putting his old proposition. What the Government will do is assess the five economic tests, ensuring that the Government's best economic interests—*[Interruption.]*—the country's best economic interests are met and the best decisions are made for the country, both by Parliament and by the people.

Global Poverty

8. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): What plans he has to meet his G8 and EU counterparts to discuss further practical steps on tackling global poverty. [68405]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The Secretary of State for International Development and I will meet churches and non-governmental organisations next week. We will prepare for the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings in September, where we will want the announcement that this country is raising development aid from £2 billion in 1997 to £4.9 billion by 2006 to be an encouraging signal for a new international £50 billion financing facility involving all rich countries, the aim being to meet the millennium goals for 2015 of halving poverty, cutting child mortality by two thirds and delivering primary education for every child in the world.

Mr. Griffiths: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will be aware that he and the Secretary of State for International Development are seen as the shining stars in the firmament of the developing world for the leadership that they have given in increasing the amount of money that we set aside for overseas aid and other programmes to tackle poverty and ill health in the developing world. Given the fact that the tide of Conservative cuts in development aid has been reversed significantly by this Government, would he like to speculate that we might reach the UN target of a contribution of 0.7 per cent. of GNP by the time of the next election?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is drawing me to speculate both about the date of the next election, of which I have no knowledge, and about the next spending round, which is two years from now. What I can say is that as a result of the representations made by many of his constituents, as well as by him and many others in the House, 26 countries have debt relief or are in the debt relief process. For the first time in 20 years, the decrease in development aid budgets has been reversed: they will rise over the next few years as a result of what Britain and the European Community have done and what America has announced in the past few months.

The key question now is to ensure that that extra money can be used to build better education systems and primary health care systems and to cut poverty in the poorest countries. When we meet the churches and the NGOs next week, we will discuss how we can join them and other international bodies to persuade other countries that it is worth being part of an international effort to tackle poverty.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I note what the Chancellor has said, but does he not agree that there was at least a feeling from the recent G8 summit in Canada that the developed world had moved more towards putting money into security by giving more to Russia than to eradicating poverty in Africa? What action does he propose to take to ensure that the G8 countries do not lose sight of poverty in Africa?

Mr. Brown: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. At the G8 summit, the Prime Minister led with the African initiative that has been his particular contribution to the G8 process during the past year. He pledged that Britain's aid budget to Africa, which was £300 million in 1997, would rise to £1 billion. At the same time, America pledged $5 billion after 2006 and $5 billion in total until 2006. Then the European Union pledged that it would raise its development aid to 0.39 per cent. of its budget, which is an additional $7 billion. By the time of the G8 summit, an additional $12 billion had been pledged. That is why development aid as a proportion of GDP, which had been falling, is rising for the first time in 20 years. When the hon. Gentleman looks at the overall sums and at what we have to do to build on that, he will recognise that the G8 summit, where the Prime Minister led the delegation from Britain, was a great success in pushing things forward, but we need even greater successes in the months and years to come.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in contrast with the perspective offered by the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), some of us heard at a meeting this morning that this Government had given more bilateral aid to Rwanda than the whole of the EU and any other country? The Government have an excellent record on that and on debt relief. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the recent lobby on trade indicated that there is indeed a need for a new modern Marshall plan? Does he see that as part of the Government's approach?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who takes a big interest in such matters. Over many years he has put the case for aid to Africa and for a constructive and progressive approach to solving international development problems. The issue that we faced was that despite all the good will, net disbursements of aid to Africa had fallen significantly over the 1990s. Only now is that process being reversed. That is why Rwanda, and many other countries, are receiving more money. That is why, for example, Uganda has doubled the number of children in education, and other countries such as Tanzania can do likewise. It is by our collective efforts, and by persuading other countries, that we will build both a development aid budget that is capable of dealing with the problem, and the will to ensure that the money goes, in an untied way, to education, health and anti-poverty programmes.

Public Sector Pensions

9. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): What assessment he has made of the effect of his policies on public sector pension provision. [68406]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): Prudent financial and economic management has ensured that the finances of the public services are on a sustainable basis. Through the spending reviews and other initiatives we ensure that public sector pension schemes are managed efficiently and provide cost-effective recruitment and retention of staff.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: The welfare and income of all pensioners must be central in any civilised and caring society, so will the Minister acknowledge the depth of concern felt by millions of public sector pension contributors about the crisis in funded pensions? Will the Government finally admit the connection between that crisis and their £5 billion a year tax on pensions, which has cost each pension contributor £400 a year? The Government must accept some responsibility for the crisis in our pensions today.

Ruth Kelly: I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that the tax changes that affected pension funds do not affect public sector pension funds; those are primarily unfunded schemes.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I said all pensioners.

Ruth Kelly: Of course we take the issue of saving for the long term, especially for pension provision, extremely seriously. That is why the Government commissioned the Sandler report to examine private sector pension provision, and also why we are seriously considering the proposals made by Alan Pickering in his review of the occupational pension scheme. We shall respond to those reports in the autumn, and put forward our proposals.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Most public sector pension schemes are, of course, unfunded, and they are an important part of the rewards package for low-paid workers in local government, health, the fire service and the police. Is it Government policy to continue those public sector schemes on a final salary basis, including survivor benefits and indexation of the pension once it is in payment?

Ruth Kelly: I take it that my hon. Friend is referring to the Pickering review, which proposed some changes in what it is compulsory for employers to offer in their pension schemes. We are, of course, taking those proposals extremely seriously—but at first sight some of them, especially those on compulsory indexation and survivors benefits, do not seem attractive. Against that, however, must be weighed the overall impact on occupational pension schemes. We are taking the issues extremely seriously, and we will make proposals in due course.

Manufacturing Industry

10. **Mr. Mark Simmonds** (Boston and Skegness): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding manufacturing industry competitiveness. [68407]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): My right hon. Friend has regular meetings with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on a wide range of issues, and we recognise the vital contribution that UK manufacturing makes to the economy, exports and innovation. That is one reason why the Government are now investing so heavily in innovation, with Monday's announcement of the largest sustained increase in the science budget for a decade, and the announcement in April of the extension of the R&D tax credit to all firms—a measure that will overwhelmingly benefit manufacturing industry.

Mr. Simmonds: I thank the Minister for that answer, but is it not true that since 1997 UK manufacturing industry has had to suffer an explosion of red tape and bureaucracy, as well as an increase in taxation? No fundamental reform of public services was mentioned in the Chancellor's announcement on Monday, yet he was only too happy to throw the public's money around like a drunken sailor. In that context, I would like the Minister to tell us how the Government square the increase in red tape, bureaucracy and taxation on manufacturing industry with pretending to support an entrepreneurial and enterprise economy.

John Healey: I must say to the hon. Gentleman that effective regulation has important economic benefits. If it is properly framed, regulation can correct market failures, create a more level playing field for business, and put in place essential protections such as health and safety at work. This Government have a strong record in cutting red tape. As Minister with responsibility for customs, I can say that we have recently raised the threshold for VAT registration, and we are introducing a new VAT flat-rate scheme and new VAT import reliefs. Those changes were welcomed by the British Chambers of Commerce, which said:

> "We welcome the Chancellor's attempts to try to simplify the VAT system".

Moreover, the CBI said:

> "The Chancellor has left business in no doubt that he is committed to encouraging enterprise. The tax improvements, including the red tape burden, are welcome."

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Does my hon. Friend agree that small and medium-sized enterprises are becoming increasingly important to the well-being of the economy, and that the measures on late payments that this Government have introduced incrementally are proving of enormous benefit to SMEs?

John Healey: My hon. Friend is precisely correct. It is such simplification measures, plus tax cuts targeted precisely at small businesses, that are bringing such benefits. Of course, all businesses also benefit from the greater economic stability that we have seen since 1997, including low interest rates and inflation rates, sound public finances, and steady growth. That is the best support that Government can give to manufacturers small and large—precisely the support that they did not get in 18 years of Conservative Government.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Have not Treasury Ministers cottoned on to the fact that increased costs on business operate at the margin, and have a completely disproportionate effect on competitiveness and profitability? Does the Minister not concede that further increases in labour market regulation are extremely unlikely to buy off labour market and trade union militancy, which sank the previous Labour Government and has returned to haunt this one?

John Healey: I simply do not recognise the hon. Gentleman's description. On costs for business—particularly small business—I should remind him that, thanks to a series of tax cuts since 1997 that were reinforced in this year's Budget, and to corporation tax reforms, we have the lowest rates in the UK's history. Capital investment for small firms—permanent in the first year—has given a real boost, and research and development investment has been welcomed across the board. The Budget's tax cuts for business across the piece mean that—even after the Budget—12 other European Union countries still have higher tax burdens on business than does the UK.

Credit Union Movement

11. **David Wright** (Telford): If he will make a statement on the growth of the credit union movement in the United Kingdom. [68408]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): Credit unions have an important role to play in tackling financial exclusion and enhancing opportunity, through the provision of core financial services. That is why we are delivering a programme of strategic deregulation to enable credit unions to offer a greater range of services to their members, thereby helping them to develop and to grow.

David Wright: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. Will she join me in congratulating and thanking the many thousands of people who give of their time voluntarily to support the credit union movement in the UK? Does she agree, however, that the term "credit union" is itself problematic, because for many people it implies getting into debt? Does she also agree that we should perhaps re-brand the sector, as has been done in Telford through the Fair Share credit union?

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I know that he takes a considerable interest in these matters, and I do of course congratulate the thousands of people who provide their services for free to help credit unions prosper. That is why we are undertaking a programme to make the whole credit union sector more attractive, to enable credit unions to offer a greater range of services to their members, and to offer greater protection to members by regulating the sector through the Financial Services Authority.

As to my hon. Friend's remark about the term "credit union", I do not share his enthusiasm for changing a brand name that is fairly well recognised not just in this country, but across the world. I would therefore hesitate before recommending to the sector that it changes the name.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I join the Minister and others in congratulating the credit union movement and those who have done so much to help their own communities. I also welcome the fact that steps have been taken to strengthen the supervision of credit unions. Am I right in thinking that that has been done not to hinder the credit unions, but to protect them in an age of creative accounting, when people often misuse money? Those measures should not be shunned, but accepted and supported.

Ruth Kelly: I completely agree with the remarks made by the hon. Gentleman. It is important for the sector itself, as well as for its members, that it is appropriately and proportionately regulated. I welcome the fact that thousands of members of credit unions, as well as the organisations themselves, took the opportunity to respond to the FSA's consultation on how that regulation should be carried out. The new framework will increase the reputation and credibility of the sector and it will also offer important investor protection to credit union members, bringing them under the same sort of protection regime as bank and building society depositors.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House please give the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): It will be a pleasure. The business for next week will be as follows:

Monday 22 July—Second Reading of the Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill *[Lords]*.

Motions to establish the Transport and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committees.

Motion on the summer recess Adjournment.

Tuesday 23 July—Debate on public expenditure on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. *[Interruption.]* I look forward to the contribution from the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Wednesday 24 July—The House may be asked to consider any Lords messages that may be received.

Consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill *[Lords]*.

The business for the week after the summer recess will be:

Tuesday 15 October—Motion relating to the Industrial Development Act 1982.

Remaining stages of the Public Trustee (Liability and Fees) Bill *[Lords]*.

Debate on local government finance formula grant distribution on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Wednesday 16 October—Opposition Day [18th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion.

Thursday 17 October—Debate on defence in the world on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Friday 18 October—The House will not be sitting.

I would also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for October will be:

Thursday 17 October—Debate on the report from the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee on road traffic speed.

Thursday 24 October—Debate on the UN charter on the rights of the child.

Thursday 31 October—Debate on the report from the Foreign Affairs Committee on foreign policy aspects of the war against terrorism.

The House will also wish to know that on Tuesday 15 October, there will be a debate relating to major accident hazards involving dangerous substances in European Standing Committee A, and on Thursday 17 October 2002, there will be a debate relating to the European Union action plan on drugs in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[Tuesday 15 October 2002:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union document: 15275/01, Major accident hazards involving dangerous substances. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 152-xxxiv and HC 152-xix (2001–02).

Thursday 17 October 2002:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union document: 10207/01, The EU Action Plan on drugs 2000–2004. Relevant European Union Scrutiny Committee report: HC 152-ii (2001–02).]

As this is the last business statement before the recess, may I—

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Invite us all for drinks?

Mr. Cook: Sadly, I am too constrained by my work on behalf of the House to take time off to do that. On behalf of the House, I wish to thank all the staff of the House for their hard work—[Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] Without that hard work, we could not have sat over the past year. As Leader of the House, I also wish to record my personal thanks to the parliamentary clerks across Whitehall for their co-operation and support.

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business. I echo strongly his thanks to all of the staff and Officers of the House who help us in our work. It should never go unrecorded or unappreciated.

Can the Leader of the House tell us why we are having a defence statement today? Yesterday, we had a defence debate—indeed, the Minister opening that debate took some 74 minutes of the time of the House. I should have thought that it would not be beyond the wit of the Government and the Leader of the House to have put a defence statement on the same day as a defence debate. Instead, there will be three statements today. They will squeeze consideration on the Proceeds of Crime Bill, for which 13 groups of amendments have been selected. That is the very Bill whose progress the Prime Minister tried to imply that the Opposition were obstructing. It is the Government who seem to be conspiring to give that Bill less consideration than it deserves. Will the Leader of the House explain what on earth is happening, and why he seems to have lost his grip almost completely?

Next Monday, we will get the Anderson report on foot and mouth. We know that because Anderson has told the world so. Will the Leader of the House guarantee that the House will have the opportunity to consider that very important report before we leave for the summer recess? We must not slip into the recess without being given the chance to consider the report, and perhaps we could delay the recess by a day. [Hon. Members: "You will be on your own."] I hear Labour Members say that I will be on my own, but it is clear from their response to that that my colleagues will be here. We want the opportunity to hear from a Minister about the Government's response to the Anderson report on foot and mouth. We are prepared to be here for as long as that takes.

In connection with matters agricultural, the Leader of the House will be aware of the excellent report produced yesterday by the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the annual report for 2002 from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Among other things, the Committee stated that the "achievements" section of the annual report was misnamed and that it

> "might usefully be included in future reports, but in brief, and described simply as 'how we spend our time'."

The Committee also recommends that

> "the Report contain more hard financial data . . . and less waffle."

[Mr. Forth]

That is how a Select Committee of this House, with a Labour majority, sets out what it thinks of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. It goes on to state that

> "the level of detail currently given is not acceptable."

It recommends that the Department

> "as a matter of urgency examine the accuracy of the data in the Departmental Report, and issue corrigenda as necessary."

It also states:

> "Finally, some data is missing."

I hope that the Leader of the House agrees that those studied comments by a Select Committee warrant full consideration by the House before the recess. Such matters should not be slipped away so that—as the Government hope—they might be forgotten.

The next section of my remarks might be entitled "ministerial inaccuracies". I choose that second word carefully, as you, Mr. Speaker, would reprimand me if I used words such as porkies, whoppers or anything else. In deference to you, therefore, I shall stick to the word "inaccuracies".

My first question refers to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), to which reference was made at last week's business questions by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman). The point of order referred to the Minister for Pensions, who my colleagues believed had given the House inaccurate information on whether pensioners could elect to have a home visit from the pension service.

That is a serious matter, as there appears to be a complete difference of view between the Minister and one of his officials. I hope that the Leader of the House will give the Minister for Pensions time to come to the House and correct the record, not least so that pensioners can be reassured that what he and the Department are saying is accurate and reliable.

On July 15, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the shadow Chancellor, that he was Home Secretary "when crime doubled." The truth is that crime fell by 18 per cent. while my right hon. and learned Friend discharged his duties as Home Secretary. Will the Leader of the House say what is the source of the Chancellor's assertion? Will the Chancellor come to the House to apologise, or will the Leader of the House now have to start excusing inaccuracies by the Chancellor as well as by the Prime Minister?

Talking of which, yesterday in PMPs, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition quoted the Prime Minister as saying that the Government

> "would reduce levels of street crime to below the April level."

The Prime Minister replied:

> "I shall certainly repeat exactly what I said"—

in other words, he seemed to imply that that would be done. However, at column 281, my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) asked by how much the Prime Minister

> "expects robberies to have fallen by September?"

and the Prime Minister said that

> "instead of the trend being up, it should be down".—[*Official Report*, 17 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 279-81.]

Obviously, again, the Prime Minister chooses his words to fit the moment, with a blithe disregard for accuracy. So the question to the Leader of the House is: is the Prime Minister massaging, redefining or spinning, and how often does the Leader of the House expect to have to come to the House on a Thursday and excuse or apologise for what his colleagues have said?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman must be seriously concerned that he will miss these exchanges over the next three months, so he has given us a treble helping today. I am in generous mood, and the House is in demob mood, but as the right hon. Gentleman quoted one of the Select Committees calling for a lot less waffle, I should have thought that he might reflect on those words himself over the next three months.

On the statement from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, I do not think that the House can hear too often from my right hon. Friend, who is punctilious in fulfilling his duties to this place. I am advised that in yesterday's debate we had fewer speakers from the Conservative Benches than from the Labour Benches. My right hon. Friend is no doubt keen that there should be a full attendance of Conservative Members on this occasion to hear his important statement about the future strategy for our defence forces. It is absolutely right that that should be brought before the House.

As to any squeezing of time for the Proceeds of Crime Bill, I saw the right hon. Gentleman in his place yesterday when we both supported our senior figures. He may recall that the leader of the Conservative party assured the House that the Conservative party now supports the Proceeds of Crime Bill. It is therefore a bit rich to complain only 24 hours later that there is not enough time to debate it.

On the forthcoming Anderson report, it is unusual to declare this in advance to the House, but in these circumstances I think it is right to do so: I have discussed the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and she is keen to make a statement to the House on Monday. There will be a statement on that issue.

The right hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that he wanted additional time for the House to debate the matter, and that we should postpone the recess. Before we embark on the wider question of the business statement, I should warn the House that I have no plans to go abroad this summer, so there is a serious danger that if asked to detain the House longer, I might agree. I hope that my hon. Friends will take that on board before putting their questions to me.

On the crime statistics, over the 18 years of the last Conservative Government—the right hon. Gentleman is well aware of this, as he was present throughout that period—crime did indeed double, compared with the drop of 22 per cent. since we took over in 1997. I shall be happy to provide the right hon. Gentleman with a full list of all the Conservative Home Secretaries who collectively presided over that doubling of the crime figures during the Conservative years.

I shall draw the right hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions. The right hon. Gentleman will understand that

I do not wish to give an off-the-cuff response to a matter that has not previously been drawn to my attention, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend will respond perfectly adequately to him.

On the crime figures, I remind the right hon. Gentleman and the House that street crime in the Metropolitan area has fallen by a third since last January. That is well on course for the target for September, and the Prime Minister was right to say that we are taking special measures to make sure that we bring street crime under control. I am sure that when the right hon. Gentleman next addresses the House, he will wish to congratulate the Government on their success in that initiative against street crime in the Met.

Lastly, the right hon. Gentleman asks whether there is a massaging of figures. I am sure that there is no massaging of figures. Indeed, we have just gone out of our way to provider fuller, clearer recorded crime statistics, and we did so despite the fact that, as he knows, the effect of the change in recording was to produce a slight rise. The rise was the result of the recording rather than the reality. That provides a stark contrast to the behaviour of the Government of whom he was a member in massaging the unemployment figures so that some of the unemployment would vanish. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that, on the eve of the general election, which is the nearest that we can come, he said that half of those who disappeared from the figures represented genuine falls. Given that he said that in February 1997, it is bit rich for him now to complain about anyone on the Government Benches massaging figures.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): A serious problem faces firms trying to renew their employer's liability insurance. A firm in my constituency—Moorside Mining—has ended up paying seven times more than it did just over a year ago to continue in operation. Can we discuss that insurers' ramp, which is taking place at the moment, and the possibility of a scheme being devised—perhaps through the Consolidated Fund—so that construction, mining and quarrying firms, which are particularly badly affected, can have some protection in the future; or will pressure be put on insurers so that they bring themselves into line and provide insurance cover at a reasonable rate?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a serious issue. I cannot hold out any immediate prospect of a debate of the kind that he suggests, but I shall certainly draw his remarks to the attention of the Minister for Energy and Construction, who is in charge of such matters.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): May I associate the Liberal Democrats with the words of thanks that the Leader of the House has extended to the staff, and single out those who have been responsible for our security this Session, following the events of last autumn?

I welcome the debate on the Select Committees that will take place on Monday 22 July. May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that when the House approved the Modernisation Committee on that topic earlier this Session, the one issue that was not addressed was the political balance of Select Committee chairmanships? In considering the forthcoming reorganisation, will he undertake to use his good offices to ensure that the party political balance of the chairmanships is restored to the level that it should be?

Last Monday, the House was presented with a Government motion to end Friday sittings in October. Presumably, that was done in expectation that the Home Energy Conservation (No. 2) Bill—the HECA Bill—will be successfully completed on Friday.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Read the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the hon. Gentleman speak.

Mr. Stunell: [illegible]k you, Mr. Speaker.

In the event that [illegible] Bill, as amended, does not pass—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is putting a question to the Leader of the House. Let the Leader of the House answer the question.

Mr. Stunell: Unfortunately, Conservative Members do not appear to be aware that a substitute Bill is being submitted. My point to the Leader of the House is that, were that Bill—

Mr. Swayne: It has been withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Swayne, please be quiet. The House is very noisy, and we have only a few days to go.

Mr. Stunell: I think that I am entitled to be wrong when I speak in the Chamber, as well as to be right. My point to the Leader of the House is whether he will reconsider his decision, as put to us, to end sittings on Fridays in October to give extra time to private Member's Bills that have not been completed before the summer break?

Just before I entered the Chamber, I was given a detailed brief on what the Deputy Prime Minister will tell the House in the statement that he will make in a few minutes' time. I got that detailed briefing from BBC News 24. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is highly unsatisfactory that hon. Members could put on to the record of the House what the Deputy Prime Minister will say in advance of his saying it on the basis of news reports, but that we cannot get that information from the Vote Office? I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will have something to say about that.

Finally, the Leader of the House will know that I have been challenging the Government's capacity to answer parliamentary questions during this Session. Does he accept that several Departments are still massively behind in responding to questions, and that increasing evidence exists that political advisers and civil servants are working together to obstruct and prevaricate in the provision of honest and accurate replies, rather than facilitating them as the ministerial code requires?

Mr. Cook: Let me say, first, that the Opposition will join me in saying that all Members of the House would support fully the democratic right of the hon. Gentleman and his party to be wrong. There is no contention from us on that issue.

I know of the Liberal Democrats' concern that they do not hold sufficient numbers of chairmanships of Select Committees. Of course, that is not, in the first instance,

[Mr. Cook]

a matter for me; strictly, it is a matter for the Committees to resolve. In the case of the two Committees that we shall appoint next week, there are two existing Committees in that area and two splendid Members of the House who have tended to preside over them. I could not counsel anyone to whom I have good feelings that they might intrude on that particular contested field. I am aware of the issue, however, and I shall certainly bear it in mind for a future occasion.

On private Members' Bills, those for this Friday—if I may clear up this doubt—consist of about 40 Bills on the Order Paper, which I think will be sufficient. The first three of those are: the Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs, Etc.) Bill, which, the House will be aware, the Government support; the Commonwealth Bill, which the Government also fully support; and the Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, to which I understand members of the hon. Gentleman's party have tabled a very large numbers of amendments. That does not suggest to me that they anticipate that other Bills that appear further down the Order Paper will get a hearing. It is for the House on Friday to decide how it will handle these matters. I do not anticipate, however, that the Home Energy Conservation Bill will appear in either its previous reform or in a revised form on Friday.

I understand what the hon. Gentleman says about sittings on a Friday in October. I am not sure, however, that it would be responsible to extend the time available for private Members' Bills in October, given that the Bill to which the hon. Gentleman referred will still have to go to the Lords and come back. We must be realistic about what is achievable between now and the end of the Session.

Lastly, I would not, of course, accept in any way that Departments are conspiring to obstruct answers to Members. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that in the case of the Department for Education and Skills, Ministers have made it perfectly clear that they want the guidance reasserted to match that for civil servants so that we do not have a repetition of the e-mails that the hon. Gentleman saw.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): HIV/AIDS is currently claiming more than a million lives in heavily indebted poor countries, yet half the countries receiving debt relief are spending more on debt payments than on public health. Could the Leader of the House find some time for us to debate that matter to see how we can engage the international community on debt, aid and trade, to tackle this disaster, which is set to reduce life expectancy in some of those countries to the age of only 27?

Mr. Cook: First, I fully concur with my hon. Friend on the very important matter to which she draws attention, which is having a severe impact on some of the poorest countries in the world. For that reason, the Government have fully supported the proposal, through the G8 and the United Nations, for a special fund to tackle the HIV/AIDS threat in those countries. That is also why Britain worked very hard to make sure that development aid for Africa, which is one of the continents worst-hit by AIDS, should be at the heart of the debate held only last month at the G8 in Canada. We secured some progress there in making sure that there were fuller commitments to help Africa.

We have shown leadership on the relief of debt, and it is fair to say that no other major developed country has done more than we have to tackle the debt burden. We have unilaterally renounced the debt to Britain of more than 20 of the poorest countries. We shall continue to work on that—there is a lot more to be done—but Britain does not need to be ashamed of its record in this area.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The last time that I asked the Leader of the House for a full-scale debate in Government time on agriculture, he counselled me that it could not be done until all the reports associated with foot and mouth disease were in the public domain. As that is about to be achieved—in addition to the publication of the mid-term review of the common agricultural policy, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report on the activities of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the fundamental spending review report on the future budget for DEFRA—will the Leader of the House ensure that as soon as we come back after the summer recess, if not before, we have a full-scale debate on agriculture? All the criteria that he laid down for such a debate have now been fulfilled.

Mr. Cook: It will not be possible to do that before the House rises for the summer recess. However, I am well aware of the issue and will bear it in mind when we return.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The Minister for Rural Affairs will conduct public inquiries in September in connection with the latest leg of the saga on hunting with dogs. He has given the same amount of time to those who argue for a ban as he has to those who wish to retain the status quo. Inexplicably, he has given the same amount of time to those who argue for the middle way, which has no discernible support in the House or outside. I urge my right hon. Friend to pass on my concerns to the Minister. Will he ask him to make an early statement when we return in October on precisely where we are on that issue, which concerns many of us?

Mr. Cook: The precise arrangements for consultation are for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs to determine. I am sure he will want to make proper arrangements so that he hears the full spread of views. As someone who has consistently supported the middle way both times, I can only say to my hon. Friend that I think that I am discernible.

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): The Leader of the House will be familiar with the fourth report of the Science and Technology Committee on developments in human genetics and embryology, which is an important and difficult matter. Can he reassure us that ownership of that important subject still resides with the House? Will he give us an early debate on the important matters raised in the report, especially the question of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's decision to allow tissue typing in conjunction with pre-implantation genetic diagnosis?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is right. Such matters can always be brought before Parliament, and the Select Committee's report reasserted the importance of Parliament's view. We have not legislated on that subject for some years, and I heard a spokesman this morning from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority say that there are ways in which the authority might also welcome the law being looked at. However, it is important to recognise that we established the authority because individual decisions of that nature should not be made by politicians on political lines—

Bob Spink (Castle Point): That was not an individual decision. That particular decision was ground breaking.

Mr. Cook: If I may answer the question in my own way, it might be helpful to the House.

I do not think that the House should get involved in second guessing any individual case. On the particular case in question, I disagree with the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink). The spokesman for the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority made it clear this morning that it took a decision on that case simply to ensure that the next child was healthy. That is nothing new.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the report issued by the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform yesterday, which says that it will conclude the first part of its work by the autumn and is planning to meet twice in September? Will he endeavour to allow us to vote on the report at the earliest opportunity, possibly in the spill-over Session before the Queen's Speech?

Mr. Cook: I very much welcome the report. It shows that the Joint Committee is going about its work in a brisk and business-like way. I welcome the fact that it will meet during the recess. It has already agreed that there should be two phases to its work: first, to report to the House on the list of options on composition and, secondly, to consider in more detail how it will craft a second Chamber around whatever decision is taken by both Houses. I stand ready to arrange for the first of those to be put before the House, but I need to receive it from the Joint Committee before I can do so.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The Leader of the House said that he hoped that the Modernisation Committee's latest report would be with us before we rose so that we could study it in the recess and debate it when we return. Is that still his hope and expectation? When does he expect this Session to end and the new Session to be opened?

Mr. Cook: I expect the Modernisation Committee to sit next Wednesday morning under my chairmanship to discuss the Chairman's draft, which I hope we will be able to adopt.

Mr. Forth: Oh no.

Mr. Cook: I regret to disappoint the right hon. Gentleman, but it is quite possible that we will adopt it. However, I cannot commit all members of the Committee to that, and I need their co-operation to secure that outcome.

Mr. Forth: Ah!

Mr. Cook: I do not think that I am giving away any secrets of procedure within the Select Committee. The draft is the property of the Select Committee once I lay it before it. I have a lively expectation that we may reach a conclusion next Wednesday, in which case the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) will have some useful, viable and uplifting reading over the summer recess.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that yesterday the Director-General of the BBC appeared before a Committee of the House and denied vehemently that there are any plans to dumb down political coverage? Yet only hours later we saw Mr. Jeremy Paxman asking questions of the leader of the Liberal Democrats that were highly personal and completely irrelevant to political debate. This is an issue for all of us who are involved in politics, whether covering politics or involved in policy making. Are there to be no limits to questions from interviewers? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that will do nothing to enhance the institutions of Parliament or the BBC?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a serious issue. Irrespective of political party, many Members must have been taken aback and distressed by the degree of personal questioning that took place yesterday. It does not matter how frank and open the replies Members give in these circumstances are—we all know that in such circumstances, when mud is thrown, there is a tendency for it to stick, and it is difficult to dispose of it.

The BBC needs to reflect on the fact that it is a public service broadcaster. As a result, it uniquely receives a licence fee that is paid by all viewers within the United Kingdom. One of the conditions of retaining that privileged status is that it should not seek to dumb down and compete with the bottom end of the market.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Will the Leader of the House arrange next week for a Minister from the Department of Health to make a statement in the light of the crisis in care homes, especially in the Birmingham area, which is causing grave concern to many, including my hon. Friends the Members for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) and for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride)? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that as a result of the Department with responsibility for social services spending 100 per cent. less on fees to private homes compared with its own homes, over the past 18 months it has forced more than 80 homes to close, with terrible problems for the most vulnerable and frail in our society?

Mr. Cook: I repeat what I have said in the House on a number of previous occasions. The Government have provided for a 20 per cent. increase in real terms for social service spending by local authorities. That compares with an increase in the last five years of the previous, Conservative Government of 0.1 per cent. Moreover, the House has just heard my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announce a comprehensive spending review, which provides for a similar increase over the lifetime of the next spending review. It is for local authorities to make their own judgments on priorities in their areas and how best to achieve them. It is not a matter for the Government to instruct local authorities and to try to second-guess how

[Mr. Cook]

they use resources. There are now far more resources—far more than were ever dreamed of by the Conservative Government.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Yesterday, thousands of local government employees, many of them low-paid women workers, were involved in action over their pay. Even if there is no time to debate the issue before the recess, will my right hon. Friend ask his ministerial colleagues to consider whether there is any further action that they can take to encourage an early resolution of the dispute through negotiations or the use of the conciliation and arbitration procedures?

Mr. Cook: The House will be aware of the dispute to which my hon. Friend refers. It is a matter for the local authority associations and their staff to resolve it. The offer that is on the table provides for a 3 per cent. increase. That fully matches the average settlement at present within the private sector. Over the past five years, settlements involving local government staff have more than kept pace with inflation.

I understand entirely the point that my hon. Friend makes about lower paid members of the local government sector. They are very much a matter of priority for the Government. That is why, through working families tax credit and through the other tax credits that we have provided, we have tried to make sure that we target and help those who are low paid. That means, for instance, that a school caretaker on £170 a week is now £56 better off than he or she was at the time of the 1997 general election. We shall continue to do all that we can to ensure that the low paid are assisted and get priority. I hope that the unions and employers, too, will find a settlement that does the same.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the recently published annual report of the president of appeal tribunals on the standard of decisions taken in the name of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions? For the second year running, he adverted to real problems in relation to the way in which medical evidence is collected, assessed and used by decision makers in reaching disability living allowance awards. The Department's own figures suggest that one in five cases is being under-awarded. Will there be an opportunity for the House to discuss that important matter?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. Many of us will have seen in our constituencies cases involving medical appeals where we might have come to a different judgment. The hon. Gentleman is well placed to ensure that such matters are processed, and no doubt his Select Committee will examine the matter and follow his lead.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Will my right hon. Friend reflect on the bizarre fact that after a Budget we have five days of full debate, but after a most welcome—but most complicated—comprehensive spending review, we have had no time at all for an extended debate? I say that because there were some omissions from the review. I am particularly concerned about the lack of any proper debate on provision for universities, some of which are facing such a funding crisis that, among other things, medical schools and faculties may close before Parliament reconvenes. Will my right hon. Friend request that the relevant Minister come to the House before the recess to discuss the apparent absence of commitment to our universities and their funding future?

Mr. Cook: I would not accept that there is an absence of commitment to universities. Indeed, we are proud of the fact that we now have entry rates that are among the highest of any of the OECD countries, as well as one of the highest rates of completion of higher education, and we want to build on that success.

I remind my hon. Friend that we heard a very full comprehensive spending review statement on Monday. It was well received inside and outside this Chamber and by many of those working in the public services, including in education. Since then, there have been two or three other statements in the House on how the money is to be spent by Departments, and hon. Members will have an opportunity fully to debate the matter next Tuesday. The totality of that record does not suggest that we are either seeking to deny the House the opportunity to explore the issues or saying anything that has not been well received here and elsewhere.

Bob Spink: The right hon. Gentleman showed an uncharacteristic lack of knowledge in answering the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend). He said that the decision taken on the Hashmi case was not a ground-breaking decision, but simply another in a string of decisions. That is not the case. It was a ground-breaking decision, as was acknowledged by the health editor of BBC Online this morning. Is it not time that the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 was brought back before the House to be debated, so that we can make decisions on matters of such fundamental importance as the creation of new human life for a pre-designed purpose?

Mr. Cook: I gently say to the hon. Gentleman that my election by my constituents and my democratic mandate entitle me, just occasionally, to disagree with the BBC, and I may indeed do so again. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful for that encouragement. On the BBC this morning, I heard the spokesman for the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority herself say that the decision in that case was taken perfectly in line with many previous decisions to ensure that the child was born healthy.

I repeat what I said earlier: I deprecate our debating in this Chamber the circumstances of one particular case. It is not our business, nor should it be decided along political lines.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I ask my right hon. Friend for a debate on early-day motion 1637.

[That this House welcomes the intention of film producer Steven Spielberg to create a television series recreating the life and battles of King Arthur, including British actors in the production; notes the success of the series 'Band of Brothers' filmed in England; recognises the historical and mythological connections of King

Arthur with Somerset, the identification of Camelot with Cadbury Castle and of the Isle of Avalon with Glastonbury; believes the beautiful and unspoilt countryside of Somerset would therefore be an ideal location for filming such a series; and calls on the Department of Culture Media and Sport to do everything possible to attract the production to Britain and to support the rural economy.]

That contains the dastardly and preposterous suggestion that the court of King Arthur was located at a site other than Caerleon in the city of Newport. A thousand years ago, the Mabinogion and the writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth identified Caerleon as Camelot. That was confirmed by Tennyson, who wrote his Arthurian poems in Caerleon, and by the Loyal Knights of the Round Table, who funded the excavation of the round table in the village in 1928.

Now that Steven Spielberg is thinking of making a film about Arthur, is it not wrong and opportunist of certain other areas to claim that their towns were the site of Arthur's round table? Can we have a debate on the matter? Not only might the claim threaten an opportunity for further jobs and prosperity in the beautiful town of Newport, but it is a terrible attempt to steal part of Welsh history.

Mr. Cook: Of course, many Scots scholars maintain that Arthur was a prince of Strathclyde, and the legends recount the way in which he defeated the Angles of Northumbria. I therefore conclude that the whole of Britain has a good claim to sharing in Arthur's legend, exploits and success.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Leader of the House accept that, after Tuesday's partial apology from the IRA, it is more important than ever for the Government to present their promised statement on Northern Ireland before the summer recess? Does he agree that it must spell out the full implications of the Prime Minister's statement at Hillsborough about the breaches in the IRA's ceasefire? The Prime Minister said that the Government would

> "lay down the clear principles that we abide by, and what happens if people don't abide by them."

Does the Leader of the House agree that the time has come for the Government to impose sanctions on Sinn Fein-IRA and others who fail to abide by those principles?

Mr. Cook: As the hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland welcomed the apology; it is a useful contribution to the peace process. However, the hon. Gentleman is right that the apology is valuable only if it helps us to make progress with the peace process. The test of the apology is whether we make the progress that is necessary to secure a permanent and just settlement in Northern Ireland. That is the Government's objective.

A statement will be made before the House rises for the recess and the hon. Gentleman can put his points to the Secretary of State then.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I acknowledge the leading role that the Government play in supporting international research into air travel and deep vein thrombosis. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to ensure that, throughout the summer, his colleagues in the Department for Transport and in the Department of Health continue to maintain pressure on other Governments to play an equally responsible role in funding the World Health Organisation's essential research?

I note that my right hon. Friend is not flying away on holiday this summer. However, all hon. Members will receive a free copy of the fitness-to-fly self-assessment guide before the House rises next week.

Mr. Cook: I am sure that all hon. Members will be grateful for any addition to their holiday reading. I am glad that my hon. Friend has had an opportunity to repeat his point in the last business statement before the recess. He has been one of our most regular contributors and I congratulate him on the tenacity and diligence with which he has pursued a serious issue. We are trying to make progress on the matter, and I believe that our Government have made a useful contribution to the international debate on it.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Notwithstanding the amusing exchanges between the Leader of the House and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), some important issues arise from the conduct of the business yesterday and today. Less than 16 hours after a major debate on a subject, a Secretary of State is coming to the House to make a major statement on it. That cannot help hon. Members to debate in a well informed fashion.

More importantly, we will consider the Proceeds of Crime Bill later, and there is no doubt that our time is being squeezed. Whatever the Leader of the House thinks of the measure, it is not perfect and it needs fine tuning. Could we table a manuscript amendment to the programme motion so that we can sit longer to ensure that all hon. Members scrutinise the Bill fully?

Mr. Cook: Although the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and I seek to be as interesting as we are when we make our points, there is always a profoundly serious purpose in our exchanges. I do not think that the House can reasonably criticise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I think it very important that the House should hear as often as possible and at every opportunity about any developments in our armed forces. We had a debate yesterday, we will hear a statement today and we will certainly have a further debate when the House reconvenes after the recess—an announcement that I have just made. I do not see any reason why my right hon. Friend should be criticised for coming to the House separately to make a clear statement on a new strategy for the defence forces.

I note that the hon. Lady says that the Proceeds of Crime Bill is not perfect. I did not detect that view from the Leader of the Opposition yesterday, when he expressed the Conservative party's strong support for the Bill. With that good will and support, I am sure that we can make good progress today.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the excellent debate that took place on Tuesday night at the inaugural sitting of the Standing Committee on the Future of Europe Convention. In his

[Roger Casale]

work as Chairman of the Modernisation Committee, I know that he will continue to monitor the important and innovative work of that Committee, which is open to all Members of this House as well as to Members of the other place. In doing so, will he give particular attention to the recommendation made in the report of the European Scrutiny Committee on scrutiny in the House of Commons that there should be a European Grand Committee, of which the Standing Committee on the Future of Europe Convention could be the forerunner? There are very many European issues that do not currently have the platform or profile that they need in this place if we are to bring European decision making closer to the citizen.

Mr. Cook: We are, of course, considering the very thoughtful and far-reaching report of the European Scrutiny Committee, and we will return to the matter in the autumn when we issue the Government's response. I am not sure that I am immediately attracted to the idea of establishing another Committee in this area as a way of resolving the issue. As I have told the House before, I think that it is important that Europe should form a part of the work of all the departmental Select Committees, to ensure that they have mainstreamed the European dimension. However, I welcome what my hon. Friend said about the extraordinary Committee that we have set up to hear reports from our delegates to the future of Europe convention. The Committee is an innovation, and it hears from the Back Benchers who report to it and not from Ministers. I believe moreover that it is a useful innovation that is right for the current circumstances.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Can we have an early debate on the Government's ideas about changing the way in which money is distributed to local authorities? It appears that they are currently considering three proposals that will result in substantial reductions in the amount going to councils such as the Wokingham unitary authority. We find that very difficult to reconcile with their statements about there being more money for schools and social care. Can we have a proper debate about what the Government are proposing, so my right hon. and hon. Friends and I can have the opportunity to represent our councils and constituencies, which may suffer a lot as a result of the proposals? We are quite happy to stay on for another couple of days to finish the job.

Mr. Cook: I am not entirely sure that the right hon. Gentleman understood what I said in announcing the business for the week after the recess, as I announced that that issue would be a matter for debate on the very first day when we return to the House. In the meantime, I remind him that the Government have published options. We have expressed no preference as regards those options, which are out for consultation; and as a result of the representation that I received last Thursday, the House will have a full opportunity to debate them as soon as we return. I would have thought that that would be welcome to the House.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan), will the Leader of the House explain exactly when in parliamentary terms autumn ends and winter begins? Yesterday's report of the Joint Committee on House of Lords reform stated that the first stage of the Committee's work would be completed in the autumn. When exactly is that? Given that Tennyson was quoted earlier, does he think that when the Committee issues its report, we will be seeing mists or mellow fruitfulness?

Hon. Members: Keats.

Mr. Cook: I cannot hope to match the literary flair with which my hon. Friend asks his question. [Hon. Members: "He's wrong!"] I can only hope that we manage to get some summer and autumn between spring and winter, although the matter appears in doubt at the present time.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The Leader of the House will be aware that in previous debates on the future of the Post Office, we have been assured that the universal service obligation is sacrosanct. He will also be aware that Consignia is currently trialling a scheme that may lead to small businesses being charged extra for the delivery of their mail before 9 am. Does he not agree that that appears to be a breach of the universal service obligation and the universal tariff, and will he ensure that the House has a debate on this important and disturbing development as soon as possible?

Mr. Cook: The universal service obligation certainly stands as a cornerstone of our relationships with Consignia and the Royal Mail, and indeed there is no suggestion that there will be a withdrawal of a universal service obligation to make a delivery to every premise six days a week. The pilot studies that have been proposed will affect only those premises that receive fewer than 15 letters a day, if I recall rightly. Those premises will get a delivery every day, although getting it before 9 o'clock may, in the pilots, be as a result of an additional charge. But these are pilots; there has been no universal decision yet for the country as a whole, and I am pleased that the Royal Mail appears to be reflecting on those pilots in the light of discussions.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): As the Leader of the House has confessed to being in a generous mood today, may I draw his attention to early-day motion 1408?

[That this House calls on the Government to strengthen its precautionary approach to the siting of mobile phone masts by introducing a moratorium on sites on or near to schools and by re-drafting PPG8 to make it clear that planning authorities can reject applications on the grounds of local public health concerns.]

The motion has been signed by 90 Members on both sides of the House. I signed it this week in the light of events that have taken place in Boldmere and in Wishaw in my constituency, which are causing great concern. Will the Leader of the House consider whether PPG8 should now be redrafted to ensure a better balance between the necessary commercial priorities of mobile phone companies and the rights of those affected by their decisions?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Stewart report found no evidence, on balance, of any general health risk, and that exposure levels were well below any risk level. As he rightly says, we have provided guidance on how planning authorities should proceed in these circumstances, but we are confident that no risk to public health has been demonstrated. If it had been, the planning system would not necessarily be the best way to address the problem. I am, indeed, in a generous mood, but I fear that my generosity has its limits.

Sustainable Communities, Housing and Planning

1.21 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the Government's plans for a step change in our policies for building successful, thriving communities. The Chancellor has been generous. He has given a good settlement for local authorities, regional development agencies, regeneration, housing and planning. Today, I want to talk about two elements—housing and planning—of our settlement to provide decent, affordable homes for people wherever they live, and I want the House to join together to make a step change in our approach.

Anyone looking at the record over the past decades will recognise that all Governments have failed to meet the housing needs of our people. There has been a continuing decline in the provision of all houses, social and private. We in the House should recognise that we have failed to meet the needs of this generation, let alone those of our children. The situation will get worse unless we take radical action now.

In the past 30 years, we have seen unprecedented economic growth, rising incomes, smaller households, and people living longer. We have seen an increasing demand for housing, but overall, we are building 150,000 fewer homes today than we were 30 years ago. It is no wonder that house prices are rocketing, and no wonder that many people cannot afford to live where they were born, in both urban and rural areas.

There are different problems in different places. We are failing to adjust to geographic changes in economic activity, failing to tackle abandonment and dereliction, and failing to provide homes for teachers, nurses and other key workers. We are placing our public services under pressure because they cannot get enough skilled staff. So today, I am announcing a step change in housing policy. I propose to do that by promoting sustainable communities, making the best use of our land, increasing development on brownfield sites and protecting and enhancing our green belt and valuable countryside.

The shortage of housing in London and the south-east is causing record housing costs, which are impacting directly on living standards. They are making it more expensive for companies and public services to recruit and retain staff, and more difficult for young people to get a foot on the housing ladder. They are also affecting our public services and forcing more families into bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Two years ago, in regional planning guidance 9, I put in place a "plan, monitor and manage" approach to planning for additional housing in the south-east. I said then that local authorities should provide for new homes at the rate of 23,000 a year in London and 39,000 a year in the wider south-east. Today we have to be open and honest, and recognise that those targets are simply not being met. We estimate that, over the last two years, the shortfall was approximately 10,000 homes, which has contributed to our problems. We can no longer allow this to continue. I am therefore announcing today a number of measures that will meet the real pressures and challenges that we face.

[Mr. John Prescott]

First, I will insist that all local authorities deliver the housing numbers set out in regional planning guidance. Tackling housing shortage is a national responsibility and we must all play our part—centrally and in local government alike. I am therefore putting local authorities on notice that, where they fail to meet their targets, I will take action to intervene.

Secondly, I will accelerate the existing proposals for significant growth in the four growth areas identified in regional planning guidance for the south-east. Two years ago, I asked for reports to be prepared on the potential growth in the Thames gateway, Ashford, the Milton Keynes area and the London-Stansted-Cambridge area. Those studies are complete or nearing completion, and they show how economic development will increase the number of homes we need.

Over the coming months, taking account of those studies, I will work with regional and local partners in each of the four areas to establish where, at what scale and how quickly that growth can be achieved. Overall, we estimate that at least 200,000 new homes can be created in those growth areas. In the Thames gateway in particular, I will be putting a renewed emphasis on delivery and, in discussion with the Thames Gateway Partnership, I will establish new means of delivering rapid regeneration.

Thirdly, we need to make better use of land by improving design, increasing densities and using brownfield sites to the full. In 1998, I committed the Government to a target that 60 per cent. of new homes should be on brownfield land. I am happy to report that the target has been achieved eight years earlier than predicted, but we need to keep up the pressure.

To help with that, I will establish a register of surplus brownfield land held by the Government and public bodies. I am instructing English Partnerships to use its new role on brown fields to search out and to deliver even more land for housing. I can also announce that we will be proceeding with a further three millennium communities in east Ketley, Milton Keynes and Hastings. That will add to the four we have already agreed in east Manchester, Allerton Bywater, Greenwich and King's Lynn, bringing the number of communities to seven and the homes that will be delivered to more than 6,000.

To produce more sustainable development, however, we must use land more efficiently to reduce the overall land take. To do that, I am announcing that I intend to intervene in planning applications for housing that involve a density of less than 30 dwellings per hectare. I am also setting a new target to protect valuable countryside. Since 1997, I have increased the green belt by 30,000 hectares. Today, I can announce for the first time a public service agreement target committing us to protecting the valuable countryside around our towns and our cities, and in the green belt.

We will not tolerate urban sprawl and we will not concrete over the south-east, as some have speculated in the press, or any other region, but housing pressures in London and the south-east are acute and they require ambitious solutions. My strategy of providing for sustainable, high-quality, well planned communities in the growth areas will benefit everyone. It will mean that we reduce the pressures elsewhere in the south-east and it will protect valuable countryside for the benefit and enjoyment of all.

There is a need not just for more homes, but for more homes that people can afford. We have said, "Schools and hospitals first." That means special attention for helping nurses, teachers and other public service workers to get affordable homes. Since 1997, the Government have almost doubled the funding for affordable housing, to £1.2 billion a year, and this is now supporting the creation of 20,000 new affordable homes every year.

Subject to further detailed consideration of how best to use the new money available, we will now be able to increase the funding to provide additional homes for key workers and new social housing for the homeless and families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. In addition to that new funding, we will be looking for ways to extend our existing programmes for affordable housing through a greater partnership with employers and public and private landlords.

The problems in the north and the midlands are different, but just as pressing. Some of our towns and cities are experiencing a renaissance in their economic and cultural fortunes, but many also have communities where properties are almost worthless, leaving people trapped in negative equity and facing the problems associated with social exclusion. We are building the wrong kind of houses in the wrong places and failing to tackle fully the urban decay associated with that.

Earlier this year we announced the creation of nine Pathfinder projects in the north to tackle the most acute problems of low demand and abandonment in the north and the midlands. Those projects will help to tackle the blight afflicting properties in the Pathfinder areas. Following European Union approval, we will go ahead with our new housing gap-funding scheme, which will allow support for housing programmes where the market price is less than the cost of development.

We will also reinforce our efforts to improve the overall condition of housing, and to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of a decent home. In 1997, we released £5 billion of capital receipts to target the backlog of repairs to council homes. Over the last five years we have trebled council funding for housing to £2.4 billion a year, and in 2000 we set ourselves the challenging target of making all social housing decent by 2010. Those actions have allowed us to make good progress on housing conditions.

Overall, 1.7 million improvements have been made to council homes, and we are well on track to meet our interim target of bringing a third of the worst social housing—550,000 homes—up to a decent standard by 2004. We will work towards that target by devoting even more resources to refurbishment, by allowing all local authority arm's-length housing companies to apply for additional funding, and by reviewing all policies that contribute to our 2010 decent homes target to ensure that they are as effective as possible and provide value for money.

Not just social housing needs attention. People in the private sector suffer some of our worst housing conditions. All too often, housing benefit funds the provision of unfit housing, to the detriment of the tenant and the benefit of the landlord. That is unacceptable. As soon as parliamentary time allows, we will legislate to tackle the minority of unscrupulous landlords and boost our drive against poor conditions. Over the last five years we have given local authorities funds to help improve

30,000 private homes a year. I can announce today that we are setting a new objective to help improve more non-decent private-sector homes occupied by vulnerable households.

We are investing large sums in improving all housing, so we must have an inspection regime that drives up standards across the board and ensures reform. I can now announce that I will establish a single housing inspectorate, building on the excellent work of the Audit Commission and the Housing Corporation. I can also announce that we will establish strong regional bodies, going with the grain of our proposals for regional governance. Those bodies will bring housing investment together in a single regional pot, and will link that investment with planning, infrastructure and economic growth strategies. I will announce further details later in the year when I have discussed them with key stakeholders, and I will establish the new arrangements as soon as possible.

To achieve a step change, we need to increase resources for the planning system and bring about much-needed reform. We are therefore providing an extra £350 million for the planning system over the next three years. That money must be targeted where it will improve performance the most—and I give notice that if poor performance does not improve, I will intervene.

The extra money will be linked to reform. Today I am publishing three documents: our response to the recent planning Green Paper consultation and supporting papers on compulsory purchase and on our regional and local plans. Copies are available in the Library.

The documents contain extensive reforms. Let me summarise some of the key points. First, we will give counties a new statutory role in underpinning the new regional planning system, but we will abolish the county structure plans themselves. Secondly, we will introduce business planning zones to deliver growth, jobs and productivity without sacrificing quality of development. Thirdly, I will speed up the planning of major infrastructure projects by setting out the Government's objectives in clear policy statements, and changing inquiry processes to make them more efficient. I have accepted the Select Committee's argument that the parliamentary procedures for major infrastructure projects are not the best way forward. Finally, I will not change the right for objectors to make their case to the inspector at inquiries into plans but I will take action to speed up the inquiry process.

The proposals that I have announced today focus on creating sustainable communities that will meet the needs of all, regardless of where they live or the size of their pocket, but they are just the start. I will return to the House by the end of the year with a comprehensive long-term programme of action. That will meet the different needs of both the north and the south. Whether it is key workers in need of affordable accommodation or families trapped by negative equity, we must work together to find solutions to those problems.

Our long-term programme will link policies on housing, planning, transport, education, health and regeneration—essential for the sustainability of our communities. It will demand a new standard in how we build houses and communities, seeking improvements in density, design, environmental standards and, yes, construction techniques. It will protect and help to revitalise the countryside both for those who live in it and for those who seek their leisure there.

This is a strategy for the long term. We know the problems. We have the commitment. We have the resources to make that start. We must recognise in the country and on both sides of this House that we have not done enough over the years. We need more homes where people want to live, near where they work, in the north and in the south, at a price that people can afford and in a way that protects our countryside.

This is a challenge to us all, but I believe that the strategy that I have put to the House today will begin to rise to that challenge.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for early sight of the statement on what the Government may at some future time do with regard to housing policy. I suppose that in this Jubilee year it is natural for us to look back as well as forward, and I think that there is more than a touch of nostalgia in the Deputy Prime Minister's statement. He is known throughout the House as a deeply sentimental man, much given to romantic gestures. Conservative Members certainly appreciate the gesture of the statement as we rapidly approach the 50th anniversary of the death of Joseph Stalin. There can be no greater tribute to central planning than this housing statement.

Just as the great generalissimo felt frustration over tractor production figures in the Urals, so the present Government will feel frustration over this half-thought-through attempt to solve the country's housing problems. Make no mistake, the crisis is entirely of the Government's own making. Who else but this Government, who presided over the worst housing figures since 1924—the year that Ramsay MacDonald was Prime Minister—could make a virtue out of reversing their own mistakes? This great leap forward is to achieve the same housing building figures that were achieved under Thatcherism. Perhaps the Prime Minister is right—perhaps we are all Thatcherites now. *[Interruption.]* Well, I certainly am.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister recall saying in April 1999:

> "the green belt is a Labour achievement, and we mean to build on it"?

Is this what he meant: concreting over the green belt of Kent and Essex, destroying the character of those counties?

In his statement, the Deputy Prime Minister made great play of increasing the amount of green belt. Indeed, he took some credit himself, but it has to be said that not one single acre of green belt was added to either Kent or Essex. He also says that, eight years ahead of schedule, 60 per cent. of developments are on brownfield sites. That is a direct result of the poor housing figures. Frankly, 60 per cent. of not very much is still not very much. There are no significant brownfield sites in Uttlesford.

The submissions to the Chancellor were made when transport was the responsibility of the right hon. Gentleman's Department, yet there are some deep contradictions in them. Doctors, teachers and nurses need to work in London and the south-east, and no new rail links have been announced. People living in the new houses in the new conurbations will face long,

[Mr. Eric Pickles]

uncomfortable and expensive commuter journeys. Doctors, nurses and teachers want to be part of established communities. What estimate does the Deputy Prime Minister have of the average time that it will take the occupants of the new homes to travel to work?

The statement did not address the problem of the flight from our inner cities, and the Deputy Prime Minister's suggestion that he will intervene rings rather hollow, because he shilly-shallied over the development at the Elephant and Castle. If the Government had shown some backbone over that, many of those new houses would already have been built in Southwark.

People are fleeing the city because of the quality of life—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please let the hon. Gentleman be heard; that is only courtesy.

Mr. Pickles *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pickles: I am most grateful for your protection, Mr. Speaker.

A violent crime occurs every 20 seconds in the city. People also leave the city because of overstretched health facilities and poor schools that teachers would not—to coin a phrase—touch with a bargepole. Has the Deputy Prime Minister explained his plans to the Secretary of State for Education, because there was nothing in her statement last Tuesday to suggest any match-up or joined-up government?

What percentage of people in the new rural communities will travel to work by bus, by rail and by car, and what additional capacity is being built into public transport to allow for the new homes? What estimate does the right hon. Gentleman have of the increase in road congestion? Will he confirm that at the last count there were 193,000 empty properties in London and the south-east? Has that figure gone up or down in the past year, and what is he going to do about it?

There is a second contradiction at the heart of the proposal. Last week the Government announced that they will take £100 million in Government grant away from Kent and Essex, yet at the same time obligations to provide new schools, extra social services and doctors' surgeries will be imposed on those counties.

Has the Deputy Prime Minister had the chance to have a word with people who know about the planning problems in that part of the world? Has he spoken to the water companies, and is he aware that there is an acute water shortage in both Kent and Essex? He has not mentioned any provision for supplying drainage or sewerage for the new homes.

The right hon. Gentleman needs to address the disparity in costs for developing brownfield sites. Until he does, greenfield sites will always provide the quickest solution. Kent currently has a land bank to meet its housing needs for 11 years, but much of it consists of brownfield sites and contaminated land. Helping counties such as Kent to bring those sites back into use would be a much better way to spend public money.

The simple and hard truth is that there is nothing particularly expensive about building property in the south-east. Building and fees are not expensive, but land acquisition is—and the right hon. Gentleman's proposals will simply make land in the south-east more expensive.

The idea of business planning zones was heavily savaged by the Select Committee. Whether its criticisms were right or not, there is still a fundamental problem with the idea. Will not areas close to the zones be at risk? Will it not be a case of chase the job around the region? A new set of multiplex cinemas or a do-it-yourself outlet will not revitalise an area. That idea smacks of 1980s solutions—*[Interruption.]* The 1980s were 20 years ago, and local authorities are in a different position now. They are much more able to work together than they were 20 years ago.

We of course welcome the U-turn, following the Select Committee's criticisms, on the suggestion that this House impose a pattern. However, if the Deputy Prime Minister allowed those who want new runways in the south-east to draft the recent proposals, he should not be surprised that they were both unpopular and workable.

I believe that the Deputy Prime Minister will regret the decision on country structure plans, which have been worked on hard for a number of years. He set up the Crow report, and many of the working parties are waiting to report on their findings. It would be a grave mistake to ride roughshod over local communities and local democracy.

Five years ago, the Deputy Prime Minister ordered the building of 10,000 houses on the green belt near Stevenage. Now, he has returned to type—to the policy of the bulldozer. The charge that is laid against this Government is that throwing money at the problem will not work without reform. However, he has gone one step beyond: money is being thrown at the problem without reform or thought, and it will not work.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: It would be so easy to enter into a diatribe between the political parties on what has been achieved. I did ask the hon. Gentleman to consider the fact that housing figures have fallen under all Governments, and although I will accept some responsibility on behalf of this Government, I should point out that we have not been in power for all of the last 30 years. We took over from a Government whose housing policy had led to the repossession of some half a million homes, and a £19 billion council home repair backlog that we are trying to deal with. More than 1 million households suffered from negative equity, and the mortgage rate was 15 per cent. I do not want to get into that dialogue, but that was the result of 18 years of Conservative Government.

I entreat the hon. Gentleman to come to an agreement, because those in bed-and-breakfast accommodation who want a home, and who see the tremendous increase in house prices, want this House to be serious about the matter. They want us to end the political diatribe and to begin providing the homes that people need as an essential part of a good, decent life. I could enter into the Stalinist argument, but I was under the impression that the Tories, too, used regional planning guidance and advice in various areas. Is not the county structure plan an example of Stalinist thinking? I understand why the hon. Gentleman has to use such phrases, but will he recognise that the scale of the problem is such that this House should unite and say that we are going to do something different?

I invite the hon. Gentleman to join me in that step change—in making a difference. That means changing planning and the rules on house building, and putting the resources where they are needed to meet particular problems. That is a challenge for us all, and it is clear that the first step change needed is in this House, so that we can get together to bring about those programmes.

It is a bit of a cheek for the hon. Gentleman to talk about the green belt. I was the Secretary of State responsible for increasing the greenbelt by 30,000 hectares, but it was the previous Administration who reduced it. Those who recall the relevant debates in this House will know that the Opposition could not make up their mind whether the target in respect of brownfield sites should be 55 per cent., 60 per cent., 70 per cent. or 75 per cent. They had four targets in four days. They said that we could not reach our target but we reached it eight years early, and we are tightening up the process. So it is a bit of a cheek, given the record of the previous Administration, for the hon. Gentleman to use such arguments.

The hon. Gentleman said that more houses in the south-east should be built on brownfield sites, but what does he think the Thames gateway is about? All 200,000 houses could be built in that area, provided that the money for the infrastructure can be found and long-term investment put in. Too often, short-term decisions have been taken; instead, I want to engage in the long term. Let the House together make the step change to meet the needs of our people. I will make a statement to the House about how all the various parts can be brought together. We need long-term thinking and long-term commitment. That is what this issue should be about; please join me in that aim.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I am slightly at a loss as to how to follow the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), but on behalf of the Liberal Democrats may I welcome today's statement and the fact that it rightly places housing and planning much higher up the political agenda? I welcome the admission of failure by the Deputy Prime Minister, but I acknowledge that he was right to say that Governments of all political parties have failed in the past. I welcome many of the proposals in the statement, but I wish to raise some matters of concern.

On refurbishment, why will the money go only to those areas with arm's-length housing corporations? What will be the effect on other parts of the country? The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar mentioned briefly—and I am sure that the Deputy Prime Minister is well aware of this—the scandal of the 750,000 empty properties, including tens of thousands in London and the south-east. Will he acknowledge that it is a great shame that little is said in the statement on that issue?

As 50th anniversaries have been mentioned, the Deputy Prime Minister will be aware that we are about to reach the 50th anniversary of the appalling floods in 1953. He mentioned the issue of sustainability, but can he tell us what protection he will give not only to the green belt but to the flood plains? Does he acknowledge that further building on the flood plains could seriously damage natural drainage patterns?

I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about housing benefit, but will he acknowledge that other reforms to housing benefit are urgently needed, not least as the current bureaucracy of the system is of enormous disbenefit to both landlords and tenants?

I welcome many of the arrangements that the Deputy Prime Minister is putting in place for planning. However, I am deeply disappointed that he is still not prepared to budge on the issue of rights of appeal for third parties. He should rethink that issue. While I acknowledge many of the proposals for speeding up major infrastructure project issues, I hope that he will accept that one additional proposal is desperately needed—that the relevant Secretary of State, having received the report from the inspector, makes a quick announcement about his or her decision.

Like the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, I am deeply concerned about the business planning zones. If they go ahead as currently proposed, they may mean that the very issues of sustainability, and high quality of design and build, will go totally out of the window.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I thank the hon. Member for his serious contributions to the debate and for his warm words. On refurbishment, we have tried to bring public and private finance together in those big operations to make public money go further. Like most public-private partnerships, the proposals are controversial, but some organisations have agreed to sign up for the process. We have moneys available for refurbishment of private properties, so funds will not pass only to the arm's-length companies. The scale may be different, because it will involve individual households or one or two private homes, as opposed to a large development.

The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about empty homes, and I want to look seriously at that issue. Much more could be done by using the empty spaces in urban areas. For example, I encourage private companies to develop space above shops for housing, which has great potential. It is also important to do something about compulsory purchase powers, and that is why I have placed a document on that issue in the Library. We need to develop a comprehensive approach, and I shall make particular efforts in that area.

On the issue of sustainability and flood plains, I would point out that the whole London area is what would be called a flood plain, and even my local area in Hull is designated a flood plain. However, both areas have barriers that have prevented floods in the past. What is critical is proper investment to protect the land, and in the latest announcement on public expenditure we increased the amount to be invested in those areas. Any new development must be protected against floods, because too many have not been in the past. Many changes have now taken place.

I hear what the hon. Member for Bath says about planning. I am disappointed that he feels that I have not gone far enough, as the Conservative spokesman said that I had performed a U-turn. The document notes that third parties have a role to play in inquiries, and it does not outlaw that. However, we are against inquiries being dragged out unnecessarily for the sake of vested interests. The Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions thought that that was wrong, as did everyone consulted.

[The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State]

The terminal 5 inquiry is often used as an example of how the process can drag on. I grant that that was exceptional, but it is not the only case. We must achieve a proper balance between the right of people who may be affected to have a say, and the public interest. The document in the Library tries to strike a better balance than was suggested in the earlier consultation document.

Sometimes, as Secretary of State, I have taken passages out of my contributions to avoid taking up too much of Parliament's time. A passage that I removed today had to do with something that I have learned through my experience in the job—that the process takes too long once Ministers have been called in and have received a recommendation from an inquiry. I therefore propose to place a statutory enforcement limit on Ministers to ensure that they complete their role in time. I am asking local authorities to modernise, but I also accept that we in the House must do our bit too.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I thank my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister for listening to the recommendations of the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions, especially on empty homes and the planning system. That is extremely welcome.

However, does my right hon. Friend accept that a fundamental problem in this country is that there is housing misery in the south-east because of the shortage of homes there, and a surplus of homes in many parts of the north? In his role as Minister with responsibility for the regions, will my right hon. Friend try and find ways to move some of the jobs that do not need to be in the south-east up to the regions? Will he work on getting it across to people that the north-west or north-east are very attractive places to live? If we could move some of the jobs to which I referred, we would be able to match housing and need.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I thank my hon. Friend for those remarks. He is Chairman of the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and I always value the advice that I receive from Select Committees—although I admit that I value the advice of some more than others. However, Select Committees play a valuable role in the House in keeping Ministers on their toes when they argue their cases.

I was especially appreciative of the report from the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions on planning procedures, and I have taken its advice, especially on parliamentary matters. My experience in the House with the legislation for the channel tunnel and the Cardiff bay barrage has convinced me that discussing planning procedures here is not necessarily the quickest way of dealing with them. I took the Select Committee's advice on that.

My hon. Friend made an important point about jobs. As I noted in my statement, the problem goes beyond houses: it includes health, education, transport and jobs. The reports coming out on the new community areas are interesting, in that they make it clear that there is a greater demand for housing when it is associated with economic development. We should plan the lot together. Regional development agencies and regional strategies will help us to achieve that—but the Opposition, of course, would abolish RDAs as part of what I understand is their drive against Stalinism.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The Deputy Prime Minister referred in his statement to the four areas that he has designated as having potential for very high growth, of which my constituency of Ashford is one. Although existing problems include an inadequate transport infrastructure, local health systems that cannot cope with the growth already taking place, and increasing problems with local schools, the interim results of the study to which the right hon. Gentleman referred have identified severe problems with the long-term supply of water, and suggest that much of the proposed new building would have to take place on the flood plain. If the right hon. Gentleman chooses to go for the high-growth option in and around Ashford, is he aware that he will be convicted of environmental vandalism in my part of Kent, and that the consultation exercise that he has indulged in for the past year will look like a complete sham?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I certainly hope that people do not think that. I am serious about consultation. Securing a step change such as I propose requires the co-operation of the people affected. No one gets such matters 100 per cent. right, but consultation must be taken seriously. The purpose of the studies and reports is to make an assessment of the situation, and to give people choices so that a debate can begin. That is exactly what I want to do.

As regards Ashford, I take the point about the importance of infrastructure. Indeed, it applies generally. Anyone who looks at the new areas will see the investment in the transport infrastructure. That is almost the first requirement. As we know, Ashford has the channel tunnel rail link, which I was able to renegotiate after it had collapsed under the previous Administration. It will give us 50 per cent. more capacity on the lines coming into London, but we need to back up the infrastructure from Ashford. It does suffer from water shortages, although I recall visiting it during the floods. The problems of flood plains must be taken into account. I do not want to build in areas that face that threat. That is why extra resources are provided. I understand that Kent county council has made it clear that that is one of the areas for expansion. I want to have proper discussions about that.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement as it affects Milton Keynes, and in particular the proposal for business planning zones, for which I have long campaigned. I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend has rejected a policy of no growth and a free for all, and is concentrating on sustainable communities. As Milton Keynes is on the boundary of three Government regions, may I have my right hon. Friend's assurance that the three regions will work together to achieve the Government's objectives for Milton Keynes?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: That is an important point, which applies not just to Milton Keynes but to the Thames gateway, where there are a number of authorities and regional development agencies. I suggested a new kind of vehicle to deliver regeneration better and more quickly, with the full co-operation of those bodies. We cannot act in defiance of them, so securing their co-operation is one of the challenges. My hon. Friend draws attention to Milton Keynes, which, together with the surrounding area, including Corby, is important and has always supported expansion as a growth area. The only difficulty is that the new Liberal council is against it.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): The Deputy Prime Minister's protestations about the green belt would be treated with more respect in Cambridgeshire if, when issuing his draft planning guidance, he had not made it not the last resort for development, but the second resort, after building within the city itself. What will happen to the Cambridgeshire structure plan, which is due to go to public inquiry this autumn? Will it be dropped now, or completed and then dropped? What is the future of the plan, which is currently guiding development? Will he heed the remarks of his hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) about the need to attract development elsewhere? The right hon. Gentleman is addressing a problem caused largely by internal migration from elsewhere in the country. If we can persuade organisations and magnets such as Cambridge university and the biotech industries to move elsewhere in the country and develop satellite operations, that will start to draw development away from the huge melting pot in the south-east.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Cambridge is a success story, as everybody knows. The issue is how we deal with development, given the successful development of its economy and the demands of inward investment. A number of companies want to use the resources and land available there, which, in a way, is out of kilter with the local development plan. The hon. Gentleman raised particular points about the inquiry. I am not sure about all the details and what the position is, so I will write to him. Cambridge is an area that is growing. The challenge is to ensure that that growth is balanced and sustainable.

David Wright (Telford): May I tell my right hon. Friend that the statement is one of the most impressive housing statements that we have had in many years? I spent some 13 years working in housing before coming into the House. Today's statement is much better than some of those that we had from the Conservatives during the years that I was a housing professional. Can my right hon. Friend give us some reassurance about how regional housing strategies will be developed? Will he ensure that, in areas of low demand, new affordable housing is developed where housing clearance has taken place? This is not just a simple argument about new homes in the south-east and no new homes elsewhere. It is an important issue for many areas in decline.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. He puts his finger on a difficult matter. The decentralisation of decision making and the regionalisation of discussions about housing are major changes. We have recognised that if we want a housing policy, we had better be clear about our education policy, the hospital programme and the infrastructure. That is the sustainable framework that we must establish. I shall shortly call a number of stakeholders together—the regional government offices, the Housing Corporation and the regional development agencies—to see how we can begin to take a regional view in developing a housing programme. Although I am announcing it today, the details have not been fully worked out. We stated in the regional White Paper that there will be a housing strategy on a regional spatial dimension, and we are working on giving guidance on that matter.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): The Deputy Prime Minister has rightly identified the growing problem of affordability. In constituencies such as mine, doctors, nurses, policemen and teachers cannot afford housing. Of course, there is an appetite among the Opposition for solutions to the problem. Will he clarify what he said about intervening if local authorities do not deliver? Where a local authority has undertaken extensive consultation and produced a district plan, in accordance with guidance from his Department, and where that plan has been adopted up to 2006, or perhaps 2011, will the local authority still be exposed to the intervention that he mentioned?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: With his knowledge of such issues, the right hon. Gentleman knows precisely that that is one of the major problems that we have to address. I could come to an agreement about housing, the programmes and our regional guidance on such matters, as I did in the discussion when some wide differences were expressed about Mr. Crow's recommendations on how many houses should be built in the south-east and how they should be apportioned to different local authorities. I sought to find a higher number, but one that did not involve greater land take because of the increased housing density that I propose.

If there is a failure to meet the objectives under the planned monitor-and-manage approach, which I introduced when I rejected the predict-and-provide approach, the responsibility will be placed on local authorities. I will now open discussion with those authorities—I have given notice of that in today's statement—and some of them are already announcing not only that they are not meeting those targets, but perhaps that they have no intention of doing so. Perhaps they are leaving such decisions in the hope that a Tory Government will be elected to change things. We are not prepared to tolerate that because this is not a political issue only; it involves all those who have not got homes. The right hon. Gentleman refers to doctors and nurses, but homeless people and those in bed and breakfasts are also carrying the pain, and I will do everything that I can to relieve it.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): May I congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister on introducing brave, radical and much-needed proposals to address the chronic shortage of housing in the south-east? Of course, that shortage was made worse by the decision of the last Government but one to flog off police and national health service housing. The cheapest two-bedroom terraced property in Reading now costs about £160,000, requiring an income of about £38,000 to gain access to the

[Mr. Martin Salter]

necessary mortgage—well beyond the reach of teachers, police officers and health workers, whom we desperately need and simply cannot recruit.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister realise that increasing the housing supply in areas such as Milton Keynes, Stansted and the Thames gateway will do little to address the problems in the Thames valley and that the Government will have to consider innovative and further measures, such as regional pay supplements or, indeed, interest-free loans, to bridge the equity gap that faces key public service workers in my constituency?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: My hon. Friend makes a very sound point. Indeed, he refers to one of the problems that I have tried to address in the few weeks that I have been in the job. I hope that when I return to the House with a further statement on how to deal with that issue, I shall have a better idea of the balance that will have to be struck, although I readily recognise that identifying new communities or new towns for development does not necessarily solve that problem.

An increased supply of houses will undoubtedly have an effect on prices, and all hon. Members will acknowledge that the shortage of supply is affecting prices. There are, of course, other economic considerations, so we cannot ignore the fact that this is not simply a housing problem. The issue of affordable housing in towns in the Thames valley, which my hon. Friend mentions, is a real challenge. I ask him to wait until we produce our proposals.

There is a range of ideas. Some things have been done, but others have not, and I want to put them in a proper context. If I just chose an area such as the Thames valley or Thames gateway, and said that all the houses could be built there, would I be prepared to find the billions of pounds for the infrastructure? How could I get my colleagues in the Department for Transport to deal with the order of priorities? There are major changes. How could I get my other colleagues to ensure that there were the schools and houses to meet those requirements?

I recognise that the different problems that my hon. Friend mentions cannot necessarily be solved by such an approach, but it can contribute to the solution. That is why I have to find a comprehensive framework. We have been too short term; we have concentrated on too many small issues; and we have got to make a step change, which is what I hope to do.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the call the next Member, I say to the House that if there were shorter questions, and perhaps shorter answers, many more Members would have a chance to speak.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Although the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement about brownfield site development in the south-east, particularly in the Thames gateway, will be very warmly welcomed, my constituents in central Berkshire will be amazed that his Government are still foisting so many extra unwanted houses on our area, when we have already taken more than our fair share. Cannot our excellent unitary authorities, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham, make the decision without him intervening and putting houses where people do not want them?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I am a little confused. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) has just said that there is a desperate need for housing in his constituency. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman's constituency is far from my hon. Friend's, yet he tells us that people do not want houses foisted on them. We need to sort out our priorities, which are: houses where they are wanted, at affordable prices, because everybody is entitled to a decent home. That is the challenge.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): My right hon. Friend's statement will be welcomed by teachers, doctors, nurses and police officers in my constituency, where there are currently recruitment difficulties because of the cost of housing in the area. Will he ensure, however, that when extra houses come on stream in the area, especially in the Thames gateway, extra needs—transport, medical facilities and school facilities—are taken into account as part of the planning process? That will ensure that the houses are part of a sustainable development and that they do not simply add to the pressures on infrastructure.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. Again, he has put his finger on a point that is absolutely crucial in the Thames gateway area that he represents. First, one cannot get investment in that area without the essential infrastructure investment to open it up. Following from that, one cannot just build homes; there must schools and hospitals, too. That is a real challenge. Long-term planning is necessary, not only in terms of housing, but in terms of education and health services. We need to put those things together, as I said in my statement. When I make my more comprehensive statement, perhaps we will see that we are agreed on how to achieve that.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): The Deputy Prime Minister is right to focus on more affordable homes, on more environmentally sensitively built homes and on better designed homes. Is he aware, however, that the solutions that he has outlined today spell a very black day for local democracy and for local communities? The abolition of county structure plans, particularly in East Sussex, will only raise the fear that he intends to intervene over the top of local communities' heads. Why should those local communities have faith in his centralising socialist solutions, given that he is the same Minister who, five years ago, promised solutions to all our transport difficulties, since when our transport system has descended into chaos?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: It is generally recognised by all involved—I have had time to read their reports—that there are too many plans in this area. We need to shape it better than we have before, which is why I have made these proposals. The hon. Gentleman's concern for county councils is very touching, in view of the fact that the Conservatives abolished three or four of them, county structure plans or not—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may not have done so, but I assume that he belonged to a part in government that did.

I am concerned about matters of planning and people to be consulted. The hon. Gentleman might think that this is a black day for democracy simply because we got rid of the county structure plans, but it is a much brighter day for those people who are looking forward to getting a house and a decent home. That is where our priorities lie.

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I welcome the statement and the proposals for affordable housing and accessible jobs in rural communities, which will be welcomed in the rural part of my constituency, where Labour is holding its national rural conference this weekend. I am pleased about the announcement, too, for the urban part of my constituency, and for the millennium village at east Ketley. It is an exemplary scheme. It is mixed tenure to meet all housing needs on a brownfield site, and it is a trail-blazing partnership between English Partnerships and the local authority, including a contribution of some £1 million to schools in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House and communities in new towns that this connotes the beginning of a new relationship between English Partnerships and local communities and local government, in which it will help to meet needs and solve problems, to which, in the past, it has all too frequently contributed?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks and for welcoming the millennium village concept at the community buildings in east Ketley. The review with English Partnerships is in its final stages. I envisage a strong and good role for English Partnerships in bringing groups together to ensure that we get the requirements for housing that are proposed in the millennium projects.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister on using the phrase "quality of design" several times in his statement. In that context, will he consider the documents prepared by his Department to ensure that quality of design is writ large throughout them? Will he also consider some of the contradictions that might lower design quality? Local authorities have to be able to set standards of design quality for business zones. Will he introduce general development orders for ports and docks so that they, too, have such standards? Finally, the right hon. Gentleman is going to get rid of the institutionalised bribery and corruption of section 106 agreements and introduce a system of tariffs. What impact will that have?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about industrial buildings, which we have seized on. We could get much more from such buildings. The designs of industrial buildings in some parts of our towns are a disgrace. They may win architectural awards, but I notice that the architects do not live in them. In such circumstances, it would be useful to combine the two aims. The Peabody Trust is doing some interesting work on that. Building design is important and I want to see more of it. It adds to the confidence of an area. That is why we recently produced a study on the built environment. I am keen on that and have already talked to a number of architects and developers to ensure that building design is taken into account.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, representing, as I do, a constituency in which housing is so expensive that the average university lecturer can no longer afford to live in the city. When he considers the county council structure plans, I urge him not to abandon the one on which Cambridgeshire county council is working. We are in desperate need of more land for housing because of the acute shortages. Much work has been done on the structure plan, and I hope that he will not put a question mark over its future at this stage.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: To be honest, I am not sure how to respond and will write to my hon. Friend. The matter that she raises could be a transitional problem of working to a certain plan. I want to do what is possible and best rather than laying down a rule that is then rigidly interpreted.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Does the Deputy Prime Minister recall coming to King's Lynn during the last election to announce the start of a millennium community in South Lynn, part of the Nar-Ouse regeneration area—NORA—scheme? His visit was a great success and helped to bolster my support. Is he aware that the scheme is crucial to regenerating a proud community? It will help to sort out a number of eyesores and land that has been derelict for a long time. Does he realise that part of the land has recently been sold? There is also a question mark over the start date. He is respected in my area. Will he visit us and give the scheme a kick-start?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: As the hon. Gentleman says, I visited that site. I am pressing hard to get the millennium developments up and running. They are not simply about providing houses. They offer a whole new approach to communities, involving design, environment and sustainability. I am delighted one such project was awarded to King's Lynn. I hope to visit a number of the projects and to take an active role, whether it is in King's Lynn or elsewhere. But does he want me to visit his constituency to improve his contacts, because I could always come down and damage them?

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): May I suggest that my right hon. Friend invites Opposition Members who are sceptical or nervous about the proposals to visit my constituency, in particular Gravesend town centre, which already provides high-quality affordable housing within a regenerated town centre for the key workers that we so desperately need? Given that north Kent is subject to a number of infrastructure investment projects, which are important for our future prosperity, will he underline his commitment to the fact that the consultation process will not be damaged by the streamlining of planning, which we all welcome? Will he assure me that my constituents' views will be heard?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I agree with the point that my hon. Friend makes about Gravesham, which is an important area in the Thames gateway. I am well aware, although I have not seen some of it, of the excellent work that is done through the combination of the Housing Corporation and the local authority. I would like to see more of that. That is one of the reasons why my right hon. Friend with responsibilities for regeneration will be leaving the Chamber after questions on the statement to visit the area that my hon. Friend represents. Perhaps he could then start the discussion.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): There will be great concern in my constituency about what the Deputy Prime Minister has announced this afternoon. I ask him a question about principle. Planning powers currently rest, rightly, with locally elected councils. What is the point of people continuing to vote in local elections if the councillors whom they subsequently elect can have thousands of houses rammed down their throats by regional quangos? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that establishment of the quangos that he has announced will require primary legislation?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I have not announced any new quangos today. We are talking about organisations that are in place. I want to bring in regional governance, which will make these bodies accountable. I understand that the policy of the Conservative party is to get rid of regional accountability and have more and more quangos. That is the Conservative party's history.

Accountability and planning are important parts of local democracy. We are not abolishing the process but strengthening it. There is controversy about the counties but we are not abolishing their planning role. We are abolishing structure plans, but we are giving the counties certain statutory powers that they already have in terms of mineral rights, transport and statutory consultation, for example. The counties are important, but the issue is about getting a proper balance.

I am trying to achieve a balance that is more effective and more efficient in terms of what the hon. Gentleman calls unwanted homes. I do not know what people feel when they hear Members saying, "We don't want any of these homes. We don't need them." Housing is a national responsibility, and the responsibility of the House is to provide it. Even if the people who need housing are not in his constituency, they are entitled to be considered.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): May I thank my right hon. Friend for the commitment that the Government have made to the welfare of Hastings, and especially today's decision that it will have the status of a millennium community? My right hon. Friend is absolutely right when he says that these new communities will work only if transport infrastructure is available. Roads are not easy to build. Will he use his influence to ensure that the Strategic Rail Authority gets on with the job of electrifying the Ashford line and providing new signalling so that the millennium villages really can work?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: My hon. Friend reminds me that it is always easy to talk about infrastructure investment in various areas. When I had responsibility for transport, he often asked me to do something about road communications with Hastings. He will know that a considerable amount of extra money has been made available for transport. He will know also that reviews are under way. I hope that he is more successful, but I thank him for his kind words about the millennium community.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Where a local authority has an adopted plan, it having been adopted in entire conformity with the Government's guidance, does the Deputy Prime Minister intend to overrule its provisions? Is he to call in every development where the density is fewer than 30 houses per hectare? Will there be a size threshold? Does that run alongside or instead of the provision on social housing? What are the implications for the size of the inspectorate and the cost of it, public inquiries and delays in approvals?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Provided that the plan is in conformity with the Government's advice, I have no intention of overruling it.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I welcome the Government's commitment to improving and increasing the housing stock. Will my right hon. Friend turn his attention to the problems of inner London, where there is enormous housing pressure. There are very high rents in the private sector, enormous numbers of people are on waiting lists and, tragically, a huge number of people are living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Will my right hon. Friend do his best to ensure that local authorities have the resources to buy whatever land becomes available, and that that will apply likewise to registered social landlords? Above all, will he ensure that planning laws are so implemented that 50 per cent. of all residential development sites are used for affordable rented housing? At present, most of these sites are very small, and therefore are way outside the guidelines that apply elsewhere.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I agree with the central thrust of my hon. Friend's point about providing more affordable homes in London. That can be achieved through smaller developments, as provided in the Mayor's London plan. We have not yet responded to that, but I believe that a great deal more can be done. I am in active discussions with London authorities about planning, resources and the framework in which these things are done.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I welcome the spirit of the Deputy Prime Minister's statement. The entire country needs more affordable low-cost homes—we certainly need them in the south-west. If affordable, low-cost housing is to be built for sale, we need the funds or we need to subsidise the developer. If Government funds are provided, the purchaser receives Government help. Without a covenant, the home will be sold on the open market and therefore will be lost for ever to the low-cost housing regime. Does the right hon. Gentleman propose to subject every sale to a covenant, and so lock the house into low cost? If he does that, those living in it will never be able to afford to get on the housing ladder. How will the whole thing work?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. I hope that I will be given more encouragement, given the spirit of the approach. It will be much better if we can get more co-operation, rather than the spirit of some of the earlier exchanges following my statement.

The hon. Gentleman puts his finger on a difficult problem. There are various difficulties. For example, we are putting a great deal of money into areas such as Hull to knock down houses, but at the same time we are trying to get money to build houses in areas where they are needed. It is important to bear that in mind. We must ask whether unwanted houses should be knocked down and about the priorities given to using existing resources.

We appear to be trying to find money to meet the difference between the market price and affordable housing. That is not easy in areas such as the delightful one that the hon. Gentleman represents, where the demand is from people elswhere who want to move to them to retire. That raises the real issue of communities providing housing for those who live in the area. The same may apply in the south-east or in rural areas. People are being told, "I'm sorry, you can't live by your parents; leave the community." That is unacceptable, and it is as true in a rural area as it is in parts of the south-east, and I shall address the matter.

Under the right to buy, property in urban areas is bought at a very discounted price, but it is then sold back to the state at a high price when improvements are sought. That is costing us millions of pounds. We must ask ourselves, what is the proper balance? These are difficult questions, and I have no easy answers. The difference between the price of a house and what is affordable goes right to the heart of these matters. I shall address the question in the coming months and return to the House with what I think is a conclusion.

Paul Clark (Gillingham): I welcome the statement, which is firm and fair in terms of housing policy. Within the Medway towns alone, the council estimates that, over the next 20 years, 20,000 more homes will be required just to meet the immediate need of the indigenous population. One of the reasons for the housing crisis is that from the mid 1980s, for 10 years, the Conservative Government allowed developments of fewer than 20 houses per hectare.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's comprehensive approach in having a transport, social and environmental infrastructure. It will be delivered by Government Departments, but what steps is he taking with developers and other parts of the private sector to engage them fully in delivering the necessary infrastructure?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point about getting all the stakeholders involved. It is not just a simple matter of encouraging local authorities to do more; we must include the private sector, including the builders. We must also consider the argument about whether the land is being held back, or whether it is being used for a better purpose that is to the advantage of the community.

On high density, I take the point that the previous Administration reduced the average to 20 houses per hectare. However, I said before that the housing situation has been declining for decades under all Administrations and we need to make that step change. I tried to address the issue of high density when I came to the House two years ago to announce some of these matters. The average for the south-east appears to be 24 per hectare, but in Islington, or elsewhere in London, there are areas of Georgian property where the density is 80 per hectare, yet prices are going through the roof. The millennium project community in Greenwich has a density of 90 per hectare. That is an example of what good design and an imaginative approach can do in bringing some of these issues together and that is what I must try to do.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Deputy Prime Minister has touched on a difficult problem. In my constituency in Surrey, the average house price is more than £300,000 and there are social housing problems. However, I am concerned that if he is going to override the local authority, there must be a judgment as to how best to deal with it. We cannot just have new houses built at 30 per hectare in a constituency that does not have brown land. That will mean that in-filling is the only way. Is the Deputy Prime Minister proposing to call in all plans and then impose further density restrictions? I have to tell him that the infrastructure locally is under strain and that it would be better for him to boost the payments to Surrey county council so that we have a greater social services spend that we can use.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I am not satisfied that all the brownfield sites have been identified. One of the curious things about housing is that all of the land that may be available for housing is not recorded in a form of land bank information. I have asked English Partnerships to see whether we can find more.

On the question of the density of housing per hectare, in the south-east, the average is 23 to 24 per hectare; that is the lowest of any developed economy. I do not believe that we cannot lift that higher than 23—say to 30, as I am suggesting, as a minimum—and, with good design, still get good quality housing. We can do that, but I suspect that it will be more profitable to build executive houses at 23 or 24 per hectare. I still think that a density of 30 per hectare can be profitable, and I am quite prepared to discuss that.

The hon. Gentleman asks what happens if the local authority does not agree. The answer is that it is the same whatever the number is. Let us say that the number was half what I announced for the south-east; there would still be some who said that they did not accept it. The responsibility is to find homes for people who live in areas with problems of supply and demand, where we are left with the kind of problems that we have at the moment.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend. How much money will come through the Housing Corporation in general, and how much through the Housing Corporation in London? Can he assure me that in multicultural areas such as mine, registered social landlords will still be able to build larger housing units because, in those communities, the larger family is still the norm and Londoners are six times as overcrowded in their housing as people in the rest of the country?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I recognise the point made by my hon. Friend about overcrowding in London and the desperate need for housing. That must be a high priority. The mayor has made the position clear in his statement and we will be doing what we can to help. We have provided £1.5 billion extra for housing, which is a sustainable increase. Some of that will be going to the Housing Corporation, but I said earlier that I want to talk to the various institutions that have a role to play to see how the money will be used. We have made more money available and we must be sure that it is used effectively.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Can the Deputy Prime Minister clarify the position with regard to Stansted and the Stansted corridor? Does he anticipate much of the housebuilding being concentrated on the immediate area of Stansted? How far into the hinterland of Essex, and particularly mid-Essex, might that corridor extend? What bearing will the right hon. Gentleman's statement have on the draft plan inquiry that is expected to be held next year in Chelmsford on its existing housebuilding proposals?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I am very much involved in the planning responsibilities, so I cannot answer that question. However, I will see if I can give the hon. Gentleman a more informed answer about the inquiry. With regard to the study of the M11 corridor—Stansted-Cambridge—that is an important matter and I have announced today that it is one of areas on which we want to concentrate. I have only just received the report and I cannot answer him now, but it is an area that we have identified. One of the significant features of development in communities is that airports are a very important part of regeneration.

Strategic Defence Review

2.35 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Following the appalling events in New York and Washington on 11 September last year, I launched work on a new chapter to the 1998 strategic defence review, designed to ensure that our defence policies, capabilities and force structures matched the new challenges that were so vividly and tragically illustrated on that day.

The SDR recognised the potential threat from new forms of terrorism. It recognised such asymmetric attacks as one of a range of tactics that an adversary might use. But the attacks on the United States showed that such attacks could have strategic effect. We have consulted as openly and widely as possible on the new chapter. In February, we published a discussion paper outlining some of our emerging thinking. Last month, we published a further discussion document, setting out proposals for enhancing the role of our volunteer reserves in home defence. Rarely has a defence White Paper had contributions from so many individuals and organisations. I am grateful to all of those, especially in this House and the other place, who have contributed.

Today we are publishing that groundbreaking White Paper, setting out further and more detailed conclusions, particularly in the area of capabilities to counter terrorism abroad. The White Paper covers a wide range of defence issues, but central to them is the way we want to use our forces against a determined, mobile, often disparate and elusive enemy. We must be able to get the right forces quickly to where we need them, make better use of intelligence to identify the threat, decide how to deal with it and then strike, decisively. This is known as "network-centric capability", but it can be summarised more simply as "detect, decide and destroy". It means being able to strike hard and fast, cutting down the enemy's time to think, plan and act. I will explain later how we intend to achieve this.

First, I should like to deal with the budget planning on which our ideas are based. The Government have already made £359 million available to fund operations in and around Afghanistan, including the cost of the new equipment our forces needed for these specific operations.

Further significant resources will be made available during the current financial year to enable us to manage the pressure arising from the high levels of activity in which we are currently engaged. But the new chapter is about planning for the longer term. International terrorism and other asymmetric threats are long-term challenges. To plan effectively, we need a solid foundation of resources. I am delighted to say that the results of the spending review—set out by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer earlier this week—provide an excellent basis from which to take forward our commitment to strong defence. It represents the biggest sustained real increase in defence spending plans for 20 years.

The defence Budget will rise by £3.5 billion by 2005–06 compared with this year. This means growth in real terms of 3.7 per cent. over three years; around 3 per cent. in 2003–04 alone. Within this settlement, the Government are making available over £1 billion of new capital and a £0.5 billion increase in the resource budget for the equipment and capabilities that the armed forces need to meet new challenges. It provides a mandate for accelerating the modernisation and evolution of the armed forces.

To ensure that we maximise the resources available to deal with new threats, we are taking further steps to improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which we deliver defence outputs. The defence change programme is focused on reforming the Department's business processes. It covers projects across defence, particularly logistical and supply systems and information systems. Recent operations have underlined the crucial contribution of our logistical organisations in supporting operations over long distances. Our aim is to continue to drive down overheads in order to maximise our front-line operational forces.

Since the events of 11 September, all areas of government have been involved in enhancing our arrangements for dealing with the threat from international terrorism. The Government have developed a broad-based strategy aimed at tackling international terrorist groups, ranging from cutting off their finances, through law enforcement, to military action. We recognise that a successful campaign will need to address the origins and causes, as well as the consequences, of international terrorism.

The armed forces have two principal roles in countering terrorism: home defence and action overseas. Although assisting in the defence of the United Kingdom is a key element of the campaign, long experience indicates that a wholly defensive posture will not be enough. Terrorism thrives on the element of surprise, and one of the key ways to defeat it is to take the fight to the terrorist. We must be able to deal with threats at distance—to hit the enemy hard in his own backyard, not in ours, and at a time of our choosing, not his, acting always in accordance with international law.

As well as helping to deal with the long-term causes of terrorism, we have identified several ways in which our armed forces, in partnership with other areas of government, can contribute towards a long-term campaign: first, by helping to prevent terrorism emerging; secondly, by deterring terrorist groups and states that might harbour or support them, or to coerce states to stop harbouring them; and thirdly, by disrupting terrorist groups and, in the last resort, destroying them. Our ability to operate alongside the United States and other allies, especially in Europe, will be essential to our future success. In the United Kingdom we have certain capabilities which many of our allies do not possess. Others, equally, can bring their own skills and equipment to the table. That role specialisation is crucial if we are to provide the overall military capability that future operations require. For example, at Bagram airbase in Afghanistan, Spain provided an excellent hospital facility, while the Jordanians and the Danes provided crucial mine clearance specialists. Other nations provided other specific capabilities. The overall effect was quickly to create a base on a scale that no single nation could have matched.

To be able to make such contributions, armed forces need to be ready to undertake three types of military tasks. First, there are stabilisation operations, for example the kind of operation undertaken by the interim security assistance force—ISAF—in Kabul this year and in Macedonia in 2001.

Secondly, there is deterrence and coercion. If an established state is harbouring or supporting a terrorist group, it may be necessary to threaten the use of force. Potential aggressors should know that we will use all our resources, military and non-military, to deal with their activities, reduce their chances of success, and ensure that the United Kingdom can act to defend itself and its interests. Aggression against us will not secure political or military advantage, but will invite a proportionately serious response.

Thirdly, there are find-and-strike operations such as those undertaken by the US-led coalition in Afghanistan. If terrorist groups continue to operate and to pose a threat, it will ultimately be necessary to disrupt and destroy them. Operations can range from interception at sea, which requires specialist boarding capabilities, to engagement by combat troops or with precision weapons.

We recognise that in future we may have only fleeting opportunities to strike at the enemy. That is where network-centric capabilities come in. Terrorist groups show themselves as little as possible. As Afghanistan has shown, it is vital to have the best available intelligence and communications to allow a rapid decision about when and where to attack. We need to be able to identify the enemy fast, then bring the necessary weaponry to bear in the shortest possible time. We need the sensor and the shooter to be better linked by a real-time network—we want to be able to detect, decide and destroy. That requires extra investment in airborne and other sensors, so we will upgrade the E3D AWACS aircraft. It also requires extra investment in networks to pass information quickly to allow strikes by sea-launched or air-launched missiles, by artillery, or by troops on the ground. That will give us more control of the battle space, hunting down the enemy, identifying targets, then hitting them hard.

Unmanned air vehicles will play an important part in the system. US forces in Afghanistan demonstrated how effective they can be in providing persistent surveillance of the battlefield or theatre of operations without putting the lives of aircrew at risk. Some of the American UAVs also provide an attack capability. I can announce today that we are accelerating our own UAV development programme—known as Watchkeeper—and will invest in state-of-the-art technology in that area in coming months. We have learned a great deal from the use of our Phoenix UAV in the Balkans, a system which was designed as an artillery spotter, but quickly took on a far wider intelligence-gathering role. Advances in datalink technology mean that modern UAVs offer greater potential for improving operational effectiveness. Certain issues of commercial sensitivity surround the Watchkeeper programme, but we expect shortly to select the two consortiums to work with us on the next phase of the project.

I can announce that we are setting up a new joint service trial to begin testing prototypes of the Watchkeeper system early next year. We will evaluate additional enhancements to our target acquisition and strike capabilities to enable them to operate 24 hours a day, in all weathers, and to enable rapid retargeting.

The work on the new chapter has also confirmed the increasing utility of special forces. It is not our policy to comment in detail on those forces, and I do not intend to do so today. However, I can say that we will be enhancing the capabilities of our special forces, particularly their key enablers, maximising their utility and flexibility.

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

The strategic defence review said that the size and shape of our armed forces should be determined principally by the requirements of operations in Europe, the Gulf and the Mediterranean. But terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda can operate worldwide and tend to hide in remote, ungoverned areas. Some small-scale operations may need to be conducted both further away and in areas with little or no local infrastructure. I can tell the House that we are looking at the use of more rapidly deployable and sustainable light forces and ways of improving their mobility and firepower. Operations in Afghanistan have again shown the importance of support helicopters, and we are examining possible enhancements in that area. We are also pursuing the concept of a family of air transportable medium-weight armoured vehicles—the future rapid effect system. In addition, we will accelerate the introduction of additional temporary deployed accommodation for our troops and further improve its hot weather capability.

We will also need to deal with a greater risk that terrorists will acquire chemical, biological, radiological—and potentially even nuclear—devices. We need specific capabilities to deal with such devices safely and to ensure the protection of our own deployed forces—and, indeed, of wider United Kingdom interests. Detailed techniques will have to remain secret, but I can say that we will acquire appropriate technology to meet the threats from CBRN weapons that we may face in the future.

There has already been some speculation about what the new chapter work might mean for the structure of the armed forces. I emphasise that it is focused on ensuring that we have the capabilities that we require. That will probably need some adjustments in order slightly to rebalance the force structure, but there have certainly been no decisions about any specific changes.

In the United Kingdom and in our overseas territories, domestic security is the responsibility of the civil authorities, particularly the police. When the armed forces are used, it is at the specific request of the civil authorities. We are therefore strengthening arrangements for liaison with the civil authorities at national and regional levels of government by creating joint regional liaison officers to act as a single point of liaison on emergency planning matters. In addition, we will establish reaction forces of around 500 reservists from volunteer reserve units of all three services in each of 11 areas of the country—some 5,000 to 6,000 reservists in all. They will aid the civil authorities in handling major incidents, with individuals committing themselves to turn out at short notice for a range of duties, including site search and clearance, transport and communications, control and co-ordination.

We have already taken steps to improve the ability of the United kingdom's air defences to respond to threats from rogue aircraft. Further enhancements to our radar systems are in hand. We are investing in airfields across the UK—RAF Marham in Norfolk, RAF St. Mawgan in Cornwall and RNAS Yeovilton in Somerset—so that they can support quick reaction alert aircraft when needed. Those are in addition to the bases that are already able to operate such aircraft, and will give us greater flexibility in our air defence arrangements. We are also considering seaborne threats—the armed forces supported the civil authorities in intercepting a suspect vessel in the channel approaches in December last year.

In the new chapter work, we wanted to avoid placing unmanageable demands on our people. We recognise that for a considerable time many of our service men and women have been working at or near—in some cases beyond—the boundaries of what was planned in the SDR. They have borne those challenges with their customary professionalism and determination. So have their families. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to them for the way in which they have shouldered those burdens. The needs of our people are a top priority for us. We will continue to work hard to deliver the real and sustainable improvements that they and their families deserve. Simultaneous operations place a particularly heavy burden on our enabling forces—crew for strategic aircraft and ships, logisticians, signallers, engineers and so on. We will work to ensure that we do not ask more of them than is reasonable.

The new chapter to the strategic defence review provides a firm foundation for responding to the threats demonstrated on 11 September. Together with this week's comprehensive spending review, which provided the largest sustained real-terms increase in the defence budget for 20 years, the Government are ensuring that the United Kingdom's armed forces have the investment that they need—investment to deliver new equipment and enhanced capabilities and to be a force for good in the changing strategic environment. I commend the new chapter and the defence spending settlement to the House.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for providing me with an advance copy, with the supporting documentation and the new chapter of the strategic defence review.

On Tuesday, the Prime Minister made it clear that the potential threat that Iraq poses is "enormous". At such a time, we should emphasise that far more unites Her Majesty's Government and the official Opposition than divides us. Whatever differences are aired between us this afternoon about the spending review and the new chapter, the House and the nation should bear in mind that we share the same dedication to basic democratic values, the same commitment to the war against terrorism and the same determination to face down dictators such as Saddam Hussein.

For a long time, we have said that the 1998 strategic defence review was underfunded. I therefore begin by welcoming the increased allocations for defence in the comprehensive spending review. However, we must put the increases in perspective. The Chancellor disingenuously claims a

> "rise of £3½ billion a year".—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 22.]

The Secretary of State for Defence repeated that claim today, and I fear that Labour is up to its old tricks again. *[Interruption.]* The Chancellor said that on Monday. Labour Members should read *Hansard*, which I have checked.

The House of Commons Library confirms that, on the internationally accepted measure of defence cash spending—the traditional measure—the increase in real terms is only £1.2 billion for the three-year period. Before Labour Members crow that the years of decline have been ended, I point out that the Government will not only spend less in 2005 than last year—for understandable reasons, which reflect the extra costs of the war in Afghanistan—but they will spend less than the Conservative Government in their last year in office when my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) were Defence Ministers.

Defence spending as a proportion of gross national product will continue to fall from the 2.9 per cent. that Labour inherited from the Conservatives to 2.2 per cent. in 2005. That is well below the SDR target of 2.4 per cent. that Labour set in 1998. Are the days of overstretch and underfunding truly over? I doubt it. I share the Secretary of State's admiration for the people in the armed forces, but I hope that the Government will not continue to take them for granted.

There is much to welcome in the new chapter, not least the thoughtful doctrine that the armed forces have started to develop for the war against terrorism. It rightly goes far beyond the use of simple military force. I reiterate our welcome for the increase in aid spending, which is vital in the war against terrorism.

We welcome the Secretary of State's intention to spend more on digitising the battlefield and on support staff and headquarters. However, that must not be at the expense of front-line ground troops, who are always decisive. They proved that in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, the Gulf and every serious military conflict in history. It would be dangerous for the Government to believe that our armed services can remain effective if they continue to reduce in size, however network-centric they become. Surely the Government have learned the lesson since 1998 that we need to put more boots on the ground. Although the Secretary of State has abandoned the 1998 manning targets for the armed forces and made a commitment to increasing the size of the Army, will he assure hon. Members that he has no plans to disband or merge regiments simply to make ends meet?

We have long harboured the suspicion that the Government will use under-recruiting as an excuse to scrap Scottish regiments such as the Black Watch and the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards. Will the Secretary of State spell out clearly what he meant when he said that an adjustment would probably be required to rebalance the force structure? When will he announce the detail of the review of force structures, which is likely to be far more controversial than his good news today?

In the coming weeks and months, we will study today's announcement and its implementation. The new chapter contains omissions, which worry us. Many European Governments and NATO, presumably supported by the Secretary of State, are already committed to the development of theatre missile defence systems. Where is the Government's much vaunted leadership in Europe on that? Even under the heading of force protection, the new chapter does not mention the missile threat. Why does not the document tackle the dispute between NATO and the European security and defence policy that is now in its fifth year?

Hon. Members should broadly welcome the Secretary of State's announcement today. However, I reiterate that the Government have so far failed to fund the defence capabilities that they promised in the 1998 strategic defence review. We must hold the Government to their commitments. The defence capabilities that are essential to safeguarding national security and fulfilling our international obligations must be fully funded. The next Conservative Government will do that.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's words of support at the beginning of his remarks. I am sorry that he did not see that through by studying more carefully my comments and those of the Chancellor. Let me deal with the hon. Gentleman's first whinge about the £3.5 billion. I clearly said that the defence budget will increase by £3.5 billion by 2005–06 compared with this year. The figure therefore applies to the CSR period. I did not claim anything else, and I am not aware that the Chancellor did so. The hon. Gentleman was responding to my statement and to avoid doubt, I emphasise that the £3.5 billion will be spent over the three years.

The figures have been published since Monday, and I am again a little disappointed in the research effort that the Conservative party puts into supporting the shadow Secretary of State for Defence. It has been found wanting, and not for the first time. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know the total cash increase, calculated on the previous basis, I shall provide the figures. In the first year, the increase is £700 million; in the second year, it is £972 million, and in the third year, it is £1,244 million.

Mr. Jenkin: Real terms?

Mr. Hoon: They are real-terms increases, after inflation has been taken into account. If I were one of the hon. Gentleman's researchers, I would be examining my terms and conditions of employment. They are simply not doing their job.

On the jibe about the percentage of GNP, the hon. Gentleman needs to consider more carefully the state of the economy at the time to which he referred and compare it with that today. In effect, he pointed out the success of the Labour Government in increasing economic growth and ensuring that we have more people in work and paying taxes than at any other time in the country's history. I therefore take his comments as implied congratulations on the success of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's economic policies, which are allowing us to deliver on defence and the full range of public services.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned more boots on the ground. If he had read the strategic defence review carefully, he would know that the targets for manpower in the armed services were indicative. They change year on year, and that has always been the case. Perhaps he might consult some of the hon. Members behind him who have done a ministerial job in the Ministry of Defence. If he chooses to ask them, they will tell him that those figures for manpower targets change annually, according to the needs of the armed forces, and that Ministers do not have specific control over them. Indeed, that can be one of the frustrations of the job, as those issues are determined by military requirements set by the chiefs of staff. If he knew anything about it, he would see the that the same argument arises in relation to force structures, as the issues are constantly changing. If they did not do so, we would be left with the armed forces that we required at the end of the 19th century, never mind those that we require at the start of the 21st century. Of course, those changes will be announced to the House at an appropriate stage, but they are not significant. I assure

[Mr. Hoon]

him and the House that no substantial changes are involved in the size or organisation of our historic regiments.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for the advance copy of his statement and the White Paper and supporting documents.

At least between the Liberal Democrats and the Government, there is a great deal of cross-party consensus on the continuing relevance of the conclusions of the SDR and the broad balance of the forces that the UK requires. However, it is always necessary to make adjustments even to the best-laid plans, so we believe that our defence policy should always be regarded as work in progress. We support much of what the Secretary of State has announced today on special forces, reservists, intelligence gathering and unmanned air vehicles.

Does the Secretary of State agree, however, that the greatest threat to our forces is still the problem of retention? Several branches of our armed forces, such as the defence medical services, are chronically under strength. What part of what he announced today will help recruitment and cut the number of men and women leaving the services? It is easy to pay tribute to those personnel, as we do, but we must match those fine words with deeds.

Does the Secretary of State agree that much of the campaign against terrorism will be undertaken without recourse to B52s or Marines and will be fought by accountants and diplomats? Does he therefore agree that there might be a case for ensuring that a single Cabinet member is responsible in the UK for all aspects of defence against international terrorism?

Finally, the Secretary of State should be proud of the victory that he has achieved against the Treasury. It is not bad. I am not sure that it is excellent but, in short, the men and women of our armed forces will receive the statement with relief rather than rapture.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support, especially for the special forces.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): It is hardly surprising.

Mr. Hoon: I could not possibly comment on whether that is surprising.

On retention, the hon. Gentleman is right. I have made no excuse at all: retention remains a challenge. We are doing remarkably well with recruitment in a very healthy economy, but clearly retention could improve. A number of specific measures have been taken, such as those relating to pilots, but we still need to do more and I make no apology for saying so. The Budget settlement will give us a degree of flexibility to address some of those issues, and not least the very difficult question of accommodation. As I have told the House before, some of the accommodation that is available, especially to single men and women, is in a shocking state and has been neglected for very many years. Sadly, accommodation is one of those areas on which it has been most easy for previous Governments to turn the other way and not allow appropriate investment. It is therefore important that we carry through the £1 billion programme for improving accommodation, especially single living accommodation.

I am also grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments about the Budget settlement. I emphasise that there is a five-year programme of steady increases in the amount available to defence in real terms. That will allow us to plan over a long period for the success of Britain's armed forces.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I believe that it was a measured and realistic response to the dreadful events of 11 September. There is always a danger that Governments will give a knee-jerk reaction and do things for show that have no great effect.

I accept entirely the need for greater global reach, flexibility and versatility, and the ability to deploy rapidly. However, given the delay in the A400M aircraft, is my right hon. Friend satisfied that we have the lift capability to allow us to deliver that versatility for the future?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. In a sense, the document represents a continuation of work in progress, as it is a continuation of the work successfully conducted in the strategic defence review. Inevitably, further work is required to ensure that we have the right capabilities as the potential of the enemy with which we must deal develops and expands. That is why we have placed so much emphasis on global reach and flexibility.

On my hon. Friend's specific point about lift capability, there is a very attractive photograph of a C-17 somewhere in the White Paper. C-17s are certainly available and have performed magnificently since we first leased them. Clearly, they are preparing the way for the A400M aircraft, which will provide still greater lift capability to the United Kingdom.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): More money for the defence budget, especially in the light of 11 September, is of course to be welcomed and the Secretary of State is to be congratulated on that. However, does he agree with the House of Commons Library, which suggests that in each year of the Conservative Government, the near-cash constant prices spending on defence was higher than in each year of this Government and each year that is planned? Does he not agree that that is a rather disappointing reaction to 11 September?

Mr. Hoon: More money was available for defence even before 11 September. In talking about a five-year period, I was referring not only to the current CSR round, but to the last one. In each of the three-year periods, there was a planned growth in expenditure. I have not seen the figures from the Library. I will certainly look at them very carefully, but it is extremely doubtful whether such a comparison could be made, as the figures with which we are dealing represent real-terms increases year on year.

The problem that I have with those on the Conservative Front Bench—I exempt the right hon. Gentleman—is that they do not appear to understand the basis on which the budget for defence is arranged. They have issued a series of statements, some of which have made their way into the newspapers, indicating that they are comparing the outturn figures for the budget with the planned figures. As a former Defence Minister, he will know that that is not an appropriate basis for comparison.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): When the Chancellor handed out a lot of money on Monday, he accompanied it with public service agreements, independent audit, statutory inspection regimes and tough policies for managements that fail. As the Ministry of Defence has wasted money on the rifle and the Army radio and is overspending on countless other projects, why is it exempt from those tough new inspection, audit and management failure regimes?

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence is not exempt from those techniques. Indeed, as I said in my statement, we are setting out on yet a further round of very tough efficiency arrangements. I hope that they will be more satisfactory than in the past, as they will deal with outputs and will therefore look at the ways in which we deliver military capability, rather than the amount of cash that goes in in the first place. That will have a very clear advantage not only for the Department at the centre, but for those responsible for the various devolved budgets, as it will mean that they get the benefit of any savings that they have generated through efficiency. I think that that is a much more sensible way of proceeding.

I must argue against my hon. Friend's suggestion that we have wasted money on the rifle or, indeed, on the radio. The current programme on improving the communications system available to the armed forces is proceeding very successfully.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's announcement that he has secured new money for defence. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot) said, that is wholly to be welcomed. While the new chapter is extremely sensible in taking forward much of the work that needs to be done following 11 September, does he agree that it is important in this matter as in any other not to be too deluded by fashion at any one time or by the wonders of defence technology, and that at the end of the day there will be no replacement, particularly in the British armed forces, for basic grunt soldiering? Will he also assure the House that, when he comes to consider the future size, shape and structure of the armed forces—which clearly need to be adjusted—and the difficult decisions that he is going to have to take on the future of the main battle tank, on the structure of the Royal Armoured Corps and on Eurofighter numbers, nothing will interfere with the continuing, astonishingly brilliant achievements of the British armed forces of all three services? That success is achieved by the most demanding and rigorous training, which enables them to do what they do for us overseas in much easier circumstances than might exist for other people.

May I also ask the Secretary of State to examine the whole question of defence diplomacy again? Does he agree that it is one of the golden assets offered by this country, and that as many foreigners as want to should have the opportunity to train at our great military institutions—the staff college, the Royal College of Defence Studies, Sandhurst, Cranwell, Dartmouth and all the others? This facility is a great plus for Britain and a great driver for our interests overseas.

Mr. Hoon: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his observations, particularly those about the people involved in the armed forces, who, as he rightly said, do a tremendous job. I ended my statement with a proper tribute to the effort that they make, and I always strongly insist that that should include the civil servants in the Department, who perform magnificently alongside members of the armed forces.

The hon. Gentleman is also right to suggest that there is a risk, when producing a White Paper of this kind, that we simply reorganise our armed forces to fight the last battle. The most important theme of the strategic defence review was that we should have flexibility, and that we should have the kinds of armed forces and equipment that we judge will be necessary over the longer term. Adding technology to that, particularly the kinds of technology that are dealt with in the White Paper, is a crucial part of it, but it should not be—and will not be—at the expense of previous commitments that we have entered into and recognise that we have to deal with.

On defence diplomacy, I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. In the course of my travels—I have recently come back from Russia, for example—I am always enormously impressed by the way in which the expertise of our armed forces is welcomed, supported and sustained in other countries. In Russia, co-operation between the Royal Navy and the Russian navy has gone on, even in some extraordinarily sensitive and difficult times, and the men and women of our armed forces have continued to work with their opposite numbers in a way that can only enhance the United Kingdom's standing.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement today, especially the centrality that the review gives to conflict prevention and defence diplomacy. Does he agree that money and time spent on working with democratic Governments throughout the world, and with moderate regimes in places such as the middle east, to tackle the root causes of terrorism and to identify embryonic terrorist cells and deal with them in situ represent an investment, and that that is money well spent? What discussions is my right hon. Friend having with other arms of the British Government—the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for example—and with our allies to ensure that the vital work of conflict prevention has a central role in the years ahead?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and he makes a number of extremely good points. Conflict prevention involves a number of different Departments working together, and it is a characteristic of the threats facing international security that they cannot simply be addressed by the armed forces; we have to ensure that we engage other Departments. Perhaps the most recent illustration of that involves the difficulties undoubtedly being experienced today in Nepal. We are working closely with the Department for International Development to ensure that there is a coherent approach to the problems of that country.

[Mr. Hoon]

I would, however, emphasise that one of the lessons that we must learn from the appalling events of 11 September is that we cannot necessarily afford to ignore threats to our security simply because they appear to be in far-off countries and do not immediately threaten our interests. The one lesson, above all others, that I have learned from the events of 11 September is that we cannot simply put out of mind appalling regimes of the kind that we saw in Afghanistan on the basis that they are doing damage to the local population but may not be a threat to us. Globalisation means that that threat to us can occur very sharply, and in a very dangerous way.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does the Secretary of State agree that the weakest link in our entire defence array is defence medical services, in which there are now shortfalls of as much as 75 per cent. in certain key faculties? He will know that this is not just a constituency interest for me, but one that involves defences generally. Our armed forces have not faced heavy casualties recently, but if we wait to reconstruct defence medical services until there are heavy casualties, it will be too late. Will the right hon. Gentleman look again at the whole of defence medical services? Will he also recognise that it will not be possible to reconstruct and improve them unless a proper training centre is available to improve esprit de corps, linked to the hospital ships and to the deployment of field ambulances, and that that should, of course, be the Royal hospital Haslar?

Mr. Hoon: I was about to agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman said. I certainly agree that there is still significant room for improvement in defence medical services. There has been some modest improvement recently, but we inherited a dreadful situation, which I am determined to tackle and get right. I believe that we have the right kinds of plans in hand to do that, and I certainly do not want our armed forces to be deployed without appropriate medical support.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the new chapter. Given the immense difficulties of ensuring homeland security against the threat of smuggled terrorist weapons of mass destruction, does he agree that, alongside the measures that he has outlined, there is an urgent need for us to strengthen international co-operation and treaties on non-proliferation?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government put a great deal of effort into ensuring the success of non-proliferation agreements. Equally, however, it is my job, on behalf of the country, to look at situations that could arise in which those efforts could fail. Without being pessimistic about this, we need to have the right plans in place to be able to deal with the prospect of failure. That is why, while emphasising the importance of improving the co-ordination between our armed forces, in terms of their playing a part in defending the territory of the United Kingdom, I equally emphasise that that responsibility rightly lies with our Department for homeland defence, which is known as the Home Office.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his statement to the House today. I welcome much of it, particularly the part relating to unmanned air vehicles. Will sufficient resources be devoted to the process of speeding up their development from a reconnaissance vehicle to an attack weapon, so as to achieve that quickly? Four times this afternoon, the Secretary of State has stressed that the new money will be spread over a five-year period. Much of what is required in the new chapter, however, needs money fairly quickly. I should be grateful if he would give an assurance to the House that the resources to carry out those developments that are needed speedily will be contained in the money that is available, and that we shall not have to resort to implementing cuts in the nation's existing defence commitments.

Mr. Hoon: So far as UAVs are concerned, part of the work that we would do would involve looking at the extent to which they require that offensive capability, as well as the reconnaissance aspect that they already enjoy. So far as any earlier spending is concerned, I would draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention this paragraph in my statement:

> "Further significant resources will be made available during the current financial year to enable us to manage the pressure arising from the high levels of activity in which we are currently engaged."

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I am prompted by the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) to remind my right hon. Friend that there is already a defence medical services training establishment for reservists at Strensall, on the outskirts of York. I went there recently, and observed an exercise in which an entire district general hospital, staffed by reservists, was created in a weekend. I welcome the White Paper, especially the section on international organisations. My right hon. Friend knows that the G8 action plan on Africa gives a strong commitment over the next 12 months to making progress on conflict prevention there, and sees, in particular, a role for regional defence forces.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that we must make progress, as the afternoon is crowded with business. I do not want a statement; I want a question.

Hugh Bayley: Will resources be provided for staff training of African soldiers so that they can undertake their own peacekeeping?

Mr. Hoon: A great deal of effort is made in that regard. We have already had questions on defence diplomacy, and part of the excellent work done by our armed forces is to ensure that we offer such training and assistance wherever possible, including specifically in Africa.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): We know that the extra chapter has been called forth by the events of 11 September. One of the most embarrassing aspects of that is the fact that the leader of al-Qaeda, many of al-Qaeda's financial resources and the majority of its personnel who committed suicide and killed so many people on 11 September come not from Afghanistan, but from Saudi Arabia. What steps is the Secretary of State able to take to ensure that we maximise co-operation with our defence counterparts in Saudi Arabia? If they are left out of the picture, all the attacks in places such as Afghanistan, and even Iraq, will surely be insufficient to our ends.

Mr. Hoon: One of the beneficial consequences of 11 September, if I may put it that way, is the enormous improvement in co-operation right around the world, including with Saudi Arabia. As I said earlier, I have just come back from Russia. The co-operation with that country since 11 September could not have been imagined on 10 September.

That is a consequence of those appalling events that we need to continue to build on, so I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that we are working with Saudi Arabia and other countries that supplied nationals. We should not be too complacent: I still find it astonishing that United Kingdom citizens were involved and were prepared to go to Afghanistan and participate in terrorist operations. We simply cannot afford to point the finger at any other given country when we have similar problems.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): This is a significant new chapter and I welcome it. The devil is in the detail, and understandably the detail is not in the chapter. Will the Secretary of State assure me that due consideration has been given to the pressure on the Army training estates, particularly the defence nuclear, biological and chemical centre at Winterbourne in Wiltshire, the NBC Regiment and Winterbourne's neighbour, Porton Down?

Mr. Hoon: I can give that assurance but, as I said in my statement, we must work on those areas simply because we recognise the growing threat, which facilities such as Winterbourne Gunner and Porton Down in particular will give us the capability to deal with.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, in combating terrorism, it is important to act within international and domestic law? Does he accept that, usually, that will involve seeking explicit authority from the United Nations? Does he accept also that he should generally come to the House for express authority for the deployment of troops overseas? Does he accept, finally, that we need to define in international law the rights of those who are alleged to be terrorists and who are held overseas?

Mr. Hoon: Let me make it clear to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, although I am sure it is not necessary, that international and domestic law involve recourse to the UN for specific authority, but that is not, as I think he suggested, an absolute precondition. As he well knows, there are many circumstances in which it is perfectly proper to take international action without specific recourse to the UN. The law relating to self-defence is an obvious example of that.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Will the Secretary of State please explain how putting the defence fire service in the private sector will improve the effectiveness and security of our defence personnel? He is of course aware that when the Minister of State for Defence was asked on Monday how many positive representations he has had on the issue, he candidly and honestly replied none. In the light of what has been said today, will the Secretary of State reconsider this daft privatisation?

Mr. Hoon: No decision has been taken on that, and an announcement will be made once a decision has been taken. Certainly, I have taken the hon. Gentleman's representations into account and, indeed, those made by others on the subject.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): Whatever Army numbers are—we can argue about what they should be—the fact remains that they are still about 7,000 short. Indeed, the document says that

> "fully manned and sustainable manpower structures are proving elusive."

The fact also remains, however, that certain regiments and battalions are overmanned and fully sustainable. Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that those units will be used in the roles fulfilled by the Parachute Regiment and the Royal Marines so that a two-tier Army does not emerge and dwindling morale is restored?

Mr. Hoon: We have had this conversation before. I do not accept that there is dwindling morale, but I certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that part of the implication of what I have said is that we must ensure that there is a wider, rapidly deployable capability available to us. By implication, therefore, I agree with at least part of what he says. We have made no secret of the need to make up that shortfall, but he knows from his considerable experience that the real pressures on the armed forces are in those areas that I mentioned—key enablers and the kind of people that we have to deploy time after time when we are engaged in a series of operations around the world. We need to devote specific resources to that area to improve our capabilities.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Will the Secretary of State confirm that nothing in this welcome new chapter will change his commitment to buying all 232 Eurofighters? Will he also tell me whether the European-based successor to the future offensive air system programme will be fully engaged in developing unmanned air vehicle technology to the advantage of our British aerospace industry?

Mr. Hoon: I can absolutely confirm to the right hon. Gentleman that nothing in the new chapter will affect our commitment in relation to the Eurofighter. The Prime Minister made that clear to him very recently, I believe, and I am happy to repeat it. Certainly, our work on UAVs will inform considerably our thoughts on FOAS and how we take it forward. This and many other countries must have that important discussion on the aircraft that we shall have in future, and I am delighted to say that we are leading the way with that.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I welcome most of today's announcement, including consideration of the volunteer reserves, but has the Secretary of State at all examined the model of the American air national guard? It provides all America's continental air defence, and did so effectively when patrolling after 11 September, although our own Air Force has just withdrawn its last regular squadron from the London area.

Mr. Hoon: The issue is obviously to ensure that we have the right capabilities available to deal with potential

[Mr. Hoon]

threats. As I said in my statement, we have quick-reaction aircraft available. The statement set out the circumstances in which we intend to extend the availability of airfields for that purpose and ensure that we have appropriate protection in place across the country. That has undoubtedly been improved since 11 September and we must continue that improvement.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): In his statement, the Secretary of State trailed the development of a new air-transportable medium-weight armoured vehicle. Presumably, it will fall mid-way between the current main battle tank and the light armoured CVR(T), or combat vehicle reconnaissance (tracked). That is much to be welcomed, but given that the Ministry of Defence has clearly identified it as a gap in our capability, will he tell the House when it might come on stream and what we are doing to plug that gap in the meantime?

Mr. Hoon: As a consequence of the events of 11 September and, specifically, the operations that we have had to conduct at a great distance, we recognise that there may be a greater need for air-transportable medium-weight equipment. We are working on that. I do not anticipate a gap today, but we recognise that there may be such a requirement for the future.

Points of Order

3.28 pm

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rarely raise points of order, but I must seek your guidance. Several issues were covered in this afternoon's statement by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, but empty houses and the Pathfinder project, which are crucial to my constituency and the constituencies of many of my hon. Friends, were not dealt with, although they formed an important part of the statement. Is there any way for us to indicate our concerns to the Chair during statements? I realise that those in the Chair always have a difficult job and that not everyone can be called, but can we ensure that all parts of statements are covered?

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Only two Members representing constituencies in the north-west were called to ask questions, although we have a huge problem in the north-west. I think that the Chamber should be seen to reflect the whole nation, not just parts of the south-east and East Anglia. I realise that you are in a difficult position in having to ensure that all points are covered properly, but I would be grateful if you could tell us how those of us who represent areas beyond the south-east can make our points in regard to a statement by the Deputy Prime Minister that covers the whole of England.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Experience teaches that Members must always be extremely selective in making points relating to a statement of that kind, but I think I heard the Deputy Prime Minister describe his statement almost as an interim statement, suggesting that there was more to come. Even between today's statement and the statement that is promised, there may be plenty of opportunities for Members who are concerned about the subject to seek Mr. Speaker's approval for Adjournment debates. Several more hours are now available for such debates in the calendar of the House.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of which I have given notice to Mr. Speaker.

Item 6 in the section of the Order Paper entitled "Remaining Orders and Notices" mentions a statutory instrument,

> "the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 105) . . . on Invest to Save Budget Round 4 Projects and Local Government On-Line".

At the start of business today, that statutory instrument had not even been printed, and it was not on the internet. It was not on the departmental internet, or on HMSO's website.

The statutory instrument is not a matter of urgency, yet it has been selected for debate in the Second Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation at 4.30 pm on Monday. We, the official Opposition, still have no idea of its contents. Indeed, had it not been for the excellent Order Paper of the House, we would not even have known of its existence. Given that it concerns putting Government information online, it seems something of a mistake not to put it on the internet.

I must add that this is not the first time we have had this problem with the Deputy Prime Minister's Department. When discussing numerous statutory instruments, we have found that vital information on, for example, environmental impact and on important maps has not been placed in the Library.

I have raised these points consistently in the relevant Committee. We expect better from it—or is this an attempt to stop Government information being disseminated and, above all, to stop the House performing its scrutiny role properly? I consider it a gross discourtesy to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving notice of his important point of order. I note that the statutory instrument was laid before the House on 9 July. It follows that there should be at least one copy in the Library. If, as the hon. Gentleman says, a supply of fully printed copies is not yet available in the Vote Office nine days after the laying of the document, that is indeed most regrettable. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's point will be noted, and that action will be taken as quickly as possible to resolve the problem.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance on a matter relating to the Home Energy Conservation Bill, which, as Mr. Speaker's Office will be well aware, was pulled suddenly. It was due to be debated tomorrow.

There is massive interest in the Bill out in the country. By sheer coincidence, a Conservative Member has tabled an identical Bill—the Home Energy Conservation (No. 2) Bill—which is rather low in the batting order for tomorrow. Can you advise the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and advise all who are so concerned about the fact that the Labour Member has pulled his Bill, whether the Conservative version of what is in effect the same Bill could be moved up the batting order, and whether the Government have notified you that they would be willing for that to be done?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It was the promoter of the Bill who decided to withdraw it, and the Chair has no control over that. As the hon. Gentleman says, another Bill of a similar nature then appeared. That Bill, I am afraid, must take its appointed place, and neither the Chair nor anyone else has power to change the order. We must wait and see what happens tomorrow.

Proceeds of Crime Bill *[Money]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

3.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I beg to move,

That, for the purpose of any Act resulting from the Proceeds of Crime Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) the remuneration of the Director and staff of the Assets Recovery Agency;

(b) any expenses incurred by the Director or any of the staff of the Agency in the exercise of his or their functions.

The motion arises from technical amendments made to the Bill in another place to ensure the status of the Assets Recovery Agency as a non-ministerial department. The money motion passed by the House on 30 October enabled any expenditure incurred by any Minister of the Crown under the legislation to be met from money provided by Parliament. The amendments made in the other place, however, provide for the director's expenses to be met directly from money provided by Parliament, rather than through the Secretary of State. This motion is intended to ensure that that will be possible.

3.36 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I am still a little perplexed about what event in the other place triggered the motion, but I think the Minister can help us on a number of points. First, what is the anticipated full-year cost of the agency? Secondly, when does the Minister expect all the necessary staff to have been recruited? Thirdly, how many will there be? Fourthly, can the Minister give an undertaking that there will be no order triggering commencement of implementation of the relevant parts of the Bill until all staff are in place and fully trained?

3.37 pm

Mr. Ainsworth: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has asked for details of when we will be able to implement the various powers, and when we will be able to recruit staff. We have not even secured Royal Assent—which is, in fact, being delayed by some substantive issues with which the right hon. and learned Gentleman's own party appears to disagree. I therefore consider his questions a little out of order.

We have some estimates of the number of staff envisaged for the agency. It is estimated that eventually there will be about 100. We expect the agency to be able, effectively, to recover more than its costs by recovering the proceeds of crime.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): It is interesting that the Minister still sticks to the line that he will recruit about 100 people. Two or three days ago, an advertisement appeared in the press seeking applications for the post of director of the agency. According to the advertisement, he would be responsible for a staff of between 150 and 200.

I had intended to congratulate the Minister on noting what was said in the report of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. We said that we feared that the

[Mr. Michael Mates]

agency might be understaffed. Surely the Minister's officials are not advertising for more people than the Minister is prepared to approve? Which figure is correct, 100 or 200?

Mr. Ainsworth: The figure is expected to be something in excess of 100. We have not settled on an exact figure. We have advertised for a director, and there has been considerable discussion—as the hon. Gentleman knows, for he has been party to it; I hope he is happy with the conduct of that discussion—about the number of staff who might be needed to deal with Northern Ireland matters. It is indeed an important matter, which has not been finally settled. I hope we will be able to satisfy the hon. Gentleman that not just the staff covering the rest of the United Kingdom but the staff in Northern Ireland will be equal to their task. I do not think there will be any real point of controversy between us.

As I have said, we hope eventually substantially to increase the moneys recovered from the proceeds of crime, and thus more than recover any costs of the agency. If we secure all-party support and obtain Royal Assent before the summer recess, we shall be able to do that much sooner than we could have otherwise.

Question put and agreed to.

Proceeds of Crime Bill (Programme) (No. 3)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Proceeds of Crime Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 30th October 2001 and 26th February 2002:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Bill shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Seven o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

Subsequent stages

2. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords on the Bill shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Proceeds of Crime Bill

[Relevant documents: Second Report from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, Session 2001–02, on the financing of terrorism in Northern Ireland: interim report on the Proceeds of Crime Bill, HC 628, and Fourth Report, Session 2001–02, on the financing of terrorism in Northern Ireland, HC 978-I.]

Lords amendments considered.

3.40 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I must draw the attention of the House to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 9, 47, 78, 166 and 276, which are to be considered today. If the House agrees to those Lords amendments, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry be made in the Journal.

Clause 1

THE AGENCY AND ITS DIRECTOR

Lords amendment: No. 1.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 2, 3, 34 to 37, 101 to 104, 178, 259, 260, 273 to 277, 317, 318 and 320.

Mr. Ainsworth: These amendments make detailed technical changes to the provisions that establish the Assets Recovery Agency. They also respond to concerns expressed by the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs about the personal safety of staff working in this area.

Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 273 to 277 make some minor amendments to clause 1 and schedule 1. Those confirm the agency's status as a non-ministerial department and the director of the agency as a civil servant of the state.

Lords amendments Nos. 2, 3, 34 to 37, 101 to 104 and 320 clarify the provisions on the accreditation of financial investigators who will have access to the restraint powers under parts 2 and 4 and the investigative powers under part 8. The amendments put it beyond doubt that the director can provide different classes of accreditation for different purposes, rather than a single all-encompassing award.

Lords amendments Nos. 178, 317 and 318 will ensure that police officers can be seconded to the new agency on normal central service terms. Such officers will, however, be prohibited from exercising the functions of the director in relation to part 5.

Lords amendments Nos. 259 and 260 respond to the helpful comments of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee about the importance of protecting those working for the new agency and those undertaking similar work in Scotland. The amendments will enable relevant staff to use pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): At the risk of this becoming a bit of a love-in, I thank the Minister for listening to what the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee said. We examined the matter carefully. It is one of the all too rare examples of Government listening to Parliament, for which the whole of my Committee is grateful.

Mr. Ainsworth: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his thanks. He came to the House, put his point of view and argued his case well. I said at that time that we would take on board the points that had been made and try to respond to them. He had a concern. I am pleased that we have been able to do exactly that and that he is satisfied with the outcome.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Can the Minister give me an assurance that these are all genuine improvements and that he has not gone all soft and soggy on us?

Mr. Ainsworth: As I have said, the overwhelming majority of the amendments are technical. I hope my hon. Friend would accept that there is a specific issue—the safety of people working in the environment of Northern Ireland. The ability of people to maintain some anonymity by the use of pseudonyms will help both to recruit people to the agency and to make it more effective. I would have thought that there was no way that could be interpreted as being soft and soggy.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): As the Minister will be aware, we appreciate his response to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, but may I press him again on the numbers? In our judgment, unless this goes off with a real bang—I do not mean the bangs that we have been used to for far too long—we will be in difficulties. We are looking forward to the recruitment increase not all being around London: we hope that there will be more than 15 extra staff in Northern Ireland. There is a less difficult problem in the Republic, where over 100 staff are involved. We must have the number of people in post to deal with the problem now, rather than hoping that the number will grow and thereby losing the momentum.

3.45 pm

Mr. Ainsworth: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that we try to get the agency off to a flying start and that there is a step change in this area of law enforcement. Obviously, that has particular resonance in the environment of Northern Ireland, but it applies across the country. I ask him to accept that we are not wholly relying on the agency to achieve that step change: we need to step up our activity and capability with regard to confiscation across the piece. We have been able to do many things without the legislation. For example, we have substantially increased the number of financial investigators to police forces. Our asset recovery strategy is already starting to show some results. The amount of assets recovered from criminal activity has increased over time.

We are looking to the agency to provide the sort of expertise that will be necessary to use some of the powers, to take over the complicated confiscation cases that will be too much for individual crown prosecution services or other law enforcement agencies, and to operate civil recovery and other powers which will be exclusive to the agency.

The hon. Gentleman is right. If the staff of the agency are the only people involved in the step change—the culture change that is needed on confiscation of criminal assets and the proceeds of crime—we will not get to where we badly need to be. A lot more people from all kinds of agencies must be involved. We are working on getting the assets recovery strategy up and running ahead of the agency's establishment, to ensure that we have a substantial start and are not seen to be ineffective for any period.

I hope that I have been able to satisfy hon. Members. I am extremely grateful for the support for what we have been able to do in Northern Ireland. I am sure that the debate on the number of officers in the Northern Ireland Office will continue and remain under scrutiny by everyone who is involved in work in the Province. Obviously, we will listen to that continuing debate.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): As the Minister has said, this group of amendments covers a fair number of issues but many are not major issues. I have a couple of specific questions, but Conservative Members greatly welcome the constructive way in which the Minister and his former Front-Bench colleague, the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), approached the matter through many weeks in Committee. We welcome the Under-Secretary of State, Scotland Office, who has taken over from the right hon. Gentleman.

Can the Minister indicate whether there is any specific significance in the addition of amendment No. 320 relating to the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, and whether the fact that, under a couple of amendments in this group, everything will be referred to the Minister for the civil service has any particular significance? I wondered whether that was as a result of any disagreement among Ministers and whether the Minister for the civil service felt frozen out. No doubt the Minister will say that it is all part of joined-up government.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) has already referred to the work of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. I am glad that, in line with the spirit that has characterised our debates in Committee, the Minister paid tribute to the work of the Committee. I hope that he will also pay tribute to Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville, a distinguished former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, formerly the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster. As the Minister will be aware, the Government amendments dealing with pseudonyms were based on amendments originally tabled by Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville, as it were on behalf of the Select Committee. I hope that the Minister will try to reflect the tenor of the debates between my noble Friend Lord Brooke and his noble Friend Lord Rooker in another place.

The debate on this group of amendments will be relatively short. Some substantial questions will arise on later groups, and I do not want to delay the House now, but may I ask the Minister, in line with the constructive spirit in which we have approached the Bill, to confirm that the Prime Minister must have been misinformed when he

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

suggested yesterday that the Conservative party had opposed it? I ask him to refer specifically to what my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said when the Bill started its progress many months ago:

> "We on the Conservative Benches share the Government's desire to deprive people who profit hugely from very evil acts, but who cannot directly be related to some of those evil acts, of the ill-gotten gains on which they subsist. I suspect that that is common ground among members of all parties . . . I shall not recommend that my hon. Friends oppose the Bill."—[*Official Report*, 30 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 767.]

I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that that has been the position of the Conservative party on the Bill throughout.

Mr. Ainsworth: On the substance of the amendments, the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) will know that the Bill is very complex and has many strands, so many Departments are involved in different ways. He should not be surprised or look for little arguments that do not exist. The blunt answer to him is yes, he is right: this is about joined-up government. That is what we believe in, and that is what we try to carry out, although we do not always do so successfully; I should have thought that his party, too, had tried to do so when it was in power.

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 has to be amended to assure the funding for accredited financial investigators working for the Financial Services Authority. The role for the Minister for the civil service flows directly from the change of status, because the director comes under a non-ministerial department rather than receiving his funding directly from the Home Secretary. There is no issue here that the hon. Gentleman should not be able to understand, and he should not surmise that someone's nose has been put out of joint or that that has subsequently had to be put right. He is far too suspicious.

As for the hon. Gentleman's concerns about what the Prime Minister said yesterday, let me read the *Hansard* report to him so that he can hear exactly what was said—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has it with him, but for the sake of the record I shall read it out:

> "However, if he is serious in his commitment to the fight against crime, there is the Proceeds of Crime Bill that is now before the other House. According to the police, that measure is essential to deal with drug dealers and others who can secrete there assets. I ask him now to reverse the position of the Conservative party and to support what is an essential measure in the fight against crime.—[*Official Report*, 17 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 279.]

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: Will the hon. Gentleman remain in his seat for a minute?

We shall see in the course of this afternoon what the Conservatives will do. Three substantive groups of amendments will come before the House today, and we shall see whether the Leader of the Opposition and his right hon. and hon. Friends do what the Prime Minister asked. We shall see what happens between now and 7 o'clock—and I hope that we will be pleasantly surprised.

Mr. Grieve: If that had been the only occasion on which the Prime Minister had brought forth such bizarre utterances, which showed a cognitive deficit on his part, I would not be too troubled. But there has been a series of repetitions over a number of Prime Minister's Question Times. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we indicated our support for the measure on Second and Third Reading—but this afternoon we shall continue our task as an Opposition, which is to try to improve the Bill.

Mr. Ainsworth: Throughout the passage of the Bill I have paid tribute to the hon. Gentleman for some of the helpful and constructive comments that he has made about it—but not all his comments fell into that category. Between now and 7 o'clock we have to consider three sets of wrecking amendments, which would do substantial damage to the Bill, and which were moved and supported by the hon. Gentleman's colleagues in another place. Within the next couple of hours we shall see whether the Conservative party will respond to the Prime Minister's request, support the Bill, and give the forces of law and order an effective tool to use.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3 agreed to.

Clause 6

MAKING OF ORDER

Lords amendment: No. 4.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may take Lords amendments Nos. 43 and 73 and the Government motions to disagree thereto.

Mr. Ainsworth: We now come to the first serious test of whether the Conservatives are trying to do serious damage to the Bill, or whether they intend to support the measures needed to combat crime and remove its profits. I look forward to that.

This group of amendments returns us to a theme that will by now be familiar to the House—the question of mandatory versus discretionary confiscation procedures. It has been discussed at length in Committee in both Houses and on Report in another place; I refer the House to the *Hansard* reports for 4 December 2001, and 22 April and 25 June 2002.

It is not clear to us what the exact effect of this group of Opposition amendments would be—*[Interruption.]* The amendments would do serious damage, as I shall explain, and would reverse the direction in which policy in this area has been travelling for a long time, including under the guidance of Conservative Governments.

There are two schools of thought about what is being proposed. The first is that the amendments would give the courts the discretion not to mount a confiscation hearing at all. The second is that the amendments would require the court to confiscate the benefit from the defendant's particular criminal conduct, at the request of the director or the prosecutor, but would empower it not to confiscate the benefit of the defendant's general criminal conduct.

Either way, we are wholly opposed to these amendments. Replacing a mandatory procedure with a discretionary procedure would drive a coach and horses through the basic policy in the Bill. The amendments would reverse a gradual historical development in the direction of an increasingly mandatory regime, not a less mandatory one.

Confiscation in England and Wales has always had a strong mandatory element. Under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 the court was required to make a confiscation order in every case. The assumptions procedure under the Act was discretionary, but was replaced with a mandatory assumptions procedure by the Criminal Justice Act 1993.

The non-drug confiscation legislation was originally discretionary—

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman in a moment.

That was changed, and the procedure was made mandatory by the Proceeds of Crime Act 1995.

To emphasise the direction in which policy has been travelling, and before I give way to the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), I shall read what Lord Hurd, as he now is, said during the passage of the 1986 Act:

> "the Crown court will in future be required to determine, in the case of every person convicted of a drug trafficking offence, whether he has benefited from drug trafficking and, if he has, to impose a confiscation order to deprive him of the entire proceeds of that trafficking . . . Therefore, we propose in clause 2 that courts should be able to assume that the whole of an offender's property, together with any assets which have passed through his hands in the previous five years, represent the proceeds of trafficking, except in so far as he shows otherwise."—[*Official Report*, 21 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 243.]

That shows the intention of the then Minister, way back in 1986.

4 pm

Mr. Hogg: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman in a moment, as I said I would.

Some six years later, in making amendments, the Minister said:

> "During the six years in which the legislation has been in force, the courts have declined to apply the assumptions in a number of major cases, thereby placing the prosecution in the impossible position of being expected to prove matters in relation to the offender's property which are solely within his knowledge."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 8 June 1993; c. 76-77.]

That shows clearly—

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is very impatient.

Those comments show clearly that the Conservative party recognised the need for a move towards a mandatory scheme. There is no evidence since that time of a huge abuse of power or of miscarriages of justice—quite the reverse. All the evidence shows that, despite such efforts, confiscation has been used a lot less than it ought to be. Given the problems that we face, there is therefore no reason for us to start heading in the opposite direction by softening the regime rather than toughening it up, which, in effect, is what the amendment proposes.

Mr. Hogg: The Under-Secretary criticises the Opposition for championing a discretionary power. Would he be good enough to look at clause 6(3)(b)? On doing so, he will discover that his own Bill gives the court discretionary power. If the prosecutor or the director does not make an application to the court, it will be for the court to decide. That is a discretionary power.

Mr. Ainsworth: Exactly. We believe that the Bill as it stands contains sufficient safeguards to allow for the avoidance of injustices. Yes, it is for the prosecutor to decide whether it is appropriate to make an application, and if he thinks it inappropriate, he should not do so. Yes, in terms of the risk of a serious injustice, the court can effectively prevent an action from taking place. However, the existing mandatory system should continue, and should be toughened rather than loosened. We do not need to retreat from the direction in which we are travelling, given the continued existence of a very real problem.

Perhaps Opposition Members think that the impact of such legislation has been profound up to now, or perhaps they can give instances of its being so draconian that it has led to injustices. However, I have seen no such evidence, and nor has such evidence been presented to the House during the Bill's passage.

In effect, mandatory assumptions have been tested in court, so even if concerns exist about the Human Rights Act 1998 or the European convention on human rights, there is no particular reason why we should retreat from our current direction. In considering the mandatory application of assumptions in drug trafficking cases such as the Phillips *v.* United Kingdom case, which was decided on 5 July 2001, the Strasbourg court found that such applications are consistent with the convention. So I am not persuaded that there is a problem, or that the amendments would improve the Bill's effectiveness.

Without the amendments, the Bill gives a clear definition of a criminal lifestyle. When criminals commit offences, they will know exactly what they are exposing themselves to in confiscation terms. The amendments would remove certainty, turn confiscation hearings into a lottery, and reverse the trend towards a mandatory regime that has continued for some time under both Labour and Conservative Governments. I do not believe that there is any justification for the amendments; indeed, they would do considerable damage to the Bill. I therefore ask the House to oppose them.

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary for his kind remarks. He pointed out that we sought to improve the Bill in Committee and on Report, and I note with great pleasure that many of the tabled Lords amendments have in fact arisen from discussions in Committee that involved all parties, and which the Government undertook to look into further. I am pleased to have this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Under-Secretary for taking those discussions on board.

However, on this matter I fear that there may be a continuing difference between us. In saying that, I should make clear my support for the Bill's confiscation provisions. Given that the Under-Secretary raised the

[Mr. Grieve]

issue earlier, I should also point out that, as an Opposition, it is our job to scrutinise legislation. That process, which we hope will lead to the best possible legislation, comes to a conclusion when Royal Assent is given. We do not have to suspend our judgment or our debate and get into a happy-clappy, mutually self-congratulatory moment before that happens. I shall welcome the Bill when it receives Royal Assent, but until then I shall continue a dialogue with the Under-Secretary and other Government members on how to ensure that it is in the best possible condition.

We have indeed already discussed the question of whether there should be a discretionary or a mandatory component in initiating the confiscation procedure. As the Under-Secretary will remember, one intriguing point about the Bill was that, when it was first considered in Committee, it contained a discretionary regime for Scotland, but not for England and Wales. Apparently, that was due to an historical fact—but not one, I am bound to say, that appeared ever to have interfered whatsoever with the operation of previous Scottish legislation.

The Under-Secretary has gone on at some length this afternoon about the previous regime under previous legislation. I accept that, but the point is that that legislation was in no way as wide ranging and draconian in its powers and consequences as this Bill.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, under the discretionary regime, a mere £750,000 of drug dealers' assets were confiscated in Scotland in the past year? That is an indictment of the discretionary regime.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman asks me to comment on an individual decision, but I cannot do so. What is clear—the Under-Secretary and I agreed on this point in Committee, in the light of the evidence—is that earlier regimes showed signs of having started with massive confiscations, only for them to tail off rapidly. I suspect that that is far more a reflection of a lack of will on the part of those concerned rather than of a lack of means. If it was possible to make such confiscations when the system was introduced, I find it difficult to understand why it stopped being possible.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) may know, I was involved with drug trafficking cases in my professional capacity, and I remember that there were some successes on the regime's introduction. However, one problem was that orders for confiscation were being made that proved impossible to enforce. The orders were there, but as it turned out, the amounts that the courts estimated as capable of being confiscated were simply never found. I do not know whether that was because they were secreted away, or because they never existed in the first place. However, in my view they have nothing to do with the question of having a mandatory or a discretionary regime.

The discussion in the other place took place between extremely reasonable people, and I commend the reading of the report of the proceedings to the Minister and other hon. Members. What was envisaged was as small a final stopgap—to ensure that injustice did not occur—as could be devised, and that was the phrase "exceptional circumstances". What might constitute exceptional circumstances? It appears that one could become liable to a confiscation order for acts that, as the Minister knows, any right-thinking person would be amazed to learn came within the legislation. One example is the conviction on several occasions for not having a rear light on a pedal cycle. That would not normally be the signal to scrutinise someone for signs of a criminal lifestyle.

However, it is because of such examples, and the absence of other safeguards—the Minister might wish to consider what other safeguards might be possible—that a residual right for a judge to stop the initiation of the process seems eminently sensible, and compatible with all our principles of justice and of common sense.

Mr. Hogg: If it is right to give the court power to initiate the process, it is also—almost by definition—right to give the court power not to proceed with the process.

Mr. Grieve: My right hon. and learned Friend is right, and that very point was made by Lord Carlisle of Bucklow in the other place. He expressed astonishment that given that the court had the discretion to initiate the process—and the Minister seemed apologetic when he had to accept that that existed—it should not have a residual power to stop it. The Minister clearly envisages that a judge might on occasion—notwithstanding the fact that a prosecutor did not wish to initiate the confiscation process—consider the case and say, "This is outrageous. The interests of justice demand confiscation." He is content to give judges that power. That is why it is bizarre that he has such distrust of the same judges to whom he is prepared to give that power that he will not give them the discretion to say that circumstances do not warrant initiating the confiscation process. That is the point at issue between us.

In the other place, Lord Goldsmith said that the legislation would apply only to "inherently acquisitive offences". I am sure that that is the intention and I assume that, because prosecutors are people of integrity, good standing, benevolence and propriety, that is what will happen. However, the House must always have regard to the possibility that power may be abused. When we give power to bureaucrats, however well intentioned they appear, it is right to consider what safeguards we can introduce to ensure that abuse does not occur. The normal safeguard that a sensible Parliament introduces is a judicial discretion. I do not share the Minister's sudden distrust of judicial discretion, especially when, as in this case, it would be so circumscribed and limited.

The Minister claimed that the amendment would wreck the purpose of the Bill. We will consider some amendments later that pose real difficulties, and I acknowledge that, but in this case the Minister is descending—I regret to say—to the sort of comments that the Prime Minister made. I do not know whether the Prime Minister was programmed by his spin doctors to make those comments—

Mr. Tom Harris: That is a stupid thing to say.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman appears to be so well programmed that he tried to raise the issue as a bogus point of order yesterday. I greatly regretted that. I hope that we can continue to have a sensible discussion about the issue, and I hope that the Minister will accept the sincerity of our views. I am confident that the Bill would survive the amendment and operate perfectly, but it would do so with the safeguard that the amendment would provide against possible abuse.

4.15 pm

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I am concerned that the amendment could be used to give protection not only to people who fail to illuminate the rear light of their bicycles, but to people convicted of much more serious crimes. The Minister will be aware that I would like to see the confiscation and restraint orders applied to people charged with, or convicted of, the new offences of international bribery and corruption in the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. I have written to him on that point.

Mr. Hogg: I may have misunderstood or misheard the hon. Gentleman, but did he say that the provisions should apply to someone charged but not convicted?

Hugh Bayley: The provision for confiscation applies only to those who are convicted, but the restraint orders can be applied at an earlier stage.

If a UK citizen or company obtains a contract abroad as result of bribery, it is a crime under British law. Therefore, the benefits of that crime—the income derived from the contract—are the proceeds of crime and should be subject to restraint at the point of charging, or confiscation on conviction. If the House decides to disagree with the Lords amendment, is it the Government's intention that the Bill should be used in that way against those either charged or convicted of the new offences of international bribery and corruption?

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Here we are again, going over well trodden ground. If the debate so far is any indication, it is not even very fertile ground. The words of the Minister filled me with sadness and disappointment in him. I had acquired tremendous respect for him in Committee, and on Report and Third Reading. To hear him describe the Lords amendment as a wrecking amendment beggars belief.

Mr. Tom Harris: It is a wrecking amendment.

Mr. Carmichael: Simply repeating that untruth does not make it true. It is an exceptionally modest amendment that is limited to exceptional circumstances. It would not give a general power of discretion to the court. The discretion would also only be exercised in circumstances in which a trial of some sort had occurred and the judge or sheriff in question was already familiar with the circumstances. In the event that the discretion was abused in the way warned of by Labour Members, it would be open to the prosecutor to remedy that on appeal. What constitutes exceptional circumstances would be easily capable of judicial definition.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) earlier intervened to criticise the discretionary regime that has existed hitherto in Scotland. He said that it produced only a few cases, but he did not make it clear that no case that has been subject to the discretionary scheme in Scotland has been refused. He risks misrepresenting the position, and misleading the House, when he suggests that the discretionary system is the reason that few cases are brought in Scotland. He should consider instead the way in which the Crown Office has traditionally been structured and how it has operated, and the resources devoted to that office and to the police. He would improve the debate immensely if he concentrated on such matters instead of trying to misrepresent the current position.

Regrettably, a recurring theme in the discussion of this Bill has been the fact that the Government have said that they will not trust the judges. That is very depressing, if true. Why have the Government said that? I accept that there are faults with the judiciary, but the proposals in the Bill are not the way to tackle the problems. They would be better addressed by looking at the way in which judges are appointed, and at how people who are not members of the Faculty of Advocates can work in the Court of Session as senators of the College of Justice. We should also bear in mind the people who are entering university to study law and begin the journey to judicial appointment. Picking away piecemeal at judicial discretion is no substitute for a proper and comprehensive overhaul.

The Government may say that a degree of discretion is given already to the prosecutor in Scotland and to the director in England. I remind the House that both are arms of the Executive. Any discretion given to the Executive requires that a counter-balancing discretion be given to the judiciary. Power exercised by the Executive is always open to abuse. If proceedings are raised that are oppressive—and I defy the Minister to say that that cannot happen—it is surely vital that some balancing discretion is given to the judiciary to redress the matter.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): I note with interest what the hon. Gentleman has said about placing checks and balances on the power of the Executive, but is not judicial review precisely that? It is designed to redress any irrational or unreasonable exercise of discretion by the Executive.

Mr. Carmichael: My understanding is that the decision could not be reviewed. In Scotland, the decision to initiate proceedings would not be open to judicial review. However, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that it is important that the judiciary should be able to place a check on the powers exercised by the forces of the state.

If the Government reject the Lords amendments, a dangerous precedent will be set. The powers given to the different parts of the criminal justice system will be out of balance. My experience is that the system works best when people concentrate on their own jobs and do not try to second guess what others are going to do. Each part of the system must exercise an appropriate and responsible measure of power, but the power has to be given in the first place, and that is what the amendment would do.

Mr. Davidson: This is a key debate on a key amendment. For the first time, the Tories are boldly attempting to water down some of the Bill's proposals. They endorse the Lords amendment, the effect of which would be to allow some criminals to keep their assets, who otherwise would have those assets seized.

Mr. Grieve: The amendment would do no such thing. Its purpose is to ensure that proceedings are not brought

[Mr. Grieve]

against people who have no assets that could be seized, and that they are not put through the process in the first place.

Mr. Davidson: I accept what my hon. Friend the Minister said—that the Bill already contains enough safeguards to make sure that that did not happen. I shall say more about the danger posed by the amendment in a moment.

We should remember that this is not an arcane or abstruse debate between lawyers. We are discussing how our decisions affect real people in the real community outside the House. We are talking about crime and drug abuse, about people making millions out of selling drugs to their victims, and about communities and lives being wrecked. We must make sure that that is at the forefront of our minds.

It struck me that Conservative Members were protesting somewhat too much about their good intentions. It is clear that, as so often, the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister struck them to the heart. What he said was absolutely true—and I am not slow to criticise my right hon. Friend when he disagrees with me and gets things wrong. However, what he said on this matter was absolutely correct, and I enjoyed seeing the Tories squirm.

We were not far short of the mark when we described the Tories as the criminals' friends. They have consistently acted to water down the Bill, in a way that would allow some people to escape justice who otherwise would not. The only people in the Standing Committee less supportive of the police and criminal authorities were the nationalists, and that was because they did not attend, as they did not apply for membership of the Committee. Liberal Democrat, Tory and Labour Members were there for hours and hours, week after week, but not one nationalist took part.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth) *rose—*

Mr. Davidson: I am glad to see one bob up now.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is probably not surprised that I should want to intervene on this fascinating matter, on which I think he is wasting the House's precious time. The hon. Gentleman should note that only three Labour Back Benchers from Scotland are participating in this important debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have heard equal views on this matter, which is outside the scope of the amendment.

Mr. Davidson: Having noted the absence of nationalists from the Standing Committee, I shall not refer to it again in this contribution.

There is a difference between mandatory and discretionary powers, and there is a danger that giving courts the discretion to apply the measures set out in the Bill will result in something resembling a plea-bargaining process. A recent murder case in my constituency was downgraded to culpable homicide, and it is clear that that was part of a plea-bargaining process. Giving courts the discretion proposed in the amendment would lead to plea bargaining about whether sanctions such as confiscation should be applied.

I do not want that to happen. It is true that some of us have less confidence than we should have in the judicial system, and that we want to restrict the judiciary's flexibility in these matters.

4.30 pm

I listened to the points made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) about reform of the judicial system, university admissions and all the rest of it—the doctrine of the unripe time: we should not change the system now; we should do it at some other time in some other way. Discussing access to university law studies as a means of reforming the judiciary seems too long term, even for the Liberals. We might have a Liberal Government in power by that time, but I doubt it. My constituents and I want action now on these matters. The clearest message that we can send is that we want to fetter the discretion of the judiciary; we want mandatory provisions.

Mr. Carmichael: I take the hon. Gentleman back to the parallel that he drew with plea bargaining. That has no bearing on the judiciary having a measure of discretion. Under the Bill, it is open to the prosecutor to decide not to take confiscation proceedings. That is where any plea bargaining between the prosecutor and the defence would come in. There is no safeguard against that, as the Bill stands.

Mr. Davidson: I understand that, but we ought not to remove all discretion from the prosecutor. There is some merit in what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not want to extend the discretion, lest it waters down the mandatory aspect.

This is not an arcane debate about the law. It is about how the law impacts on real people, real lives and real communities, which we are sent to this place to represent. We are talking not about Jeffrey Archer or Jonathan Aitken, but about major league criminals. *[Interruption.]* All right, I concede that former Conservative Members were in a more major league than I have given them credit for.

We can discuss whether the terms of the Bill should have applied to Jeffrey Archer, Jonathan Aitken or any other Conservative MP, present or future, who comes into that category, but we should bear in mind that we are dealing with major issues—life and death for our communities. I should like to see some stiffening and some support for the Bill from the Conservative Benches, rather than the mealy-mouthed self-justification that we have heard up to now.

Mr. Hogg: I rise to try to ensure that the House addresses the real possibility of an injustice. Unlike, I suspect, any other Member, I have been involved in litigation arising out of legislation such as the Bill. In the Republic of Ireland, the Criminal Assets Bureau legislation contains powers very similar to those contemplated in the Bill, and I have acted in the courts of Dublin on behalf of people who have been the subject of procedures against them, so I have a certain amount of professional experience of what can happen in such cases.

That makes me cautious and anxious to identify areas where we can reinforce legal and civil rights. We should welcome the amendment from the other place. The Under-Secretary said that there were two interpretations of the effect of the amendment. The second one might be theoretically possible, but the first one is clearly the intended one, which is to give to the court the power to disapply the procedure in a limited number of circumstances.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the Bill as it stands, without the amendment, already gives the court a great deal of discretion—the very point that he made earlier in the debate?

Mr. Hogg: That is true, as far as it goes.

I am in favour of giving the court the power to disapply the process. That is consistent with the framework of this part of the Bill. A careful analysis of clause 6 indicates that there are two areas in which the court already has an important discretion. The first is the one that I drew to the attention of the Under-Secretary.

The initiating process provided under, I think, clause 6(3) arises in one of two circumstances. Either the Crown or the prosecutor applies for the process to start, or the Crown or the prosecutor does not and the court has an initiating power. At that point, the court has a discretion.

But the court has a discretion otherwise in this part of the Bill. Under clause 6(6), in certain circumstances—for example, if a victim is taking recovery procedure—the obligation to take action under subsection (5) becomes not a duty, but a discretion. So already, within this part of the Bill, one finds two clear examples where the court has a discretion.

If it be right to provide the court a discretion in the two circumstances that the Bill provides, what is the objection in principle to providing the court with a discretion in those circumstances where the Crown or the prosecutor applies to institute the process, but the court, for one reason or another, thinks it unfair to proceed?

There are two points that reinforce in my mind the importance of that. Let us be clear that the decision of the Crown or the prosecutor to initiate the process might well be made at a very junior level. The House must not assume that such decisions will be made by the Director of Public Prosecutions in person, Mr. Calvert-Smith. They will not. They will probably be made by a relatively junior official. It is important that the court should have the power to put restrictions on a decision made at a fairly junior level, if the court considers that appropriate.

The second point is that the process that arrives at the conclusion that a confiscation order is made is on the low standard of proof—the civil standard of proof, not the criminal standard of proof.

Mr. Tom Harris: The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that a court should be able to decide "for one reason or another" not to proceed. That phrase strikes fear and terror into my heart and it is one of the reasons that the amendment is wrong.

Mr. Hogg: In fact, I was advocating a looser power than that provided for in the Lords amendment. The Lords amendment confines the judicial discretion to exceptional circumstances. I have many criticisms to make of the judiciary from time to time; none the less, in this case I would give the judiciary a wider discretion than that contemplated in the Lords amendment.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right to say that he has a great deal of experience in practising in the courts. He has another kind of experience as well: he was a member of the previous Government in various capacities. It is perturbing that it has been said that the present Government fear the discretion of the judges. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will know that mandatory assumptions were applied not by this Government, but a long time ago. Can he can give us an insight into why it was considered necessary for those mandatory assumptions to be applied by the Government of which he was a member some years ago? Can he, because of his wide experience, give us any indication where an injustice has occurred since those mandatory assumptions have been in place?

Mr. Hogg: Basically, I am against mandatory sentences. Yesterday, I put to the Home Secretary a proposal that judges in murder cases should have the right to impose determinate sentences, not life sentences. I have always been extremely cautious about mandatory sentences, because I believe that they do not address the particular circumstances of individual cases.

That general point, however, goes rather outwith the narrow point that I am making today, which is that in an area where the standard of proof is the relatively low one, and where the decision to trigger the process can be made at a relatively low level, the court should, in exceptional circumstances, have a power to stop the procedure. That seems to be consistent, not inconsistent, with the present framework of clause 6, and I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) will press this matter to a Division.

Mr. Tom Harris: I start by disagreeing with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson). I do not believe that the hon. Members for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) or for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) can be described as friends of the criminal. I accept that, coming from legal backgrounds, they genuinely want to improve the Bill. I do not doubt their personal sincerity on that score.

When the hon. Member for Beaconsfield intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok, he used the word "intention". He has used that word frequently in the House and in Committee. He has made clear his intention time and again in supporting various amendments, but he has not explained the effect of the amendments. I accept that his intentions are true, but he has to accept, whether he likes it or not, that the effect of the Lords amendment will be to undermine the purpose of the Bill.

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments, but the intention of the Lords amendment is to introduce a safeguard that I would expect to be used extremely rarely and only in clear cases where it is apparent to the judge that a decision by the prosecutor to seek to initiate proceedings is plainly wrong, and that is it. That is the intention.

Mr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman has, once again, proved my point. I accept that that is his intention.

[Mr. Harris]

We agree on that, but I have to disagree about the effect, which will be to follow the path of previous legislation by being far too cautious and not achieving the intended aim.

The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) said yesterday in talking about the Bill:

> "we supported that legislation . . . we voted in favour of the confiscation of assets from criminals, particularly drug dealers."—[*Official Report*, 17 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 279.]

Why was there not an asterisk at that point in *Hansard*, leading to a footnote saying, "Subject to the following conditions"? There is no point in saying one thing and doing another.

Mr. Hawkins: When Members say that they support legislation, it does not mean that they support every dot and comma in the Government's proposals. If the Conservative party did not vote against a Bill on Second Reading, Third Reading or in another place, but simply wished to scrutinise it, to improve it and propose amendments that affected only small parts of it, it is entirely right for my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) to say that we supported it. That has always been the practice of the House in such matters.

Mr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman obviously has a lot more experience in the House than I do. I bow to his greater experience, but I find it slightly unfair that the Conservative party can say, "Yes, of course we support the Bill. We believe in confiscating criminals' assets", and issue a press release saying as much, while in Committee voting time and again against the very heart of the Bill. Conservative Members tabled many amendments, and on every possible occasion they forced a vote on any measure to emasculate the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman may or may not admit this, but the original point of the Bill was not to emulate previous legislation, but to introduce a brand new principle into English and Scots law. So, whether he likes it or not, discretion, which is what we need, will be available to courts. He has every right to disagree with that view, but that is what the Bill is about. He cannot say that he supports it, and then try to undermine the very heart of it.

In Committee, the Conservative party moved a very similar amendment to clause 6, and it was pressed to a Division. The amendment has returned from the Lords in a slightly different form, but it will achieve the same. The Conservative party has lost the vote once already, and it should respect the democracy of the House and accept that we have already made up our minds. I hope that it will not press this issue to the vote.

4.45 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Can the hon. Gentleman imagine a single circumstance in which a judge who sees a low-life drug dealer of the kind described by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) and who has the opportunity to confiscate the assets of that criminal might decide not to proceed to do so unless he felt that an injustice might occur?

Mr. Harris: That is an excellent question, and the answer is no. I cannot imagine any judge looking at a down-and-out drug dealer from Glasgow and saying, "No, I'm not going to confiscate your assets." What I can imagine is a judge seeing a well-to-do business man standing before him in the dock and suddenly thinking, "There is a respectable gent. Surely he can't possibly be involved in drugs." That is the point of the Bill. I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman has to do a wee bit better than that if he is to justify his party's position.

Ian Lucas: Can my hon. Friend also imagine that an exceptional body of case law would develop on what precisely could be defined as exceptional circumstances? There would be many cases of doubt about that phrase, and many people who made money from death in their communities would benefit from the Lords amendment.

Mr. Harris: I completely agree with my hon. Friend, who also has a legal background, although I certainly would not hold that against him. The point about the phrase "exceptional circumstances" is very similar to the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg). How can we define that phrase, other than through many years of legislation? Certain people in our society hope that that phrase will be inserted into the Bill. Let us make no mistake about the fact that certain people working in this country's criminal undergrowth are desperate for the Lord amendments to remain in the Bill.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield made a very good point during our very interesting debates in Committee. He said that previous Governments—Conservative and Labour—had tried time and again to introduce effective legislation to deal with drug dealers once and for all. Obviously, they wanted to use such legislation to fight the drugs menace. He said in his contribution that none of the Acts had been as effective as the Government of the day had intended. He was absolutely right. If the Lords amendment stays in the Bill, exactly that fate will befall this legislation.

Frankly, having been involved in 39 Standing Committee sittings, I will not suddenly change my mind and want the Bill to be enacted without the powers to do what desperately needs to be done for the sake of this country, my constituency, those of my hon. Friends and, I hope, those of Opposition Members.

Annabelle Ewing: I rise to speak to these Lords amendments in so far as they apply to Scotland. I believe that an important constitutional issue is raised because, as we have heard, the Lords amendment would reintroduce an element of discretion in making confiscation orders in Scotland. Although there is a valid debate to be had about mandatory versus discretionary powers of sheriff or High Court judge in making such confiscation orders, the fact is that Westminster is not the appropriate forum in which to discuss that matter because jurisdiction over Scots law is devolved to the Scots Parliament.

Mr. Tom Harris *rose*—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scotland Office (Mrs. Anne McGuire): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Annabelle Ewing: May I continue for a moment; I shall give way later.

The Scots Parliament voted to refer the Bill to Westminster under a Sewel motion on 24 October last year. The Scottish National party supported that move, but if one reads the report of the debate in the Scots Parliament—

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Annabelle Ewing: I shall give way in a moment.

The key point is that the Bill has undergone substantial and major changes in relation to its provisions that are applicable to Scotland. In particular, the original Bill did not propose any amendment to the current and traditional discretionary powers of the sheriff or High Court judge. Even the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), the then Minister in the Scotland Office, speaking to the Scottish Affairs Committee on 7 November last year, agreed that there would be a political imperative to refer the Bill back were there substantial or major changes. Unfortunately, the then Minister seems subsequently to have changed his view. When the SNP group called a Division on Report on an amendment that would have secured the referral of part 3 of the Bill—which includes this grouping of amendments—back to the Scots Parliament, although we managed to gain support from all parties in the House amounting to 172 votes, we received no votes whatever from new Labour Members.

Mr. Lazarowicz *rose—*

Mrs. McGuire *rose—*

Annabelle Ewing: I shall give way to the Under-Secretary.

Mrs. McGuire: Will the hon. Lady please explain the inconsistency in her argument given that the Scottish Parliament gave the power under the Sewel motion to legislate in this area? As far as I and, I am sure, every Member of the House is aware, it has not asked for that Bill to be sent back. It must be happy with what is happening.

Annabelle Ewing: I fear that the Under-Secretary has not been listening to what I said. The key point is that a substantial change has been made to the Bill. The right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley agreed that there would be a political imperative to refer the Bill back to the Scottish Parliament if there had been substantial changes to it. Perhaps the Under-Secretary does not agree with the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have a substantive debate on this matter. I was prepared to allow the hon. Lady to refer to it as a prologue to anything that she might wish to say about the substance of the amendment. The question of whether it is a proper matter for the House, however, has already been decided.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will be guided by your remarks.

I want to conclude by stating that I support the Bill. It is a very important piece of legislation. I supported it on Third Reading, and it is clear that it will go a great way to deal with the evil of drugs barons who are a blight on communities the length and breadth of Scotland. My support has not changed, but I feel that the spirit and the provisions of the Scotland Act 1998 should none the less be respected.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I support the Bill, and I am very glad to see it moving forward, but some of the extravagant language that has been used, both for and against the Bill, has left me wondering. The heart of the Bill would be torpedoed. I do not believe that the effects would even be of the order of the injury to David Beckham's foot, and he recovered in time for the World cup.

We must be realistic. When the Minister referred to mandatory provisions to avoid plea bargaining, my mind went back to the early 1970s when the then Northern Ireland Government set a mandatory six-month sentence for those who were involved in disorderly behaviour. A young man walking down the Antrim road, whistling, suddenly discovered that he was in a riot situation. He was scooped up, brought before the magistrates court, and a charge of drunk and disorderly was read out, at which point, he was asked, "How do you plead?" He replied, "Not guilty, I don't drink." The solicitor asked whether he could approach his client. He came over to the young man, and said, "I can get you off on drunk and disorderly. A six-month sentence is mandatory for disorderly behaviour." The young man got off, but he now has a record of being drunk and disorderly.

My point is that I started out as sympathetic to the position manifested in the Bill. I have come to wonder, however, whether we are losing the thread of the argument because we are introducing aspects that are wrong. At least an understanding should be given that the court might make a judgment, in the light of the evidence in front of it, as to whether, at that stage, to proceed accordingly.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We may have got off to a bad start in this debate. The Opposition are clearly so upset at the allegations made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that, subsequently, they are desperate to suggest that the amendment is of no significance. I do not believe that it is; and I do not believe that the records shows that. It is an issue, as some of my hon. Friends have said, that caused considerable lively debate in Committee. No matter how much anybody tries to dress it up, the Lords amendment is of great significance. It moves us back in the direction of a discretionary scheme in which more discretion is granted to the courts in relation to whether they ought to get into the area of confiscation.

I asked a couple of questions of the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg). Those who listened will recognise that I received an answer to neither of them. I asked him whether he could shed some light on why the previous Government, of whom he was a part, felt that there was a need to introduce mandatory powers in this regard.

Mr. Hogg: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall do so in a minute, when I have completed referring to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I also asked him, based on his considerable experience, which I do not have, whether he has any

[Mr. Ainsworth]

knowledge of any great injustice that has occurred since that date—he has great knowledge of what happens in the courts, and I am sure that he has contacts who would tell him. Again, I received no answer. Mandatory powers in this regard were introduced by the last Government about 10 years ago, as I described. I received an answer to neither of my questions, and I wonder why.

Mr. Hogg: In fact, I did give the Under-Secretary an answer. The answer is that I am against mandatory powers, and I always have been. I illustrated that by saying to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, yesterday, that the mandatory life sentence for murder should be done away with, and that judges should be given the option of imposing a determinate sentence. I am against mandatory sentences.

Mr. Ainsworth: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right. He did say that, and I heard him say it, but it was not an answer to the question that I asked. He knows that. I asked him whether he could shed any light on the decision that was taken. All I have to refer to is *Hansard*, which I have read to the House. The Minister, who is now in another place, referred to the fact that, over the previous six years, the courts had not been prepared to use confiscation as was envisaged, and that there was a need to go down the mandatory route. All I have to refer to is the public position of the Government; the right hon. and learned Gentleman has the inside story. He could give us an insight into why it was felt that a mandatory route should be followed. He has not done so; he has chosen to answer another question.

Mr. Carmichael *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: Many other Members—one of whom is trying to intervene now—have experience of practising in the courts. I do not know how long the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) has practised in the courts, but he and others could give us examples of how the mandatory nature of confiscation has led to the kind of injustices that people are saying will arise now. I have not heard such an example. What I have said consistently in Committee and on the Floor of the House is that all the evidence suggests that confiscation is under-used in this country. The powers need to be improved and built on; they do not need to be retreated from. If the hon. Gentleman can give an example of an injustice having occurred, we would all be grateful to listen to it.

5 pm

Mr. Carmichael: The Minister is well aware that whenever power is given to the Executive, that power is open to abuse. It is therefore necessary to provide protections so that that does not happening. However, does it not cause him even the merest flicker of embarrassment to stand at the Dispatch Box as a Labour Minister justifying his Government's actions by saying, "We're doing exactly the same thing as the Tories"?

Mr. Ainsworth: Despite the fact that the hon. Gentleman has experience in the court, once again my question was not answered in the affirmative or the negative. He could give no example of any injustice to show that there is a problem.

Norman Baker (Lewes): My hon. Friend is relying on the Minister for an answer.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland is entitled to bring his knowledge and experience to the debate. He asks whether I am embarrassed that the Bill is based on legislation introduced by a Conservative Government. If he reads the relevant *Hansard*, he will find that my party supported confiscation. The difference is that we are trying to be effective.

I told the hon. Gentleman in Committee that I had hoped that we would be able to climb over the politics. We cannot allow more than a generation of British people to go without effective measures against the profits of crime. If we fail to deliver, we will cause disquiet about our ability to do what they know needs to be done. I had hoped that hon. Members would join us in trying to be effective.

Vera Baird (Redcar): Is not the argument just an invention by the Opposition? The director is a public authority. He will have to act in all respects in ways that are compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998 and all convention rights on the ownership of property and fair trials. If he does not, the victim could bring a freestanding course of action. Their argument is utter nonsense.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. and learned Friend brings considerable expertise to the debate and she is absolutely right. Opposition Members know that the safeguards are in place.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) suggested that previous regimes were more draconian and less broad. He is right in the latter regard. However, on whether they are more draconian, I read out *Hansard* from 1986 in which it is stated that the assets of an individual

"that have passed through his hands in the previous five years, represent the proceeds of"

crime

"except in so far as he shows otherwise."—[*Official Report*, 21 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 243-44.]

That hardly indicates that we are introducing something that is intended to be less draconian. We supported the proposition at the time. We support it now. We want to be effective. All parties thought at the time that the measure was needed.

Mr. Grieve: I agree with the Minister. I think he accepts that the breadth of the scope of the legislation means that it is possible to attach confiscation proceedings to individuals who have committed crimes that were not contemplated in earlier legislation which an ordinary person, looking in from the outside, would not necessarily have associated with money laundering or the possession of criminal assets. That is why we think that the extra safeguard is sensible. The Minister may also agree that if there is a power of judicial review, it might be sensible to allow the judge who decides the matter to carry out the review himself.

Mr. Ainsworth: The Lords amendments reintroduce the concept of discretion. We could never be certain how that would be used because courts would apply it differently. The hon. Gentleman's party did not support that idea when it was in government. We do not support it now. The system incorporates safeguard that can be relied on. Confiscation hearings are instigated only by the court itself or on the application of the director, the agency or the prosecuting authorities. The director and the prosecuting authorities are under a duty to act reasonably and will not mount hearings for inappropriate cases.

Furthermore, the court has the power in criminal lifestyle cases not to make the assumptions if there is a serious risk of injustice. The only valid arguments that I have heard relate to events that would constitute a serious risk of injustice. The safeguards are in place. Opposition Members know that. There is no need to return to the idea of discretion, with all the inconsistencies and uncertainties that it implies.

Mr. Boris Johnson: Why might a judge choose to exercise his discretion against confiscating assets unless he thought that there was a serious risk of injustice? Can the Minister give any substantive reasons why a judge might so act?

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not believe that it is necessary to go backwards. Quite the reverse. We have a serious problem with organised crime which is built largely around drugs. The hon. Gentleman knows that and it is widely recognised by all hon. Members. This is not the time to go backwards and water down proposals.

Safeguards are available to cover serious injustices. We do not need more safeguards. If hon. Members want to be effective against drug dealers and organised crime they will support us in the Lobby to reject the Lords amendments.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 260, Noes 149.

Division No. 312] **[5.6 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank (Birkenhead)
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pears[illegible]n, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Qui[illegible], Lawrie
Rammell, Bill

Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Derek Twigg.

NOES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas
(Macclesfield)
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen O'Brien and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Clause 7

TIME FOR MAKING ORDER

Lords amendment: No. 5.

Mrs. McGuire: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 11 to 13, 16, 17, 26, 27, 44, 49 to 51, 54, 55, 74, 80 to 82, 85, 86, 95 and 96.

Mrs. McGuire: This group of Government amendments on the subject of postponement has two basic purposes, and I trust that we can move forward on the basis of consensus. First, the amendments take account of the criticism of the original version of clause 7 that was made in Committee. Clause 7 originally stated that a confiscation order must be made before sentence. Although the clause was qualified by the postponement provisions in clauses 15 and 16, we agreed that it was somewhat too categorical. In practice, more often than not confiscation orders are postponed. Clause 7 and its equivalents in parts 3 and 4 have therefore been removed, and clause 15(1) and its part 3 and 4 equivalents now leave it open as to whether the court postpones the confiscation hearings.

Secondly, we have added a provision that will prevent a confiscation order from being quashed merely because of a procedural error in the court's application of the postponement provisions. We are most concerned that that sort of thing should not happen to confiscation orders under the Bill. The main purpose of postponement provisions is to enable defendants to be sentenced quickly and to give the court time to deal with the confiscation issues. We do not wish them to be grounds for appeals on technicalities, and the amendments will prevent that from happening.

The amendments will improve the practical operation of the Bill, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Grieve: I can confirm to the hon. Lady that there is agreement on the amendments. I am grateful to the Government for having taken on board what was said during one of the constructive episodes in Committee in which we were pleased to participate. This illustrates the necessity of a dialogue between Opposition Members, Ministers and their Back Benchers to try to improve a Bill. I am delighted that the hon. Lady has been able to achieve that.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 9

DEFENDANT'S BENEFIT

Lords amendment: No. 6.

Mrs. McGuire: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 7, 8, 10, 14, 15, 31 to 33, 45, 46, 48, 52, 53, 67, 75 to 77, 79, 83, 84, 100 and 324.

Mrs. McGuire: This is a mixed group of Government amendments. Some of them are fine tuning, but as a whole they are important to the operation of the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 6 to 8, 10, 45, 46, 48, 75 to 77 and 79 deal with a technical problem affecting certain cases where a previous confiscation order has been made against the defendant. That will ensure that any benefit taken into account for the purposes of a previous confiscation order is also taken into account when the court comes to make a new order against the same person.

Amendments Nos. 14, 15, 52, 53, 83 and 84 respond to Opposition concerns about clause 19, which empowers the court to order the defendant to provide information.

First, we have inserted a protection against self-incrimination for defendants. Secondly, we have made it clear that a failure to comply with the court's order exposes the defendant to contempt proceedings. That is necessary because the court has an explicit power under the clause to draw adverse inferences from such a failure. In the absence of a clear statement to the contrary, that explicit power could be misconstrued as preventing the court from exercising its contempt powers. The amendments put it beyond doubt that that is not the case.

Amendment No. 31 would make hearsay evidence admissible in restraint proceedings in England and Wales. It is needed because hearsay is not normally admissible in the Crown court, and restraint proceedings rely heavily on it in practice.

Amendments Nos. 32, 33 and 324 simply take note of the enactment of the Land Registration Act 2002. Amendment No. 67 would bring the legislative steer in clause 134 on the powers of the court and administrator in Scotland into line with those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Amendment No. 100 is technical, and would bring clause 212, which relates to the protection of receivers in Northern Ireland, into line with its equivalents for the other two jurisdictions.

Mr. Hawkins: We welcome the Under-Secretary's acknowledgement of many matters that we raised in Committee. I also welcome her transformation from being a Whip, in which role she also helped the Committee. It is a shame that the hon. Members for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) and for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), who served on the Committee and claimed in the previous debate that the Opposition were trying to wreck the Bill, are no longer present to hear her acknowledge that the Government are responding to the constructive points that we made to improve the measure. At least her fellow Under-Secretary is here and, whatever he says, he knows in his heart that the time in Committee was well spent and that it improved the Bill.

We want to make two small points. First, I want to consider the new provision about hearsay evidence, which was not debated in Committee but was introduced by Lord Bassam of Brighton on 22 April 2002. As Lord Goodhart said:

> "It is obvious that any introduction of hearsay evidence into criminal proceedings . . . where it was not available before is a matter that needs to be looked at very carefully."

He went on to say that its introduction

> "is solely in relation to restraint orders."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 April 2002; Vol. 634, c. 115.]

He did not therefore object to it. Will the Under-Secretary confirm on the record that the Government do not intend the provision to be the thin end of any wedge, or plan to introduce new provisions to use hearsay when it has previously been inadmissible?

Will the Under-Secretary of State confirm that she and her officials will try to ensure that all those who try the cases that involve the new use of hearsay have specific extra training? We are considering a new approach, which, as the Government rightly said, broadens powers. I should be grateful if the Under-Secretary would confirm that the work of the Judicial Studies Board and the preparation of judges to deal with the novel factors will take account of that.

The Under-Secretary referred to another matter that I wanted to raise: the importance of the privilege not to self-incriminate. We welcome the Government's response to Opposition Members' anxieties in another place and in Committee about that.

The hon. Lady was right to say that our debates, which led to the Government amendments, greatly improved the Bill. We do not therefore oppose the amendments.

Mrs. McGuire: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. Although we have criticisms of the Opposition, much of the discussion in Committee was constructive and I am grateful to him for recognising that we responded to that.

[Mrs. McGuire]

I confirm that the provision on hearsay does not constitute the thin end of any wedge. It does not change the procedure and is simply a consequence of moving restraint from the High Court to the Crown court. Although I accept that introducing hearsay may be a new departure in some circumstances, we give a commitment to additional training. The Judicial Studies Board will ensure that that is done. In view of those assurances, I trust that we shall have consensus on the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 7 and 8 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 9, after clause 10, to insert the following new clause—*Compensation of creditors.*

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 30, 47, 66, 78, 99 and 166 and the Government motions to disagree thereto.

5.30 pm

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: In moving on to compensation for creditors with regard to the confiscation system, I should like to make it clear to the House that, in discussing Lords amendment No. 4 and the associated group of amendments, I hope that I said nothing to detract from the understanding that confiscation applies to a very wide range of offenders—far wider than that which was covered previously. My hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) raised an issue in respect of international bribery and corruption, about which I know he is concerned. I am sure that he will be pleased to hear me confirm that the Bill enables criminal confiscation orders to be made in relation to such offences and allows restraint of assets that are the proceeds of such offences.

The amendments cover a territory that should be very familiar to the House. We discussed the issue with which they deal at considerable length in Committee on 20 November last year. I should also make it clear to the House that the provisions that the amendments would overturn have been a settled feature of the tough confiscation legislation that the Conservative party introduced in 1986 and 1988. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) is not present, but I am not the slightest bit embarrassed to say that we are trying to build on that tough legislation.

Given the degree of earlier discussion about the issues, I should like briefly to describe the amendments, which all relate to the position of unsecured creditors who have outstanding loans. The effect of amendments Nos. 9, 47 and 78 would be to make the enforcement authorities liable to pay the unsecured debts of any person whom the defendant was unable to repay because of the making of a confiscation order. Amendments Nos. 30, 66 and 99 would allow restrained assets to be used to pay any debts of the defendant that were incurred before the restraint order was made. Amendment No. 166 would have a similar effect in relation to part 5 as amendments Nos. 9, 47 and 78. It would empower to court to require the enforcement authority to pay compensation to any person whom the respondent was unable to pay because of the making of a civil recovery order. The requirement could be placed on the enforcement authority if the debt was incurred for full consideration and the debtor had no reason to expect that the recovery order could be made against the respondent.

I shall speak first to the amendments affecting parts 2, 3 and 4. The amendments would undermine the confiscation scheme so completely as to render it inoperable. As I indicated, they would make the enforcement authorities liable to pay any unsecured creditor of the defendant at the time when the confiscation order was made.

The amendments state that such payments would be a matter for the courts; the creditor would make an application to the court and it would be for the court to decide who should pay. This raises the question of how such applications would be defended. The defendant to the action would be the enforcement authority involved in obtaining the confiscation order—it might be the Crown Prosecution Service, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, or the director of the Assets Recovery Agency. It would fall to those authorities to defend such actions. I would personally prefer the CPS, Customs and the director of the agency that we envisage arising from the Bill to spend their time carrying out their proper functions, rather than defending actions against them in the courts from persons claiming to be the unsecured creditors of criminals.

Mr. Hogg: Will the Minister be good enough to tell the House the difference in principle between protecting under clause 310 an innocent purchaser for value of what would otherwise be recoverable property and a bona fide supplier of goods such as the local plumber?

Mr. Ainsworth: I think that it is quite clear what the difference is. The powers in the Bill give us various abilities to trace the proceeds of crime or that which has come to represent the proceeds of crime. To do that, we need to be able to trace it through the many transactions that might take place, some of which will be the quite genuine transactions that people enter into throughout their lives, while others will be transactions designed to hide the proceeds of crime.

Norman Baker *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that I cannot respond to two Members at once.

In giving the powers to trace the eventual representation of the proceeds of crime, we need to protect the genuine, bona fide purchaser for value, but I do not believe that the state needs to take on the responsibility for compensating the unsecured creditors of criminals. I am not sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has ever argued that position in the past, and he should think very seriously about some of the results that might flow from that proposition.

Norman Baker: The Minister said, if am not misquoting him, that he believed that the Lords amendments would undermine the confiscation procedures. Is it not the case, however, that those who have ill-gotten gains will still lose them, and that the only questions are: what will happen to those ill-gotten gains, and should genuine creditors be able to reclaim their money?

Mr. Ainsworth: If I thought that that was the case, I would give serious consideration to the amendments. I do not believe, however, that members of the criminal fraternity are so naïve that—if we put these proposals into the Bill—they would not be able to conjure up situations in which they owed all sorts of people money, to ensure that, if a confiscation order were made against them, they would have no effective assets that were not owed to whoever—their wife, perhaps, or Joe up the road. In that way, they would make sure that the state could not get its hands on the proceeds of crime.

Norman Baker: I understand the Minister's argument. Does he accept, however, that there will be many occasions on which innocent tradesmen and others—many of whom will be adversely affected by the provisions in the Bill—will be genuinely innocent victims? Is he saying that, if such people have to suffer, that is a price that must be paid for the greater good?

Mr. Ainsworth: There will be such occasions, but I ask the hon. Gentleman to consider this argument. When people become unsecured creditors of other individuals, it is a decision that they take for themselves, and a risk that they take upon themselves. There are many circumstances in which they effectively forfeit what they have loaned to the individual concerned. If someone owed tax, for example, and had no other means, would the hon. Gentleman suggest that the Inland Revenue should not collect the tax, and that the unsecured creditors should be paid instead, coming ahead of the tax man?

Would the hon. Gentleman suggest that, if a fine were imposed by the court on someone as a result of his criminality, the payment of the fine ought to come lower down the list than the payment of an unsecured creditor in relation to the call on that person's assets?

There are lots of circumstances in bankruptcy, court and other proceedings in which people do not come at the top of the list because they are unsecured creditors. I see no reason for their coming top of the list with regard to confiscation. My real problem—I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts this—is that the scope for abuse is absolutely phenomenal—to the point where it would render confiscation inoperable.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I appreciate that there is scope for abuse, and the Minister is right to refer to it. Equally, there is the issue of commercial certainty and common sense. In answering the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), the Minister referred to the real point on insolvency. However, does he not appreciate that there is an inconsistency between the Government's position in that regard and the new Enterprise Bill, under which, of course, the Crown preference is being done away with? It is therefore now understood that the Crown—be it some tax authority or other—would not necessarily have preference in such circumstances when an insolvency occurred.

Mr. Ainsworth: Let me continue with the notes that I had planned to read to the House. Insolvency will be picked up and, I hope, dealt with satisfactorily. If not, we may wind up differing on the issue.

As I was saying, the enforcement authorities would be in the front line of implementing the amendments, so I asked my officials to ask them what they think. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) has evidently lost all interest in the Bill.

We asked those who would wind up defending such arrangements—Customs and the CPS, for example—what the practical effect of the amendments would be. They told us that it would be highly detrimental to the operation of an effective confiscation system. They consider, as we have always argued, that the amendments would provoke a flood of bogus applications from alleged creditors, who are often the criminal's associates, based on spurious documents purporting to show that debts occurred before the relevant date, when in reality they did not.

The amendments would also encourage defendants to defeat the confiscation process by running up legitimate debts, safe in the knowledge that the authorities would be left out of pocket at the end of any confiscation proceedings. That would deter the authorities from taking on cases in the first place.

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: Now that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has decided to pay attention to the proceedings, I give way to him.

Mr. Hogg: I know that the Minister is concerned about the position of employees. Will he please tell the House the answer to this question? If a bona fide person is employed by the person against whom the confiscation order is made and the effect of the confiscation order is to prevent the person against whom it is made from paying his employees, will the employee have any claim as a secured creditor, or is he simply out of pocket?

Mr. Ainsworth: Let me ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman to think about the issue that he raises. I do not know whether he is suggesting that, because somebody is an employer, that protects them against the power to confiscate the proceeds of crime.

Mr. Hogg: Employee protection.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am talking about the employer. I do not believe that employers should be put in any special position where they are protected because they are employers and allowed to continue to keep the profits of crime.

Mr. Hogg: Employee protection.

Mr. Ainsworth: Employees have statutory protection in many, many circumstances. I see no measures in the Bill that would decrease the protections given to employees in many circumstances in which they find themselves on the receiving end of the demise of their employer.

Mr. Hawkins: Someone who is owed wages, but has not yet been paid, simply becomes yet another unsecured creditor—is that not true? The Minister may not fully understand the implications of his own legislation,

[Mr. Hawkins]

but there is no doubt that owed wages would simply disappear if the confiscation order were made. Then there would be no security for the person who was owed.

5.45 pm

Mr. Ainsworth: As I think I have told the hon. Gentleman, I do not believe that because someone is an employer—

Mr. Hawkins: That is not the point.

Mr. Ainsworth: It is the point. Will the hon. Gentleman listen for just a minute? I do not believe that because someone is an employer and therefore has the responsibilities of an employer, a separate set of regulations should govern what that employer should get away with in terms of profits from crime. Furthermore, I do not think any measures in the Bill are detrimental to the statutory protections offered to employees in the many other circumstances in which their employer's demise may take place.

Rob Marris: It appears that the Opposition want to put the employee of someone subject to such an order in a better position than the employee of a company that goes bust. In the latter case, the holders of fixed charges and floating charges would in many instances take all the money. The discharged employees would have recourse only to the Secretary of State's redundancy fund, which would apply following a restraint order against, say, a drug-dealing employer.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend is right. It is being suggested that employees of a criminal employer would enjoy greater protection than those of a legitimate business enterprise. I do not know whether Conservative Members believe that that ought to be the case, but if they want to advance such an argument they can wait until I sit down. It would certainly be interesting to hear what they had to say.

Annabelle Ewing: I do not think such an instance will arise, but in what other circumstances—under Scotland, England and Wales or Northern Ireland law—are creditors put in such a preferential position?

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not pretend to be an expert. I never come to the Dispatch Box and claim to be an expert on insolvency, contract law, commercial law or anything else of that nature. But I know of no circumstances in which people are given such preferential treatment, which is why I have raised the issue of tax that is owed and the issue of fines. In neither of those circumstances are creditors given preferential treatment in the case of unsecured loans, but that is now being proposed in relation to confiscation.

As I have said, the amendments would encourage defendants to defeat the confiscation process by running up legitimate debts, safe in the knowledge that the authorities would be left out of pocket at the end of the proceedings. That would strongly deter the authorities from initiating cases, and would put a significant weapon in the hands of criminals seeking to disrupt their activities. We also consider the amendments wrong in principle, for a number of reasons. As we said in Committee, they have implications for a wide range of other debts to the Crown, such as unpaid taxes and fines. Although it was argued in another place that it was possible to distinguish between such disposals, there is no difference between them: they are debts to the Crown.

We have yet to hear a satisfactory explanation of how that objection can be overcome. The logical consequence of the amendments, if they are accepted, is the Government's establishing a scheme to transfer unpaid taxes, fines and other obligations to the creditors of those with outstanding loans which, as a result of an obligation, the debtor is unable to repay. We feel that no Government would ever accept such a principle. Nor is it clear to us why the enforcement authorities should be liable for the debts, given that the defendant's liability for a private debt is unaffected by the making of a confiscation order. The defendant should be obliged to pay the confiscation order and to honour the debt, which is what the Bill provides for.

Mr. Grieve: It seemed that the Minister answered his own question as he went along. He mentioned taxes and fines, and said that we should not contemplate the idea of taxes and fines being paid to a creditor, but I am sure that he will agree that we are not concerned in this case with taxes and fines. This is a completely new regime. The money that is being taken by the state is not being taken either as a tax or a fine. Indeed, in the civil context, it is a novel concept.

Mr. Ainsworth: The fact that it is a new concept hardly makes the hon. Gentleman's case. These are the proceeds of criminality. He appears to suggest that the proceeds of crime should be used to pay creditors. If someone were to steal my car, they should not use the proceeds to pay their debts, or be allowed to do so. Why on earth does he think that someone should be allowed to use the proceeds of crime to pay their debts?

Mr. Grieve: The Minister is being disingenuous. If his car is stolen and the money is used by a person, he will have a prior claim on that money. We have discussed this in Committee; we went round and round in circles. The point is that no one has a prior claim to a great many of the assets that are being confiscated. They are not a debt owing to the state. They are not a tax. They are not a fine. They are moneys that may have been acquired by a tremendous amount of sweat and labour by the person concerned. It just happens to have been tainted by criminality. That is the distinction. When implementing the new regime, we should have regard to the victims, who will be the unsecured creditors in this case.

Mr. Ainsworth: As I have said, the problem, which I hope the hon. Gentleman acknowledges, is that it would be easy to fabricate such situations, but I am not suggesting that the creditors are criminal in those circumstances. We do not encourage people to thieve to pay their debts, so why on earth should we allow people to pay their debts from property that they have stolen? I simply do not see the point. That is my fundamental objection in principle.

If the hon. Gentleman is to persuade the House to support the amendments from the other place, he will have to explain in great detail how on earth we would guard against the kind of abuses that would inevitably arise, rendering confiscation ineffective. Here is a second opportunity for the Opposition to prove the Prime Minister wrong and to support the Government on these much needed measures, which go to the heart of the Bill.

Mr. Davidson: I would be grateful if the Minister clarified what the effect of the Opposition proposals would be. Am I right in thinking that, if someone were charged but not detained on offences, and they would be likely to know whether they were guilty, they could easily decline to pay any credit card bills that they had outstanding and incur all sorts of expenditure? If the Lords amendment were passed, would that expenditure be met out of assets that would otherwise be seized? Is that the way in which the provision would operate? Surely there would be a perverse incentive to waste money—to spend money on meals and drink?

Rob Marris: These people could buy a Rolls-Royce.

Mr. Davidson: If they bought a Rolls-Royce, the Rolls-Royce would then be an asset that could be seized, but it would be difficult to get a meal or drink back. It is difficult to get a drink out of some of my colleagues at the best of times. After it had been consumed, it would be even more difficult.

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not know whether my hon. Friend falls into this category, but there are people who, for many different reasons, live constantly in a state of credit and debt.

There would be so many ways round the legislation if we accepted the amendments. If, because of the activities that they knew they were involved in, people had any suspicion that they might be threatened with a restraint order, they could ensure that their debts were always more than their assets, and so be free from any threat of confiscation. Alternatively, they could manufacture unsecured creditors after the fact, and it would be extremely difficult and massively time-consuming to prove that those creditors were not bona fide.

Earlier in the debate hon. Members complained that the Assets Recovery Agency ought to be two or three times the size that we envisage, and Members from Northern Ireland want there to be a substantial office over there. Is this what we want the Assets Recovery Agency to do? Do we want it to spend half its time trying to prove in court that creditors are not bona fide, or do we want it to get on with confiscating the proceeds of crime? I suggest the latter, so I ask hon. Members to vote against the Lords amendments.

Mr. Hawkins: We on the Conservative Benches feel that in part the Minister and his colleagues genuinely misunderstand the purpose of the Lords amendments, and in part, as we heard in the later part of the Minister's speech, they are overstating their response. May I make it clear, especially to Government Back Benchers, that the purpose of the amendments is only to prevent the creation of more entirely innocent victims of the Bill? To those who are worried about the idea of protecting the innocent little man, I shall quote from what Lord Goodhart said in response to the Minister in another place:

> "As the Minister says, the Bill protects the rights of secured creditors. That means banks and building societies. They are the big boys, who always come out well on this sort of occasion. However, the small people—the unsecured creditors—lose out."

In an extraordinary exchange between the Minister in another place—Lord Falconer of Thoroton—and the Opposition spokesmen there, the Minister suggested that innocent people could protect themselves from the legislation by "getting security", and putting themselves in the position of secured creditors. To his credit, the Under-Secretary has not argued that this afternoon. Both my noble Friend Baroness Buscombe and Lord Goodhart pointed out that it was ridiculous to expect small builders or plumbers to get security.

We are talking about the entirely innocent bona fide person with no knowledge that the small amount of building or plumbing work that he is doing might be for somebody who, although they appeared legitimate, later turned out to be on the receiving end of a confiscation order.

When these matters were being debated in another place—the amendments were eventually carried by a substantial majority—Lord Goodhart said:

> "Obviously, we do not wish to enable bogus debts and artificially created debts to be used, as I have said, to extract money. So the existence of full consideration provided by the creditor must be shown. Thirdly, the creditor must have no reason to believe that a confiscation order or a civil recovery order is likely to be made so that if the creditor is aware of the possibility of an order then he is on notice of the existence of the risk. We accept that in those circumstances it is proper that he should bear that risk".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 25 June 2002; Vol. 636, c. 1231-37.]

We accept entirely the Minister's case against the creation of bogus debts, but if he consults those who advise him, he should accept that the courts are well used to analysing whether debts are bogus. If it is made clear, as was the intention when the amendments were agreed to in another place, that their purpose is only to protect the entirely innocent, such as the small builder or small plumber that I have talked about—

6 pm

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend points out that the courts have experience in determining whether or not a claimant is bogus. Will he also point out to the Under-Secretary that clause 310 and related clauses make provision for exactly that process?

Mr. Hawkins: As my right hon. and learned Friend points out, certain other parts of the Bill are inconsistent with this one. In our lengthy debates in Committee, we tried very hard to ensure that, so far as other aspects of the Bill were concerned, those who are bona fide are protected. The Government have accepted our argument in other parts of the Bill and in their own provisions, and we find it difficult to understand why they have not accepted the same logic here.

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): Will the hon. Gentleman address the point that was made earlier? The principal reason why Labour Members will reject the amendments is that sham creditors could be put forward by drug dealers, for example, and it would take for ever to get the compensation orders through the courts. The hon. Gentleman has not mentioned that point, and he should deal with it.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken—that is precisely what I have been talking about. Indeed, I quoted Lord Goodhart, who explained that the purpose

[Mr. Hawkins]

of the amendments is to prevent the creation of bogus debts. The hon. Gentleman should know from his own professional expertise that in bankruptcy cases, courts frequently have to deal with supposedly legitimate debts that turn out to be bogus. Courts therefore have enormous expertise in such matters.

We are talking about trying to prevent entirely innocent people from being caught by these provisions as a side wind. It is a question of introducing not loopholes for employers, but protection for employees and small traders.

Mr. Davidson *rose—*

Stephen Hesford: For the benefit of the House, will the hon. Gentleman explain what will happen if drug dealers know that they can gum up the works? My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned staffing the agency in respect of Northern Ireland and other places. If drug dealers know that they can gum up the works with all this nonsense, they will do so, and the Assets Recovery Agency will spend its time gazing at its own navel.

Mr. Hawkins: My point is that the works would not be gummed up because the courts have great expertise in showing easily what is bogus and what is not; indeed, that process is already commonplace in insolvency cases. These amendments were put forward in another place on the basis of making it clear, specifically and in terms, that there is no intention of opening a loophole for bogus claims.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Tom Harris: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can deal with a specific example of what Labour Members are worried might happen if the amendment were accepted. What if it emerged that a suspected drug dealer who is appearing before the courts owes hundreds of thousands of pounds to, for example, the much maligned sauna parlour or tanning shop? Indeed, we discussed such an example at length in Committee. Such premises are often owned by relatives or friends of drug dealers. With a good accountant, it would be very easy to wrap up such a process interminably—to the extent that such confiscation orders would mean absolutely nothing.

Mr. Hawkins: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken in thinking that it is easy to wrap up these matters interminably. Given the existing expertise in our courts, I do not accept that it would be at all difficult to disentangle the bogus from the genuine. That happens all the time—day in, day out, week in, week out. It would not gum up the works.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman says that it happens all the time and that that is the reality of life, but let us consider that reality. He talks about trying to protect the little man, but he will surely accept that small business people have to protect themselves from default every single day of the week. When was the last time he managed to get a double glazing firm to fit windows without its receiving some money up front? How much work has he ever got a plumber to do without providing some kind of credit first? He is a Member of Parliament who is clearly not going to rush off, yet such people still seek to protect themselves. As he well knows, that is the reality of life as it affects the little man now.

Mr. Hawkins: I do not accept that that is common practice for small firms. It is not easy to obtain security for small debts. Lord Falconer of Thoroton repeated the argument that that is the way of the world. However, in reply, Lord Goodhart said that

> "even the most distinguished and successful of barristers sometimes has to appear to advance a totally indefensible argument. I must say that I have rarely, if ever, heard such an indefensible argument as that put forward by the noble and learned Lord this afternoon.
>
> For a start, he said that the enforcement authority would be an agent paying off the unsecured debts of the criminal . . . he then said that what we are asking for would be 'stunning' protection. What is stunning about this is the Government's claim to take away an innocent person's property. That is, among other things, contrary to the first protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights.
>
> In the case of the builder that we have suggested, the Government are claiming money twice because the state gets the improved value of the defendant's building without having to pay"

the trader

> "for the cost of the improvement. That is clearly double counting."—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 25 June 2002; Vol. 636, c. 1237.]

Vera Baird: I intervene in a genuine search for enlightenment. The point has already been made by several hon. Members, but all we are really concerned about is a situation in which someone is forced into bankruptcy or insolvency. If the director takes away part of that person's assets but he still has some left, he pays his own debts. If he is forced into bankruptcy or insolvency, the hon. Gentleman wants to protect the little man from that situation; but why should the little man in that situation be in any better position because the criminal has been forced into bankruptcy by this legislation as opposed to by the VAT man, the tax man, his mortgagees or anyone else? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Hawkins: The simplest answer—as my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) has just pointed out from a sedentary position—is that in this situation there is no debt. That is what makes it different from the conventional bankruptcy. The hon. and learned Lady shakes her head, but I hope that the Minister will accept our good will. We are not trying to drive a coach and horses through the legislation: we are trying to protect entirely innocent people. The Minister knows that and we discussed the issue at length in Committee.

The debate will not improve by repetition, but when the Minister responds I hope that he will accept that when Baroness Buscombe and Lord Goodhart proposed the amendment in the other place, they were supported by many peers, of all parties and none, including Law Lords who understand the significance of the point that we are making. This is not simply a matter of removing the assets of the criminals: it is ensuring that no more innocent victims are accidentally caught in the side wind from the Bill.

Vera Baird: Much of what I intended to say has already been said, so I shall be brief. Unsecured creditors, by definition, do not have security for their debts. They are hostages to whatever befalls their debtor. He may run away and go overseas, and if they cannot get their money, that is hard luck. If the debtor becomes insolvent or bankrupt, again the creditors might not be able to get their money. That is not a new situation, nor is it unexpected. In business, that sort of thing needs to be taken in one's stride.

I do not accept the argument put vicariously by the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), for the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), that the order does not constitute a debt to the state. Once an order has been made, there could be no more acute debt to the state. Why should particular protection be given in such cases?

Mr. Grieve: I disagree with the hon. and learned Lady. Generally speaking, in civil litigation or even in tax there is a legal obligation of money owing by one person to another. In this case, although I fully support the institution of the new regime, there will be no debt owing. The money will be taken not because it is owed as a legal debt, but because its origin is tainted. That is a distinct state of affairs and that is why it would be proper to look to the other victims of the offender, which would include the small creditors.

Vera Baird: That intervention does not make sense. Once the order has been made, there is a debt to the state. It is as simple as that, and no alternative argument can alter the matter. The order will push the defendant into bankruptcy, at which point the debt becomes a debt to the state. It is at that point that a person owed money by the defendant will get into difficulties.

Mr. Boris Johnson: The hon. and learned Lady may be right that, in her legalistic phrase, it is a debt to the state, but does not the state also owe a duty to the innocent people who will be caught up in this expropriation of money?

Vera Baird: That takes me neatly to my next point. I repeat that there is no justification for putting victims of bankruptcy caused by this Bill into a separate category from those who are victims of other types of bankruptcy.

No Conservative Member has offered a convincing argument for that. However, if such an argument had been made, there would need to be a value judgment about whether it was more important to protect unsecured creditors or to seize criminals' assets for the state's use. At least part of what is seized will be given to the local police force, for use on local policing needs such as the detection of crime and the prevention of future crime. The proceeds would be used to save people in my constituency and others like it from the disorder that wrecks their lives every day. My value judgment would place confiscation above the protection of unsecured creditors

Mr. Grieve: May I offer a couple of other examples? If a house is seized whose value has been improved by a local builder to the tune of £25,000, the state acquires the benefit but the builder does not get compensated for the money that he has put in. Again, what happens if a car that has not been fully paid for is seized? The state takes the car, but the person who sold the car is left with nothing because he is not secured. Surely that is the justification for the amendment that the hon. and learned Lady seeks?

Vera Baird: I repeat that that is exactly the same as what happens when a person goes bankrupt for any other reason. We are concerned not with what happens when a person has enough money to pay his debts, but with what happens when the order renders that person bankrupt. A bankrupt is bankrupt, regardless of who caused it, and a creditor should not be left in a better position because the bankrupt happens to be a criminal. There is no sense in that argument.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Does not my hon. and learned Friend agree that a creditor in this situation would enjoy a benefit that is not available to others? He would benefit from what is in effect a state guarantee service, which would pay the debt. No other type of creditor has access to such a service.

Vera Baird: Creditors in the situation that has been described would either get the cast-iron benefit of the state-backed guarantee company, or there would be intolerably long arguments in court about who owed what to whom, and about what was or was not a justifiable debt. I do not accept what the hon. Member for Surrey Heath said about courts arriving at quick and simple decisions.

Do Opposition Members really think that the courts should spend time deciding whether claims are bogus, when the only people with real information about that will be the parties to the claim—that is, the gangster and his best friend, or the gangster and some remote acquaintance arranged through that best friend? How will a court be able to get to the bottom of that puzzle simply and easily?

Moreover, a debt might be genuine but there could be a problem with the goods—how would the court deal with that? Let us say that the police find a computer supposedly worth £10,000 in a criminal's house, but discover that it is not fit for its purpose and does not work: is there then to be a long civil trial to determine whether the goods were defective and whether the debt is really owed? The proposal is guaranteed to gum up the works.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. and learned Lady will be familiar with clause 310, where she knows full well the Bill provides that a property does not come within the class of recoverable property if it was disposed of in good faith and without notice. Those are precisely the issues that we are discussing. Is the hon. and learned Lady saying that the court cannot discharge the function under clause 310?

6.15 pm

Vera Baird: No, I am not saying that. I am saying that what is suggested is a recipe for gumming up the works. It offers to the criminal an opportunity to do everything that he can, as soon as he feels the scent getting closer, to generate as much debt as possible.

It is likely, is it not, that such debts which are unsecured will be small ones? It will not necessarily be the normal case that seizing a criminal's assets under the Bill will make him go bankrupt or insolvent. We are speaking of a small number of small debts which the amendment would assist. The balance of opinion in all parts of the House is clearly against the amendment, which would open the floodgates to abuse.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. and learned Lady consider the possibility that if the Bill becomes law in its current form, a year or so after it has come into force she may be

[Mr. Hawkins]

faced in her constituency surgery in Redcar one day by a small builder who comes along and says, "I want you to take this up. I am £1,000 out of pocket for work that I did in all good faith for somebody who I had no idea was a criminal, but who has been the subject of a confiscation order under the Act." Will the hon. and learned Lady say to her constituent the builder, "I am terribly sorry. My value judgment is that it is far more important that the state should grab the money than that the innocent builder should have his £1,000"?

Vera Baird: I have explained the realities of the position, which are not as the hon. Gentleman is, I fear, pretending that they are.

Norman Baker: We heard from the Home Secretary this week how important it was that the victim should come first under the new criminal justice regime that the Government want to create. Great stress was put on that. We were told that for too long, the victims of crime had been neglected and the criminals had got away with it. Yet this afternoon, I hear many siren voices from the Government Benches clamouring to get hold of the guilty, and not very many who are keen to speak up for the innocent, and there are innocent people—

Mr. Tom Harris *rose*—

Norman Baker: I have barely started, so I shall wait until I have made some progress before I give way.

As the Minister was generous enough to accept when I intervened on him, some innocent people will be caught up and will suffer as a consequence of the Bill. For reasons that I entirely understand, the Minister fears that if the amendment were passed, it would open the floodgates to people gumming up the works—that is the phrase that has been used—and that the effect of the Bill would be diminished.

I understand that point, and we in the Opposition must address it. Equally, the Minister must address the point that innocent people will be caught up. It is not satisfactory to brush that aside and say, "If a few bystanders are caught up in the process, that's tough." In the House, if nowhere else, we must ensure that the innocent are protected. That is a basic point of justice, which we operate in our democracy. It is no good acting as though the innocent do not count; they do count.

How does the proposal differ from the existing situation? Let me deal with some of the points that Labour Members have made. The first difference is one of scale. The Minister said, in response to a comment from one of his colleagues, that confiscation will apply to a wide range of offenders. Indeed, the Bill is designed to be far reaching and to ensure that the proceeds of crime will be picked up wherever they can be found. Of course my colleagues and I support that principle, as do the Conservatives. So the scale of possible injustice will be greater because the scale of confiscation will be greater. That is the first point.

The second point is about predictability. The Minister said that small builders and others who enter into arrangements with other people ought to have their eyes open and be prepared for eventualities that are unhelpful to them, and they are to some degree. However, the difference is that it will be more difficult for the small builder or another individual to pick up the fact that a calamity is about to befall him and that the debt will somehow be unsecured because the very purpose of the legislation is to catch not simply the low-life drug dealers that the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) talked about and whom people in the community may well know. *[Interruption.]* Did the hon. Gentleman say that there were such people in Henley?

Ian Lucas: The hon. Gentleman said, "High life".

Norman Baker: Oh, high life. The people who undertake tasks or perform services for those people probably know that they may well have question marks over their heads, that they are identified in the community and therefore that there is a risk. However, the Bill is designed to deal with the people whom the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) wants dealt with. They are the sort of people who are City business types, who are respectable types, who have a nice house in Esher and who appear to be the pinnacle of respectability. They are the kind of people who the hon. Gentleman wants to get at. They are the kind of people who may well have a criminal lifestyle, and they will be caught for the first time. It is very good that we catch those people, but how can a small builder have a suspicion when he undertakes a massive job for a landowner with a big house in Esher that suddenly, before his very eyes, all the money will be seized because, for the first time, we have a legislative framework that will allow that to happen? He will have no way of knowing that.

Annabelle Ewing: I do not want to go over the same ground again, but the small builder in the hon. Gentleman's scenario would be at exactly the same risk as if he were to treat with a landowner whose assets were sequestrated. What is the difference?

Norman Baker: I am trying to explain the difference, and I am running through a list of points that show the difference. I have dealt with two main differences so far—scale and predictability.

The third point is that the fact that the Minister sought to draw inappropriate parallels in responding to my intervention. He referred to the Inland Revenue and tax liabilities. He also referred to the possibility of imposing fines. I understand why he makes those points, but, with respect to the Minister, they are not appropriate analogies to make.

First, the Inland Revenue involves a debt. We are not talking about debts, except in the purely legalistic and slight odd way in which the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) did so. What we are talking about is not the same as a tax debt. Indeed, I think that the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) intervened earlier to make to the point that the Enterprise Bill will diminish Crown preference, so the Government are doing away with the idea that the state can automatically grab something.

Except in extremely rare circumstances, fines are not of a magnitude to confiscate people's assets entirely. Fines involve an element of people's assets. It is an odd fine that says, "Pay over everything you have." We do not have such fines, but such confiscation may have that effect in law. So it is not fair to draw that parallel and to say that we are talking about fines.

It has been argued that those in the enforcement authorities would be distracted because dealing with such issues is not the main part of their job. I accept that there may well be a time consequence and that it may well be significant, but that is no reason to allow a few innocent people to suffer as a consequence. I do not recognise that equation as being in any way just or appropriate in a democracy. If the Minister wants to ensure justice, he should ensure that provision is made for justice. That is a red herring, and it is wholly inappropriate for the Minister to raise that issue.

The Minister made a serious point. He and his hon. Friends are concerned that the Lords amendment will let criminals off the hook. Other bits and pieces around the edges have been mentioned so far, but that is the nub of his argument. If someone has their Rolls-Royce seized, it will still be seized. The argument about whether the state has the benefit of that Rolls-Royce or the builder who has undertaken the work has the benefit of it will take place afterwards. For the person whose assets have been seized, that Rolls-Royce still goes. There is no benefit to him from that arrangement. Those who benefit from the proceeds of crime will still lose those proceeds under the amendment.

It would also be possible, were the Under-Secretary concerned about the matter, to put in place a system that put an onus on the creditors to prove what was owed to them. Creditors would therefore have to bring forward to the court—were the Under-Secretary more comfortable with such an arrangement—proof that they are owed money. They would have to do that in any case, but some of the onus should be taken off the Assets Recovery Agency. They should at least have a chance, however, to say, "I have incurred work, I have put half my life over the last six months into this house", or whatever it happens to be. They should at least have a chance of saying in court or elsewhere, "I've just lost everything I had because of something that I knew nothing about. This guy has assets that you are not letting me get hold of."

If the Under-Secretary is not happy with the amendments in their current form because he feels that they will lead to criminals using their friends or their relatives, the onus should be changed. We could examine the hurdles, consider when the provision might kick in, and perhaps limit it to one-person businesses. Let us do something at least to ensure that those innocent victims—of which there will be some under this Bill—are not affected. It cannot be beyond the wit of the Under-Secretary and his officials to construct a scenario in which the criminal is not given gaping holes through which to walk, but in which, at the same time, the innocent are not persecuted and deprived of what is rightfully theirs.

Mr. Davidson: I want to raise the question of whether this proposal is genuinely being put forward by the criminal's friends. We should judge that on the basis of whether, if the proposal were passed, criminals would be more or less likely to enjoy their ill-gotten assets, and whether they would be more or less likely to be able to hold on to some of them.

It seems perfectly clear that the thrust of the proposal would benefit the criminals whom we seek to pursue. I have been impressed by the way in which the lawyers among the Opposition have been able to find loopholes through which people can hide money away. That seems to be the role of the lawyer in these circumstances. As was indicated earlier, money could be hidden in a variety of ingenious ways, which are almost deliberately designed to clog up the machinery.

I heard from the Opposition some tears of grief for innocent tradesmen, which I had not thought was generally typical of them. Will they clarify what is a small creditor? We have heard no such definition. What worries me is that it is not just the man who is owed money for a couple of bottles of milk. We have already heard reference to building contractors; indeed, the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) commented on the possibility of massive building work being included. Clearly, the door that the Opposition are seeking to open for small creditors could easily be opened widely to encompass almost any creditor. The Opposition's case is greatly diminished by the lack of mention of a maximum figure. Nor have they mentioned or acknowledged the potential for abuse.

I accept that it is possible—

Ian Lucas *rose—*

Mr. Davidson: I would prefer not to take interventions, as we have had two major statements this afternoon. We are therefore left without much time to debate these matters.

I accept that there is a difference between bogus and artificially created debts. It is entirely possible, however, for debts to be created that are not artificial and bogus but are the product of spending sprees undertaken by people who know that they are likely to be found guilty, and who know that they are likely to have all their assets seized. Those debts would be genuine, but, none the less, they are created in a way that is deliberately designed to thwart the means of this Bill.

As I said, it is a matter of going out on spending sprees, buying consumables and clothes and giving away presents. Some of those could be chased up at great personal expense, but none the less it gives a green light to abuses. Although some innocent people might be damaged by the measure, I cannot think of any other proposal that will not be abused by lawyers to clog up the machinery and to benefit the criminals. I hope that the House rejects the Lords amendment.

6.30 pm

Mr. Hogg: The fact that we are hurrying on with the debate and many of the amendments will not be discussed shows the evil associated with timetable motions.

My right hon. and hon. Friends are on the side of the victim this time. Yesterday the Home Secretary told us that the criminal justice system should be attuned to take account of the interests of the victim. That is what the Lords amendment would do and it is what my hon. Friends, supported by the Liberal Democrats, want to achieve. The question is where the loss should fall in the event of a confiscation order being made. We are being asked to prefer the interests of the state to the interests of the innocent supplier of goods and services. In all conscience, I cannot understand why the interests of the

[Mr. Hogg]

state should be preferred to the interests of the innocent supplier. Indeed, that protection is enshrined in the Bill and other legislation.

Clause 310 protects an innocent acquirer of property for value. The hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) asked why we should preserve the little person. The answer is that the innocent purchaser is preserved under clause 310. She also said—although I had difficulty understanding her argument, coming from an accomplished lawyer, as I am sure she is—that courts could not distinguish the bogus from the genuine. Yet the courts have to do that in a large number of cases. Indeed, they are expected to do that under clause 310 and its statutory predecessors.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Surely the point is the extent to which the state should protect the innocent or the bogus creditor when that individual would not obtain such assistance in any other respect from the state. If a confiscation order of, say, £10,000 is made against an accused and convicted person, the court might make compensation orders of perhaps £5,000 against that individual. If it transpires that the amount stipulated in the confiscation order cannot be collected, the state will end up paying out a greater sum in compensation than it recovers from confiscated assets. Does not that give those creditors an unfair advantage?

Mr. Hogg: That point was covered when my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) intervened on the hon. and learned Member for Redcar. What happens when a builder comes to the hon. Gentleman and says, "Look. I cannot recover the charges I want to make for repairing the plumbing because a compensation order has been made and there is no money available"? I do not suppose he will say, "Tough luck. I thought that decision was in the strategic interest of the country." Indeed, what he will say is, "I am extraordinarily sorry. I will write to the Minister and do what I can to help."

I can give another example that is little closer to the Labour party. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) referred to Maxwell's pensioners. He was right. Those pensioners could have claimed against Mr. Maxwell for fraud. A confiscation order could have been made against Mr. Maxwell which would have precluded him from paying the pensioners. I do not suppose that the Labour party would be saying to each and every one of the pensioners, "I am so sorry that you cannot be paid because all of the money has gone to the state." That would be the consequence of the amendment. We are saying that the little man should be protected against the state. Labour Members are saying that the state should be preferred to the little man. I know on which side I am.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) is obsessed with comparisons with clause 310. If he reads the Bill carefully, I hope that he will recognise that that clause deals with people who are already in possession of property that they bought for full value. I do not know whether in his dealings with the law he has ever come across a situation where people are seriously suggesting that unsecured creditors should be dealt with in the same way and given the same level of protection as the possessors of property. I do not know whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman has ever argued that in a court of law. However, that is not the position of unsecured creditors, and he knows that. His attempts to make comparisons with clause 310 are fallacious for that reason. The Bill protects victims, and it also protects the victims of crime. As hon. Members know, we changed the Bill so that we could pay compensation orders ahead of confiscation orders.

There is little doubt that there are two fundamental issues. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) almost begs me to accept that his intentions are wholly honourable and that he is trying only to protect the innocent. Yet he failed entirely to deal with the issue, as did the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker). The issue is how we protect ourselves from abuse. The creditor and the debtor would be able to collude in the fabrication of evidence that a debt existed. It would be in the interest of both of them to do so. Yet Opposition Members suggest that there is a simple way in which we could protect ourselves from that situation. There is not such a solution. It would be massively difficult so to protect ourselves. Confiscation proceedings would be rendered impossible to operate.

Let us say that the hon. Member for Surrey Heath loans me money. If I clear off to South Africa he will lose it, and that is all right. However, if it is proved that I am a serial criminal and the money is confiscated, it is being argued that the money should be returned to him. I do not see much difference between the two situations.

Opposition Members have failed to address fundamental difficulties. How could we protect ourselves from abuse? There are risks that unsecured creditors have to protect themselves from every working day of their lives.

Mr. Grieve: Is the Minister's only objection the practical one of fear of collusion? Is there not some further issue of principle, which seemed to be hinted at by the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird)? I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I did not understand the hon. and learned Lady's. For instance, in the Scottish provision, there is protection for wives, which the Government were happy to leave in the Bill. On that basis, I assume that the Minister did not have a philosophical objection. I found it extremely unpleasant that the state had to come first in such circumstances. Is that not in itself a recognition that we are not dealing with ordinary indebtedness, taxation or anything of the kind, but a completely new system? That is why the Government should listen on this issue.

Mr. Ainsworth: I have made it clear that I have two objections. I fail to see that there is a fundamental difference that applies to many people in many circumstances. I say to the hon. Members for Surrey Heath and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), but not as eloquently as would my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), that if they loan me money and I go to South Africa, they will not get their money back from me but they think that somebody else should cover the debt if I end up having it confiscated.

Mr. Boris Johnson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: No. I will not give way again. The big problem—the Opposition know that this is the truth—is that their proposal would wreck this part of the Bill. It is therefore quite justifiable, despite the doe eyes that the hon. Member for Surrey Heath is making, to say that this is a wrecking amendment, and I ask my hon. Friends to reject it.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 253, Noes 136.

Division No. 313] **[6.40 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

NOES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
R[illegible]rtson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
R[illegible] Mrs Marion
R[illegible]dell, Andrew
R[illegible]y, David
R[illegible]ll, Bob *(Colchester)*
S[illegible], Andrew
S[illegible]onds, Mark
S[illegible], Sir Michael
Sp[illegible] Bob
Sta[illegible] Rt Hon Sir John
Stee[illegible]hony
Streete[illegible]y
Stunell, A[illegible]y
Swayne, D[illegible]ond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen O'Brien and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords Amendments Nos. 10 to 17 agreed to.

Clause 22

ORDER MADE: RECONSIDERATION OF BENEFIT

Lords amendment: No. 18.

Mrs. McGuire: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 19 to 25, 28, 29, 56 to 65, 87 to 94, 97 and 98.

Mrs. McGuire: The amendments tackle concerns about the reconsideration provisions that the Opposition expressed at an earlier stage in our proceedings.

As hon. Members may recall, two of the three reconsideration clauses allow the prosecutor and the director to apply for an increase in the confiscation order only when they have new evidence of the defendant's benefit. However, clauses 22, 108 and 174, which enable the prosecutor and the defendant to apply for an extension to a confiscation order that has already been made, originally contained no requirement for the evidence to be new. We accept that that is a fair point, and the amendments would make the necessary changes to the clauses.

When we considered the amendments, we noted that it might be possible to argue that the relevant clauses do not permit more than one re-evaluation of an earlier confiscation order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Conversations are breaking out throughout the Chamber. The House should listen to the Minister.

Mrs. McGuire: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The effect that I described was not our intention, and the amendments would therefore make it clear in the clauses that multiple re-evaluations of earlier confiscation orders are possible.

A similar argument—that multiple re-evaluations are not possible—could be used about clauses 23, 109 and 175, which apply when further realisable property comes to light. A similar amendment has therefore been tabled to those clauses.

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to the Minister for taking on board the comments made in Committee. The amendment is undoubtedly a considerable improvement to the Bill and removes the possibility of sloppy practice by the agency in deciding how to deal with the recovery and confiscation process. I hope that she can reassure me that the same applies to multiple re-evaluations, which are an extremely good idea. I assume that any such further re-evaluation must be undertaken on the basis of further evidence becoming available, and not simply on the basis of the agency not having done its job properly.

Mrs. McGuire: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 19 to 29 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 30 disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 31 to 37 agreed to.

Clause 75

CRIMINAL LIFESTYLE

Lords amendment: No. 38.

Mrs. McGuire: I beg to move, That the House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 39 to 42, 68 to 72, 105 to 109, 261, 262, 265, 267, 268, 271, 278 to 280, 285 to 309, 314 to 316 and 319.

Mrs. McGuire: It has probably taken you longer to say that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, than it will take me to explain it.

The amendments respond to concerns expressed in the House that the offences attracting the criminal lifestyle regime were not set out in the Bill. As hon. Members will see, new schedules 2, 4 and 5 now set out a detailed list of such offences. We have approached the list by identifying offences that are inherently acquisitive and known to generate large profits. It is striking how many of the offences in the resulting list are serious, associated with organised crime or relate to matters of immediate public concern. That underlines once again how much of the criminal activity affecting our communities is driven by the profit motive.

It will be possible for the Secretary of State to add further offences to the list by order. In case there is any anxiety about that, I stress that the order-making power will be subject to the affirmative procedure. In addition, we have amended the test stating that a defendant who commits an offence lasting for six months or more has a criminal lifestyle. The test would theoretically have caught defendants convicted of offences from which they had not benefited. We would not wish that to be possible, because the criminal lifestyle regime is intended to catch only offenders who have been involved in acquisitive crime.

As a whole, the amendments represent a major improvement to the Bill, and I hope that the House will agree to them.

Mr. Hawkins: The Minister drew attention to the fact that, in relation to amendment No. 40 for England and Wales, amendment No. 70 for Scotland and amendment No. 107 for Northern Ireland, there is an order-making power allowing the Secretary of State and Scottish Ministers to amend by order. I am grateful to her for confirming that that is subject to the affirmative procedure, as the Opposition are always very concerned about legislation that gives Secretaries of State or Scottish Ministers power simply to amend by order without full debate in the House. Will she confirm that when such matters are debated, if Opposition Members or the Liberal Democrats wish, they can be taken on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Grieve: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are now within a few seconds of ending this evening's debate, and, by virtue of the fact that we had two statements this afternoon, we are quite unable, through no fault of any of the hon. Members participating in this debate, to do justice to the issues before the House on the Lords amendments. Is this not a travesty of the procedures of the House? We are in this position because of the way in which the Government wish to spin their business through statements, which overload the programme.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that I can deal with that point of order. These matters have already been decided by the House, and they are not a matter for the Chair at this time.

Mr. Wilshire: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not going to take any more points of order.

It being Seven o'clock, Mr. Deputy Speaker *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Lords amendment agreed to.

It being after Seven o'clock, Mr. Deputy Speaker *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Lords amendments Nos. 43, 47, 66, 73, 78 and 99 disagreed to.

Clause 251

PROCEEDINGS FOR RECOVERY ORDERS IN ENGLAND AND WALES OR NORTHERN IRELAND

Lords amendment: No. 110.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

The House divided: Ayes 242, Noes 133.

Division No. 314] **[7.2 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette

Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, [illegible]da
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
MacShane, Denis
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

NOES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen O'Brien and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I will take points of order after I have finished putting the Questions.

Lords amendments Nos. 113 and 166 disagreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Mr. Bob Ainsworth, Norman Baker, Mr. Dominic Grieve, Mr. John Heppell, Dr. Howard Stoate and Mr. David Wilshire; Mr. Bob Ainsworth to be Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

7.15 pm

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You said a few moments ago that you would take no more points of order. I am troubled about that because, as you know, in the House hon. Members are usually free to make points of order, and the Chair hears points of order. Can you help the House and help me certainly by clarifying whether there is any deeper significance in what you said, or whether it was specific to the circumstances in which you said it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Perhaps I can answer the right hon. Gentleman's question directly. At the point when he raised the point of order, it was the responsibility of the Chair to put all the questions necessary to be put at that time. That is laid down by the House.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At Prime Minister's Question Time yesterday, the Prime Minister alleged that the Conservative party was opposed to the Proceeds of Crime Bill. It is undoubtedly the case, in my opinion, that that statement was directed at our support for what is known as the Lloyd amendment. That amendment was voted on a few moments ago without any opportunity to demonstrate that the Prime Minister was completely and utterly wrong in his allegation, and that our purpose in opposing the Government today was simply to make it clear that we are trying to improve the Bill. We were denied the right to put that on the record. What remedy do we have when the Prime Minister makes allegations that are not correct?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair at this point.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) and Order [20 November 2000],

That, at this day's sitting, the Business of the House Motion in the name of Mr. Robin Cook may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Dan Norris.]*

The House divided: Ayes 243, Noes 101.

Division No. 315] **[7.17 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*

Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Heath, David
Hendrick, Mark
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
MacShane, Denis
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Dan Norris.

NOES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas
(Macclesfield)
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson
and
Mr. Stephen O'Brien.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that we are coming to motion 6, the Business of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not trying to prevent the right hon. Gentleman from continuing his point of order, but we must deal with motions 4 and 5 before coming to motion 6. Does the right hon. Gentleman want to pursue his point of order now?

Mr. Forth: I am seeking guidance on the conduct of motion 6, so I am content to follow your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Perhaps we should deal with motions 4 and 5 first.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees).

WASTE FROM ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 9923/01, amended draft Directive on waste from electrical and electronic equipment, the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum from the Department of Trade and Industry of 15th March on the Common Position of the Council on that draft Directive, No. 10143/01, amended draft Directive on restricting the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment, and the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum from the Department of Trade and Industry of 15th March on the Common Position of the Council on that draft Directive; notes the Government's current negotiating line; and supports the Government's actions.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

Question agreed to.

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance and clarification. It has been suggested that motion 6 may be subject to what has come to be known as the deferred Division process, so although the debate would be held now the Division, and therefore the determination of the substance of the motion, would be taken next Wednesday, on a ballot of Members. However, the motion refers to the conduct of business on Monday. It would be bizarre if the House were to be asked to vote on the motion on Wednesday, when the business had already happened on Monday. Before we launch into debate on the motion—it has no time limit, happily, and we may have much to say about it—it would be helpful if you could resolve that oddity. I hope that you can help.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that I can. The right hon. Gentleman is correct. If the House wishes to divide on this motion, the Division will be deferred until half-past 3 next Wednesday. It is for the House to decide whether it wishes to agree to the motion.

Mr. Forth: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With the greatest respect, how can that be? Only by a Division can we decide whether the House will follow the pattern of business laid down in the motion, which would allow three hours for the Adjournment debate on Monday. How will we know whether the debate should last for three hours on Monday, if we do not have the vote until Wednesday? Perhaps I am being obtuse—that is not entirely unknown—but I fail to see how we can know on Monday what substantive decision the House will make on Wednesday. If it will help you to help us, I confirm that I may ask my colleagues to test that point by dividing the House on the motion, just to see what will happen.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is open to the House, if it so wishes, to agree to the motion this evening without a Division, in which case the circumstances that the right hon. Gentleman outlines would not occur. With regard to the other matters that he raises, the Chair is not responsible for the wording of motions on the Order Paper or the circumstances that surround them. Perhaps that helps the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a more serious issue than it appears. We have spotted a flaw in procedure. We know that when the Government change the constitution they seldom think about the real implications, and when the House agreed to the bizarre procedure of deferred Divisions the Government did not anticipate a case such as this. It is surely a nonsense for the House to make a decision on Wednesday about a matter that has already happened. If the House were to vote against the motion on Wednesday, it could not influence something that had happened two days earlier. That is obviously nonsense and I suggest that it is an abuse of the procedures of the House for the Government to attempt to proceed in that way. I suggest that the business managers confer urgently, with a view to withdrawing the motion, so that we may proceed in a more orderly way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not possible to withdraw the business at this time, but the Government Whip might wish to refrain from moving it. Otherwise, I cannot add to the points that I made earlier in response to the initial point of order. Of course, the House and those responsible for the matter will have heard the points that the right hon. Gentleman has made.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As Chairman of the Procedure Committee, I am deeply worried by what has happened. Undoubtedly, the current procedures of the House are flawed. The House would look stupid if we went ahead with the business on Monday but then voted in a deferred Division on Wednesday that it should not take place. Is it within your power to suspend the House so that the issue can be discussed with the Leader of the House—whom I saw standing in the Chamber only a few moments ago, so he is here—to resolve the issue satisfactorily? I am not seeking to make life difficult for you, for the House or for the Government, but this nonsense should be sorted out before the House of Commons makes a fool of itself.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given that the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office is present, would it be possible for him to assist us in resolving the matters that have been raised?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, I have listened to the points made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) and the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). I am sure that the whole House will have heard them. I have no power to suspend the House, although, as I have said already, the motion could be withdrawn.

Business of the House

7.36 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I beg to move,

That, at the sitting on Monday 22nd July, the Motion for the adjournment of the House in the name of the Prime Minister relating to matters to be considered before the forthcoming adjournment may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours, and the Motion shall then lapse.

I have just dropped my speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I doubt that it will be very helpful anyway.

It is not my job to answer points of order, but perhaps I can respond to the contents of some of the points that were raised. I defer to your better judgment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as to what the impact would be if anyone were to call for a Division on the motion. I hope that no one does, as the motion is an attempt to guarantee that Monday's summer recess Adjournment debate is guaranteed three hours. That debate is valued by hon. Members of all parties, and none of them would want to risk letting the other business that the House has to conduct on Monday eat into the time set aside for it.

I do not know what would happen if the motion were to be pressed to a vote—which, as you rightly said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would be subject to a deferred Division on Wednesday evening. I defer to your wisdom and advice on procedural matters, but my guess is that the implication would be that there would be no guarantee that the summer recess Adjournment debate would get three hours.

7.37 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): This is a fine mess, is it not, Mr. Deputy Speaker? In some ways, the benefit to the House is that we have identified an apparent flaw in the ghastly deferred Division process. I hope that, at the very least, that further thought will be given to what some of us argued from the start was a nonsense and an anomaly.

However, that is for another day. We are now debating the substance of the motion, and I am delighted—it takes me back to the good old days—that we can do so until any hour. That is only right, as the motion raises a number of important issues.

First, why is the motion necessary at all? The answer is readily available. Exchanges earlier today at business questions—to which I made a modest contribution—made it clear that the Government are overloading the House's business for next Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday to a ridiculous and unacceptable degree. Further, for some reason the Government have decided that the summer Adjournment debate must happen on Monday, when there is other substantial business to be disposed of.

The Minister, in his usual open and engaging way, has said that he is here only to protect the summer Adjournment debate, but from what? The answer is that it has to be protected from the Government, as it is they who are putting pressure on the time available for that debate.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. As usual, he is being extremely reasonable, but is not the situation worse than he suggests? By scheduling the summer Adjournment debate for two days before term ends, is not the Leader of the House still further undermining the topicality of that, which was supposed to be one of the gems of the so-called reforms?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As ever, he has anticipated one of the many points that I intend to make. If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall return to the question why the Adjournment debate should not be held on Monday. First, I shall plough through some of the other points that I am determined to make.

The next question is why only three hours are to be allocated to the Adjournment debate. The House has become accustomed to the fact that we often have a whole day on the end-of-term Adjournment debate, precisely for the reason that my hon. Friend points out. Those debates are often fully subscribed, because they are one of the rare occasions when right hon. and hon. Members can raise constituency or policy matters in the House and explore them in a relatively relaxed way—something that we all value highly.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right in what he says. A number of usual suspects attend the Adjournment debates—I am one of them. There are usually 20 to 30 of us. We like to air important topical issues that concern our constituencies. The debates are an important part of the annual parliamentary diary, and it would be outrageous for the Government to seek to curtail the power of individual MPs to bring before the House matters that concern them in their constituencies.

Mr. Forth: A number of unusual suspects also turn up for the debates, in my experience. My hon. Friend makes a proper point: why only three hours? If the Minister boasts, as he did a few moments ago, that the motion was a benign move to protect the business, and that the Government were generously giving the House a whole three hours for the Adjournment debate, the obvious question to the Minister, which I hope he can answer, is why are the Government giving us only three hours? Why can we not have five hours or even more than that?

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Can my right hon. Friend assist me as a relative newcomer to this place, and tell me whether there are any conventions about the length of speeches that might be made from the Back Benches or from the Front Benches in that important debate? I certainly have a number of issues that I should like to deal with at some length, were I lucky enough to catch the Speaker's eye on that occasion.

Mr. Forth: It is fair to say that the Speaker has never yet exercised his prerogative to limit the time for such speeches. The debate is one of the occasions on which the House exercises its own self-discipline, and admirably so. Hon. Members can come along and make brief or occasionally not-so-brief contributions, depending on the importance of the subject matter.

David Burnside (South Antrim): As a relative newcomer who is gaining a little experience, I spoke in the Adjournment debate at the end of the last Session. My party and right hon. and hon. Members are expecting a very important statement from the Prime Minister by

24 July—the day the House plans to rise. It may be in response to a question, or it may be a statement followed by a statement from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the state of the peace process in Northern Ireland. I had hoped to have an opportunity in the Adjournment debate to comment on behalf of my constituents on a very important statement on Northern Ireland. Why are we having the Adjournment debate on Monday, rather than at the end of the Session on Wednesday?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which relates to the point made by our hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) a few moments ago: why choose Monday? Is that a cock-up or a conspiracy? We keep having to ask that question about the Government. I suspect that in this case, it is probably a bit of both. The comments of my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) rather indicate that the Government may have something to hide, or that there is something of which they are afraid, and that they want to get the Adjournment debate tucked neatly out of the way on Monday, before hon. Members start worrying about such an important matter.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): As a relative newcomer, may I draw on my right hon. Friend's experience in the House? On how many occasions can he recall the Adjournment debate not being on the last day of the parliamentary term?

Mr. Forth: I would say, at a guess, that that is pretty unusual; the convention has been that such debates are held at the end of term, so why are we forced to hold the debate on Monday? The Government have got us and themselves into difficulty by insisting that the debate take place on Monday, rather than on Tuesday or Wednesday. That brings me to another point altogether: why choose Monday, Tuesday or even Wednesday?

Earlier today in a different context, we said that the Opposition would be more than happy, even at this late date, if the business managers suggested that the House may want to sit for an extra day or two to debate, for example, foot and mouth disease matters or, as we now discover, to have a proper, full-day Adjournment debate. What is wrong with that? Why are the Government in such indecent haste for the House to rise for the summer recess when it is now becoming perfectly obvious that there are more and more important matters to be dealt with?

Bob Spink: Perhaps I can help my right hon. Friend. There is good reason for the motion. It is not a cock-up, but a conspiracy because an important announcement will be made on Tuesday regarding airport planning in south-east England. I am sure that a number of hon. Members, including myself and those with constituencies in Southend and Kent and even Labour Members, such as the hon. Members for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) and for Basildon (Angela Smith), may wish to raise that issue on the Adjournment. So I agree with my right hon. Friend. Why should not the House sit for an extra day on Thursday to debate those important matters?

Mr. Forth: We are now getting to the bottom of things, which shows the value of such debates, does it not?—as if we needed to demonstrate the value of debate. We are now beginning to shine some light on the fact that the Government hope and expect to get that rather inconvenient Adjournment debate out of the way on Monday and then some very controversial and important matters will be brought before the House in statements on Tuesday and Wednesday. However, there will be no opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members to consider those matters further and perhaps in more detail in the Adjournment debate, which we would normally expect to occur at the very end of term. I hope that the Minister will be able to answer another question when this debate finally finishes, which, given the level of interest that I detect in the Chamber, may yet take some little time.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The right hon. Gentleman mentions a conspiracy. We are told that there are no such things as conspiracies, but I have worked out my own theory: some conspiracies are moved on by cock-ups. Perhaps that is what has happened. However, there is a more serious aspect. Is it because the Government have such a large majority that they believe that they can do anything without considering any opposition? Is there not a possibility that a precedent will be set? In future, we may be asked to take such a decision about something other than the Adjournment debate. We must look very carefully at the procedures of the House so that such things do not happen again.

Mr. Forth: Of course my hon. Friend, who has great experience in the House, puts his finger on the problem. I wish that we could look at the procedures again. In fact, I think that we will be forced to do so, because the truth is that we have now discovered a flaw in the deferred Division process that will have to be considered and sorted out pretty quickly.

I certainly will ask for my hon. Friends' support in opposing the motion at the end of the debate, if only to find out what will happen as a result. Unless the Minister gives us a very satisfactory explanation for the questions that I have asked, I am not inclined to agree to the motion any way. We have a series of questions. Why only three hours? Why on Monday? Why cannot we sit for an extra day to allow the Adjournment debate to be a proper length?

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): If we are to provide such an opportunity for hon. Members, should we not even consider starting at half-past 9 on Wednesday to afford more time at the end of the day?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that constructive suggestion. We are full of constructive suggestions, and I hope that the Minister has been listening to them because we are trying to be helpful. However, the Government probably do not want to be helped in this case.

I wish to make a final point. If we allow this motion to go through unchallenged this evening, what worries me is that it will give the Government the idea that they can start to bring these Adjournment debates further and further forward, and bring on unpleasant and controversial business afterwards, thus denying Members the opportunity to use the Adjournment debate further to explore the unpleasant matters that the Government hope

[Mr. Forth]

to conceal or semi-conceal. The motion has therefore turned out to be a nasty little measure. Furthermore, it has turned out to be flawed. The procedure is flawed, and the Government have put the House in an absurd position. Somehow, we must work our way out of it.

I hope that the Minister will be able to give some helpful responses, but, nevertheless, we owe it to ourselves and to the House not to agree to the motion in the terms in which it is put. We can, therefore, force a review of the procedure and find out what is the truth behind it: is it a conspiracy or sheer incompetence? In that respect, it will have served one purpose, if nothing else.

7.50 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I want to say two things. First, I was distressed and saddened that the Minister, in his introductory remarks, failed to justify the terms of this particular motion. He could see that Members were troubled—they were rising on points of order—and he even told the House that he did not think that his remarks would be of much use anyway. He failed to explain to us the construction of the business now before us.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) was entirely right to point out that, traditionally, this Adjournment debate has run for more than three hours. I totted up the subjects for debate had I wanted to participate in it—I still have not made up my mind on that. There are questions to deal with in relation to the Eurofighter, the lack of computerised tomography scanners in our local hospital, the state of the west coast main line, the state of agriculture in the north-west, some remarks on Uganda and India, the delivery of public services, the use of laptop computers in Committees of the House, and a matter concerning taxation. I could have happily occupied 100 minutes on those subjects. Given that only three hours may be available, I would not do so in the interests of other Members. As many subjects could be raised, however, I hope that when the Minister winds up this debate, he will explain the paucity of time and the mess of this motion.

7.52 pm

Mr. Bradshaw: I hope that I can help right hon. and hon. Members with the questions that they have raised. I did not mean to be rude to any hon. Member, as I thought that there would be an opportunity to make points anyway, and that I would reply to them in my answers now.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) asked, as did other Members in interventions, why this motion is necessary. We believe that it is necessary if Members on both sides of the House want to guarantee that there will be three hours for the Adjournment debate on the recess. The consequence of not passing the motion may be that we have longer, but it may also be that we have shorter, or even no time at all.

The right hon. Gentleman suggested that we were being over-burdened on Monday. We have two other main pieces of business to consider on Monday. One is the Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill, which I hope that all Members accept is important. It is not terribly contentious, and it should not take up too much of the House's time.

Mr. Forth: It might.

Mr. Bradshaw: As the right hon. Gentleman rightly says from a sedentary position, however, it might, which is exactly why the Government are bringing this business motion to the House today. If the debate goes on for some time, the motion will guarantee that the Adjournment debate on the recess has at least three hours.

The other piece of business that we must consider on Monday is the debate on the restructuring of Select Committees. Again, that is an important piece of business, and I would expect Members on both sides of the House to feel that we need to get on with it, so that the Committees can get on with their work. It should not be too contentious, but one never knows. There has been debate on it in the past, and that is why the Government want to make sure that, in the event that those debates run on, we have three hours for the Adjournment debate.

Bob Spink *rose—*

Mr. Bradshaw: If I do not address the point that the hon. Gentleman wants to raise, I will give way to him in a second.

Let me address the issue of the three-hour limit. It is not the tradition for the House to have an Adjournment debate that is longer than three hours. Between 1982 and 1995—so for the vast majority of the time of the previous Conservative Government—there was a three-hour limit on the debate.

Bob Spink: If I can correct the Minister, three important items will be discussed on Monday. The Adjournment debate at the end of our proceedings is on education in Castle Point.

Mr. Bradshaw: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I accept that that is an important issue for him and his constituents.

Mr. Forth: For the sake of completeness, the Minister will know that the Leader of the House told us—rather unusually, but I am grateful to him—that there will be a statement on Monday on the Anderson report on foot and mouth, which I suspect the Chair will allow to run for some time. So there is a substantial statement, a Second Reading, which could be controversial—we never know in advance—and at least one political party will have a lot to say about setting up Select Committees because it is annoyed that it is not chairing at least one of them.

Mr. Bradshaw: We will face those issues on Monday, but they demonstrate why the Government are so keen to protect the three hours for the Adjournment debate on the recess. I know how much the right hon. Gentleman likes to sit late in the House and if the motion is passed we can sit into the early hours of Tuesday morning to 1.30 am. If we do not pass it we might have no debate on the Adjournment and the business will finish at 10 pm.

I have dealt with the three-hour limit. It was in place in the House between 1982 and 1995. It only changed when the Adjournment debate on the recess was moved to Wednesday mornings. Hon. Members will be aware that that has been discontinued because of the introduction of Westminster Hall debates. It is also not the case that the Adjournment debate on the recess has always taken place on the last day of Parliament. We have allocated time on Monday for it because we will be busy on Wednesday receiving messages from the Lords, which might mean sitting late into the night.

The motion is not about a conspiracy or, dare I say it, cock-ups. It is simply about trying to ensure for the convenience of hon. Members that the traditional end of term Adjournment debate, which they value so highly, is protected. I hope that hon. Members support the motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The Question is as on the Order Paper.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 24 July, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001].

Garment Manufacturing (Wales)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

7.58 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I was fortunate in securing the Adjournment debate tonight on an issue of great importance to my constituency and west Wales. I did not realise how prescient it would be, but just three hours ago it was announced that the Dewhirst factory, which manufactures ladieswear, was going to close. That has left 350 workers in Cardigan feeling utter despair. I share their despair and, as their Member of Parliament, I also feel helpless.

It is a private company that has decided, for profit reasons, to relocate outside the European Union. There is little that I or the Minister can do. Indeed, there is little that the National Assembly Executive can do. However, the closure raises wider issues that relate to manufacturing in Wales, especially the garment manufacturing industry, and to how we can provide a future for the skilled work force at Dewhirst in Cardigan. That is where I, as the constituency Member for Ceredigion, want to turn my attention. I hope to receive some words of comfort and support from the Minister.

As I have said, the announcement was made about three hours ago. The first inklings that we had that the Cardigan factory might be under serious threat came when Dewhirst shut its Fforest Fach, Swansea, operations a couple months ago. I immediately requested a meeting with the managing director of the Dewhirst factory in Cardigan to explore with him what the future would be there. That meeting took place on 14 June with Mr. Stan Liptrot, who is the managing director, and Mike Jones, who is the financial director.

At that meeting, I was told how dark and bleak the future for Dewhirst in Cardigan would be. It should be put on the record that this is no reflection on the workers, who have been magnificent in responding to the challenges placed on them. Mr. Liptrot told me that they were the best work force in the Dewhirst group—the most hard working, efficient, effective, flexible and adaptable, as well as the most skilled and the least wasteful.

One of the great ironies—a horrid and grotesque irony—is that many members of the Cardigan work force have been travelling to Morocco to help Dewhirst set up its factory there and to help train the workers, only to see their jobs being transferred wholesale to factories in Morocco and Turkey. We have exported our technology, as we might expect, and the knowledge of the work force to those countries outside the European Union, only to see our jobs being exported likewise, with the company coming face to face with the fact that it is cheaper to employ people in factories in places such as Morocco and Turkey.

I thought at the time that perhaps something could be said about this—something about the strength of the pound, investment, requests for guarantees; perhaps something that the National Assembly could do, or something on the wider political scale that I could do as a Member. But it seems not. The strength of the pound affects manufacturing, but in this instance it would make no difference if we went into the euro tomorrow.

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

The manufacturing of jeans, which is what happens at Cardigan for Marks and Spencer, has changed because fashions change. Fashions come and go. Unfortunately, in fashion at the moment are jeans that are painted by hand, cut in a certain way, ripped in a certain way or decorated with sequins, stars or whatever. They are attractive, popular and trendy, but it takes time to make jeans of that sort. It involves not only machine cutting but adding things, and that is a hand job; and a hand job can be done very effectively and efficiently in Cardigan, but not cost-effectively for the company. It is cheaper to do it in Morocco. That is despite the fact that I was assured that the waste and lack of standards in Morocco and Turkey were much greater. Wastefulness is to be seen in those countries. Nevertheless, that has not helped the Cardigan work force.

I wish to put on record my sympathy and deep understanding of the future that the workers and their families in Cardigan face, especially given that the factory employs many women. The jobs are reasonably well paid for the low-wage economy that we have in Cardigan. Many of the women are the main breadwinners for their families. Many of them have family members who are engaged in agriculture or tourism, areas of work that do not have secure futures at the moment.

The factory was put on a weekly review, and I am sorry to see that that review has revealed Dewhirst's decision to close the factory. When I met the trade unions and the representatives, including Bridget Campbell of the GMB, on Monday, I was struck by their spirit and determination. However, they also knew that an announcement would be coming soon, but I do not think that anyone expected it this week. The announcement was couched in these words:

> "The group has today regrettable announced the proposed closure of its Cardigan factory with the loss of approximately 325 jobs in Cardigan and 10 supporting jobs elsewhere . . . This is a direct result of continued consumer pressure on prices that has led to insufficient profitable business being available to maintain UK manufacturing at current levels."

In many respects, that bald and bleak statement has ended 250 years of garment manufacturing in the Teifi valley. The Teifi valley was once known as the Huddersfield of Wales and was the centre of the Welsh woollens manufacturing industry. Dewhirst was the main inheritor of that tradition of manufacturing. The impact of the closure would be similar to the closure of a steelworks or a coal mine. Cardigan is a one-factory town in many respects.

The history of woollens and clothes manufacturing in the Teifi valley is even longer than the history of steelmaking or coal. It predates the industrial revolution, driven by steel and coal; it came from the earliest industrial revolution, driven by the water power of the river Teifi.

Some small niche manufacturers remain in the Teifi valley and some important museums remain there. I am sure that one or two jobs will be found for skilled machinists with those niche manufacturers. However, the vast majority of the 350 workers—I think it is slightly more than the 325 mentioned in the statement; until recently, 380 people were employed at Dewhirst—will go straight to the jobcentre.

Current unemployment in the Cardigan travel-to-work area is 297, representing 3.2 per cent. That is the claimant count, not the measure of the non-employed or non-working part of the population. However, the loss of what I estimate to be up to 380 jobs—not including the knock-on effects—will mean that overnight the claimant count will rise to 677, a 7.3 per cent unemployment rate according to the claimant count. In other words, unemployment in the Cardigan travel-to-work area, which straddles both sides of the Teifi valley, will virtually double overnight.

I do not think that there are many jobs available. I heard a story on Monday about a young man who was made redundant by Dewhirst. For four days, he went to the jobcentre in Cardigan, only to be offered one job, working at night in a bar. That was all that was available to him in Cardigan at that time. What will happen when more than 300 people go to the jobcentre and make similar requests?

On Monday, I heard a story that indicates the shock that will come to the town shortly. The union rep, Bridget Campbell, was at the hairdressers in Cardigan, and was talking about the difficulties with Dewhirst and her fears for the future. The hairdressers blithely said that it would not affect her business. Bridget Campbell looked around and saw several ladies in the hairdressers, all of whom were employed by Dewhirst. She told me that one of the first things to go when one loses one's job is the luxury items, such as having one's hair done every week or month. Many businesses will see the effects of that shortly.

Mortgages will be difficult to pay, and hairdressers and travel agents will be affected. The factory is about to shut down for its fortnight's holiday and many people have committed themselves—perhaps through borrowing—to go away for the fortnight. They will face an uncertain future when they come back from holiday.

The Minister, who is from the south Wales valleys, does not need me to tell him how quickly some of our towns can die when a major manufacturer leaves. The flower shops, hairdressers and other upmarket shops close first. Grocery stores will experience difficulties next. I wonder what will happen to Tesco, the main store in Cardigan. Will the sort of goods that it sells get a receptive audience now with so many people reliant on benefits—if only for a short period of time, I hope? We can foresee our town entering a distressing spiral into difficulty with so many jobs being lost so quickly.

Having accepted the devastation in Cardigan, we must find a way forward to create and secure new jobs for those skilled workers. I am not asking for some sort of intervention to help a private company that was clearly going to go. It is a bit late to do that anyway because of the announcement, but I would not have asked for such intervention. The company decided that £23 million of profit last year was not good enough and that it wanted to make even more profits. What distresses me is that the company will still be listed as a UK company, even though the vast majority of its manufacturing will be done abroad. It also distresses me that Marks and Spencer—which has done so much to support UK businesses over many years—now makes as little as 20 per cent. of its goods in the UK. Marks and Spencer's profits have soared, but on the back of exporting jobs out of the United Kingdom.

The Minister knows that I have described only the latest blow to garment manufacturing in Wales. The trouble started in 1998, when Dewhirst cut 300 jobs in Ystalyfera. Last year, 165 jobs were lost in Lampeter in my constituency. We barely managed to cope with that. Some of those affected in Lampeter came to Cardigan to work, and they face redundancy for the second time in two years. Recently, 435 jobs were recently lost in Fforest Fach in Swansea, and now the decision has been made to cut 350 to 380 jobs in Cardigan.

One company accounts for the loss of 1,200 jobs in the garment manufacturing sector in Wales in the past three years. That is disastrous. A sector that was once so important for manufacturing—one of the few genuine success stories of manufacturing in mid and rural Wales—is on its uppers and has almost ceased to exist.

Given that the Dewhirst decision is based on access to much lower labour costs, it is unlikely that the clothing sector will provide new employment opportunities. We should aim for that, and try to support companies that are involved in garment manufacturing. However, when I met the Welsh Development Agency to discuss what we could do for the skilled workers at Dewhirst, it said that it did not expect to place more than a handful of people with local garment manufacturers because the jobs were simply not there.

I want to conclude with some wider points. First, what are the Government doing to secure a UK procurement policy? It is a pity that we are running away from placing contracts with UK companies, such as garment manufacturers. For example, there was a recent outcry about placing Ministry of Defence contracts for boots and uniforms with a German manufacturer. What has been done to tighten up and improve access for our companies in procurement policy? I understand the European Community directive, but I also note that other companies, especially in France, get around that.

The Government will doubtless point to the taskforce approach that has been used in Fforest Fach to date. Although I would welcome the presence of a taskforce to help Dewhirst workers who have been made redundant to find new jobs, the position in Cardigan is different from that in Swansea, where there are other employment opportunities, manufacturers and large employers. There is no other single employer in the Cardigan area. Indeed, there is no other large manufacturer in my constituency. We have Aberporth, but that project is taking on no new people at the moment.

I should like the Minister to explore with Andrew Davies, the Assembly Minister for Economic Development, the possibility of adapting an idea from England to Wales. In Prime Minister's questions, we hear much about urban regeneration companies. I understand that the experiment has been successful and that the companies have been a good vehicle for regeneration in England. There is now talk in England of rural regeneration companies. Perhaps it is time for us to consider useful vehicles to regenerate the town of Cardigan and create new jobs for the workers who are now being made unemployed. We need a better vehicle for investment in the town than a piecemeal, agency-based approach.

The Minister has visited the Aberporth development and he knows that the proposals are exciting. However, he also knows that they are some way down in the line and that planning permission will not be determined till September. Objective 1 is a long process. I therefore hope that the Minister will give us some comfort by saying that, as a matter of urgency, he will work with the WDA and the Minister for Economic Development in the National Assembly to put a taskforce and resources in place to create the new job opportunities that are needed in Cardigan.

The union representative whom I met on Monday said, "As an Englishman, I say that your language is going to die unless you can get jobs in this area for your young people." That problem faces both me as a constituency Member of Parliament and the Minister as someone who represents the Welsh government.

8.14 pm

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): Thank you—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Has the hon. Lady informed the occupant of the Chair that she has the permission of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) and the Minister to contribute to the debate?

Mrs. Lawrence: Indeed I have, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I should like to thank the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) for allowing me to take two minutes of his debate, as I have a constituency interest. The factory at Cardigan to which he referred employs many of my constituents from north Pembrokeshire. He spoke comprehensively about the effect that the closure will have in his constituency and I shall not repeat any of the details that he raised; but I have another concern, as the company has another outlet in Fishguard in my constituency that employs a further 120 people.

Like the hon. Gentleman, who has been in contact with the factory in Cardigan, I have been in touch with Fishguard, which was under monthly review only 18 months ago, when Marks and Spencer was having difficulties. It got out of those difficulties, the reviews stopped and we thought that things could be looking better. However, the fact that the plants at Cardigan, Lampeter and Swansea have closed is of concern to my constituents, many of whose families have worked for Dewhirst for generations—their fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers have worked for the company.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the Minister can probably do very little in terms of the commercial considerations that are involved. I spoke today to Terry Jones from the company, who made it clear that Cardigan and Fishguard are highly efficient and have been well invested in. That is not the problem, however. The difficulty relates to market prices, competition, the fact that a pair of jeans costs less now then 15 years ago, and competitors outsourcing abroad.

The company is left with a choice and we are seeing the human consequences. The Government can probably do little about that, but on behalf of my constituents in Fishguard, in addition to those who worked in the Ceredigion factory, I ask the Minister please to ensure that Team Wales is immediately involved. It was put in in respect of ITV Digital in the south of our county. Can it be put in posthaste not only to look at Ceredigion, but with regard to my fears about the potential knock-on effect for Fishguard in my constituency?

8.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): It is usual on these occasions to congratulate an hon. Member on securing the debate, but I am sure I share with the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) the wish that we were not having this debate at all. I very much regret the fact that Dewhirst this afternoon gave its staff at Cardigan notice that the plant would be closing in the autumn. That is a heavy blow to the community and in excess of 300 jobs will be lost as a consequence. He made clear the knock-on effects in the wider Cardigan community, and not only for the families of those involved.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that my officials have already been in touch with Assembly officials. I know that the Assembly, working together with the Welsh Development Agency, Education and Learning Wales, the Employment Service and other key agencies, will do everything that it possibly can to mitigate the effects of the closure and the job losses. Today's announcement also raises fears for the future of the Dewhirst plant in Fishguard, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) referred. I sincerely hope that the management of the company will find a way to retain its presence there and retain the jobs.

It might be helpful for me to tell the House what steps were taken when Dewhirst closed its plant at Swansea, when a very effective Team Wales approach helped to mitigate some of the problems. Following the announcement, a meeting was immediately set up, including representatives of the Welsh Development Agency, the city and county of Swansea, ELWa, the Employment Service and the Assembly. A strategic overview of the Dewhirst situation was issued by the company and a response in terms of what various parties could do to assist matters was then provided to Dewhirst. The main thrust of the group to which I referred was the setting up of a human resource action group, which first met to discuss the ongoing skills audit and the demographic information that is emanating from Dewhirst. That is of key importance; when jobs were lost in my constituency, one of the key things that helped us to find replacements was a skilled audit carried out by the local employment agency. We found that most helpful in getting people into work.

It is worth mentioning that Swansea college and ELWa are working together to provide basic IT skill provision and detailed job search. A matching exercise is currently under way to ensure that the redundant Dewhirst workers are given every opportunity to find alternative work. ELWa is working very hard to prepare user-friendly packs relating to the redundancy action plan, and the city and county of Swansea are currently preparing a presentation on local learning provision in order to share that information with the work force. I would hope that we will be able to persuade them; I am sure that we will, because I have met the hon. Gentleman and representatives of Ceredigion council, and I know how proactive they will be in response to this blow. Now that further redundancies have been announced, I believe that the effective Team Wales approach that has already been developed will help to mitigate some of the consequences of these job losses.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the urban regeneration companies that have been set up in other parts of the country. He makes a good point, and I certainly undertake to raise the matter with my colleague, the Assembly Minister responsible for economic development. The hon. Gentleman and I were at Aberporth recently, and if anything makes this issue more vital, it is this news today, because there is great potential for regenerating that part of west Wales and Ceredigion and helping to find work for those who have lost their jobs today.

The Government and the WDA are working together to support the garment industry. Since 1997, the Government have made £80 million available to the industry across the UK in the form of capital investment, export promotion, research and development, innovation support, retraining, and regional support. In 2000–01, the Department of Trade and Industry invested about £8 million, which was focused principally on the technical textiles market, employment and training opportunities, help for the supply chain, design skills, the benefits of e-commerce, and export support. On support for exports, Trade Partners UK has relaxed its rules so as to allow textile industries to receive assistance to participate in more than three events.

The WDA has two major initiatives to support the garment and textile industry. The first is the WDA's garment and textile sourcing programme, in which Welsh manufacturers are introduced to new supply opportunities and encouraged to develop new customers. Since the sourcing programme was piloted in 1995, Welsh suppliers have been introduced to new sales opportunities valued at more than £60 million, which is most welcome. A wide range of companies have benefited from the programme, ranging from one-person, designer-based businesses, through cut, make and trim companies, to larger manufacturers. The service is completely free to both buyer and supplier.

The second initiative is the WDA's company development programme. The WDA recognised, as far back as 1997, that some companies required assistance to improve their competitiveness. This programme provides participating businesses with new skills, and with knowledge and experience of management, manufacturing and marketing processes. It is important to recognise that the garment industry in Wales is important; there are more than 30 companies in this sector in Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire alone. The hon. Gentleman referred to some of them in his speech. They are small and medium-sized companies, ranging from those engaged in the traditional woollen industry through those that focus on bridalwear, sportswear, knitwear and home furnishings, to specialist suppliers of naturally coloured rare breed wool, luxury mohair wool, silk blends and organic wools. There is a whole range of small companies there.

The Government recognise that it has been particularly tough for manufacturers in the last year or so, owing to the economic slowdown in the world economy and weakness of the euro. That, of course, is not confined to Wales; it hits the whole of the UK. There are signs, however, that manufacturing industry is becoming more confident. The latest Confederation of British Industry and Engineering Employers Federation surveys point to stabilisation in manufacturing output over the next three to four months, and only today I noticed that the South Wales Chamber Group has said that a number of companies are predicting an increase in profits and showing greater confidence for the next year.

The hon. Gentleman is looking for help from the Government for the immediate problems in his constituency, and I will certainly take on board the issue of procurement policy. I shall make some inquiries on that matter and write back to him as quickly as I possibly can. I would also commend the work done by the all-party clothing, textiles and footwear group, which has had the opportunity to study the "Making it Happen" report issued by DTI Ministers a while ago.

I am pointing these things out because it is important to recognise that, although we have had this awful blow today, not everything is bleak in the economy in Wales. There are opportunities, and I see Aberporth in the hon. Gentleman's constituency as an exciting opportunity. It is right to point out that some good things are happening, and we must ensure that the people who are losing their jobs at Aberporth can benefit from new job opportunities. Our first thoughts must be with those people who are faced with redundancy today. That is what I believe Team Wales will take on board. I shall certainly take on board the remarks of the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) and follow them up.

We must seek new job opportunities for those who are losing their jobs and we must find opportunities for them to retrain and upskill. I sense the sadness in the hon. Gentleman's remarks, and he is desperately keen to get back to his constituency to do whatever he can to help, but I want him to know that the Secretary of State and I will do everything we can to help in any way possible. Please be assured that we are just at the end of a telephone line. If there is anything he comes across in the next day or so that he thinks the Wales Office can help with, we will certainly do all we can.

I want the hon. Gentleman to convey this to his constituents, because there is nothing lonelier for an individual, a family or a community than job losses and, perhaps, despair over where they should turn to, especially as there is high unemployment in the town of Cardigan. I want to ensure that we send that message out to people: we as the Government, the hon. Gentleman as the constituency Member of Parliament, and all the agencies will do everything they possibly can to help those people to get back into a job as quickly as possible. We face a difficult time in parts of our economy in Wales, and this is a blow to an area of Wales where we have high hopes for a brighter economic future.

The hon. Gentleman also touched on an important issue, which I know is close to his heart: the impact that the closure might have on the language. He and I discussed the Aberporth project when I was down there, and we agreed that the investment in Aberporth and the realisation of the project would help to deal with some worries that he, I and other Members have about how we protect Welsh-speaking communities by ensuring that there are jobs, good services and affordable housing.

The hon. Gentleman should be assured that we will do everything we can to help in this difficult time for him and his constituents. We will leave no stone unturned in trying to ensure that the people in Cardigan get back into a job as quickly as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 19 July 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Totternhoe)

9.33 am

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I wish to present a petition bearing the signatures of more than 400 residents of the village of Totternhoe, in Bedfordshire, to which I am pleased to add my support.

The petition states:

> To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.
>
> The Humble Petition of residents of Totternhoe, Bedfordshire
>
> Sheweth that the narrow roads of Totternhoe were not made for heavy goods vehicles to pass through the village, and that the size, noise and speed of these vehicles are abhorrent to the petitioners. In addition, when the "Green Wave" starts in Dunstable the position will worsen and the number of lorries increase.
>
> Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House shall urge the Government and local authorities to impose a 7.5 tonne weight restriction order, except for access, in Stanbridge Road, Castle Hill Road and Dunstable Road, Totternhoe.
>
> And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

9.35 am

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that under the heading "Business of the House", yesterday's Order Paper states:

> "at the sitting on Monday 22nd July, the Motion for the adjournment of the House . . . may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours".

However, it was then pointed out that the Division on this question stands deferred to Wednesday 24 July.

You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that we attempted to deal with this matter yesterday evening, and I simply seek your guidance as to where the House now stands on this motion. It appears that the motion provides for three hours for the Adjournment debate on Monday, but that the Division that will decide the matter is not until Wednesday. The House would be grateful for your guidance as to what is likely to happen on Monday. The Leader of the House said that there will be a statement, and there are two other items of business that we know about: Second Reading of the Mobile Telephones (Re-Programming) Bill, and the motions to establish the Transport Committee and the Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Given that Monday is already a fairly busy day, can you explain the likely shape of business, and in particular the status of the Adjournment debate?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. Monday's business will go ahead without account being taken of the proposal in the motion before the House yesterday, which was not decided on. By the time that the deferred Division on that motion is taken, it will be too late for it to have effect; however, the Chair has no power to cancel the deferred Division. The right hon. Gentleman may wish to take up, through the usual channels, how this odd situation may be dealt with.

Mr. Forth: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am most grateful for that guidance, although I doubt whether anybody else will be. However, it raises another matter relating to the Adjournment debate itself. Will it be within the gift of the Government to arrange business on Monday so that we can have an Adjournment debate of a proper length? I see the distinct danger that, if the business that we know about is in any way prolonged—and if the Government insist that we stop at 10 o'clock, for example—the Adjournment debate could be squeezed very severely. Can you confirm that it is now a matter for the Government as to whether proper time be allowed for the Adjournment debate?

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman, as usual, is very accurate in these matters. It is a matter for the Government as to what shape Monday's business will take.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your advice because I am very concerned about what appears to be the incredible shrinking Order Paper before the House today. On Monday, 63 Bills were down for consideration today, on Tuesday there were 64, and on Wednesday we had an embarrassment of riches—67 Bills. Yesterday, 68 Bills were listed for consideration today, all of which have some merit and are certainly worthy of closer examination.

Today, however, only 49 Bills are on the Order Paper, and I seek your advice, Mr. Speaker, on what has happened to the others. I want to know why they are not before the House today and whether some dirty deal behind the bike sheds has been done to get rid of them, thereby robbing this House of the opportunity to scrutinise them in any way, shape or form. Can you advise me whether it is possible to find out if undue pressure has been brought to bear on any Member to withdraw his or her Bill? That information would be most helpful to other Members, and certainly to Opposition Members.

Mr. Speaker: I am always happy to advise the hon. Lady. Bills that are not printed are not included on the Order Paper. Of course, hon. Members of this House would not tolerate undue pressure from any quarter.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): On a very pleasant point of order, Mr. Speaker. As this is the day on which Trevor Dann, the Principal Doorkeeper, announced your arrival in this House for the last time before his retirement, will you advise us whether this would be an appropriate time

[Bob Spink]

for us, on behalf of the whole House, to thank him, and Peter Overfield, the Deputy Principal Doorkeeper, and Maureen Coxon, the first lady Doorkeeper, who guarded the Letter Board so admirably over many years, for their work and the help that they have given us, and to wish them a long and happy retirement?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman gives me the opportunity to say that I have known those officers for a long time, and they have been conscientious, hard-working and most obliging to all Members of the House. I wish them all well in their retirement and thank them for their excellent service to the House.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I draw your attention to page 1088 of the Votes and Proceedings for yesterday, which reports the deliberations of the Reasons Committee in respect of the Lords amendments to the Proceeds of Crime Bill? I was a member of that Committee and I found myself in a difficult position, so I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker, as to how one should deal with the situation that developed.

The Votes and Proceedings says:

> "The Commons disagree to Amendments Nos. 110 and 113 made by the Lords, for the following Reason:
>
> Because it is not appropriate to provide any such exceptions, the House having reached its decision without the opportunity for debate."

I find myself in an awkward position, and I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker, because I was asked to be party to a vote on why this House disagreed with something, when not a single word had been uttered in the Chamber to explain why the vote turned out as it did. Is it appropriate for a Committee of the House to sit and speculate on what the Government really meant but refused to give us the opportunity to discuss? It was the statements that the Government arranged yesterday, and the lengthy delays that they caused, that prevented the House from knowing what the reason for disagreement was. I feel very uncomfortable at having put my name to a guess about what the House meant. Is there not a better way of doing things?

Mr. Speaker: The responsibility of the Reasons Committee is to give reasons as to why certain legislation has been dealt with in a certain way. It is not for me to interfere with the business of the Reasons Committee. It has put down a reason and that will be sent to the other place.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can it be in order for any Member of the House to seek your absolution because he regrets his own voting record?

Mr. Speaker: It may be more appropriate for the Speaker's Chaplain to do such things.

Orders of the Day

Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs etc.) Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

DAMAGE BY ASSISTANCE DOG

'Where an assistance dog being carried in a private hire vehicle causes damage, vomits, urinates or defecates therein then the disabled person accompanying the assistance dog shall be liable for the full cost of repairing and cleaning the private hire vehicle, the amount being recoverable as a civil debt.'.—*[Sir Sydney Chapman.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.45 am

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 6, in clause 1, page 2, line 4, after "medical", insert "or other reasonable".

Amendment No. 7, in page 2, line 11, at end insert—

'and any relevant medical condition or allergy to dogs (supported by such medical evidence as the licensing authority may prescribe) of the driver'.

Amendment No. 8, in page 2, line 14, after "vehicle", insert "or named driver".

Amendment No. 9, in page 2, line 15, at end insert—

'which period shall be not less than 12 months'.

Amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 20, at end insert—

'or

(c) at the time of the refusal the assistance dog was in an excitable, agitated or boisterous state which might have endangered the drivers ability to properly control the private hire vehicle.'.

Amendment No. 10, in page 2, line 20, at end insert—

'(8A) No offence is committed by a driver under subsection (3) if—

(a) the dog is so large as not to be able to sit comfortably on the floor of the vehicle, or

(b) the disabled person refuses or fails to require or fails to cause the dog to sit on the floor of the vehicle'.

Sir Sydney Chapman: My right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) has suddenly had to go to an unexpected and rather serious engagement in his constituency. A matter has come up, and I will willingly explain privately to any hon. Member the reasons why my right hon. Friend cannot attend today. He sends his apologies for not being here. I understand that as the amendment stands in my name as well as his, I am permitted to move the new clause and to speak to amendment No. 2.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me say first that I fully support the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and wish it well; I hope that it reaches the statute book expeditiously. The purpose of the new clause and amendment No. 2 is to protect the security interests of the driver of a private hire vehicle.

I have received a briefing from the Royal National Institute for the Blind, in the names of its campaigns director and its campaigns officer, Mr. Nicholas Russell. I have been very much persuaded by what Mr. Russell has written, and it seems to me on balance that, provided that nothing to the contrary comes out of the ensuing debate and the Minister does not argue the other way, I should not seek to put either new clause 1 or amendment No. 2 to the vote, but should rather, with the leave of the House, withdraw the motion.

Before doing that, I shall mention the reasons why I have come to that conclusion. New clause 1, as the House will know, deals with the possibility of a guide dog vomiting, urinating or defecating in a vehicle. The driver would be able to recover the costs in civil law if necessary. I am not a lawyer, but I am assured that if that happened the owner of the dog would in any case be liable for a civil debt under the general law of tort. If that is the case, it would be extraneous to proceed with the new clause.

The new clause was not intended to suggest that such events would happen except in the most extreme and rare circumstances. I am deeply aware of how guide dogs are chosen and trained, and the care that goes into that, and I would not seek to suggest that it is the norm that a dog would do any of those things, or cause damage in the way described in the new clause.

Amendment No. 2 deals with the possibility of a dog being

"in an excitable, agitated or boisterous state",

and the same applies to that. Dogs are selected and extensively trained to ensure that they are of a placid temperament and know how they are expected to behave in cars. If, exceptionally, a dog became excited or boisterous, it would be retrained, and the RNIB assures me that if the retraining was unsuccessful the dog would be retired.

In the light of those assurances, and unless there is some legal point that might necessitate strengthening the defence for a driver in such exceptional circumstances, I shall not insist that the House divides on either new clause 1 or amendment No. 2.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Characteristically, the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) has made a very moderate speech—indeed, a good speech—in opposition to the new clause and amendment No. 2. However, there are some in the House today who may recall the passage of what was then the Disability Discrimination Bill. The Government of the day chose the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) as the Minister who piloted the Bill through, and he did that extremely well. I led for the Opposition, and I leave others to decide what my performance was like. [HON. MEMBERS: "Tremendous."] I am sure that it is all on the record. However, I very much regret, as do Members who were involved in that Bill, including my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), who has done such a marvellous job in introducing this Bill, that we had to move the then Government on transport because it had not been included in the original draft Bill. So we made more progress on transport than was originally expected. However, we did not reach the issue in this Bill.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet for giving the impression that he will not press new clause 1 and amendment No. 2 to a vote because all the evidence is that the behaviour of guide dogs for blind people and hearing dogs for people with hearing impairments is normally impeccable. They are properly trained and their owners look after them. Were the new clause and amendment to be passed, the opposite impression might be given, which would do a great disservice to a progressive step forward.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): The whole House respects the work that my right hon. Friend and the supporters of the Bill have done. However, does he agree that it is often human beings, particularly those who have had too much to drink or are intoxicated in other ways, who cause the offence to drivers of private hire vehicles? Yet the proposal before us implies that dogs or other animals are capable of the same behaviour that some people indulge in after a certain hour.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for underlining what I think would be the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow. Were we to adopt new clause 1 and amendment No. 2, we would impose on dogs something that we do not impose on people. Yet all the evidence is that some people—a minority—behave much more unacceptably than most dogs. Therefore, the proposals are unnecessary.

The experience of the House, not to mention that of individual Members, the advice of our constituents and of the RNIB, is profound. Nearly every day we are delighted to see a guide dog in the House. Very often, the guide dog behaves much better than the average Member, yet no one would seek to impose draconian rules on Members regarding their behaviour. It is certainly not necessary for that wonderful dog, which comes in with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Sir Sydney Chapman: The hon. Gentleman is quite right in general terms. However, I recall one time when the guide dog of a very distinguished Member performed in this Chamber in a way that I have never seen any right hon. or hon. Member perform.

Mr. Clarke: I leave the defence of canines to their friends. It would be a dangerous path, and I am sure that you would not allow it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were I to deal with the behaviour of every Member at every moment the House is sitting.

On the serious point, I think that we are making excellent progress.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. He is right that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) was reasonable in his analysis of some of the defects in new clause 1. We have yet to hear the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). However, does my right hon. Friend agree that the amendments would introduce uncertainty into the legislation and allow the unscrupulous minicab driver—I am sure that there are very few of those—to prevent those who use guide dogs or hearing dogs from taking them into the car? That uncertainty, which has not yet been touched on in the debate, is an added reason for rejecting the amendments.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas) is absolutely right. He spoke, as always, very coherently. That takes me to my peroration.

[Mr. Clarke]

The Bill is long overdue. Those who train guide dogs for blind persons and hearing dogs for persons with hearing difficulties do a first-class job. I want more training to take place. More people should have access to these dogs, and people with disabilities should not be restricted in using transport. As I said, I regret that access to minicabs was not included in earlier disability legislation, and it is important to welcome a measure that is long overdue.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): This is an extremely important Bill, which I support. I am slightly perturbed by this group of amendments. I agree with the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) did a good job of demolishing the case for his new clause and amendment. Perhaps he was not in full possession of the facts when he appended his name to the new clause in the first instance and has had time for reflection since then.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I really cannot let the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) get away with that. I admitted that I was not a lawyer. I received legal advice, which I then understood. Irrespective of that, new clause 1 and amendment No. 2 were genuinely designed to strengthen the Bill, not destroy it. They might make it more detailed, admittedly, and would cover the rights of the vehicle's driver. However, having had other matters explained to me, on balance, I think that new clause 1 and amendment No. 2 are not necessary and are even irrelevant to the Bill's main purpose and objective.

Mr. Heath: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that explanation. Of course I accept at face value everything that he says about his intentions. I still have difficulty in reconciling the original intent of new clause 1 and amendment No. 2 with strengthening the Bill, but no doubt that point will be developed as we debate this further.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): With all due respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), does the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) think it possible that the new clause gives us a glimpse of the real meaning of compassionate conservatism?

Mr. Heath: That may well be the case, but as the hon. Gentleman says, he will have to apologise to the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), who appears to have joined the gang. I hope that the hon. Member for Hendon will have an opportunity to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and explain his intentions.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): While in no sense wishing to rise to the bait of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe), do the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and other Members present for this fascinating debate agree that whether or not we accept the amendment and new clause, it is important for the credibility of the Bill that these difficult issues, analogous but not identical to some of those raised in Committee, are fully debated to sustain the future credibility of the Bill?

Mr. Heath: I am happy to accept that proposition. The hon. Gentleman will recall a similar balance of interests when we considered the Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill. That is one of the two Bills of the Session which, if they reach the statute book, will greatly advance the interests of those with visual impairment. It is important to reconcile conflicting interests in matters of this kind, so that everyone feels that their concerns have been properly heard and addressed in this place.

10 am

Nevertheless, I find it difficult to understand why an assistance dog should be singled out as an animal or sentient being—I use that term in its broadest sense to include some members of the human race who may use private hire vehicles—subject to specific treatment under the law in such circumstances. As was correctly said earlier, by the right hon. Member for Coatbridge—

Mr. Tom Clarke: And Chryston.

Mr. Heath: I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman.

As the right hon. Gentleman pointed out earlier, our experience and that of the trade shows that such problems are far more likely to be associated with human beings who may over-consume certain substances during an evening, hire a cab late at night and then find themselves indisposed. The likelihood of an animal being in that condition is much more remote, especially in the case of the best trained dogs in the country. They are wonderful creatures; they undergo extensive training and behave appropriately. It is somewhat perverse to single out that group for a specific requirement in the Bill.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Does my hon. Friend agree that there should at least be some test of reasonableness in the provision? Some of the folk that we are dealing with may not be able to see what condition the dog is in and may not fully anticipate what it might do in the vehicle. Such people should not be subject to harsh penalties if they behaved reasonably, whatever might have happened later.

Mr. Heath: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I am not a lawyer, but I suspect that the owner is responsible for the actions of their animal, irrespective of whether they can determine its condition in advance. I suspect that action under civil law and recovery of costs through tort would still be possible.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I agree with the line of the hon. Gentleman's argument about the new clause. Does he agree that it seems unfair to impose such a condition on the carriage of blind people and their dogs when, as far as I am aware, the same restriction and redress in law is not applied when a blind person takes his or her dog into a shop or workplace? Would that not be a brand new requirement under law?

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point that I am not qualified to address in detail, but I agree that the provision would be unique.

The counter-argument of course is that there would be a unique requirement under law that the private hire operator could not refuse carriage of the animal, whereas if it were of a different species or if the circumstances were different, he or she would be within their rights to say, "No, I believe that were I to carry a water buffalo in the back of my cab, it would be likely to cause damage to my vehicle so I am within my rights not to carry said animal." That clearly does not apply to a guide dog. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about children?"] Indeed, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) make the same point—we all know the dangers of travelling with children. However, that is to go a little way from the purpose of the proposal.

The new clause is not necessary. Damage caused to a vehicle by the animals described in the Bill is covered by other areas of law and cost recovery would be available to the driver. The new clause is at the very least otiose and possibly damaging to the interests of the Bill. I hope that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet will withdraw it in due course.

We have heard relatively little about amendment No. 2, which raises different problems. It provides that there would be no offence if

> "at the time of the refusal the assistance dog was in an excitable, agitated or boisterous state which might have endangered the drivers ability to properly control the private hire vehicle."

I could just about understand that provision in the case of a black cab hailed on the street, when the driver could assess the state of the animal, which would be standing at the kerbside with its owner, and could suggest that the dog was not in an appropriate state of mind to be carried in the cab.

Private hire vehicles would not normally be hailed in the street, however; indeed it is illegal. They are hired by a phone call or a visit to the company's office and it would be impossible for the driver—other than through a process of extra-sensory perception—to assess the state of mind of the animal in question. I cannot for the life of me understand the circumstances in which the amendment would be relevant other than as later rationalisation of a decision taken on other grounds. That would seem an unfortunate addition to the Bill as it would offer an avenue for abuse on the part of the private hire company.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I do not want to put words into the mouth of the supporters of the amendment, but perhaps their intention is to put the responsibility on to the person who is booking the private hire vehicle. The hirer is supposed to make the assessment when they book their cab. Does my hon. Friend want to question—as I do—whether the provision impugns the behaviour and sensible conduct of all owners of such dogs?

Mr. Heath: That would be one interpretation of the amendment, albeit a most unfortunate one if it were correct. I certainly would not want Members of this place to suggest that a person with a sensory impairment who was the owner or user of an assistance dog would be so lacking in proper care and consideration that they would hire a vehicle in the full knowledge that their dog was in a state quite alien to the normal conduct of such animals. However, my hon. Friend is right to say that that is one interpretation of the amendment.

I prefer to assume that the purpose of the amendment is to allow the operator or driver of the car to refuse carriage on the grounds of the boisterous or unruly behaviour of the dog. However, I do not think that the driver would be able to assess that.

Mr. Clarke: Following the very logical arguments that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome is putting to the House, I wonder whether he would agree that my constituents in Coatbridge and Chryston would find it very unusual if their Member gave support to an amendment that includes a split infinitive: "to properly control". Given the excellent Scottish education system, they would have some reservations about that as well, would they not?

Mr. Heath: I am most grateful to the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston, who has clearly had the benefit of an excellent Scottish education. I shall not go too far down the road of parsing the clause in question, but I have a difference with the right hon. Gentleman about the appropriateness or otherwise of the split infinitive. The split infinitive was commonly used in the authorised version of the Bible, and historically. It is only a Victorian invention that equated the English infinitive with the Latin infinitive, which of course could not be split because it was incorporated in a single word.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): The same happens to be true of modern Greek, but that is by the by. I actually discussed this point with the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) in the Library this morning. There is not only a split infinitive in amendment No. 2; there also happens to be a dropped apostrophe, but that does not take away from the substance of the amendment, on which I hope to address the House later, if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman has now raised a very important point indeed, because the fact that the apostrophe is not there means that we have no way of assessing whether the amendment refers to a single driver or plural drivers, and that would have an effect on the operation of the clause.

Mr. Webb: I want to bring my hon. Friend back to the question of reasonableness. Does he agree that a private hire driver expects wear and tear as part of the cost of the hire, and that includes wear and tear caused by people who make the seats dirty, and people who have accidents? These are things that happen in the back of a vehicle as part of the ordinary running of a private hire vehicle. Is it not wrong to penalise a particular group of disabled people when they have been acting reasonably? Reasonable wear and tear and reasonable accidents should surely not be included in the legislation.

Mr. Heath: I think that my hon. Friend is right, although when we look at amendment No. 7, which the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) was prepared to support, apparently without caring or troubling to look into its syntactical quality or grammatical errors—perhaps I do him a disservice; perhaps in the original form these errors were corrected—

Mr. Dismore: I was aware of the grammatical errors and I anticipated that the amendment might not be pressed

[Mr. Dismore]

to a vote. However, I believe that it raises some important issues, which we need to debate in the House, and should I catch your eye later in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have some points to make on it, in response to some of the points that the hon. Gentleman has made already.

Mr. Heath: I am most grateful for that intervention; as a declaration of intent, it could not be bettered. I am not sure that it took the arguments a great deal further.

I do not want to take too much of the House's time this morning. I accept that there is an issue about the control of animals, or of children—or of adults if they are not entirely compos mentis, whether that condition is chemically influenced or otherwise—in a vehicle, but I consider that there are already proper protections under the law for circumstances in which that would apply. My argument, quite apart from what I have said about the point of assessment—which is relevant to a private hire vehicle that is not a black cab—is that I see very little reason to include in this legislation a specific prohibition or qualification in relation to something that applies much more widely than to those with some form of sensory impairment who make use of an assistance dog. Indeed, I would suggest—reasonably, in my opinion—that those who use assistance dogs and those with sensory impairments are the least likely among the general population to cause what one can only assume to be the mischief that the new clause and the amendments seek to remedy. That is the bone of contention and that is why I do hope that, in the fullness of time, the new clause and the amendments will not be pressed to a vote.

10.15 am

We have not yet had the benefit of the advice of the hon. Member for Hendon on the amendments that he has tabled, so it is inappropriate to deal with them in detail until he has had the opportunity to address the House. My only observation is that I hope that he will explain why he feels that the amendments are necessary, given what is already in the Bill, and particularly why he tabled amendment No. 7, which seems to be a reiteration of something which clearly—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think perhaps we should wait until we reach amendment No. 7 before we start to debate it.

Mr. Heath: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I had understood that it was grouped in this group. Am I wrong?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No; the hon. Gentleman is quite right. It is my fault.

Mr. Heath: I am most grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a great rarity for the occupant of the Chair to be wrong in any way in the Chamber and I do appreciate the immediate correction.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although many of us may think that it is not necessarily a great rarity for the Chair to be wrong, it is a great rarity for the Chair to admit it so quickly and so—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think at this point we should return to the amendments.

Mr. Heath: I had no intention of following the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) down that road. In my experience it is certainly not a rarity; it is simply a rarity for there to be anything wrong with the judgment of the Chair in the first instance, and I would reject utterly any suggestion to the contrary.

I return to amendment No. 7, about which we have not yet heard from the hon. Member for Hendon. The point that I was seeking to make was that the amendment appears, as I read it, simply to reiterate and re-state in a different form a provision that is already in the Bill, which allows an operator to have a certificate exempting him from the provisions of the Bill for medical reasons. I am not clear—but no doubt we shall hear from the hon. Gentleman why I am wrong in my interpretation—why he wishes to re-state that in the Bill and why it is necessary to have a doubling up. Perhaps it is a belt and braces approach. Perhaps he is concerned that the subsection may be contestable in law and he would prefer to repeat the provision elsewhere in the Bill to enable him to direct his defence lawyers to a different part of the Bill in order to adduce additional legal evidence in the case. We do not know; we must wait until the hon. Gentleman makes his speech. We shall listen carefully to the arguments that he adduces in favour of his amendment.

In conclusion, this group of amendments, which may be well-intentioned—I am perfectly happy to accept that the amendments are well-intentioned—in fact does very little to advance the interests of a Bill which, as I have already said, is extremely important. Indeed, I consider that they are to its detriment. Worse, they single out a group of people—a group who are already singled out by virtue of their sensory impairment and their need for the help of assistance dogs—in what could be considered a discriminatory way. That is unjustified. It is not relevant to the operation of the Bill, should it become statute. I hope that, having heard the arguments in some detail, those who have tabled the new clause and the amendments will, having reflected on the matter—it appeared that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet had done quite a lot of reflection in advance—feel it appropriate to withdraw the new clause and not press the amendments, so that we may make further progress with the Bill.

Mr. Dismore: Before I start to justify my amendments and speak in favour of new clause 1, although perhaps not its precise wording, may I say that I very much sympathise with the aims of the Bill? I have read the briefing from the RNIB, and I very much hope that the Bill will pass today, although a number of issues need to be addressed. Even if the amendments are not accepted today, there will be an opportunity to consider some of the technical issues in another place if the Bill receives its Third Reading today, which I very much hope it will.

In response to the point made in an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), I simply say that, although the Bill may become a little more complicated if some of my proposals are accepted, my objective is not to make it more complicated, but to ensure that we do not inadvertently create injustices for the owners and drivers of minicabs. Of course our job in the House is to try to ensure justice for those on both sides of any argument. Although it is the natural tendency of hon. Members to favour the less advantaged in society, such as those whom we are trying to help with the Bill—and rightly so—we must ensure, while doing so, that we do not inadvertently cause an injustice to someone else.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) asks why we have singled out guide dogs. Perhaps he hinted at the answer in his own contribution: if someone wanted to take his pet water buffalo or warthog—or even his ordinary, small pet mongrel—in a cab or minicab, the driver would have the right to refuse to take him. I used to have a pet dog before being elected to the House. On one occasion, when she was in a slightly muddy condition, I tried to flag down a cab, but the driver refused to take her. She was called Griswald. She occasionally damaged the upholstery of my car, so I know that we need to address such issues.

Dogs could be refused passage, as, of course, could a drunk on a Saturday night. We are creating the right for people to insist on being taken. That is the right thing to do, but people must accept the consequences of any damage that may arise from insisting on exercising that right.

Mr. Heath: May I make it absolutely clear that I entirely understand that balance of interests? I think that I alluded to it in my comments. Before I was a Member of Parliament, I used to keep pigs. I never required a private hire carrier or black cab driver to try to take one of my pigs in the back of his cab.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Claire Ward (Watford): My hon. Friend refers to his own experiences of attempting to take his dog in a cab but being refused because the dog had muddy paws. Does he think that those who drafted the new clause considered that muddy paws equated to damaging a vehicle?

Mr. Dismore: Muddy paws themselves cannot damage a vehicle. In fact, my dog had rather more than muddy paws on that occasion. However, if the muddy paws got on to the upholstery, the vehicle could be damaged. I have still got the car with the muddy paw marks in the back to prove it. Sometimes such marks do not come out.

Mr. Gardiner: What happened to the dog?

Mr. Dismore: I am afraid that the dog died of old age in 1996, and I have not replaced her because, frankly, my lifestyle since being elected to the House would not allow me to look after a dog properly. As a responsible dog owner, I thought it inappropriate to get another one.

Lawrie Quinn: I am sure that all hon. Members would appreciate not only my hon. Friend's skills as a dog owner, but the fact that he has a legal background. Indeed, the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) said in his opening remarks that the current civil law of tort made provision for recovery of a debt if a vehicle is soiled. Will my hon. Friend confirm from his experience as a lawyer that that is the case now and that it would be the case if the Bill were to become a statute?

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I shall come to that issue shortly, and there are some points to be made about the present legal position in the absence of the new clause.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) suggested in an intervention that, if the dog owner were sight impaired or blind, he might not be able to see the condition of the dog. That is an important point, but it goes against the argument, which he was trying to advance, that the owner may not be aware of the condition of the dog at the time. The briefing from the RNIB says that that will be a very unusual occurrence and that it would arise only if the dog were ill, for example, because assistance dogs are properly trained and well behaved. I certainly take that point on board, but even if such occurrences are comparatively rare, it is important to ensure that the rights of the car owner or driver are protected, because the damage could be expensive to repair.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Does my hon. Friend understand that the difficulty that may arise is that, if a driver says, "I'm sorry. I am not going to take you and your dog because your dog is in a poor state and might damage my vehicle," the owner of the dog may be unable to assess whether that is the truth? That is a very serious loophole in the Bill.

Mr. Dismore: If the new clause said that, I would agree with my hon. Friend, but I am afraid it does not. It relates to carrying the dog in the car, not to refusing to take the dog in the car. It would apply ex post facto, rather than on refusing to admit the dog. That is dealt with in amendment No. 2, which I shall come to later. So there are some important considerations to bear in mind.

There is a problem with the wording of the new clause. It refers to "the full cost", and there could be arguments about the full cost of restoring the vehicle to its previous condition. I would have preferred the new clause to refer to "reasonable cost", as perhaps that would be a fairer way to deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Northavon. The phrase "reasonable cost" would have been better, but perhaps we could consider that on another occasion.

Mr. Boswell: Is the hon. Gentleman aware—the House should be made aware—that the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association has advised that dogs trained by it are covered by public liability insurance and that the cost of repairing any damage so caused would not fall on the blind person? So it seems that the point that he makes has been taken into account.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. When we debate amendment No. 2, I shall make a point about the definition of the term "assistance dog". That definition raises some issues that the hon. Gentleman might not have anticipated in making that intervention. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing my attention to that fact, but of course public liability insurance applies only if there is liability in the first place. That point has been made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington,

[Mr. Dismore]

West (Joyce Quin), and the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet has referred us to the RNIB briefing, which simply says that such damage would be covered by the common law of tort. I should like to know a little more about that.

Before being elected to the House, I practised as a solicitor for 20 years in the law of tort, and I can envisage something of a minefield. For example, if a case were brought on negligence, the question would be whether the dog owner was negligent. The dog owner may well be able to say, "I was not negligent", for a variety of reasons. Could such an action be brought in contract? Doing so could be difficult because the contract may not be with the car driver and car owner, but with the minicab company, subcontracting the call to the car driver. So it may be difficult to bring the action in contract.

There is an argument about whether the dog owner would be liable under the Animals Act 1971. Hon. Members have said that the behaviour of guide dogs is always excellent, so it could be strongly argued that that Act may not apply because it normally clicks in when strict liability is involved and the species of animal has a propensity to behave badly. If the normal propensity of the breed or species of guide dog is to behave properly, it may not be strictly liable under the Act. It may come under other provisions, but then there are arguments about whether liability is involved.

10.30 am

Lawrie Quinn: Is my hon. Friend aware that taxis in some seaside towns, not least the towns of Scarborough and Whitby, display the terms of carriage, which often state the fine for soiling. Under the new clause, the terms of the contract would have to be made available in braille, and before a booking was made those terms would have to be explained. Does that not provide over-regulation, which I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) does not intend?

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He makes an important point, which relates to the distinction I was making between black cabs and minicabs. If a driver picks up a passenger off the street, the contract of hire is immediately between the passenger and the driver, who, as part of the contract, can specify the terms, which could include the need for liquidated damages should this problem arise. The difficulty in this case is that, first, the driver has no say in whether to accept the contract—we are making that clear in the Bill—and, secondly, the contract may not be between the driver and the passenger, and, thus, there is no privity of contract that can be enforced between the driver and the passenger, because the contract may be between the passenger and the minicab company, which subcontracts the hire to the driver. That is the problem that one can reach in contract.

Whether I am right or wrong, these points are arguable at law. I would hate the small claims court to have to adjudicate between a sight-impaired person and a minicab driver. It would be far better to have a very clear statutory term under which, if damage is done, the reasonable cost could be met, whether through the public liability insurance policy to which the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) referred, or by the owner of the dog.

Mr. Gardiner: My hon. Friend's argument, as I understand it, hinges on two things. One is compulsion—the minicab driver is compelled to take the dog or the animal—and the other is potential ignorance on the part of the passenger as to the condition of the dog. What I fail to understand—perhaps my hon. Friend will enlighten me—is why he does not envisage a minicab driver being able to say to the owner of the animal about to board his cab under compulsion, "Your dog looks a bit ropey to me, are you sure he is all right to travel?" The passenger, or potential passenger, is therefore made completely aware of the condition of the dog, and everything else will follow. I am not a lawyer, however, so I accept that I probably do not understand these things.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. That assumes, however, that the driver can see that the dog is ill. The dog may have an illness that is not immediately apparent to the driver. My point is that a whole series of arguments could end up having to be litigated on in the county court. In practice, however, we could deal with the problem very simply with a new clause along these lines. I fully accept that the new clause is not perfect in its current form, and that can perhaps be corrected in another place. Important issues need to be addressed, however, to make sure that we deal fairly with the obligation that we are imposing on the driver.

Mr. Webb: I thought that the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) was going to make the opposite point. Let us imagine that there is a blind person with a dog, and that a driver who does not really want to take that person pulls up and says, "Sorry guvnor, that dog looks a bit iffy to me, I won't take you," and drives off. If that loophole is put in the Bill under amendment No. 2, what can a blind person do? They cannot report the number of the cab that has just driven off. Does not that make a nonsense of the whole Bill?

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Those arguments come under amendment No. 2, and I shall address that point separately. At the moment, we are not dealing with those circumstances; we are dealing with circumstances in which the dog is in the vehicle and causes damage. That is not the situation pronounced on by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), in which the dog has not got into the vehicle. We are talking about a situation in which the dog has got into the vehicle and caused damage. On the question of whether the driver can refuse to accept the hire, under the Bill in its current form he could not refuse to take the dog, no matter what was wrong with it.

Mr. Gardiner: I cannot allow my hon.—and learned—Friend to get away with that. His own justification for new clause 1 was on the basis of the compulsion on the driver to admit the passenger with the dog. He cannot, therefore, divorce the two elements that he has logically connected.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Of course, these provisions are not necessarily both acceptable in their current form, and I fully accept that those points need to be addressed separately. At the moment, we are dealing with the position in which the dog has caused damage to the vehicle. A separate issue arises in relation to whether a dog could be refused admission to the vehicle for whatever reason, but that is not the point that I am addressing in relation to new clause 1. I have probably exhausted my arguments on new clause 1, unless my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North is tempted to intervene yet again.

Mr. Gardiner: I hesitate to intervene once again, but I think that it is incumbent on my hon. Friend to give the House an exposition. Again, I claim no particular knowledge of the law, especially of the law of tort, but perhaps we should consider the case of Rylands *v.* Fletcher. As I understand it, that case hinges on the obligation on a person to ensure that anything that comes from their property does not do damage elsewhere. I understand that that has caused many a legal case and much dispute. This is one occasion on which I would welcome listening to the perorations of my hon.—and learned—Friend.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. As he will no doubt recall, Rylands *v.* Fletcher concerned the law of nuisance and the release of water. Of course, we are talking about a rather different release of water under this provision from that which applied in Rylands *v.* Fletcher. That case concerned a piece of land that was flooded by water that came from another piece of land. It is concerned with the principle of a hazard arising on one piece of land or property and affecting another. Cases have been brought in relation to damage by fire and so forth. I do not really think that the law of nuisance applies in the circumstances that we are debating.

I want to move on to amendment No. 6—I shall deal with the amendments in the order in which they appear on the amendment paper. I promise the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) that I shall deal with his points in relation to amendment No. 2 when I get to it.

Clause 1(5) indicates that the only grounds for granting a certificate of exemption are medical grounds. That is somewhat restrictive, as there could be other grounds on which it would be perfectly fair to grant an exemption. My amendment would allow a licensing authority to take into account other reasonable—not fanciful—grounds. I shall give the example of someone who has a pathological fear of dogs. When I have been out door knocking and canvassing with my campaign team, one or two of them have been terrified of dogs when we knock on doors. I do not think that that is a medical condition—some may think that it is a natural reaction—but when a dog is barking on the other side of the door, they tend to run away and send me instead. I always take dog biscuits with me when I am out campaigning, just in case. That is a useful tip for all hon. Members.

Claire Ward: I would not wish my hon. Friend to fall foul of the electoral law, but does giving biscuits to dogs when canvassing for votes constitute the bribery or treating of voters and their families?

Mr. Dismore: At the risk of trying your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not think that giving dog biscuits is treating.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. My patience is beginning to be tried. Will the hon. Gentleman return to the amendment in hand?

Mr. Dismore: I give way again.

Mr. Heath: I cannot quite let the hon. Gentleman get away with the suggestion that a pathological fear of dogs is not a medical condition. If something is pathological, it is medical. If it is not pathological, it is not medical.

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point. Perhaps I slightly overstated my case.

Mr. Gardiner: May I help my hon.—and learned—Friend out? Although the minicab driver may not have a medical condition and be able to obtain an exemption certificate, he may have a standing contract with someone who has an allergy to dogs. Does my hon.—and learned—Friend agree that such a circumstance presents the reasonable ground covered by the amendment?

Mr. Dismore: I will come on to the issue of allergies shortly. I am dealing with the point that some people are frightened of dogs.

Mr. Tom Harris: One of the weaknesses of my hon. Friend's argument is that unscrupulous taxi drivers may simply decide that they do not want to carry animals. It would be very difficult to prove that they are telling the truth about their pathological fear of dogs. Will my hon. Friend consider that point?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend has a point, and I deal with it in the amendment that considers the evidence that should be considered by the licensing authority. A pathological fear of dogs is an example of the circumstances that might not be covered by the provision in clause 1 for a new section 37A(5) that outlines the grounds on which an exemption might be granted. If someone is genuinely frightened of dogs—

Claire Ward: That is medical.

Mr. Dismore: That person might not consider himself to be ill, so I am not entirely convinced that it is covered by the provision for medical grounds. The licensing authority should, however, be able to take account of such circumstances.

Mr. Edward Davey: On amendment No. 6, the hon. Gentleman must convince the House that there are other reasonable grounds by which an exemption could be made by the licensing authority. So far, he has failed to give one example that has not been countered by the arguments of other hon. Members. He must come up with a concrete example before the House can accept the amendment. I ask him to do so.

Mr. Dismore: I stand by my view that a fear of dogs is not a medical condition. The people with whom I canvass would not say that they are ill because they are frightened of dogs. They think it is a natural reaction. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome that people sometimes have a mental illness that creates such a fear, but people can have a genuine fear that does not go that far.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I would not dream of suggesting that my hon. Friend is making a meal of this, let alone a dog's breakfast. However, when people have a phobia, the treatment involves confronting them with the conditions

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

that led to the phobia. Given the charm of guide dogs and hearing dogs, would it not be to the advantage of people with a fear of dogs to have more experience of dealing with them?

Mr. Dismore: My right hon. Friend makes an interesting point. However, the first time that a driver is exposed to a guide dog should not be when he is about to take charge of a moving vehicle. Perhaps the RNIB could help people to overcome their fears through other programmes. However, the provision could create a hazard not only for the driver, the passenger and the dog but for other road users. The driver will be travelling along looking over his shoulder to see whether he will be attacked by what appears to be the placid dog sitting in the back.

Claire Ward: I realise that my hon. Friend is trying very hard to justify the amendment. However, I find it difficult to accept that what he describes as a fear of dogs will not simply mean that the driver will refuse to carry dogs because he does not like them. My hon. Friend must establish the fact that such a fear will not be covered by the provision that relates to medical grounds. I suspect that the amendment would create a loophole so that drivers would be able to say, "I have a fear of dogs, but I have not been to the doctor about it." They would say that just because they simply do not like dogs.

10.45 am

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I do not dispute that it is a potential problem. However, it should be left to the discretion of the licensing authority to satisfy itself that there is evidence for a driver's claim that he is afraid of dogs. That point is covered in amendment No. 7, and that answers the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome, who asked me what the purpose of the amendment was.

Mr. Edward Davey: I am afraid that the House is not yet with the hon. Gentleman on this point. I understand his motives, and we are grateful to him for allowing us to debate the point. It has focused our attention on the matter in hand. However, I am concerned that we would place on the licensing authority an obligation that it would find almost impossible to carry out. It would find it impossible reasonably to assess someone's claims that he had a fear of dogs if there were no medical evidence to back them up.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) *rose—*

Mr. Dismore: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) and deal with two points at once.

Bob Spink: I agree with the mood of the House. I am not convinced that inserting the words "or other reasonable" grounds would be a good move. It would provide an escape clause. We are aware that specific medical conditions such as agoraphobia and arachnophobia, which is the fear of a particular animal, exist. However, if someone had a true phobia of dogs, he would have sought medical help. He would have a medical history, so the fear would be covered by the provision relating to medical grounds. Can the hon. Gentleman not accept that the problem would be dealt with in that way?

Mr. Dismore: I will deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) when we consider the next amendment. On the other point, some people do not consider themselves to have a medical condition, but they are frightened of dogs.

Mr. McCabe: I do not agree with the thrust of my hon. Friend's argument, but he is right on one point. It is perfectly possible to have a rational fear of dogs. For example, a person might have been bitten more than once or someone close to them might have been attacked. The fear would not constitute a medical condition, but it would be perfectly rational and understandable.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He makes succinctly the point that I have tried to make in the past few minutes. That is why a driver should be able to use other reasonable grounds for refusing to carry a dog.

Mr. Pond *rose—*

Claire Ward *rose—*

Mr. Dismore: We will have one last round, before I move to my next point. I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Claire Ward).

Claire Ward: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing us to pursue the issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) suggested that, if the driver, a member of his family or one of his friends had been bitten, we should perhaps consider that a reasonable ground for his refusing to carry a dog. However, that argument is not reasonable, because the fact that a member of his family or an acquaintance had been bitten should not allow him to continue his prejudice against dogs. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) thinks that such circumstances justify the amendment, I believe that they merely highlight another weakness in it.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but I think that she is wrong. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe). The fact is that people have a fear of dogs, and the question is whether they can satisfy the licensing authority that it is a genuine fear. If they cannot do that, they will not receive the exemption.

To suggest that an exemption can be allowed only on medical grounds boxes the driver in. There may be other reasons, as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton said. I cannot come up with another example now. I am focusing on the one that we are discussing because we need to make progress. It is wrong to say that there is only one reason why a licence exemption should be granted. I am concerned that there may be many other reasons that we cannot think of now, which if brought to our attention could properly be considered a fair reason for refusal. It is a matter for the licensing authority in the light of the evidence that is presented to it.

Mr. Pond: My hon. Friend has referred to the need for drivers or operators to persuade licensing authorities that they have a genuine fear of dogs. Does he realise that that would introduce a real inconsistency from one licensing authority to another? Such inconsistency would allow real loopholes. Unless we have exemptions that are based on medical criteria and which have some element of objectivity, there could be a serious weakness in the implementation of the Bill.

Mr. Dismore: I hear what my hon. Friend says but I do not agree with him. Fear of dogs may be a subjective fear, but it is an objective issue for the licensing authority to determine from case to case. I do not see the issue arising very often. I believe that simply saying that there can be no reason other than a medical one is creating an injustice that we may not even be aware of as we consider the Bill.

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman said that he cannot think of another reasonable reason, but that there might be one so we should accept the amendment just in case. That is not a persuasive argument for the House. Surely it is a matter of the balance of rights. There is the right of the person who cannot see to travel in the same way as a sighted person can travel versus the right of the person who is driving to avoid the discomfiture that he might suffer from a fear of dogs. We must find that balance. In saying what is reasonable, how do we measure fear? Where do we draw the line? A medical condition is definable and can be justified and argued. By introducing "reasonable", we are giving lawyers work. I think that we should reject the amendment.

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman makes the valid point that the issue is where the balance lies. That was where I started my speech. Where does the balance lie in ensuring that we do justice between the two parties? I am concerned that we may end up creating an injustice by not allowing slightly more flexibility to the licensing authority.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): My hon. Friend has pursued this point with some passion and at some length. I am interested to know his motivation. Is he expressing a concern, having read the Bill in detail, or has he received representations from minicab owners in his constituency or elsewhere, which have led him to pursue this point with passion?

Mr. Dismore: The answer to my hon. Friend's question is simple. I have read the Bill and I perceive injustices and loopholes. We should address them today and give our concerns an airing. I will listen to the promoter, my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), when he replies. He may convince me that I am wrong, or he may say that he sees some merits in some of my points.

I move on to amendment No. 7. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome asked me why we need it. I have been debating, in responding to various interventions, the question of medical conditions. The starting point is that clause 1(5) reads:

"If the licensing authority is satisfied . . . on medical grounds",

it should

"issue a certificate of exemption".

Clause 1(6) deals with the issues that should be taken into account in

"determining whether to issue a certificate of exemption".

The issues that should be taken into account all relate to the particular vehicle. They do not relate to the medical condition itself.

I am concerned that the licensing authority is not required to examine the medical condition on the basis of medical evidence. Almost everyone in the Chamber made that point to me during our discussion of amendment No. 6. There would have to be medical evidence to prove that there should be an exemption. However, the Bill does not provide that the driver must provide medical evidence to justify the reasons why he should be exempt. He could merely say, "I have an allergy to dogs" or whatever. The licensing authority would then say, "All right, fair enough." According to the Bill, the driver does not have to produce medical evidence to justify what he is saying.

Bob Spink: If the taxi driver refuses to take the person who cannot see and his dog, how could the person who cannot see take down the taxi driver's number?

Mr. Dismore: That is a rather silly intervention. The minicab will have been booked through the mini cab company, which will know the name of the driver who was allocated the job. That intervention is not pertinent to amendment No. 7.

Lawrie Quinn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dismore: I shall develop my argument and then give way to my hon. Friend. I am concerned that subsections (5) and (6) do not sit together as well as they should. I am not sure why the physical characteristics of the vehicle, or kind of vehicle, are relevant to the medical condition. Yet there is no requirement to produce medical evidence. It seems that that is a loophole and something that a driver could exploit. He could give the licensing authority a great spiel about why he has a problem with dogs without having to justify that with medical evidence.

Lawrie Quinn: Many Members will be aware that my hon. Friend has great expertise in industrial and health and safety law. I return to my earlier intervention about the relationship between the subcontractor and the contractor. I followed my hon. Friend's argument. However, in terms of health and safety provisions at work, what is the liability in the relationship between the subcontractor and the cab hire company? Surely anyone who found himself in medical difficulties because of taking jobs that involved the carrying of a dog on many occasions could take some action against his employer or the person to which he was contracted, namely the minicab hire company.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend's intervention raises complicated areas of law, especially in relation to vicarious liability in terms of the main contractor and the subcontractor. I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you would not like me to go down that road. However, my hon. Friend has a valid point that needs to be addressed at some stage.

[Mr. Dismore]

The purpose of health and safety legislation is to ensure that people do not get injured or ill in the first place. However, if they do get ill or injured, there must be compensation arrangements afterwards. In my view, the purpose of health and safety legislation is preventive rather than compensatory.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Is my hon. Friend not stating the obvious with amendment No. 7? What evidence does he have, for example, that the licensing authority does not currently require medical evidence to be provided? Is not the solution to his concern about the licensing authority to ensure that those who sit on the authority carry out a rigorous inspection? Perhaps the House might like to nominate him to sit on the licensing authority, but only if it meets on Friday mornings.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend may be interested to know that I was once a member of the Westminster City Council licensing committee. We had great fun considering the licensing of sex shops, but that is another story.

Perhaps I might answer my hon. Friend by putting his question back to him the other way round. There is nothing in the Bill that provides that the licensing authority should consider medical evidence. It is an open question. Some licensing authorities may say, "We take the driver's word for it." Other authorities may be more rigorous. We return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham about inconsistencies between the approach adopted by different authorities. If we include in the Bill a requirement that they must take into account medical evidence—they can specify what they want—that would address the issue.

11 am

The amendment deals with allergy to dogs. That is because the RNIB briefing dismisses the point about that being equivalent to carrying a passenger with a heavy perfume to which some people could be allergic. It is a little more complicated than that. We should take into account the possibility that someone has an allergy to dogs, because it is potentially dangerous if a driver is sneezing while driving.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Given the hon. Gentleman's experience of licensing, can he tell me how many cases of exemptions he thinks will be brought about on these grounds?

Mr. Dismore: I have no idea, and I do not think that anybody knows. We know roughly how many minicabs there are and how many guide dogs there are, but we do not know, because the question has never arisen, how many people are allergic to dogs or have other medical reasons why they should not carry them. Nevertheless, it is something for which we should provide. In response to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome, the point of amendment No. 7 is that it would enable a licensing authority to require medical evidence in justification, whether it is a note from a GP or something more serious. At the moment, the Bill does not require that.

Mr. Pond: I wonder if I can help my hon. Friend as regards the scale of the problem that we are addressing. I am grateful to the RNIB for digging out the relevant Department of Health figures. I understand that approximately 4 per cent. of the adult population have asthma that is so severe as to require regular medical supervision, but of course the number of those whose asthma or other allergy would be triggered by dogs will be much smaller than that. Although I accept that such allergies are not to be sneezed at, there are not huge numbers of people who will be affected by the problem.

Mr. Dismore: The RNIB briefing tells us that there are 150,000 private hire vehicles, and 4 per cent. of that figure represents quite a lot of people. I take my hon. Friend's point that not all of them will have a dog allergy, although some will, and perhaps he can do some arithmetic on that basis. However, a sufficient number of people will be affected to warrant our trying to ensure that their interests are protected.

Mr. Edward Davey: The amendment does not specify the type of medical evidence that the hon. Gentleman would wish a licensing authority to take account of, so it is superfluous. Clause 1(5) says:

> "If the licensing authority is satisfied that it is appropriate on medical grounds".

Given that, does the hon. Gentleman really believe that a licensing authority would not want to see medical evidence?

Mr. Dismore: The simple answer is that we do not know. Some licensing authorities may have a very busy agenda to get through on the day the driver turns up and says that he has the allergy. Those of us who have been in local government know that many matters pass through relatively quickly without the scrutiny that they deserve.

Mr. Edward Davey: I know that the hon. Gentleman served on Westminster city council, which is known for one or two methods that are not beyond reproach. Surely he would agree, on the basis of his experience and knowledge of local councils, which are for the most part the licensing authorities that we are talking about, that most of them would act in a responsible manner and would in no way wish to grant an exemption certificate that would disadvantage some of their own residents unless they were assured that there was evidence to back up the driver's claim.

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. Most licensing authorities would take their responsibilities seriously. However, given that subsection (6) specifies that the authority should take into account the characteristics of the vehicle, it seems peculiar not also to draw attention to the medical evidence that is required. That is putting the cart before the driver.

As for allergy, that can be a serious hazard for a driver, because if they are driving along the road sneezing they may lose control of the vehicle. That is an important factor that the RNIB, somewhat unfairly, discounted.

Mr. Wiggin: I am curious about this. If the hon. Gentleman is right that a driver would refuse to take a guide dog because he was worried that he would have an accident if he did so, which law would he have broken? Would he be driving with undue care and attention, or would he be in default of the Bill?

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, but he is not following the point of the amendment. We are dealing with an exemption for a driver who has a medical condition. If a driver were exempted, he would not be put in the position of having to take the dog. The problem is that if he took the dog because he did not have an exemption, what would happen to him then? He would not have broken the law under the Bill because he took the dog, but he could fall foul of the general laws relating to loss of control of the vehicle, careless driving or whatever.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Earlier I raised a point of order to say that 49 Bills are on the Order Paper for consideration today. Yesterday, the Leader of the House said that the Government are backing this Bill and the Commonwealth Bill. Is it in order for such lengthy debate to take place at this stage, preventing us from reaching other worthy Bills? Is there any mechanism whereby we can reach the other Bills, and what chance do we have of getting them through today?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Lady knows full well how these matters are normally dealt with. As long as hon. Members who are addressing the House are in order, it is not a matter on which the Chair should intervene.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In fairness, I have dealt fully with the point of order.

Mr. Dismore: If the hon. Lady is concerned to ensure that legislation is properly scrutinised, that is exactly what I am doing. As I said, I very much support the Bill, but certain issues need to be addressed.

On amendment No. 8, the certificate of exemption refers to particular vehicles, but does not say that the driver has to be named. It is relatively straightforward, and I hope relatively uncontroversial, that a certificate should say whom it is granted to as well as in relation to which vehicles.

Amendment No. 9 deals with the period of exemption. If an exemption is granted, it should be for a finite period, not indefinitely, and a period of 12 months would be fair in relation to people who have a medical condition that is transient, so that it is appropriate for the exemption to be re-examined from time to time.

Much play was made earlier about amendment No.2, which deals with the behaviour of dogs. I am glad that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) said that he is not going to press it, because, apart from the serious grammatical errors, it raises a rather different issue as regards the construction of the Bill.

We have assumed that the assistance dog is properly trained by the RNIB or whoever, and that it is a placid dog that does what it is told and behaves itself. We all know that dogs that are properly trained by a registered charity, such as the RNIB, behave. However, proposed new section 37A(9) does not stipulate that. Proposed new subsection (9)(c) states that an assistance dog is one that has been trained by a prescribed charity to assist someone with epilepsy or other stipulated conditions. The problem is that the definition of assistance dogs in the context of a blind or deaf person does not state that it has to be trained by a prescribed charity.

If the electors of Hendon decide that they have had enough of me, there is no reason why I should not set myself up as a guide dog trainer. I have no qualifications or skills to do that. I could claim that I have a dog that is trained to look after blind people, but it could be a lively dog that jumps around a lot. It could be Scooby Doo.

We have a serious problem to address. If the definition of assistance dog does not say that the dog has to be trained properly by a prescribed charity, there is a serious loophole in the Bill. An assistance dog that has not been properly trained by a prescribed charity could be excitable, agitated or boisterous. In those circumstances, the driver might be in a difficult position.

Lawrie Quinn: My hon. Friend mentions a loophole. On amendment No. 2, what would happen if a dog became boisterous or agitated during a journey? If the Scooby Doo dog becomes animated—although Scooby Doo is, of course, already animated—will the driver be able to stop in the middle of the journey and ask the passenger with said dog to leave? How would that affect the original contract?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a valid and important point. Amendment No. 2 deals with the behaviour of a dog before it gets into the vehicle. It does not deal with what happens if a dog becomes agitated after it gets into the vehicle. I suspect that amendment No. 10 addresses that problem, although I accept that it may not be on all fours with my hon. Friend's argument. I would be much happier if the definition of assistance dog in amendments Nos. 2 and 10 applied to a dog that had been trained by a prescribed charity no matter what the disability. If we do not address that serious loophole today, it will have to be sorted out in another place.

Mr. Edward Davey: The hon. Gentleman's point does not stand up to much analysis. All dogs that are trained for use by a blind or deaf person, or the people covered by proposed new section 37A(9)(c), will have a certificate to show that they have received full training. Should the driver of a private hire vehicle wish to question whether a dog was properly trained and thus came within the parameters of the Bill, he could ask for such a certificate. I should be surprised if the people who own the dogs did not have the certificate with them.

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman misses the point. He is right to say that proposed new section 37A(9)(c) refers to a dog that has been trained by a prescribed charity. It covers people with, for instance, epilepsy and problems of mobility and manual dexterity. However, proposed new section 37A(9)(a) and (b) do not say that a dog has to be trained by a prescribed charity.

I fully accept that if the dog is trained by the RNIB, RNID or a similar organisation, it may have a certificate of training. I am sure that both the driver and the dog owner would be confident that the dog would not be

[Mr. Dismore]

boisterous and would be properly behaved, which was the point made by the hon. Member for Daventry. The problem is what happens if the dog has not been trained in those circumstances. If no training certificate can be produced, how can the driver be guaranteed that the dog will be well behaved?

11.15 am

Claire Ward: My hon. Friend raises an important point and he has proved why it is important to scrutinise the Bill. Proposed new section 37A(9)(a) and (b) could provide an opportunity for an unsuitable person to train a guide dog for a blind or deaf person. However, surely a dog could not be trained to guide a blind person if it was boisterous by nature.

Mr. Dismore: The problem is that that becomes a matter for the lawyers in relation to what is meant by "trained" and "guide". If there is a certificate to say that a dog has been trained by a registered charity, that would be conclusive. However, there is no provision for that. I think it is a drafting error that could be corrected in another place. I am sure that when my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow responds, he will tell us whether there are organisations that are not registered charities that do such work.

However, there is a loophole. As I said, there is no reason in principle why I should not set myself up as a dog trainer, although bearing in mind my experiences with Griswald it is clear that I would not be very good at it. She seemed to be trying to train me rather than the other way around, which is the problem with many pet dogs.

Mr. Edward Davey: The hon. Gentleman says he thinks he has found a loophole, which he describes as a drafting error. Does he really think that lots of people are queueing up to pass off their dogs as guide dogs and dogs for the deaf? Does he have any evidence to back up that claim?

Mr. Dismore: There is no reason for people to do that at the moment. However, we are talking about imposing an obligation on someone who is outside the guide dog loop. It is fine if someone who does not represent a registered charity agrees to train a dog and the deaf or blind person is happy with the dog, but we are proposing to impose an obligation on someone else who has to take it for granted that the guide dog is what it purports to be.

There are rules about allowing guide dogs into restaurants. I suspect we could be opening a can of worms for restaurants as well—if I can put it that way—if we go down the route of not specifying what we mean by a guide dog. The hon. Gentleman may well be right; perhaps it is belt and braces.

Bob Spink: We are in the realms of the absurd. Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that we issue licences for the dog to show that it has been trained? That would be a dog licence in reverse because it would be attached to the dog rather than the owner. Who would issue that licence? Would we require an inspection department to check that the standards were being upheld? Would he call that department Ofdog or Ofwoof? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could move on and let us make some progress.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are now straying far from the point.

Mr. Dismore: I am pleased that you are getting into the spirit of the morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The intervention of the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) was rather silly. The answer is simple: if the Bill stipulated that the dog had been trained by a prescribed charity, the problem would disappear. Both parties could thus have confidence, and the law would be confident that a proper arrangement was in place for the dog. I am not sure of the precise arrangements for a dog that the RNIB trains and whether it has a certificate, docket—or dogget—to prove it. If so, there would be a clear presumption that the dog was properly trained.

Claire Ward: I want to revert to the serious point about the definition of an assistance dog. Let us consider dogs who are being trained but who are not yet fully trained to be guide dogs for the blind or for the deaf. The dog obviously needs to be exposed to circumstances that it will encounter later. It needs to be able to guide a person with a disability into a minicab or taxi or on to public transport. The definition in the Bill does not cover dogs that are being trained. Does my hon. Friend believe that we should consider that?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I assume that part of a dog's training is in getting in and out vehicles, and that the driver will be part of the training set-up, and will therefore know the propensities of dogs that are being trained.

There are serious training problems. I shall not go into the matter in detail, but the Bill does not even define "dog".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I believe that hon. Members know what a dog is.

Mr. Dismore: When we considered hunting with dogs, the definition caused problems.

Amendment No. 10 does not go as far as amendment No. 2, but I believe that it should be accepted. The RNIB brief states that a properly trained assistance dog is required to sit on the floor between the owner's legs or lie down in the well of a cab. However, what happens if the dog is too big for the vehicle or if the person in charge of the dog refuses to make it sit on the floor? A dog can make a terrible mess by sitting on a car seat, especially if it is moulting. It is fair for the driver to be able to insist that the dog sits on the floor. That is also good practice.

Mr. Edward Davey: The problem with amendment No. 10 is that it fails to deal with small private hire vehicles. A dog's inability to sit on the floor may be no fault of the owner, and may have nothing to do with the dog's size or its behaviour.

Mr. Dismore: The amendment is trying to deal with that. The hon. Gentleman should consider it with proposed new section 37A(6), which refers to

"the physical characteristics of the private vehicle"

that could be a ground for exemption.

Mr. Tom Harris: Amendment No. 10 refers to the dog being

"so large as not to be able to sit comfortably on the floor of the vehicle".

How can one ascertain whether the dog is comfortable?

Mr. Dismore: A dog that is uncomfortable in a vehicle lets it be known pretty quickly. It will not stay put. We must also consider the animal welfare issues. If a dog is uncomfortable, it is not right to force it to go into the vehicle.

Claire Ward: Who will determine whether the dog is comfortable: the person who is being guided or the driver?

Mr. Dismore: The dog—although my hon. Friend has a point.

Perhaps proposed new section 37A(6), which deals with the physical characteristics of the vehicle, covers paragraph (a) in amendment No. 10. An exemption could perhaps be made under it if the vehicle were too small to take a dog. However, it does not cover paragraph (b), which relates to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby made when he asked what would happen if a dog that initially sat on the floor tried to get on to the seat or started to jump about. Paragraph (b) would deal with a dog that started to misbehave during a journey because it would allow the driver to stop and require the dog to leave the vehicle.

Mr. Pond: I am reliably informed that few vehicles that are used as minicabs are not sufficiently large to take an alsatian, which is the largest assistance dog. Surely that practical point does not need to detain us for too long.

Mr. Dismore: I agree, and I hope that the point will not detain us. My speech has been longer than I intended because I have taken a lot of interventions. The debate has been important because we have aired the issues well.

Mr. McCabe: I appreciate that my hon. Friend is desperate to move on, but I want to consider his previous point. He said that amendment No. 10 would give the driver the power to stop the vehicle and order the blind person and the dog out. Does he seriously mean that he is prepared to table an amendment to a Bill that aims to protect blind and disabled people, to allow a driver to stop in the middle of nowhere and order the dog and the blind or disabled person out because the dog is irritating the driver? Is he seriously proposing that?

Mr. Dismore: As my hon. Friend says, the Bill is about the "carriage of disabled persons", but the long title also refers to "carriage" of "guide dogs". We must therefore consider the animal welfare issues that affect the dog as well as protecting the disabled person who is being guided. As I said, perhaps proposed new section 37A(6) deals with the problem of the dog being uncomfortable in the vehicle, but the Bill does not cover paragraph (b) of amendment No. 10 and the problem of the dog refusing to sit or stay on the floor.

There are serious road safety considerations to be taken into account. The driver is responsible at all times for controlling the vehicle. The dog could jump about, try to get into the passenger's lap, or look out of the window. I admit that my dog used to do that. That could cause a serious problem for vehicle control. If the vehicle had an accident, the person who was hit would sue the driver. Would the driver have a claim against the owner for not controlling the dog? That takes us back to tort, which we discussed at the beginning of my contribution.

Mr. Gardiner: Everybody understands that a driver has a responsibility to his passenger and other road users for the safety of his vehicle and his conduct on the high road. None the less, a less nuclear approach might be to provide that the driver must stop the vehicle until the animal has been brought under control. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) said, it may be too much to evict the passenger and the animal from the vehicle.

In passing, I congratulate my hon. Friend on speaking for more than an hour and eight minutes, which was the record for a Friday morning.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a tempting point and there is some merit in his argument. The point may well be one that is addressed in the other place. It is a question of doing justice and striking a balance between the passenger and the dog, the minicab operator and other road users. A slight difficulty arises—especially if the minicab driver is working to a schedule—of how to deal with a dog that cannot be brought under control. As always, my hon. Friend has come up with a sensible compromise in respect of the points that I am making. It is a shame that he did not table his own amendment to that effect, as we could then have explored that possibility.

In my amendments, I have tried to draw attention to one or two drafting problems in the Bill, and I am interested in hearing the response of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow. If, as I hope, the Bill proceeds to the other place, some of the points I have made might receive further consideration, although I hope that my hon. Friend and the Minister will be able to respond to them today.

11.30 am

Mr. Boswell: So far, the debate has been fascinating. The group of amendments was introduced succinctly by my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman), and has been spoken to by the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) at rather greater length—and, to be fair, in greater detail and with a lawyer's perceptiveness. It is also fair to say that the hon. Gentleman has triggered a clutch of questions and counterpoints, which is the proper role of the House of Commons. We sometimes hope that such matters might be dealt with more expeditiously in Committee, but we all agree on the importance of their being properly resolved before a Bill passes to the other place.

Mr. Dismore: I did not have the good fortune to be appointed to the Standing Committee on the Bill, otherwise I would have made my points there.

Mr. Boswell: As one who was a member of the Committee, I can say that it was the Committee's loss that the hon. Gentleman was not able to participate in our deliberations.

Conscious of the time, I should like to say on behalf of the Opposition that although the debate has been wide ranging, we should have some regard to the generality of the issues involved. I do not often quote my own remarks, but I shall do so briefly. In the Standing Committee, in response to comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire), I said:

> "The legislation will allow us to prevent people from using the excuse of some theoretical inconvenience when there is no problem at all."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 12 June 2002; c. 12.]

That remains my strong view, and I know that it is shared by the Bill's promoter, who responded to my remark.

As all hon. Members have said, we want the Bill to succeed. As the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) remarked, it is all of a piece with the development of law from the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 through subsequent amending legislation. It would remove or repair an omission by including private hire vehicles in the provisions, along with public carriage vehicles.

A huge complex of law and practice is building up in the field of disability discrimination, dealing with the sensitive handling of guide dogs and other assistance dogs as well as the strict letter of the law, and nearly all of it seems to work perfectly well. This morning, only one reference has been made to the admission of guide dogs and assistance dogs to public restaurants; as far as I know, when that has happened, no major concerns of public health, order or nuisance have arisen. I see no reason why the provisions of the Bill should give rise to exceptions.

I believe that I am right in saying that under the existing law covering black cabs, only three drivers have required exemption. That is entirely proper and it reflects the scale of the problem that might be encountered if the Bill is passed. The problem will not be large, although I agree with the hon. Member for Hendon that that in no way absolves the House from the obligation to get the provision right.

I listened with great interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet, whose introduction of the amendments was somewhat qualified, and to the extensive discussion of the whole group of amendments led by the hon. Member for Hendon. After listening to the latter building up his argument, the nearest analogy I could think of was a famous story of an Australian outback farmer in the 1920s. He ordered a new Rolls-Royce—no doubt, he farmed on a fairly large scale—and the company was intrigued by his special emphasis on having a glass partition; it was the main selling proposition. When asked delicately why the partition was so important, he is reputed to have replied, "Because it stops the sheep licking the back of my neck when I'm driving." With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, I felt that the debate was starting to stray into that sort of territory. Of course there will be hard cases, but he is a lawyer, unlike me, so he knows that hard cases make bad law. We have to think about them, but we also have to deal with them and get past them.

Broadly speaking, the exchanges, all of which were quite proper, struck a fair balance. As my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) said, we are in the business of seeking a balance. He questioned whether, under amendment No. 8, it would be possible to put qualifications on the exemption certificate. When I revisited the provision, it looked to me as though we had a prescription for either the vehicle or the driver to be exempted, and I thought that that would probably cover all possible cases. No doubt the Bill's promoter, the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), will be able to explain that point.

The subject with which the Bill deals invites a jocular attitude, and that has been the mood in the Chamber today, but a serious point has been made that whereas guide dogs normally behave in an exemplary manner, are trained to do so and can be proved to have been trained to do so, a bigger concern for cabbies and operators of private hire vehicles is the behaviour of the human cargo and the various things that can go wrong. I suspect that the many hon. Members who are avid readers of *The Economist* noticed the story in the American section last week about the United States hot dog eating competition. It was won—by a considerable margin—by a Japanese gentleman, who was, in the words of the newspaper, able only narrowly to avoid a "Roman incident".

I shall not dwell on that subject at length, but I am reminded of one of my modest attainments in Parliament. It is no great confession, but in the Jubilee Room some years ago I won the national biscuit dunking competition. I hasten to add, lest there be any question of interest, that I did it for charity and the only prize was the award of a golden biscuit. The runner-up, my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), was greatly distressed and was heard to say under his breath, "I'd like a blood test, please." On the whole, that was rather odd given that neither of us is a member of the union Amicus. Let me conclude that point by mentioning the fact that after my triumph, I was invited to comment in a television interview and in the best style of "Match of the Day" described myself as feeling as sick as a parrot.

People can be sick in taxis, as can dogs. What we must not do is use the pretext of an extremely rare occurrence to scupper, dilute or destroy this excellent measure. To the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) I say that I regard the Bill as a parallel to that other legislative brick that we laid this year, the Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill. I very much hope that the Bill before us today will succeed as well.

I want to touch on the case for any amendments of comfort along the lines of those proposed by the hon. Member for Hendon. We want to carry the minicab trade with us and meet its reasonable concerns, ensuring that people are not treated unfairly when they comply with the law. I believe that the Bill does that. Legislation prescribes that something should happen, and we should not need further legislation to absolve people who have found an excuse for it not to happen. As my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point said, it is a matter of striking the right balance. Having listened carefully to the debate, I judge that we have got the balance about right.

There is a powerful business case for this, too. If cab drivers can be shown to be friendly and welcoming to people with assistance dogs, that is good business. There may be cases in which that cannot happen, and that is what the legislation is trying to pick up on, but to remove oneself from a significant section of the market, with perhaps 2 million visually impaired people in this country and a large number who may require assistance, though not all from dogs, would be a foolish business decision.

Mr. Edward Davey: The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) has, as usual, made a thoughtful and intelligent contribution to our debate. His last point applies to regulation in general. Many people see regulation as damaging to business, but often it can promote business, creating a market and encouraging people to get involved. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that there is a business case, although that may not be the main point. The overriding case for the Bill is the need to end the discrimination that blind, deaf and other disabled people have experienced.

The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) did the House a great service by bringing out some of the key underlying issues that faced those who drafted the Bill. It is worth pointing out, though, that the dogs in question are all exceptionally well trained. We have missed that point up to now. My partner's family have a dog called Sweep who was rejected as a guide dog because he was not up to the mark. He had been chosen as a puppy and had gone through the initial training, but had been unable to control himself—he had been too "boisterous", to use the word in amendment No. 2.

11.45 am

I want to draw the attention of the House to Canine Partners for Independence. Hon. Members are probably aware of Guide Dogs for the Blind and of the increasing number of dogs being used to assist people with hearing impairments, but they may not know of the CPI, which is a small but growing charity that shows how dogs can help people with disabilities in amazing ways: they can do shopping, load dirty washing into machines, open doors and call for lifts.

I want to focus on dogs calling for lifts. Dogs are trained to do that, which may go some way towards answering the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who questioned the intentions underlying amendment No. 2. It might be possible for the operator to know whether the dog is in an excitable state when the lift is called for. To be serious, however, I would imagine that the operator receiving the call would have been trained to understand and accept such calls.

Mr. McCabe: What exactly happens when a dog calls for a lift? I find that quite amazing.

Mr. Davey: I would love to be able to explain that in detail, but to save time I refer the hon. Gentleman to the website of Canine Partners for Independence. It may be that the hon. Member for Hendon will be able to elucidate further.

Mr. Dismore: When the hon. Gentleman speaks of dogs calling for a lift, does he mean an elevator or a vehicle?

Mr. Davey: I was referring to a vehicle, but I am sure that dogs could call for an elevator as well.

I want to take the House through some of the processes that the CPI uses to train dogs. First, there is a selection at the puppy stage. Only puppies that show an aptitude for the tasks are chosen. The chosen puppies are placed with families that bring them up in a certain way for the first 12 months. Then, the one-year-old dog gets six months of advanced training in a training centre. That is a huge investment, and shows how seriously the CPI takes the job of training.

Afterwards, the disabled person and the dog are matched in a very careful and sensitive way. There is a two-week residential training course during which they get to know each other and learn the various commands, followed by a graduation ceremony if the dog is successful. Even after graduation, there is follow-up care and supervision. All that training has not been mentioned in the debate so far.

All of that underlines the most worrying aspects of new clause 1 and amendment No. 2.

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman is making a constructive contribution, and setting the debate in the right context. Dogs for the Disabled is located just inside my constituency, near Banbury, so I can echo the experience that he has just outlined.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful for that. I do not know the dogs myself, but my constituent Pauline Hamblin works for the CPI and brought its good works to my attention. She was a great help in preparing for this debate.

The new clause and the amendments are not necessary. We should bear in mind the fact that the dogs are exceptionally well trained. The Bill should go onto the statute book as it stands.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): Had the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) been here, he would have been a little surprised at the slightly surreal contribution of the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman), who moved new clause 1 and proceeded to speak against it forcefully. I am in danger of doing the opposite—of opposing the new clause but speaking for it.

You will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a story to which the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet referred. During a debate on education, I was an illustrious member of the Whips Office, sitting where the Government Whip is sitting now. The dog belonging to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) unfortunately misbehaved by doing one of the things to which new clause 1 refers. At one point, it was suggested that we adjourn the House for a moment so that a clean-up might be effected; indeed, I believe that you were in the Chair at the time. However, in the end it was I who crawled along the floor with a cloth and performed the clean-up.

There was a sequel to that. Shortly afterwards, in September, I went on a parliamentary trip to the United States. The senator who introduced the British parliamentarians and said a little about their backgrounds eventually got to me. He looked down at his notes and said, "Mr. Jamieson, you're the guy who cleaned up the dog puke." So my claim to fame in this House is that I was the guy who cleaned up after my right hon. Friend's dog. One reason to smile on that occasion was that the dog threw up just as the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) got to his feet to make his speech.

[Mr. David Jamieson]

However, there is a serious point here. It is important that other people respect dogs that are kept for that purpose, and do not feed them without the knowledge of their owner. Indeed, that was the problem that gave rise to the incident to which I referred.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): There is a further important and serious point that needs to be made. As a former Whip, the Minister will be aware that colleagues consider a Whip's job as involving all sorts of nasty things. He has just demonstrated that the reality of the Whip's job is to crawl around on the ground doing strange things. Is that not the truth of the job that he used to do, and which I now do?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman is perhaps reflecting his own role, rather than the one that I had. *[Laughter.]*

The Government believe that new clause 1 is unnecessary and we will not support it. It adds nothing to the general law of tort—a point on which there has been an interesting debate today. If a person or an animal over which he has control causes damage, a tort arises and the owner of the damaged property can sue for the cost of repairing or replacing it. That applies equally to a disabled person with an assistance dog and to someone with a pet dog.

Mr. Pond: Does the Minister agree that new clause 1 is not only unnecessary but could also prove dangerous? I know that he, like other hon. Members, has visited Gravesham. He will have seen that the cabs in that town are in pristine condition, but that is not always the case throughout the country. Perhaps some unscrupulous cab owners might use the new clause to get such passengers to pay for a clean-up that in reality had nothing to do with their dog. Indeed, such passengers would be unable to ascertain the truth of the situation.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and it is a further reason to oppose the new clause.

The right hon. Member for East Yorkshire—in whose name new clause 1 has been tabled—may have thought that, by imposing an obligation on the driver of such a vehicle to carry a dog, the Bill will remove the driver's normal private law rights to sue for damage caused by passengers and their animals. However, we believe that the general law covering such circumstances does not remove such rights. I should also point out that new clause 1 is flawed, in that it does not state to whom the payment should be made, or by whom it would be recoverable.

Mr. Boswell: Am I right in thinking that the driver's public law obligations in relation to the safety of his vehicle, for example, are not removed, and that if there is ever any doubt as to whether he should carry on driving, he would be fully within his rights to stop? Is not the provision concerned solely with discrimination, in terms of admitting a guide dog to a vehicle?

Mr. Jamieson: Yes, drivers are always responsible for conducting their vehicles safely and properly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) made a brief and succinct contribution on amendment No. 2. In our view, the Bill already offers sufficient protection for drivers. It does not force drivers to carry dogs in circumstances in which they would normally refuse. For example, as was pointed out, they are not obliged to take a drunk or disorderly person, with or without a dog. Equally, they can refuse to take an unruly assistance dog. Refusing to take an unruly dog is not the same thing as refusing to take a fare. Because the passenger in question would be accompanied by an assistance dog, no offence would be committed in such circumstances.

If the Bill succeeds—it is my earnest hope that it should—we intend to issue full guidance to private hire operators and drivers, as well as disabled users, just as we have done in respect of taxis. The guidance will cover all the issues raised, and we believe that that will be more than sufficient to reassure people. In any event, I think it highly unlikely that the circumstances envisaged in the amendment will arise. No similar provision for taxis is made in section 37 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, so the amendment would create an imbalance in legislation. Of course, it may be felt that that is not good enough, and that we should look at the provisions afresh. In support of our position, I should point out that since April last year—when the provisions in section 37 began to apply to taxis—we are unaware of any cases of problems arising through the behaviour of assistance dogs.

Mr. Edward Davey: The Minister said that the Government will issue guidelines to the industry and to other affected parties, but in his list he did not mention licensing authorities. Can he reassure the House that guidelines will be issued to licensing authorities, because that would deal with some of the points that the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) rightly raised?

Mr. Jamieson: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that all parties involved, including licensing authorities, will be issued guidelines.

As has been pointed out, the dogs in question are highly trained animals. It is therefore unsurprising that we intend that the provision cover only dogs trained by recognised bodies that are to be prescribed in regulations. It is therefore highly unlikely that they would behave in such a manner. If they did, they would be of little assistance to their owners.

I hope that I have given the House an explanation of why the Government believe that the new clause is unnecessary.

Mr. Dismore: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but that is not in the Bill. It refers to prescribed charities in certain circumstances, but does not mention assistance dogs for the deaf or blind. That is a genuine drafting problem. If what my hon. Friend says is correct, so be it, but that does not appear in the Bill, except in connection with assistance dogs for people with other disabilities.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend has made his point, as indeed he did in his previous contribution. Notwithstanding that, we hope that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet will seek the leave of the House to withdraw the motion.

12 noon

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): This has been an interesting debate, and I shall try not to repeat what has already been covered by the speeches from both Front Bench spokesmen, because they have already dealt with some of the points that came up. Sometimes during the debate it has felt as if we were discussing something totally new that had never been thought of before, and that none of the potential problems had ever been considered. On the contrary, since the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was passed we have had legislation imposing exactly the same obligations on the licensed cab trade as are proposed in the Bill. A great many local authorities already include the provisions in the Bill in their licensing requirements for private hire vehicles, and require drivers to take guide dogs.

The problem is not that that does not happen, but that it does not happen everywhere. There is inconsistency between one local authority area and another, so that people with assistance dogs, especially when they are travelling away from home, cannot be confident that they will be able to use private hire vehicles. The problem is the lack of consistency across the country.

The attempts that we have heard to construct convoluted scenarios for the problems that guide dogs might cause ignore the fact that we already have experience, and we are not dealing with something completely new. We may be spending too much time trying to find all the extreme examples of things that might go wrong with the Bill, when the fundamental issue is really very simple: rights of access for people with disabilities.

Mr. Gardiner: Does my hon. Friend agree that our hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) perfectly illustrated the fact that the only way one can tell whether a minicab driver has run over a assistance dog or a lawyer is that there would be skid marks in front of the assistance dog?

Mr. Gerrard: It would be dangerous for me to go down that road now, because I do not wish to upset the lawyers, especially while we are still debating the new clause and the amendments.

I want to address some of the issues related to new clause 1 and amendment No. 2 concerning damage, and dogs being excitable. A lot of them have already been covered; the legal advice that I have been given makes it clear that there is nothing to prevent someone from suing now, and the Minister agrees. Again, we have the benefit of the experience of the licensing authorities that already make that requirement. In the very unlikely event of a guide dog causing damage, there is nothing to stop people suing now, so it is unnecessary to add the provisions to the Bill.

Clearly it is important that excitable dogs should not make cars dangerous to drive, but as several hon. Members have already explained, the very nature of assistance dogs makes that scenario highly unlikely. We should also remember that private hire vehicle drivers are used to dealing with difficult situations and customers. Unfortunately for them, that is part of the business.

It is important to remember what the Bill actually says. There have been several references to the idea that a passenger would have the right to insist on being taken. That is not strictly accurate, because clause 1 says that it will be an offence for the operator or the driver to refuse a booking for the sole reason that the person is accompanied by an assistance dog. That does not mean that someone with an assistance dog is in a privileged position compared with any other person trying to make a booking. The Bill simply brings parity.

There is nothing to say that a private hire vehicle driver has to accept every booking offered. If a driver is offered a booking to the airport and he does not want to drive all the way across London to Heathrow, he can say no. The Bill will simply stop discrimination. The driver and the operator will not be able to say, "I'm not going to take you because you've got your assistance dog with you." If, in the very unlikely circumstance that the driver turned up for a booking and the dog was unruly or the passenger drunk or abusive, there would not be the slightest problem if the driver refused to take them for that reason. It is an offence only if he refuses to take them because the dog is an assistance dog.

The definition of an assistance dog is the same as in section 37 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It works for black cabs, and I see no reason why it should not work for private hire vehicles. The very detailed guidance issued by the Department to drivers, people with disabilities and the local authorities, which are the licensing authorities, covers the definitions clearly.

It would be a mistake to look for additional reasons for exemption. A number of issues were raised in relation to exemptions, such as phobias and medical grounds. The guidance issued under section 37 of the 1995 Act to licensing authorities for black cabs specifically refers to drivers having severe asthma aggravated by contact with dogs, allergies or acute phobias. Those are given in the guidance as the sort of reasons that would allow a driver to apply for exemption. The guidance also makes it clear that the driver would be expected to produce to the licensing authority the medical evidence required for such an exemption.

People have asked what is the point of the provision on having regard to the physical characteristics of the private hire vehicle in proposed section 37A(6). This relates to the driver's medical condition. As with black cabs, if a driver claims that he cannot have a dog in his cab because he is allergic, questions about the physical characteristics of the vehicle become relevant when considering whether a medical exemption should be granted. Is there a partition between the passengers and the driver, for example? Do the physical characteristics of the vehicle have a bearing on the medical condition that is being claimed?

We should get the scale of the exemption into perspective. I believe that so far three exemptions have been granted to drivers of black cabs. This will not be a huge problem—vast numbers of people will not suddenly require exemptions. We should recognise the scale of the problem and approach it with common sense. It affects about 5,000 to 6,000 people who own guide dogs—they are the people who suffer problems, not the drivers. However, there are about 150,000 drivers, and the average driver will never have to deal with this situation, or only extremely rarely.

I suspect that anyone who uses private hire vehicles, as I quite frequently do in my constituency, will soon realise which firms are reliable and which give a good service and they will use them. People who own assistance dogs

[Mr. Gerrard]

will quickly learn where to go, and a pattern will emerge. I am sure that this already happens in areas that have licensing arrangements. Drivers who are happy to take assistance dogs will become known to customers and will frequently take them, while others will hardly notice any difference.

Some of the amendments are unnecessary, as they cover points that are already dealt with in the Bill; for example, the ability of a driver or operator to sue for damage if necessary, or to refuse carriage provided that the reason for refusal is not simply the assistance dog—he can certainly refuse to take an abusive or unruly passenger whether or not they are using an assistance dog.

Some of the points raised about exemptions and definitions may not be included in the Bill, but they are already in practice under section 37 of the Disability Discrimination Act and provisions for black cabs. We are familiar with them. We do not want to introduce inconsistency; what works for black cabs should work perfectly well for private hire vehicles and it makes sense to amend the Act in the form currently taken by the Bill to achieve that consistency for different classes of vehicle, rather than to make that aspect more complex. We should not look for problems that do not exist.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I have listened with interest and at length to the debate. It is good that we have held the debate because it has brought out certain problems that might be faced. However, I am entirely persuaded by the hon. Gentleman and the eloquence on both sides of the House, not least from the Front-Bench speakers, so I shall withdraw the new clause. I understand that if that is accepted by the House, amendment No. 2 will fall so I shall be in the happy position of knowing that a dropped apostrophe and a split infinitive are no longer in danger of getting on to our statute book.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Gerrard: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 2, line 47, at end insert—

'(2) In Schedule 8 to the 1995 Act (modification of Act in its application to Northern Ireland) the following paragraph is inserted after paragraph 21—

"21A (1) In section 37A(5) and (6) for 'licensing authority' substitute 'Department of the Environment'.

(2) In section 37A(9) for the definitions of 'driver', 'licensing authority', 'operator' and 'private hire vehicle' substitute—

"'driver"' means a person who holds a taxi driver's licence under Article 79A of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 (SI 1981/154 (NI 1));

"operator" means a person who in the course of a business makes provision for the invitation or acceptance of bookings for a private hire vehicle;

"private hire vehicle" means a vehicle which—

(a) seats not more than 8 passengers in addition to the driver; and

(b) is licensed under Article 61 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 to carry passengers for hire (but not to stand or ply for hire).'.".'

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 1, in clause 2, page 3, line 19, after "(2AB)", insert—

'Regulations under subsection (2AA) above may provide for the creation of offences and for making offenders liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

(2AC)'.

Mr. Gerrard: The amendments are straightforward but important. As originally drafted, the Bill did not apply to Northern Ireland and Scotland because of their devolved powers. However, it is of some importance that we try to extend the provisions across the whole United Kingdom.

The Northern Ireland Assembly could have dealt with this matter but it would have taken some time. In fact, a couple of weeks ago, the Assembly unanimously agreed to urge us to amend the Bill so that its provisions would extend to Northern Ireland. That is the purpose of amendment No. 3. The Northern Ireland Department of the Environment will make detailed regulations for Northern Ireland so that there are parallels between licensed taxis and private hire vehicles.

Amendment No. 1 deals with Scotland and will correct a drafting error made in Committee when a clause was inserted to extend the Bill's provisions to Scotland but, unfortunately, omitted anything that made it an offence in Scotland not to comply with the provisions. We thus had the rather odd situation whereby a Bill applied to Scotland but if people chose not to obey it nothing would have happened. Amendment No. 1 puts that straight and ensures that, as well as the Bill applying to Scotland, there is also an offence for not complying with its provisions.

I hope that the House will support the amendments, which will give us consistency throughout the whole UK.

12.15 pm

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend has spoken to the amendments very effectively.

Amendment No. 1 is necessary to ensure that Scotland has parity with England and Wales in enforcing the provisions of the Bill. The Bill, which now extends to Scotland, amends the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and places a duty on drivers of private hire cars to take guide dogs and other assistance dogs and not to make a charge for doing so.

Enforcement measures are an integral part of the process and, as the Bill is drafted, there is now some doubt about the ability of Scottish local authorities and police to enforce its provisions. They felt that the Bill needed to be corrected and express provision made for this purpose; to do otherwise would render the Bill impotent in Scotland.

The amendment replicates the current offence relating to the duty placed on taxi drivers in Scotland, the penalty for which, on summary conviction, is a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

The Bill has been extended to Scotland and I am pleased to say that amendment No. 3 has been tabled to ensure that it extends to Northern Ireland as well. I am certain that all of us in the House would agree that disabled people who rely on assistance dogs in any part of the United Kingdom should enjoy the same rights as everyone else when they travel by private hire vehicle, and the Bill will now secure those rights.

At this point it may be appropriate for me to state, on behalf of the Government, the position of the Bill with regard to the European convention on human rights. It is the view of the Government that the provisions of the Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs etc.) Bill are compatible with the European convention on human rights.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 1, in page 3, line 19, after "(2AB)", insert—

'Regulations under subsection (2AA) above may provide for the creation of offences and for making offenders liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

(2AC)'.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Clause 6

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Mr. Dismore: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 3, line 39, leave out "may" and insert "shall".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 13, in page 3, line 40, at end insert—

'within 12 months of the date of Royal Assent'.

Mr. Dismore: I shall be relatively brief. Both the amendments relate to the commencement provisions, which I am always anxious to test. It is simply an opportunity for the Minister to say when he expects to be able to bring the legislation into force. At the same time, perhaps he will say when the guidance that he has spoken of will be promulgated.

Mr. Gerrard: I shall be brief. I understand my hon. Friend's wish to be certain about the dates on which the Bill's provisions come into effect, but there is a problem with putting a specific time scale in the Bill. There are still some issues to be sorted out in relation to London. Transport for London recently launched its follow-up consultation on the licensing of drivers, which should probably come into force early next year. However, there is a further issue in London—licensing of vehicles—on which there is still uncertainty as to timing. It would not help for the Bill to state a time scale that perhaps could not be met; further primary legislation would be needed to put things right. With the Bill in its present form, timing can be dealt with by regulation. I am also anxious to make it possible for the Bill to be brought into force in different parts of the country at different dates, without requiring everyone else to wait for everything to be sorted out in London.

Although I appreciate what my hon. Friend says, obviously, I personally want the Bill to come into operation as soon as possible, and we need the practical flexibility with the timing that it contains at the moment.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friends have effectively made the point, but may I say on behalf of the Government that we intend to introduce the provision as quickly as possible? The Bill provides different commencement dates for different areas of the country—for example, in London—so we felt it inappropriate to set a specific time scale for the whole country.

Mr. Dismore: I have listened to what my hon. Friends have said, and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

12.20 pm

Mr. Gerrard: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I shall be brief because this morning's debate has ranged over most of the issues that the Bill covers, but I want to put on record my thanks to all the hon. Members who have supported the Bill. Since first introducing it, I have received support from hon. Members from all parties, and I am extremely grateful to them for their support. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister and his officials for their help, without which I am sure I would not have been able to deal with all the required drafting details. I also thank the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and the RNIB, which, again, have been very supportive in getting the Bill drafted and, I hope, accepted by the House.

Some significant changes have been made in the Bill since Second Reading. On Second Reading, clear arguments were made about the principles and the need for a Bill to bring consistency across the country and between black cabs and private hire vehicles. In Committee, we had to make sure that the Bill would work, which required some changes to ensure that operators, as well as drivers, were covered. Of course, amendments were made on Report to extend the provisions to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

I am pleased that we have been able to make progress. As I said in an earlier contribution, the Bill will not affect huge numbers of people. It will affect perhaps 5,000 to 6,000 people, but it will be enormously important to those people. People who rely on assistance dogs rely much more on private hire vehicles and taxis than the average person does, and it is enormously important for them to be able to travel freely and to know that they can take their dogs with them. So the Bill makes a valuable contribution to helping people with assistance dogs in their daily lives. I am sure that that is the view of hon. Members in all parties, and I am grateful to them for all their support, which has enabled me to reach this point with the Bill.

12.23 pm

Mr. Boswell: I simply wish to congratulate the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on his Bill and to echo his thanks to all those people who have been involved in its preparation and consideration in the House, including the officials, the representatives of the disability organisations and those hon. Members who have participated. We wish the Bill every success as it passes to another place.

12.24 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke: I join the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and, I think, the whole House in warmly congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on the excellent Bill that he has piloted through the House. We all hope that it will achieve its Third Reading and, of course, that it will be enacted in due course.

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

I wish to express two main thoughts in this brief contribution. The first is about the empiricism of the House as we develop legislation. The second is about the sheer persistence of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow, who deserves to be congratulated most warmly on seizing the opportunity that this Bill offers to extend rights to people who would otherwise be denied them.

On the point about empiricism, my hon. Friend will recall—as he was proactive in the House when the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was introduced—that, as I said earlier, there was no intention to introduce transport provisions into it, even on its Second Reading. In due course, some of us, including my hon. Friend, pushed hard. Eventually, we achieved provisions on access to stations, to trains, to bus terminuses, to buses, to taxis, but not, alas, to private hire vehicles, which has been achieved today. I think that that shows the House at its best. It shows that the sort of determination that we have seen from my hon. Friend succeeds.

I thank my hon. Friend, too, for the sensitivity with which he has extended the Bill to Scotland. People in Scotland do not like paying out all that much, but the fines are perfectly agreeable and should, of course, be consistent with those in the rest of the UK. It is right that we should work in partnership, as we are doing, with the Scottish Parliament, which in due course will introduce a statutory instrument putting the Bill into effect in Scotland.

For all those reasons, I say again that my hon. Friend has done a fine job in the reforming tradition of one of his greatest predecessors, Clement Attlee, and long may he continue to do it. I know that people in disability organisations are profoundly supportive of what he is doing today. We thank him sincerely for his excellent efforts.

12.27 pm

Mr. Heath: I join other Members who have warmly congratulated the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard). We can be as brief as we need to be on Third Reading, as we explored the issues in Committee.

This is a good Bill. It will not make a difference to a huge number of people, as the hon. Gentleman said, but for those whom it does affect, it will make a substantial difference, across the country, to their way of life. The Bill has not been imposed on Scotland and Northern Ireland but it has been welcomed and embraced by people there who wish to be involved with it.

As some Members know, I chair the all-party group on eye health and visual impairment. We take no credit for the hon. Gentleman's initiative in the Bill or for that of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) in her parallel measure, the Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill, which I mentioned earlier. Perhaps, however, at long last, the House is taking seriously issues of visual impairment, and we are able to provide more focus on an area that has been neglected for too long. Two major stepping stones have been put in place in this Session, and I hope that both Bills succeed in another place. The House, the hon. Member for Walthamstow, the Minister and all involved with the Bill are to be congratulated on what they have done.

12.28 pm

Mr. Pond: I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on what is a very significant contribution. If I may, I would like to pay tribute to organisations such as the RNIB, Guide Dogs for the Blind and Assistance Dogs UK, whose briefings have informed our debate effectively.

Clearly, private hire vehicles are an important part of the network of accessible transport for people with disabilities. For some of those people, in some areas, they constitute the only available form of transport. If I may, I want to share with the House the experiences of one of my constituents, who is also a friend, Mr. Wayne Busbridge of Ifield road, Gravesend. He is visually impaired and has an assistance dog. In my discussions with him in preparation for this morning's debate, he told me:

> "The biggest fear is being stranded in a town you don't know, feeling vulnerable and insecure."

He said that some private hire vehicles even try to charge him for his dog—as much as £10 a time. He said that the worst experience is turning up at taxi ranks and drivers refusing to take him, even when there are no other taxis at the rank and it is clear that he is being left stranded. He has talked about his experiences in a strange town or city. If a taxi drives away, he has no other means of getting to where he needs to go. He feels vulnerable and often waits 40 or 50 minutes while the telephone operators in cab firms search for someone who is willing to take him. It is important that the Bill has its Third Reading.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) for his persistence. He assisted the debate considerably, and I am sure that the whole House was saddened to hear of the demise of Griswald, which we hope was not too closely associated with the damage that she did to the upholstery of my hon. Friend's car.

I confess that I am a dog owner. I was feeling rather edgy in our earlier discussions in case the organisers of the Westminster dog of the year competition were listening. In last year's competition, my dog, Camden, was guilty of many of the activities listed in new clause 1, and was so in close proximity of the judges. I had to explain that he was very obedient but hard of hearing, and that I had been telling him to sit.

I have shared the experiences of my hon. Friend the Minister, and we must be clear that such embarrassments do not normally afflict only the owners of assistance dogs. As other hon. Members have said, they are highly trained dogs and it is unlikely that they will cause difficulties in, or damage to, private hire vehicles. We must not allow discrimination to hide behind the suggestion that they would cause such damage.

It is important that the Bill brings private hire vehicles into line with taxi cabs, removes the inconsistencies that apply around the country and makes sure that people such as my constituent Mr. Busbridge no longer have to wait at taxi ranks in fear, feeling vulnerable and facing the indignity of not being able to get to where they want to go.

12.32 pm

Bob Spink: I congratulate the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on introducing the Bill. It shows that we recognise and respect the needs of everyone in society. I am sure that the wonderful people who run and attend the Phoenix club in Castle Point will be delighted that the Bill is likely to make progress today. They will welcome it as an excellent Bill that will help some of them. Having said that, I hope that we can move on quickly so that we can discuss the Pensions Annuities (Amendment) Bill and help pensioners equally.

12.33 pm

Mr. Dismore: I shall be brief in warmly congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on piloting his Bill through the House, particularly as it is a ten-minute Bill. I know from my experience that trying to make law with a ten-minute Bill is very difficult.

In the earlier debates, I raised a series of reservations and concerns about the Bill, and my hon. Friend amply dealt with them in his reply. I now wish to be much more positive about the Bill. It is important to take forward the rights that it contains, given the situation in my constituency in outer London. The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) will share the view that, in outer London, the availability of black cabs is less than in central London, so people rely much more heavily on minicab services.

My constituents who depend on assistance dogs have told me that they have been refused the use of minicabs. I have taken the issue up with the minicab company concerned, which has taken steps to ensure that the problem did not reoccur. I am pleased to say that, when problems have arisen in my constituency, we have been able to deal with them amicably and on a voluntary basis. Nevertheless, I fully accept that that is not necessarily the position throughout the country. I therefore welcome the Bill as an important step in meeting the needs of those who depend on assistance dogs. I fully accept that those dogs are always well behaved and well trained. They provide a very valuable service.

12.35 pm

Mr. Edward Davey: In the spirit of joining the congratulations that have been offered to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), I would say that the way in which he has conducted the passage of the Bill throughout its stages has been exemplary, and has shown the private Members' Bill process at its very best. I was delighted when the hon. Gentleman asked me to be a co-sponsor, and I thank him for that. I have been appreciative of both the communication that I have had with him on the Bill and the communication that I have had with various charities, in particular the RNIB and the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.

At an earlier stage in our proceedings, the hon. Gentleman put his finger on it when he said that we were not giving any extra privileges to the people who will benefit from the Bill. He then said that we were giving them the chance to enjoy the access to transport and the freedom of movement that others enjoy. That is not a large thing to ask. Indeed, it is a small thing. It is good that there is great support for the Bill from Members on both sides of the House. We all have been seeking to remove inconsistencies and discrimination, and more importantly, to increase independence. I think that the Bill does these things well.

The hon. Gentleman said that the Bill will affect only 5,000 to 6,000 people, but that it was important that they had their rights recognised. From the information that I have received from the various charities involved, I can add that it is not a small matter for the 5,000 to 6,000. It can literally change their lives, so it is very significant for them.

In a recent survey carried out by the RNIB, it was found that one in seven of a sample of 500 visually impaired people said that they regularly used regulated taxis and private hire vehicles, and that they were the most frequently used forms of transport. One in five stated that he or she used taxis or private hire vehicles once a week. The people that the hon. Gentleman was talking about are frequent users of these vehicles. That is why the Bill is so much needed to help them.

It has been interesting throughout our debates to note the increasing range of activities in which dogs can help human beings. That suggests that this will not be the only time that we see legislation of this sort brought before us. I hope that policy changes will be made by the Government as well. We should utilise the amazing skills and attributes that dogs have. In my experience and that of my constituents, they can completely change the lives of people with physical impairments. I hope that through the experience of the Bill, the House will have heard and acknowledged these benefits and will return on future occasions to improve legislation still further. I very much support the Bill on its Third Reading.

12.38 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): At the conclusion of our proceedings, I want to add my welcome for this measure, which I know will be extremely welcome to my constituents. I spoke once again this morning to the Merton Voluntary Association for the Blind and the Guardian centre for the blind, which are delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) has introduced the Bill. It is excellent that it has enjoyed so much cross-party support. Sometimes that does not bode well for a Bill, but I think that this Bill is an exception. It is clear that we are bringing common sense into law.

The Bill is important because, as we have heard, the present lacuna in legislation causes great inconvenience to people who use guide dogs. Many measures discriminate against people with a particular disability, but this lacuna adds insult to injury. We have heard the suggestion that people are unable to look after their guide dogs, for example. That causes further offence. I know from my contact with my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow and having followed his career over many years, that he is inspired by his longstanding commitment to extend the rights of disabled people. I congratulate him on this measure. When disabled people are discriminated against, it is an injury and an insult to those people and to us all.

I am also delighted that the Bill is progressing because it is an important development in relation to the licensing of minicabs generally, which has been much debated in recent years. When I spoke in the debate in this House in 1998 on the licensing of minicabs, I said that I was not able to come to the House by minicab and I wished that I could say that it was because I was unable to find one that was licensed. Any humour in that remark would be removed by the fact that if I had been blind and the owner of a guide dog, even had I been able to find a licensed minicab I might not have been able to avail myself of it because it would not have accepted me with the dog.

[Roger Casale]

In my discussions this morning with the Merton Voluntary Association for the Blind, I was told that it is very difficult for their clients to find minicab firms that take guide dogs. Indeed, only one company in Merton—Olympic Cars—does so, when estate cars are available. Eighteen months ago, the centre wrote to all the minicab firms in the local area asking them if they would carry people who had assistance dogs with them, and not a single one replied.

That brings me to my final point about why I welcome the Bill. It is often said in the House that we have too many regulations, but we need them if people's rights are to be properly respected. The Bill is a good instance of that. It builds on earlier measures on the licensing of minicab operators, drivers and vehicles. That is especially important in London, where many abuses take place. We cannot simply rely on the goodwill of the operators to comply with the perfectly reasonable requirement that they should accord the same service to people with assistance dogs as to everybody else.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on the Bill, which will be very much welcomed in my constituency. I am pleased that it has received all-party support and wish it well on its further passage through the House.

Mr. Jamieson: It is considerable pleasure for me to be able to wind up the debate. Many thousands of disabled people rely on private hire vehicles or minicabs for their day-to-day mobility. In a recent MORI poll produced for the Department for Transport's disabled persons transport advisory committee, 40 per cent. of respondents reported that they had used taxis or minicabs at least once a month, and the figure was even higher for visually impaired people, 53 per cent. of whom had made similar use of those modes of travel. It is therefore clear that minicabs are a vital part of the transport mix for many disabled people, so it is intolerable that people who use assistance dogs often face a barrier to travel not because the vehicle is inaccessible, but because the attitude of the driver or operator of the service is at best indifferent to their needs or at worst downright discriminatory towards them. By introducing the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) has ensured that such attitudes will no longer be tolerated in the trade and that the way will be clear for disabled people to go about their daily business in the confidence that they will not be refused a minicab because they are travelling with a well-trained assistance dog.

I pay tribute to Guide Dogs for the Blind and the Royal National Institute for the Blind, which have made continuing representations on the matter not only to us but to those in local government with responsibility for private hire vehicles. I pay a warm tribute to the officials in my Department, who have worked extremely hard with my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow to get the Bill securely on to the statute book, or at least to assist it in its progress through the House.

I should also like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke). Like many hon. Members, he has a long and distinguished record on disability issues. However, today we must offer the warmest congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow not just on introducing the Bill, but on the way in which he has steered it through Parliament. As one of the few hon. Members who has managed to get a private Member's Bill through all its stages, I know what a difficult and arduous task that is.

My hon. Friend has placed his name on a piece of legislation that in some small way will improve people's lives for years to come. There is nothing better that a Member of Parliament could do.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Commonwealth Bill

Not amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

12.46 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am delighted to speak in support of the Bill, whose purpose is twofold: to sever the Government's statutory link with the Commonwealth Institute and to make provision for recognition in the United Kingdom of the admission to the Commonwealth of Cameroon and Mozambique, which happened in 1995. Conservative Members fully support this small but important Bill. In doing so, we join the Leader of the House who said at col. 427 of *Hansard* yesterday that the Government fully support the measures.

In 2000 the Commonwealth Institute was established as an independent charitable company and links to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were severed. The management of the Commonwealth Institute is no longer under the direct control of the FCO. We have always supported severing the links with the Foreign Office and giving the institute greater independence to promote learning across the Commonwealth. The Bill repeals the statutes that provide for the management of the Commonwealth Institute as a Government-supported body. More importantly, it will ensure the transfer of the institute's trust fund, which is approximately £50,000, from the trustees to the institute.

The second part of the Bill enables us fully to recognise Cameroon and Mozambique. They were admitted to the Commonwealth in 1995 when my good Friend Baroness Chalker was Minister with responsibility for the Commonwealth. The Bill tidies up parts of the law covering the Commonwealth. For example, it amends the Army Act 1955, the Air Force Act 1955 and the Naval Discipline Act 1957 to include Cameroon and Mozambique in the definitions of "Commonwealth force" and "Commonwealth country". Other legislation is amended to ensure that the forces of Mozambique and Cameroon can be treated as visiting forces from a Commonwealth country under those statutes.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gillan: No, I am drawing my remarks to a close.

There is nothing more to add to my comments. I hope that the Bill has a safe passage.

12.49 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I do not want to speak at length because overall I welcome the Bill. It is interesting that we are debating it when the Commonwealth games are about to commence. In addition, *The Guardian* today has an interesting section on the future role of the Commonwealth which raises some questions. However, I am sure we all agree that the Commonwealth is an important institution to support.

The membership criteria for the Commonwealth were set out in the Harare declaration and reinforced in Edinburgh. The Edinburgh communiqué states:

> "to become a member of the Commonwealth, an applicant country should, as a rule, have had a constitutional association with an existing Commonwealth member; . . . it should comply with Commonwealth values, principles and priorities as set out in the Harare Declaration; and . . . it should accept Commonwealth norms and conventions."

On Second Reading, I raised the human rights record of Cameroon. I also said that a new electoral commission had been appointed and that elections would be held this year. In view of the criteria for Commonwealth membership, I remain worried about Cameroon's human rights record. There are serious tensions between Cameroon and Nigeria over the border area, which contains oil. A case is before the International Court of Justice in The Hague, and we hope that it will make a ruling soon. Nigerian communities have repeatedly reported alleged attacks by Cameroon gendarmes, despite the fact that there is a case before the International Court of Justice.

The election campaign has been marred by violence. Indeed, elections were postponed because of irregularities, intimidation and election fraud. It is interesting to note that the election, which was postponed for a week, has been challenged and that the court in Cameroon has ordered a rerun of the election in nine constituencies because of fraud. However, the Opposition parties are worried that many of their objections and allegations of fraud have not been properly investigated, although many were accepted as valid. It was argued that petitions were filed too late or that there was a lack of sufficient evidence. The latter is a serious problem.

The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture states that torture is commonplace in Cameroon. Its report refers to serious abuses. Amnesty International's 2002 report, which covers January to December 2001, relates some horrific examples of human rights abuses and the lack of the rule of law. They include intimidation and attacks on the defenders of human rights and journalists. I shall not go into that in detail, but the report is available in the Library.

I remain worried that Cameroon's record does not fulfil the high standards that we should expect from a member of the Commonwealth.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Does he agree that we need to strengthen the monitoring elements in the Commonwealth so that we can be sure that they are ever vigilant not only of new but of existing members?

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I do not want to oppose Cameroon's membership of the Commonwealth, but if it is part of that organisation, it is incumbent on Commonwealth institutions to do all that we can to help Cameroon to improve its democratic and human rights records.

Mozambique has proved a success story. Although the Amnesty International report raises questions about political abuses, it is not as damning as the information on Cameroon. For example, in Mozambique, the death penalty has been abolished and police officers have been dismissed and have faced prosecution for abuses. Progress has therefore been made in Mozambique. Arms have also

[Mr. Dismore]

been handed in. A programme that was backed by Christian Aid destroyed more than 100,000 guns, grenades and rocket launchers.

However, Mozambique faces serious economic challenges because of the floods. I am pleased that efforts have been made through the African Development bank to build dams to control that problem. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need for food aid. When the Minister replies to the debate, I hope that he will say what the Government are doing to help with prompt action on the African famine through the Commonwealth and by ourselves. The United States has already begun to tackle that.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): On the subject of human rights and aid, does the hon. Gentleman think that it would be appropriate if the Government were to adopt a policy of smart aid, whereby the delivery of non-humanitarian, non-NGO aid is linked to the development of good governance and human rights?

Mr. Dismore: I agree, and I hope that we shall start to develop such a policy. In *The Sunday Telegraph* on 7 April, there was an interesting article about the fact that Mozambique is welcoming refugee farmers from Zimbabwe and helping them to re-establish themselves.

Both Mozambique and Cameroon are welcome. Despite all the serious challenges it faces, Mozambique is making a lot of progress with the assistance of the Commonwealth and other countries, and I hope that we will start to see better progress in Cameroon.

12.55 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I shall be extremely brief—in fact, if the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) had been willing, I would have preferred to intervene on her than to make a speech. I mean no disrespect to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or to other hon. Members, but I must briefly leave the Chamber at 1 o'clock. I hope that I will not miss an important part of the Minister's reply to the debate as a result.

I broadly support the Bill. I hope that the Minister will be able to explain why no earlier opportunity was taken to make the statutory changes in respect of Cameroon and Mozambique. I am aware of legislation sponsored by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and by the Department for International Development which could have been used as a vehicle for such minor changes to British law in respect of those two countries.

I understand and support the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). It is important that the Commonwealth is conscious of the need to do more than require that lip service be paid to human rights, but to monitor and ensure that Commonwealth members live up to such expectations. Having said that, we should welcome the admission of Cameroon and Mozambique to the Commonwealth.

Cameroon is part of what is normally considered francophone Africa—perhaps the Minister knows whether it is simultaneously a member of La Francophonie—but it is clear that within Africa the Commonwealth is regarded as a better vehicle for countries' aspirations to development and co-operation than La Francophonie. That is a good thing for Great Britain and its interests.

Mozambique is in a unique position. Not only has it never been part of the British empire, but it is lusophone. It is the only lusophone member of the Commonwealth, which is an excellent thing. Mozambique's recent history is terrible. A great deal needs to be done to deal with the corrosive effects of war—especially landmines, as the Minister knows—and the after-effects of natural disasters such as floods. Offering the greatest co-operation we can to the people of Mozambique, including enabling the armed forces to take part in combined operations to deal with the natural disasters which I have no doubt will strike that country in future, is to be applauded.

I am well aware of the work of British non-governmental associations in Mozambique. One NGO based in my constituency, Action on Disability and Development, has done a great deal of work with people in Mozambique who have been disabled, mainly by landmines. The connection between our two countries is extremely important to both of us, and I wholeheartedly welcome the Bill to cement that relationship.

12.59 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): It is a pleasure to support the Bill, and to follow the hon. Members for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). Let me express my admiration for the latter, whose range of interests and intellectual agility allowed him to move seamlessly from the behaviour of guide dogs in private hire vehicles to human rights in Cameroon and flooding in Mozambique. Those are all important matters.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) rightly said, the Bill will regularise the legal footing of the Commonwealth Institute, an independent body that promotes learning throughout the Commonwealth, by severing the statutory link with the Government, which has become necessary because it is now an independent charitable company. The Bill also acknowledges the admission of Cameroon and Mozambique to the Commonwealth.

The institute is a force for good in the Commonwealth. We all deeply appreciate our links with the Commonwealth and its Parliaments. I am conscious of the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham is a member of the international executive committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. This year, with the role of the Commonwealth in the golden jubilee celebrations and the Commonwealth games coming up in Manchester, we can all agree about the value of the role of the Commonwealth, in which the institute certainly plays its part.

1.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I congratulate the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on the progress of his Bill, as well as the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), who is standing in for him today.

As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office said on Second Reading, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) said in Committee, the Government are committed to the Bill. I hope that the House will give it its full support today.

As the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) reminded us, it has two key purposes: to repeal the statutes providing for the management of the Commonwealth Institute following its severance from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's responsibility and its establishment as an independent charitable company in January 2000; and to acknowledge in United Kingdom law the admission of Cameroon and Mozambique to the Commonwealth, by amending certain Acts of Parliament to allow them to be listed and treated as Commonwealth countries.

The Commonwealth Institute has made a distinguished contribution to British understanding and appreciation of the Commonwealth since it opened in 1962. In the late 1990s, its board of governors agreed that it should seek to change its status from a non-departmental public body responsible to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to that of an independent charitable company. We were asked to support the change. We examined it in detail and agreed to do so. We negotiated terms with the institute and drew up a severance contract that allowed it to determine its own future.

As an independent organisation, the institute continues to develop its role to meet the challenges and demands of the Commonwealth at the start of this new century. I want to recall the impressive contribution that it made to the golden jubilee of the Queen as head of the Commonwealth. It organised the Commonwealth aspect of the bank holiday procession in the Mall, demonstrating the strength of the Commonwealth in this country and the contributions made by many of its people to our multicultural society at the start of the 21st century. As part of its contribution to the 17th Commonwealth games, which open in Manchester next Thursday, it has devised and distributed educational materials to schools throughout the country, deepening children's knowledge of the Commonwealth and its contributions.

We wish the institute well in its new independent role. I commend the Bill to the House in respect of its repeal of legislation to allow the institute to determine its own future and how it can best contribute to the needs of the modern Commonwealth.

Clause 2 formally ensures that the admission of Cameroon and Mozambique to the Commonwealth is properly recognised in UK legislation. I should point out to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) that past efforts to secure the parliamentary time necessary for considering this issue have not been successful. However, thanks to the hon. Member for Havant and his Bill, we have now been able to do so, and we are grateful for that.

Of course, the Commonwealth as a whole operates in a spirit of consensus, and all its members agreed to the admission of Mozambique and Cameroon in 1995. The House should be aware that the Bill does not imply that any further formal approval is needed for the membership of these two countries; it simply tidies up the statute book. However, their membership highlights the value of the Commonwealth as an international organisation.

Mozambique had no traditional links with the association. Surrounded by Commonwealth countries, its membership resulted from its active and constructive engagement with problems in the then Rhodesia and South Africa. Once both countries secured majority rule, Mozambique applied to join the Commonwealth, and it was warmly welcomed. As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said, it has proved a committed and enthusiastic member. Its role in the Commonwealth has proved to its benefit, and to the benefit of the Commonwealth itself.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr Dismore) said, Cameroon's membership of the Commonwealth has proved somewhat less encouraging. Member countries are expected to uphold the Commonwealth's principles of good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights. International concern about Cameroon focuses on the need for reform in these areas. The Commonwealth has actively engaged with Cameroon since it joined in 1995, and it has looked at particular ways in which it can help Cameroon to uphold Commonwealth principles.

In the light of last month's legislative and municipal elections, there is now even greater emphasis on the need for electoral reform. Although the official results are not yet available, we are concerned about indications of procedural irregularities and flaws. There is a real need for reform before the presidential elections in 2004. We are pleased that the Commonwealth sent observers to monitor the recent elections, and we welcome the Commonwealth Secretary-General's appointing of a special representative to Cameroon—the Canadian Christine Stewert—to support its efforts to meet the requirements of Commonwealth membership.

In response to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon and the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome, I should point out that—despite some concerns about Cameroon's human rights record—it is right that we welcome it into the Commonwealth, and that we seek to challenge it to improve its human rights record. As part of that exercise, we shall work with Cameroon as closely as we can—as, no doubt, will the Commonwealth as a whole.

Mr. Edward Davey: The Minister is using much of his speech to point out some of the existing problems, particularly in Cameroon. He agreed with the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) that perhaps the best way to deal with those problems is to allow Cameroon into the Commonwealth, and to offer the support network that only the Commonwealth can provide. Can he say a little more about that, and about how soon he hopes to see those improvements? We are being asked to vote for a Bill that, in many ways, will give up one of our existing sanctions. The Minister shakes his head. He may wish to say that we will consider the case for removing Cameroon from the Commonwealth in due course, after discussing it with our partners, if it fails to meet the mark, but he should reassure the House that Her Majesty's Government will be very strict with Cameroon and Mozambique if they fail to meet the standards required.

Mr. O'Brien: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but let me make it clear, as I thought I already had, that the Bill does not secure the entry of Cameroon into the Commonwealth. Cameroon joined in 1995, and the Bill simply tidies up our statute book by recognising something that has already occurred.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General has engaged, as we have, in a number of ways with Cameroon, and there have been discussions with its Government to ensure

[Mr. O'Brien]

that they are aware of our concerns about a series of issues, some of which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon touched on, and others of which we could go into, no doubt at great length, today.

The point is whether through the Commonwealth and particularly through the appointment of Christine Stewert by the Secretary-General to enter into close discussions with Cameroon and support its membership of the Commonwealth, we can engage it in a serious discussion of how it can improve its human rights and electoral system. We are talking to Cameroon and ensuring that it is aware both of our concerns and of the fact that there are ways in which we can encourage it, and provide some practical assistance if it wishes to improve its electoral and other procedures to protect human rights better.

We believe that membership of the Commonwealth is important to enable our partners to encourage Cameroon to meet its commitments, and we hope that the way in which we and the rest of the Commonwealth are engaging with it will start to secure some change. There is no point in making threats and wild statements. We need to engage constructively and seek to change the way in which things are done. I hope that hon. Members will feel that the Bill is worth supporting, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Clause 1

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR DECLARATIONS: CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

1.13 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 5, leave out "a year" and insert "six months".

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 8, after "convictions", insert—

'and taking into account any previous unspent convictions'.

No. 3, in page 1, line 13, after "convictions", insert—

'and taking into account any previous unspent convictions'.

No. 19, in page 1, line 14, at end add

'and

(c) it is satisfied that any withholding of benefit, as set out in section (3) below and related regulations, will not increase the likelihood of the offender committing similar offences again,'.

No. 4, in page 1, line 15, at end insert—

'and specify the period of disqualification for the purposes of section 3(1)'.

No. 21, in clause 2, page 2, line 35, after "behaved", insert—

'and is satisfied that any withholding of benefit, as set out in section (3) below and related regulations, will not increase the likelihood of the offender committing similar offences again,'.

No. 8, in page 2, line 35, after "declaration", insert—

'and specify the period of disqualification for the purposes of section 3(1)'.

No. 22, in page 2, line 35, at end insert—

'(3A) A court may only make a declaration under subsection (3) above against a person over the age of 65 if it considers that there are exceptional circumstances and if it is satisfied that no other method of dealing with that person's behaviour is applicable.'.

No. 11, in clause 3, page 2, line 44, at end insert—

'(1A) In deciding to make a declaration under this Act, the court shall give due consideration to any hardship which may be inflicted on others as the consequence of disqualification of the person from benefit'.

No. 24, in page 2, line 44, at end insert—

'(1A) Subsection (1) shall only apply after the Secretary of State has—

(a) reviewed evidence as to the likelihood of the offender re-offending as a direct result of the benefit reduction, and

(b) stated that, in his opinion, the benefit reduction does not increase that likelihood.'.

Mr. Dismore: Although there are quite a few amendments before the House, the issues—or at least, the issues behind the amendments in my name—are straightforward. Amendment No. 1, which is a probing amendment, raises the question of when the declarations about antisocial behaviour can be made. Clause 1(1)(b) suggests that an order cannot be made if a sentence of a year or more has been imposed. I would like the promoter, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), to explain why he has picked that period.

If a person is in custody as a result of a sentence imposed by the court, the question of their receiving housing benefit does not arise. Whether they receive housing benefit will not make much difference to their behaviour if they are already in jail—although it may have an impact on their family.

I could understand the position if the sentence were a community sentence. That would be clear, but I do not understand why any custodial sentence should not be a bar to the making of such an order. That needs to be considered, especially bearing in mind the qualification regulations for receiving housing benefit when people are sentenced to a term of imprisonment.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this point because in Committee we did not consider in great detail the length of the custodial sentence that would apply to the housing benefit sanction. Why does the hon. Gentleman believe that it should be six months rather than the year provided for in the Bill?

1.15 pm

Mr. Dismore: I hit on six months simply as a probing measure—I could have chosen any period. I wanted to probe whether it was appropriate for an order to be made at all when someone is sentenced to a term of imprisonment. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead is an expert in the operation of housing benefit in these circumstances, and I am sure that he had a reason for deciding on a year rather than any other period.

Mr. Davey: May I help the hon. Gentleman? It was not the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) who proposed this part of the Bill, because it was largely rewritten in Committee by the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks). The Minister proposed the provision that the hon. Gentleman is probing.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful for that clarification. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will have an even better reason to justify the term of imprisonment referred to in the Bill. If someone is sentenced to imprisonment, taking away their housing benefits seems a belt and braces approach, to say the least, to correcting their behaviour.

My next point concerns previous offences. When a court passes sentence on someone who has been convicted of an offence, the sentence will reflect the form of the offender concerned. The offence for which the court was considering the offender could be relatively trivial but could be seen in the context of a series of prior offences that were not before the court. It seems peculiar, given the Bill's present wording, that the court can take into account only the convictions that are being considered.

If somebody is up before a court for one event of disorderly conduct, such as trouble outside a pub or drunken, noisy behaviour on the way home, the court is unlikely to do much about it other than sentence that person to a community sentence at worst, although it would more likely be a fine. However, if that was just one in a long series of antisocial behaviour incidents, the court should be able to consider any previous unspent convictions when deciding whether a declaration under the Bill should be made. It is something of a loophole, if we are trying to deal with that annoying but relatively low-level form of antisocial behaviour that currently escapes the powers of the courts. I hope that the Minister will answer that point when he replies.

Amendments Nos. 8 and 11 relate to who sets the order for the withdrawal of benefit—the disqualification period. I have real concerns that this will simply be an administrative process. A court may make a declaration and have no real understanding or knowledge of how long that person will be disqualified from benefit. Equally, when the social services department imposes a disqualification period administratively, it may not know the full context, which the court may have known when deciding to make the declaration. The appropriate course would be to telescope that procedure into a declaration and disqualification, both of which should be considered by the court when deciding what action to take.

When considering a sentence, the court always listens to a plea of mitigation. There may well be a social inquiry report and other matters may be brought to the court's attention when passing sentence. It seems peculiar if, at the same time, those facts are not brought to the attention of the person or body implementing the disqualification order.

Mr. Davey: If the hon. Gentleman reads the Bill, he will see that the situation is even worse than he describes, because we are not told the sort of benefit reductions that will apply. The Minister gave some indication in Committee but did not share with us the details that the Government have in mind in respect of the different stages of benefit reductions and how they would apply. It is all under regulation in the Bill. Therefore, in debating the hon. Gentleman's amendment, the House is bereft because we do not know the detail of what the Government intend.

Mr. Dismore: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. The point is important. We are considering whether it is correct to impose as a simple administrative process what is, in effect, a sanction, when there are grades of offence. It would not be as though someone had failed to sign on or had fraudulently claimed benefit—either they have done that or they have not. We are considering the use of the benefit sanction as an adjunct to the powers of the courts, so it would be appropriate for the court to decide the length of disqualification.

Mr. Davey: I understand from information given to us in Committee that the Government intend that the first reduction of housing benefit—when the sanction has been applied after the court's declaration—should be a fixed sum. The hon. Gentleman's point is thus even more valid; everyone will be treated in exactly the same way even if one person's antisocial behaviour was far worse than that of another.

Mr. Dismore: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. No doubt we shall also hear from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on that point when he replies to the debate.

[Mr. Dismore]

I am certainly concerned about the disqualification period, which we may discuss later. When the Select Committee on Work and Pensions visited the United States to examine such issues in the context of its benefits system, we found that the first penalty was often a short sharp shock rather than the long one that the Bill seems to presage. The court might want to take that point into account.

Similarly, there could be repeat offences; an offender could come before the court to face a second benefit sanction. If there is no opportunity for the court to examine all the circumstances and to consider a gradation of penalty—perhaps increasing the disqualification period for a second offence—we are not sending the right message to offenders. I support some of the ideas behind the Bill, but I am worried about the practicalities. We would be wielding a big and rather inflexible stick instead of using the measure as it should be intended: to correct offending behaviour rather than to provide a penalty for having offended. We should see the measure as a tool of correction, to try to help people to recognise that they owe an obligation to society in return for their benefit, in which case a gradated approach would be far more appropriate.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): My hon. Friend is of course aware that although we are discussing only one measure, the Government want to introduce a series of measures in the next Session, including model tenancy agreements, fast-track evictions, and conciliation services such as those in Dundee. It is not as though someone committing antisocial behaviour will go straight into court as a result of the Bill; there will be several steps before they reach that point.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention, but it does not mean that there should not be some degree of flexibility in the process so that it can complement those measures rather than being used as an inflexible stick at the end.

Mr. Davey: May I clarify one point? I do not want the hon. Gentleman to misunderstand what the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) was saying. Although the Government have a range of measures to tackle antisocial behaviour, many of which we wholeheartedly support because they are exactly right, the Bill does not set out a process whereby those methods and policies can be used before the court is asked to make a declaration and the benefit sanction is applied. In Committee, I tried to insert a provision for such a process so that all the options could be explored, but the Government resisted such amendments. I do not want the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Davey) to be under any illusion: no process involving other measures is foreseen in the Bill—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps, in order to make this more of a debate than a conversation piece, the hon. Gentleman might save up his comments and seek to catch my eye later on.

Mr. Dismore: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I noted what the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said, and the House will obviously form its own view when it considers the amendments at the end of this short debate.

The last amendment in my name in the group, and probably the most important, is amendment No. 11. It concerns the extent to which the penalty could have consequences for people who are not before the court, or are not directly in receipt of the benefit. If I may return to my basic point, which is that the power should be exercised by someone with a bit of discretion—that is, the court—it seems to me that the court should be able to take into account not only the circumstances of the offender before it, but any hardship that is likely to be inflicted on others as a consequence of that person's disqualification from benefit.

If benefit is taken away and the person concerned happens to be the householder, that could have a serious impact on their children and/or their partner, husband or wife. I am keen to ensure that we do all that we can to deal with those who behave in the most appalling antisocial ways, but I do not believe that it will necessarily be constructive if in doing so we penalise the children or the partner in the relationship. That could make things worse. That would not necessarily apply in all cases, but the court should certainly have discretion to look at the hardship of what could be, according to the Bill, a very lengthy withholding of benefit. These provisions must be exercised with a degree of flexibility.

Mr. Edward Davey: I shall primarily speak to amendments Nos. 19, 21, 24 and 22, and I shall try not to be tempted to cover ground that I covered in exchanges with the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) because that would try your patience sorely, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Amendments 19, 21 and 24 are intended to highlight one major change to the Bill that has occurred during its passage. In Committee the Bill was effectively rewritten, and the sanction, instead of applying after two antisocial behaviour orders had been issued on a person—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) tries to intervene from a sedentary position. I am saying that the old Bill talked about two antisocial behaviour orders. It has been changed. In clause 1, the Government have introduced the link between the benefit sanction and a custodial sentence. Under clause 2, in civil proceedings the sanction will be triggered by some method of which we are not yet told, because those proceedings will be prescribed in due course in regulations.

Amendments Nos. 19, 21 and 24 are intended to challenge some of the thinking behind those amendments, particularly the linking of the sanction to the custodial sentence, which would introduce a double punishment. Once an offender's case has been heard, and he or she has been convicted of the crime that they were accused of, the court decides a punishment appropriate to the crime. Clause 1 seeks to add another punishment to that initial punishment. Although it may be related to the original offence—I wish to discuss that point in a second—it is a double punishment. That may well be a first in law, and to my knowledge it certainly is in benefit law, because other benefit sanctions have been introduced very differently.

The second aspect that really concerns me is what will happen as a result of the relating of the extra punishment to a benefit sanction. The consequence will be one of two things. The offender will either come out of prison with debts because his rent has not been paid during his time in prison—at least the 13 weeks in prison that it can currently be paid for—or come out without a home.

Either way—whether people come out of prison with increased debts or having lost their homes—the chance is that they will have no stable accommodation, as the opportunity to have stable accommodation will have been reduced. There can be no dispute about that fact because that is the Government's and, indeed, the Bill's original promoter's explicit aim, so there is no debate about that. My concern is what will happen as a result.

I should have thought that our policies—whether those for benefits or housing in general—should ensure that ex-convicts, people coming out of prison, have [illegible] good chance of getting stable accommodation. Why? Because a lot of the evidence shows that the risk of reoffending significantly increases when ex-convicts do not have access to accommodation.

1.30 pm

Government reports—particularly the social exclusion unit report, "Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners", which was published this month—and a lot of other detailed work by Departments say that reducing reoffending is one of the Government's key targets. The Government say that reoffending is a major problem and that they wish to stop the vicious cycle of crime, which can add to the prison population.

Page 3 of the Prime Minister's foreword to that report says:

> "People who have been in prison account for one in five of all crimes. Nearly three in five prisoners are re-convicted within two years of leaving prison. Offending by ex-prisoners costs society at least £11 billion a year. This all tells us we are failing to capitalise on the opportunity prison provides to stop people offending for good."

So the Bill, which deliberately sets out to penalise offenders by reducing housing benefits, goes exactly against what the Prime Minister said in a report published this month. I find it quite bizarre that we are debating the Bill given that the Government say that they are in favour of joined-up government.

Having stable accommodation for ex-offenders has been shown to reduce the risk of reoffending by a fifth—a significant amount. If we could ensure that all prisoners have access to stable accommodation when they finish spending time at Her Majesty's pleasure, we would significantly reduce crime. That is what the evidence shows. The Bill, particularly clause 1, goes in exactly the opposite direction.

A third of prisoners already lose their homes while in prison. That comes from recent Home Office research. The SEU report to which I have referred makes a number of recommendations to try to improve that figure, including changes to the housing benefit administration regime, which go in exactly the opposite direction to the Bill.

The recent Home Office survey, "Jobs and homes—a survey of prisoners nearing release", says that

> "71 per cent. of those with no accommodation arranged on release had not received any help in finding accommodation."

Clearly, the Prison Service and Her Majesty's Government have a lot more to do to tackle that aspect of reoffending. I cannot believe for a minute that they welcome the Bill because it would make that huge challenge far more difficult.

I refer hon. Members to the details of the amendments in this group. If the amendments were accepted, they would at least mitigate some of the problems that I have identified. Amendment No. 19 would add another test: the court would have consider whether

> "it is satisfied that any withholding of benefit, as set out in section (3) below and related regulations, will not increase the likelihood of the offender committing similar offences again."

That would ensure that, before making any declaration to trigger the benefits sanction, the court would have to consider the likelihood of such a sanction worsening the chances of reoffending. That is a sensible thing for the courts to have to consider, as the criminal justice system plays its full part in trying to reduce reoffending.

Amendment No. 21 has a similar effect, but it amends clause 2 and would attempt to ensure that the civil courts were satisfied that there would be no increase in the likelihood of reoffending.

Amendment No. 24 would apply at another stage. As it amends clause 3, it relates not to the court stage but to the stage when the Secretary of State would apply the benefit sanction. Before clause 3(1) kicked in, therefore, the Secretary of State would be required to review all the evidence as to the likelihood of the offender reoffending as a direct result of the benefit reduction. It is therefore very specific and targeted. It would require the Secretary of State not just to review the evidence but to state that, in his opinion, the benefit reduction does not increase that likelihood.

I cannot see how the Minister could reject such an amendment. Given that his boss, the Prime Minister, stated this month in the publication from which I quoted that the Government's express aim is to reduce reoffending, and given that that document refers at length to the importance of improving the housing opportunities of people released from prison, the tests that I seek to add to the Bill are very mild, both for the court and the Secretary of State. I would therefore be extremely surprised if the Minister were to reject them.

Amendment No. 22 states:

> "A court may only make a declaration under subsection (3) above against a person over the age of 65 if it considers that there are exceptional circumstances and if it is satisfied that no other method of dealing with that person's behaviour is applicable."

The reason I have tabled that amendment is that people over the age of 65 need extra protection from the penal sanctions in the Bill. The Minister said in Committee that a hardship regime will be introduced, although we have not had any description of that hardship regime in any shape or form. Amendment No. 22, however, would at least ensure that pensioners over the age of 65—who could still be hit by those benefit sanctions, as I am sure the Minister would agree—would be subject to an extra test that the courts would have to consider. That can only be right.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Does he not agree, however, that in the real world an awful lot of people aged over 65 are looking for protection from the antisocial behaviour of others, who are predominantly younger people, and that they want to see people who behave antisocially, of whatever age, brought to account for it?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is exactly right. He enables me to make the point that I had intended to make at the beginning of my remarks. Liberal Democrats take the problem of antisocial behaviour very seriously. We support strong, tough measures to deal with those who behave in that appalling way, to pensioners who are their neighbours or to people of any age in our communities. As I explained at length in Committee—I will not do so now, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Liberal Democrat councils up and down the country are using innovative measures to deal with antisocial behaviour that are proving far more effective than the Government's measures.

I quoted at length—I shall be brief now—the case of acceptable behaviour contracts, which are an innovation in the Liberal Democrat-controlled borough of Islington. Acceptable behaviour contracts did not require legislation. They are much quicker in effect than measures such as antisocial behaviour orders and the proposals that we are debating, and they have enabled the council, working with the different partners in the borough of Islington, to tackle the problem quickly. They do not require a legal process or huge expenditure of taxpayer's money. They have been very effective, however, at dealing with the problem.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) for his intervention, because, effectively, he refers to the second part of my amendment No. 22, which states that the court must be

"satisfied that no other method of dealing with that person's behaviour is applicable."

When we debated the issue at length in Committee, we heard that many alternatives are available to local authority social services departments and so on. The alternatives are being piloted around the country, and I cited several examples. They all show the high degree of success of the relatively new experiments that deal with such behaviour.

Liberal Democrats believe that successful experiments should be rolled out across the country. They should be fast-tracked and given top priority by the Government, so that we can ensure that councils and public authorities are made aware of the tools that they already possess, have the funds to ensure that they can act quickly and have the pressure of Government on them to ensure that they use those tools appropriately.

The hon. Gentleman's intervention was rather ill-advised. Amendment No. 22 would ensure that best practice is used. It would particularly ensure that older people are not affected, and I am grateful to Age Concern England and Age Concern London for the evidence that I have received from them. It shows how elderly people are currently disadvantaged under the complexities of the housing benefit administration system. There is a danger that the disadvantages that they already suffer will be exacerbated by the Bill. These are modest amendments.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that another point relates to those aged over 65. If financial penalties drive people into debt, a retired person is less able than someone of working age to work themselves out of debt. The use of financial penalties will especially penalise those who cannot earn the money to take themselves out of debt.

Mr. Davey: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point, and one that I had not noticed. He strengthens the case for the amendment. I stress that it deals with people who have appeared before the courts. They have already been sentenced to prison or received a conditional discharge. They have been punished, but the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and the Government are effectively seeking to put them into poverty and perhaps into homelessness. It is extraordinary that they should seek to make elderly people homeless; it is bizarre.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) does not need my protection, but the hon. Gentleman is being slightly disingenuous. The people to whom he referred are not the victims, but the perpetrators. No one is trying to put them into poverty; they are choosing to accept the sanctions by choosing to continue along the path of constant antisocial behaviour. It is their choice to have the sanctions, which they know about, imposed upon them.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman would have a point against my argument if it was that we should not do anything about such people. I made it very clear that we should be very tough and seek to change their behaviour. My argument, both in Committee and now, is that the approach taken by the Government and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead will not work.

I sought to discuss in Committee much of the evidence about other aspects of the benefits system in which benefit sanctions have been trialled and explored at some length—the new deal, the job seeker's allowance and so on. Much of the evidence suggests that benefit sanctions have not worked. I know that the right hon. Gentleman might jump to his feet and refer to examples of research in which people have said that they have changed their behaviour. He would be right to do so. I said in Committee that the evidence was mixed. *[Interruption.]* I think the right hon. Gentleman is saying that I have changed my tune. I have not.

Mr. Frank Field: When the hon. Gentleman was under threat from the Chairman in Committee, he changed his behaviour and gave us a good example of how the threat—not the exercise—of sanctions actually worked.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is just a small point, but I said nothing in Committee.

Mr. Davey: I confirm that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I also confirm that the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) was exemplary. I had no quarrel with the Chairman. However, some of the amendments that I tabled for consideration today were not able to be debated in Committee because of a closure motion. The Committee was unable to sit for as long as I think it needed to in order to scrutinise a particularly serious Bill.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): Given that in Committee the hon. Gentleman monopolised the time, so preventing concerned Conservative Members and Labour Members from discussing this important measure, our concerned constituents would like to know now whether he is trying to talk out the Bill.

Mr. Davey: I assure the Minister that I am not intending to talk out the Bill. I can say to him that he and

Conservative Members moved the closure motion. It was not Liberal Democrat Members who sought to reduce the time for debate in Committee. If there is any problem with the Bill not going forward, the Minister should take his share of the responsibility.

I return to the point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris). It is important that we try to improve the behaviour of these people because it is unacceptable. We must tackle it and be hard on it. That is why I quoted an example from the hon. Gentleman's own country, Scotland. I referred to the Dundee families project, which I will not talk about now because I did so at length in Committee. The project has proved exceedingly successful. It has involved resettlement of some families—taking them away from the communities that they are disrupting. I fully support such resettlement projects. In some cases, I even support evictions of these families. I do not suggest that we must be anything but tough on these people. We must be. The question is whether the approach set out in the Bill will either change their behaviour or result in less antisocial behaviour. I think that all the evidence shows that if we make people poorer and give offenders less chance of stable accommodation when they come out, crime will increase as well as antisocial behaviour. The proposition before us is contradictory in its own terms given the evidence which the Prime Minister supported this month.

Mr. Tom Harris: The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that the measures contained in the Bill are the only possible sanctions against the people about whom we are talking. Surely the hon. Gentleman will agree that this is only one of a wide range of measures. He is right to point out other measures, but this is an important measure even though it is one of many that the Government and local authorities should have at their disposal.

Mr. Davey: I think the hon. Gentleman unintentionally misrepresents what I am saying. I am in favour of a range of measures. He has talked about a few of them, and the Minister has talked about some others, that are designed to tackle the sort of behaviour that we are discussing. My point is that the measure before us will have the reverse effect. It will increase antisocial behaviour, not reduce it. I think that all the evidence backs our case. We have had no evidence that the reverse is the case. I seek to draw the attention of the House to that.

In drawing my remarks to a close, I wish to point out that the amendments that are in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) are focused on a key aspect of policy for the criminal justice system. We are trying to stop reoffending, to stop crime, and to stop antisocial behaviour. That is the purpose behind our amendments, and they will have that effect. If the Government were to accept them, they would make the Bill better. Their insertion would remove some of the more worrying consequences of the Bill.

Mr. Frank Field: An intervention and the speech of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), gave the game away for the Liberal Democrats. Any Member who was concerned to represent their constituents' views about how their lives are being ruined by a small, dedicated group of constituents behaving in an antisocial manner would have introduced their comments on the amendments by making that plain. It took an intervention to stir from the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) that that was the real point behind his amendments. I do not accept that. Liberal Democrat Members tabled a whole series of wrecking amendments in Committee, some of which we spent five hours going round and round, and they are doing it again today. We all have in our mind's eye the image of Liberal Democrats as being people with shaggy beards and sandals. They must be here today if they think that we have a load of 65-year-olds running around terrorising young families with children in an antisocial manner. Their amendments are absurd.

Matthew Green: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Field: I will in a minute, because it is good to see the hon. Gentleman in his seat.

I hope all those who are of pensionable age in Surbiton and other Liberal Democrat seats think carefully about the absurd image that Liberal Democrats have of people who cause antisocial behaviour in their constituencies. It is to protect those older constituents that many of us on both sides of the House are supporting this and other measures.

Matthew Green: My concern about what the right hon. Gentleman is saying is that measures introduced by his Government, such as antisocial behaviour orders, are not being used. If there is such a huge problem, will he explain why ASBOs are not being used before he advocates more measures?

Mr. Field: That question should have been addressed to the hon. Gentleman's own Front Benchers. If the measures are never used, why should they stir up the fear that this one will send vast numbers of our constituents to prison? The two things do not add up. When pressed in Committee, Liberal Democrat Members sprang up like jack-in-the-boxes to say, "Of course we are representing the interests of our constituents: we are massively concerned about antisocial behaviour, and we want a whole range of measures to deal with it." I therefore asked the Library to find out what concerns every Liberal Democrat had expressed about antisocial behaviour before the introduction of the Bill. Let me record on the Floor of the House that not one Liberal Democrat had asked a question about it, made a speech about it in this Chamber or written an article about it for a national or local newspaper. They may be concerned about it now, but they certainly were not before the introduction of the Bill.

Mr. Edward Davey: The right hon. Gentleman is factually incorrect. I have spoken to my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and I know that my hon. Friends have raised the issue. More importantly—with great respect to the right hon. Gentleman—Liberal Democrats on the ground are not just talking about it and writing articles, but producing policies to tackle antisocial behaviour in our communities. I challenge him to go to the borough of Islington to see how acceptable behaviour contracts are working. I also suggest that he go to the Home Office's website, where that Liberal Democrat innovation has been held up by his own Government as best practice and has been recommended across the country. That has not taken legislation or parliamentary

[Mr. Edward Davey]

questions, but active engagement by elected Liberal Democrat councillors in Islington. The right hon. Gentleman should withdraw his remarks.

Mr. Field: I shall not do so for the simple reason that, as Labour and official Opposition Members have made plain, if we are to stand any chance of countering antisocial behaviour more successfully than in the past, we need a whole range of measures, and the Government have said that they will provide them. Some will require legislation, but many will not. Some councils, thank goodness, are already pressing ahead with such measures, but others are dragging their feet.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Many seaside communities such as Scarborough and Whitby have a persistent problem in relation not only to tenants, but to landlords who fail to police and monitor their tenants' activities. My local council and local community would want this measure to be placed on the statute book to give them an extra deterrent to ensure that such behaviour is dealt with.

Mr. Field: I agree. Given that our seaside towns usually have a higher proportion of elderly people than elsewhere, it is interesting that my hon. Friend chooses not to use the scare tactic of saying that we have to protect pensioners from the measure when, of course, we want to protect them from antisocial behaviour. He probably knows that a clause in the original Bill dealt directly with landlords. Sadly, it had to be withdrawn because it clashed with human rights legislation that the House passed.

The good news is that the Government are considering measures for the next Session aimed specifically at bad landlords—in particular those who make a cool killing on milking housing benefit. Those people pay not the slightest attention to the way in which they contribute to the collapse of working-class areas by accommodating such families. None of us would want to live next door to those families, so we should not inflict them on our constituents.

The Liberal Democrats took the typical old line of pulling out one tiny bit of Government policy. They said that the Bill must fall because it is against the Government's strategy on people who reoffend, but that is only part of their strategy. The Prime Minister's overall vision of our society is to remoralise it and to change people's behaviour. That is the cornerstone of policy. We are in a new situation in which old class politics are giving way to the new politics as regards how we control behaviour. As we get to grips with that agenda and fashion measures to deal with it, of course we must be careful and listen, especially to our constituents, but to pretend that we can pull measures off the shelf, as we could for the past century, as solutions to issues that are only just emerging, shows how naive the Liberal Democrats are on this issue.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Does my right hon. Friend agree that during the next election, the neighbours from hell who make so many people's lives a misery should put up Liberal Democrat posters in their windows, because it is clear from debates in Committee and the House that the Liberal Democrats are the party of the neighbourhood nuisance-makers?

Mr. Field: We all hope that those who are in error change their ways. I have warned the Liberal Democrats, and in so doing perhaps slightly hardened their views about antisocial behaviour, that they have to answer one question: are they prepared to have one, let alone two, of those families living on one or both sides of them? Hence the Liberal Democrats' support in Committee for the establishment of what some people crudely call sin bins. If we do not want those families living next to us, we cannot expect to inflict them on our constituents. In that case, we have to think about where we put such families until they change their behaviour.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I am listening to my right hon. Friend with care. As someone who has a serious problem of antisocial behaviour in my constituency, on which I have spoken many times, the aspect that concerns me most is that the neighbours from hell who have been evicted have almost invariably ended up living with friends, sometimes staying on their floors, in private accommodation, which gives the local authority virtually no leverage to deal with their behaviour. The consequence of the actions taken under the current provision is to relocate the problem from within, say, a council estate to a street nearby where their behaviour continues unchecked.

Mr. Field: I fully accept my hon. Friend's point. That is why I have lobbied the Government to the effect that local authorities should be given the resources so that they can build accommodation to house people who inflict such horrors on our constituents. That is part of the overall picture. However, the measure does not deal with it because the Bill's title means that we can deal with only one aspect of the problem in our debate. However, the contrast between the amendments that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) tabled and those that the Liberal Democrats tabled reveals a difference in approach.

2 pm

Let me deal with my hon. Friend's amendments. I accept that my hon. Friend was probing through the amendments and that he therefore probably already knows some of the answers. Indeed, given his legal experience, he probably knows them better than me. It is important that hon. Members do not have a view of the courts that is too mechanical. Things may be different in London, but most of our constituencies are clearly defined areas of towns, villages or groups of villages. The courts' operations happen against the background of that framework. Those there know a bit about the people who come before them.

At the end of proceedings, a charge of antisocial behaviour will be made against the individual before the court. That should be taken into account when we devise sentencing policy. The House has always been careful not to be too prescriptive on sentencing; it grants some freedom of manoeuvre in a general framework. However, some courts are still waiting for their first, second or third order to arrive. The hon. Member for Kingston and

Surbiton referred to that. The logic of his position is that we need to find methods of speeding up the process and ensuring that antisocial behaviour orders come before the courts more quickly.

We began to consider the matter in Birkenhead seven years ago, and we lobbied the Labour party, which was then in opposition. We proposed a simple system of penalty points, which the police could apply mainly against young lads for their misbehaviour. That was not accepted and we got antisocial behaviour orders instead. Not one application for such an order has been successful in Birkenhead. Consequently, we have made representations to the Home Secretary to turn the procedure upside down so that one seeks an order and returns to the court after carrying out all the detailed work to implement it. The Home Secretary accepted that reform, which is outlined in the White Paper that was cited.

Considering methods of controlling behaviour is new, and we realise that even after introducing a measure, we may have to revert to it to speed up the process of justice to protect our constituents.

Ms Buck: My right hon. Friend has been generous in giving way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must remember to address the Chair.

Ms Buck: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My local authority has also been slow in introducing antisocial behaviour orders. The primary problem is obtaining witness statements that are sufficient to enable the police and the local authority to take action. It is difficult to persuade members of the community to give evidence. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is the principal reason for the slowness of ASBOs?

Mr. Field: Indeed. When preparing for the debate, I asked our local authority, Wirral, to give me all its papers on taking four families in my constituency—the figure will be low in most constituencies—to court. A single parent who has been smashed in the face, pushed over and had her house wrecked by the family next door, is the only person under pensionable age who is appearing before the courts to give evidence, even though the family next door has threatened to kill her if she goes to court. That makes laughable the Liberal Democrat amendment to protect those over 65 and ensure that the Bill does not sanction them. In Birkenhead, and, I guess, even in Surbiton, the bravest people, who are prepared to go to court, stand up, and be seen and known by the thugs are pensioners. They feel that strongly about it.

My answer to the point about the difficulty of getting cases to court is that on the first occasion, the sanction is applied only against the head of the household for a part of that head of household's benefit. The difficulty of getting the case back into court if the behaviour remains unchanged will be considerable, but the fuller sanction will be applied only against the head of the household and not to the housing benefit for the whole household. I hope that by the end of the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon will feel that this aspect of the Bill has been explored effectively, and that further probing will take place when the Bill goes to the House of Lords.

Mr. Clappison: I shall be brief. The Conservatives welcome the Bill and want it to make progress because it deals with a serious issue for many of our constituents, that of antisocial behaviour by badly behaved neighbours.

With that in mind, I appeal to the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) to think again about his amendments. The Committee debated how long the prison sentence in respect of which the sanction would not apply should be, and the Minister told us that it was not appropriate in respect of longer sentences. The Committee accepted that. As for taking unspent convictions into account, the hon. Gentleman will see that the Bill catches antisocial behaviour on any occasion on which it arises. The legal definition of antisocial behaviour is the same as is used in other statutes. The message is clear: the Bill is designed to catch antisocial behaviour and to bring it to a halt.

As a result of amendments standing in the name of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and supported by the Conservatives that were accepted by the Committee, we now know how long the period of reduction of benefit—the disqualification period—will be. It will be at least 26 weeks, which substantially strengthens the Bill. As for the question of hardship, I ask the hon. Member for Hendon to read the Committee debate on the provisions that were to be put in place to deal with that.

I understand the point of view being expressed by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), but have difficulty with his approach to the Bill. I wish that he would face up to the consequences of his arguments. When we debate disapplying provisions in the Bill for the over-65s, we are becoming somewhat fanciful. I do not know what sort of world he inhabits, but it appears to be full of Victor Meldrews on crack. In the real world—the one inhabited by our constituents—the over-65s are often the people who are affected by antisocial behaviour. As for their being made homeless, they will not be made homeless as a result of the Bill; what all too often makes the over-65s and many others homeless is their own decision to leave their homes because they can no longer endure the behaviour of people around them.

We want more measures to bring antisocial behaviour to a stop. People are crying out for assistance—for a measure that will end the behaviour that far too many people have to endure and that makes their life a torment. We appeal to the Liberal Democrats, even at this late stage, to face up to the consequences of their actions. They must realise that the Bill will help people, or at least acknowledge that their chosen approach will block a piece of legislation that would otherwise help many people whose lives have been made a misery by the antisocial behaviour of others. We want to stop that behaviour, they want it to be stopped, and I ask the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton not to continue his present course of trying to talk out a measure that many people want and that would help many people, including the elderly.

Malcolm Wicks: I am happy to be back in the Chamber discussing the Bill promoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) following an extensive series of debates in Committee. The Government fully support the Bill's objectives in preventing antisocial behaviour which, as some speakers today have said, blights the lives of so many of our constituents. We believe that it would make a valuable

[Malcolm Wicks]

third strand in our armoury, alongside the use of antisocial behaviour orders and the Government's strategy to improve landlords' powers to tackle antisocial tenants.

Our priority has been to make the Bill workable and compatible with human rights legislation. We recognise the concerns that have been expressed urging caution but also the voices recommending a tougher approach. We believe that the Government amendments made in Committee strike the right balance.

I shall not try to respond to each of the amendments individually. They have a common theme in giving a greater role to the courts in deciding whether to apply a benefit sanction and considering the likely implications of any sanction. We would all agree with many of the objectives of the amendments, such as that of ensuring that sanctions are used in a fair and proportionate way, but as I explained in Committee, the Government's proposals will achieve those objectives by a different route and the approach suggested here is not compatible with the streamlined process that we introduced with the Government amendments.

We deliberately designed a procedure of court declarations that would sit on top of decisions that the courts already make. It will be a relatively quick and straightforward decision following a conviction or an order. The crucial factor under our approach is that the courts need consider only the nature of the behaviour—that is, was it antisocial or not? There is no need for them to know whether the person is on benefits, has other family members, has received previous declarations and so on.

In practice, the courts have no way of knowing many of those things. There is no ready mechanism for them to check whether someone is receiving housing benefit, or the details of their family. Equally, they may not know whether there has been a previous court declaration, especially if that declaration was made in a different type of court proceeding, either civil or criminal.

Requiring the courts to find out and take account of such factors would drastically increase the amount of work involved in making declarations. We believe that it would be disproportionate in relation to the objective and could risk disrupting the wider work of the criminal and civil justice systems. In a week when the Government have just published the criminal justice White Paper, that is an important factor to bear in mind.

For those reasons, we believe that the amendments would not work under our approach and that they are not necessary. The Government's plan is to set up a hardship scheme in the same way as for other benefit sanctions, taking account of the family circumstances at the point when the sanction is applied, and not just when the court is making a declaration. For example, it may be some time after the court hearing before a sanction is put in place, allowing time to cross-match declarations against housing benefit records. The composition of the household may have changed in that time.

The Government approach would be not only more streamlined and efficient but more responsive to family circumstances, and therefore more effective at preventing hardship as a result of benefit sanctions.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): To clarify how existing hardship provisions work, can the Minister tell me—I genuinely do not know—whether support can be given to the sanctioned person because the sanction has caused hardship, or only when the hardship is caused to other family members?

Malcolm Wicks: The purpose of the hardship regime is to take account of children and other factors such as a pregnancy. If the Bill is enacted, we will spell that out in secondary legislation and the House will be able to discuss it. We noted the hardship regime as one example of our approach, but we will need to take expert advice and make specific proposals in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) asked about prison sentences. There is clearly no exact science, but the Government think that there should be a cut-off point to exclude long prison sentences. The question is where to set it, and that is a matter of judgment. We feel that a year is about right. In practice, that means that anyone who served longer than six months would be excluded. With shorter prison sentences, there is perhaps less distinction between offenders sent to prison and those given alternative punishments. Exempting shorter sentences might create a more arbitrary cut-off, whereby people who carried out similar kinds of antisocial behaviour were treated differently under the Bill. That is the thinking behind our approach to this issue.

2.15 pm

The Bill introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead is a very important one that has been welcomed by many people on both sides of the House. As he noted, increasing numbers of such cases are brought to us in our constituency advice surgeries, and I am afraid that my own constituency of Croydon, North is not exempt from such bad behaviour. My constituency notes show instances of people being verbally threatened, and doors being kicked and bashed in order to frighten residents. In one case, a saw was held to a woman's neck and she was racially abused, and in another a blowtorch was used through a neighbour's letterbox. A woman who asked that a dog stop barking incessantly was attacked with a knife. In a further case, a radio was left on constantly, not tuned in to any particular channel, with the windows left open. There was also an instance of dog faeces being put through a letter-box.

In one case that I personally recall—it is particularly relevant to the debate—a woman and her children had to flee their own house because of antisocial behaviour, a form of self-eviction over which she had no choice. When I hear the Liberal Democrats talk about the terrible plight of those who might be evicted if they continue in their antisocial behaviour and sanctions are stepped up, I wonder why they do not recognise—as the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) recognised—that in effect, many decent, honest people are evicted because of such behaviour. That is an important point.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): As my hon. Friend knows, as a council leader I employed private detectives to ensure that evidence was submitted to enable the eviction of unruly tenants. Does he agree, however, that the purpose of housing benefit is to enable those on low incomes to pay for their housing, and that it is not a tool for other policy objectives? Those who are rich will have no sanction against them, and the danger is that this Bill will be seen as evidence that those who do not behave themselves might lose their home—unless, that is, they are well off.

Malcolm Wicks: We have stressed that there are different weapons in the armoury, some of which I have noted. For example, owner-occupiers can also be antisocial, and hopefully antisocial behaviour orders will apply in their case. However, I would find it difficult to explain to those of my Croydon constituents who are being abused and harassed why that is happening, and why those responsible are having their rent paid by the rest of the community. If we are to turn the decent rhetoric of rights and duties into practical social policies, we have to get real and get tough where appropriate—not for the sake of being macho, but for the sake of the decent people in our constituencies who form the great majority.

We dealt with these matters in great detail in Committee, and as I pointed out, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) chose—sadly—to hog the discussion for various purposes, but mainly to hold up the Bill's progress. That showed great discourtesy to those Conservative and Labour Members who wanted to make proper contributions to the debate—including, no doubt, some challenging questions for me in my role as the Minister tabling amendments. I recall that the Chairman of the Standing Committee urged the hon. Gentleman on several occasions—some 15 times in respect of the first group of amendments—to make progress. That shows the real concern that exists about such bad behaviour in Committee. The Liberal Democrats' sole purpose—*[Interruption.]* They are muttering because they are embarrassed. Their sole purpose was to oppose the Bill as amended by the Government. They opposed the idea of an additional useful, and perhaps minor, weapon in the armoury against antisocial behaviour.

I find that approach troublesome, because it would have been good if we could have returned to our constituencies tonight and—in my advice surgery this evening, for example—reassured our constituents that Parliament was taking their views seriously and had now sent to the House of Lords a serious measure that had been usefully amended. Sadly, that may not be possible now because of the tactics of the Liberal Democrats.

In drawing my remarks on the amendments to a conclusion, it is not unfair for me to say that in our constituencies, whether those be in Croydon or Surbiton, it will be the abusers, the bullies, the harassers and the thugs who will be pleased by the Liberal Democrats' performance both today and in Committee. That is not just political rhetoric; I say it with more sorrow than anger.

The Liberal Democrats' political tactics on the Bill will come back to haunt them. This must be the first case in our democracy of Liberals writing the manifestos of their political opponents for the next general election. The people who are crying out for decent social policy and decent law to stem the tide of antisocial behaviour will be aghast at their tactics today.

Mr. Webb: Faced with a bad Bill, we have a duty to scrutinise it and, if it should come to a vote, to oppose it. We make no apology for that, because we would be doing the victims of antisocial behaviour no service by passing bad legislation that will make a bad problem worse.

Our amendment No. 19 says that a court should make a declaration and pave the way for cutting housing benefit only if it is convinced that doing so will not lead to further reoffending. How can anyone oppose that? If the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) is so confident that his measure will reduce antisocial behaviour, he should also be confident that that test would always be passed. If it were, the courts would always make the declarations and we would not have stopped the process. Our amendment would bite only if a court of law—which would presumably be on the side of justice rather than on the side of the offender—thought that the declaration would not help to reduce reoffending. In that case the declaration should certainly be stopped, so what could possibly be wrong with the amendment?

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the fear and worry caused by the prospect of losing their home would be likely to stop people reoffending?

Mr. Webb: I do not deny for a moment that some individuals might be affected by that threat, but others will carry on regardless. They may be pushed from one neighbourhood to another, causing mayhem wherever they go. Critically, that might undermine attempts to make them less likely to reoffend. For example, the evidence suggests that antisocial behaviour is often linked with the abuse of drugs and alcohol. How are the support services ever to solve those problems if we keep shunting people from one place to another? That simply mucks up the support services and wrecks any chance those people may have of building up a relationship with the professionals who might have been able to help to solve their problems.

It is no good Members of Parliament pretending that some of us are the good guys and the others are the bad guys. We are all against antisocial behaviour—but we oppose a Bill that will make matters worse, and is not on the side of the victims.

Mr. Frank Field: Why does the hon. Gentleman say that the Bill will make matters worse, when his hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) said that no matters would ever be referred to the courts? Either one Liberal Democrat is right or the other is; they cannot both be right.

Mr. Webb: The right hon. Gentleman must have misheard my hon. Friend; that is not what I understood him to say.

Lawrie Quinn: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the migration problem when people are moved from one neighbourhood to another. Does he realise that the movement of people from one seaside resort to another is now being encouraged by absentee landlords who are trying to milk the system? What answer does he have for my constituents who have asked me to come here today and support the Bill? What does he think I should tell them?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly fair point. As he has discovered from earlier interventions, the parts of the Bill that deal with landlords have been removed, so nothing in the Bill deals with the point that he makes. However, a document from the former

[Mr. Webb]

Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions on tackling antisocial tenants makes proposals that would help deal with landlords who do not take their responsibilities seriously.

Mr. Field: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: I should like to pick up on one of the Minister's points, if I may. The hon. Gentleman made a perfectly fair point about the relative merits of our amendment as against other ways of assessing whether these measures would lead to more or less antisocial behaviour. He said that the court should not make this decision because there would be an administrative cost in getting all the information that it needed, which would slow the court down, but he did not say who would take the decision. The Secretary of State and his representatives decide whether taking this action is likely to reduce reoffending, but are we talking about a housing benefit officer or someone representing the Secretary of State?

Malcolm Wicks *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Webb: The Minister shakes his head. I am not clear who will take the decision, and I am happy to give way if he can tell me who will.

Malcolm Wicks: The hon. Gentleman has not followed the discussions, of course, because he was not in Committee. The court makes the judgment as to whether behaviour is antisocial. There will then be an automatic sanction policy. If the hon. Gentleman had followed the details instead of trying to hold up proceedings, he would understand that point.

Mr. Webb: I am not sure whether my five-minute contribution has played a major part in this delay. Indeed, it was certainly not my hon. Friends who delayed the debate in Committee.

When cutting housing benefit is considered, the test should be whether such action would help. We should all agree on that. We believe that the court should make that decision because it is the only place where all the information about the person accused of the offences is present. The court has access to what the probation officers say and the social inquiry report. No one else has that information.

Mr. Tom Harris: Does the hon. Gentleman believe, to take a parallel situation, that the fixed penalty for a speeding offence should be imposed only if the court is convinced that it will reduce someone's speed in future?

Mr. Webb: The difference is that, under these measures, people will lose the roof over their heads. That is more likely to affect the possibility of someone reoffending than whether they incur a fine for speeding. The order of magnitude is completely different.

Mr. Frank Field: I just wanted to take the hon. Gentleman back to his argument. It is clear who makes the decision—it is the court.

Mr. Webb: We are saying that the court should make that decision based on a further test which, according to the right hon. Gentleman, will always be passed. If the right hon. Gentleman is empirically correct that imposing these sanctions will reduce the likelihood of further antisocial behaviour, the test that we are trying to impose will never stop things. We believe that if the court considers the evidence independently and decides that imposing a penalty will not make a difference or will actually make things worse, it will not have to do so. That is the discretion that we want for the courts, which have the ability to consider all the circumstances.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: No, I do not want to delay the House any further.

There are issues in this group of amendments that need further scrutiny. However, we cannot say that the Bill has come to the House completely different from how it was on Second Reading and the first day of its Committee stage. It has had one day of Committee scrutiny and an hour or so today. We should never let legislation go any further without proper scrutiny, especially when it is bad legislation like this Bill.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Edward Davey: I beg to move amendment No. 17, in page 1, line 9, at end insert—

'and provide written evidence of that anti-social conduct'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 18, in page 1, line 13, after "convictions", insert—

'and by reason of the written evidence it has considered as to the specific anti-social conduct concerned,'.

No. 20, in clause 2, page 2, line 35, after "behaved", insert—

'and has considered written evidence of the anti-social conduct'.

No. 23, in page 2, line 40, at end insert—

'(6) Where a court is minded to make an order under this section and it forms the view that any person against whom the order is intended is unable to represent himself properly and is not otherwise represented, the court shall adjourn the proceedings to give any such person the opportunity of securing legal representation.'.

Mr. Davey: The amendments seek to ensure that the court has written evidence of antisocial conduct. As the Bill stands, the court will make the declaration following discussions on whether the person should be convicted of the crime of which they are accused, not related to any antisocial behaviour. The only test for antisocial behaviour is whether someone could have been responsible for antisocial behaviour at the same time as committing a crime. No evidence is required for the court to judge whether antisocial behaviour occurred. All we want to do is to ensure that there is written evidence before the court, so I would like—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

Remaining Private Members Bills

PENSIONS ANNUITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order read for further consideration, as amended (in the Standing Committee).

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Home Energy (Conservation) Bill seems to have disappeared from the Order Paper. Can you confirm that it was withdrawn by order of the promoter of the Bill, under pressure from Government Whips? How much has it cost the taxpayer for the Bill to go through so many of its parliamentary stages, and would you agree that it is a denial of the sovereignty of Parliament that a Bill supported by the votes of a majority of the House should be cut by a Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The hon. Gentleman has obviously not consulted the *Official Report* as I ruled on that matter on a point of order yesterday. The later questions that he asked cannot possibly be matters on which the Chair could comment.

Further consideration what day? No day named.

PRIME MINISTER (OFFICE, ROLE AND FUNCTIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

FOOD POVERTY (ERADICATION) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

HOUSING (WALES) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

MOTOR VEHICLES (PROHIBITION ON USE OF HAND-HELD MOBILE TELEPHONES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 15 November.

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

TRAVEL CONCESSIONS (YOUNG PERSONS) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

ENDANGERED SPECIES (ILLEGAL TRADE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

MUSEUMS BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

ALCOHOL SERVICES BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

WASTE BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

FIXED-TERM PARLIAMENTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there anything in our rules or procedures to protect the House against Members who allow their Bills to be on the Order Paper, thus raising expectations among other Members and people outside, but who gratuitously fail to be here on the day so that their Bill has no chance of making progress? Is there anything that can protect us from that casual attitude of Members to the House of Commons?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As in all matters, all hon. Members are expected to behave in a responsible way and are entirely responsible for their conduct in the House.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there any way that one can place on record the fact that, so far at least, the vast majority of Members who have not shown up to move their Bills—if not all of them—are Labour Members?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that the *Official Report* will show precisely what has happened and people may make their own interpretation.

David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If some Members have

[David Maclean]

been unavoidably detained and thus unable to be here to move their Bills, would it be possible for other Members, who may have an interest in the matter to move the Bills in their place?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that that procedure has already been demonstrated and is in order.

RELATIONSHIPS (CIVIL REGISTRATION) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

HEALTH (AIR TRAVELLERS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [25 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

ROAD SAFETY AND SPEED BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

TRESPASSERS ON LAND (LIABILITY FOR DAMAGE AND EVICTION)

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not the normal convention that if a Member is moving a Bill on behalf of another hon. Member, they should say that they have the consent of the Member concerned?

Hon. Members: Wrong again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Not on the question whether the Bill is moved, no.

RIGHT TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND REMEDIES BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

AGE DISCRIMINATION (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 14 November.

TREASON FELONY, ACT OF SETTLEMENT AND PARLIAMENTARY OATH BILL

Order for Second Reading read—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you could advise me. We have so far had three Bills this afternoon in respect of which Her Majesty had to go to the trouble to give her consent to allow us to proceed to Second Reading. Is it not appalling that, Her Majesty having gone to that trouble, we do not now have the opportunity as a House to consider those three Bills? Could you advise me how we may enable those three Bills to be discussed and considered in the House after Her Majesty has gone to such trouble?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Dr. Julian Lewis: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance once again. Is there any way in which at least we can place on the record the fact that now, Labour Back Benchers' Bills are being killed by their own Government Whips?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think the hon. Gentleman has just done so.

HEALTH REFORM (EDUCATION AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

PRESCRIPTIONS (CHRONIC DISEASES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 14 November.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Many of us are used to this end-of-term cull of good prospective legislation—[Hon. Members: "Oh."]—by the Government. To which Committee would we refer the question whether we could make the Government give reasons for objections when they make them?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The only advice that I can give the hon. Gentleman is that he might take this up with the Procedure Committee. I am sure that the Chairman would be pleased to hear from him.

FIREARMS (REPLICA WEAPONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

BROADCASTING ACT 1990 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

FOOD LABELLING BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [15 March].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

VACCINATION OF CHILDREN (PARENTAL CHOICE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Mr. Dismore: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As hon. Members have moved Bills in the names of other Members who are not present without indicating whether they have the consent of those Members, which is the usual courtesy, can we assume that they are doing so without the Member's consent?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not an assumption on which the occupant of the Chair can comment.

PATIENTS WITHOUT LEGAL CAPACITY (SAFEGUARDS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): I beg to move formally, with the consent of the hon. Member concerned.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

REGULATION OF CHILD CARE PROVIDERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 14 November.

AREA CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

DATA PROTECTION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No named day.

SHOPS BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

FOOD SAFETY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

WASTE (No.2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

HEALTH (AIR TRAVELLERS) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS TRANSMITTERS (RESTRICTIONS ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My constituents are crying out for this Bill, and I have had inquiries about it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman cannot engage in a debate now. He could have done so if he had been given the opportunity, but he cannot do so now.

ANIMAL SANCTUARIES (LICENSING) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

ORGAN DONATION (PRESUMED CONSENT AND SAFEGUARDS) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Mrs. Gillan: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So far we have dealt with 41 Bills on the Order Paper, many of which have been moved by my hon. Friends or myself. In particular, three of the Bills that stand in my name—those on the health of air travellers, which covers deep vein thrombosis; on animal sanctuaries, the proper regulation of which is a matter close to all our hearts; and, lastly and most seriously, on organ donation—have all been objected to by the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Jim Fitzpatrick), who is a Government Whip.

We are rapidly approaching the 44th Bill on the Order Paper—the Control of Fireworks (No. 2) Bill. Although it may not be as important as the other three of my Bills to which the Government Whip has already objected, it deals with some important safety matters that affect my constituency and those of every other Member. Can you advise me whether there is any way in which I can prevent the Government from blocking further discussion of that Bill in the cavalier fashion that they have exhibited today?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that the hon. Lady knows the answer to her own question. Under the procedures of the House, many Bills—good or bad—do not get the time that their promoters and sponsors perhaps think would be sufficient for them.

LITTER AND FOULING OF LAND BY DOGS (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Mr. Swayne: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can the record show that it was the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Jim Fitzpatrick), who objected to all three of my highly worthy Bills?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The discerning reader of the *Official Report* may well make that assumption.

TRAVELLER LAW REFORM BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

CONTROL OF FIREWORKS (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 15 November.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid–Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would you confirm that the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Jim Fitzpatrick), a Government Whip, has objected to a Bill that has been supported by five Ministers and the majority of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can only confirm that I received an objection and that it was taken.

FIREARMS (AMENDMENT) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would you not agree, and is there any way of making it absolutely clear, that the Government have objected to this Bill, which would attempt to make it much more difficult for irresponsible teenagers to fire air guns at animals and at people, thereby causing injury? Is it not a disgrace that the Government are against that sort of sensible measure to protect the public?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As I think the hon. Gentleman appreciates, those are not matters on which the Chair can comment.

CRIMINAL EVIDENCE (PROHIBITION OF SALE) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Dr. Julian Lewis: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there any way in which I can show for the record that a Government Whip has just blocked a Bill that was modelled on another that arose out of the terrible Fred West murders case?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No more than in the words that the hon. Gentleman has used.

Claire Ward (Watford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there any way in which I can place on the record the fact that the points of order made by Opposition Members today are a pantomime, given that when they were in government they objected to private Members' Bills in exactly the same way? The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), who is on the Opposition Front Bench, has a considerable record of many years of objecting to private Members' Bills.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid–Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would you confirm that Opposition Members and Labour Members have been consistently trying to get the Home Energy Conservation (No. 2) Bill through all its stages during this Session? The Government have gone against the sovereign will of Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We must not get involved in debate on particular measures. The official record shows precisely what has happened throughout this Session.

RAPE (CONSENT) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. By my reckoning, the Government have today callously killed 33 private Member's Bills. Can you confirm whether that is a record? It strikes me that this Government have excelled more than any other in the heartless and inconsiderate killing off of these Bills, many of which my hon. Friends obviously cared about and took the trouble to bring to the House only to find the hopes of many people outside the House dashed by the Government and the Government Whip.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I cannot answer off the cuff from the Chair the question that the right hon. Gentleman has posed. I dare say, however, that that information can be unearthed with a degree of research.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am conscious that the Government have objected to both the Food Labelling Bill and the Food Safety (Amendment) Bill in the extraordinary calumny this afternoon of defeating more than 30 Bills of good measures. I have a record of taking a keen interest in those particular matters on behalf of my constituents and consumers throughout the country. The Government have always proclaimed, but, clearly, by their actions, they are not prepared to follow through, their concern for the safety of the public in terms of the food that they eat and the protection of farmers' interests—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. First, the hon. Gentleman cannot enter into a debate on the substance of these measures. Secondly, there is still some time left in this Session, and I do not think that he needs advice from me on the opportunities that may be available to raise the subjects in which he is interested.

Britain's Muslims

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

2.50 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Since I was elected to the House, a number of Adjournment debates have explored issues of concern to specific communities. Among the most recent was a debate on Sikhs in Britain that was initiated by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). In discussion with my constituents, a series of concerns affecting the Muslim community have been raised with me. I am therefore grateful that Mr. Speaker saw fit to grant me this opportunity to highlight its concerns.

Islam is one of the world's great religions. "Islam" derives from the word for peace, and it involves allegiance to God and to his prophet Mohammed, and the Koran sets out the teaching of Mohammed as relayed to him by God. There are five pillars of the Islamic faith. Shahada is the profession of faith, and salat is the formal act of worship. Zakat is the giving of alms to the poor and is assessed on the basis that all adult Muslims give 2.5 per cent. of their capital assets once a year. The hajj is the pilgrimage to Mecca, which every Muslim is supposed to undertake at least once in their lifetime. I understand that an estimated 20,000 British Muslims undertake it each year. Sawn is fasting during Ramadan.

There have been Muslims in Britain for centuries. It is worth placing it on record that Britain's first mosque was established in Woking in 1889, and London's first mosque was built in 1941. An estimated 1.2 million to 1.8 million people of Muslim faith are in the United Kingdom, with an estimated 675,000 to 780,000 Muslims actively attending one of the 660 mosques in the UK.

There are three mosques in my borough. The oldest is Harrow central mosque, which has been active for 20 years. It developed from one house that was converted into a mosque, and it gradually extended as other neighbouring properties were bought and adapted. The mosque is used predominantly by Sunni Muslims. The second mosque is in Stanmore, in the neighbouring constituency of the Under-Secretary of State for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), and it is used mainly by Shia Muslims. The third mosque, the Mehfil Ali mosque in north Harrow, is in my constituency and it has been in use for 10 years. It is used predominantly by Shia Muslims, and by Sunni Muslims as well. The three mosques serve an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Muslims, who are also served by a variety of other local cultural and social organisations for which a key co-ordinating body is the Middlesex Muslim forum, which was set up two years ago to promote dialogue within local Muslim organisations and between the local Muslim community and decision makers. In particular, I commend the work of Riaz and Razir Esmail for their establishment of the forum and for keeping it as active as it is.

In 1997, the Runnymede Trust published a report, "Islamophobia: a challenge for us all", which described Islamophobia as an unfounded hostility to or dread of Islam. It considered the practical consequences of such hostility. They include the unfair discrimination against Muslims in the provision of services; the violence, verbal abuse and vandalism of property that takes place simply because someone is a Muslim; the exclusion of Muslims from employment and senior management positions and from the political process; as well as prejudice in the media and in everyday conversation.

The Runnymede Trust rightly drew a distinction between unfounded hostility to Islam and an entirely legitimate and democratic disagreement with elements of Islamic faith or particular Muslim organisations or activities. It is certainly not wrong to challenge or criticise the speeches of one or two extreme clerics and the activities of their adherents, but it is patent nonsense to think that they reflect the opinions of the vast majority of Muslims in my constituency or more generally.

As a prelude to a week of articles that explored the depth and breadth of the Muslim community in Britain, the opening paragraph of a leading article in *The Guardian* a month ago reflected the concerns of many Muslims in my constituency. It said:

> "Muslims have been on the receiving end of so many accusations over the last year that it sometimes requires an extra effort to see past the stereotypes".

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): On that point, would the hon. Gentleman like to pay tribute to the work of imams in my constituency and throughout the country, who rightly made it clear in the aftermath of 11 September that the actions on that day were in no way representative of the real teachings of Islam?

Mr. Thomas: I pay tribute to the imams in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and endorse his general comments.

The Guardian article continued:

> "At home . . . since September 11, Muslims have been placed under an often unforgiving spotlight. They have been depicted as angry and alienated, united in opposition to modernity and tolerance, and as people who choose to live culturally separate lives involving a minimum of interconnection with our values . . . To others, Muslims are already the enemy within, a fifth column."

I think that that analysis is perhaps somewhat over the top, but it is undoubtedly true that Muslims in Britain are looking at Members in this place to take further action to tackle the consequences of the religious and racial discrimination that the community continues to experience in Britain. I think that they are right to do so.

It would be useful, for example, if the Press Complaints Commission were to consider how the Muslim community has been reported, especially over the past nine months or so. The new head of the commission might want to undertake that task. I have asked a series of parliamentary questions over the past 18 months about discrimination against Muslims and the Government's response. I welcome the progress that has been made since 1997, but through this debate I hope to encourage the Government to go further.

During the series of articles in *The Guardian* on the Muslim community, a poll of British Muslim was featured. A third of all Muslims say that they or their families have been abused because of their faith. It is too soon for any analysis to be made of attacks on Muslims since 11 September, but anecdotal evidence of a rise in the number of attacks—especially on visible Muslims such as those wearing traditional dress, for example—has circulated in the media and within the Muslim community. Similarly, anecdotal reports of a rise in vandalism against mosques have been noted.

I am pleased to say that there have not been significant problems for the local Muslim community in Harrow since 11 September, not least because of the strong partnership that exists between local community organisations, led by Harrow Council for Racial Equality, and the local police. I commend the ongoing work of Asad Omar, who is one of my constituents. He has recently been elected as a local councillor for his leadership in the community. I commend also the leadership of the local police. I hope that such positive partnership working will continue to be encouraged, particularly throughout the Metropolitan police area.

The Runneymede Trust report chronicled the level of racial harassment and violence back in 1997, supporting the intention, now implemented, of new legislation to make racial violence a specific offence. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will outline the further efforts that are being made to bring the perpetrators of racially motivated crime, particularly against Muslims, to justice, and to improve the recruitment of members of the Muslim community into the police and the wider criminal justice system.

The trust recommended even in 1997 that incitement to religious hatred should be made unlawful, and that when sentencing offenders for crimes of violence or harassment, courts should formally treat evidence of religious hatred as an aggravating factor. I welcome the fact that the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 created new religiously aggravated offences including assaults, threatening behaviour and criminal damage, and provided that there should be greater penalties where there is evidence of religious hatred. I hope that my hon. Friend will detail how the courts, police and prosecuting authorities are being trained to use those powers. I welcome the fact that the Act increased the penalty for inciting racial hatred from a maximum of two years to seven years in prison. Like many Labour Members, I was disappointed that the proposal to make incitement to religious hatred an offence had to be dropped from the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act because of opposition in the other place. I welcome the decision by Lord Avebury and my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin) to reintroduce those provisions in private Members' Bills, which will keep the debate and the argument for the measure moving forward. It is worth restating that similar provisions have existed in Northern Ireland since 1987, and that the Bills would prevent only religious hatred, not comedy or genuine religious debate, as some feared when the proposals were first mooted last year. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that we remain committed to legislation when time allows.

In its report, the Runnymede Trust chronicled the under-representation of Muslims in political life. The situation has changed since the trust first began its work on the report, with the elections of my hon. Friends the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) and for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) and the appointment of four new Muslim peers to the House of Lords. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in welcoming the formation of an all-party friends of Islam group to consider issues of importance to the Muslim community on a cross-party basis. It is essential to take further action to stimulate dialogue and understanding and to encourage active debate between representatives of the Muslim community at all levels of government.

One issue that the all-party group will want to consider is the extent to which our efforts to modernise and reform public services to make them more client-focused are succeeding in respect of the Muslim community. I hope that my hon. Friend will explain how Muslim organisations, charities, cultural organisations and other independent sector Muslim groups are being invited to work in partnership with Government—for example, to prevent crime and to improve our delivery of health care, education and employment. In its report, the Runnymede Trust undertook a comprehensive examination of the extent to which Britain was making progress towards being an inclusive society for the Muslim community. It highlighted concerns across public services, noting the sharp rise in the number of Muslim men in prison and the fact that unemployment levels for those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin were considerably higher proportionately than for other people. The trust also highlighted work by the Policy Studies Institute, again noting the relatively greater disadvantage of Pakistani and Bangladeshi families in housing and public health, and called for further research to explore the level of opportunity for Muslims to hold senior staff positions in local government and in the civil service and to be appointed to quangos.

The report also drew attention to examples of where public services could be more finely honed for the Muslim community. To pick out two specific examples, Muslim women often do not use mainstream leisure services as they want to take advantage of women-only sessions and want such sessions to be entirely private. Although providers of leisure services are increasingly providing women-only swimming sessions, some are neither entirely private nor have women lifeguards. What may seem to many outside the House to be trivial concerns are of considerable importance to the Muslim community, who are as a result unable to partake of such mainstream services. It would not take a rocket scientist to address that issue, and more effective dialogue with the Muslim community could produce improvements to services from which all women would benefit.

Another example concerns the burial of Muslims. Islam requires the early burial of a dead relative, ideally within 24 hours. Most local authority cemeteries are geared up for speedy burials during the traditional working week, but the facility to provide early burial at weekends is much more problematic and patchy. Local authorities with significant Muslim communities need to be encouraged to consider how such issues can be considered further. Perhaps the Government might encourage local government, through the best value process, to consider the issues in more detail in those areas where there are significant Muslim communities. I also hope that my hon. Friend can say what preparations are being made to implement the welcome EC employment directive outlawing discrimination in employment and training on the grounds of religion.

Lastly, will my hon. Friend consider, in the reviews of planning law, whether proposals for new mosques, or extensions to mosques, can be dealt with more appropriately, so that the needs of local communities and worshippers are addressed effectively? We need to ensure that proposals for mosques do not become the source of tension within communities. Of course licensing should properly reflect the needs of neighbours, but it must also reflect the observance of key religious traditions.

Since my election to the House, I have seen it as my role to speak up for the people of Harrow, West; to raise key local concerns about public services; to resist

[Mr. Thomas]

proposals that will have a damaging impact on my constituency; and to raise wider concerns about the Government's work. Members of the Muslim community in my constituency have raised those concerns with me, and it is right that they have an airing in the House. I look forward to my hon. Friend's response.

3.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Wills): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on securing the debate. It is clearly an important subject for his constituents and he has shown characteristic diligence and assiduity in pursuing their concerns. However, the subject is important for the country as a whole.

The Government have a clear vision of a multicultural and multifaith Britain; a truly dynamic society that values the contribution made by each of our many diverse communities. We have a pluralistic view of our national identity, in which Muslims and representatives of all communities come together under the broad heading of our British identity. It is vital to ensure that all communities live and work together, and retain their distinctive identities, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Since the events of 11 September, that vision has been tested in various ways. The hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) rightly stated that those events and those who perpetrated them are in no way representative of Islam, and I want to stress how much the Government agree with him.

British Muslims bring with them a strong and inspiring history of academic, scientific and cultural achievement which enriches all of us in Britain today. There has been a significant Muslim presence in Britain for at least 300 years. Britain's first mosque was established in 1889. The site for the Regent's Park mosque was donated by the British Government in 1944. Today more than 1,000 mosques serve the 2 million or so British Muslims.

It is particularly important that we celebrate the Muslim community's contribution—socially, culturally and economically—to the stability and prosperity of British society. Islam is thriving within Britain as a religion, and many people are converting to it because they find in it both spiritual enlightenment and personal freedom. That is why Islamophobia is such a cancer and why we must tackle it. The Government have a role to play, but so has the rest of society. We have to ensure that we are engaged with the Muslim community in many ways. We need to stress over and over again that those terrible events on 11 September last year had nothing to do with Islam.

The hon. Member for Wycombe drew attention to his constituents' condemnation of those terrible atrocities. The general response of British Muslims in condemning those atrocities reminds us of the real Islam: an Islam of peace, tolerance and understanding.

That is why the Government find the unprovoked attacks on Muslims so repugnant. We all need to understand that careless use of Islamophobic language and images causes great suffering in Muslim communities. In the worst cases, it influences those who abuse and attack Muslims. It has no place to our society.

My hon. Friend drew attention to the fact that we must engage with the anxieties of Muslims and other minority faiths about religious discrimination. We must consider the case for it to be made subject to the law. That inevitably raises many difficult, sensitive and complex questions to which there are no easy answers or quick fixes. The Government are determined to take a strong lead in eliminating all forms of discrimination and intolerance. We are therefore tackling religious discrimination in several ways.

My hon. Friend referred to article 13 of the EC employment directive. As hon. Members know, it outlaws discrimination in employment and training on grounds that include religion. We are committed to implementing it by 2 December 2003.

The Department of Trade and Industry issued a consultation paper on implementing the directive last autumn. It is now analysing the responses with a view to drafting regulations and related good practice guidance, on which it will consult later this year.

We are also tackling religious discrimination through the Human Rights Act 1998. We incorporated the European convention on human rights into UK law on 2 October 2000. We believe that it will help to create a new culture of rights and responsibilities in Britain, including people's rights to hold or manifest their religion or belief. The Act changes the nature of the debate on religious discrimination that must take place in the light of the developing human rights culture.

As hon. Members know, in the aftermath of 11 September, the Government tried to introduce proposals to extend the law to make incitement to religious hatred a criminal offence. That was part of our measured response to counter those who exploit the fears that terrorism raises.

We tried to protect those who risked assault or abuse because of their religious beliefs. The proposals would have expanded the current law on incitement to racial hatred. However, opposition in another place unfortunately meant that the proposals could not be made law. We await with interest the outcome of the deliberations of the Select Committee on Home Affairs on Lord Avebury's Bill, which covers much of the same ground.

As my hon. Friend said, the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 created new religiously aggravated offences. They include assaults, threatening behaviour and criminal damage, and they carry higher maximum penalties when there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with them. We believe that that will play an important part in tackling the problem.

As my hon. Friend knows, we need to continue to engage, and practical information is important to doing that. The 2001 census therefore included a question about religious affiliation. It will provide important data on Britain's minority faith communities. It is also symbolically important because it acknowledged the importance of faith identity. The responses to the question will help inform the planning and delivery of services that are sensitive to the needs of faith communities. I gather from my hon. Friend's remarks that he is especially concerned about that. As hon. Members know, the results of the census are due in February next year.

Legislation alone is not enough. We are considering a complex and crucial matter. We cannot achieve everything through law. We need to affect our culture, and that means adopting a comprehensive approach in which education, training and a greater effort to teach more in schools about the diversity of faith will play an important part.

Mr. Goodman: Is the Minister aware of the expressed desire of many of my Muslim constituents for either an Islamic school or a girls school in the area, and will he speak to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about making it generally easier to establish such schools?

Mr. Wills: The hon. Gentleman might be aware that we are introducing measures to encourage the establishment of faith schools, which we think are an important means of engaging people in the community. In return for receiving state funding, they undertake to subscribe to the national curriculum and various other provisions. That is an important way in which we can integrate minority faiths into our society and bring both sides together. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills is aware of the hon. Gentleman's constituents' desires.

We need to do more to encourage in young people an understanding of different faiths and the importance of the richness they bring to our society. From September, citizenship will form part of young people's education. For the first time, pupils will be taught as part of the national curriculum about the diversity of identities in the UK, about the importance of the fact that we in this country have plural national identities, and, critically, about the need for mutual respect and understanding.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West referred to the need to engage with faith communities across the spectrum, including in the delivery of public services, which is critical. The Government are reviewing the way in which we interface with the faith communities. We shall ensure improved consultation and participation and the presence of appropriate faith communities at major national events, and we will build on that. In the context of the jubilee there was a remarkable reception for faith communities at Buckingham palace, involving 700 members of the main world faiths from all parts of the United Kingdom. It was the first time that such a gathering had taken place.

All the main faiths share core values of peace, tolerance and helping others—all essential elements of social cohesion. The participation of faith communities in interfaith dialogue and activity plays a critical role in building and sustaining cohesive communities. We know that the process is not always easy. The disturbances last summer in some northern towns showed that some things can fracture communities and trigger violence. It is vital that attempts by the British National party and others to create divisions along ethnic or religious lines do not succeed, and the obligation to ensure that they do not rests on the Government in particular, and on every member of our society. Such divisiveness is cruelly destructive of the cohesive communities that we all want.

Faith community leaders at national, regional and local level have a responsibility to show others the way forward by their good example. That is currently an active process in my Swindon constituency. As a Government, we have to play our part by giving leadership, by listening and by responding, and I assure my hon. Friend that we are determined to do that. We recently published a guide for local authorities, "Faith and Community", which we believe will assist in the process.

My hon. Friend spoke of the need for the media to play their part. That is crucial because people's view of the world is in large part seen through the eyes of the media. Whatever politicians do or say, people are often far more informed by what they see on television or read in their newspaper, so my hon. Friend makes an important point when he says that the governing bodies responsible for the media, both print and broadcast, also have a role to play.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport was similarly concerned, and facilitated a meeting following the events of 11 September between Muslim leaders and the Press Complaints Commission and the broadcasting authorities about the portrayal of Muslims in the media. I am sure that the dialogue will continue and I hope that we will see an accurate reflection of our communities in the media.

Our relations with the Muslim community are extremely important to the Government and we will continue to strive to improve them. We want our Muslim community to find in the Government not only a sympathetic ear but a friend, willing to do all that we can to make Britain a safe and fulfilling place in which to live.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 22 July 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

INQUIRY INTO FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE 2001

Ordered,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there shall be laid before this House a Return of the Report, evidence and supporting papers of the Inquiry into Foot and Mouth Disease 2001: Lessons to be Learned, conducted by Dr. Iain Anderson.—*[Mr. Kemp]*

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Bill

1. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): If she will make a statement on her policy towards the licensing of televising of sport in public houses under the terms of the proposed Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Bill. [68956]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): As is the case with existing legislation, the proposed Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Bill will not include the licensing of the televising of sport in public houses in its definition of public entertainment. A publican, of course, already requires and will continue to require a normal domestic television licence.

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. However, given the licensing disparity between televised football and live music in pubs—the former is subject to no regulation but the latter is subject to a complicated regulation mechanism—will he encourage members of the Cabinet to look at introducing legislation in the Queen's Speech that will reform the public entertainment licence system and encourage live music and particularly young musicians in small venues?

Dr. Howells: We will certainly look at getting rid of the absurd two in a bar rule. I have looked long and hard at the evidence, but we have never received any to suggest that watching television in a pub causes the kinds of scenes that have sometimes occurred in pubs with live music. Nor, indeed, have we had any reports of disturbances caused by watching television in a pub—we have certainly received some reports of incidents following the playing of live music in pubs. Generally speaking, however, pubs are excellent venues for live music. We want to make sure that that continues to be the case and that there are more venues for live music, not fewer.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Following that very welcome answer, does my hon. Friend agree that the distinction between two musicians and seven musicians is irrelevant, and that the real issue is the amount of noise? A string quartet or an unamplified jazz group should be perfectly acceptable in a pub, should people choose to listen to them. Does he also agree that more venues for live music would give work to tens of thousands of amateur musicians and increase our country's cultural richness?

Dr. Howells: I am very much in favour of live music in pubs, but I am not in favour of any Minister in Parliament trying to define what constitutes jazz, folk music or any other kind of music. I have been the victim of one man with an amplifier that nearly blew my head off.

Mr. Speaker: Question 2. Mr. Mole is not here.

Lottery

3. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): If she will make a statement on the changes in the number of lottery tickets purchased over the last two years. [68959]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): Total national lottery sales in the financial year 2001 to 2002 were £4,000—*[Interruption.]* I am terribly sorry, £4,983 billion—I am terribly sorry; wrong glasses—£4,983 million. In the last financial year, they were £4,834 million—a fall of 3 per cent.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the national lottery is obviously a little less popular than it once was, would the Secretary of State remind the public that it performs a great service in providing about £2,500 to worthwhile causes every single minute of the day? In particular, would she bear in mind the fact that in the Republic of Ireland, where spread betting on lotteries was introduced, the income of the lottery has been reduced by more than 20 per cent? Could she therefore give a clear assurance that after the gambling review, the Government will not introduce spread betting in Britain, observing that that practice is purely gambling in bookmakers and does not give any help to worthwhile causes?

Tessa Jowell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue, which I know he has pursued very energetically. He will know that Sir Alan Budd's review of gambling law recommended opening up the possibility of side betting on the lottery. We considered carefully the potential impact on lottery sales if that reform were allowed. In view of the risk to lottery sales, we did not accept that recommendation, so we will not introduce legislation to allow side betting on the lottery.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that lottery proceeds need to be considered together with grant in aid, money derived from local authorities, money from European sources, charitable donations and box office receipts if we are to form an overall view of cultural funding? In congratulating her on the settlement that she secured in the spending review, may I put it to her that it is extremely important, as she considers the array of causes that deserve her Department's support, that she should be able to do substantially more for heritage and national museums and galleries?

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. Friend is right to say that from the public's point of view, the source of funding is largely undifferentiated. The public are keen to ensure only that public money is well spent. My right hon. Friend is well aware that we have always sought to draw a distinction—not always an easy distinction—in relation to lottery funding, regarding it as additional to Exchequer funding, and not as a replacement or substitute for Exchequer funding. He draws attention to the spending review announcements made last week. I know that as a former Minister for the Arts, he will welcome, as the arts community has welcomed, the settlement that we announced for the arts.

My right hon. Friend will be aware of our determination to ensure that national museums and galleries have the necessary funding to maintain the popular public policy of free entry, which has seen the number of people going to our national museums and galleries increase, in some cases, by up to 75 per cent. He will also be aware of our clear aim to increase the level of investment in regional museums and galleries—a long neglected quarter. We will make as much progress in that as we can. My right hon. Friend is right to welcome the settlement. It is important to maintain a clear distinction between lottery money, which is by and large a one-off, and Exchequer funding, which ensures sustainability in the public interest.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Does the Secretary of State share my concern about recent media reports that village shops that do not sell many lottery tickets may have their terminals withdrawn? Is she aware that in rural areas such as mine, where often the shop serves a few hundred houses, sales may not be that great, but the lottery terminal has an important role in making sure that there is footfall into those shops and that there is custom? Will the Secretary of State have words with the lottery operator to make sure that it sticks to its licence obligations and maintains a thorough network of terminals?

Tessa Jowell: As to the conduct of the lottery operator in accordance with its licence, the relationship is between the National Lottery Commission and Camelot. Yes, I am aware of the proposals by Camelot to withdraw terminals from a number of shops on the ground that they do not yield the maximum ticket sales. It is important to remember that, as with most of Camelot's decisions, that is a commercial decision. It is also important to remember that, as hon. Members on both sides of the House will understand, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of shops that are queueing to be awarded the licence to run a terminal. It is good for trade, as the hon. Gentleman makes clear. The important point is that we have secured protection for precisely the kind of communities to which he refers, and Camelot has agreed that in about 1,000 areas, considerations other than mere profitability will be brought to bear. Hon. Members who may be concerned should remember that even in isolated communities where there may be a threat of withdrawing the operating licence from one retailer, it is highly likely that there are other retailers in the same area who will be awarded a substitute licence because of the volume of demand to engage in such a highly profitable activity.

Motor Sport

4. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): If he will visit MSport to discuss the promotion of motor sport. [68960]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I will be going to the north-east to visit Cumbria and my hon. Friend's constituency before the end of the year to see the very exciting MSport scheme, which I understand employs between 150 and 200 highly skilled people and plays a major role in the economy.

Tony Cunningham: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure that Malcolm Wilson, the head of MSport, and the highly skilled work force at the facility will be absolutely delighted that he is coming to visit. The facility is superb; it is the headquarters of the Ford rallying team worldwide, and as he says, it has a highly skilled work force. Does he agree that motor sport plays a vital part in the economy not only nationally, but locally? Will he join me in congratulating the MSport team, which recently won the Kenyan safari rally with cars that were, of course, built entirely in my constituency?

Mr. Caborn: Before the sketch writers start writing, let me say that I should have referred to the north-west and not the north-east. I always get mixed up about Cumbria; in my days in regional policy, it used to be in the north-east, until we changed that in 1997, so I correct the sketch writers before they mention that tomorrow.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the success that our teams are having in both Formula 1 and rallying. The UK has seven of the top 11 teams in Formula 1 and four of the seven top rally teams, which shows that our engineers, mechanics and designers—and indeed our drivers—are probably the best in the world. I congratulate him on the support that he gives to the Ford company. Since its takeover in 1998, it has done a tremendous job for the economy and in the success that its teams have had around the world, including in rallying.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): May I join my right hon. Friend in congratulating MSport and the Ford rally team on their success, which, as he says, is another example of Britain's pre-eminence in motor sport generally? Does he agree, however, that although we currently lead the world in this field, there are signs of challenge from abroad? Will he explain to the House some of the practical steps that can be taken to ensure that British engineering, the British motor sport industry and British motor sport generally remain world class and ahead of the field?

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Over the past two or three years, we have seen the industry and the sport come together, especially in Formula 1, which I am very pleased to support. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry takes the same view—so much so that we will have a conference on 5 August with the industry and the sport to take forward the propositions that she has put to them.

On the rallying side, a lot can be gained by bringing sport and the industry together. My hon. Friend is right that a lot of people out there would like to get their hands on the centre of excellence here in the UK, which plays a tremendous role in the automobile industry not only in motor sport, but in the luxury and volume car markets. As we have said before, what happens today in Formula 1 happens in the luxury car market tomorrow and in the volume car market the day after. We must be ever mindful of that and I know that he is playing a major role as far as Formula 1 is concerned in making that happen.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): As the former Conservative candidate for Workington, I should like to add my personal congratulations to MSport. Obviously, as we stand today, we have the world's pre-eminent motor sport industry. Does the Minister regret that the lead Department for the future of the sport now appears to be the DTI and that his own Department is playing second fiddle?

Mr. Caborn: Ford was much more successful than the hon. Lady in using Workington as a launch pad to success. The matter is not about having a lead Department, but about partnership—something that is obviously very difficult for Opposition Members to understand. Departments can work together, although a lead Department is needed. Anybody who asks questions of the industry and the sport will find that they are saying very clearly that what is happening is very welcome. I do not know anybody in the industry or the sport who is criticising the role that the Government are playing in bringing those partnerships together. As I said, that is something to encourage, and I hope that she will encourage it, rather than knock it and shout from the sidelines. If all of us got behind our industries, such as Formula 1 and the rallying industry, the message of unity and partnership that would be sent out would be far better than denigration.

Entertainment Licences

5. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What plans she has to reduce the cost of entertainment licences for live music in pubs and clubs. [68961]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): Our plans for the modernisation of the alcohol and entertainment licensing regimes were set out clearly in the White Paper "Time for Reform". The proposed new licensing system will remove at a stroke a considerable amount of existing red tape and reduce the licensing costs that currently deter many venues from providing live music and dancing. The reforms will be implemented by means of primary legislation to be introduced as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Lawrie Quinn: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and for his recent excellent two-day visit to my constituency. [Hon. Members: "Two days?"] It is a big constituency. As he will remember, he had a listening brief on that occasion and, regretfully, turned down my invitation to go into some of the bars in Whitby to add his baritone voice to the great deal of notable folk-singing that goes on in the area. Next time he visits my constituency, will the people of Scarborough and Whitby be able to hear his lovely voice?

Dr. Howells: I could clear the entire Chamber within three bars.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): May I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 1182, tabled in my name? It has been signed by nearly 200 right hon. and hon. Members, which underlines the view across the House that it is a ridiculous law that needs to be amended at the first opportunity. May I extend a welcome to him to visit not only Scarborough but, in a spirit of amity across the Bristol channel, the Red Lion, just across the road, at 12 o'clock on Wednesday, where I, other hon. Members and Billy Bragg will be engaged in a little light singing that may or may not contravene the present law, but will serve to show what a ridiculous law it is?

Dr. Howells: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will turn out to be a star performer, but it all sounds a bit left-wing for me.

Local Commercial Radio

6. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What his policy is on the regulation of local commercial radio. [68963]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): We set out our policy for the future of radio regulation in the draft Communications Bill, which was published on 7 May. Our general approach to the radio industry and to the communications market in general is deregulatory. Format controls and ownership restrictions will both be relaxed. However, we recognise the importance of maintaining the distinctive local basis of commercial radio. We therefore propose to retain key local ownership rules and to give Ofcom a duty to protect and promote local character.

Mr. Blizzard: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. My area is very well served by local commercial radio stations such as Beach Radio and the local GWR stations. Does he agree that radio with a truly local focus is becoming increasingly popular? Such companies have welcomed many of the proposals in the draft Bill but, on the regulation of ownership, they ask why, if there is to be a requirement for at least three local cross-media owners, further specific ownership rules are needed for radio through the complex points system. Why are two layers of rules required for local radio?

Dr. Howells: I welcome my hon. Friend's support for our proposals in general, and assure him that we recognise the tremendous role that local radio plays in many respects. The three plus one formula to which he refers was adopted as a consequence of the commercial radio stations themselves saying a year ago that it was the best system. Now they are pushing the envelope and believe that it should be two plus one. We are in a consultation period, and if they come back to us with good arguments we will consider them carefully.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): Does the hon. Gentleman think that it makes sense to relax the rules on newspaper and TV ownership while maintaining such strict controls on radio? Does he accept that plurality of ownership and diversity of choice and listening can sometimes run up against each other, and that the potential of digital radio might be better fulfilled by allowing one company to put out three different radio formats instead of insisting that three serve up the same sort of middle of the road diet? Given that we have cross-media rules, general competition rules and licences based on content format, does Ofcom really need the additional sledgehammer of such clumsy radio-specific rules?

Dr. Howells: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), we are in a period of consultation and these are precisely the kinds of debates that we should have. I should like to think that we have adopted a wholly deregulatory role on radio, but I can see the sense in some of the hon. Gentleman's points. We will look at all of these arguments during consultation, and I hope that we will be able to come up with a set of regulations that will make the radio sector feel that it has been liberated rather than further constrained. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that I say that in good faith, because I want commercial radio to succeed. It is a great sector, and it has done some marvellous things for this country.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) is lucky to have two commercial stations. My constituency is stuck between two different FMs, so we have neither a commercial nor a decent public sector radio station. What is my hon. Friend the Minister's thinking on community radio, and on how such radio is to be paid for? I suspect that many more people will listen to community radio than currently listen to the BBC's digital radio, yet that is funded through the licence fee. Is there any chance that community radio could also be funded in that way?

Dr. Howells: I agree with my hon. Friend. Community radio—or access radio, as it is sometimes called—can add a great deal to the radio service in this country. How it should be funded is, however, a matter that we have to look at very carefully. In my constituency, for example, it gets funding from lots of different places. The university of Glamorgan puts money into it, as do various community funds, and there is a real sense of ownership of access radio as a consequence. I would hate to see that disappear. This is the kind of radio whose raison d'être is to be part of the community, to grow from it, and to feel that it is serving it. The community should, therefore, have a sense of owning it, and that is rather an important consequence in terms of the way in which it raises its funding.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Is the Minister completely happy with a system of regulation that allows the chairman of the body that regulates the BBC to share a platform with its director general at the launch of the annual report, and to use that platform to support Mr. Dyke against criticisms from MPs, bearing in mind that, in future, the equivalent procedure would be for the chairman of Ofcom to share a platform with the chief executive of BSkyB and to support Mr. Ball against other criticisms?

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman will be surprised to learn that I think it very important that there should be a difference between the executive of a broadcasting corporation and the regulator. I have always argued the case for a sense of independence for regulation, and for a separation of regulation. I am sure, however, that Mr. Greg Dyke needs nobody to defend him; he is perfectly capable of doing that himself.

Mr. Yeo: Does the Minister understand that he has just completely undermined the Government's position on the Ofcom Bill—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is out of order.

Archaeology

7. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): If she will make a statement on her Department's support for archaeological excavation and research in the UK. [68964]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): In the policy statement, "The Historic Environment: a Force for our Future", published in December 2001, the Government recognised archaeological remains as an integral part of the historic environment, and affirmed their commitment to the maintenance of an effective framework of statutory protection for all elements of that environment. That includes the continued funding of archaeological excavation and research. In 2001, the Department, via English Heritage, provided more than £11.6 million; that figure is likely to be more than £11.8 million for 2002.

Tim Loughton: The Minister will be aware that the all-party archaeology group has recently held a series of Select Committee hearings in the Lords with a number of people and groups involved in archaeology, from which it has become clear that British archaeology is in a state of crisis. Site and monument records are patchy throughout the country, and there is a real problem with archaeological education. There is also a lack of trained archaeologists—which is not surprising given that the average wage is just £13,000—and many archaeological sites are subject to deep ploughing without proper recording. Furthermore, when the British Museum celebrates its 250th anniversary next year, it will do so with 15 per cent. fewer staff than this year, and 30 per cent. less funding than it had 10 years ago. Will the Minister ensure that British archaeology is given a higher priority in his Department, and that some of the funding from the comprehensive spending review announced last week is used to that end?

Dr. Howells: My Department takes archaeology very seriously. The recently published Government statement entitled "The Historic Environment: a Force for our Future" fully acknowledges that archaeological remains from all periods constitute a key component in the historic environment, and includes a number of proposals to help improve understanding of that key component. The report on the state of the historic environment is also directly relevant to archaeological remains, and the statement does not overlook the importance of marine archaeology.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that we take the subject seriously, and that it will be taken into account in consideration about how money should be spent in the Department.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does not the brilliant and innovative, if gruesome and spine-chilling, restoration by the Guildhall of the Roman amphitheatre show what can be done? But what can be done to rescue archaeology when those practising it are not as well endowed as the City of London?

Dr. Howells: There are various funds. If my hon. Friend tells us of specific projects that he does not think are being given proper attention, we will certainly try to help however we can.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The Minister mentioned marine archaeology. He will know that under the National Heritage Act, which became law recently, responsibility for underwater archaeology is being transferred from his Department to English Heritage. Members on both sides of the House welcome that, but can the Minister assure us that appropriate funds will also be transferred? Indeed, given the backlog of work to be done on the subject, could a little more money be provided?

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. I congratulate him on the work that he himself did to ensure that the transfer was conducted with such speed and style, and assure him that we are well aware of the need to provide appropriate funds for marine archaeology, which is an important part of our heritage.

Museums (West Midlands)

8. **David Wright** (Telford): What assessment she has made of the development needs of museums in the west midlands. [68965]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts regularly meets Lord Evans of Temple Guiting, chairman of Resource: the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives, to discuss the needs of museums in all the English regions, including the west midlands.

David Wright: As my hon. Friend knows, my constituency contains the Ironbridge Gorge, which attracts some 300,000 visitors to Shropshire every year. Can he reassure me that he will work with his colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ensure that floods do not damage that UNESCO world heritage site?

Dr. Howells: Yes. As I am sure my hon. Friend knows, DEFRA has money for that great and vital project. We must make certain that what is now a world heritage site retains its status.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that he could boost tourism and help museums throughout the west midlands by engaging in urgently needed talks between now and tomorrow morning, before the auction at Bonhams of the Minton collection, which is being sold by Royal Doulton, to establish whether eleventh-hour measures can be taken to save that national treasure for the museum in Stoke-on-Trent?

Dr. Howells: I will certainly alert my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts, although I am not sure that she would be able to get to the auction on time. I do not know whether it is happening this afternoon or tomorrow morning.

Sport (Young People)

9. **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What assessment she has made of the adequacy of sport and recreation facilities for young people. [68966]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): The need to improve and to extend the sports facilities available to young people was key to the decisions that we took when initiating the new opportunities fund, and when setting up the sport in schools and the space for sport and the arts programmes. In total, about £700 million is going into those two joint initiatives.

Vernon Coaker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is one of the most fundamental issues affecting young people? Many of the young people to whom I have spoken recently from Arnold, Carlton and Gedling in my constituency—I am sure that hon. Members have the same issues raised with them—have asked where the sports recreational facilities are. They say that more are needed much more quickly. As well as formal facilities, they also raise the question of informal space: spaces to kick a ball, to play, to skateboard, to do this or that. Are not those places lacking in our communities? Does not that often result in kids hanging around on the street because they have nowhere else to go? Will my right hon. Friend consider trying to accelerate the whole process and doing something about informal space for play, as well as formal sport and recreation facilities?

Mr. Caborn: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. Later this week, he will find out that the Government have been taking that matter seriously. Revised planning guidance on sports facilities and, for the first time, open spaces will, I hope, be published. We will be looking at the criteria laid down for sports fields. It is important that we get shot of the demarcation between sports facilities and open spaces. As my hon. Friend said, a synergy of the two can help young people to find recreation and to go into formal sport.

The ministerial meetings that I chair once a month have brought together Health, Education and many other Departments of State. We are working with Sport England on a complete audit of all sports facilities. I believe that there will be better informed decisions on investment in sports facilities and open spaces, guided by the new PPG17—or the PPS17, as it is called—which has been long overdue for revision.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does the Minister agree that we need not just the facilities—I agree with everything that the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) said—

but, given that there is increased obesity among young people, the will to go out and enjoy sport and recreation? When he chairs his meetings with the Department for Education and Skills, what does he say to the Department about instilling in young people the need to get away from their computer screens and to go out into the streets, to recreation facilities or to open fields, to enjoy sports?

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Gentleman should have been following the ever unfolding important debate about sports facilities and the whole question of obesity—*[Interruption.]* We will have to start banning lunches. As one doctor said to me the other day, a time bomb is being developed: diabetes in young children. We have to take that seriously. That is why we are bringing in two hours of PE or quality sports every week for every child from the age of six to 16. Some would say that that is only a minimum. I hope it is. We will move that forward, along with investment in sports facilities, our plan for sport, the development of coaching and the modernisation of governing bodies. A complete overhaul of sport not just in schools but in the community is necessary, not just for sport but for the well-being and good health of our nation.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): A number of sporting facilities in my constituency, one of which is attached to a secondary school, are crumbling; they are in a terrible state of disrepair. It is partly due to the low standard spending assessment that Havering council receives, which means that it cannot make the necessary investment—or at least, that is what it has always been telling us. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that any bids from my constituency to enhance those facilities will receive a fair hearing; and are there any plans to channel even more resources into such facilities?

Mr. Caborn: I do not know the details of the application from my hon. Friend's constituency, but if he writes to me I shall look at it and ensure that it is dealt with fairly. A total of £581 million is being invested through the new opportunities fund via local education authorities, but the funding is conditional on the facilities being used by the community, too. That is important. Many people have been critical of investment in sports facilities that have not been available to the wider community. There is a change in culture and attitude among many in education—those who must ensure that those centres of excellence can be used by the whole community. If my hon. Friend wants to write to me, I shall look into the questions that he has raised.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Does the Minister recognise that the single most useful step towards improving sports facilities for young people would be to ensure that all school children receive two hours of compulsory competitive sport every week of their school lives?

Mr. Caborn: I understand the play on words about compulsory and non-compulsory. If the Conservatives, in nearly 15 years, had done a 10th of what we have done in the past four to five years, we would now have a much healthier nation than the one that we inherited.

Sports Clubs

10. **Mr. Gareth Thomas** (Harrow, West): If she will make a statement on her Department's plans to encourage sports clubs to seek charitable status. [68967]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I have written to 153 of sport's governing bodies, representing 90 sports, outlining the benefits of charitable status. The Government believe that the governing bodies should actively encourage their member clubs to apply. Through the governing bodies, we have distributed 140,000 leaflets advising clubs how they can access charitable status. The Charity Commission is working closely with my Department in trying to ensure that as many sports clubs as possible can get charitable status.

Mr. Thomas: Does my right hon. Friend accept that local authorities could have a role in encouraging sports clubs to consider the benefits of charitable status? Will he meet the Local Government Association, and in particular the Association of London Government, to encourage them to take an initiative in this sphere? What does he think of the new club set up by Conservative Members to promote the sport of David Davis baiting—charitable or uncharitable?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Caborn: I have a dialogue with the Local Government Association, and we hope that, collectively, we can move the whole sports project forward. It is important also to note that, in the Finance Bill, which we hope will complete its passage through the House before the recess, the Chancellor announced a package of tax relief that will be available through the Inland Revenue. Charitable status and the new CASC—community amateur sports clubs—development in the Finance Bill, along with the performance and innovation unit report, form part of our agenda concerning whether an amateur sport should have charitable status as of right.

I think that we are making considerable strides towards ensuring that more money is invested in sport at club level, where it is most needed, helping the clubs and all the volunteers who work in them.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I welcome what the Minister said about charitable status for sports clubs, but can he assure the House that the Charity Commissioners will not make over-burdensome bureaucratic demands on the clubs or interfere with their running in any way?

Mr. Caborn: This is an important question. We are genuinely trying to take the load off sports clubs. The Charity Commission, my Department and Sport England are working together to set up a one-stop shop in every region, where small sports clubs without a lot of resources can get the answers to their questions. The Charity Commission, especially in the person of John Stoker, has played a fantastic role in helping my Department and Sport England to develop a far more comprehensive and user-friendly package for charitable status. We will continue to work to that end. We all know that many of the clubs could not operate without the volunteers who do a full-time job. We must help them as much as we possibly can, and that is what we are doing.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of my long-standing interest in this matter, following the introduction of my 10-minute Bill more than two years ago. There is still a slight discrepancy between the charitable route and the CASC route through the Inland Revenue. There is also a serious question about rate relief for clubs. I welcome the one-stop shops, and I would encourage people to go through either of those routes, but the biggest bill that many clubs face is their rates bill. Will he apply pressure, in the dying days of this parliamentary Session, to ensure that rate relief is at the top of the agenda during the consultation process?

Mr. Caborn: Yes, we will obviously raise that question with our colleagues in other Departments. We have come a long way in the past 12 to 18 months in instituting charitable status. Perhaps my hon. Friend should reflect on what the PIU report will say about charitable status for sports as of right. Perhaps when the report comes out it will be advantageous for him to resurrect the arguments that he has been deploying, skilfully and forcefully, for the past four months.

Free Television Licences

11. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): How many families in the Wakefield district area are benefiting from the introduction of free television licences for households with a member aged 75 years and over; and if she will make a statement. [68968]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): TV Licensing, which administers the free television licence scheme for the BBC as licensing authority, is not able to provide precise geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 census indicate that there were approximately 20,400 people aged 75 or over living in the Wakefield metropolitan district council area.

Mr. O'Brien: Obviously, the figures show something that we should concentrate on in future, but I should point out how welcome the free television licence is to the over-75s. Given that the Government's policy is to encourage more disabled and elderly people to be retained in, and to receive treatment in, their own homes, will my hon. Friend support the campaign to offer the television licence concession to those aged 70; and will he ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the representatives of other Departments whether that concession could be thus extended? Because of the Government's policy of withdrawing care beds, such people will have to remain in their own homes, and we need to look after their interests.

Dr. Howells: I am sure that the Chancellor will have heard those words. I remind my hon. Friend that 3.6 million households already benefit from this concession, at a cost of more than £370 million a year. That is a lot of money, and I am sure that all hon. Members will join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Government on introducing that measure.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Clergy

29. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the level of spending on recruitment and retention of clergy *(a)* now and *(b)* 1991. [68942]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Church has made no formal assessment within those parameters, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, during Dr. Carey's archbishopric, the number of attendees at selection conferences who were recommended for selection has risen to 71 per cent.—an increase of 16.6 per cent. during that period. Moreover, the number of ordinations has risen by 14.3 per cent.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman spotted the purpose of my question. I was tempted to ask about the recruitment and retention of archbishops, but I shall not do so. Can he confirm that, under George Carey's charge of the Church of England, the number of ordinands has gone up in respect of full-time clergy, and that the number of non-stipendiary clergy and deacons has also gone up? Moreover, women can now be ordained to the full ministry of the Church—an historic move that has added to the quality, quantity and extent of the ministry in a way that can never be undone.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the outstanding legacy of Archbishop Carey's time in charge has been the growth in the numbers of those ministering in the Church of England, while some other denominations in this country have sadly slipped in the other direction?

Mr. Bell: I am sure that the archbishop will be very grateful to hear the hon. Gentleman's comments, and I can build on what he has said. The national average stipend was £11,668 when Dr. Carey took office; in 2001, it was £17,030; and through its "Generosity and Sacrifice" document, the Church is aiming at stipends of £20,000.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Party Funding

30. **Martin Linton** (Battersea): What plans he has to ask the Electoral Commission for a report on *(a)* limits on individual donations, *(b)* new limits on campaign spending and *(c)* increased grants for policy development. [68943]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): This summer, the Electoral Commission will launch a review of the funding of political parties, which will examine several issues, including the capping of donations. The commission will also undertake a review of the policy development grant scheme, and a review of campaign expenditure limits for parties and candidates is expected to begin next year.

Martin Linton: In considering the Electoral Commission's review, will the right hon. Gentleman note the comments of Lord Haskins? He said that the time has gone when we should allow our political parties to rely on large donations from individuals such as himself. He also said that we should allow more of the constructive work of political parties—policy development, training and international work—to be state funded, and that, as a quid pro quo, we should limit individual donations and reduce spending limits, so that people feel confident that their money is not just being spent on funding an escalating election spending arms race.

Mr. Beith: I have much sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman says and with what Lord Haskins says, although not on every subject. The reviews to which I have referred will consider the arguments on both sides of the issue, and that will take place soon.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Would not it be a great shame if comments and questions of the sort that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Battersea (Martin Linton) were thought to be motivated by today's news that the Labour party is between £6 million and £10 million in debt? Would it not be an even greater shame if, as a result, the public purse were to be raided by this Government yet again?

Mr. Beith: I am grateful for any means by which attention is drawn to this important subject, but it was clearly in the Commission's mind long before today's news came out.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would it not be a blessing, not only for political parties but for the electorate, if there were a curb on campaign spending in general elections? Is not there enough evidence to demonstrate that all the campaign spending has hardly any effect on the outcome? In those circumstances, political parties would need less money, and that would be a good thing.

Mr. Beith: There is a curb on campaign spending in general elections and the only issue now is whether it has been set at the right level. We now have experience of the limit in operation, and we will have further experience in the Scottish and Welsh elections next year.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Bishops

32. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): How many bishops employed *(a)* drivers and *(b)* private chaplains last year. [68946]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): In 2001, 33 bishops employed drivers, most of them either part time or combining the post with other duties. That equates to 19 full-time posts. Some 35 diocesan bishops employed full or part-time chaplains as part of their office staff allowance.

Mr. Bryant: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer, but would not it make more sense in these days of straitened ecclesiastical finances for the Church to appoint bishops who can drive themselves and even say their own prayers? In that way, more of the clergy could be devoted to the areas where they are most needed—in the parishes—not just to supporting bishops.

Mr. Bell: I am always intrigued by my hon. Friend's questions and hesitate to suggest that his talents would be better deployed on subjects other than chauffeurs and bishops. [Hon. Members: "Ooh!"] That is meant as a kindly comment. The finances of the Church are not straitened. Bishops have learned to drive and do drive. However, we expect our bishops to be spiritual leaders, teachers, diocesan managers and local communicators. It is not unreasonable of them to accept such help as they can, and Professor Mellows' review "Resourcing Bishops" found that our bishops are by no means over-resourced, given all that they do.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in a large diocese—such as Lichfield, where the bishop is the Right Reverend Keith Sutton—the bishop must travel over a large area? While travelling to various locations, he has to prepare speeches and sermons. Is not it a good idea for him to use his intellect to prepare sermons and deal with documentation while he travels, rather than simply to drive himself?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He draws attention to the fact that bishops have a wide range of responsibilities at diocesan, provincial and national levels. It is important that they fulfil those responsibilities in the most efficient way that they can.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Electronic Voting

33. **Bob Spink** (Castle Point): What progress the Commission has made in considering electronic voting. [68947]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): The Commission has evaluated the electoral pilot schemes held in 30 local authority areas in England in May 2002, including several schemes involving electronic voting. The Commission will shortly submit to the Deputy Prime Minister individual evaluation reports on each of the schemes from the local authorities concerned, and will also publish, on 1 August, a report making recommendations for the future development of the pilot programme. The Commission also funded, together with the Local Government Association and others, the research report into the implementation of electronic voting in the UK which was prepared by a team led by De Montfort university and published in May this year.

Bob Spink: I am grateful for that full answer. Will the Commission be prepared to look to the private sector for further innovative possible pilot studies? I am thinking especially of the Canvey Island company, Telephony, which produced a promising solution in Teletrack, which it launched with IBM, just over the river, last Friday.

Mr. Beith: I can put the hon. Gentleman's constituents in touch with the Electoral Commission in case it can be of help to them.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): When the Commission considers the results of the pilot studies in electronic voting, which were held this year, will it consider differential access to such voting in terms of both age and social class and consider specifically the different experiences in the Church and Everton wards in Liverpool earlier this year?

Mr. Beith: I assume that those wards were covered by the pilot project and therefore will be covered in both the individual evaluations and in the general review which the Commission is producing. The Commission is certainly aware that there are great differences between people—perhaps even between Members of this place—in their ability to cope with electronic means of doing things.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): When the Commission is considering the entire process of trying to encourage greater use and participation, will it also have in mind the serious concerns that have been expressed in several areas about postal voting and postal ballots, which sometimes have not been returned on time? In some instances, the numbers of returns that have come in later than the last day have been more than the majority obtained in the election.

Mr. Beith: Yes, these are all matters that the Commission has under consideration.

Electoral Registration

34. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): What research is being undertaken into procedures among local authorities as part of the Commission's review of electoral registration. [68948]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): I understand that as part of the Commission's review of electoral registration, research into local authority practice in managing the registration process is under way. There will also be consultation with local authorities and others as part of the review process. The Commission will report in spring 2003. A separate research project into local authority practices in promoting registration has also been funded by the Commission, and is expected to be published in the autumn.

Mr. Love: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that reply. I have been trying to ascertain the figures for the numbers of people prosecuted because they have not registered on the register. I have not been able to do that, although I have had contact with the Electoral Commission. Before the Commission starts to investigate the merits or otherwise of compulsory voting, would it be worth while it undertaking some research to see whether it is of merit to continue compulsory registration?

Mr. Beith: The Commission does not have an enforcement role in electoral registration, and the figures are not held centrally or held by the Commission. The legal obligation to register has implications for other persons who would be resident in the household, not only for the individual who fails to register. These are matters that the Commission regularly considers.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Clergy Pensions

35. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will make a statement about the effect on clergy pensions of longevity, changes in taxation on pension funds and the recent stock market movements. [68949]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The latest actuarial review of the Commissioners' pension liabilities added a total £11 million a year to Church costs due to increased longevity. The withdrawal of the dividend tax credit from pension funds and charities has cost the Church some £12 million per year. Current stock market conditions disadvantage the Commissioners but help the new funds to be better and more cheaply invested. The net effect is broadly neutral.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that reply, which I shall study with care. Is not the real problem the fact that the pension is so modest? I recognise the important part that the Church Commissioners play in meeting a sizeable proportion of pensions. However, will the hon. Gentleman consider the problem from the point of view of a modest pension and see what the Commissioners can do to safeguard pensions during this difficult time?

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to clergy pensions. As he knows, the Commissioners are not entirely responsible for all pensions, but only for pensions entered into in the past. The question of having them under review is one that the Church always takes to heart, and keeps constantly under review.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Simon Thomas—the hon. Gentleman is not here. I call Mr. Michael Fabricant.

Cathedral Repairs

38. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What assessment has been made of the cost of repairing the fabric of cathedrals in each of the last three years. [68952]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): I am reminded of the Alice in Wonderland poem which goes something like, "I met a Member who was not there; he was not there again today; he was not there again tomorrow." Perhaps next time we will have more Members present for the final session before the recess of Church Commissioner questions.

English Heritage has recently made an overall survey, in consultation with individual cathedrals and the Association of English Cathedrals for the purpose of assessing the continuance of its own programme of grant aid to cathedral repairs.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the hon. Gentleman, although he has a very short memory; he knows that I was "there" because I asked him a question only three minutes ago.

With regard to Question 38, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that English Heritage was spending something like £10 million on restoring the fabric of English cathedrals only a few years ago. That sum has reduced to just £2 million. Can he use his best offices to ensure that cathedrals such as Lichfield's and others get the required money, because not just church-goers, but the whole community benefit from our great cathedrals?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me that he was here three minutes ago. He was not here at the last Question Time, however, when I answered a very similar question. He will be delighted to know that I have written today to the Chancellor of the Exchequer pointing out the discrepancies in the figures to which the hon. Gentleman refers and inviting my right hon. Friend to use them as a submission for his next Budget.

Foot and Mouth Inquiries

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the foot and mouth disease inquiries.

Following last week's publication by the Royal Society of its independent examination of how we might prevent and combat future animal disease epidemics in the United Kingdom—chaired by Sir Brian Follett—today we publish the independent report of Dr. Iain Anderson, in which he identifies the lessons he believes can be learned from the most recent of those: last year's outbreak of foot and mouth disease. The Government are grateful to Dr. Anderson for the huge amount of work and effort that he has put in and to all the 800 to 900 individuals and organisations who gave him evidence.

Foot and mouth disease is a devastating and highly infectious animal disease, which is feared and loathed across the world because of its impact and virulence. In Britain alone, the experiences of the 1967 outbreak are a remembered nightmare in many rural communities, but what hit us in February 2001 was, as Dr. Anderson notes, due to a

> "rare set of circumstances . . . one of the worst epidemics of FMD the modern world has ever seen. Numbers alone cannot capture the sense of what unfolded. The great epidemic of 2001 left an indelible mark on communities, businesses and people from all walks of life."

The Government are determined to learn the lessons of what happened in 2001. That is why we so quickly set up an inquiry process with three strands—each of them independent. That decision means that within six months of the United Kingdom regaining disease-free status, we already have the scientific review, the policy commission report charting the way forward for the industry and, now, the report of lessons that we need to learn.

Dr. Anderson's report, which concentrates primarily on the early part of the outbreak, is a sombre and thoughtful document—measured in its tone and content, though unquestionably grave in its import. What is crucial to future policy is that he makes a large number of strong recommendations, most, if not all, of which I believe we will be able to accept. Indeed, many of them suggest actions that the Government—while trying not to prejudge his report—have begun to address.

Separately, in his comments and observations, Dr. Anderson draws on the views and evidence put before him, about which there is certainly scope for different interpretation, even for disagreement. However, he asks in his introduction whether, as a first step, DEFRA can

> "simply . . . admit that Government made mistakes during its handling of the crisis and that all involved are determined to learn from these mistakes"—

I can and I do. The House will know that I have always acknowledged that, in the desperate circumstances faced not only by the farming community, but by my Department and its officials, as well as by our departmental and ministerial predecessors, mistakes were bound to have been made.

Dr. Anderson shows complete understanding and sympathy for the terrible experiences of those in the field, but he also shows recognition of the dilemma of the centre, especially where there were clear or substantial deficiencies in management information. He suggests that, for the first few weeks, the Government did not realise the seriousness of the measures that would be needed to control the outbreak. I accept—though it is with hindsight—that that is so, but he also shows how often the action taken was entirely consistent with the information and advice then available. But if we are to learn the lessons from those dreadful months, what we need most to consider is whether—while, as I say, there are bound to have been mistakes—there were structural defects.

Dr. Anderson does identify what he regards as mistakes of strategy. I think that it is right to say that many, if not all of those, the Government already acknowledge. Where there may be room for disagreement is, again, on how much of that was evident only, or at least primarily, with hindsight. On the issue of an immediate national ban on animal movements, Dr. Anderson himself says in the report:

> "Even today the SVS"—

the state veterinary service—

> "believes it would not have had the justification or the support immediately to introduce widespread restrictions".

Throughout the report the reader returns again and again to what was known and to what was without precedent and consequently unanticipated. For example, the report says:

> "The disease could have been present at Burnside Farm for weeks, but it went unreported, despite the requirement of farmers to report suspected cases of notifiable diseases."

We now know, in fact, that there was virus present on at least 57 farms in 16 counties on the day the first case was confirmed, 20 February.

As to the unknown origin of the first case, both inquiries stress the importance of effective import controls to prevent exotic infectious diseases from entering the country. We have set in hand a wide-ranging programme of action against the risks posed by what must have been illegal imports of meat and animal products, but as both reports acknowledge, it will never be possible to reduce that risk to zero. So the necessary measures must be in place to limit the risk that, if disease enters the country, it will reach livestock and subsequently spread.

Both reports also highlight the importance of contingency planning. Dr. Anderson examines the pre-existing contingency plan, which was followed, but demonstrates that, though it met the international standards then expected—the European Commission judged the UK's readiness for disease outbreak as among the best in Europe—we can see, with hindsight, its deficiencies. But that is an admission that I make with hindsight. The European Commission is on record as having said recently:

> "It cannot be reasonably expected from any Member State to design a contingency plan for the event of an epidemic causing more outbreaks within months than the 10 year's estimate for the whole Community".

On all those issues the analysis in the report is detailed. It shows that, in Dr. Anderson's own words—words echoed, among others, by Commissioner Byrne—the outbreak in Britain in 2001 was of a kind unanticipated in any country in the world.

Dr. Anderson makes some trenchant criticisms to which I shall return, but he also deals comprehensively with the myriad conspiracy theories in circulation then and since.

[Margaret Beckett]

He does not just dismiss them; he investigates and dispels them. One in particular, the charge that the handling of the crisis was driven by concern over the timing of the election, he explicitly rejects, saying:

> "We have explicitly examined Government papers and questioned Ministers and officials, but have found no evidence to support such a suggestion."

While awaiting the reports, we have already published a draft interim contingency plan and invited stakeholders and operational partners to comment. We will now review it comprehensively in the light of the inquiries' recommendations for regular updating, involvement of stakeholders and rehearsals, all of which the Government accept.

Dr. Anderson calls for a mechanism to assess potential domestic civil threats and for steps to improve our capacity to handle an emergency of national proportions. We have set up the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, reporting to a Cabinet Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, which is intended to do just that through horizon scanning, an assessment capability and work with Departments facing disruptive challenges on how to prevent or manage crises. Dr. Anderson also identifies the need to establish "trigger points", where issues move to a new phase of crisis handling. Again, we agree.

Both reports make important recommendations about how the Government should improve their ability to respond effectively in the event of a disease outbreak. Again, I can say that we support the thrust of those recommendations, especially where they relate to the need for high-quality management information systems.

The Army is praised, rightly, for the role it played in helping to deal with the enormous logistical challenge—one that it has identified as being of larger dimensions logistically than the Gulf war. The Army did indeed do a remarkable job. I believe that had we had better information systems in place, it would have been called into action earlier—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—but, as Dr. Anderson demonstrates, not in the context, as so often claimed, of the Northumberland report, but when at a much later stage disposal options were failing to keep pace with slaughter.

In addition, knowing what we now know, we would on any future occasion work on the presumption that a national ban on livestock movements would apply when the first FMD case was confirmed. However, because of the early, silent spread of disease in last year's outbreak, it is important not to assume that it would ever have been easy to check. Dr. Anderson himself says that

> "even a perfectly implemented cull of infected premises within 24 hours of discovery would not, on its own, have controlled that epidemic until the disease itself had reduced the density of susceptible farms to such an extent that the epidemic ended naturally."

We do not intend, in the future, to permit local authorities to impose a widespread closure of footpaths. That, too, is a judgment made with the benefit of hindsight, and the House will know that it is a contested judgment. Some local authorities clung to a blanket ban long after the Government had encouraged its lifting.

Both inquiries have called for a strategic approach to animal health and disease control policies, and endorsed the call in the report of the Policy Commission on Food and Farming, chaired by Sir Don Curry, for a comprehensive animal health strategy. My Department will in the near future open discussions with industry and other interests on the content and coverage of such a strategy. It would need to deal with the protection of public health, animal disease prevention and control, surveillance, animal identification, animal welfare and emergency preparedness.

Another key issue that has drawn much comment is the contentious issue of vaccination, on which both inquiries made recommendations. We can immediately accept two specific recommendations: that, as in 2001, we should ensure that the option of vaccination forms part of any future strategy for the control of FMD; and that any emergency vaccination policy should in future be not "vaccinate to kill" but, ideally, "vaccinate to live". That, however, does not require action from the Government alone; it requires acceptance of meat and meat products from vaccinated animals entering the food chain normally.

The inquiry reports rightly address most of their recommendations to the Government, but they both also recognise that the farming industry shares responsibility for minimising disease risks. Dr. Anderson concludes that the Government can do only so much to prevent a recurrence of disease; the farming industry has a crucial role to play, particularly with regard to biosecurity.

That reminder is particularly pertinent after last month's FMD scare in the midlands. It is not enough for any Government to have the right approach or proper rules to mitigate disease risk; everybody in the industry must follow those rules and they must be properly enforced. In that recent episode, existing pig identification rules were not followed. Had the tests confirmed disease, the effort to track down the source of the infection would have been severely hampered. The episode strengthens our resolve to continue to work with the livestock industry to establish better livestock identification.

Both this episode and the report lend weight to the call by Sir Don Curry's commission for farm assurance schemes, owned and operated by the industry itself, rewarding good farm management practice in biosecurity and other areas. The Government endorse that principle, too.

However, although we shall give full consideration to all the lessons in the reports, there are two areas where we can and will move forward more quickly. The emphasis in the reports on the roles that might be played by emergency vaccination and by pre-emptive culling underlines the importance of the passage of the Animal Health Bill, which my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State will be taking to a delayed Committee stage next week. The Bill contains powers that could be vital to the timely interventions for which the inquiries call.

Secondly, the Government need to take an early decision on the animal movement rules to apply from the late summer and, in particular, on the 20-day standstill. We shall consult quickly with industry stakeholders in the next week or two, in the light of what the two reports say, on interim rules to apply from late August.

Dr. Anderson's is a serious report into an outbreak of foot and mouth disease that was devastating for many parts of our country. I want once more to quote Dr. Anderson:

> "Even had everything been done perfectly by all those concerned to tackle the disease, the country would have had a major epidemic with massive consequences . . . many farmers, local people and government

> officials made heroic efforts to fight the disease and limit its effects. Through their efforts it was finally overcome and eradicated after 221 days, one day less than the epidemic of 1967–68."

The inquiry report makes many criticisms and addresses many concerns. It accepts, however, that all those involved did their level best to deal with a crisis of unprecedented importance. It makes criticisms that are accepted. It makes recommendations on which we will act. Above all, it fulfils its remit—it gives us the basis on which to learn lessons, and learn lessons we will.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): First, may I thank the Secretary of State for giving me access to the Anderson Committee's report this morning and for the 30-minute sight of her statement?

Members on both sides of the House will agree that at this time we need to have in our thoughts and sympathies those thousands of people whose livelihoods were either threatened or completely ruined by the devastating outbreak of foot and mouth disease last year. Although the report makes some trenchant criticisms of the Government, to which I shall allude in a little while, it is also right for the Opposition to make clear our appreciation of the work done by those many officials and veterinary surgeons, both in the right hon. Lady's Department and outside, working in the field and in London, who gave their all, often under impossible pressures and with inadequate support, to try to bring this dreadful epidemic under control.

The right hon. Lady drew attention to a number of the recommendations for the future in both the Anderson report and the Royal Society's report. We welcome the fact that she, like us, has been persuaded by the Royal Society's report of the need to incorporate emergency vaccination as part of a future strategy for containing further outbreaks of the disease.

Although I welcome, too, the Secretary of State's emphasis on the need to strengthen controls of illegal meat imports, can she confirm that 10 months after the end of the epidemic and three months after the publication of her Department's action plan, there have been only three spot checks on aircraft at our ports and that her Department is still wrangling with Customs and Excise over who exactly is in charge of those import controls? Is not it a disgrace that the Department should show such a lack of urgency in the wake of the devastation last year?

I hope that the Government will, as early as possible in the autumn, make time for a full parliamentary debate on the reports and that they will also make time for parliamentary scrutiny and debate of the contingency plan that they are drafting—as recommended in the Royal Society and Anderson reports. Will the Secretary of State use her best offices with her colleagues to ensure that those opportunities for parliamentary scrutiny are given to us?

The report amounts to a shocking catalogue of incompetence and confusion. Although the Secretary of State sprinkled her statement with the word "hindsight", is it not clear from any reading of Dr. Anderson's report today that many grievous mistakes were made, which ought to have been avoided on the basis of the evidence that the Government had available to them at that time?

Is it not the case that Dr. Anderson concluded about contingency planning that, although contingency plans were in place,

> "maintaining and updating these plans was not a priority at national level."?

Why was it not a priority? Why did the Government ignore the Drummond report of 1999, which identified serious shortcomings in their contingency plans? Why were the concerns expressed by the chief veterinary officer in 2000 about the inadequacies in contingency planning never followed up?

Why did the Government ignore the warnings of the European Union's foot and mouth disease conference committee and of their own scientists in 2000 that a virulent new strain of the virus was spreading through Asia, the middle east and into Europe? Why was no effective action taken in the wake of the outbreaks of classical swine fever in the Netherlands in 1997 and in this country in 2000?

Will the Secretary of State explain why there should be such a contrast between the inaction shown on this side of the channel and the reaction of the Dutch Government, who reviewed their contingency plans in the wake of classical swine fever, tested their contingency plan, agreed it with stakeholders and had it approved by that country's Parliament?

Why were Ministers, right up until and even during the proceedings of the Anderson inquiry, refusing to admit to the failure of their contingency planning? Has the Secretary of State seen the passage in the Anderson report where Dr. Anderson states that Government Ministers told the inquiry that

> "'comprehensive contingency plans were in place.' We did not find this to be so."?

Does the right hon. Lady agree—even with hindsight—with Dr. Anderson's conclusion that the Government's plans were

> "limited in scope, out of date . . . and not integrated into a national programme of rehearsal and testing"?

The right hon. Lady spoke of hindsight, too, in her discussion of the reasons why the Government did not at an earlier date, during the critical first three days, impose a ban on livestock movements. Can she explain why the Dutch Government acted with greater alacrity than ours, and imposed a ban two days earlier than she and her colleagues chose to do? Can she confirm that Dr. Anderson's conclusion about the importance of hindsight in that decision was somewhat at odds with her own, as just given in her statement? Dr. Anderson stated:

> "Considering what is known about the infectious nature of this disease, we conclude that earlier movement restrictions would have been justified, and should have been ready to be put in place more quickly than they were."

The Secretary of State spoke about how her Department's response was handicapped by serious failures in management information, but might it not be considered, at least to some degree, the responsibility of Ministers to ensure that management information and systems were adequate? Does she agree with Dr. Anderson's conclusion on page 6 of his report that

> "no one in command understood in sufficient detail what was happening on the ground"

[Mr. David Lidington]

and that, for the first two months of the outbreak, there was a

> "serious deficiency in the reliability and completeness of the information available to those in charge of the disease"?

Why should that be so when we know, not least from the public sessions of the Anderson inquiry, that again and again farmers and others living at the sharp end of the epidemic were shouting from the rooftops about the failure of the Government's systems on slaughter and the disposal of livestock?

Does the right hon. Lady agree that knowledge of the Government's failures to implement their declared policies effectively was a key factor in undermining public confidence in the Government's policy to stamp out the disease? How much confidence can we now have that she and her colleagues can put things right when the Select Committee reported only last week that her Department had no strategy on information technology and that key financial data are either omitted from its annual report or given in an inaccurate form?

The present Administration make much of their philosophy of joined-up government. Does not that slogan seem somewhat ironic when contrasted with Dr. Anderson's description? He said:

> "A sense of panic appeared, communications became erratic and orderly processes started to break down. Decision making became haphazard and messy".

The situation was serious enough, even early on, for a ban on all livestock movements to be introduced and for the countryside to be closed down, so why did it take Ministers 31 days before activating the Cabinet Office Briefing Room system, or COBR, to co-ordinate Government actions—31 days during which, in Dr. Anderson's words,

> "a serious veterinary problem became a national disaster"

and there was an

> "apparent vacuum in central advice and expertise on crisis management"?

Why, even after COBR was set up, was strategic decision taking involving the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture taking place outside COBR?

Does not all that add weight to the widespread suspicion that the Government were allowing concerns about the election date and their election plans to take precedence over effective measures to control and stamp out the disease? Nowhere was that more obvious than in the Government's delay in calling in the Army. It was hardly as if there was a shortage of people asking for that course of action. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) called for that action, their proposal was rubbished by the same Ministers who say that, with hindsight, they ought to have called in the Army earlier. Does the Secretary of State endorse the comments of her permanent secretary to the Public Accounts Committee on 3 July that the delay in calling in the Army was due to difficulty in getting approval from senior Ministers? Does not that verdict from her most senior civil servant suggest once again that we are right to say that concerns about presentation and electoral prospects counted for most with Ministers?

The Government's response to the epidemic is best summed up in a statement given not by the right hon. Lady but by the Prime Minister himself to Dr. Anderson on 22 January this year. When asked about the failures of Government policy, the Prime Minister responded:

> "The Government had no reason to think about Foot and Mouth Disease before it broke out".

Does not that single sentence encapsulate the special blend of negligence, incompetence and complacency that has characterised the Government's handling of foot and mouth disease? It is not just farmers but the entire rural economy and all taxpayers who have paid a heavy price for that neglect and incompetence. Does the Secretary of State agree that it will take more than promises? It will take action and results to restore the trust of people in the countryside in Ministers, a trust that has been wholly destroyed by the grievous failure of her policies and those of her colleagues.

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman asked me so many questions that I am not entirely sure that I can reply to every single one—*[Interruption.]* Let us not get into a master class on how to be in opposition. He asked me first about the issue of spot checks. I do not recall his precise wording, but I think that he was referring to personal imports and checks at airports. I am not sure that his figures were correct, but even if they were, they were not, if I may say so, particularly relevant.

The hon. Gentleman will find when he has a chance to study the report at more length—I fully appreciate that neither he nor other hon. Members will have had the opportunity to do so—that Dr. Anderson makes plain that it is widely believed that, in so far as an illegal import might have been the source of the original material that caused the disease to enter this country, that is most unlikely because of the chance of its coming into contact with animals. The source is much more likely to have been some commercial import. Of course, very thorough and very many more checks are carried out on commercial imports—*[Interruption.]* It is no good Opposition Members squawking about what they think; I suggest that they look at the report. Dr. Anderson makes it very plain that there are thorough checks, and details the nature of those checks and what they uncover.

Secondly, it is total nonsense to talk about us wrangling with Customs and Excise. We are in fact in close communication with the range of other officials who have the responsibilities in the field. We are awaiting the outcome of the risk assessment on the handling of imports, and we anticipate that when it comes in it will give us some recommendations on how we can even more improve our contacts.

The hon. Gentleman then talked about reviewing the contingency plans. He quoted rather selectively—inevitably, I suppose. He said, quite correctly, that Dr. Anderson stated that he and his team did not find comprehensive contingency plans in place. However, Dr. Anderson went on to point out that the contingency plans that were in place

> "had been prepared and accepted by the European Commission and approved by the Standing Veterinary Committee."

Opposition Members have frequently alleged that there were no contingency plans. That is nonsense; there were contingency plans. They were not adequate to deal with the outbreak that hit us, but then nobody thought that they would have been.

The hon. Gentleman talked about why concerns expressed by the chief veterinary officer were not followed up. If the hon. Gentleman has been following that issue in the report, he must know that those concerns were shared internally in the veterinary service but not communicated to Ministers or the permanent secretary. I do not say that as any criticism. Although the issue was of concern, there were a range of other concerns and priorities on the mind of the state veterinary service at that time. I think not least of the outbreak that we had just had of classical swine fever, which tied up 80 per cent. of the resources of the veterinary service only a matter of weeks before the immediate crisis hit us.

The hon. Gentleman asked why we did not impose a ban on day one. I have explained that, had we done so, it might have made some difference to the degree to which the disease spread—although no one could quantify that. I deliberately shared with the House Dr. Anderson's specific wording in identifying—the facts very clearly show—that there is no question whatever but that the disease had spread so far before the first case was spotted, never mind confirmed, that such a ban would have made no difference in the end to the fact that Britain was bound to face a dramatic and terrible outbreak.

The hon. Gentleman asked about responsibility for management information. Of course Ministers accept—it is why I said this in my response to the report—responsibility for management information. We also accept that there is a need for much improved IT and services in the Department. I bid for that in the recent comprehensive spending round, but I say to the hon. Gentleman that it was not something that anybody found when they took over the Department in 1997. So let us have a little less lecturing about the state of the Government machine from those who were in charge of it for 20 years. Indeed, with regard to the scientific outcome, Sir Brian Follett talks in his report about the problems that have been caused and suggests that significantly increased funding of research is needed to restore some of the cuts of the past 20 years.

The hon. Gentleman made three particular points to which I should now like to turn. First, on the Army, there is one thing that Opposition Members may not have had the chance to take on board and which I would like to make plain to them: Dr. Anderson considers with care the suggestions so often repeated, not least in this House, that anybody who looked at the Northumberland report would have known that the Army had to be brought in straight away. That is not true; what the Northumberland report says—indeed, I have pointed this out to Opposition Members before—is that when the capacity of civilian labour to dig the holes and make other preparations is exhausted, it will be time to call in the Army. The Army made it plain—I think that there were some colourful quotes from Brigadier Alex Birtwhistle—that one can get from the *Yellow Pages* people who can do such things. What the Army of today can provide is the logistical support and expertise in providing such support on the ground, especially to deal with carcases.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman made a remark—again, I accept that he cannot know that he has, to some extent, given the House a quotation that does not apply in the way in which he sought to use it—about the wording that Dr. Anderson used with regard to a sense of panic breaking out. Those are Dr. Anderson's words. I was slightly surprised to hear that, because that was not my impression and it has not been confirmed to me by any of the observations that I have heard, from people at a range of levels in dealing with the crisis, related to the centre. *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (David Maclean) will contain himself, I can say that I have asked Dr. Anderson what he means, and he has told me that, on the ground, he encountered junior officials, people in the control centres and so on—*[Interruption.]* I am not blaming anybody; hon. Members should contain themselves. I am simply explaining what Dr. Anderson meant—so he tells me and hon. Members are free to ask him—in making the comment that the hon. Gentleman quoted. I can understand his making the assumption that Dr. Anderson wanted it to apply to the centre, but that is not what Dr. Anderson is saying. He is saying that on the ground, as the scale and scope of the disease became apparent, there were considerable difficulties and indeed problems.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman drew attention to what he believed was the key issue: the electoral impact and the reason for the decisions that the Government made. I should like to refer the House to what Dr. Anderson explicitly says on page 102 of his report, in paragraph 11.2:

> "Many submissions . . . suggested that government . . . were heavily influenced by electoral considerations."

Again, I quote:

> "We have examined government papers and questioned Ministers and officials but have found no evidence to support such a suggestion. Indeed"—

[Interruption.] I have not finished the quote:

> "Indeed, officials at all levels and in many locations are adamant that they were never exposed to any pressures other than the need to control the disease in the best possible way."

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): Lessons must be learned and this time they must be learned well, not because of the scandalous waste of public money or even the unnecessary culling of so many perfectly healthy animals, but because of the human misery that we all saw throughout the country. Farmers committed suicide, families were broken up, small businesses were lost and people suffered the emotional trauma of seeing their life's work destroyed before their very eyes.

It has to be said that the crisis had its genesis not very recently, but in the 1980s, when complacency set in. The state veterinary service was run down, MAFF offices were closed and valuable research projects were cancelled. But many mistakes were made last year and, although the Secretary of State cherry-picked some of the quotations in her statement, the overall thrust of the report is one of considerable criticism of many of the shortcomings that it exposes. It will require considered reading by those inside and outside the House to ensure that this time the lessons are truly learned. Will the Secretary of State ensure that this time those lessons are not eroded by the passage of time and that no complacency sets in?

Will the right hon. Lady ensure that contingency plans are robust and that resources are made available, not only now, but next year and in the coming years? Will she ensure that those plans are properly rehearsed and constantly updated to reflect changes in risk, because it is clear that risk factors changed enormously and that the plans failed to keep up to date? Will she make those final contingency plans available to Parliament and ask Dr. Anderson to provide an overview so that we may

[Mr. Colin Breed]

have the benefit of his experience and expertise? None of us wishes ever again to experience a crisis on the scale of last year, nor to see in our constituencies the human misery that was experienced by so many people, and for which so many are still paying the cost.

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman will not have had time to go through the report. I understand and sympathise with the concern that leads him to talk about the unnecessary culling of so many healthy animals, but he will find when he looks at the report with more care that Dr. Anderson does not find that masses of unnecessary culling was carried out. As regards the contiguous cull—which he says was highly controversial—he identifies the reasons for that being carried out and considers whether the Government may need to have greater powers during another outbreak in different circumstances. One of the points that he makes is that one must never expect precisely the same circumstances to be repeated. He discusses the possibility that on another occasion a pre-emptive cull could halt the disease in its tracks. I understand why the hon. Gentleman makes his point, but it is important that hon. Members do not get the impression that Dr. Anderson says that there was masses of unnecessary killing. He identifies mistakes and says that one can argue about what might have happened in the way of culling if we had had at an earlier stage the information to tackle the disease in the way that was ultimately required. He certainly does not suggest that it could all have been all right and that there was an easy solution—for example, that we could just have vaccinated and did not need to kill.

I share the hon. Gentleman's view that it is important for us to publish contingency plans—although they are not secret; they are on our website—and to encourage people, especially in the industry, to study them, take them on board, and carry out more trial and rehearsal. That is a point that Dr. Anderson makes in general, not only about this particular episode. The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting suggestion about inviting Dr. Anderson to comment on the plans, and I will bear that in mind.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Does my right hon. Friend agree that although the report is critical—coming from Cumbria, I cannot see how it could be anything else—the Government got it right by setting up three separate inquiries, as less than 12 months since the outbreak finished, we have the results? Does she also agree that the Anderson report is not a whitewash, as Opposition Members said that it would be?

Margaret Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is entirely right. No doubt a great deal will be said today about how we should have listened to Opposition Members. If we had done so and waited to set up a public inquiry, experts with much more experience than I say that it would just about be setting up its secretariat. We should recognise not only the merits of having those three reports, each of which is demonstrably independent, but the importance of allowing each of them to concentrate on a specific sphere of the matters that needed to be considered. If we had set up one inquiry to examine all the issues, whatever its terms or structure, we would never have got so quickly the information that we need to enable us to make the improvements that have to follow.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): May I welcome the Secretary of State's frank admission that some mistakes were made in the handling of this crisis? She also said, however, that better information systems would have been necessary to know that the Army was required at an earlier stage. May I ask her to concede that many of us in the House called repeatedly for the deployment of the Army, using only the time-honoured information systems of listening to our constituents and walking round with our eyes open during the administrative chaos that had descended on our constituencies? Looking to the future, will she lay the contingency plans not only on the website but before Parliament, and arrange for us to have a full debate on them, so that those of us who witnessed an economic catastrophe in our constituencies last year can influence those plans in public with a full debate?

The Secretary of State rightly undertook to look at the 20-day movement restriction. To ensure that it is rigorous but practical, will she consider aligning the rules in England more closely with those now prevailing in Scotland, so that they can be safely and efficiently applied before the beginning of the upland livestock sales, which are crucial to the economies of places such as Wensleydale and Swaledale in my constituency?

Margaret Beckett: I shall begin where the right hon. Gentleman ended, with the 20-day rule. We shall look with very great care at that issue, and we are already consulting with the industry on it. I am conscious of the difficulties that movement restrictions are causing to the industry, but both the reports give grave warnings about the implications of handling that issue. The right hon. Gentleman says that we heard much in the House about the Army—I sat through much of it, at the side of my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown)—but what we heard was the Conservatives telling us to do as the Northumberland report said and call in the Army. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that that is not what the Northumberland report said, and that, when the Army felt able to come in and was ready and able to contribute, it was to play a very different role, in a very different context, from the one that it had played in the past.

As for saying that we should listen to what is said by right hon. and hon. Members, of course we do. We paid great attention not least to the right hon. Gentleman when he warned farmers on 5 June 2001, not in the House, for obvious reasons, but through the pages of the *Daily Mail*, that

> "Ministers are already putting in place plans for a mass cull on Friday, as soon as the election is over."

We have heard a great deal about the criticisms and warnings uttered by Opposition Members, and all I can say to them is that, bearing in mind the millions of animals that they claimed were going to be slaughtered the day after the general election, a little modesty on their part might be in order.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I welcome what my right hon. Friend said about the recommendations in the report, in particular on contingency planning. Does she agree that having an effective memorandum of understanding between the Government and all those likely to be involved in tackling a disease outbreak will be very important? I hope that there will be a longer debate on this subject in the autumn, because there are many points that it is impossible to make in a supplementary question to a statement, and they need to be brought out in such a debate. I also recommend to my hon. Friends a re-reading of *Hansard*, particularly in the light of some of the comments of Opposition Members. *Hansard* shows that, between February and May last year, the Opposition endorsed the Government's actions very strongly, and that there was co-ordination between Departments from day one.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that nothing in the report contradicts the fact that the cause of the outbreak was two illegal acts: one a failure to heat pig swill to the temperature at which disease would have been eradicated, the other a failure to notify the disease of foot and mouth, which was the disease that farmers and those in the countryside rightly dreaded most?

Finally, I endorse the tributes that my right hon. Friend paid to the many people who worked tirelessly during the outbreak. Although mistakes were made and there are lessons to be learned, there are none the less many unsung heroes who deserve to be recognised.

Margaret Beckett *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the Secretary of State replies, let me remind Members that they are entitled to only one supplementary question.

Margaret Beckett: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, and pay tribute to the work that she did, along with the rest of the ministerial team in which she served, in helping to deal with the terrible consequences of the outbreak.

I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend about the need for a memorandum of understanding. One thing that emerges very clearly from Dr. Anderson's consideration of how crises of this kind can be handled is the need for better flows of information and communication, and for rehearsal and crisis planning. He obviously thinks we should be giving much more attention to that.

I apologise to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague): I forgot to respond to his request for a debate. While I recognise, as always, that the way in which business is scheduled is not a matter for me, I am well aware that Members want to explore these matters in more depth than is generally possible on occasions such as this.

My right hon. Friend is right to say that, whatever the origin of the specific source of infection, illegal acts were undoubtedly committed at the outset. That is something that none of us should overlook.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): If the Secretary of State is so confident that Dr. Anderson has cleared No. 10 of interfering and preventing the Army from coming in, why does she not ask him to publish tapes and full transcripts of the interviews with Ministers, so that the House can at least know the questions that were asked and the replies that were given?

Margaret Beckett: I realise that the Conservative party will be extraordinarily disappointed by what Dr. Anderson has found. He has found that the Prime Minister performed a helpful role in dealing with the disease, and that there is not the slightest evidence of any kind that, in any way or at any level, there was political interference for electoral reasons in the running of the campaign. As for what Dr. Anderson decides to publish, this is, as I have said, an independent report, and it is for Dr. Anderson to decide what he wishes to do.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I was delighted to hear what my right hon. Friend said about contingency plans and the need to review continually from now on. I was also delighted to learn of the genuine recognition that mistakes were made.

As for the question of bringing in the armed forces, it will not surprise my right hon. Friend to learn that the situation was dealt with better in Scotland. In fact, the Secretary of State for Scotland offered to bring in the forces six days before the local authority accepted that kind offer.

One issue that was not raised in the report, perhaps because it was not appropriate to do so, is that of not just the personal but the financial costs incurred by many people. May I suggest that when we debate this matter—as I hope we shall—we consider financial costs, and look seriously at the possibility of insurance, especially for farmers wishing to deal with rare breeds and pedigree stock?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the whole issue of financial costs and the way in which we can encourage and provide incentives for good practice in the industry. As he says, many people—not least, I suspect, members of the Select Committee—will want to consider all those matters.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Dr. Anderson has written a clear, crisp and clinical report. He has judged the events against five criteria. He mentions planning, and asks whether the contingency plan was comprehensive, up to date and detailed. He mentions the speed of response, the provision of first-rate intelligence and information systems showing what was happening on the ground, the effective mobilisation of the wider resources of Government, and the establishment of trust and the communication between all players. He concludes that the Government fell down on all five criteria.

What is even more alarming, however—because this applied to a BSE incident as well—is the evidence, highlighted by Dr. Anderson, of a silo mentality and an aversion to risk in the Department. Senior people were concerned about the state of preparedness and about whether the Department could respond to an outbreak in terms of resources and mobilisation, but they did not communicate that to the most senior level of management or to Ministers. Will the Secretary of State make it absolutely clear to her Department not just that machinery should exist to enable people's concerns to reach the top, but that people should be not merely encouraged but obliged to communicate those concerns to the top, so that we can hold to account those who must ultimately take political responsibility?

Margaret Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman is probably right in identifying that those are the areas where

[Margaret Beckett]

Dr. Anderson has addressed his concerns. The right hon. Gentleman refers, rightly, to the issue of BSE, which I suspect lies underneath some of the problems of building trust and maintaining good communication.

I know that the right hon. Gentleman is a fair-minded person. Inevitably, many of these things have an element of hindsight. I accept that, when it was thought that there was less than adequate resourcing in, say, the state veterinary service for the scale of problems that it was conceived might at some stage come along, that should have been communicated further up the Department, but those who were expressing those concerns at that time had foot and mouth disease as a relatively low priority on their agenda. Much more immediate issues had hit them.

In his report, Dr. Anderson identifies, for example, that the resources available to the veterinary service were very much what were thought to be adequate in the face of a severe outbreak of foot and mouth disease. What is clearly the case is that no one ever envisaged an outbreak of the severity and precise nature of the one that this country faced.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): I have not yet read the Anderson report—I will save it for the beach because anything is better than Frederick Forsyth—but my right hon. Friend does not have to be defensive. It was not Ministers who went round creating foot and mouth disease. How many million pound cheques were issued to the farming community in terms of compensation? Who will apologise for the slaughter of all those millions of animals, many of which were totally unaffected by foot and mouth disease?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is right to identify that there were substantial costs associated with the disease. I cannot give him offhand the figures that he seeks, but he probably will find them in *Hansard*. If not, I am sure we can supply them. He is right to mention the terrible impact on the farming community, not least the animal population. One of the things that he will probably welcome in the report is Dr. Anderson's identification of the effects of the disease. I spoke about Dr. Anderson dismissing many of the myths. One that he dismisses is the often made assertion that foot and mouth disease is not a big problem and that it is like having a common cold. He identifies clearly that it causes considerable suffering to animals, although it is usually only fatal perhaps to very young animals. In consequence, as well as its economic impact, it is not a disease that any country should wish to let go unchecked.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the right hon. Lady accept that in view of the nature of international trade it is likely that there will be future outbreaks of foot and mouth and other animal diseases? Does she accept that one of the problems that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food experienced was an absence of sufficient numbers of policy makers? Against that, will she give an undertaking that if there be future outbreaks she will draft in policy makers urgently? With regard to contingency plans, if they are not to become stale, will she undertake that Ministers would personally cause them to be regularly and comprehensively reviewed?

Margaret Beckett: One of the recommendations that Dr. Anderson makes, which I have made clear, I hope, the Government accept, is for regular review and indeed regular rehearsal of contingency plans as a way of keeping them fresh. With his previous ministerial experience, the right hon. and learned Gentleman will know that the Northumberland report recommended that contingency plans should be reviewed regularly. At that time, foot and mouth disease had been so endemic in the country that the recommendation was that they should be reviewed, particularly if there had not been an outbreak for a couple of years. Of course, it was some 30 years before we had another major outbreak; there was a small one in the Isle of Wight under different circumstances.

As I have identified already, we all have to recognise that there is no such thing as zero risk. One of the instruments of policy development on which my Department is now diverting much work is improvement in our methods of risk assessment as well as risk management. That will inform the future work and the reform of the Department.

On the number of policy makers, the key point that comes through clearly from the tone and tenor of Dr. Anderson's remarks is that he feels that Government as a whole should rehearse more and get better at knowing when the trigger is to move things up a stage and involve local authorities, other Departments and so on. That is precisely why we have set up the civil contingencies unit, and we will study its work in the light of these reports.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): I welcome the report. As a Cumbrian Member, I fully appreciate the suffering not only of the farmers who had foot and mouth but of those who did not but lived in affected areas and were subject to the restrictions. Yet another group who suffered were people in the tourism industry. Does the Secretary of State agree that we cannot again allow the widespread closure of footpaths, which had a devastating effect on tourism in many parts of my constituency?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. With hindsight, we may note that some local authorities resisted the lifting of the footpaths ban. We need to examine Dr. Anderson's recommendations in this respect more carefully. It is true that the farmers who were not hit by the disease but suffered the economic impact when they could not move their animals were in perhaps the worst position of all. I accept that those were very difficult circumstances. I note that the report says that the disease was thoroughly seeded in Cumbria before the first case was ever identified.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): As well as accepting the criticisms in the report that are relevant to people in Northumberland, which was devastated in farming, tourism, and other businesses, will the Secretary of State accept the specific suggestion in recommendation 45 that she should conduct research into compensation for communities affected by mass burials, bearing in mind the fact that not one penny of compensation has gone to local businesses or individuals in the Widdrington area, where more than 100,000 carcases were buried and thousands more burned beside the beach?

Margaret Beckett: Dr. Anderson does indeed suggest that we research the issue, although he recognises that it is fraught with legal and other complications. I accept entirely the right hon. Gentleman's concerns for his constituents, but he will know that a great deal of investment has already had to be made to mitigate the impact of what had to be done. Certainly, the issue of how one handles something on this scale pervades the report, and Dr. Anderson has a great deal of value to say on it.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on a really excellent statement. Does she recall that her predecessor was also rightly praised for his skilful handling of the outbreak, by the National Farmers Union, the vets and even the Opposition—understandably, because he was following the advice of the National Farmers Union, the vets and, in some cases, even the Opposition—and that things changed only when the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) realised that he could make party political gain out of the situation in the run-up to the general election?

As the report is called "Lessons to be Learned", I wonder whether my right hon. Friend has read the article in the Glasgow *Herald* today, suggesting that there may be infected meat imported from China, and what action she intends to take.

Margaret Beckett: My right hon. Friend is kind enough to compliment both me and my distinguished predecessor. He is right to say that there was much in the latter's handling of an unprecedented and dreadful set of events that was worthy of praise, and indeed it received it in the House. It comes through clearly in Dr. Anderson's account of the dreadful situation that my predecessor and his ministerial team and officials did their utmost in the face of a situation in which they were not getting the information that they needed to deal with the crisis as effectively as they would wish.

I fear that I have not yet read today's edition of *The Herald*, but my right hon. Friend puts his finger on a point that was made a moment ago by a Conservative Member—perhaps it was the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies)—who said that there is no such thing as zero risk. There will always be risks, and it is important to maintain surveillance, and to ensure that we identify and obstruct imports; however, that is just the very first step. Even if disease enters this country, there is much more to be done to prevent it from coming into contact with the animal community and—should that happen—to prevent it from spreading. Great emphasis is sometimes placed on the role of imports, but one of the most important lessons in the report is that if disease comes in, we must also address issues such as handling.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Although nobody would impugn the integrity of her predecessor, does the right hon. Lady accept that this report is such a damning indictment of the Government's handling of the outbreak—and such a vindication of the many who offered criticism at the time by calling for vaccination, and so on—that it will be incomprehensible to those whose lives were shattered if the Minister who formerly presided over the Department remains in the Government?

Margaret Beckett: I am really quite shocked at the hon. Gentleman, not least because he is a long-serving and normally sensible Member of this House. It is not true that the report bears out all the criticisms that were made of the use of vaccination; nor is it true that it, or the scientific report, says that vaccination offers an easy answer. Indeed, both reports make it plain that much work is still required before vaccination could be a tool to replace culling. I particularly deplore the hon. Gentleman's remarks because, as a regular and assiduous attender of this House, he was present when my right hon. Friend presented the Phillips inquiry report, and absolutely and adamantly refused to attribute blame to any of those involved, or to call for their resignation. In the light of that, the hon. Gentleman's comments are wrong and quite disgraceful.

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): I welcome my right hon. Friend's straightforward and honest response to the report; indeed, that was the approach taken by her predecessor during the crisis. However, can she assure me that she will implement all the recommendations, and not just those that she mentioned in passing in her statement? The burning of animals on mass pyres should not be used as a strategy for disposal. It caused not only great distress but considerable damage to the rural economy—particularly to tourism—through the images that were seen on television and in the newspapers. What steps will my right hon. Friend take to ensure that, should we ever have to go down this route again, other methods of disposal will be at hand?

Margaret Beckett: I anticipate that we will accept almost all the recommendations—indeed, we may be able to accept them all—but there are some to which we will need to give further consideration. My hon. Friend will know the perils of saying never in politics, or in life in general. I accept that Dr. Anderson suggests that we should rule out the method to which she refers. If we can follow his other recommendations—such as developing a hierarchy and getting much more information on the capacity to use rendering, along with his various other suggestions concerning the disposal of carcases—it might not be necessary to proceed to such steps, should a similar event occur in future. That is certainly highly desirable, but I am cautious at this stage about saying never. Nevertheless, we will examine that recommendation with great care, along with the others.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Royal Society's report makes it clear that, in the past 15 years, animal diseases have cost this country £15 billion. Has the Secretary of State considered establishing a national centre of excellence to look into all aspects of animal disease? What work is planned to provide a better understanding of how foot and mouth disease spreads? It was the reaction to the disease, and our perhaps inadequate knowledge of how it spreads, that led to much of the countryside being closed down.

Margaret Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting suggestion, which I undertake to consider,

[Margaret Beckett]

although I am not sure whether we need exactly the sort of institution that he suggests. I accept that we can always benefit from more information about the way in which the disease spreads. However, my understanding of the evidence that has been put forward so far is that it does so through contact, poor biosecurity and so on. Those are relatively familiar mechanisms of spread, although little mention has been made of the variety of strains of foot and mouth disease that exist. As it happens, the strain that hit this country in 2001 was less easily spread by plume. In other circumstances, with different viruses, the position could be different. I accept the right hon. Gentleman's view that there is much to be learned from the Royal Society's investigation, and the Government intend to learn those lessons.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The Secretary of State has already accepted one of the lessons to be learned from this tragic episode, which is the value of visitors to the countryside. When the footpaths were closed and local authorities such as Lincolnshire were hesitant and reluctant to open them, it was the pub, the local shop and the broader rural economy that suffered. Given that, will she move quickly with her already established policy to switch payments to farmers from subsidies for production to payments for creating a landscape and environment that people will want to visit?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is correct to say that one of the clear lessons from the outbreak was the impact on the wider rural economy, and Dr. Anderson makes it clear that we should take that into account in future planning. On my hon. Friend's final point, the Government will do as much as they can in present circumstances, but he will know that some element of common agricultural policy reform would be of great assistance in that change and that is why we are pursuing it.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I preface my question by expressing the hope that the Secretary of State will find at least two full days for debating this important subject when the House returns in the autumn. Does she understand that the people of Throckmorton are still learning daily the lessons of foot and mouth, with continuing concerns about the environment, the health impact and the total inability to sell houses and rebuild their shattered lives? In the light of recommendation 45, will she look again at the question of compensation? Will she also launch a proper investigation of their concerns about the health and environmental impact of the foot and mouth disease landfill burial site that is located on their doorstep?

Margaret Beckett: I am conscious of the difficulties that have been experienced by the hon. Gentleman's constituents. I am also aware that he has constituency cases in which the issue that was raised by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) concerning compensation particularly arise. I cannot say any more than I have said in the past on that subject, but I accept the points that he makes. He may like to know that in the report Dr. Anderson also considers the environmental and health impacts, and his words about the investigations and inquiries he has made will—I hope—be of some reassurance to the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): My right hon. Friend will know about the significant impact of the disease in north Yorkshire, especially the moorland areas. I pay tribute to the former ministerial team, the officials and the vets, especially for what happened in the hefted areas of the moorland. The BBC, the trading standards people and the national parks people all played an important part in disseminating information. In the light of the lessons learned about biosecurity measures, as outlined in the report, what training will be provided for people in agriculture and vets and what measures will be taken to improve information dissemination in remote areas in future?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an important point and, indeed, Dr. Anderson reports how, in several areas, the best and most effective source of information was the local radio, with regular bulletins and so on. Dr. Anderson is clear that that is one of the lessons that we can all learn. He also identifies the need for an overall communications strategy, not least about subjects such as biosecurity and ensuring better information, training and practice on farms to minimise some of the difficulties that were experienced in the outbreak.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Secretary of State will agree with me that the whole of the farming community and inward tourism in the United Kingdom suffered in the same way, but will she not learn lessons from different parts of the UK? Northern Ireland managed the disease better; it had very few outbreaks. Given that the disease came into Northern Ireland with smuggled sheep from the north of England and that there are a lot of operators—not the whole of the farming community—in the dealers' yard who need to be penalised and sanctioned, will the right hon. Lady give a commitment to the House that in her review and her recommendations on contingency plans, she will include penalties for those who spread the disease through the mainland and into Northern Ireland?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. To some degree, but in a slightly different context, he echoes the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin): it was illegal behaviour on someone's part that led to the disease having any impact in the Province. It is clear that one of the things that we must do is to discourage such behaviour because of the dreadful consequences that it has had for so many.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must move on to the next statement.

Chinook Accident (Mull of Kintyre)

4.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the crash of Chinook ZD 576 on the Mull of Kintyre.

During a routine flight from Aldergrove to Inverness on 2 June 1994, all on board—the 25 passengers and four crew—were killed. What we must remember, above all, is that this was a tragedy. Twenty-nine families lost loved ones that day. The whole House will once again want to extend their sympathy to them. This was also a blow felt throughout the Royal Air Force and in the many other areas of the armed forces and the public service from which the passengers on board were drawn.

This has been the most extensively examined air crash in the history of British military aviation. Not only aviation and engineering experts but at least 10 Ministers from across two Governments—from the right hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind to, most recently, Lord Bach—have considered the case. Each new Minister has, like me, had the advantage of coming to this with an open mind. Every new Minister who has examined the facts of the case has come to the same conclusion.

The senior reviewing officers of the original RAF board of inquiry found the pilots grossly negligent. They concluded that the pilots had flown the aircraft at a consistently high speed at low level, and into poor weather that they had been warned to expect. These facts led the board of inquiry to believe that the only possible conclusion was that this accident was a result of a controlled flight into terrain.

Many have challenged this conclusion. As a result, in April last year a Select Committee was established in the other place to consider the justification for the findings by the senior reviewing officers. The Select Committee concluded that the reviewing officers were not justified in their findings that negligence on the part of the pilots "caused the crash".

The Government have now considered the Select Committee report extremely carefully. We have thoroughly examined the alternative explanations for the crash that were considered by the Committee in the other place. We have painstakingly reviewed the complex technical, legal and airmanship issues which the report raises. We have sought further clarification from Boeing on the points made about its original work conducted as part of the RAF board of inquiry in 1994.

In order to leave no question unanswered, we have also asked Boeing to undertake further work to review its original analysis, including a full FADEC simulation. Those familiar with this case will know that the FADEC system, by controlling the fuel supply, maintains approximately 100 per cent. rotor speed in all conditions and matches engine torque between the two engines on the aircraft. It has been argued that the failure of this system was a cause of the accident.

Our deliberations are now complete, and I am arranging to place in the Library, as well as in the Library of the other place, copies of our response, together with copies of the further work by Boeing. A number of theories have been put forward to explain the cause of the accident. Each theory depends on a particular interpretation of the evidence. That is why at the outset I want to try to set out as best I can those facts that are not actually in dispute. We know that, as before every routine flight, the pilots received meteorological information, in this case, warning them of poor weather conditions in the vicinity of the Mull. They took that into account in planning their route from Aldergrove to the Mull lighthouse; on to Corran, near Fort William; and then up the Great Glen to Fort George, near Inverness.

We know that the first way point entered on the aircraft's navigation computer was very close to the lighthouse on the western tip of the Mull. That way point was the position where the pilots intended to change or adjust their course to head towards Corran. Taking into account the weather conditions, they planned to fly their route at low level under visual flight rules, which means that they needed to maintain at least 1,000 m of visibility. If they were unable to do so during the flight, they would be required under the rules either to turn away from the poor conditions or to climb to a safe altitude of 1,000 ft above the height of any known obstacle. They would then have flown under instrument flight rules, which would require them to fly with sole reference to their cockpit instruments.

We know that the aircraft took off from RAF Aldergrove at 17.42. We know from an exchange between the crew and air traffic control that at just after 17.46 the aircraft was 7 nautical miles from the Aldergrove radio beacon. A number of witnesses reported the aircraft flying low as it headed for the coast. Those sightings are consistent with a high-speed, low-level transit towards the Mull along the planned track.

We know from the data in the SuperTANS navigation system on board every Chinook that the aircraft was 0.81 nautical miles from the lighthouse when the pilots took the steps necessary to enter the second way point—89 miles away at Corran—into the computer. Given their training and experience, the pilots would not have performed that task if they had been experiencing any significant difficulty in handling the aircraft. The Committee in the other place accepted that it was highly unlikely that the pilots would have entered the way-point change if they had thought they were not in control of their aircraft.

We know from all the eye witnesses on the Mull that the weather there was generally foggy and very bad—indeed, consistent with the meteorological advice. The lighthouse keeper estimated visibility to be 15 to 20 m at most.

We know from the power down recording in the SuperTANS system that the time of initial impact was 17.59 and 36 seconds, giving a total journey time of just under 18 minutes. From those facts we can calculate that the ground speed of the aircraft from the air traffic control fix to impact averaged 158 knots, which shows that the pilots had selected a high cruising speed for their crossing to the Mull.

We know that the ground speed at impact was at least 147 knots from the evidence on the aircraft's instruments at the crash site and corroborated by data extracted from the global positioning system and the navigation computer.

We know that the aircraft hit the ground at a height of 810 ft above sea level. All the evidence clearly points to the aircraft having flared—or "pulled up" in layman's

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

terms—with its nose upward at an angle of 30 deg in the final few seconds of flight. That is shown not only by the physical evidence at the crash site—in particular, the alignment of the fuselage—but by the fact that the collective control, which controls power, was set at or near full travel at impact, with the cyclic control, which controls pitch or elevation, at 25 per cent. aft and 23 per cent. left of neutral, all indicating a demand for high power and nose-up attitude in what was probably a last desperate attempt to pull away. That evidence at the crash site also indicates that the aircraft was almost certainly responding properly to its controls, at least in the final seconds before impact.

Those then are the facts, which have not been seriously challenged by anyone. What remains at issue is what happened in the last 20 seconds or more of the flight, from the point at which the pilots entered the way point change into the navigation computer until moments before impact, when they pulled hard up in a clear attempt to avoid hitting the ground. Various theories have been put forward and we have considered each in turn. They are examined in detail in our fuller response which has been placed in both Libraries.

One hypothesis suggests that, because of the low cloud, the pilots had slowed down for the way point change, intending to turn left to hug the coast towards the way point at Corran while remaining at low level. The Committee in the other place has accepted that the aircraft was performing satisfactorily up to and including the way point change. It suggests that, the aircraft having performed the required deceleration successfully, some catastrophic failure occurred in the last 20 or more seconds of flight. That failure caused the aircraft to accelerate out of control so that it flew at high speed into the Mull, with the pilots unable to control the aircraft, at least until the final few seconds.

Was it the crew's intention to slow down significantly for the way point change? Boeing's analysis shows that, given a normal rate of acceleration, it would not have been possible to achieve the speed conditions for the final flare if the ground speed was below 80 knots at the way point change. If the aircraft had slowed to around 80 knots at that point, an even higher average cruising ground speed from the air traffic control fix to the way point change would have been necessary and, crucially, the aircraft would have begun to decelerate about one mile before the way point change and, in the process, to reduce power considerably, adopting a nose-up attitude for a considerable period. Such a manoeuvre is not consistent with any of the evidence.

In addition, the further analysis from Boeing shows that, given a normal rate of acceleration, it would not have been possible to accelerate from below 80 knots and achieve the speed conditions necessary to be consistent with the final flare just before impact.

Even if the aircraft had performed the manoeuvres necessary to slow to 80 knots at the way point change, what plausible explanations could account for the pilots not being able to execute the turn and to cause the aircraft to accelerate to the known speed at impact? And what sort of incident could have cleared in time to allow the pilots to perform the final flare in the seconds just before impact?

It has been suggested that a control jam of some sort could have occurred. For that to have happened, the aircraft would first have had to be rotated nose down to an accelerating attitude, the power set to full and the controls "frozen" to such an extent that neither a heading change, nor a climb, nor a speed change was possible. Moreover, that condition would have had to have remained fixed throughout the significant period required to achieve the acceleration. To achieve those conditions either simultaneous multiple failures would have had to have occurred to the pitch of the aircraft and have frozen the controls, or the pilots would have had voluntarily to conduct at least some of the extraordinary control combinations needed themselves.

The Committee in the other place also explored the possibility that the thrust balance spring attachment bracket and other inserts detached before impact, as some of these flying control components were found to be detached at the crash site. But because the controls are hydraulically powered, such a fault would result in a change to the "feel" of those controls and would be detected by the pilots. Moreover, the aircraft would still be controllable. It is not credible that that could have caused the accident as it occurred. In any event, the report from the air accidents investigation branch indicated that the brackets were likely to have become detached during the post-accident break-up of the aircraft.

Despite suggestions from other commentators, the Committee in the other place accepted that the FADEC system and the trials of the Chinook Mark 2 which had been suspended at Boscombe Down had no bearing on this accident. In fact all the available evidence indicates that the engines were working normally up to the point of impact. The Committee was also satisfied that the E5 software fault, which has also been the subject of much media speculation, had no relevance to this accident.

We have examined in detail all the alternative hypotheses put to the Committee by witnesses. The question is, when taken in the context of the whole flight, are they, or is any one of them, plausible—plausible against the strict standard of proof needed at that time before a finding of negligence could be made against deceased aircrew?

As the Committee observes, the standard of proof of "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" is even higher than that applicable in criminal cases. I am, of course, aware that four of the five members of the Committee in the other place are distinguished lawyers.

It also follows from this strict standard of proof that if there is another plausible explanation for what took place other than the one accepted by the board of inquiry, its conclusion cannot be allowed to stand. The reviewing officers in this case were required to be in no doubt whatsoever that the pilots' negligence was a cause—although not necessarily the sole cause—of the accident.

No investigation into a serious accident can ever hope to answer every question with absolute certainty. Negligence can itself be the cause of an accident, or it can be one of a number of factors. The reviewing officers were charged with considering all of the evidence as a whole; they were entitled to call on their own knowledge and experience of military flying, and to take proper recognition of the very high standard of airmanship that is required of RAF pilots.

It follows that if the senior reviewing officers were left with no "honest" doubt that the pilots were negligent, and that the negligence was a causative factor in what happened, they would have failed in their duty if they had not found the pilots to be negligent. It would have been wrong of the reviewing officers to avoid such a finding on the basis of a hypothesis for which there was no plausible evidence.

The senior reviewing officers' finding of negligence was not dependent upon whether the pilots could see the Mull at the time of the way point change. We can deduce that at some point the aircraft entered cloud—which the crew had been warned to expect—well below what was the safety altitude. The issue is whether at the time that they did so the aircraft was fully under the control of the pilots. There is no other plausible explanation for the accident: the only realistic explanation is that found by the reviewing officers of the board of inquiry.

As they approached land, the pilots would have been aware that their visibility was about to reduce significantly. Had they been flying with the minimum visibility allowed for visual flight rules, by the way point change they would have seen the landmass of the Mull and would have recognised their perilous position. They should have taken prompt action by flying higher or by turning away. The finding of negligence is therefore based on the fact that they failed to take such avoiding action.

This is a sensitive and emotive case. I recognise that some people would have liked to reach a different conclusion from that of the reviewing officers. Indeed, some former Ministers have since changed their minds about their original interpretation of the facts. However, we require senior military officers to make decisions on the facts at the time, applying their judgment as professional airmen against the high standard of airmanship to which the Royal Air Force adheres.

We have therefore reviewed the material put forward by the Committee with the very greatest care. We have considered the alternative hypotheses rigorously to see if there is any other plausible explanation that fits with the facts. We have agonised over whether there was some way in which we could exonerate the pilots posthumously, but on the basis of all the evidence, I am unable to do so.

Apportioning blame for such a terrible accident to men who lost their lives in it was not an easy task for those responsible. Reviewing the circumstances of the case has been one of the hardest duties that I have been asked to perform as a Minister. Nevertheless, where lives have been lost, we must be willing to examine the facts as carefully and dispassionately as possible, for the sake of all those involved. This we have done.

I know that this response to the Select Committee's report will be unwelcome to some. As I have consistently stated before, should new evidence come to light, I would certainly be prepared to look at that evidence again. Indeed, it was precisely the possibility of new evidence that led me to commission the further work from Boeing.

I hope that this statement and the supporting detailed analysis which is being published today will assist the House in understanding the reasons why we have not been able to support the conclusions of the latest report into this tragic accident.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I thank the Secretary of State for an advance copy of his statement and of the material which he is placing in the Library. I think that the House understands how difficult this case has been for Ministers to deal with, and we are grateful for the care that the right hon. Gentleman has obviously taken. However, we, like many others, continue to be drawn inescapably to the conclusion that this is not a safe verdict.

Today is another sad day for the families and all those who lost their loved ones on that fateful day, 2 June 1994—and especially for the families of the two pilots. I join the Secretary of State in reiterating our sympathy to all those who were bereaved. In criticising the right hon. Gentleman for his announcement today, I stress that the issue is one of natural justice, not one of party. Indeed, as the right hon. Gentleman noted, we have been pressing for the reversal of a mistaken decision taken under the previous Conservative Administration—a decision that the Secretary of State's predecessor, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, to whom the right hon. Gentleman referred, and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), the then Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, have said should be reversed.

May I also make it clear that we do not seek to challenge the honour or integrity of Ministers or senior RAF officers? However, we believe that they should be prepared to review their original decision in this matter, because the RAF rules in force at the time provided that the deceased aircrew should be found negligent only when there was "absolutely no doubt whatsoever". That is a very much higher standard of proof than "beyond all reasonable doubt" which is usually required in criminal trials in civilian courts. It means that every other possible explanation of the crash must be disproved, and in this case that cannot be done.

May I refer briefly to the Secretary of State's own statement today? At one point, he said:

> "This evidence at the crash site also indicates that the aircraft was almost certainly responding properly to its controls, at least in the final seconds before impact".

I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that "almost certainly" is not "absolutely no doubt whatsoever". He then went on to say

> "These, then, are the facts".

I put it to him that these are not the facts.

Later on, the statement refers to senior reviewing officers who were left with "no honest doubt". I do not know the legal antecedents of that term "no honest doubt", but it is not the same as "absolutely no doubt whatsoever". That is the basis of the case expressed by those who object to this verdict.

The inquiry conducted by the Committee in the other place, chaired by someone who is not only a distinguished lawyer but a former judge in the Scottish Appeal Court, concluded that the Ministry's original report was not sufficiently based on fact, but was based on assumptions that have subsequently been challenged. I put it to the Secretary of State that most of the Boeing evidence is conjecture, not fact, and that even Boeing cannot be said to be the most impartial witness. I do not question the company's integrity but as manufacturer of the aircraft it certainly has an interest in the outcome of the inquiry. Pilots also question the reliability of data, to which the Secretary of State referred, from the SuperTANS navigation system.

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

How can the Secretary of State continue to sustain this position, except in the most legalistic of terms? He dismisses others who have challenged the board of inquiry findings. However, may I point out that the report from the other place supports three other independent inquiries? The air accidents investigation branch did not conclude that the pilots had been negligent. The fatal accident inquiry concluded that it had not been established

"on the balance of probabilities"

that the cause of the accident was due to the decisions taken by the crew.

The "balance of probabilities" is the weakest possible argument that a court would accept in a civil case. It is very much easier to accept a guilty verdict on the balance of probabilities than on absolutely no doubt whatsoever.

The Select Committee on Defence, while avoiding the question of blame for the accident, questioned the procedures that led to the controversies. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee found that the verdict of the RAF board of inquiry was "unsustainable" and recommended that it should be set aside.

Surely, after all that, the conclusions of the Select Committee in the other place cannot simply be ignored. For the Government to persist in their verdict is, in the minds of many, very difficult to accept.

The Secretary of State's mantra is that there is "no new evidence". However, the case made by both the PAC and the Select Committee in the other place is not that they have uncovered "new evidence" but that there was insufficient evidence at the time to reach the verdict of gross negligence beyond absolutely no doubt whatsoever.

Ultimately, this is not a legal argument, but an argument about natural justice. Does the Secretary of State understand that pilots still serving in the armed forces feel utterly betrayed by the Ministry of Defence on this issue? Can the right hon. Gentleman really put his hand on his heart and tell the House today that he believes that there is "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" that these pilots, who were mostly highly trained, who had unblemished records and who were carrying such a notably precious cargo of intelligence officers, together committed the most cardinal and basic errors in airmanship? In the civilian world, is this not virtually the equivalent of finding the pilots guilty of manslaughter—despite the fact that the fatal accident inquiry could not reach that verdict even on "the balance of probabilities"?

In all honesty, some doubt continues to exist in the minds of many of those who have studied all the issues very closely. In all humanity, the Secretary of State should reopen the RAF board of inquiry and review the verdict.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his mostly dispassionate account of the response. I invite right hon. and hon. Members as they approach this issue to try to do the same. Perhaps once they have gone through my statement in more detail and looked [illegible] the fuller account that has been published and made available, they will see the care with which the Ministry of Defence [illegible] entirely dispassionately approached this issue.

I hope that my reasoning conforms to the hon. Gentleman's analysis. I have sought to demonstrate that there is no doubt whatsoever. I have done that by very carefully relying on the facts about which there is no substantial dispute. I set them out for the benefit of the House. Perhaps with more time, right hon. and hon. Members will have the opportunity of considering those facts—and they are facts—extremely carefully.

The hon. Gentleman said that every other possible explanation must be disproved. I take issue with him only in that that should be "every other plausible explanation". We are not dealing with explanations that do not stand up. I hope that, when he looks more carefully at my statement and the material in the Library, he will see that each and every explanation has been gone through with a very considerable amount of rigour. Indeed, that was precisely why I specifically asked Boeing again to go through the material that it had made available to the board of inquiry, and to do so from scratch with appropriate care. That report is also available to hon. Members.

The point about honest doubt was simply a reference to the duty placed on the reviewing officers. I was not referring to the burden of proof at that stage. Again, if the hon. Gentleman looks carefully at my statement, he will see that to be so.

If the hon. Gentleman looks at the Boeing report—I accept that he may not have had the opportunity to do so in detail as yet—he will see that these are not assumptions. These are very carefully worked-through facts arising from a detailed analysis of what took place during that flight.

On evidence and so on, what is important is that we consider the facts of the case and not simply how people may feel. I entirely recognise the obvious, understandable human sympathy. I have spent some considerable time since I was appointed to this office talking to helicopter pilots about the accident. Although there are certainly some who feel betrayed, I must tell the hon. Gentleman and the House that there are others who feel very differently about the matter. So I do not think that the anecdotal experience of helicopter pilots is particularly helpful in these circumstances.

As the hon. Gentleman says—I make no argument with him—the issue is whether there was sufficient evidence. I invite right hon. and hon. Members dispassionately to consider that evidence, which is available in the Library. I hope that they will notice as they analyse my statement today that I have excluded pieces of evidence about which there is some doubt simply in order to rely on the known facts rather than to try to form a hypothesis based on disputed ones. I have consciously and deliberately excluded and not mentioned today pieces of evidence that are largely favourable to the reviewing officers simply because there is some doubt about its reliability. On the basis of evidence and the known facts, I invite right hon. and hon. Members to accept what I have set out to the House today.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I begin by associating myself with the Secretary of State's preliminary remarks about the terrible consequences of the tragic accident for many people? He urged us all to be dispassionate, and so we should be, but I regret that I cannot conceal my disappointment at the nature of his statement to the House of Commons. Nothing that he has said today has shaken my belief that the board of inquiry, in good faith, made an error of judgment and failed to apply the necessary high standard of proof. Its failure led to an injustice that the House ought to put right.

I find it difficult to understand why the Secretary of State should attach so little weight to the views of Sir Malcolm Rifkind, the then Secretary of State for Defence, who says that he would not have accepted the findings of the board of inquiry had he known then what he knows now. Can the right hon. Gentleman recall a similar instance in which a former Secretary of State has publicly sought to reverse a difficult decision that he took during his tenure as Secretary of State? I most certainly cannot—it is a unique feature of this matter.

How can the Secretary of State justify ignoring the conclusions of the sheriff, Sir Stephen Young, conscientious to a fault, who presided over the fatal accident inquiry for 16 days, supervised two days of legal submission, and wrote a judgment in excess of 120 pages, but could not accept the Ministry of Defence's explanation of the way in which the accident occurred? How can the Secretary of State fail to accept the conclusions of a Select Committee of the House of Lords chaired by Lord Jauncey, one of Scotland's most eminent judges in recent times? He concluded that the standard of "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" was simply not present and did not justify the conclusions of the board of inquiry? Do not those independent, impartial and painstaking conclusions fatally undermine the finding of negligence against those pilots?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who has looked at the issue over a long period of time. I do not in any way take lightly his serious comments, but I hope that he will look at the further report from Boeing and my statement to the House today in considerable detail, as I believe that they will satisfy a number of his concerns.

I invited Sir Malcolm Rifkind to my office when it was clear that the matter would be raised again, and we had a thorough and detailed conversation. I accept that Sir Malcolm is not here to give his side of the story, but his essential point was that were he to look at the case again today he would reach a different view from that which he took at the time. While that is a perfectly proper position, it is not a sufficient reason for disturbing a carefully thought-through finding from the board of inquiry. As I indicated at the outset in my statement, at least 10 Ministers from two different Governments have looked independently and separately at the issue, serving their country and the House of Commons as best they could at the time, and each independently came to the conclusion that the findings of the board of inquiry were justified.

The weighing of evidence, however, from different sources, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman and others are undoubtedly seeking, is not necessarily the right approach. The right way is to look objectively at known facts that can be established beyond any reasonable doubt, and to apply the circumstances of the case to those known facts. I simply make it clear to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the Committee in the other place accepted that at the way point change the aircraft was functioning normally. It is also clear that in the last few seconds the aircraft responded to a command from the pilots because it gained ground and hit the Mull in a particular way. It did not hit the Mull head on. It hit the Mull having responded to what was clearly an effort to pull up in time to avoid an impending crash.

In those circumstances, any plausible explanation of what went wrong must satisfy the pretty stiff test of what could have happened in those last 20 seconds that arguably cleared itself by the time the pilots were in a position to take what they tried to take—avoiding action. I should be grateful if right hon. and hon. Members would concentrate on that 20-second period, because it is the crucial period, as members of the Select Committee accepted. They accepted that the aircraft was functioning properly at the way point change.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement today and accept that it is not an easy duty for him to perform. I respect his attempt to be dispassionate, and his success in that, but it is difficult for me to be dispassionate. Under the previous Government, I was a member of the Defence Committee that decided not to hold an inquiry. I now regret that and I congratulate the House of Lords on holding its inquiry.

When people in our armed forces put their lives in harm's way to defend our country and our democracy, it is fair for them to assume that they have, at the very least, rights equal to those of every other citizen whom they seek to defend—in other words, that the onus of proof is not on the deceased, but on those who say that they were to blame. The onus of proof today, I say with respect to my right hon. Friend, is on him. I have not heard anything in his statement or read anything so far that supports the decision of the Secretary of State to come to the House and support a board of inquiry that consisted of two air marshals against a previous RAF inquiry that found that there were no human failures at all.

Mr. Hoon: If my hon. Friend studies my statement, he will see quite clearly that I accept—and I set it out for the benefit of the House—that it is a question of being able to show that there is no other plausible explanation. I conceded to the House, and I concede again, that if there is another plausible explanation, the test set by the board of inquiry under the relevant rules will not have been satisfied. There is no other plausible explanation.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): This simply will not do, will it? The Secretary of State accepts that he has to rule out all other plausible hypotheses, and in doing so he has to accept that, unless he can disprove something else that is plausible, it is not enough to say that there is no evidence that something did not happen; he has to disprove it. So will the Secretary of State please explain to the House why he personally has absolutely no doubt whatsoever that, for example, neither of the pilots was taken ill during the last two minutes of the flight?

Mr. Hoon: Because, again, as I told the House a few moments ago, having looked carefully at the facts as agreed—so far, none of the facts has been challenged by anyone in the House, although I recognise that everyone must have the opportunity of reading the reports in detail—the issue is what happened in those last 20 seconds or so. The Committee in the other place accepted that, at the way point change, the aircraft was working properly. The evidence is that in the last few seconds, there was a flare—the aircraft was pulled up suddenly in order to avoid what was clearly going to be a crash.

[Mr. Hoon]

There is no evidence whatsoever of any possible reason why, in between, the pilots were not fully in control of the aircraft. In any event, the point that the right hon. Gentleman overlooks is that the reviewing officers found negligence even before the way point change, given the distances involved, the cloud cover of the Mull, and the altitude at which the aircraft was then flying. The issue is not what happened in the last 20 seconds, although I recognise that if there were any possible explanation, it would enormously help the effort that the right hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members have made to disprove the findings of the board of inquiry. However, I have heard nothing to suggest that that is the case.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I refer to the question that I asked on 19 March at column 244 of *Hansard* and repeat it: what explanation has been given by the Ministry of Defence as to why it did not tell Malcolm Rifkind that legal proceedings were taking place against Boeing?

Mr. Hoon: I am not in a position to answer that question precisely, as that was obviously a matter for previous Ministers. My hon. Friend will be aware of the rules affecting papers supplied to previous Ministers. In any event, the question of legal proceedings arose out of the testing procedures relating to FADEC. *[Interruption.]* If my hon. Friend will listen to the answer, I can tell him that the Committee in the other place made it clear that the FADEC issue was not, in its judgment, relevant to anything arising from the causation of the crash.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I commend the Secretary of State for having the courage to come to the House and make a statement about an accident which has understandably caused deep emotion? Is it not the case, however, that in analysing military accidents, or any flying accident, we must be guided only by the truth as the circumstances disclose it? Is it not true that the more one looks into the causes of this accident, the clearer it becomes that the original judgment of the reviewing officers, Sir William Wratten and Sir John Day, was correct? Is it not, prima facie, negligent to fly a serviceable aircraft in instrument meterological conditions in the proximity of high ground? In those circumstances, the finding was entirely correct. I applaud the Secretary of State on this occasion, and, as probably the only person in the House who spent his formative years in military cockpits, I think that most professional people will agree with the judgment that he has given to the House today.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I would be less than honest with the House if I did not say that there were times when I thought that it might have been easier to take a different way out. I am grateful for his observations about the fact that I chose not to do so.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I thank my right hon. Friend for coming to the House to make the statement, as it would have been very easy for him to hide away for the recess. It would also be helpful for us to have a debate in the House after the recess, as well as the one that I imagine will be conducted in the House of Lords.

My right hon. Friend said that there had been a painstaking review of the complex technical, legal and airmanship issues raised by the report, and that he had placed the Boeing evidence in the Library. I therefore believe that legal advice will also have been available to him. Will he place that in the Library as well, as it is that aspect that causes many of us the gravest doubt? As he said, in order to secure a judgment of gross negligence, there must be absolutely no doubt whatsoever. This is such a narrow area that it is important that we see what seems to have been the major stumbling block for Jauncey and others. Many of us think that 10 Ministers coming to the same conclusion on the basis of the same advice from the same group of officials is not a source of consolation.

Is it not the case that the black box cannot be found in military helicopters, that TANS is no substitute for a black box and that conclusions about anything that happened are drawn on the basis not of facts, but of hypotheses that can be challenged and in which lie the doubts that many of us have about the soundness of the judgment?

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry that my hon. Friend chooses to phrase his comments about Ministers in that way; perhaps he will reconsider.

Mr. O'Neill: It is true.

Mr. Hoon: I assure him—I suspect that other Ministers can confirm this—that a new Minister in a Department who is faced with such an issue wants to ensure that it is considered thoroughly and properly. I knew that at some stage I would have to face the House of Commons, and that simply to accept the advice that was put in front of me would not necessarily equip me with the arguments and information that I would need to be able to answer right hon. and hon. Members' questions. It is for others to judge whether I am able to do so. I assure my hon. Friend that I personally—and other Ministers serving in the Department—have gone to a great deal of trouble to challenge the advice put in front of us.

On the legal advice, I doubt whether any Minister could have set a higher bar as regards what it is necessary for the Ministry of Defence to show in order not to disturb the finding of the board of inquiry than to say that there should be "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" that negligence occurred. I have accepted the highest legal standard that any Member of Parliament has ever proposed to the Ministry of Defence. In those circumstances, my hon. Friend's looking at the legal advice—which in any event, as he knows, is not something that any Department publishes—would not assist him, because I have accepted that there should be a very high standard for the Department to satisfy in order not to disturb the original finding.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Secretary of State aware that the parents of Jonathan Tapper are constituents of mine? Jonathan Tapper was an officer with a completely unblemished record and a true professional of the utmost integrity. Given that three reports—the fatal accident inquiry, the House of Lords Select Committee report and the Public Accounts Committee report—overruled the finding of gross negligence, the parents of the two pilots were hoping and praying that the Secretary of State would follow those reports and quash the finding of gross negligence. Does he understand the heartache and grief that those families are suffering? Does he also understand that it is bad enough to lose a loved one, without having to endure the slur of gross negligence, as well as the inference that, had they lived, the pilots would have been guilty of manslaughter? All that those parents are asking for is to have their sons' names cleared, so what advice can he give to enable them to do that?

Mr. Hoon: I understand to some extent. Although I do not claim possibly to be able to share the anguish that they have gone through, I understand the difficulties that they have faced and I have sought to face up to them myself. As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), I thought of taking what would have been politically a much easier way out than coming here to make the statement, but I felt unable to do that having personally considered carefully the facts of the case and having gone through an enormous amount of detailed information about the circumstances. I am sorry that I am unable to assist the hon. Gentleman in the way that he describes.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The Father of the House suggested that the Secretary of State should look at the papers that misled Sir Malcolm Rifkind in reaching his conclusion about the accident. Would my right hon. Friend welcome an initiative by Sir Malcolm to lift the ban on present incumbents looking at previous incumbents' papers?

The Secretary of State said that he felt unable at the present time to conclude that he should overturn the decision. On several occasions he told us to consult his statement carefully. I have a copy of it here. One of the phrases that he used is that there was to be "no doubt whatsoever that the pilots' negligence was a cause—although not necessarily the sole cause—of the accident." Does not that shift the grounds of the standard of proof from what we had all thought them to be—that is, "absolutely no doubt whatsoever"? Is not there a worrying trend among suppliers of armaments to the Government whereby when rifles do not work properly, the suppliers blame the service men for not being able to fire them, and when helicopters do not fly properly Boeing lends its weight to blaming the pilots?

Mr. Hoon: I would certainly be willing to look at Sir Malcolm Rifkind's papers and I have indicated all along that I would be willing to look at any new evidence. As I said to the House earlier, I commissioned a new report—which is now available to right hon. and hon. Members—specifically because I wanted to see from scratch the material that was available, so far as it could be, to Ministers. I am certainly willing to consider any further material that anyone supplies to me at any stage. I do not, however, accept my right hon. Friend's further observations; they are unfair, and that is not the way in which we have gone through this process.

Angus Robertson (Moray): May I express my disappointment at the missed opportunity to overturn the findings of negligence against the Chinook pilots, Jonathan Tapper and Richard Cook? Will the Secretary of State confirm that, if there were to be an RAF board of inquiry today, it would not be able to reach a finding of negligence because the rules were changed after the crash on the Mull of Kintyre?

Mr. Hoon: That is absolutely right. After asking that question, however, the hon. Gentleman must ask himself whether it would be right, once the rules have been changed, for us retrospectively to apply a different standard to events that occurred in the past. He is asking only half the question.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the way in which he has approached this statement. If we were looking at these matters in terms of a balance of probabilities, he would certainly have a point. But, as the Public Accounts Committee found, that is not what we are looking at. The Committee—an all-party Committee—considered the legal and technical evidence as thoroughly as it could, and used very strong language to express the view that the Ministry of Defence, in continuing to support the two senior officers, was guilty of "unwarrantable arrogance". That was a very strong statement from the Public Accounts Committee, and it came to that conclusion because of the dispute about the words "absolutely no doubt whatsoever".

I want to put a question to the Secretary of State, and he must answer it if he is to convince the House of Commons. Looking at what the House of Lords report said, is the Secretary of State telling the House of Commons that he has

> "absolutely no doubt whatsoever that the pilots intended to overfly the cloud-covered Mull"?

Is he also telling the House of Commons that, in his view and in the absence of a black box, there was

> "absolutely no doubt whatsoever that some mechanical failure had not caused a loss of control of the aircraft"?

Is that what the Secretary of State is telling the House of Commons?

Mr. Hoon: I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's observations about the term "unwarrantable arrogance". That represented one of the most disappointing aspects of the Public Accounts Committee's report, not least because the Committee failed, for example, to call the reviewing officers to give their own evidence. It struck me as somewhat inconsistent of the Committee to reach that very strong conclusion without having called all those who could give relevant evidence as to what had taken place.

On the hon. Gentleman's second question, I am entirely satisfied that at this stage there is no plausible explanation other than that the pilots themselves were responsible for negligently flying the aircraft into the Mull.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): May I say to the Secretary of State and to my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) that I am glad that this is not a party matter? The Secretary of State has shown evidence that he has approached this with an open mind, that there is no other plausible explanation with any proof attached to it, and that those on both sides of the House who are asking for any implausible explanation to be ruled out by evidence are going far beyond the natural consequences of the decisions that, sadly, the pilots took when they flew that aeroplane in the direction that they did, at the height that they did and at the speed that they did.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I would simply invite right hon. and hon. Members to look

[Mr. Hoon]

carefully at the facts, and to deal with each of them as they are set out in the report that we have made available to Members of the House.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will the Secretary of State take it from me that a large number of us are genuinely sorry—in my case, on behalf of my constituents at Boscombe Down—that a statement has been made this afternoon that changes absolutely nothing? Will he tell me whether he has at any stage discussed this statement and the outcome of his deliberations with the Prime Minister?

Mr. Hoon: The usual discussions have taken place across Government for many years. I come to the House presenting a settled Government view.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Given that a number of independent, qualified and distinguished individuals who have investigated have declined to blame the pilots, and given that it is really rather undesirable for the Ministry of Defence to have the final say, would it not be best to appoint a senior judicial figure to review all the existing evidence and make a report?

Mr. Hoon: That is certainly a possible option, and I would not rule it out. I think, however, that the senior judicial figure would be much better served if new evidence could be added to the existing evidence, because he or she would then have something to deal with.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The right hon. Gentleman's statement was littered with uses of the word "plausible", referring to alternative explanations for the crash. Surely the problem is that what the Secretary of State, the senior reviewing officer and the board of inquiry are inviting us to believe is itself implausible. It is implausible that two pilots who had expressed doubts about the quality of their aircraft should then fly, at such a height and speed, into cloud and into the Mull, with a cargo of such value. There was no data recorder and no voice cockpit recorder, and one of the digital engine control units was destroyed in the crash. Does the Secretary of State accept that he cannot ask us to uphold a wholly implausible view without "absolutely no doubt whatsoever", and that he has not the evidence to sustain that?

Mr. Hoon: Sadly for the hon. Gentleman, the only explanation that fits all the known and agreed facts is the conclusion reached by the board of inquiry: that the pilots flew the aircraft at high speed, low, in contravention of the "visual flight rules", into the Mull. Unfortunately, that is the only explanation that fits the known facts. I wish it were otherwise, but that is the position.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): If the pilots had lived, albeit having done something negligent, would they not have been able to speak in their own defence? Was it not therefore deeply unsatisfactory that under the rules before this incident, deceased pilots could be blamed when they could not speak in their own defence? Is it not a fact that the reason for the belated recognition that that is unsatisfactory is this very case; and is it not a fact that a verdict of this kind could never be reached again as a result of dissatisfaction about what has happened in this very case?

Why does the Secretary of State not reconsider his answer to the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), and say that it would be possible to revisit the circumstances and decide that the application of the rules to this case at that time constituted a basic injustice? Surely the revoking of the rules represents a belated acknowledgement that they were unjust when applied to the deceased pilots.

Mr. Hoon: I certainly agree that the two pilots would have been the best witnesses. Part of the tragedy is the fact that they are not available to give us their evidence. Nevertheless, neither the hon. Gentleman nor any other Member should try to avoid the fact that the best evidence is not available on numerous occasions. On such occasions, we must still try to make judgments on the basis of what evidence is available. That, sadly, applies to this case.

The change in the system does not undermine the fact that the reviewing officers and the board of inquiry considered the case in the light of the test and the rules that applied at the time. If the hon. Gentleman applies his perfectly logical reasoning to the situation, he will realise that if that were not the case any single decision made at any tribunal or court in our history could be challenged simply because subsequent generations took a different view of what test should have applied at the time. That would simply not be satisfactory.

Point of Order

5.45 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will recall that, at columns 476–77 last Thursday, in relation to the statutory instrument Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 105) on Invest to Save Budget Round 4 Projects and Local Government On-Line, I raised the fact that, as at half-past 3 on Thursday, the relevant statutory instrument was not printed and was not in the Vote Office. The Chairman of Ways and Means gave a ruling at the time:

> "It follows that there should be at least one copy in the Library. If, as the hon. Gentleman says, a supply of fully printed copies is not yet available in the Vote Office nine days after the laying of the document, that is indeed most regrettable."—[*Official Report*, 18 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 477.]

That was a pretty strong ruling. I subsequently discovered that a copy was not even in the Library, which must be pretty close to contravening the rules of the House.

We discussed the statutory instrument in Standing Committee at 4.30 pm today, and we discovered that it had not even been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. That seems to be pretty close to breaking the rules of the House, if not actually breaking them. It is certainly breaking the spirit of the workings of the House.

This is an extremely sloppy way of working the part of the Government. I raised the matter in Committee on a point of order. I asked for the instrument to be postponed, but the Chairman ruled that he was empowered to consider only whether it had been properly considered by the Committee. I would like you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to rule that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister should follow better working practices when laying statutory instruments in the House. It was not even an urgent statutory instrument. It could have been laid in the House in the autumn.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I note what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I believe that that procedure is not unprecedented.

BILL PRESENTED

ENDANGERED SPECIES (OFFENCES)

Mr. David Amess presented a Bill to provide for the punishment of offences relating to endangered species; to make consequential amendments to certain enactments; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Thursday 14 November, and to be printed [Bill 185].

Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

5.48 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has been debated in another place and I am pleased to say that it has been passed there without amendment. It is a short and perhaps slightly technical Bill but it seeks to tackle a fast-growing and significant problem: the theft of mobile phones. There has been much public, parliamentary and media concern in recent months about mobile phone theft and street crime in general. The Bill will help to deal with some of those concerns.

We are determined to tackle street crime through a comprehensive programme of measures across government, the police service, the courts and the criminal justice system. The Bill should be seen as a part of that wider programme. It is fully supported by the police and the mobile phone industry as part of the fight against street crime.

There is now a broad body of evidence, some of it anecdotal, some statistical, that the theft of mobile phones has contributed significantly to the rise in street robberies. Therefore, tackling mobile phone theft can play an important part in driving down street crime.

A Home Office report on mobile phone theft was published in January 2002. It showed that in 2000–01, mobile phones were stolen in 28 per cent. of all robberies, compared with 8 per cent. only three years previously. Since 1995, there has been a 600 per cent. increase in mobile phone owners. There are about 50 million mobile phone users in the United Kingdom. Clearly, the opportunity for mobile phones to be stolen is significantly greater than a few years ago. None the less, the only conclusion that we can draw is that robberies involving mobile phones are increasing at a much greater rate than robberies in general.

In the Metropolitan police area alone, the percentage of offences in which a mobile phone is among the items stolen has risen from 25 per cent. in 1999–2000 to 50 per cent. in 2001–02. In January this year, the police estimate that 31 per cent. of all robberies and snatch thefts in London targeted mobile phones alone, while 20 per cent. involved a mobile phone as well as other items, so 51 per cent. of all street crime in London in that month involved a mobile phone.

As we all know, the police in London and other major cities, where most street robberies take place, are clamping down on street crime. They are tackling mobile phone theft, with the support of the other criminal justice agencies, local authorities, schools and employment services.

One strand of that work has been to find ways of reducing the number of mobile phones stolen. In January 2001, we set up a steering group with the police and the mobile phone industry to consider the practical measures that needed to be taken. Significant progress has been made, especially with the network providers Vodafone, O2, T-Mobile, Orange and Virgin. Following extensive discussions throughout last year, and prompted by the

[Mr. John Denham]

evidence of the scale of the problem in the report to which I referred, Vodafone and O2, which were previously not able to bar handsets on their own networks, have now invested in the technology needed to do so.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Bill has my full support and, I am pretty sure, that of my party. However, its whole effect is to stop the re-programming of the international mobile equipment identity, or IMEI number, and that will be effective only if the companies can disable the handset. How convinced is the Minister that Vodafone and O2 will have not only the hardware but the software in place by September, as set out in the explanatory notes, rather than later, in 2003, which would negate the whole point of the Bill?

Mr. Denham: I have of course been in contact with the operator companies throughout the past year, and my officials work with them through the standing group that we set up to tackle mobile phone theft, and my understanding as of today—it is the best information that I can give the House—is that, by the end of August, each of the five main operators will be able to bar stolen handsets on their own network.

The next stage beyond that is to prevent the stolen phone from being used on one of the other major networks, and the second part of the agreement that we have reached with the operators is that they will create a central equipment identity register, which will enable each of them to bar the use of stolen mobiles across all the networks. That decision was announced in February 2002, and we have the industry's assurance that it is on course for implementation of the shared database in September 2002. I have no reason to doubt that the target date will be met.

Michael Fabricant: I totally accept what the Minister says, and only time will tell whether his confidence is justified. If a phone is stolen and then exported, will there be a similar sharing of databases with other global system for mobiles—GSM—operators elsewhere in the world, because if not, all that will happen is that the phones will be usable everywhere but here?

Mr. Denham: I am anticipating some remarks that I shall make in due course, but in Europe, where the bulk of the other GSM operators are, our initiatives are being recognised as setting best practice standards for the whole region. We are considering how we should follow up in Europe the initiatives taken here. I cannot claim that everything is in place in Europe to mimic what we are doing here, but what we have achieved with the operators here has been noted as best practice. We shall continue to press on the matter. I shall shortly say something about the security of the phones themselves.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the export of phones. He is right to say that wider international action will help to tackle the problem. Although there is undoubtedly some theft for export, that is clearly a more complicated transaction than the simple theft and re-use of a mobile phone. I cannot claim that the Bill totally closes off the export route, but it will have a significant impact on the theft of phones for domestic use.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Clearly, if the technology exists to bar a mobile phone, irrespective of its keeping its original IMEI number, it will not be able to be used. The Bill is aimed at criminalising the re-programming of the telephone, but if the technology exists for such re-programming to continue to be done on the black market—if people are willing to risk the penalties—it will be possible to continue to use it with a new number.

Mr. Denham: That is self-evident, I suppose. With the current generation of phones, we cannot make re-programming physically impossible. That is why we continue to press the industry, and especially the manufacturers, with the support of the operators, to make phones themselves more secure and more difficult to re-programme. Given that there is a fairly rapid replacement rate of the stock of mobile phones—fashions and designs change—we can look forward to a new generation of phones that are more secure. I believe that criminalising the act of re-programming, with tough but justified sentences, as proposed in the Bill, will help to make a significant impact on the problem.

We all know that there is no magic bullet that will instantly solve the problem, and we are pursuing other measures, educating mobile phone users and persuading schools to discourage pupils from taking their phones to school. All those measures have a role to play, but the Bill is a significant part of the process.

From September, customers who have their mobile phone stolen will be able to ring their network and get it disabled, just as they can ring their bank and cancel a stolen credit card. We have also worked with the industry and the police on promoting greater awareness of security and personal safety, and there is much more information on phone operators' and retailers' websites. The Government have issued 5 million crime prevention leaflets on avoiding mobile phone theft as part of the safer streets campaign.

In London, for example, the Metropolitan police have marked thousands of mobile phones with a permanent ultra-violet property code, making them instantly identifiable if they are stolen and subsequently recovered. In Birmingham, the police and youth offending teams and Victim Support are focusing on mobile phone security and crime prevention presentations, which they are delivering to all secondary school assemblies.

Hon. Members asked about wider issues. We are working with colleagues in Europe and discussing possible cross-boundary solutions, building on the good practice developed in the UK, because we want to prevent stolen phones from being used in other countries, too, so as to remove incentives for illegal export.

The Bill is specifically designed to complement the handset blocking measures taken by the mobile phone operators. Phones are identified and disabled by reference to a serial number on each handset, known as the international mobile equipment identity, or IMEI number—a 15-digit number both programmed into the handset and visible on its body. The number appears on the records of the network providers each time the phone is used. The operators' handset barring system works by reference to the IMEI number, so barring handsets in that way will prevent thieves from being able to use the phones that they steal, and if they cannot be used, they cannot be sold on. That, in itself, should act as a deterrent to mobile phone theft.

However, barring a handset is not fully effective if the IMEI number itself is changed. Changing the number makes it impossible for the operators to track and disable a handset, and that is what we believe is happening. A tracking exercise that operators have undertaken with the police has shown that the IMEI number of as many as 75 out of 100 stolen phones could not be traced on any of the UK networks' records. We can make a reasonable guess that these phones were not thrown away, but were re-programmed and were therefore untraceable. However, I accept that some were sent overseas to emerging markets.

Another indication of the extent of the re-programming problem was revealed last July when BT Cellnet—now O2—estimated that, potentially, the IMEI number of 1.5 million phones on that network had been changed from the manufactured number. Those who were re-programming mobile phones used duplicate IMEI numbers that they knew would work on the network. The most duplicated number on the BT Cellnet network had been copied more than 9,000 times.

Michael Fabricant: Has the Minister discussed with major telephone operators the introduction of a system through which the IMEI number is matched with the telephone number? Such a system is technically possible, and if it were adopted the duplication of an existing and correct IMEI number would not work, because it would not match up with the recognised phone number on the SIM card that is inserted in a GSM telephone.

Mr. Denham: We have looked at various technical arrangements, and the problem with that solution is that it is not quite as straightforward as the hon. Gentleman suggests. All simple mechanisms that cannot be got round have been examined in detail by the industry, and by the consultants whom we have retained to advise us independently on these matters. The existence of so many duplicate IMEI numbers may well be a by-product of the particular software, often written by hackers, that is used for re-programming phones in the same place. Such software may inadvertently create the same IMEI number.

It is relatively cheap and easy to change the IMEI number of a mobile phone—all that is needed is the relevant software to re-programme the handset, a computer and a cable. The software is freely available; it may be bought, or downloaded from the internet. A kit can be bought for under £150. The Metropolitan police say that stolen and re-programmed phones can be sold for about half their retail price—up to about £100. Given the number of stolen phones and the estimated number of re-programmed ones, it is clear that the re-programming of stolen phones has the potential to produce large-scale criminal profits. At the moment, it is completely legal to re-programme a mobile phone. Re-programming services are lawfully offered and advertised by independent retail outlets, market stalls, car boot sales and internet companies, despite the fact that no legitimate reason exists for changing the number.

On the next stage in the process, to which I have referred, new international security standards that came into force on 1 June state that the IMEI number should not be changed, and should be resistant to change. I am pleased to say that manufacturers are now playing more of their part in the fight against mobile phone crime by hardening the IMEI numbers on their new phones, in compliance with the new standards. That addresses the problem at source. We are also meeting manufacturers to discuss other measures that they can take to enhance the security of their products. However, as I said, at the moment the IMEI numbers of phones already on the market can be changed, and that is the issue that the Bill seeks to address.

In February, we made clear our intention to introduce the Bill at the earliest opportunity. It will create a new criminal offence: the unauthorised re-programming of mobile phone handsets. Specifically, it will be an offence to change, or to interfere with, the operation of a phone's unique identifier—the IMEI number. The Bill will also create linked offences of possessing, supplying or offering to supply equipment for that purpose. It will be an offence to be in possession of equipment with the intention of unauthorised re-programming.

There will be occasions when the manufacturer of a mobile phone will need to change the IMEI number. No offence is committed if the change is made by the manufacturer, or with their written consent. The new "either way" offences of changing, or interfering with, the unique identifier of mobile phones without authorisation, and of possessing or supplying the equipment for that purpose, will carry a maximum penalty on indictment of five years' imprisonment, or an unlimited fine, or both. In the magistrates courts, an offender may be punished with six months' imprisonment, or a fine of up to £5,000, or both. The offence will be an arrestable offence under the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. The penalty for the new offence is in line with those for the various offences of obtaining telecommunications services dishonestly, as provided for in the recently amended Telecommunications Act 1984.

We accept that these penalties are severe, but I believe that they are fully justified. A strong deterrent is needed for those who, in some cases, are hardened criminals engaged in several other criminal activities. However, such a deterrent is also necessary in the context of the wider street crime problem, which has certainly been fuelled by rise in mobile phone theft.

Norman Baker (Lewes): My colleagues and I support the Bill and we will support it in the Lobby if there is a vote, but I am concerned about the sentences to which the Minister has just referred. I accept that it is important to send out a clear message, but I fear that, if the sentences are too severe, we will simply encourage the exporting to which the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) referred. After all, if the penalties are severe, people are surely more likely to try to avoid them by taking phones across the channel to France to re-programme them, and then bringing them back.

Mr. Denham: I do not think that that is right, and even if such a consequence were to occur, that would be no reason for not adopting the appropriate range of penalties for the crime. It must have crossed the minds of those in this country who are carrying out this currently legal activity that they are playing a role in encouraging the theft and re-sale of mobile phones. Enacting a Bill that sends powerful sentencing messages is the best way to get across to those people that they should not take part in that activity.

The idea that we should confine the issue to home and treat it as a cottage industry by keeping the penalties low, rather than allowing British illegal activity to go abroad, is

[Mr. Denham]

not one that I have a great deal of time for, and I doubt whether that is what the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) was really suggesting. We should set the appropriate penalty, and in the light of our discussions at European level, we hope that our stand might be replicated elsewhere in time.

The creation of these new offences will close the existing loophole in the law, and send out a strong message from Parliament. They will prevent businesses from advertising a re-programming service, thereby inadvertently fuelling street crime, and they will tackle those who must be aware of the way their activity relates to street crime. As a result, mobile phone theft will be considerably less attractive. Let us be clear: the aim of the legislation is not so much to generate the largest possible number of prosecutions, as to dissuade people from offering this re-programming service in the first place. If we can achieve that, it will be well worth while.

The new offences will make it easier for the police to prosecute cases involving the handling of stolen goods, which attracts a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment. At the moment, although the police may have reasonable grounds to suspect someone in possession of re-programmed handsets of being guilty of handling stolen goods, once the act of re-programming is itself a criminal offence, much stronger grounds will exist for prosecuting that person for handling stolen goods.

Michael Fabricant: The Minister is absolutely right to talk of the deterrent factor of stiff penalties, but have the very stiff penalties that exist for hacking into certain websites prevented such hacking from taking place? The evidence suggests not.

Mr. Denham: Several offences for which there are stiff penalties are still carried out by some people somewhere along the line. My guess in respect of the activity to which the hon. Gentleman refers is that those penalties do dissuade some people from carrying it out. I am pleased to say that, in anticipation of the Bill, some forces have already done the necessary preparatory work to bring about a change in attitude. For example, Merseyside police force has identified every second-hand mobile phone dealer across its area, and it is visiting each shop to provide advice and a contact helpline, should there be any future queries. That type of proactive initiative by the police is very welcome.

Legitimate businesses will not be adversely affected by the Bill. We have established with the industry that there is no legitimate reason for an individual to be involved in re-programming a mobile phone. We accept that equipment or software that can be used to re-programme a phone can also be used for other, legitimate purposes, but no offence is committed unless there is intent to use it unlawfully.

The Bill, though short, is an important part of the drive to stop the theft of mobile phones, which has fuelled robbery and underpinned a fear of crime on our streets. It should be viewed as part of a significant package of measures being taken in co-operation with the mobile phone industry and the police, and against the background of the wider initiatives we are taking to make our streets more safe. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.11 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): We greatly welcome the Bill. We are aware of the background that has brought it about, and the Government could rely on our support if the House were to divide at the end of the debate, although I think that most unlikely.

The Minister rightly highlighted the serious problem of stolen mobile phones. Various statistics have been bandied about, and we must bear in mind the fact that they contain some element of individuals claiming that mobile phones have been stolen as part of an insurance scam. I noted that some 8,210 more Nokia phones have been claimed as stolen than have ever been made. That figure should incline the House to a moment of caution when considering the scale of the problem, although I wholly acknowledge that the number of people who reported the theft of a phone in 1998–99 increased by 377 per cent. However we interpret the statistics, mobile phone theft has clearly been an important component fuelling crime, especially street crime.

I do not wish to take up the House's time, so I hope that the Minister will not take it amiss that—even though this is a Second Reading debate—I intend to consider some of the wider problems. When I intervened in his speech, he said that my comment was self-evident. It may have been so to him, but to the wider public it might not be self-evident that although the step that we are taking tonight is important, it can be only a component part of the total fight against the misuse of mobile phones through theft, because vast areas are still open to exploitation.

The Bill criminalises those who, without the manufacturer's express authority, decide to reprogramme a phone to change its IMEI number. That, taken together with the willingness of mobile phone operators to bar the IMEI number of mobile telephones that have been stolen, should—at least, we hope that it will—go some way to ensuring that it becomes much less useful to steal a mobile phone. After the short period when one may be willing to use a phone on the basis of its current SIM card, which most thieves dispose of quickly, it will be more difficult to have the phone re-programmed.

Let me strike a note of caution—the same point has been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker). The Bill's success will depend on its deterrent effect on the large number of individuals who are willing to re-programme telephones. As the Minister pointed out, those people must be carrying out that operation now in the knowledge that they are almost certainly facilitating the commission of crime. They are acting for gain as the facilitators of those who wish to make a profit from the theft or robbery of mobile telephones. I hope that the Minister will understand my reservation, because I fear that those people who are willing to do that in the first place will not necessarily be deterred by the high sentences that will be imposed.

I see nothing wrong with the sentencing regime in the Bill; the problem will be enforcement. Re-programming is carried out at car boot sales and in shacks and garages, and it has been described by the industry as so easy that anyone with the basic technology could do it. We must hope that the Bill will have an impact, but I have slightly greater reservations than the Minister appears to have. This is not the first time that a Government have come forward—this is not a political point—promising to criminalise an activity and therefore to stop it. For example, when the landfill tax was introduced, extra sentences were imposed for fly tipping, but it is still difficult to catch those who do it. I hope that the Minister will take that caveat in good part, because otherwise I entirely welcome the Bill's aim of criminalising re-programming.

The Minister will be aware that when the Bill was considered in the other place, only one amendment was tabled in Committee. The Bill refers to the custody and control of equipment that could be used to facilitate re-programming. It was suggested in the other place that the word "possession" instead of the words "custody" and "control" would make it easier to obtain convictions. I know that we will have a Committee stage on Wednesday, but I hope that it will be short. If the Minister has a view on that point at this stage, it might be useful if he shares it with us when he winds up this debate.

Michael Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the burden of proof includes the intention

"to use the thing unlawfully for that purpose"?

Those are the words in the Bill, although a better word than "thing" could surely have been used. Does he agree that the inclusion of that necessary mens rea will make it difficult to obtain convictions?

Mr. Grieve: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We do not wish to see the criminal law become so onerous for an individual that it presents a real chance that the innocent will be convicted, but we may wish to consider the issue that my hon. Friend raises on Wednesday to see whether the Bill can be improved. I shall listen with great care to what the Minister has to say, because—given that he has been alerted to the point by the proceedings in the other place—I hope that he and his advisers have had the chance to mull over the matter. If we can improve the Bill, we shall seek to do so. I await the Minister's response.

The issue is clear. It is desirable that re-programming be outlawed, and the Bill will achieve that aim. Whether we can succeed in reaching the happy state in which stealing someone's mobile phone is a valueless activity will depend on the industry, and the Government's ability to co-operate with it in future moves. That may require further legislation or firm action by the industry, but it must be our aim. The Bill is a contribution in the right direction, and it therefore has our support.

6.19 pm

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I shall try to make my speech as short as possible. The debate has attracted some Members who want to contribute to it—*[Interruption.]* Then again, perhaps not.

Mobile telephones have become increasingly prevalent in today's society. I had a mobile phone in 1998, and it was about as compact, portable and attractive as a breeze block. Nowadays, however, mobiles are much more elegant and stylish, and people want them. There are people who want to steal them so that they can pass them on to others and make a profit. They know that other people will purchase them because they wish to have the most up-to-date technology. Technological developments are making telephones more and more desirable, so we must make things more and more difficult for thieves. I think that the Bill does that, and the Minister should be commended on it.

More than 700,000 mobile phones are stolen each year, and many of the thefts involve violent attacks. On new year's day, a 19-year-old woman was shot when her phone was stolen. Even worse, a 10-year-old boy was held at gun point, all for a mobile phone. We want to try to stop such crimes. Those under 18 make up nearly half of all victims. School surveys suggest that the number of incidents is far higher than the number reported. More and more young people own mobile phones and the progression of thefts will become worse if nothing is done.

Many people cite the use of a mobile phone as a safety measure: they want the comfort of a phone to use in case they feel threatened. However, people feel threatened when they use a mobile. We must try to stop mobile phone theft. Perhaps the Bill could have done more to achieve that.

Stolen phones can readily be turned into cash. SIM cards alone sell for between £10 and £60, and if a handset goes with a SIM card, the price is higher. I welcome the fact that the Home Office has been working with mobile phone companies. I chair the all-party group on telecommunications, and I have had many meetings with the companies. I have been trying to put them under pressure, because they could have done much more, much earlier, to help try to track down those who steal mobiles. It is a bit late for them to agree to help, but help will be welcome. Vodafone and O2 have done some good work.

I agree with the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) that mobile phones will be taken abroad, re-programmed and then brought back into the UK, which will circumvent the Bill's objective of criminalising those who change the codes in this country. The Minister has said that he will be talking to his allies in the European Union. That is important, but we need to go further and ensure that other countries introduce similar legislation.

As things stand, changing the IMEI number makes it impossible for an operator to track and disable a stolen phone. As has been said, it is fairly easy and cheap to change that number. Using software to re-programme handsets makes the back-street selling of mobiles extremely desirable. It is important that the police be involved. I am pleased that the Minister mentioned the Manchester police, and I hope that the Glasgow police have been listening.

I welcome the severity of the proposed punishment, but we should draw a clear distinction between those who seek to derive financial benefit from their crimes and those who steal phones because they seek possession of items that they do not have and cannot afford, and because peer pressure is put on them. I hope that the Crown Prosecution Service will consider the nature of crimes, and likewise the courts when it comes to sentencing. At the same time, we must have a go at the Mr. Bigs: some £4.2 million worth of Samsung phones have been stolen recently, to be re-programmed and sent out of the UK.

I appreciate that the Bill has not been introduced in isolation, but is part of a package of measures to combat crime. Young people experience particular problems with mobile phone thefts which the Bill does not address. Phone accessories, such as cases and covers, are largely targeted at the teenage market. Mobiles are made

[John Robertson]

fashionable and desirable, especially for those aged between 11 and 15, who are targeted as victims more than any other age group. Perhaps the Minister will tell us how we might protect those young people.

How do we deal with stolen phones that are sent abroad for re-programming? Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us what discussions he envisages having in Europe.

Once again, I congratulate the Minister on introducing the Bill, and I commend the other parties in this place for supporting it. The Bill is an important step, but I reiterate that those who are the most vulnerable and the most affected by the stealing of mobile telephones are the young. That should be considered in more detail.

6.27 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): It is always pleasant to participate in a debate where there is such conviviality and wide agreement among the parties. That is not always the case with Home Office legislation, but it is today. That makes it less of an interesting story for those outside this place. I suspect that we shall not see headlines in tomorrow's newspapers stating, "Three parties agree on mobile phone Bill." That would not be newsworthy, but I think that there are 45 million mobile phone subscribers in the country.

Michael Fabricant: Fifty million.

Norman Baker: The number has increased since half an hour ago. It is obviously a significant number of phones with which to deal. Therefore, it is an issue that affects almost everyone in the UK.

I caution the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), who said that he supported the Bill, and then mentioned one or two caveats. If he is not careful, he may find the Prime Minister declaring at Prime Minister's Question Time that the Conservatives are opposing the Bill and trying to wreck it, as has been the case with other legislation.

Mr. Grieve: I am used to the problem of my words going through some strange sort of misinterpretation as they percolate through the outer offices of Downing street. Anyone reading the entire text of what I had to say this afternoon might be rather hard pressed to imagine that the Opposition were opposing the Bill.

Norman Baker: I am sure that that is true. The problem is that some people might be selective and not choose to read the entire text. Time will tell.

I suppose I should declare an interest of a sort, because I cannot stand mobile phones. I try not to use one unless there is no alternative. I have a hatred of those who sit next to me on trains speaking extremely loudly into these devices. I say "devices" because the explanatory notes refer to mobile phones as "mobile wireless communications devices." I wonder whether we might not be better with "things", to which the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) drew attention, which appears in the Bill.

We are dealing with a serious issue and I think that there will be cross-party support on the wide principles. It is for the Minister to answer points that arise round the edges and to try to ensure—I think that this is the most important aspect—that the Government reach agreement with other EU countries, and agreement more internationally, so that the good work that is reflected in the Bill is not undermined by others circumventing national boundaries within which the legislation will operate.

I was staggered when my researchers produced for me information to suggest that there were 470,000 phone thefts in 2000, and that school surveys suggested that there had been 200,000 to 550,000 thefts from 11 to 15-year-olds in 2000–01. Estimates from the police suggest that 330,000 offences had been committed. Those are staggering numbers by any account, and there have been big increases in such theft.

Incidentally, to digress for a second, that shows the value of having more police officers. They clearly have to deal with crimes that did not take place 10 or 15 years ago, so we have to increase the number of police officers to deal with the wider range of offences that now exist.

The Minister needs to reflect gently on the fact that, sadly, such theft may continue even if the mobile phones cannot be used because of the accessories point made by his colleague, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson). The hon. Gentleman made the valuable point that possessions are being stolen because of their attractiveness, not necessary for their use.

I am sure that the Minister would accept—indeed, he said so in his opening comments—that the Bill does not represent the only way to deal with the matter; there has to be a package of measures, which includes education in schools. Although I understand that parents may want their children to have mobile phones for security purposes when they go to school, I cannot help thinking that some steps could be taken to try to educate children and, indeed, parents themselves that perhaps it is not always essential to carry mobile phones in certain circumstances. If fewer people carried mobile phones, the people who wished to carry out a theft would be less certain that a mobile phone would be found on someone and therefore there would be less crime as a consequence. So the Bill is part of package that we have to develop.

I am concerned that it is apparently quite easy to reprogramme mobile phones. I understand that Home Office research shows that the reprogramming can be done with commercially available equipment that costs about £30. According to the BBC, software packages allowing people to change the IMEI number can be bought via the web. With that software and a cable that connects to a laptop or a personal computer, the IMEI number can be re-chipped within a few minutes.

I should be interested to know, when the Minister responds, whether he thinks that much of the reprogramming that occurs is done on that low-level basis by opportunist criminals—perhaps by young people who are more streetwise on computers than people such as myself—or whether it is predominantly carried out by those involved in large-scale crime. One of the motivations for those involved in large-scale crime might be that reprogramming mobile phones might make it more difficult to track what they are doing, so it may provide them with a defence to prevent the law enforcement agencies from knowing what they are doing. Is that a motivation in such reprogramming? We have to consider how such theft can be tackled and who is being tackled.

I am very happy with the Bill, as I have said, and I do not think that much can be done to improve it. It seems that it will make such reprogramming less attractive for low-level criminals, which may well take out a range of people who are involved in what is currently a legal activity, although it is clearly inextricably linked with illegal activities. However, my great fear is that the Bill will not deter those who view such reprogramming as a big money-making operation, for whom it is perhaps an adjunct to other criminal activities. They may well feel that the necessity to go abroad to reprogramme mobile phones is, frankly, not much of an inconvenience. So the Bill will deal with one element of the activity, but not necessarily the more serious element.

It is good that the Minister has said that he recognises the need to take such proposals to the European Union and beyond. He needs to do that, and we need to reach some sort of international agreement—not simply European Union agreement—on those matters. I wonder what the Government are doing internationally.

I wish to refer to what is perhaps a side issue. Can the Minister say what the situation is in the Republic of Ireland? The legislation will apply to Northern Ireland, but if there is no agreement or co-working with the Republic of Ireland, frankly, it does not take much imagination to realise what will happen. In fact, I suggest that the legislation will become inoperable in many ways in Northern Ireland. So I hope that he has considered that point and has reached an agreement with the Republic of Ireland to take matters forward.

My other concern is to differentiate those who may be caught by the legislation. It is very important that there is strong message and a proportionate and, in some cases, severe penalty for the big boys—those in the organised networks and those who deliberately reprogramme mobile phones professionally—such as those who were subject to one or two criminal actions recently. Multi-million pound profits can be made, so it is absolutely right that those involved should be dealt with very hard. However, it is also important that the sledgehammer that rightly exists for the big boys is not applied to the odd youth who happens to be involved in what will now be more easy to prove as handling stolen goods. That is a low-level crime, and it should be deal with appropriately.

The Government have rightly said that, as part of their youth justice programme, they want to be careful about how youth crime is approached to try to ensure that young people are not unduly criminalised and sent on a road from which there is no return. I would welcome an assurance from the Minister that the penalties that may be appropriate for the big boys cannot be used inappropriately for the relatively low-level crime of handling stolen goods. The 14-year maximum for a 16 or 18-year-old who happens to have bought a mobile phone—perhaps in a pub or a boot sale—would be disproportionate, and I hope that the Minister can assure me that that is not the intention or the effect of the Bill.

I want to ask the Minister what steps he is taking to deal with insurance fraud. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) mentioned this in passing, but I understand that a significant percentage of the 700,000 mobile handsets reported stolen last year were never really stolen at all, according to the industry. The recent surge in mobile phone thefts is at least partly caused by fraudulent insurance claims, rather than by actual thefts. I wish to make two points about that.

First, we obviously want to stop fraudulent insurance claims, so I assume that the Minister is in discussion about that with the insurance industry, as well as with the mobile phone industry. Secondly, for the accuracy of Government statistics, we need to separate out the fraudulent insurance claims so that we can have as accurate a picture as possible of what is actually happening with thefts. If the Government want to demonstrate—I hope that they will—that the Bill will have a positive effect on reducing mobile phone theft, they need to be able to separate out the false insurance claims to assess accurately how effective the Bill has been.

The industry representatives that the Liberal Democrats saw recently claimed that at least 20 per cent. of reported mobile thefts were faked. That is a serious matter in itself, although it is not as serious as the multi-million frauds that have been going on and, no doubt, are the reason for introducing the Bill.

Finally, I refer the Minister to the amendment—no doubt, he will be familiar with it—tabled in the other place by his colleague, Lord Campbell-Savours, in seeking to ensure that the Bill was not too widely drawn. I ask the Minister not to interpret what I say. Before he or anyone else suggests that I am seeking to create loopholes, may I say that that is not the case? I simply ask—this is a proper question to pose—that he ensure that the terms used in the legislation are such that innocent people cannot be swept up inadvertently. The amendment tabled by his hon. Friend, Lord Campbell-Savours had some merit—I put it no more strongly than that—in clarifying the word "anything".

I wonder whether the Minister has reflected on that issue and whether he has concluded that it might be possible to amend the wording slightly to ensure that no innocent party can be swept up in the legislation, without in any way weakening the Bill, which is supported on both sides of the House. Having said all that, the Bill has our almost unqualified support. Certainly, the principles have our unqualified support, and I look forward to its becoming legislation as soon as possible.

6.39 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): This is a little Bill, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) has said, it will work only in association with other measures. I take the point about adequate enforcement made by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve). I also take the obviously very important point about the European dimension made by him, and by the hon. Members for Lewes (Norman Baker) and for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), who mentioned it in interventions.

The Bill creates a new criminal offence of reprogramming, without authority, a mobile phone's unique identifier, and associated offences such as having or supplying equipment that can be used for reprogramming. As hon. Members have said, it is important to try to stamp out such unauthorised reprogramming, because once it has occurred, the only information showing that a mobile has been stolen is eradicated. If mobiles cannot be reprogrammed, there is less incentive to steal them.

I want to focus on other parts of the story. The first point, which was raised by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, concerns the common knowledge that

[Ross Cranston]

the theft of mobiles, often from young people, has become prevalent, especially in urban areas. My right hon. Friend quoted the Home Office report, "Mobile Phone Theft", published earlier this year, which showed a significant increase in the number of phones being stolen. Clearly, it is too simple to adopt a mono-causal opportunity theory of criminal behaviour because complex processes are involved in explaining why people commit crimes, but in this context the opportunity factor has a high explanatory force. Mobiles are easily stolen and, with reprogramming, can be easily reused or resold.

Moreover, given the ownership patterns, it is not surprising that half of mobile phone-related robberies involve victims under 20. The Home Office study found that most of the offenders involved in phone robbery were young, with a peak age of 16 for those being accused of the crime. Over two thirds of the incidents involved offenders working in groups, which is, no doubt, a more frightening experience for the victim. Mostly the crimes were male on male, and very disturbingly, at least 90 per cent. of the offenders were black, with the vast majority of the victims being white.

It is important not to get carried away. I am not trying to down-play the fact that it must be, at the very least, upsetting and, most probably, traumatic for any person to have their mobile stolen on the street or in a public place, even if both victim and offender are young. Indeed, it is a matter of great concern that over the past 10 years, there has, in robbery offences, been a marked increase in the number of young victims and young offenders. However, it is wrong to think that the increase in mobile phone robbery, or in robbery generally, is representative of a plague of violent crime in this country.

The recently published Home Office statistical bulletin reported the British crime survey finding that the number of violent incidents had increased by 2 per cent. compared to 2000, but that increase was not statistically significant. In fact, the estimate for violent crime has fallen by 22 per cent. since 1997 and by 17 per cent. since 1999. The British crime survey is a better indicator of crime patterns than are recorded crime statistics because it does not turn on police recording practices and, of course, it extends to crimes not reported to the police.

By contrast with the British crime survey figures, an increase in violent crime is being recorded by the police, but the authors of the Home Office statistical bulletin say that it

> "appears to be largely due to increased recording by police forces."

In the case of robberies, however, which are one category of violent crime, there is an increase of 28 per cent. That does not seem to be caused by increased recording by the police, although the authors of the bulletin say that

> "it may have been affected by increased reporting by the public."

Apart from the numbers and the way in which they have to be treated, it is crucial to appreciate that in 50 per cent. of violent incidents there is no injury, with around two thirds of robberies and common assaults involving no injury.

Mr. Grieve: I have been listening carefully to the hon. and learned Gentleman, and I apologise for my unavoidable absence from the Chamber for a brief period when he was speaking. Robbery does not involve violence, but it is a serious offence because it involves the threat of violence, as I am sure he will agree. I hope that he will forgive me for saying, therefore, that to suggest that one should not be too troubled by robbery merely because the victim has not been injured is not the best point.

Ross Cranston: Obviously, I appreciate that whether or not one is injured, the threat of violence is traumatic. My point is that the hysteria that we sometimes see in the media does not accurately reflect what is happening in the country.

There is undoubtedly an unacceptably high concentration of robbery in urban areas, and I welcome the street crime initiative, which was launched earlier this year and includes the west midlands. The 10 areas that are part of the initiative account for 83 per cent. of recorded street crimes. Like the youth justice pledge, the initiative will be instrumental in getting criminal justice agencies working together and fast-tracking offenders.

Earlier this year, in the cases of Q, L and S, the Court of Appeal sent out a very strong signal to the effect that custodial sentences would generally be imposed in cases of street robbery involving mobile phones, whatever the age of the offender. I know that the chairman of the youth justice board has expressed concern about that, saying that it has set back his attempts to tackle the causes of crime and boosted the number of young offenders in custody. The court was trying to draw together the principles involved in certain cases without laying down new guidelines, and when the problem of mobile phone theft is brought under control, it may need to reassess the matter. Perhaps guidelines are needed and the advice of the sentencing advisory panel should be sought.

My second point concerns the passage in a judgment in which the Court of Appeal

> "urge the manufacturers and those who supply the means by which mobile telephones are used to make strenuous efforts to make the object of these offences more difficult to achieve."

There is now considerable learning about the relationship between design and crime, which can take a variety of forms.

Earlier this year, for example, the metropolitan borough of Dudley and the West Midlands police published a superb community safety supplementary planning guidance, the first such document published in the west midlands. It set out how, with good design and the lay-out of the physical environment, crime, the fear of crime and antisocial behaviour can be reduced. Those measure are often quite simple. To reduce street robbery, for example, lighting is important, and other, longer term measures may be taken to create better connecting networks of streets and public spaces and more mixed use areas in town centres.

The other example of preventing or reducing crime by design concerns car theft. Car manufacturers have dragged their feet in that regard, but the introduction of immobilisation devices can reduce car theft. The same is true of mobile phones. I was somewhat disturbed to find that some of the networks were rather slow on the uptake. Even when mobile phone theft was becoming prevalent a couple of years ago, some of the networks did not take the necessary steps. Until early this year, Vodafone UK and BT Cellnet were still refusing, once a phone had been reported as stolen, to take action to blacklist the IMEI number. They have now come on board, and I congratulate them on doing so, and the industry generally in trying to introduce measures to reduce the incentive for theft.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): What does my hon. and learned Friend think of the recent invention of chips for mobiles that will self-destruct on a signal from the network providers? Would not their introduction end, in one fell swoop, the attraction of stealing a phone?

Ross Cranston: Such technological advances can certainly help. I acknowledge that some of the industry finds it more difficult, because it entered the market early, to introduce some of those changes. However, with the new generation of mobile phones, it is possible to introduce devices such as those mentioned by my hon. Friend.

My point is that manufacturers and others should design their products and provide services in a way that minimises opportunities for crime. Sometimes, the Government have a lever to ensure that that happens: in the case of mobile phones, for example, the networks depend on Government for permission to operate.

Coupled with the measures introduced by the industry, the steps taken by the police and education measures such as those mentioned by the hon. Member for Lewes, this little Bill should ensure that many more stolen mobile phones will be useless in the UK. The problem of export remains, however, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will address that. I can assure the House that the penalties under the Bill are consistent with those for comparable offences, such as copying or reprogramming of credit cards. To pick up the point made by the hon. Gentleman for Lewes, judges will of course vary the penalty imposed according to whether a professional is involved or the offence is a casual one. I support the Bill.

6.50 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I should declare an interest of sorts, in that back in about 1994, I was in my rather swish open-topped sports car, stopped at traffic lights on the A40 waiting to go on to the M40 to go up to Lichfield, when I was mugged for my analogue mobile phone. I can assure the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) that whether or not the crime is violent, having one's mobile phone stolen is indeed a traumatic event.

I want to make it clear that I, too, welcome the Bill. It is a good move, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said, it is no panacea. First, as has been pointed out, even if the IMEI chip is re-programmed, nothing has changed that will make the mobile phone impossible to use. I was pleased to hear the Minister say that there are moves afoot to encourage international mobile phone manufacturers to embed the IMEI number more securely, so that it cannot be changed using equipment that is readily available. Make no mistake about it: the equipment needed to change an IMEI chip is readily available from Tandy's and many other electrical stores.

I have to correct the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), who said that the software can be downloaded from the internet for a small charge; in fact, it can be downloaded free of charge. I am concerned about how easy it is to change an IMEI number provided one knows a little about chip programming. The hon. Gentleman mentioned his concern that heavy penalties might fall on younger people, especially those who practise hacking. I am sure that judges will take such matters into account, but I am certain that these things are often done by 15 and 16-year-olds who, far from being in a factory, are in their bedroom while their parents are watching television downstairs.

The Minister made an interesting remark when he said that some investigation had been done into whether the IMEI number could be tagged up—linked to—the telephone number. I understand that the Minister has to go by what manufacturers and telephone companies tell him, but I am not wholly convinced that that cannot be done. Clearly, a much wider database would be required, but if the IMEI number had to be linked to the telephone number, changing the IMEI number would result in the phone being disabled—unless it was being used with the right SIM card; and as others have pointed out, the SIM card is not used for reasons that we already know.

One good thing on the horizon is the introduction of third-generation telephony, which will have such safeguards built in, but that is a long way off. I urge the Minister to visit one of perhaps only two places in the world where 3G telephony is operating. He could spend a great deal of taxpayers' money on visiting Tokyo, where there is a 3G network, or he could stay closer to home and visit the Isle of Man, where O2 is running an experiment. I can see the Minister weighing up the attractions of sushi and the local delicacies of Douglas, Isle of Man. I know that O2 has taken on board the very issues that I have mentioned.

The Minister, answering my intervention, addressed the question of phones being exported. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield and others have said, there would be a problem if it were only the UK that enacted this type of legislation—and given the agreement on both sides of the House, I am confident that on Wednesday the Bill will be enacted. If that were so, all we would do is repeat the experience of IR35, whereby people started billing for services abroad. People would start exporting phones overseas. Nor is it simply a question of getting agreement in Europe: the area affected covers anywhere GSM networks can be used, which includes Africa, the far east and Australasia, as well as, if we are talking about tri-band telephones, north, central and south America. Unless worldwide agreement is secured, phones will simply be re-programmed outside the UK—and that is assuming that people will be sufficiently deterred by the legislation not to re-programme them here in the UK.

Mr. Hendrick: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the desirable features of modern telephony that system designers try to include is telephone number portability—the facility that enables people who lose their telephone to continue to use their number on another handset? That facility would not be possible if the number were hardwired to a chip inside the phone.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is right to a certain extent. Yes, it would not be possible to take out the SIM card—although if the phone were stolen, the SIM card would be gone, too—and put it in another phone. Instead, owners would have to register with the company the fact that they now had a new phone. However, that is the only thing that they would have to do; they would still

[Michael Fabricant]

have portability. The trade-off would be having to make a telephone call, set against the advantage of its being less likely that one's phone would be nicked. Personally, I think that people would be happy to accept that.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that we might be becoming too enthusiastic about the Bill? Although it might stop people pinching mobile phones for the sake of the phones themselves, most people committing a street mugging are likely to take the phone simply because it is the means by which the person who has been attacked can summon help quickly. The danger is that a lot of mobile phones stolen on the street will end up being simply "whizzed"—thrown away—which could have considerable environmental consequences if they ended up in watercourses and similar places.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman has introduced an interesting new element into the debate. It would be interesting to know how many of the 470,000 mobile phone thefts or attempted thefts in 2000 were committed for the intrinsic value of the telephone, and how many for the very reason that he gives—to prevent the person who has been mugged from using their phone to summon help. Perhaps the Minister will be able to answer that question when he winds up the debate.

I am concerned about the burden of proof. Although I endorse the presumption that one is innocent until proven guilty, I sometimes think that too many guilty people get off in this country. The Minister says, rightly, that under clause 2 a person cannot be prosecuted simply for having

> "in his custody or under his control anything which may be used for the purpose of changing or interfering with the operation of a unique device identifier".

That is because the same equipment can be used to programme chips in general. Many people who are interested in re-programming software devices own that equipment, which can cost as little as £20 or £30, and, as I said, the re-programming software is available for downloading free of charge. Clause 2 contains the additional burden of having to prove intention—mens rea, or guilty mind. Although that is good, because we do not want people to be prosecuted when they are innocent, I wonder whether that will mean that the burden of proof will be so great that the provision will not be as much of a deterrent as we would like.

I welcome the Bill; it is a useful first step. I praise the Minister for his good work in persuading O2 and Vodafone to introduce the software. I hope that he is right that the software and the hardware will be operational by September, although I am not totally convinced that it will be. Once we pass the Bill, the right hon. Gentleman's next step must be to tour the world to ensure that all parts that have GSM—that is, most countries—have similar legislation. Otherwise, all that we will find is that the stolen equipment will be exported.

7 pm

Mr. Grieve: I had not really intended to say anything at the conclusion of the debate, but the comments of the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) prompted me to do so. Properly, he widened the scope of the debate, as one is allowed to do on Second Reading, in order to consider in a more general way some of the problems connected with robbery that we might be experiencing.

I do not share the hon. and learned Gentleman's view that we are considering an inflated figure that does not reflect the reality on the ground, and that we should be guided by the British crime survey rather than the police's own statistics. We have statistics that show a 4.3 per cent. rise in reported violent crime and a 12.9 per cent. increase in the number of robberies in the year to March 2001. Therefore, there is a significant and real problem.

Furthermore, although I fully accept that statistics might be misleading, one has only to look at what I would describe as localised figures, as I know from my constituency. My constituency has had an extremely low robbery rate historically, as one might expect of an area outside London and not encompassing a large urban centre. The rise in robbery in my constituency in the same 12-month period has been of the order of 70 or 80 per cent. I cannot remember the exact figure.

Taken overall, those figures are significant and appear to reflect a worrying trend. There is a willingness—perhaps born of the fact that burglary has become more difficult for those who want easy pickings—to confront an individual in the street and threaten them with violence. I am sure that the Minister would agree that the fact that violence might not be used does not detract one iota from the traumatic nature of the experience suffered.

Ross Cranston: I did not in any way down-play the significance of what is happening. Robbery is a serious offence. The point that I was making was twofold: first, the British crime survey is a better representation of people's experience, and secondly, the crime recorded by the police depends on the extent to which the police record things and to which people report things to them. I am not saying that there is not a problem, but we have to take those factors into account.

Mr. Grieve: I fully appreciate the hon. and learned Gentleman's point and I understand the way he puts it, but everything that I have seen suggests a growing problem of street crime—be it robbery or theft from the person, but particularly robbery—and that that involving mobile phones, which brings us squarely to the issue addressed in the Bill, has been a contributory factor.

If I have understood correctly what the Prime Minister has had to say at Question Time on a number of occasions over the past few months, he appears to think that there is a serious problem. If he did not think so, he would not apparently have been issuing his commands to the effect that there must be a marked reduction—I am not sure that it is even a marked reduction, but some reduction—in the statistical evidence by September. We shall all await the results with interest. I sincerely believe that there has been a significant increase. The fear of crime that has gone with that has also risen considerably. I judge this legislation on that basis.

As I said to the Minister earlier, I hope that the Bill will make a significant contribution. I also hope, however, that he will feel able to respond to the thoughtful comments made in this short debate about what can be done in practice. I did not raise the question of the exportability of these telephones in my opening speech, but my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) did so, as did other hon. Members, so I very much hope that the Minister will have some words to say on that subject. Given an open market and—let us face it—open transportability between Britain and France, one can imagine how it could be the easiest of things for people to escape the criminal sanctions in the belief that they will be able to import and export telephones or use them abroad as they wish.

I cannot get away from the point that I made that if rep-rogramming has become a cottage industry, the Government might find that the police have a serious enforcement problem. Listening to hon. Members' speeches, I began to see that some who know a little more about what happens on the ground see such re-programming as a cottage industry. The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) referred to young people being involved, in which case it is argued that the penalty should not be so high.

I would be much happier if I learned that such crime was the result of the activities of a number of cartels of criminals who had decided to focus on it as a way of making a profit. That would at least raise in me the hope that proper intervention would lead to the breaking up of those cartels. I think that many people have jumped on the bandwagon, and enforceability will be a key component of the Bill's success. If the Minister can provide us with any reassurance on that issue at this stage, I would be happy to hear it.

I await with interest the Minister's response to the debate. I repeat our assurance that we shall give the Bill a fair wind. If it receives Royal Assent on Wednesday as intended, as I have no doubt it will, it will probably have completed all its stages in the shortest possible time. That is a good thing; it is good that the House is able to do that. In that process, I very much hope that we do not lose sight of our objectives, and that if necessary the Minister will respond positively to any amendments that hon. Members may table to try to improve the Bill.

7.7 pm

Mr. Denham: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) for the way in which he has approached this debate. I shall try to touch on most of the issues raised. We have had notice of some of the issues that are likely to be raised in amendments. Although I shall not try to deal with them in full now, we will obviously consider them on their merit. I am grateful to hon. Members for giving us early warning of what we may be discussing on Wednesday afternoon. I am also grateful to hon. Members of other parties for their co-operation in the passage of the Bill. Despite the recognition on both sides of the House of the fact that the Bill does not wholly solve the problem we face, such co-operation shows that it is worth enacting as quickly as possible, rather than leaving things until the autumn.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) raised two questions: one about violent crime and the other about design in crime. We have to take a balanced view. The British crime survey shows pretty conclusively that, when taken as a whole across all categories, violent crime has fallen significantly in recent years.

When we launched the crime statistics a couple of weeks ago, we in government chose to use the recorded crime figure for street robbery as the best proxy for the trend over previous years. We did not attempt to say that overall violent crime was down and that therefore the problem addressed in the Bill did not exist. We have acknowledged head-on that it does exist, and for a variety of reasons. It is a relatively rare type of crime and it features a significant number of under-16s who do not show up in the British crime survey. The British crime survey is not the best measure of street robbery. So the balanced view is that, yes, violent crime overall is down, but there is a particular facet of street robbery with which we must get to grips.

My hon. and learned Friend also talked about design in relation to the reduction of crime, and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), who spoke as the chairman of the all-party telecommunications group, referred to the role of manufacturers and operators. We have made it clear to the operating companies on several occasions during the past 12 months that we would if necessary be prepared to legislate to require the establishment of certain standards by the industry, but it has always been our preference not to do so—not least because with a fast-moving issue such as this there is a danger of legislating for the problem that existed two years previously rather than the problem that we might face in two years' time.

I am pleased that, albeit after some significant delays, Vodafone and O2 came on board and recognised the seriousness of the problem in January. They have helped to set in train the measures that we are discussing. In addition to the common database on IMEI numbers, they stressed the importance of legislation that made re-programming illegal.

In the run-up to the debate, I was toying with the idea of naming those manufacturers who were not yet committed to introducing a hardened IMEI number, but I am pleased to say that following the assurances that we have received during the past few days I could no longer name with confidence any major manufacturer who was not adopting the new GSM number. That is important because the GSM standards are not legally enforceable internationally, so the pressure both of consumer demand and from operating companies and retailers saying that they will market only secure phones is crucial.

We are of course pursuing the matter internationally, not least in global forums. The European Union leads on certain trade issues and I am pleased to say that my officials have been invited to Brussels to discuss the measures that we are taking in this country as well as some of the international issues that we want to pursue. As we are a major market for mobile phones, I hope that if manufacturers implement the high standards demanded by consumers, operators and retailers in this country that will put significant pressure on the global market for mobile phones. That must certainly be our aim.

Questions were put about insurance fraud. The nature of "pure" fraud, when a claim is made but no phone has been lost or stolen, makes it difficult to obtain a real measure. The issue on which we have closely focused with the industry pertains to circumstances where a lost phone has been reported stolen in order to substantiate an insurance claim. We have been able to establish that the insurance policies offered by the mobile phone companies cover loss as well as theft, so there should be no need to require someone to report a phone as stolen in order to claim against a company insurance policy. That does not apply to some household insurance policies, however—

[Mr. Denham]

nor is the advice always properly or routinely followed by all retail outlets. Further work needs to be done to ensure that recorded crime figures are not artificially inflated by people who think that they have to state that a crime has taken place in order to make a legitimate claim on their insurance policy.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) talked about penalties and the hon. Member for Beaconsfield asked about their operation. As I made clear in my opening speech, there is more of a cottage industry than a cartel at present; as there is nothing illegal in offering a re-programming service, it is offered by independent retailers, at market stalls and car boot sales, through internet companies and so on. Clearly, the aim is to persuade a large number of those people, who may be aware that they are operating in a dubious moral zone but have no desire to put themselves in an illegal position, out of that business. That will hopefully enable the police to concentrate their efforts on what I am confident will be a smaller number of people prepared to offer such a service knowing that it was illegal and what the penalties would be.

There will be flexibility in the penalties; this is an each-way offence and there are different ranges of tariffs in magistrates courts and Crown courts. However, we should not forget that someone who re-programmes a mobile phone is not really in a different category from someone who has gone into the street, hit another person and taken their mobile phone. In effect, people know where such phones come from and must take responsibility for their part in that chain of events.

There was some discussion of two issues raised by my noble Friend Lord Campbell-Savours in another place. The first was whether the Bill's wording would put at risk people who owned equipment for legitimate purposes. The second—perhaps the other side of that argument—was whether the difficulties of proving intent would be so great as to make prosecution ineffective.

The reliance on intent or belief protects the legitimate owner of equipment. I am sure that we shall debate the matter in more detail than is appropriate on this occasion, but my view is that the concepts of intention and belief are already used effectively in the criminal law without major difficulty. The Theft Acts, for example, create the offence of theft where a person dishonestly appropriates property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it. The concept is well established.

The Bill is worded so as to protect somebody who legitimately owned a piece of equipment that could be used for those purposes. In practice, it is self-evident that in most cases there is likely to be significant circumstantial evidence, such as a large number of mobile phones, that would be taken into account.

Important points were made about accessories, as opposed to the mobile phone itself. This Bill does not deal directly with that, but the Government are taking other initiatives. For example, we are working with schools to try to discourage students from taking their phones to school. The balance of advantage to students is very much that they should not take their mobile phones to school, despite the so-called security arguments. Local education authorities in areas that suffer from the highest rates of street crime have already taken initiatives whereby police officers visit schools and that helps to address a range of youth crime issues, including mobile phone theft, so I hope that Members will feel that I have not ignored that point.

John Robertson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in many cases parents ask their child to take their mobile to school and to ring up when they are ready to come home? The parents then come by car to collect their children—[Hon. Members: "Tell them to walk."] Should we not be trying to educate the parents as well?

Mr. Denham: There are such pressures, but I have discussed the point with a significant number of head teachers, all of whom successfully pursue a policy of not allowing mobile phones in their school. They all insist that in the vast majority of cases it is not a major problem to make arrangements that do not rely on mobile phones. After all, as parents, we all seemed to manage without them until a few years ago. Schools can make arrangements for emergency calls and contacts. I am convinced that the balance of advantage for our young people is not to carry mobile phones; there is much evidence that the peak period for mobile phone theft, certainly in London, is during the hour or so after school ends. We need to realise that.

I do not want to detain the House too much longer—

Norman Baker *rose—*

Mr. Denham: I shall obviously have to detain the House for a little longer—I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Norman Baker: I rose only because I hoped that the Minister would respond to a point that I made earlier on the situation in Northern Ireland. What discussions has he held with his counterparts in the Irish Republic, given that the legislation is intended to apply to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Denham: The legislation will apply throughout the United Kingdom, but it will not apply to the Republic of Ireland. As I mentioned earlier, we are anxious to encourage states throughout Europe to harmonise their approach, but I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman that this measure will deliver such a system outside the boundaries of the United Kingdom.

I hope that we have covered the key points. We have been given fair warning of the amendments that will be discussed later this week and I am grateful to the House for its co-operative and constructive approach to the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

Committee tomorrow.

Select Committees

7.20 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I beg to move,

That,

(1) with effect from 23rd July, Standing Order No. 152 (Select Committees related to Government departments) be amended as follows:

In the Table

After item 9 insert

'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	11'

Leave out item 13 and insert

'Transport	Department for Transport	11'

Line 11, leave out from 'Committee' to end of line 12.

(2) That the unreported evidence taken by the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee shall stand referred to the Transport Committee and the Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions.

(3) That, with effect from 23rd July, the Order of 5th November 2001 relating to Liaison Committee (Membership) be amended as follows:

Paragraph (2), after 'Northern Ireland Affairs' insert 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions'.

Paragraph (2), leave out 'Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and insert 'Transport'.

(4) That paragraph (2)(a) of Standing Order No. 121 (Nomination of select committees) shall not apply to nominations to any Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions and to any Transport Committee made before 23rd July, and any such nominations made by the House shall have effect from 23rd July.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I understand that with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That Tom Brake, Mr. Gregory Campbell, Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Clive Efford, Mrs. Louise Ellman, Chris Grayling, Helen Jackson, Mr. George Stevenson, Mr. Graham Stringer and Mr. Robert Syms be members of the Transport Committee.

That Andrew Bennett, Sir Paul Beresford, Mr. Clive Betts, Alistair Burt, Mr. David Clelland, Mr. John Cummings, Chris Mole, Mr. Bill O'Brien, Dr. John Pugh, Christine Russell and Mr. Gary Streeter be members of the Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions.

Mr. Cook: The first motion is self-explanatory and simple—it contains no hidden tricks. It arises from the recent Government decision to separate the Department for Transport from the former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. We now have two new Departments—the Department for Transport and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which embraces housing and local government and the regions.

It is a cardinal principle of the Select Committee system that our departmental Select Committees track Whitehall Departments, so any change in the Departments requires a corresponding change in Select Committees. The motion gives effect to that change, which we are trying to introduce without disruption. The motion therefore includes a commitment that the new Committees will inherit the unpublished and unreported evidence taken by their predecessors; it was tabled just after the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions completed its pre-legislative scrutiny of the Local Government Bill. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, for his flexibility, enabling us to introduce the motion in the House tonight. It is important that the House considers and disposes of the matter tonight, because if the motions are carried the new Select Committees will be able to meet before the recess, elect Chairs and take a preliminary look at their future programme of work.

The Government have recently demonstrated powerfully their commitment to the Select Committee system by the historic appearance of the Prime Minister before the Liaison Committee. The motion before the House demonstrates again our commitment to keep our Select Committee system in good order, and I commend it to the House. I cannot think of any conceivable controversy that might lurk within this simple and straightforward motion. I therefore hope that it can proceed expeditiously so that the House can address itself to the richer, more complex and diverse topics that will arise on the motion for the Adjournment.

7.22 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Believe me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have tried to find something controversial in the motion, but I seem to have failed, so it falls to me to welcome the timely way in which the Government have introduced it. I accept what the Leader of the House said and the spirit in which he said it, and I urge the House to agree the motion.

7.23 pm

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for his congratulations, which are entirely undeserved as they apply to all members of the Committee of Selection. May I repeat that it is in interests of the House to deal expeditiously with the matter? If we do so, I shall move formally the motions tabled in my name.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I shall be expeditious, but not quite as congratulatory as the Conservative spokesperson. It is not what is in the motions that is controversial—it is what is missing from them.

I am relieved that the motions have been grouped together, as that helps me to deal in a more businesslike way with concerns that I share with my colleagues. We accept the logic of dividing the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions into two Select Committees. We acknowledge that the Committee has worked extremely effectively, but it is obviously important to reflect the division of departmental responsibilities since the recent change—that is not a problem and we have no difficulty with it.

Our discussion of the motions, however, could have provided an implicit opportunity to redress an injustice that occurred after the general election. There is a long-standing convention, of which you will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the arithmetic proportionality of

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

the membership of the House should be reflected not only in membership of Select Committees but in the allocation of chairmanships. Members in the Chamber will probably recall that there was a major injustice after the election—the Liberal Democrat party was allocated only one chairmanship, although we had two in the last Parliament, when we had fewer MPs—which has not be subsequently redressed.

The Leader of the House has acknowledged that problem, and he and his colleagues have borne in mind the difficulty caused by that allocation, but our debate could have provided a good opportunity to correct the problem. The Modernisation Committee has produced a report on Select Committees, paragraph 25 of which reiterated the principle that chairmanships should be allocated on an arithmetic basis. That recommendation was not a matter of contention when we debated the report and, as far as I am aware, has never been challenged since, so it is the obvious way to proceed and one that has a long history in the conventions of the House.

After setting up the two Committees, we naturally progress to agreeing from which party their Chairs should be drawn. Of course, it is usual practice for Committee members to elect as Chair someone who is a member of the party that has been allocated the chairmanship. We do not oppose the motions as they are inherently sensible, but we request an assurance from the Leader of the House that the matter that I have drawn to his attention will not be overlooked yet again in the weeks and months ahead. It has been a long wait to get justice and we require a firm assurance that the discrepancy will be addressed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that in 1997 and, I suspect, at the last election, the Liberal Democrats were offered an extra Select Committee—the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments—but they chose not to take it up?

Mr. Tyler: That is not technically true. All sorts of offers are made and it is perfectly true that the hon. Gentleman's party and the Conservative party sometimes ask that certain Committees have particular Chairmen. I assure the hon. Gentleman that my comments this evening are not intended as a reflection on the qualifications of certain Members to chair Select Committees—there is nothing personal in my comments. However, we would be grateful if the Leader of the House gave us an assurance that the conventions of the House will be obeyed in future.

7.27 pm

Mr. Robin Cook: The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) raised the issue of who might chair the Select Committees. Strictly speaking, as he knows, that is not a matter to be debated on the Floor of the House—it is a matter for the Committees themselves. However, it is on record that we are creating two Committees from a Committee which had two sub-Committees. I mention this delicately because I do not know what those Committees will do, but the field is already rather crowded.

I am sensitive to the hon. Gentleman's grievance, which he has raised on a number of occasions, and assure him that I am under no illusion about the fact that he will continue to raise it until I take action to remedy it.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside) *rose—*

Mr. Cook: Ah, the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) has a grievance. I will give way in a second so that he can express it.

This is not the occasion to take action in response to the grievance of the hon. Member for North Cornwall, but I am conscious of it and shall bear it in mind. Should an opportunity present itself, I shall certainly welcome the occasion to remedy it, but many factors have to be taken into account when choosing the Chair of a Select Committee.

Pete Wishart: If the Leader of the House is in the business of addressing grievances, how does he feel about the fact that there is still not one member of Plaid Cymru or the Scottish National party serving on non-regional Select Committees?

Mr. Cook: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that the list before the House in the motions to be moved by the Chair of the Committee of Selection includes one member of a minority party. In a total of 22 appointees, a member of one minority party strikes precisely the right arithmetical balance. I know of the hon. Gentleman's grievance. I know of the grievances of most parties in the House and most corners in those parties but, sadly, it is not within my power immediately to remedy them. However, I am conscious of the matter raised by the hon. Gentleman, and we shall certainly watch for an opportunity when we can put it right.

I was enormously encouraged by the opening remarks of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), who failed to find any controversy in the motion, which gives me hope that when the motion is put to the House it will be carried. I commend it to the House, as it will enable us to make good progress on keeping our Select Committees in good order.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to Committees.

Ordered,

TRANSPORT

That Tom Brake, Mr. Gregory Campbell, Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Clive Efford, Mrs. Louise Ellman, Chris Grayling, Helen Jackson, Mr. George Stevenson, Mr. Graham Stringer and Mr. Robert Syms be members of the Transport Committee.

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER: HOUSING, PLANNING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

That Andrew Bennett, Sir Paul Beresford, Mr. Clive Betts, Alistair Burt, Mr. David Clelland, Mr. John Cummings, Chris Mole, Mr. Bill O'Brien, Dr. John Pugh, Christine Russell and Mr. Gary Streeter be members of the Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions.—*[Mr. McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Summer Adjournment

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

7.30 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I should like to raise a number of issues regarding regeneration initiatives in the Orchard Park ward of my constituency.

I remember the negative impact that Conservative policies had on the people of Hull, North during the 1980s and 1990s, especially on those living in the Orchard Park ward. There were high levels of unemployment and long-term unemployment, no commercial or retail activity, housing that needed improvement, and rising crime and delinquency. The Tory financial constraints imposed on local government meant that the council's Labour group had to look for other ways to raise funds, such as the flotation of Kingston Communications, to improve the quality of life for the people of Hull.

It seems strange that an article on the subject in *The Guardian* last Saturday expresses shock, horror and disgust that a Labour council is spending money on repairing dilapidated schools, repairing houses, installing central heating and double glazing, and building a suitable stadium for the people of the city—a shocking waste of money.

Thankfully, the election of the Labour Government saw a tide change for the people of Orchard Park. For the first time, central Government policies were having a direct impact. The new deal started to break the cycle of generational unemployment. The sure start scheme in Orchard Park aimed at child health and development is having a great and growing impact. The city learning centre at the Sir Henry Cooper school offers courses for local people to improve their basic skills and is helping to raise the standard of adult education.

In addition, the regeneration of Orchard Park has started, and it is about this that I shall voice most of my concerns. Those stem from what seems to be the political inexperience of the new Liberal Democrat leadership of Hull city council. Bit by bit, its decisions are unstitching the regeneration programme that had been put in place, and I fear that that will have a devastating effect on the local community, the quality of their environment and their hopes for the future.

Surplus housing stock had been a major problem in Orchard Park and the surrounding area. After much debate, the Labour council agreed a programme of demolition, and remodelling commenced. On the Danes, an estate in Orchard Park, I recently witnessed—to the delight of local residents—two tower blocks being demolished, as had been agreed by the Labour council, with a further 150 houses due for demolition.

I fully support the demolition of surplus housing stock. I equally support the remodelling of those areas but, worryingly, it is this second factor that the Liberal Democrats are refusing to acknowledge. There are plans to halt any further demolition in the Danes area, pending a re-examination of the entire future of that area. More importantly, the council has removed the £800,000 available to carry out the remodelling of the Danes area. That will mean that my constituents who live there will have to live in unacceptable conditions, with boarded-up houses next to improved properties and uncertainty about their future and their future housing.

In addition, the council's cabinet has agreed to delegate plans for further demolition to remove surplus stock to private consultants and the newly established citywide residents and tenants groups, which do not cover all the groups in my constituency. That will put on hold for at least a year the identification of surplus properties and the demolitions already agreed with the Danes residents. That is an unacceptable situation and is unfair to the people of Orchard Park. It is not consistent with the original council plan or the policies of the Labour Government, which advocate revitalising the area.

Given the content of the Deputy Prime Minister's statement to the House last Thursday, I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary could relay those concerns to the Minister in charge of housing and regeneration, to see what can be done to prevent any delay in the demolition of surplus housing and the remodelling of the area.

The second and more urgent issue is the proposed Department of Health LIFT scheme for Orchard Park. In his sustainable communities statement, the Deputy Prime Minister emphasised the need for adequate health services, but that seems to have gone unnoticed by the Liberal Hull city council. Hull was one of the 18 areas to be given approval for LIFT funding, with the aim of improving primary care services where they are desperately needed. That is of particular importance to the Orchard Park area, which has low health status compared with other areas of Hull. Unfortunately, it seems that that much needed investment is unlikely to occur—again, because of the decisions of the Liberal Democrats.

To summarise the situation, a regeneration plan for Orchard Park had been agreed between Hull city council and the West Hull primary care trust. The outline business case had been drawn up for the project and private finance initiative credits had been provisionally approved for the replacement community centre, citizens advice bureau and a new retail development to replace the substandard shopping precinct. In addition, it was agreed that, through the LIFT scheme, a number of retail shops would be purchased from the council and that the one-stop health centre costing £5.5 million would be located there.

The council's and LIFT's funding sources are interlinked, and failure by either party to fulfil its commitment would put in serious doubt the whole regeneration scheme. It is here that my concern lies, because Liberal Democrat-led Hull city council has indicated to West Hull PCT that it is not in a position to buy the retail shops.

That poses a number of serious issues for the future of the Orchard Park LIFT project. If the council had owned the shops, that would have reduced the risk and ensured the managed transition from existing retail units to the shops planned as part of the regeneration project. Without that, and leaving the shops at Orchard Park in third-party ownership, as the Liberal Democrats seem to demand, is inappropriate. If the shops were vacated piecemeal, that would result in some shops being boarded up, which would not add to the expected improvements resulting from the regeneration scheme. The council's purchase of the retail outlets is key to the entire LIFT scheme.

As a result, it seems that the burden will fall on the PCT to buy the shops. Current advice that I have received is that that option is likely to be rejected under the LIFT funding scheme. It therefore puts in doubt not only the

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

viability of the Orchard Park regeneration project, but the whole Hull LIFT scheme, both in my constituency and in that of the Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Alan Johnson). Without the Orchard Park project, the Hull LIFT scheme would have a £5.5 million hole and therefore not enough critical mass to interest a private developer. That could delay the Hull LIFT scheme for at least a year, if not more, as new plans are drawn up.

It is sad that the actions of the Liberal city council are jeopardising Hull's LIFT scheme, which the Department of Health has described as

"one of the most exciting schemes in the country".

The Department is keen that it should proceed.

The Orchard Park regeneration scheme is vital not only to ensure better health provision, but to deal with employment, environment and community involvement, yet the Liberal Democrats are turning their backs on it. As it seems that the council is reneging on earlier promises, I should be grateful if my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Health and the Minister with responsibility for regeneration could work together to investigate whether any alternative funding methods are available, so that the Orchard Park scheme can be included in the LIFT scheme, and the LIFT scheme can go ahead. That is most important in one of the most deprived wards in the whole of the United Kingdom.

7.39 pm

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): It is a great privilege to speak in this debate and I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). I have an especially high regard for the vice-chancellor of his university, David Drewry, whom I have admired for many years. As the hon. Gentleman spoke, I was reminded that I am bereft, as an undergraduate from Hull who has been with me for the entire year, James Holden, has now returned to sunny Hull, abandoning me to a state of chaos and incompetence. I therefore have two reasons to be especially appreciative of his constituency. I also have a very strong point of contact with him in having to bemoan the destructive effects of much of the Liberal Democrat activity in my constituency.

It has been my privilege to represent my very beautiful tract of the country for the past 18 years, but I want to raise three issues that I think are especially serious. They relate to the good will and tolerance in areas such as mine, which pay very high taxes and are aware that increasingly high taxes are being charged through national insurance and the everlasting array of stealth taxes being introduced by the Government. Their tolerance of the inadequacy of the way in which the funding formulae work is growing very thin. The Prime Minister constantly says that such concerns are a plea for more money, but they are a plea for greater equity in the funding formulae.

I have the latest information, which shows that in Durham, the Prime Minister's health authority area, of the 12,000 patients waiting for in-patient treatment, only one has waited more than a year. In my health authority area, 13,700 patients are waiting for in-patient treatment—another 1,000 people—but 558 are waiting more than a year. I regret that, since the Government took office in 1997, they have consistently distorted the funding formula. There is genuine inequity in health service delivery and they know full well that that is the case, although I am sorry that the Department of Health provides such paltry responses to letters. The current state of affairs is entirely unsatisfactory. Some 558 people in west Surrey are waiting more than a year for in-patient treatment. The Government have announced a very substantial increase in health funding, but my constituents feel extremely strongly that the money that is allocated should be delivered equitably.

With that in mind, two particular issues are causing concern in South-West Surrey. I give credit for the fact that Farnham's community hospital is at last under construction after many years of campaigning. Haslemere has the largest elderly population in Surrey. Very many elderly people live alone and they must be completely secure in terms of their community hospital. Frankly, I am confident that the hospital's future is secure, but following on from the comments of the hon. Member for Hull, North, there has been some scaremongering in the Haslemere community. I ask the Minister to use his good offices to obtain confirmation from Health Ministers that the Haslemere hospital is indeed secure.

In Godalming, the pressure in local accident and emergency departments and extremely serious waiting time problems have led to a request that a local care centre be developed. I strongly endorse that request and I know that Waverley borough council would act as co-operatively as it is able within the constraints of its resources. There is a serious issue: general practitioners are extremely cramped in their premises and there is a serious need for a local care centre. County councillor Maureen Nyazai and many others are working towards that, but if the Minister felt able to communicate with his colleagues, I would be more than grateful if he gave a fair wind to both those initiatives.

In passing, I should like to applaud the industry and endeavour of the health service managers who serve my constituency and the country generally. There has just been a meeting of our new strategic health authority, involving our new chief executive, Simon Robbins, and our chairman Terry Hawksworth, as well as our primary care trust chief executive Elizabeth Slinn and chairman Chris Grimes. People rarely thank health service managers, but I think that they are wrong not to do so, as the country is well served by their commitment and their trying to deliver services in the face of huge obstacles and, I am afraid, unrealistic rhetoric.

Our problems are compounded by the acute care sector crisis. I applaud the initiatives of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen and their consistent approach in drawing attention to the problems of care homes. My hon. Friends the Members for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and many others have drawn attention to the degree to which excessive regulation, lack of regard for the cost of living and many other issues have made the delivery of care home services acutely difficult. Woodlarks in Farnham is an example of a specialised and wonderful facility for women with physical disabilities, but it is having the greatest difficulty in managing to continue its work. The Meath home is somewhere that any of us would gladly wish any relatives with mild learning disabilities or epilepsy to stay. The pressure on those voluntary homes to make ends meet is formidable and unacceptable when one considers allocation of funding.

That brings me to the recent consultation paper on the local government finance formula on grant distribution. I speak on behalf of TACFIG, the town and country finance issues group. Waverley, my borough council, has led on much of the preparation in advancing the case. There are problems in areas with a high cost of living and a population that is not densely packed, and where the presence of several towns means that the service has to be delivered in rural and urban areas. The needs of such areas are not sufficiently or fairly recognised by the formula. If there is to be a sense of equity and justice throughout the country with regard to the use of taxpayers' money, I urge the Government to accept that it is inappropriate and wrong to force areas such as mine to confront a situation of public squalor amidst private affluence.

A further measure that is causing deep concern is the pressure on debt-free local authorities to hand over the proceeds of council house sales to so-called "more needy" authorities. It is well understood that every time the Government weight a formula with regard to deprivation measures, it is a veiled attack on areas such as mine. I have long believed in the principles of the welfare state, even though it should be modernised, updated and altered, but if there is such a sense of injustice, it will not be sustainable to suggest that the good will of constituents such as mine can be maintained.

Let me turn to the last concern to which I should like to draw the House's attention. I ask for the Minister's assistance in getting confirmation that the plans for the A3 at Hindhead are on target and that there has been no moving back from the commitment that there should be a tunnel past this appalling transport trouble spot. The Devil's Punch Bowl is a beautiful area that is scarred by the problems of traffic. The traffic lights at Hindhead are the only ones to be encountered when driving between Scotland and Portsmouth, as I have frequently told the four Scottish Transport Ministers. The Highways Agency has been extremely helpful, but in accordance with what the hon. Member for Hull, North said about the mischievous behaviour of the Liberal Democrats, scaremongering and rumourmongering are rife in the Hindhead area to the effect that the scheme has been abandoned. I do not believe that to be the case, but I urge on the House and the Minister the importance of the Hindhead tunnel not only for my constituents, but for the regeneration of Portsmouth, Southsea and, of course, that very important area, the Isle of Wight.

I hope that the Minister will take up those points and reply to me in due course before the House adjourns.

7.49 pm

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. I want to cover two issues of crucial importance on which I should like progress to be made before the House goes into recess. I make no apology for the fact that in the 19 years I have been a Member I have raised one of those issues in the House on more than 300 occasions, either in debate or in written and oral questions—that is, the empty housing in my constituency. More than 4,000 houses in Burnley are empty, many of them derelict and abandoned, and the problem gets worse week by week. Dozens of Ministers—virtually every housing Minister in those 19 years—have been to Burnley to look at the problem and accepted that it exists. Then, a year later, it is worse than when they came. This is our last chance to do something. The Government have to give the council the means and the ability to tackle the problem. If, in 12 months' time, the people of Burnley cannot clearly be shown that progress has been made, we will face serious difficulties.

Last Monday, I welcomed the Chancellor's statement, in which housing moved up the agenda for the first time in several years. It identified two key problem areas: first, the south—I do not in any way want to diminish that problem—and, secondly, parts of the north such as Lancashire and Yorkshire, where we face the problem of empty houses that nobody wants. The statement said that money would be available to deal with those problems.

When we heard Thursday's statement by the Deputy Prime Minister, I hoped that we would get further information about what was to be done to help. He mentioned the figure that would be available, but unfortunately did not give much detail. I do not say that as a criticism—I realise that he had difficulty in covering every issue that he wanted to cover in the course of that statement. Nevertheless, Burnley needs to know more than what was said last Thursday. On Friday, I attended a meeting in Accrington, which had been arranged before the statement, in which east Lancashire council leaders, the chief executives of the councils and local Members of Parliament discussed the pathfinder housing renewal project. There are nine such projects, one of which is for east Lancashire, of which Burnley is a part. We know from a statement that was made a few weeks ago that £2.66 million has been made available up-front. That is welcome, but it will not scratch the surface of the problem that we have in Burnley, let alone in east Lancashire as a whole. Of course, it is not intended to—it is there to help to prepare the way for what local authorities are going to do. But local authorities need to know how much money will be available over the next three years in order to be able to plan the right type of programme to match the resources that they will get. Will it be £150 million, £50 million or £250 million? Everybody recognises that at least a 10-year programme will be required to solve the problem.

On 16 May, I took part in a debate in Westminster Hall and made several points that I do not intend to repeat today. I also referred to the issue during the debate on the Queen's Speech on 20 June, the very first day of the new Session.

A few years ago, the Bishop of Burnley, Ronald Milner, who is now retired—we have had two bishops since then—produced an independent report in which independent experts from several sources, including housing associations and the industry, considered housing in Burnley and east Lancashire. It identified a real crisis. A few weeks ago, the bishop was back in Burnley celebrating the fact that Burnley has had a bishop for 100 years. If he had gone around Burnley or east Lancashire he would have been amazed to find that the situation that he so clearly described in his report is no better—indeed, it is far worse—than at the time he published it.

The Deputy Prime Minister has been to Burnley twice in the past 12 months. He has seen the decay and despair and understands the problems that so many people in Burnley face. We have to recognise that many houses are beyond the stage at which they can be improved and therefore have to be demolished. About 2,000 houses need to be demolished very speedily—in my view, within the next 12 months. We then need to be able to concentrate

[Mr. Peter Pike]

on improvements, whether it be knocking two houses into one or knocking alternate terraces down, according to the area. That is necessary because there is an oversupply of houses to meet an underdemand from people who would not want them even if they were in good shape and good repair, yet many are in an absolutely appalling state because they have been vandalised or used by drug addicts, causing great fear to people living in the area.

However, demolition is an extremely expensive option in a part of the country where after houses have been demolished there is very little or, in many cases, no site value available. That is completely different from the situation in London and the south. In Burnley, the houses are demolished and the area is cleared but there is nothing to go there. We cannot bring people into the area. If we could, we would do so, but we have to accept that we do not have the jobs for them. There is no point in saying, "Let's bring people from the south to relieve the pressure there", because there are no jobs to give them the security that they would want.

Every day I get at least one letter identifying a different problem. Today, I got a letter from the daughter of two old age pensioners aged 81 and 82. The father is critically ill. They are in an area that is to be demolished, but the resources are not there to allow for that, so it is not in this year's phase. I hope that it will be in next year's phase. Once the father is in hospital, it is likely that the mother will have to leave the house. Compensation will be based on the value of the house at the time when the council compulsorily purchases it. It has already lost a tremendous amount in value owing to the deterioration of the area. Just imagine what that house will be like in six months' or a year's time if the family leaves. Many of my constituents now live in negative equity. The value of their house has gone down, and the price that they are offered in compensation if they move out when it is to be demolished is less than they owe on the mortgage. When they get a new property, straight away they owe more than it is worth. It is a real problem, and the Government must show what they are going to do to help the people of Burnley, east Lancashire and the other pathfinder project areas.

I could speak for ages about this, because I am so concerned about it, but other hon. Members want to speak. The other issue that I want to discuss is mentioned on pages 1,4 and 5 of today's edition of *The Mirror* in an article by Steve Dennis. He spoke to me about it on my way to London today, as have people from other newspapers. The report is about the death of Christopher Alder at Hull police station in 1998. Hon. Members might wonder what my involvement in that case could be. His sister, Janet Alder, lives in my constituency, and she raised the matter with me just after her brother had tragically died in police custody.

Over the years, I have had considerable correspondence with the Police Complaints Authority, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Hull police force, Ministers, the Home Secretary—the present one and the previous one—and the Attorney-General. You name them, I have written to them about this case. It is a matter of great concern that a youngish lad who had been a paratrooper in the British forces could have died on that day. I have seen the video that is referred to in the report, as has the previous Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), whose constituency is close to my own. Anyone who sees that video will be appalled at what happened at that time.

I have deliberately not raised this matter in the House before today, because I wanted to ensure that, when the case went trial, I would in no way have prejudiced that trial or assisted the police in saying that it should not proceed because I had prejudged the issue. The trial has now been heard and the case was thrown out a few weeks ago. The jury did not, in fact, take a decision on the case. So, it has gone.

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions, who also represents a member of Christopher Alder's family, and I wrote jointly to the present Home Secretary a few weeks ago. My hon. Friend and I said in a press statement on 25 June that we were calling for a public inquiry into the matter. We stated:

> "The decision to end the trial by the Judge last Friday raises many questions and all the issues flowing from that tragic night"—

in April 1998—

> "involving the Police and others, and subsequent investigation and actions on behalf of the Police Complaints Authority, Crown Prosecution Service and the Court System need to be investigated fully by a Public Inquiry. Only this action will answer all the questions clearly and the family understandably feel justice has not been done."

Our statement went on to say that we were asking for an urgent meeting with the Home Secretary. He has said that he would prefer to wait until the police disciplinary action had taken place, and I understand that. Indeed, for that very reason, I have not tabled an early-day motion or called for an Adjournment debate in the House on the matter. In view of the fact that the case has now been made public, however, I want to make it absolutely clear that both my hon. Friend and I will pursue this case vigorously, because we are very concerned about it.

I do not want to make any judgment on the facts that have been reported in the press, and I am not going to refer to them tonight. All I will say is that I believe that the House should be concerned about what happened on that tragic night, and about what has happened since in all the investigations, and recognise that the only way in which we can satisfy the family and the wider public—because wider concerns are now being expressed—is by having a full public inquiry. I believe that it is right that I should make that point in this debate tonight.

8.3 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The problem with these debates, particularly with the prospect of a long—in fact, over-long—recess ahead of us, is always one of what to identify as the key issues facing our constituencies. It would certainly have been possible for me to have spoken at length about the findings of the report on foot and mouth disease that were announced this afternoon, the catastrophic effect that the disease had on the whole of the west country's rural economy, and the implications of those findings for the treatment of future catastrophic epizootics such as foot and mouth. Suffice it to say, however, that the report underlines the lack of an early application of the advice of epidemiologists with relevant experience. It also illustrates that the ongoing paucity of numbers in the state veterinary service has to be rectified, and that the present import controls are insufficient for the task and not commensurate with those of other countries from which we could usefully learn lessons.

It would also be possible to talk at length about the formula for funding local authorities, to which the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) referred earlier. Indeed, many of my constituents will have looked with care at what the Chancellor of the Exchequer had to say in his statement on the comprehensive spending review last Monday, and will have read with interest the funding figure of £4,900 per pupil by 2006 that he promised. They will compare that with the present funding for a child in Somerset, which I believe is £2,529.18, and will assume that the funding per child is going to double in the space of three years. Nothing would please me more than to have it confirmed from the Dispatch Box tonight that that is the case, but my fear is that it will not be. I fear that this is another misapprehension on the part of my constituents. Indeed, the more I look at the proposals for the reform of the local authority funding formula, the more I see that they actually put those authorities that are already massively disadvantaged—in terms of the funding that they receive for education and other services—at an even greater disadvantage on most of the options offered. That is a matter of considerable concern.

I could also raise the matter of care homes, as did the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey. I have to say quite plainly to the Minister that the care home sector is in crisis in my county and in most of the south of Britain. The measures that have been taken so far have not been adequate for the task. The funding is still insufficient to keep the private sector care homes in place, which means that there are huge problems in store for our social services departments and for the acute services in our hospitals.

I could also ask for further information about the universal bank and the post office card account. I am not convinced that they will be ready by 1 April next year, and if they are not, that will have a catastrophic effect on the sub-post office network in my constituency, in all rural areas, and, indeed, in urban areas.

I want to focus, however, on another roads issue. It is one with which I think that the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), will be familiar, because it deals with the A303, which runs through my constituency and on to the south-west. The hon. Gentleman will know that the long-awaited south-west regional multi-modal study report—the SWARMMS report—has now been published, and that it contains proposals for the A303. He will also know that there are controversial aspects to the proposals relating to the road where it runs across the top of the Blackdown hills, and to the alternative plans, proposed by consultants, for the A358 to Taunton to be dualled, and to direct traffic by that route.

I have to say to the Minister that I do not wish to debate the rights and wrongs of dualling over the Blackdowns; I have strong opinions on that, but those hills are not in my constituency. I see huge merit in the proposal for the A358 route, because it would provide not only the least environmentally damaging option but an additional north-south route, which the despoliation of the Blackdowns would not offer.

My concern, however, is to separate out from that issue the improvements to the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester that have long been agreed—not just considered, but agreed. That is a piece of road that needs improvement not to increase its capacity, as most measures propose, but to make it safe. It is a place where there are fatal accidents every year, and there will be fatal accidents there this year as the holiday season comes upon us, with the huge increase in traffic from London and the south-east seeking the resorts of the south-west.

It is unfortunate that an inadequate piece of road should coincide with the point at which people get tired on their journey to the south-west. Their concentration is at its lowest, and, at that point, the road ceases to be a dual carriageway. It becomes a rather strange single carriageway plus, then recedes to a single carriageway over a rise where there is no visibility. That section of road clearly needs some attention, to make it safe.

All this was agreed years ago. We had a public inquiry. Uniquely, for road schemes of this kind, it was not seriously opposed by any particular group. Everyone agreed that the plans presented by the Highways Agency constituted the right way of dealing with an accident blackspot on a major trunk road. A public inquiry submitted proposals, and agreement was reached a long time ago, before the 1997 general election.

A moratorium was then imposed on road building of this kind. We were told that we would have to await the outcome of the multi-modal study. I do not know why: as I have said, not a capacity issue but a safety issue formed the basis of the multi-modal report. Anyway, we have waited and waited, and we now learn that this is somewhere in a queue of schemes for the south-west and, according to current plans, will almost certainly not be proceeded with until much more contentious issues further west are dealt with.

That cannot be acceptable to my constituents who, every day, run the risks involved in trying to use or cross the A303. It cannot be acceptable to those who want to use it to gain access to the south-west. Surely the safety issue can be detached from the capacity issues further down the road, and dealt with as a matter of priority. Surely it is possible to use plans that have already been agreed in order to make the road safe.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The hon. Gentleman will know that the Marsh to Honiton section of the A303 goes to my constituency. It is not just a question of capacity; that single-carriageway stretch of road has a very bad safety record.

Mr. Heath: I hear what the hon. Lady sa[illegible], but, as I have said, I am not qualified to talk about th[illegible]d further west, and I do not want to enter into an [illegible]ent with her or with any other Member about that.

I am simply saying that the scheme will stand or fall on its merits. It is solely to do with safety. There is no effective opposition to it, and the plans are ready to run; yet it has been held up by other considerations. I do not think that acceptable, and I ask the Minister to think about it. Perhaps he will pay attention to this stretch of road when he next travels to his constituency, or perhaps he will break his train journey to have a look at it. Sadly, breaking a journey on First Great Western is often quite easy nowadays.

Let me make a more important suggestion. Will the Minister ask his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), to go and see what needs to be done? Perhaps he will then meet me, along with local people, so that we can discuss the matter.

[Mr. Heath]

This is very simple. All that is needed is a ministerial fiat. I urge the Minister to treat the issue as a priority, before another life is lost on the road

8.13 pm

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley): I invite all Members to visit Manchester over the next fortnight or so. If they do, they will find the streets awash with red, blue, green and yellow bunting and flags to celebrate the start of the 17th Commonwealth games on Thursday.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) is not here, because I would have liked to pay tribute to her. What has made the event in Manchester possible is the support of Ministers in the last Government, including the right hon. Lady, the former right hon. Member for Henley—now Lord Heseltine—and the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). We have also received support whenever we have asked for it from the Liberal Democrat party leadership, and from our own Ministers. Before I sound as though I am being too nice to the Liberal Democrats, let me add that the excellence of their leadership has not always been mirrored by the behaviour of one or two nasty Liberal Democrat councillors "on the ground", whose perspective has been non-existent and who are now eating their rather unpleasant words.

I hope that people will go to the games and will recognise the work that has gone into their organisation. I am thinking of work done by Charles Allen of Granada Television, chair of the organising committee; Frances Done, chief executive; Howard Bernstein, chief executive of the city council; and Councillor Richard Leese. They have made major contributions, as have the Commonwealth Games Council for England and many sponsors, as well as thousands of volunteers.

No doubt over the next fortnight those people will be lying awake worrying, or having nightmares about things going wrong—as of course they could. I am sure that everything possible has been done to prevent that, but we should bear in mind the fact that the event will involve 4,000 athletes and that hundreds of thousands of people will attend 17 events, one of which—the shooting event—will take place as far away as Bisley in the south-east. The potential for organisational difficulties is enormous, but I have every confidence in those who have organised the event.

Three outcomes can be identified now. First, there will be no white elephants. All the sporting facilities will have an after-use, which is generally funded in partnership with other organisations. For instance, the aquatic centre is in partnership with the universities, which provides an excellent use for it afterwards. I confess to finding it difficult that Manchester City—not my favourite team—will be able to use the stadium afterwards. One of the oddest features of my career is the fact that I spent some of it securing an excellent stadium for the team in Manchester that I do not support. In any event, there will be no white elephants. That was not the case in Kuala Lumpur, and has not been the case after many other international sporting events in a stadium holding 100,000 people—a stadium that is now sprouting weeds.

The jobs benefit and the economic spin-offs are already there. The Commonwealth games will create more than 6,000 jobs, and independent financial advisers have told us of more than £600,000 of direct investment in the area. That is certain, whatever else happens over the next fortnight to the biggest youth and sporting festival that this country has ever hosted.

Moreover, those who organise sport throughout the world will be in attendance. The perception of English, or British, sport will be changed by what people say. I am sure that they will be impressed when they see the facilities.

Finally, let me compare and contrast that with what has happened in the south-east and London. Money has been pledged, and things have not happened. Picketts Lock is just one example. It would have aspired to be a white elephant, but never quite made it. Another example is the world athletics championship. I believe that this country could have hosted it in Manchester or elsewhere, but we have damaged our standing with the international sports community by not getting the organisation right. The bid for the World cup, which I supported passionately, was not helped by the fact that we managed to support—shall we say—the less honest side of the FIFA organisation, continuing with the corrupt Havelange dynasty followed by Blatter. That was not a smart move in terms of our standing in Europe and the rest of the world. Finally, more money was spent turning Wembley into a derelict site than has been spent on producing an excellent stadium in Manchester for the Commonwealth games.

I make those comments not to have fun but to make a serious point. Some time ago—I have asked questions in the Chamber about it—the British Olympic Association, supported by the Government and much of the establishment, said that if Britain were to bid for the Olympic games again, they would have to be in London. London is a great world city with many facilities. However, that decision was not subject to a competition, unlike Manchester's bid for the Commonwealth games or different cities' bid for the Olympic games. In the light of the mistakes in relation to facilities in the south-east and what I am sure will be a success in Manchester, this country would have a stronger international bid for the Olympic games and would get more support around the country if there were a proper competition between the United Kingdom cities that wanted to host the Olympic games, be it Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds or London. The issues could be fully aired in the light of the experience of the past four or five years. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take that issue up because competition in these issues strengthens our position in the international community. Often, assuming things will happen does not work.

I leave the Minister with one further thought, as the Government bring forward legislation to provide for direct elections to regional assemblies. What Manchester has done and what to a large extent London, Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow do to project their image in competing to host events—whether it be the international city of culture, the Commonwealth games, the Olympic games or whatever—is very healthy. Had the north-west had a regional structure 10 years ago, I am not sure that it would have been as easy for Manchester to achieve investment of £250 million in sporting facilities—there has been a lot of private sector investment. It might have got stuck in a regional body where lowest common denominator politics predominated.

I believe that people associate themselves seriously with cities, are happy to support competitions such as that for the international city of culture, and are less happy to associate themselves with the regions, most of which are named after a point on the compass and have no real economic, cultural or political community association.

I shall finish on a positive note by inviting you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and everyone else to come and enjoy the events in Manchester over the next fortnight, and to reflect on the fact that our cities and towns are often the public face of this country. They are its economic engine and powerhouse. We need to ensure that our political structures reflect that.

8.23 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer), who made a telling speech about the excitement that he expects in Manchester over the next few weeks. Many people will watch with great interest as those games unfold, and recognise the tremendous amount of effort that the hon. Gentleman put into securing those games when he was leader of the city council.

This debate often gives us the opportunity to raise a number of issues that concern us and our constituents, the people we represent, before the House rises. This time, it rises for a long summer recess, but if the rumours are right we can rest assured that it will be the last time we have such a long recess. In future, we will be sitting in September. I for one welcome that. I would have welcomed sitting in September this year, but the Leader of the House told us that it was not possible because of works taking place outside the building.

I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House called for us to have extra time to debate a number of important issues that we have not had time to cover before the House rises. A number of hon. Members have said that one of the great sorrows is that we will not have time to talk about the Deputy Prime Minister's proposals for local government finance reorganisation. By the time we come back in October, many fundamental decisions will have been taken and the House will not have had a chance to give its opinion on that important subject. A number of us were led to believe that the proposals would lead to a huge flow of new money into our counties, and it seems on a first reading of the consultation paper that that will not happen.

I want to raise some other matters that are local to my constituency of West Derbyshire. On 31 March 1987, I had an Adjournment debate that started, as they used to in those days, at 2.48 am. I had secured the debate the previous week. I rang some of the parents concerned and said that the Adjournment debate would take place the following Tuesday. They said, "Great. Can we come down to listen to it?" I rang on the Monday night and asked how many were coming, and I was told 170.

I was a new Member at that stage, and I found that I always learned something in this place. I went along to the person who was then sitting in the Serjeant at Arms chair and said, "Can I have some tickets tomorrow night for my Adjournment debate?" He said, "Yes, of course. How many would you like?" I said, "170." He said, "Can you come back in a few minutes?" I did so, and I got the 170 tickets. I learned that one could get 204 people in the Public Gallery. When I spoke to the organisers, I said, "You must make sure that you are down at 9 o'clock, because I expect the Adjournment debate to start at 10 and it will not wait for you if you are late."

The three coach loads all arrived at 9 o'clock. I was slightly embarrassed as I went to tell my constituents that the debate was running somewhat late. However, 170 people insisted that they did not want to miss the Adjournment debate and went into the Public Gallery. At the time, my majority was 100. It concentrated the mind somewhat sitting in the Chamber, watching and waiting with eager patience for the Adjournment debate to start. A number of my colleagues kept coming in, looking at the Public Gallery and saying, "Who are all those people?" "It's McLoughlin's Adjournment debate," came the reply. "That'll teach him," they said.

The debate was on an important issue. At that time, the sixth form of a successful school in my constituency, Ecclesbourne school, was threatened with closure. That was eventually rejected by Kenneth Baker. It is a popular and successful school. As I said in that Adjournment debate, Ecclesbourne is

> "of proven worth not because the headmaster says so and not because the teachers say so. It is of proven worth because the parents and pupils say so."—[*Official Report*, 31 March 1987; Vol. 113, c. 1069.]

The school has been consistently led for quite a few years by Dr. Robert Dupey, who retires at the end of this term. The problem is that, as a very successful school, it tried to redraw its catchment area, part of which goes into the city of Derby. It tried to make a more sensible arrangement for its future. Both Derbyshire county council and Derby city council agreed that its proposals were sensible, but unfortunately they have now been thrown out by somebody known as the adjudication officer.

Children in the villages of Kirk Langley, Weston Underwood and Mugginton now do not know whether they will be able to go to the school. That is a big problem because the next nearest school for those villages is quite some miles away. It is not just a matter of getting a bus for another five or 10 minutes, as in urban areas. Such a decision in a rural area could add at least 12 to 14 miles to the journey, along some unfortunate country lanes.

A further housing development is now planned for Duffield in the next couple of years, and we can expect a high proportion of the properties sold to go to families with school-age children. Did the adjudicator consider that? No; the adjudicator did not even visit the area. The governors could see the problem looming and undertook a consultation process earlier this year. Sadly, the adjudicator chose to ignore that and told the school that it could not proceed.

The result is real disaster for families in the rural parts of my constituency. Because they live furthest from the school's flagpole, they may not get places when the demand is high. The situation will vary from year to year. The adjudicator has said that the catchment area must be based on the radius from the school's flagpole.

Derbyshire's local education authority is unhappy about that, because it will have to find the children places elsewhere in the county. It will have to provide and pay for transport to another town, quite some distance away. In my part of Derbyshire we have no nice straight dual carriageways with bus routes.

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

The school is unhappy, because it spent a lot of time and effort making what was a very difficult decision. I raised the matter a few weeks ago with the Leader of the House. As we have come to expect of him, he was very open and honest. He said that

> "such matters and local issues are best determined locally, wherever possible . . . I understand the frustration of the hon. Gentleman's constituents if a decision is imposed by people outside their locality."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 2002; Vol. 387, c. 965.]

That is at the heart of the problem. It was not a local decision and did not take into account the local issues, such as transport and communities. The adjudicator listened only to those parents who had complained about the school's decision and did not consider the consequences for those who believed that they were unaffected and were therefore not invited to comment.

Even though there is no right of appeal, the Secretary of State takes no responsibility for the decision, and nor does the Parliamentary Commissioner. The only avenue open to parents is costly and time-consuming legal action. No wonder they are deluging everyone they can think of with desperate letters.

I urge the Government to look at the whole matter again, and with some urgency. I would be naive to think that they could do that within the next two days, but it is their creation of the adjudication office that has brought the problem about, and they should very quickly review the consequences of what has happened in this case.

West Derbyshire is a large rural constituency and we have a huge number of visitors to the national park—it is the most visited national park. I have consistently raised the problem of transport and roads in the area. A new link road, the A50, which runs between the M1 and the M6, has recently been built. It has done a lot to relieve certain traffic congestion, but it has created several traffic problems that were not investigated thoroughly enough when it opened.

The A50 now attracts a huge number of heavy goods vehicles. The section through Doveridge was, unaccountably, given a concrete surface. We were promised that it would be resurfaced in the Government's 10-year plan, but we all know what has happened to the 10-year plan: two years on, we are told that the Secretary of State for Transport is rewriting it. We want to know when that section will be resurfaced, for the sake of the people of Doveridge and Somersal Herbert.

Just a few weeks ago, the A6 in another part of my constituency was de-trunked. There is growing demand from people in the Darley Dale area for more pedestrian crossings. There are two campaigns, which I support. A tremendous number of road deaths occur every year, but because they happen in ones and twos, we tend not to regard them in the same way as accidents in the public transport sector. One way to address that problem, particularly where roads are being de-trunked, is to consider the entire subject of pedestrian crossings.

The A515 comes off the A50, and since the A50 upgrade—the M1-M6 link road—there has been a huge increase in traffic on what are very narrow and winding lanes. I raised the matter two years ago with the then Minister responsible for transport, the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), whom I now shadow in another position. He said that there would be good news on those roads and that he would ask the county council to investigate them as a matter of urgency. Perhaps he did ask them to do so, but nothing has happened since, and I hope that something will happen in the not-too-distant future, for the sake of the people in those areas.

I turn to the final issue that I wish to raise. Last week, the Government published a document entitled "The Review of English National Park Authorities". As I said, the Peak district serves a huge area in my constituency. It receives some 19 million day-visitors a year—a huge number—and covers some 143,000 hectares. Its national park authority comprises some 38 people. In referring to the governance of national parks, the Government document suggests that the number of people who serve on national parks should be reduced. I ask the Government to proceed very carefully in this regard. When I was first elected to the House of Commons, there was great local dissatisfaction at the fact that insufficient local people were being appointed to national parks bodies. When he was Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) introduced what he called parish representatives. Parishes were joined together, and they could have representation in respect of the national parks.

Having read the document, I very much fear that such appointments are under threat. That would be a grave mistake, because they bring a locally elected element to national parks that did not exist before. I urge the Government not to take the view that we need smaller authorities and a smaller decision-making process. The Peak district national park is unusual among national parks. It includes representatives from Cheshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire county councils; Barnsley, High Peak, Kirklees, Macclesfield and Oldham borough councils; Derbyshire Dales, North East Derbyshire and Staffordshire Moorlands district councils; and Sheffield city council. It includes those councillors because it covers their boroughs and areas. I urge the Government not to change that level of representation, and to reject the recommendations—if only in respect of the Peak district. The Peak district is unique: it has the highest number of visitors of all the national parks.

It is said that the Peak district is within an hour's drive of some 60 per cent. of the population of the United Kingdom, including the people of Manchester, the west midlands, Nottingham and the Sheffield conurbation. It deserves to have a large governing body, and it is very important that that local element be represented, but such representation is under threat through the document's proposals. I hope that there is plenty of time to consider this issue, and that the Government do not proceed with their plans.

8.39 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I shall speak briefly, as many right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak. I want to raise two issues of concern to my constituents, the first of which relates to the previous portfolio of the Deputy Leader of the House, who was Minister with responsibility for entry clearance.

Last weekend, I was inundated at my constituency surgery with complaints about the lack of visa facilities in respect of posts abroad, particularly in the Indian subcontinent, Pakistan and India. I was astonished to discover that the Government have closed the personal services that are offered to visitors who seek to come to this country for short-term visits.

As the Deputy Leader of the House knows, the entry clearance operation in India and Pakistan is the largest in the world. In 2000, 73,000 visas were issued in Mumbai, 70,000 in New Delhi, 64,000 in Islamabad and 32,000 in Karachi. The House will therefore understand the seriousness of the present situation. This is the busiest period for visitors visas, because this is the wedding season for the Asian community. That is acknowledged, because in the old joint entry clearance unit in London—now renamed UK Visas—additional staff were taken on at this time of year to deal with the extra applications. At the moment, very few applications are being dealt with, because the posts have closed to those who wish to make applications for visits.

We all understand the background to that decision—the tension between India and Pakistan and the decision taken by the Foreign Secretary to issue travel advice and to withdraw staff from India and Pakistan. However, the situation has improved. Indeed, tensions between India and Pakistan have receded and the ban on direct flights between Islamabad and New Delhi has been lifted. However, there has been no consequential increase in the staffing of our high commissions in those two countries.

The result is that I and, I am sure, other hon. Members have had constituents ringing to say that they cannot make simple applications for visitors visas. They are expected to drop their applications in a box in Mumbai or New Delhi. The applications are taken away and sifted, and the applicants are then contacted. People have little chance of getting a visa to come to a wedding or for a short visit to the UK if they have not applied before. That was confirmed to me by UK Visas just before the debate began. Those applying for a visa for a wedding or a visit for the first time will not be able to come this year. Indeed, they will not be able to come until the level of facilities has increased.

I have arranged a meeting with the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), for Wednesday, but I hope that before then some rapid progress can be made in the way in which those applications are handled. If the House rises before the difficulties have been resolved, constituents will make representations to hon. Members throughout the summer and we will have to contact the Foreign Office and disturb Ministers on their holidays or on other important business. That will not be popular. Therefore, I urge the deputy Leader of the House to pass on a message to the Foreign Office and remind his colleagues that the matter must be resolved immediately.

One constituent was told, when he visited the high commission in Delhi today, that he would be notified of his visa being issued through the national press in India. He has to make sure that he buys the newspaper every day to learn when the high commission is ready to issue the visas. That is unacceptable and I hope that something can be done.

My second point also relates to the travel advice in the subcontinent. I received an e-mail from the former chief justice of Goa. I declare an interest, because I went to Goa for my honeymoon, although it lasted only three days because I was summoned back to vote on the Maastricht treaty by the present Foreign Secretary. The e-mail informed me that because of the travel advice, bookings for Goa—probably the most popular destination in India—have reduced to a trickle and flights are on the verge of cancellation. Annually, the bookings for the winter holiday season in Goa start in June and, by 31 August, 60 per cent. of the bookings have been made. The chief justice's message is that unless we receive some clarification about the travel advice that has been issued by the Foreign Office, the tourism industry in India will suffer greatly.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will ask the Foreign Office, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, whether he is in a position to review the travel advice that he has issued so far. We all understand why the advice was issued and when it was issued. We understand entirely the important role that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has rightly played in the war against terrorism, and his efforts to bring a diplomatic solution to the problems between India and Pakistan, and no one but him could have done it because of his knowledge of the sub-continent and his interest in the affairs of the Asian community. However, on reaching an important stage, we should consider the advice again and ascertain whether it can be refined and changed to allow British citizens to travel to the subcontinent.

I did not interrupt my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) because I know that many others wish to contribute to the debate, but he missed one important name when he referred to the list of people who had helped bring the Commonwealth games to Manchester. His role in achieving that, as leader of Manchester city council, needs to be acknowledged by the House. We are grateful for all that he has done. I know that he wanted to get the Olympic games to Manchester in the past, but was not successful. I know that my hon. Friend will continue to support his home city.

A part of my constituency is the Hamilton estate in the northern part of Leicester. It is a new estate, and the pledge is to build 4,000 homes. Two thousand homes have already been built. I was pleased to hear the statement by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister setting out his radical reform of the planning system. I welcome his statement, which represents the most radical planning moves for almost a generation. However, I am worried that there is no clarity on planning gain, which is one of the most important ways in which the local community can benefit from planning permissions being given to big developers. We do not have firm and fair rules on planning gain.

On the Hamilton estate, there are 2,000 homes. When they were built, there were the promises of a doctor's surgery, a community centre, leisure facilities and an additional school. None of these promises has been forthcoming. We have only a large branch of Tesco. I am not opposed to Tesco, where I shop occasionally. However, when people buy pretty expensive houses in that part of the city, they expect to get more than a supermarket. They expect to get everything that was promised. I do not think that the local council extracted a sufficient degree of planning gain when planning permission was given to the supermarket.

It is important that we remind developers that in exchange for the huge profits that they make by building new homes and securing new supermarkets, they must give something back. I am sure that this issue affects other

[Keith Vaz]

right hon. and hon. Members. It is important that developers realise that they must make a contribution at the start.

I hope that the message will go from the House before we rise for the summer recess that there is a need to ensure that the old section 106 agreements and the planning system are not merely made more efficient and more effective, although that is what we all want. We want a planning system that will not result in a huge amount of money being given to planning silks and planning inquiries, such as the terminal 5 inquiry, which cost almost £90 million. At a much more local level, developers who obtain planning permission should be told at the start that they will have to put something back.

I hope that the Minister will have sufficient information to pass on to relevant colleagues. If that can be done before the House rises for the recess, I know that my constituents will be grateful.

8.49 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I, too, wish to raise an issue with the Government that relates to the operation of the licensing system. The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) has spoken on behalf of those of his constituents who are affected by visa delays; I wish to raise two constituency cases involving very small businesses that are being starved to death by regulation and, in particular, the inequitable operation of the licensing regime for arms export licences.

I shall not quote the name of the small firm because this issue is commercially very sensitive to that firm. It is only after having failed to get satisfactory replies to parliamentary questions and to letters to Ministers that I have decided that I must raise the issue in the forum of this debate; otherwise, after Wednesday, there will be no chance to save it from what will be its certain demise, unless the Government do something about the problem that I shall describe.

The firm employs about half a dozen people and 90 per cent. of its business is supplying spare parts for military aircraft to the Indian market, many of which go directly to the Indian Government. It has operated under an open individual export licence. Such licences are normally renewed every two years.

Last year, the firm applied for the routine renewal of its licence, but it received a temporary six-month extension instead of a renewal. It was then led to believe that the renewal would be granted as soon as that extension period expired, but a few days before that six-month extension expired, it was informed that the substantive renewal application still could not be determined and that it could have a further extension, but excluding exports to India. Of course that was not very helpful to the firm because 90 per cent. of its business is with India, particularly the Indian Government.

So the firm has been pushed into making standard individual export licence applications for each spare part that it wishes to export to India. Many of those spare parts are for the Jaguar aircraft, which is being built under licence in India—still, I understand, with the Government's approval. The company has made those individual applications, but it cannot obtain any decision.

The managing director has now sent me a letter in which he says:

> "My company's position is precarious. We are now receiving thousands of pounds of equipment, which we cannot ship due to the fact that we have not received any standard licences. So far we have despatched forty-five applications to DTI for clearance and we still have a considerable number to send which are being processed."

He goes on to say that each licence application takes a long time for him to prepare and send, but he can get no result from the Department.

I have tabled parliamentary questions, and I have reached the conclusion that there is Government-inspired discrimination against that firm because another firm in Dorset still has an open individual export licence to supply exactly the same equipment to the Indian market. That firm has contacted the Indian high commission in the past 10 days to tell it that it is happy to supply the very goods that would have been supplied by the firm in my constituency. That is intolerable.

I have written to the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), who has expressed some surprise, although he is meant to be in charge not only of small businesses, but of export licensing. In raising this issue this evening, I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office will ensure that the firm, which will be well known to the Department of Trade and Industry and to the Foreign Office, gets early responses to its licence applications because it will go out of business unless it gets justice, which it deserves.

That is not just an isolated incident. A much larger firm in my constituency has told me that it has ~~had an~~ application with the DTI and the Foreign Office for an export order to Turkey—not one of our well known enemies, but a member of NATO, which we are delighted to see taking on our responsibilities in Afghanistan. That firm won an export order to Turkey at the end of last year. It is still waiting for a result on that application.

The firm wrote to the Foreign Secretary about a month ago and copied the letter to me, and it was led to believe that there would a very quick result. It has still not had that result. It has written an incensed letter to the Foreign Secretary, saying, "Hasn't he the courtesy even to respond to our correspondence?" That order is not small beer; it is probably worth £800,000 or more to that firm in my constituency, with a prospect of follow-on orders as well.

Last Friday, the Quadripartite Committee issued a useful report on export control. At paragraph 92 of that report, the committee condemns the Government, saying:

> "Delays in processing of applications can adversely affect the companies concerned and it is essential that such effects are minimised."

The export control organisation is not small; it has a budget of £5.25 million and employs 137 staff, yet it seems totally incapable of monitoring its progress towards its own targets. It has a target of dealing with 70 per cent. of applications within 20 days.

The Department of Trade and Industry has been unable to answer a question that I tabled four weeks ago asking how many individual export licence applications had been outstanding for more than three months, more than six months or more than one year. The fact that it cannot answer that question in good time suggests that it is not compiling the basic statistics necessary to determine whether it is meeting its own targets, which is thoroughly unsatisfactory.

My final points concern a slightly different type of organisation, called Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. It is a registered, limited company run by volunteers, one of whom, the secretary, although not a constituent of mine, lives very close to my constituency in Dorset. He has involved me and other bee-keepers in my constituency in the plight of his organisation. It comprises bee-keepers who subscribe 60p per colony of bees to insure against the destruction of the hives if the bees become diseased with foul brood. The company's total annual income is £20,000. It has been incredibly successful in ensuring that the disease of foul brood has not become a problem for this country to the extent that foot and mouth disease has been a problem and that it has not run rife here as it has in other countries. Australia and New Zealand are considering using the model established by Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd.

What are the Government doing about that small voluntary organisation? Until a couple of years ago, the company paid an annual registration fee of £25 to the registrar of industrial and provident societies, but that fee, which is now paid to the Financial Services Authority, has gone up to £375 a year—a fifteenfold increase. The company also has to pay £130 to the financial services compensation scheme because apparently it has to contribute to the losses suffered by the Chester Street insurance company. It also has to pay £279 to the financial ombudsman service.

Apart from dealing with the costs imposed on the company, which total 5 per cent. of its turnover, the secretary has to spend a great deal of time on administration. He sends off all the paperwork to be dealt with by highly paid officials in the FSA, but he finds that his whole life is being dominated by the voluntary service that he has been providing to the bee-keeping community, which I am sure we all recognise and praise.

In a letter, the secretary says:

> "The support and protection of the environment, and particularly the area in which we are involved, is not the prerogative of any one person, industry or authority but we all have responsibility towards it, including for that matter the FSA."

He continues:

> "As a retired man I am prepared to undertake a reasonable amount of work for the benefit of others. In addition to my personal responsibility to my wife, family and grandchildren, I have been a Welfare Visitor for a National Charity for twenty-five years and a Business Mentor for the Princes Youth Business Trust . . . Unfortunately because of the excessive amount of time this business with the FSA is taking I have had to stop my work as a mentor for the PYBT. However I have previously informed you in writing that in November this year my wife and I will be back-packing around the world for six months which all the young people are doing now."

Because of the burden of regulation, that gentleman cannot find anyone who is prepared to take on the voluntary work he does running that important company, Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. I am not asking the Minister to provide a volunteer to replace that gentleman; I am asking him to create a climate in which it is possible for a volunteer to come forward to work for the good of the bees of this nation, and for its people.

9 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Like the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) I am trying to save a firm in my constituency. I also intend to discuss insurance matters; that is the second of three matters that I intend to raise, all of which have a common theme.

It might be an exaggeration to say this—there are countervailing forces to be taken into account—but it often seems that people are trying to close down my constituency by various different devices, and we have to fight to ensure that firms remain viable and continue to exist. The first item in my speech is an issue that arose two years ago. It is well known to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase), as I spoke about it at length in Committee and on the Floor of the House during proceedings on the Enterprise Bill, but it is also relevant to the points I shall make in this debate.

Two years ago, Biwater, a pipe manufacturer in my constituency, was taken over by a multinational company, Saint-Gobain. Biwater was profitable and had good export markets, and Saint-Gobain—to get rid of a competitor—quickly closed the firm, with the loss of 700 jobs. The area has suffered the loss of other manufacturing jobs. There has been a serious impact on Clay Cross in my constituency, where the Biwater works were centred. A once-thriving Saturday market is now much duller, and the pubs and shops are not as full as they once were, and several have closed.

The area is now in need of regeneration. There is plenty of effort and lots of plans, and the local councils and regeneration organisations work hard. A town centre development is in the offing, and a lot of work is being done by the East Midlands development agency and the Government office for the east midlands, but so far only bits and pieces have been put in place. There is an interesting development at Coney Green for small businesses, and some imaginative work has been done, but relatively few people have found employment in the small areas of growth. There is a large-scale plan for development at Markham, a former mining area, which will certainly bring employment and have a good knock-on impact in areas such as Clay Cross, but generally the area needs much more hands-on intervention by the Government, particularly the Department of Trade and Industry.

If there is a place that can be described as Labour's heartland, it is Clay Cross. Way back in 1931, when the Labour party was decimated in the general election, the Clay Cross constituency was held by Labour with a handsome majority. The area has always been a force in the Labour movement and it has produced many people who have been active in their communities and extended and developed their interests. It would be a pity if we did not repay their dedication over so many years. We must become more directly involved in ensuring better provision for the area.

The usual taskforce was sent in at the time of the closure, and various works were done. Some people have picked up jobs here and there, and some have started taxi firms and other operations in the area. However, the non-interventionist approach that is often adopted by the DTI led to the collapse of Biwater in the first place: the Department failed to ensure that the firm was defended, or that the matter was referred to the Competition Commission to try to stop the closure. Government must be more to the fore in the redevelopment programmes in the area.

Now, however, there are two fresh if smaller problems concerning employment in the northern end of the constituency in Eckington. One concerns Moorside Mining—the last underground coal mine in Derbyshire. It

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

is a small mine; only 27 people work underground. It should have an assured future, as it has good order books and has over a period obtained two out of three tranches of state aid, which have helped to turn it round considerably. However, the mine faces immediate closure. Its problem is with obtaining a renewal of insurance for employer's liability, which it is statutorily obliged to hold.

I raised this matter in a debate last Monday under Standing Order No. 24. Shortly afterwards, a deal was done, drawing from the insurance of another company. It looked as if work would be able to continue, and for two shifts the pit went back into production. However, the firm with which the deal was made began to be worried about its renewal, and the deal collapsed. So, from 11 am on Friday, the pit has again been out of production. If it does not receive some cover, production will end entirely and in the end the pit will flood.

The problem with insurance companies is that they have been hiking the level of payments considerably. For instance, the insurance deal under which the firm had been operating temporarily is costing seven times more than just over a year ago. The mine cannot now get insurance through brokers contacting Lloyd's or through other areas at any price; no offer is being made.

The Minister for Energy and Construction is very much involved in these matters. There are arguments that there is a need for universal cover—perhaps for small mines, but perhaps for the whole of the coal industry—but if that cannot be achieved very quickly, a bond or a waiver operated through the Department of Trade and Industry will become increasingly important. We face a crisis, and that is why the matter needs to be dealt with and pressure applied before the summer recess.

The Treasury needs alerting to the matter—something that I have attempted to do. The problems concerning employer liability insurance do not just affect small mines. They may affect the whole mining industry, including quarrying, rail supplies and small-scale manufacturers. The question of the operation of an insurers' ramp needs to be investigated carefully, and appropriate action needs to be taken to overcome it, which may involve the Government playing a role or threatening to involve themselves in order to try to bring insurers into line.

The third point that I want to raise also relates to Eckington, where the Moorside mine is situated. We face the prospect that the Eckington jobcentre will close.

Four years ago, we were involved in a campaign to save it. At the time, there were rationalisation proposals to get rid of five jobcentres, two of which, unfortunately, were in neighbouring parts of north-east Derbyshire. We mobilised a campaign against the threatened closure of the Eckington and Dronfield job centres, including visits to the appropriate Minister.

We won one—we held on to Eckington; but we lost Dronfield. However, we are back to the same situation as regards Eckington, although the context is different. The current reorganisation is related to the proposals for the Jobcentre Plus programme for Derbyshire, which will involve the closure of the New Mills, Bakewell and Eckington jobcentres.

The Derbyshire unemployed workers centre is greatly involved in the campaign to save the job centre and has christened the proposals "Jobcentre Minus". Jobcentre Plus will amalgamate benefits—apart from pensions—and employment services; that synthesis will ensure that they work together.

In effect, the proposals put flesh on the 1997 new Labour slogan "Off benefits, into work". I always thought that was the wrong way around and it should have been "Into work, off benefits", to show that heavy pressure would not be put on people who were in receipt of benefits. They also fit in with the idea that people should be given a hand up rather than a hand-out.

Unfortunately, it will be difficult and costly for people to use jobcentres in Staveley and Chesterfield instead of Eckington owing to the poor quality of the local bus services. A campaign was launched in Eckington on Friday.

The centre also serves Killamarsh, the very place where Moorside is hoping to produce coal. Given the amount that the Government were able to take from miners pensions funds, it is appropriate that great attention should be paid to the current insurance problems in the mining industry. In the light of the unfortunate experiences at Selby, small mines, such as Moorside, should have assured markets in future. Like Biwaters at Clay Cross, it is a viable firm and should not be closed.

9.13 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I do not want to delay the House for too long. Before we rise on Wednesday for the summer recess, I want to raise two very pressing issues of great importance to my constituents.

The first concerns the perennial problem faced by many Members—the erection of telecommunications masts in residential areas of our constituencies. During the past 14 months, there have been 29 applications in West Chelmsford, most of them in highly residential areas. Tomorrow, there will be an inquiry about an application in the village of Little Waltham, and on Wednesday an inquiry will be held about the decision relating to Linnet drive in a residential area of Chelmsford.

Many of us feared that the planning regime would be too antiquated to cope with the problems following the second wave of telecommunications and the resultant masts that would have to be erected all over the country, especially because—as hon. Members will be aware—masts of less than 15 m do not have to comply with the traditional planning rules that apply to many types of building. My own borough council has robustly reflected the wishes of local residents and has refused applications time and time again, although many of those refusals have been brushed aside on appeal. It is crucial that the Government do more to reform and update the planning regime to empower people so that they have more influence in their local community and more say on what they have, and do not have, to put up with.

The Government, and certainly the Under-Secretary of State for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), would say that they have undertaken reform, as they have revised PPG8. In a recent letter to me, the Under-Secretary said:

> "The general policy is to facilitate the growth of telecommunications systems while protecting the environment."

Most of my constituents would certainly agree that the Government's policy facilitates the growth of telecommunications systems but does little to protect the environment outside the national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty. It does not do a great deal to protect the environment of people who live in residential areas in towns and villages.

The Under-Secretary said that on 22 August last year the Government significantly strengthened the planning arrangements for telecommunications development, and listed what had been done. The Government, he said, had

> "strengthened public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below and for masts on buildings and structures so that they are exactly the same as applications for planning permission".

Frankly, many of my constituents would turn around and say "big deal", because nothing has changed. The local authority may refuse permission to erect a mast, but more often than not, permission is granted on appeal, so there do not seem many extra powers for local residents to express their views. The Under-Secretary said that the Government had

> "increased the time for authorities to deal with prior approval applications from 28 and 42 days to a uniform 56 days".

Big deal if, in the end, the company gets permission to erect a mast.

Another grave concern for my constituents is the question of whether or not there is a significant impact on individuals' health. The Government's Stewart report cleared the masts of having any impact on health, but other reports do not take such a rosy or cosy view of their health implications. I am not scientifically qualified to determine whether the conclusions of the Stewart report are correct or whether those of other reports are more accurate. However, the perception is that there is a knock-on effect on people's health. The jury is out until there is conclusive scientific evidence that there is not a problem. I urge the Government to err on the side of caution before allowing masts to go up.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I have a great deal of sympathy with what my hon. Friend is saying. Does he agree that the Stewart report advocated the so-called precautionary principle—in other words, playing safe—and that PPG8 does not allow local authorities to embrace it?

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is quite right—the precautionary principle has been brushed aside and PPG8 does not fully take account of conclusions in the Stewart report.

Tomorrow and on Wednesday, many of my constituents will be at the Chelmsford Civic Centre giving their views to the inspector on two inquiries. Sadly, once those inquiries are completed, there are more than a dozen applications pending. They have been submitted to Chelmsford borough council in the last few months, and all are in residential areas. It is a matter of urgency that the Government act to empower people, as we sought to do in our manifesto at the last general election, so that there is a bottom-up, rather than a top-down, approach to a significant problem for many of our constituents.

The second issue, which is also pressing, concerns housebuilding in the Chelmsford local authority area. On Wednesday night, Chelmsford borough council, which is a hung council but is controlled by the Liberal Democrats, will take its final decision on its draft structure plan. As I have mentioned before in the House, we have a problem in my constituency and in my local authority area, because we have been told that by 2010 we must build more than 11,000 extra houses, of which a significant number are to be built in my constituency.

It may surprise the Government and the Deputy Prime Minister, but my constituents do not want to see the greenfield sites of West Chelmsford concreted over and becoming one massive sprawl. As I have said on one other occasion in the House, the Liberal Democrat-controlled council will force one of my villages, Boreham, to be totally destroyed, because the council intends to impose 2,000 houses on that village, which currently has only 1,800 houses.

Hon. Members on the Labour Benches, and certainly my hon. Friends, will know better than most people the way in which Liberal Democrats behave. We know from the general election, as we do from other elections, that the Liberal Democrats can walk down a street, meet 30 individuals in 30 different houses and tell them different viewpoints if they think that it will win them a vote. That is their hallmark. We can laugh about it, because we are used to the Liberal Democrats' two-faced approach to politics. It is not such a funny matter to the people of Boreham.

Two years ago this month, a by-election was held in Boreham. It was caused by the retirement of one of the Liberal Democrat councillors who ironically had been the chairman of planning some years before, but who had become so disenchanted with the Liberal Democrats in Chelmsford that he resigned his seat, forcing the by-election. The Liberal Democrats presented their candidate, their leader was wheeled out, photographs were taken for their focus groups, and promises were made to the people of Boreham that the houses would not be dumped on Boreham—it was too important a local community, and a vibrant village that would be destroyed if the houses were dumped on it.

Funnily enough, the Liberal Democrats lost the by-election on a 31 per cent. swing to the Conservatives. A mere five months later, the Liberal Democrat council announced that 2,000 houses were to be built in the village of Boreham. They had promised that they would not do that to the village, but being Liberals, they can do anything. That is what we are faced with: a village destroyed by the swamping of the area with extra housing that the village does not want.

On Wednesday night, the council, with all the Liberal councillors turning up and the promises long forgotten, will vote through the structure plan which they hope will force the houses on to the village. I look forward to the public inquiry next year, when we will seek to get common sense to prevail and the decision overturned.

Given the Deputy Prime Minister's statement last Thursday; given that Chelmsford borders the Stansted corridor which has been identified as a significant area for development; and given that in the south of the county we have the Thames gateway, where the Deputy Prime Minister also identified significant development and housing, what will be the impact on mid-Essex? Two thousand of the houses that it seems we must have in Chelmsford have nothing to do with the anticipated housing needs of Chelmsford. The development is intended to relieve pressures in the south of the county, but if the Thames gateway is to be developed, with substantial housing to sustain that development, could not

[Mr. Burns]

the 2,000 houses be given back to the Thames gateway instead of being put in an area where they are not needed to fulfil the housing needs arising in the next decade or so?

Finally, in the light of the Deputy Prime Minister's statement, will there be any impact on the timetable for a public inquiry on the structure plan next year? If things are to change because of new developments, especially in the Stansted corridor, what relevance might that have in the Chelmsford and Mid-Essex area and in terms of holding a public inquiry next year, when the proposed approach might be completely thrown out or altered because of changes that the Deputy Prime Minister has announced in the past week?

9.26 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I am pleased to report that Stafford is in good shape. The town is currently ablaze with riotous colour, as flowers abound in baskets and beds because it is going all out to win this year's Britain in Bloom award. It has also just completed another very successful annual festival, whose highlights included open-air Shakespeare at the castle, where Matthew Kelly and Julie-Kate Olivier in "The Taming of the Shrew" played every night to crowded, sell-out audiences. My favourite was the folk dancing in the market square by dancers in traditional folk costume from our Spanish twin town of Tarragona on a beautiful Saturday afternoon, with the sun shining out of a perfect blue sky, which must have made them feel very much at home and delighted the audience of Stafford people. At the same time, Staffordshire organised another successful young musician of the year contest, which delighted the audience, including me, who saw some glimpses of the talented artistes of the future. They performed with such skill and poise that I went home that night with great confidence and optimism for the future of a society in which we are bringing up such talented young people.

I should like to mention some concerns about two issues affecting my constituency: education and transport. On education, like several other hon. Members who have spoken, I am angry about a system of allocating central Government money to education that leaves Staffordshire at the bottom of the pile year after year. For several years, I have joined delegations seeking to persuade Ministers to change the system, and I have often been accompanied by my constituent Eunice Finney, a tireless campaigner on the subject, who likes to show the Ministers two school photographs. One of them is of her children, Richard and Amy, and the other is of a friend's children who attend schools in Hertfordshire. She asks Ministers to explain the difference between those smiling pictures of happy and healthy children. To all intents and purposes, they look the same, but she points out the difference in the value that the system places on the children in the schools that they attend. Richard, who attends a primary school in Stafford, is valued at £300 less a year than the child attending the primary school in Hertfordshire. Amy, who attends the secondary school in Stafford, is valued at £360 less a year than the child attending the secondary school in Hertfordshire. In a secondary school of, say, 600 pupils, that adds up to more than £200,000 a year by which a Staffordshire high school is losing out.

That issue is so significant that, when Ofsted recently inspected Staffordshire local education authority, it made a point of mentioning the underfunding of schools in Staffordshire. While many local education authorities have received a pasting from Ofsted about the abysmal state of their education service, Staffordshire received a glowing report, with the exception, I admit, of its special educational needs provision, which needs some attention. The Ofsted inspectors drew attention to the above average academic achievements that are made in Staffordshire while it is underfunded because of the way in which the Government distribute money for education. I know that the Leader of the House has allocated a full day in October for a debate about the Government's proposals to change that system of funding from next April, so I will wait until then to join in that debate.

I want to mention a scheme, which I followed from start from finish, that attempts to tackle bullying in schools in Stafford. It involved four schools and was sponsored by Barclays new futures, and focused on teaching children the skills of co-counselling. That enabled pupils themselves to confront bullying and to bring it out into the open, thereby overcoming it. It has been so successful that the talented teacher who led it, Netta Cartwright, is to promote the practice of co-counselling throughout the schools of Stafford, and hopefully beyond.

When we go off on our recess in two days' time, the busiest time of year begins for the parliamentary education unit as it starts to welcome more senior students from schools around the country for its summer educational programme, which involves Members of Parliament, peers and staff contributing their time to the education of those young students. The staff cope with some 8,000 students every September, while we are away, and they do a tremendous job. If we return to sit in future Septembers, we must give careful thought to how that successful education programme can continue at the same time. During the times at which we are sitting, the parliamentary education unit engages in teacher seminars, pupil parliaments, Wednesday visits for 12 to 14-year-olds and citizenship visits. On that last point, the Government have ordained that from this September all our secondary schools will teach citizenship as a curriculum subject—a move that I applaud. I hope that when hon. Members return from their summer holidays, I will be in a position to deliver to each of them a pack to help them to cope with the inquiries that they will receive from teachers in their constituencies asking for their help in teaching that new subject. I hope that that will be of assistance.

Turning to transport, the big story in Stafford at the moment is the way in which passengers are being treated by the national bus company, Arriva, which has a monopoly of services in the town. For the second time in two years, at short notice, it has made major changes to services, almost completely depriving elderly residents in Gravel lane of a service; depriving the elderly residents of Trent close of all services; upsetting all the Highfields residents who have to walk further to catch a bus and can no longer use it to go to their doctors' surgery; and upsetting all the Coton fields residents by rebadging their bus and sending it down streets about which nobody knows, so they cannot catch it. I recently received a petition carrying 139 signatures about the disappearance of the bus stop at the back of Marks and Spencer. I wish that the company would pay more attention to its passengers so that I did not have to receive that kind of attention from my constituents. Following those complaints, I tabled early-day motion 1405, which has so far attracted the support of 72 hon. Members, to draw attention to the great amounts of public money that bus companies receive through fuel duty rebates, concessionary fares and direct subsidies, and asking whether that money does not at least entitle us to a quality, comprehensive and accountable bus service from those companies.

The subject of transport brings me to the west coast main line, which is a very important transport link for Stafford and beyond. Today's news that £100 million has been paid to Virgin Trains out of public money is a stark exposure of what was wrong with Railtrack, the company that was supposed to be running our railway network. It promised in a binding agreement to upgrade the west coast main line for Virgin Trains so that it could take trains running at 140 mph. On the basis of that agreement, the company spent more than £1 billion on the new Pendolino trains. Now we learn that Railtrack was unable to complete the upgrade, and I cannot foresee when trains will be able to run at 140 mph on that line.

On the subject of railway companies that do not keep their promises, Stafford railway station was promised an upgrade for years. The two councils—borough and county—carried out their side of the bargain by improving the environment outside the station and moving bus stops next to it to provide integrated transport, but Railtrack has not completed the passenger lifts that it promised and Virgin Trains has not completed the foyer refurbishment or building of the car park that it promised. I have now arranged for representatives of the Strategic Rail Authority to come to Stafford and face local passengers, and to explain how the rail companies can expect to increase passenger numbers on trains when they cannot deliver the services that they promise to the public.

Looking to the future, I want to say a few sentences about renewable energy sources, and about Stafford's contribution to them. With a history in the power industry going back more than 100 years, Stafford is well placed to play its part in promoting renewable energy. Some hope came to manufacturing industry and farms in Stafford at the county show this year, when I was privileged to launch a new scheme for energy crops that would involve 20 farmers growing miscanthus, or elephant grass, for burning and conversion into electricity to sell to the national grid. That is very much a way forward for manufacturing and farming in many areas such as Stafford, and I hope that many hon. Members will consider it for their areas, too.

9.36 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I suppose I could say that it is a blooming pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney). I wish him and Stafford great success in the Britain in Bloom competition. I agree with his remarks about the House of Commons education unit, which does absolutely first-class work, and I hope that all hon. Members will try to give at least one day to the unit to help it with the education programme for children who come into this place from all over the country, and who, I believe, thoroughly enjoy what is often their first glimpse of our parliamentary system.

Before we go into recess, I would like to raise a few issues about my constituency of Chesham and Amersham, which is a pleasant and, indeed, highly desirable place to live. Non-residents sometimes perceive it as an area without problems, but we all know that things are not often as they first appear. Indeed, I wonder whether it is because the Government seem so obsessed with appearances rather than fundamental facts that they appear determined to starve my constituency and others in Buckinghamshire of resources, and to ignore the wishes of local people. Their policies, which result in financial deprivation, are now beginning to ride roughshod over the area, and are affecting the quality of life of my constituents in many ways.

I am not sure what we in Chesham and Amersham have done to the Deputy Prime Minister, but he seems to have it in for us. I hope to illustrate that tonight. At county level, the planning reforms trumpeted by the right hon. Gentleman have been greeted with dismay and disbelief. The proposals have been widely criticised by respondents to the Government's own consultation, with 90 per cent. opposing the abolition of county structure plans, and 88 per cent. rejecting a proposal to replace structure and local plans with a new local development framework.

Local decision making in Bucks is going to be significantly reduced, and there is now a great deal of uncertainty over future development in the county. The despair felt by my councillors can hardly be expressed, and our cabinet member for planning and transportation, Councillor Rodney Royston, is urging the Government to rethink their plans, and not to rush through ill-conceived proposals that have no widespread support. This is just the latest blow to our hard-pressed county council, which is facing growing burdens on its social services budget—not to mention problems in education—and which has been demoralised, not least by the restructuring forced on it by the Government's reforms.

The cabinet system of portfolio holders means that the roles of ordinary back-bench councillors are vastly diminished—so much so that their roles are marginalised while an unbelievably heavy burden falls on the portfolio holders. I actually think that the Government's ultimate aim is to get rid of county councils, but they appear quite willing to kill off some of the councillors in the process. Unless something is done about this structure, we shall face meltdown not only in my county council but in others as well.

The situation is much the same for district councils. Chiltern district council is one of the six local authorities that receive no revenue support grant from central Government. All that it receives is a refund of some of the national non-domestic rate. The leader of the council, Don Phillips, has pointed out that the revenue support grant and national non-domestic rate grant will be replaced by a formula-based grant. Chiltern starts with a disadvantage, because it does not receive revenue support grant. It seeks a compensatory payment to put it on the same footing as the vast majority of district councils. Councillor Phillips has described the new arrangements as "unjust and inequitable", and they will certainly impinge on council tax payers in Chesham and Amersham.

The local government settlement for 2002–03 continued the discrimination against shire district councils. Buckinghamshire county council's revenue support grant fails to acknowledge the level of spending required to support social services and, in particular, care for the elderly. It was hoped that reparations might be made in the proposals for future local government

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

funding, but that has not happened. Proposals were made recently by—yes, again, the Deputy Prime Minister. It looks as if, rather than a recognition of the needs of shire counties such as Buckinghamshire, there will be an outflow of funds to other less prudently run authorities, whether in London or elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Can that possibly be right? Council tax payers in my constituency should not be expected to shore up inefficient authorities, whether near or far.

There is a lack of funding in Buckinghamshire which needs to be redressed. It can be illustrated by an incident at Chalfont St Peter at a time when residents were looking forward to celebrating the Queen's Golden Jubilee. A contingent of travellers pitched camp in the village on Monday 3 June, and mayhem ensued. The police estimated that at any one time there were 30 to 40 vehicles with trailers and other equipment. The behaviour of the travellers—I regret to say that it was often children under 16 who behaved in an antisocial fashion, with no supervision by their elders—led to the logging of more than 60 complaints with the local police. Complaints about criminal damage, harassment and acts of vandalism were coupled with a disturbing list of allegations of physical assaults—including one sexual assault—and revolting behaviour such as public defecation, urination and indecent exposure.

No community should be expected to put up with behaviour of that kind, but the mechanism enabling the travellers to be moved on could not be put into action because public offices were closed for the bank holidays. The police, too, were hampered by a lack of resources over the holiday period. It was Wednesday 12 June before the county council could enact its eviction order.

I welcome what the Home Secretary has said about refusing to allow behaviour by travellers that would not be tolerated in other sections of the community. That is fair. Indeed, the local police sector commander has acknowledged publicly that there must be a good level of support from the police when such incidents occur. Incursion by travellers will be dealt with robustly. Funding for the police, however, is tied in with funding for local government, and, as we know, Buckinghamshire has been systematically starved of central Government support.

While I welcome the Home Secretary's approach, I want it to be backed up with hard cash for police forces such as the Thames Valley force so that when such incidents take place their hands are not tied by a lack of resources. Perhaps the Home Secretary should consider the impounding of vehicles if travellers do not leave any site promptly. Perhaps he will consult—yes, the Deputy Prime Minister. He has published the details of a new approach to tackling illegal encampments, and new guidance is promised for the autumn, but we shall have to wait until then, and yet again there is no extra money for the tackling of those illegal encampments.

It should not be forgotten that it cost £9,000 to clear up after the incursion. The impact on businesses is hard to calculate, but the events of that week will form part of residents' memories of what should have been a peaceful celebration.

Perhaps we would have a better chance of dealing with such incursions, and with other criminal and antisocial activities, if we had the requisite number of policemen in the Thames Valley area. At present we face growing problems, with little real recognition or action from the Government. Admittedly the incidence of burglary and robbery has fallen in the Chiltern area, but the number of car crimes has increased in the past year, as has the number of sexual offences. So many officers are now leaving the force that my local newspaper, *The Bucks Examiner*, reported this week that our chief constable is calling for the introduction of a £10,000 transfer fee. Other forces would have to compensate Thames Valley when officers transferred. Even if that bright idea were accepted by the Home Secretary, it would be too late for one of the great backbones of law and order in my constituency: the special constable.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Is my hon. Friend aware that, in the Thames valley, we have lost so many police constables and there is such a recruitment crisis that the chief constable estimates that within 12 months one out of every two police officers will be a probationer?

Mrs. Gillan: I am familiar with that and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention.

We are facing a sad situation in the Thames valley. In 1997, when the Government took office, we had 694 specials in the Thames Valley constabulary. A written answer on Friday to a question that I tabled said that, today, the number stands at a miserly 377. The Government should be ashamed that they have presided over such a decline in a key element of our policing. How on earth will the Government prevent the haemorrhaging of special constables in the Thames valley and in other areas?

I pay tribute to the police in Chesham and Amersham, who are doing a fantastic job in trying circumstances. We all think a great deal of them. As the editorial in the *Bucks Free Press* said this week:

> "we need to make sure police are responding to low level crime and disorder . . . we have every confidence our police can do it provided they are given the manpower."

We need a police force that is manned to its full strength to ensure that my constituents are allowed to live in peace.

My constituents strongly value the peaceful enjoyment of their homes. I was particularly pleased when I was recently asked to open purpose-built housing for workers at Amersham hospital. I hope that the people who have moved in will enjoy living in Amersham. Indeed, I welcome them particularly as neighbours; they live just down the road from me.

The Government are concerned with housing and housing for key workers, but while they have been focusing on that they have slipped out something else. My constituents are very concerned about one of the ideas being floated by Downing street: a stamp duty on property that would increase the longer the family had lived in the home. The idea, a chief economist at the Department of Health told *The Daily Telegraph* on 9 July, is

> "to encourage people to move around".

As one of my constituents in Amersham put it, she had always understood that even in the Soviet Union one had to commit a crime before the state drove an individual into exile. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is laughing but I think that he understands that that is a daft Downing street dodge that would undermine the strong communities in my constituency. Rather like the mean-spirited child in the playground who sees another child with a toy he envies, the instinct is not to steal the possession but to smash it up. It is the strong communities in Chesham, Amersham, the Chalfont villages, Hazlemere, Penn and Jordans whose quality of life this Government are breaking down.

I hope that I have voiced some of the issues we face in Chesham and Amersham this summer, although there are many more: care home shortages, pension shortfalls, burdens on schools and teachers, teacher shortages, bed blocking, transport chaos and disastrous rural policies to name but a few. They all add up to an attack on my constituents quite unprecedented in previous years.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): It is such a deprived area.

Mrs. Gillan: You may mock but we do have deprived areas in Chesham and Amersham. I invite you to visit Pond Park.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to visit the hon. Lady's constituency but I am keen to get back to Springburn on Wednesday.

Mrs. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, you are always welcome to go back to Springburn via Chesham and Amersham.

All these measures add up to an unprecedented attack on my constituents. They are paying much more in stealth taxes and now they are getting much less. Let us face it: they contribute so much to our society that surely they deserve some respite from the relentless march of this over-regulating, over-taxing and under-performing Government.

I am sure, because he is very good at it, that the Minister will give the usual smooth answers in a speech honed by spin doctors, but as I said, we in Buckinghamshire are not taken in by appearances, and only real solutions will do. I hope that he will provide some tonight.

9.50 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan). I would like to see the real facts and figures on investment in police, the health service and social services in her constituency. I fully appreciate that there are pressures, as there are in many areas, but there is no question but that there has been huge additional investment in social services, for example, with a real terms increase to date of 3.3 per cent. a year under this Government, compared with 0.1 per cent. under the Tories—and it will be up to 6 per cent. over the next three years.

Mrs. Gillan: I am sorry that the hon. Lady has chosen to start her speech by attacking me. The figures for the reduction in special constables are from a parliamentary answer that the Home Office gave on Friday, and they are a disgrace.

Ms Drown: I do not question those figures, but I would be interested in the figures for investment in criminal justice as a whole in the hon. Lady's constituency, as well as the wider investment in health, social services and education. The Government's record across the board shows that they are investing significantly more than the Tories did. That cannot be questioned, just as I do not question the pressures that exist in her constituency and others throughout the country.

I want to refer to bids for Home Office action in the Gracious Speech, following serious concerns that have been brought to me by constituents. In proceedings on the Police Reform Bill I raised the question of being able to impose antisocial behaviour orders in county courts as well as magistrates courts for behaviour associated with prostitution. I was pleased that there was cross-party support for that. I appreciate the fact that the Government did not want to respond, because antisocial behaviour orders are very new and more guidance is to be issued, but I hope that they will keep the matter under consideration and, if it is seen to be necessary, introduce the changes soon. Antisocial behaviour associated with prostitution blights the quality of life of many of my constituents, especially in central Swindon, and they see this as a possible solution.

Last week, I introduced a ten-minute Bill on rape reform that was well supported in the House. It is essential to get the current laws on consent, which mean that many rapists still walk free from our courts every year, off the statute book.

Home Office action is also needed on fireworks, a subject about which I get an increasing number of letters. People are worried about the increasing number of fireworks being discharged and the dangers that they pose to people and animals. The initial response to a survey that I am conducting makes it clear that the majority of people want public firework displays to be controlled only by qualified people. They want fireworks to be allowed only at certain times of the day and sold only at certain times of the year. Current legislation does not give the authorities enough powers to deal with fireworks.

There is another matter that is increasingly raised in the House and that crops up repeatedly in my postbag and at constituency advice surgeries. The increasing number of incidents involving airguns and replica guns is an issue that has been raised in this House before, but it deserves to be raised again because such guns are causing an increasing number of injuries to animals and people. In South Swindon in the past 12 months, there have been 80 incidents involving the use of ball-bearing guns and replica guns, 36 of which involved shootings at people or at animals. Shots have also been fired at vehicles, houses and shops, there have been threats to kill, and three robberies were committed using such guns. In one case, a nine-year-old boy was shot at by teenagers. It is clear that a real problem exists, and something must be done to address it.

The Government banned handguns in 1997, but it is clear that far too many are still in circulation. Indeed, the number of incidents involving handguns has increased, which shows that more action must be taken to get them out of circulation. However, in doing so, we must ensure that the problems to which they give rise are not repeated—and that the good work is not undermined—through the proliferation of airguns, ball-bearing guns and replica guns.

[Ms Drown]

People in South Swindon have made it clear to me that they want this problem to be addressed. I have heard from bus drivers who have been threatened with such guns, and I have received many letters from concerned people. They are concerned either because they have already experienced suffering as a result of such guns, or because they are scared of doing so. Police officers have visited my local surgeries and called for a ban on these weapons, not only because they have front-line experience in dealing with such attacks and the associated problems, but because they are genuinely concerned that, one day, someone will get hurt by the police themselves. The police might have to decide to take action because they cannot distinguish between a replica gun or a ball-bearing gun, and the real thing.

It is police officers in particular who have told me about the escalation in gun-related incidents, albeit involving ball-bearing or replica guns. That escalation is placing a huge demand on our specialist firearm officers. Toys and hobbies involving ball-bearing and replica guns put the police in an impossible position. Too often, they are unable to tell whether they are confronted with an airgun, a replica gun or the real thing. At some point, to protect others, an armed response unit will have to consider shooting someone who is carrying a gun, and the result could be a tragedy. For example, an armed response unit was called out in Swindon after two boys threatened passers-by with an air pistol. The unit had to make a difficult judgment as to whether it was a ball-bearing gun, or the real thing. I do not want a child or adult to be shot, only to find out later that they were merely playing, but that is getting very close to happening.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Is my hon. Friend aware that there have already been several cases of people being shot? In a recent incident, a man carrying a table leg in a plastic bag was killed because it appeared to the officers concerned that he was carrying a deadly weapon.

Ms Drown: I am very aware of those incidents, which show the huge dangers that we need to address. Such guns should not be regarded as toys or as some form of hobby; they are very dangerous, and they put the public at risk.

There are several different measures that the Government could adopt. Countries such as France and Belgium have banned uncertified look-alikes and toys, and have demanded that airguns be suitably differentiated from the real thing. That would certainly reduce the chance of a fatal accident involving the police, and it would minimise the use of such guns in robberies. However, it would not address the other problem: the injuries that such weapons can—and do—inflict on our constituents by being legally and freely available. The Government should listen to the Association of Chief Police Officers, which says:

> "The police view the availability of replica and imitation firearms as a real risk to public safety . . . The police believe these weapons should be subject to strict controls or banned."

I concur with that view, and I hope that the Minister will pass on to his colleagues the views of my constituents and the many others throughout the country who want an end to the availability of these dangerous weapons.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That at this day's sitting the Motion for the Adjournment in the name of Prime Minister may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

Question again prosposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

10 pm

Mrs. Iris Robinson (Strangford): Compared with other hon. Members, I shall keep my remarks brief, but they are relevant as the House is about to enter its long summer recess. It will come as no surprise that I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on the future of the Belfast agreement, if only to point out that the Government are deluding themselves with the pretence that it can survive in its present form. It is already fatally holed below the water line and will sink.

The Government need, therefore, to spend time over the summer considering the process of negotiating an alternative agreement that can command widespread support throughout the community from Unionists as well as nationalists. For as long as I can remember, the essential component for any constitutional proposal to win Government support was its ability to achieve cross-community support. Repeatedly, proposals proffered by Unionists were rejected by both Conservative and Labour Governments, because they did not enjoy nationalist support. In more recent times, the unspoken benchmark was that any proposal had to be capable of gaining Sinn Fein-IRA support.

Nobody would quibble with the need to have sufficient support for new institutions. No structure will have the necessary stability to last without the support of both sections of our people, but if this condition was an imperative when it was used to ensure that proposals had nationalist endorsement, it must be equally appropriate that any proposal has Unionist support.

The Belfast agreement does not have such Unionist support. Only a minority within Unionism, represented by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and half of his party, supports that republican agenda. The majority of Unionist votes cast in every election since the agreement was signed have been cast for candidates opposed to it. That is true of the last election for the Northern Ireland Assembly, the European election and both the local government election last June and the general election. Indeed, eight out of the 11 Northern Ireland Unionists returned here were elected on an anti-agreement ticket.

While the Government would never dream, or dare, to run a proposal that did not have the support of a majority of nationalists, they are quite prepared to thumb their nose at the democratically expressed voice of Unionism. The policy is shortsighted because the Government cannot dodge the electorate for ever. If the policy of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is built upon the hope that the process will be bedded down by the passage of time, he has not been reading the collective mind of Unionism very well. There is more opposition to the agreement today than when it was first signed.

The Secretary of State and the leader of the Ulster Unionist party might choose to believe that the opposition is to the manner of the agreement's implementation, but those who operate at the grass roots know better. For my part, I am opposed to the agreement. I am opposed to what it has done in placing unreformed terrorist representatives at the heart of government; in setting up unaccountable all-Ireland institutions; and in releasing murderers on to our streets to re-engage in "what they do best". I am also totally opposed to how the Royal Ulster Constabulary GC has been destroyed under the remit the agreement set.

My opposition does not stem from the way in which the agreement has been implemented. It is being implemented in precisely the manner that I expected. Those Unionist leaders who now bemoan the way in which the agreement is operating only expose their own lack of political judgment and foresight. For trusting the IRA and being prepared to buy a reduction of terrorism at the cost of their heritage, future generations will curse them. Indeed, they will not have to wait for future generations. The truth is that the IRA always saw the agreement as a transitional process, whose purpose is to divest Northern Ireland of every shred of Britishness and Unionism, and convey it in a steady and relentless process towards a united Ireland.

During this period of transition, Unionists will have to stomach the elevation of murderers and their still active terrorist organisation. Every concession demanded by the IRA is granted and every wrongdoing is ignored. The House has forced on Northern Ireland standards and procedures that it would not have accepted in any constituency outside Northern Ireland. The evidence of the IRA's continuing terrorist involvement is too legion to list. Its enormity makes it all the more preposterous that the Government refuse to acknowledge that the IRA has broken its ceasefire. They immorally attempt to defend closing their eyes to IRA activity while still rewarding it with more concessions.

Later this week, the Prime Minister is scheduled to tell the House what he intends to do about the many and continued breaches of the IRA ceasefire. Sinn Fein-IRA still enjoys the fruits of the Belfast agreement without feeling obliged to conform to the rules of peace and democracy. My judgment tells me that the Prime Minister will refuse to take any action that punishes Sinn Fein-IRA for these terrorist activities and will merely, as the BBC put it at the weekend, show it the yellow card again.

The Government have lost their credibility and have no policy that is capable of delivering good government and providing stable political structures in Northern Ireland. The Government cannot deliver that goal without Unionism, and they cannot bring Unionism along with the present policy. Change is needed, and should not be resisted by any politician who believes in democracy. The Government might find democracy awkward and it might obstruct their carefully laid plans, but the duty of us all is to find a way through.

Without wishing to sound confrontational, the truth is that, like it or not, the time is not long off when the Government and the House will be faced with the reality that a renegotiation is unavoidable. The balance of the process will have to be redressed, to be capable of providing the one ingredient that is demonstrably absent and palpably needed, which is Unionist consent.

10.8 pm

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): The hon. Member for Strangford (Mrs. Robinson) makes her case. I think that most people would rather have peace through the political process, or even a flawed agreement, rather than killing and no peace. Events in the middle east show what a terrible alternative there might be to the political process. We do not want to return to the bad old days in Northern Ireland.

Before the House rises for the summer recess, I want the House to consider the role of BP in Colombia. I shall quote from an article that appeared in *Labour Left Briefing* in March about "the latest capitalist misbehaviour". The article reads:

> "BP's oil pipeline companies are refusing to pay compensation to 300 peasants in Colombia whose livelihoods have been ruined. The families were forced to abandon their land after two pipelines passing through their farms caused extensive environmental damage. The families now live in acute poverty in shanty towns in the city of Medellin."

The Government have been involved in this issue; they met the legal representatives of the local farmers on 23 April this year. The Government's line has been that BP's role is a matter for the Colombian courts, but the Government have not been critical of BP, even though it has acted in clear breach of the Government's voluntary principles, which were launched in December 2000, after dialogue between the businesses that operate in Colombia and local non-governmental organisations.

Although that was a voluntary agreement, it stressed that oil and mining companies should assess the risks to human rights of their activities, including the use of private security firms. The Government said that their voluntary principles could produce real benefits on all sides, but they did not produce benefits to those farmers and their families in Colombia, and BP ignored them anyway, yet the Government are still not critical.

What about the court case that the Government put their trust in? Well, it is unbalanced—peasant farmers against one of the richest multinational companies in the world. The lives of those 300 farmers and their families have been devastated. Violence was used to get them out. Colombia is a violent country, as we know, and the fear must have exceeded the injustice that those people must have felt—it must have been enormous.

Let me add that the article in *Labour Left Briefing* also states:

> "BP is the largest foreign investor Colombia, a country with the world's highest trade union murder rate. Ninety members of Colombia's oil workers' union (USO) have been murdered since 1988, six in the first three months of 2002. BP's drilling sites are militarised and the company refuses to meet the union or allow them to visit drilling sites. An army brigade is dedicated to defending oil infrastructure in Casanaré, the region where BP operates, and has been implicated in extra-judicial killings. BP also employs a private security firm, Defence Systems Limited, a London-based company set up by former SAS members, now being investigated by the Colombian state prosecutor for allegedly training the Colombian police in lethal counter-insurgency tactics"—

very much in breach of the voluntary agreement that the Government launched. The Government have been weak on that issue and, as I have said, they have not been critical of BP.

I shall give another example. I wrote to the Parliamentary Secretary—he was then at the Foreign Office—and I sent him a copy of the 8 March 2002

[Harry Cohen]

edition of *Middle East International*. I pointed out that a leaked document from the Sudanese Government showed that a Canadian oil company, Talisman and Lundin Oil, had been directly involved in similar activity. The document said that

> "fulfilling the request of the Canadian company, the armed forces will conduct cleaning-up operation in all villages".

The article reported that

> "over 1,000 government forces swept through Ruweng county, killing scores of civilians and burning more than 6,000 homes—reportedly 60 per cent. of the total in the area."

I protested, saying that the Government should protest to the Canadian Government about that. I have had a reply, but there has been no protest whatever from the Government, and we now know the reason: their own near complicity in washing their hands of BP's role in Colombia when human rights abuses take place there. The Government refused to protest to Canada because, presumably, the same sort of action was going on in Colombia, with a British company.

Globalisation is supposed to be about free and fairer trade, but if that includes oil companies bullying peasant farmers, such as those in Colombia or Sudan, public acquiescence in globalisation will be very severely damaged, and the Government should take that on board.

Those BP executives have shamed Britain by their actions in Colombia, and the Government are wrong to handle the issue with kid gloves and to turn a blind eye to such human rights abuses.

The so-called free press in this country is not doing its job either. The media have not properly reported what happened in Colombia. They should bring those executives to account and force them to apologise. Every now and then we see Japanese executives apologising on television when they have done something appallingly wrong and shamed Japan. They are forced to apologise publicly, and BP executives should be forced to do the same concerning their displacement of farmers in Colombia.

Anji Hunter, the Prime Minister's personal assistant, who went on to work in public relations for BP, is an honourable, decent woman, and she should not have to apologise for BP's shabby treatment of those farmers. Those executives have brought Britain into disrepute; they should apologise, and the Government should take a stronger stance on such human rights abuses.

10.16 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The House will not be surprised to hear that I wish to raise an issue that I have raised before in the House—the future of the Royal Hospital, Haslar. I had hoped to spare the House this speech because after a massive demonstration—a rally and march of 22,000 people, parliamentary petitions and enormous public support in south Hampshire—it looked as though we were moving in the right direction.

After extensive consultation by the health authority, we won as a concession an accident treatment centre at the Royal Hospital to be manned 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. After the hospital was moved to the clinical management of the NHS on 1 April 2001, it looked as though plans were set for the future. Indeed, Haslar was one of the first hospitals in the country to be designated a diagnostic and treatment centre.

For the few colleagues who have not heard me speak on this subject before, I should give the background. The Royal Hospital, Haslar is the only military hospital in the United Kingdom, which is why it was necessary, after the decision in December 1998, for the Ministry of Defence to close it so that it could be moved to civilian control in 2001. It looked as though I might be able to save the House this speech. It looked as though we were set fair for progress because, after all, no Government would spend millions of pounds building up a hospital as a diagnostic and treatment centre only to close it in 2007, but I find, to my disbelief, that that is the current policy.

The new chief executive of the hospital's trust, Alan Bedford, whom I do not criticise personally, has said that he is considering the possible closure of the accident and treatment centre at night because the number of patients does not justify its being open. The hospital was apparently rather slow to apply for support from foreign doctors, nurses and paramedical staff to run the centre.

My response is that if that well-equipped centre is not being used widely, as we hoped it would be, surely it is up to the trust and those in the NHS who are responsible to advertise its facilities more widely, to instruct ambulance crews to take more patients there and to encourage local doctors to make their patients aware of it. The centre exists, and the fact that it is not being used is the fault not of patients who go elsewhere but of those who fail to advertise it properly.

It looked as though Haslar's future was good, with the clinical management under the control of the NHS, which meant that the defence medical services were able to use the facilities.

Colleagues present this evening know the importance to the armed forces of defence medical services. The fact is that in key faculties—general surgery, orthopaedic surgery, general medicine and anaesthetics—defence medical services are approximately two thirds, or even three quarters, short of the specialists they need. I believe that we have 26 anaesthetists rather than the 121 we need. That defence medical services can be improved by closing the only military hospital and instead opening facilities in Birmingham that are not much loved by defence medical services personnel beggars belief.

I felt that we were on the right course. If anyone thinks that I am angry about what has happened, they are wrong: I am very angry that the Government are continuing on their course. The accident treatment centre is under threat and it is planned to build up the diagnostic and treatment centre as a production line for orthopaedic and other surgery until 2007, and then to close it. How can a Government contemplate closing a hospital that has nine operating theatres, state of the art out-patient facilities, excellent telecommunications facilities, and high-technology imaging facilities, when the whole of the area in which it is situated knows that it is desperately needed?

Ms Drown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Viggers: I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me, but even though the debate will probably continue until about midnight, I am conscious that we are short of time and many colleagues still wish to speak.

Much has changed in the world of hospital planning since the original decision to close Haslar was made—originally, the closure was not to take place before 2002.

There has been a vigorous debate on the issue of admitting all accident and emergency cases to district general hospitals, the consequences of which are congestion in those hospitals and often bed blocking when it is not possible to move people back to local hospitals. Daily, patients are taken by ambulance at speed to the district general hospital at Cosham, the Queen Alexandra hospital. There, they wait an average of four to six hours, and they are often then taken back by ambulance to Haslar because there are not the facilities to admit them to the Queen Alexandra hospital.

Some years ago, split-site working was not thought acceptable for doctors and nurses. There was a belief that all facilities should be concentrated in super-hospitals. However, there has since been a relaxation of views and now the feeling is very much that local hospitals—especially diagnostic and treatment centres that can provide a production line for surgical cases—provide excellent places in which to train doctors, nurses and other medical staff, and that split-site working is not at all unacceptable.

The concept of telemedicine has been gaining currency, and Haslar is a world leader in telemedicine, using its radio and television links to provide telemedical advice to UK civilian facilities. It is, moreover, the centre of the telemedicine world, so that patients, whether they are in Haslar or Sierra Leone, can benefit from Haslar advice.

It is admitted that defence medical services are in crisis. I submit, as I did last Thursday to the Secretary of State for Defence, that if we wait for a major crisis in defence medicine—for the armed forces to face a large number of casualties—before we act, we will be too late. The Secretaries of State for Defence and for Health should work together, provide some of that much-vaunted joined-up government, recognise that their plans to close Haslar are wrong, change course and retain Royal Hospital, Haslar within the national health service.

10.24 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): By definition, mine is not a winding-up speech because several colleagues have yet to speak, but I wanted to respond to some of the points that have been made before making my own contribution.

I recall during the last Adjournment debate, before the Whit recess, commenting that we had not had the pleasure of the company of the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). I assumed that that meant that the Royal Hospital Haslar had been reprieved, given a full new status and a fresh lease of life. Sadly, that is obviously not the case, and we wish the hon. Gentleman well in his continuing campaign.

Several themes have run through this evening's debate. We often raise individually matters of constituency concern that are echoed in other parts of the country. That is surely the proper role for Parliament. We are of course here as representatives of our constituency, but we are also here to try to ensure that issues of national interest that override constituency concerns receive the attention of the national Parliament. I wanted to spend some time trying to draw out some of those themes and to add to them from my point of view.

The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is not present at the moment, but we recognise from what he has said as well as from the media attention given to the city of Hull that the former ruling group has led it into considerable difficulties. No doubt the Government will be trying to assist him and his city to retrieve the situation.

A number of Members have referred to the local government settlement. It would be remiss of me if I did not put it on record that Cornwall would suffer if the options currently proposed were put into effect without dramatic reform. It is interesting to hear Members who represent constituencies in places such as Buckinghamshire and south-west Surrey complain that they have been short-changed. We in the more remote and peripheral parts of the United Kingdom think that it is we who have been short-changed. Other Members from all parties who are present would agree with that.

I was particularly struck by the speech of the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on empty homes. That problem is not exclusive to the major cities of the north; it can be found in many other parts of the country. From his description, it is obvious that his town has a deep-seated problem. It will be important to see whether the Deputy Prime Minister's proposals, which were put before the House last week, will address the problems of lack of take-up of accommodation and lack of investment in housing stock in areas such as the hon. Gentleman's—as well as my own. In my area, we have suffered from the Ministry of Defence deliberately keeping properties empty for long periods, and then from those properties not being made available to the local authority but being handed instead to an arm's-length private company that does not make them available for local needs.

I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) concern about the A303. I spent quite a lot of time in a traffic jam on that road while coming in this direction on Saturday. I was amazed to find that people seemed to be leaving Cornwall as well as going to it at this time of year. Why should anybody want to leave Cornwall, which is of course the most beautiful place in the UK to spend July or August?

Mr. Heath: They were going to Somerset to visit Camelot.

Mr. Tyler: Before my hon. Friend gets excited, it must be said that many more people were on the other carriageway heading west. Even so, I entirely endorse what he said about that particularly dangerous stretch of road. Any Government who put the issue of increasing the speed by which people can travel on the road on the same basis as a safety issue are clearly missing the point.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) made an important point not just about the Commonwealth games but about Britain's international reputation for attracting such a major sporting event and taking full advantage of it.

In my more responsible past before I fell into the deep trough of parliamentary representation, I was vice-chairman of a national park committee. I therefore very much share the view of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) that we must ensure that the management of the national parks retains a local as well as a regional and national element. If we do not do so, the people who live in the national parks will not feel that they have proper influence over planning.

I am sure that all Members will, in recent weeks, have experienced similar difficulties to those of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) in obtaining visas

[Mr. Tyler]

for visitors from the Indian subcontinent. Surely now, with the relaxation of tension in the area, the Government should be doing what they can to try to ease that problem.

In my past, as well as being a councillor, I was a part-time beekeeper, although I had to give it up when the bees stung me. I am a sensitive soul and they managed to close both my eyes completely so that I looked like a Mongolian baby. After that, I kept well clear of bees. However, the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), who is not in his place at present, made an important point about the beekeeping community and the difficulties that it experiences with insurance.

In a curious way, that linked to the next speech: the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) also described how insurance companies have an extraordinary hold on all sorts of activities. In his case, it was a colliery. It surely cannot be right that when we as a nation invest large sums to maintain—in that case—a colliery, although it could be any business, it should be put on the rack by the failure of insurance brokers to find cover for the business. It is absurd that public money invested in an operation can be put at risk by the private company that provides insurance and by the insurance market.

I confess that I did not hear the whole of the speech made by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) as I had left the Chamber for a restorative banana. He deployed an extremely good argument about the enormous number of telecommunication masts that are apparently being permitted—it must be said—by a fast-track procedure introduced by the Conservative Government.

One of the most absurd situations that has ever occurred in planning was when that Government, who had an opportunity to do so, did not tell telecommunications companies, "Yes, you may have a mast, but you can have only one mast in an area for all the operators". However, once the Government had given consent to one operator, it was difficult to resist applications from others. It would have been perfectly possible to insist that all operators use the same mast. I am given to understand that there would be no technical problems; indeed, there would be real cost savings. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford said that there were 29 applications in his constituency. The position is similar in my constituency and I very much regret that the then Secretary of State did not insist on joint use of masts.

I wanted especially to refer to the support expressed by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) for the parliamentary education unit. A number of us are working hard in various ways to try to make this place more than an interesting historical monument, although I am very fond of it. This is a great building; it is an interesting example of the results of an architectural competition. Indeed, the architects who won that competition were ahead of their time in many, many ways.

What is most important for visitors to this place, however, is that they see a working democracy. That is what it should be all about. The hon. Member for Burnley and I sit on the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons and one of our most important functions is to try to ensure that Parliament is seen to be modern, working for the community and the nation, rather than merely an interesting museum full of old pictures. I very much hope that various proposals will make that more evident in the future.

The parliamentary education unit is a critical part of the way in which we deploy our resources to ensure that people better understand what we do. I hope that it will reduce the extent to which people feel detached from, and unable to contribute to, the political process.

It was interesting to discover that Members throughout the United Kingdom have so much in common. The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) complained about policing in rural areas. Her area is not as rural as mine, so I can claim that we have an even greater crisis—as other hon. Members might do, too. The problem is more about retention than recruitment, however. Retention of police officers is a major problem, not only in the south-east but in many parts of the country.

We have lost a large number of specials. Having been a member of a police authority, I know of the important role that specials can play. Of course, many of them go on to become full-time police officers, so the number of specials who have been recruited or retained may not be really indicative of the problem. The important point is whether total police manpower is sufficient for a particular area.

The hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) raised two issues that are important to our communities—I know that many other hon. Members have similar views—the danger, inconvenience and disturbance caused by fireworks and more seriously by airguns. There cannot be a single Member who has not had complaints from individuals or communities about the increased use of airguns, which can be incredibly dangerous, by all ages, not simply teenagers or youths. The hon. Lady rightly pointed to the additional problem of police officers believing them to be real firearms, from which they must protect the community.

I fear that I do not follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Mrs. Robinson) in her depressing analysis of what she termed the failure of the peace process and the Good Friday agreement. Members on both sides of the House may share her concern about the future in Northern Ireland, but they have yet to see any new proposals that they would wish to support to try to make the existing peace process work.

Before I come to my own contribution, I want to refer briefly to the speech of the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen). I do not know the details of the case in Colombia to which he referred, but it is important that we have accurate information on such issues, because BP, a major international company, is based in Britain.

My brief contribution—[Hon. Members: "Brief?"] We have got all night I am given to understand—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) is speaking.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I wanted to speak briefly about the funding of democracy. Not only is it claimed that the Labour party is in considerable debt, and is no doubt beginning to reconsider its position, but the Conservative party is in difficulty because it has to raise a great deal of money from a small number of individuals. The case for the state funding of political parties rests on the fact not that some parties are getting into financial difficulties, but that otherwise all political parties, especially those in government, can get into a position where they may be suspected of selling influence, which is dangerous for parliamentary democracy. Whether the parties concerned are hugely in debt is not the issue.

I want to cite—this is almost incredible—the leading article in *The Sun* last Friday, which urged the leader of the Conservative party to accept that it could have a long-term problem if a small number of organisations or individuals effectively continue to fund political parties. The perception is inevitably that they are buying access and influence, and whether it is Lord Ashcroft or the RMT, that is damaging to the health of parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Burns: What about Lloyd George?

Mr. Tyler: That was a long time ago, and my father did not know Lloyd George. However, I readily admit that Lloyd George did what he did—I have accepted in the House that this is a valid criticism of past political funding—precisely because, as now, parties had lost touch with their membership. In his case, he had lost his party and was no longer party leader. The only way in which he could maintain financial support was to sell honours.

I respect the decision of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Leader of the House not to give what the Leader of the House described as an oath of loyalty to the RMT union. They are right, but we must go the whole hog and recognise that any organisation or individual who pays millions of pounds into the coffers of a political party gives the impression that politics and democracy are for sale. That is wrong, and I hope that before we return from the summer recess the Government and, indeed, all political parties, will reassess their position and introduce concrete proposals for the House to discuss.

10.39 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I hope that, after a number of years, I can be promoted to the ranks of the usual suspects in these debates. The defining characteristic of the usual suspects is that each cares passionately about constituency matters and his or her special interests, as we heard from a number of excellent speeches tonight. They care so much that they give up their time to promote those interests, and Parliament and the country are richer for that. I thank all hon. Members for staying on tonight and for their diligence in being in the Chamber.

Unlike the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), I thought that the hon. Member for Strangford (Mrs. Robinson) made a particularly effective contribution, with which many hon. Members would associate themselves.

There are many issues that affect my constituency. My constituents are overtaxed by a Government who promised much, but who have delivered little. My constituents feel that things are getting worse. However, I shall put party politics to one side tonight and review a few issues in a non-political way, starting with the important matter of the funding of hospices.

Little Haven hospice in my constituency receives about 2 per cent. of its funding from the Government. That figure is far too low. We want to retain Little Haven and other hospices as essentially voluntary bodies funded largely by charitable donation, but they need a proper amount of Government funding. That should be nearer 18 or 20 per cent., not just the miserly 2 per cent. that they currently get, which is a disaster for the sick children.

I raised the matter about a year ago in Prime Minister's questions. I am not the only local Member to raise it or to fight for hospice funding. My hon. Friends the Members for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), who is in his seat, for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), and for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), who is in his place, have all supported improved hospice funding, and I congratulate them.

I warmly congratulate the local *Evening Echo* and the Newsquest newspaper group on their campaign to get fairer funding for our hospices. They are running an effective campaign, and have particularly caught the public's imagination with their latest headline, which reads, "Fair deal for our sick children". I could not have put it better. The hospices do the country, the health service and families that need to use them a very great service. I take the opportunity to congratulate all hospice staff, both medical and other, throughout the country on what they do.

David Taylor: The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that some months ago, when leading a debate on hospice funding, I brought to the attention of the House the fact that the previous Administration had given a promise that in the medium term—that delightful unspecific phrase—Government funding would be found to match the private sector funding on which the vast bulk of hospices depend. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is unfortunate that in 18 years it was not possible for the Conservative Government to deliver on that commitment?

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman has shown a long interest and a great expertise in the hospice movement, and he makes a valid point. I am grateful to him for taking the trouble to make that point tonight.

I could not speak in one of these debates without mentioning Canvey Island's third access road, in addition to the possibility of Canvey Island getting a rail terminus station on the island to help to alleviate congestion and to provide a safe environment for the island people. That is a matter on which I continue to press.

I hope that the hon. Members for Basildon (Angela Smith), who is on the Treasury Bench tonight, and for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), who is not in his place, although he is an assiduous attender of the House, will urge their local councils not to try to block the needs of Canvey Island people, whose road must pass through their areas. Their councils are stopping Canvey getting its third road, and we must put an end to that.

Tomorrow, there will be an announcement about airports in the south-east. I am sure that it will be of great interest to my constituents, as well as to people elsewhere along the Thames estuary and in north Kent. I shall have to wait and see what is said, but I believe that, while taking the opportunities that a new airport would offer and allowing this country to move forward and compete on a wider global scale by providing the necessary new infrastructure and capacity, we must ensure that our constituents' interests are carefully looked after. I am sure that all hon. Members will seek to protect those interests.

[Bob Spink]

I should like to raise two specific issues about housing. I refer first to the very serious issue of homelessness. Castle Point has more than 30 families with children living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. That is absolutely disgraceful, and it is outrageous that Castle Point borough council did not even take the trouble to bid for money that the Government made available to deal with homelessness a few months ago. I hope that we can get our local council to focus on the homelessness problem and provide the resources that are needed to deal with people—especially those with families—at a very vulnerable time in their lives.

I welcomed the announcement that the Government made a few months ago that they would eradicate the practice of keeping homeless people with families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, but I was saddened that they later qualified their statement—this Government often seem to do so—by saying that they intended that homeless families would not be kept in bed-and-breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks and that that aim would not be achieved for 18 months. I would like a far more stringent target to be set to help homeless people.

My second point about housing concerns the Deputy Prime Minister's recent announcement about the increase of building in the south and particularly in the Thames gateway area, which includes my constituency. We simply do not have any brownfield land available. We shall have to release green-belt land to build the 2,400 houses that have been forced on us by the Government's Serplan announcement of a year ago. We do not know where the vast numbers of houses are going to be built. We still have not identified plots for them. We know that we shall have to release chunks of the green belt, but my constituents do not want that to happen, not only because we are already overdeveloped in terms of the existing infrastructure, but most of all because no announcement was made about providing new infrastructure to deal with those new people and cars. No new roads were announced; in particular, no announcement was made about Canvey Island getting another rail station or a third road. No new doctors' surgeries or genuine offer of new housing that would be affordable to teachers, medical staff and policemen were announced. That causes me great concern and I shall fight the overdevelopment that is being forced on my constituency.

Mr. Pike: Would not better regional policy to develop jobs, industries, commerce and so on in other parts of the country help to deal with problems in the south and also those in my constituency, which are the exact reverse? Sensible regional planning is important, as a lot of the jobs no longer need to be in London and the south.

Bob Spink: I do not see what is wrong with the planning that is currently undertaken by the county councils. I do not see why we need another body to do yet more planning. To me, that smacks of the dead hand of more and more bureaucracy being piled on to us by a Government who are basically control freaks.

Hon. Members would be very disappointed if I were to speak in this debate without finishing on my usual serious note by referring to the Cyprus problem. I ask the Minister for clarification following Lord Hannay's reported comments implying that there might be a suggestion of a solution based on two states in Cyprus. That would not be a fair settlement. It would not be sustainable in law, in international diplomacy or in justice. We must stick to our position—the position that I always thought the Government held, and that I trust they still hold—that Cyprus will gain accession to the European Union irrespective of the settlement. Turkey must not have the ability to frustrate the entry of Cyprus into the EU. We must also stick to a solution of a bi-zonal, bi-communal single state.

The talks between President Clerides and the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash, have not yet borne fruit, and I am sure that that brings great sadness to everyone in the House. We have not had the breakthrough that we hoped for, but I congratulate President Clerides on his flexibility and his positive approach to those talks, and I encourage him to go forward. We need flexibility to achieve a solution, but only a solution based on a single Cypriot state, and I hope that the Minister will clarify that matter for us when he winds up the debate.

10.51 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I want to raise two points tonight. The first concerns the care of the elderly in Birmingham. My constituency regards itself as very different from Birmingham, but it comes under Birmingham for local government purposes. We are, therefore, affected by the way in which Birmingham social services department handles the care of the elderly. I want to draw to the House's attention the last early-day motion that appears on the Order Paper, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), the shadow Health Secretary, and a number of other hon. Members. It is early-day motion 1670, and it states:

> "That this House expresses its grave concern about the crisis in care for the elderly in Birmingham and elsewhere in England; is alarmed that over 80 care homes have closed in Birmingham over the last 18 months; and recognises that a main contributory factor to this crisis is the decision by Birmingham Social Services to pay substantially less than the real cost of providing care for the elderly in care homes and that this practice is threatening to force good quality independent care homes out of business, causing grave distress and confusion to vulnerable, frail and elderly residents in Birmingham."

I have quite deliberately not sought to raise this matter in the House over recent months, because I simply could not believe that it would not have been sorted out by the Government and Birmingham city council. It is astonishing that the situation has been allowed to reach this stage. A constituent of mine, Mr. Alan Pearce, who is the chairman of the Birmingham Care Consortium, has raised with me the treatment of his members, and it is no exaggeration to say that it is a thoroughgoing scandal.

More than 80 care homes for the elderly have closed in the last 18 months—as is set out in my hon. Friend's early-day motion—and the trend continues. There is no contingency plan in place to accommodate our elderly residents. Indeed, over recent days, three more independent care homes for the elderly have given notice to Birmingham social services that they, too, will have to close. It is no exaggeration to say that below-cost fee levels and the absence of contracts for funding are putting 1,600 elderly residents of independent care homes at risk.

There are 452 beds blocked in Birmingham hospitals, because Birmingham social services department claims that it does not have the funds to move elderly patients into care homes, because it has spent the money elsewhere. Eighty-six independent care homes refuse to renew service contracts for elderly care because the terms dictated by Birmingham social services involve below-cost fee levels, and it would be financial suicide for them to accept them. There will also be no referrals for consortium members who do not sign up to the unsustainable contracts that Birmingham city council has put forward.

It is possible that Government funding for Birmingham's elderly might be enough to cover the costs, but that money is being spent elsewhere by Birmingham social services, and not reaching our elderly folk. The problem is that, as the situation has got worse and worse for elderly people in my constituency and throughout the Birmingham area, the Government have said, "It's nothing to do with us. We have given the money to Birmingham." The council, however, says that it does not have the money and cannot meet the costs that it should be meeting.

The picture is, in fact, infinitely worse, given that Birmingham social services pays its own homes double the fees that it is willing to pay the independent sector. It pays its homes at least £522 per resident per week, as opposed to the £260 on which it expects other homes to survive. That represents a subsidy of nearly £13.5 million a year for its own homes. The situation is outrageous. Because of the way in which local government operates, we delegate this power to councils. We expect them to accept responsibility and ensure that elderly people are looked after in homes, rather than behaving in such an appalling way.

There is a shortfall in provision of elderly care beds in Birmingham anyway. It has been calculated that if an elderly person remains in hospital, the cost will be some £1,700 per patient per week. We have done our bit: Conservative members of Birmingham city council, both behind and on the scenes, have pleaded with the social services department to put the matter right. In a debate in the House, my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford eloquently made the case for Government action. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, went to Birmingham only last week and met owners of homes for the elderly to hear what they had to say.

It is vital for the matter to be resolved as quickly as possible. Birmingham's social services department is a shambles. Last week the department's head, Sandra Taylor, resigned. It is a rather unattractive feature of political life that this civil servant, rather than her political masters, should take responsibility; but in any event she has gone, and no doubt someone else will be appointed. Money is not reaching front-line services. If Ministers believe that they have given Birmingham adequate funds, I can only say that they are not getting through. Ministers must act now to resolve what is becoming a long-standing problem.

Mr. Burns: Does my hon. Friend recall that under the last Government money in the social services budget for personal social services was ring-fenced, so it could not be drained away to other services?

Mr. Mitchell: I do indeed. My hon. Friend will have noted that there is a rather better system in Scotland—a new system ensuring that money allocated specifically to the care of elderly people reaches those people.

Most outrageous of all, surely, is the blatant discrimination practised by Birmingham's social services department against the independent sector. How can it justify admitting that it must pay £522 a week for its own homes, while expecting independent homes to get by on half that? It is a thoroughgoing scandal, and it must be addressed. I do not know whether responsibility lies with the Labour Government or with Labour-controlled Birmingham city council, but I do know that it lies with one of those two Labour entities. Elderly people in my constituency and throughout the Birmingham area are suffering, and it behoves the Government to remedy that rapidly.

My second point relates to the Pension Service, and the way in which elderly people can gain access to it. I have raised the issue on a point of order. It was subsequently raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) in business questions, and last Thursday it was raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), shadow leader of the House, again in business questions. It has been raised no fewer than three times by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions.

The issue is this: how can an elderly person who is, or is about to be, a pensioner gain access to the Pension Service? Can that person ask for a home visit, or must he or she rely on the decision of the provider? In other words, will this be the elderly person's choice or that of the bureaucrats in the Pension Service?

That was raised in public evidence in the Select Committee. In the Committee, I said to a senior and respected official in the Department for Work and Pensions:

> "I was very encouraged when the Minister told us that home visits would be an integral part of the service, that it would be a matter of choice for pensioners whether or not they could ask for home visits."

I was somewhat surprised that the Department said that it was

> "clear that whether or not a home visit took place was very much up to The Pension Service and that it would be used where there was no reasonable alternative available. Those are different approaches to this."

Were we being spun by the Minister, or was he correct and the brief wrong? The senior civil servant said:

> "We are not building a model which is actually showing that anyone can just choose to have a home visit."

Neither I nor the Select Committee was satisfied with the response.

On 4 July, the Minister received a letter from the Select Committee, in which we noted that apparently two completely different explanations were given to the Committee. The first was by the Minister for Pensions, who said:

> "Older people will have the choice of doing their business through pension centres . . . or receiving home visits . . . By providing that choice, we will make improvements for the older pensioners who need to access such services from time to time.—[*Official Report*, 20 May 2002; Vol. 386, c. 4.]

One would have thought that the position could not have been clearer.

When we asked for an explanation and the Minister came to the Dispatch Box because, as I have tonight, I gave him notice that I was going to raise these points,

[Mr. Mitchell]

he made many cogent, interesting and helpful points but did not answer the specific question. Nor did his helpful letter of 10 July. It pointed out that

> "around 67 per cent. of customers in the pensioner client group expressed a preference for contacting the organisation by telephone",

and that

> "The Pension Service is aiming to have a dedicated local service nation-wide."

It pointed out a range of things but did not deal with the point that I, my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst and the Chairman of the Select Committee have made.

In the letter, the Select Committee makes clear its concerns. In his responses, the Minister for Pensions did not address the Committee's chief concern, which was related solely to the provision of home visits by the Pension Service. Again, the Chairman of the Select Committee made it clear that the Minister said:

> "Older people will have the choice of doing their business through pension centres such as the one at Motherwell or receiving home visits and participating in other local activities"—[*Official Report*, 20 May 2002; Vol. 386, c. 4.]

but the senior civil servant, Ms Alexis Cleveland, stated during her oral evidence on 12 June:

> "We are not building a model which is actually showing that anyone can just choose to have a home visit."

She reinforced that view in a supplementary memorandum where she said that the local service was not designed to be a visiting, on-demand service and that the department would expect such occasions to be rare.

It is clear to anyone who listens to the evidence that those two views cannot both be correct. Either, as the House was told by the Minister for Pensions, pensioners will be able to choose whether to receive a home visit or use the telephone; or as is clearly consistent with Government policy, the official was correct in saying that the department will choose which customers receive a home visit based on need. In the response to the Select Committee, nothing gainsays those remarks.

There is a most important point at issue. Parliament has not been treated with the candour that we have a right to expect. Hundreds, possibly hundreds of thousands, of pensioners have been misled. They have been told that the choice is theirs but it is not: the choice is the officials'. Nor is the model the Pension Service has developed capable of delivering the choice promised to pensioners by the Minister.

To some it may seem a small point. Some of my hon. Friends may have become cynical about what Ministers say at the Dispatch Box. They may say that all Governments behave like that. I do not believe that that is true. I ask the Minister to come to the House before we go into recess, to apologise to the House and to thousands of elderly and vulnerable pensioners. This is a point of substance and the Government need to address it before we adjourn.

11.5 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I want to raise several issues before the House adjourns for the summer recess. Today, I had the honour to introduce a Bill to give protection to endangered species. The current law, with an offence that is not arrestable and carries a maximum sentence of two years, is crazy. My Bill would make the offence arrestable and extend the maximum sentence to five years. We all enjoy watching films about dinosaurs, but we do not want to create any more, which we will unless we protect endangered species.

I am also very concerned about law and order. We meet in the House in order to make laws, but increasingly I feel that my constituents are less than happy with the way in which laws are enforced. Police morale is at rock bottom, and our constituents are often disappointed when the crimes that they report are not followed up. It does not matter what the Government say, because the general public feeling is one of a lack of confidence in law enforcement.

I have asked the Library to conduct an analysis—it will take a great deal of time—of just a few Acts of Parliament, to find out on how many occasions the laws have been enforced. In 1988, I had the honour to introduce the Protection against Cruel Tethering Bill, which became an Act of Parliament, yet I had a letter only this week from a constituent complaining that she had reported horses being inadequately watered and improperly tethered but that absolutely nothing had been done.

My constituents complain that when they ring the local police station they are put through to a call centre—it could be in Chelmsford or, on another occasion, in Croydon—with no local knowledge. That, too, has caused a reduction in confidence.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) mentioned mobile phones. The House may be aware of my own prejudices on that issue. Earlier today, we debated a related subject. It really is not good enough for Ministers to come to the Dispatch Box and pray in aid the Stewart report and sit on the fence, when we all know that the law is an ass. Local authorities do their best to turn down applications, but the operators get their way on appeal.

Ministers have said that it is not lawful to drive a motor car while talking on a mobile phone, but every single day I see a legion of people with the mobile tucked under the chin, having detailed conversations and taking not a blind bit of notice of what is going on. Two months ago, someone was convicted and went to prison for three years because he had been talking on a mobile phone and killed someone, but the law is scarcely ever enforced.

Only recently, we had the case of Dr. Shipman, a man who has been found guilty of murdering 250 or 280 patients, and who perhaps killed another 100. That had been going on since 1975. What confidence can the general public have in law enforcement when this doctor's performance was not even properly monitored? It is an absolute disgrace. If I was one of those murdered patients' relatives, I would not be satisfied with the way in which the matter seems to have been dealt with so far.

On law enforcement, the Government have kindly sent us all a consultation paper called "Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud." In 1993, I introduced a ten-minute Bill to provide for voluntary identity cards; indeed, I think that that was the first time such a Bill was not opposed. Ten years later, the current Government want us to reflect on their consultation paper, but I need not do so. I cannot understand why any law-abiding citizen would object to identity cards. Before beginning my speech, I thought, "Shall I take out my wallet, which looks a bit bulky?" It is stuffed full—not of money, unfortunately, or of losing lottery tickets, but of plastic cards. If we had identity cards, that particular problem could be dealt with. If this House is to be relevant to our constituents, we must consider carefully the fact that it is no earthly good our continually passing laws and not providing the work force to enforce them.

Several hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) and for West Chelmsford, mentioned the crisis in care homes. My hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point (Bob Spink) and for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) and I are served by the excellent *Southend Times*, and I certainly praise the efforts of the editor, Michael Guy, in trying to highlight a number of related issues. One headline ran, "Care Homes in Crisis: One home a month is closing in Southend". I should point out that, of the 659 constituencies in this country, mine is 33rd in terms of the number of senior citizens.

David Cormack, chief executive of Southend Derby and Joan organisation and chairman of South Essex Care Homes Association, told the *Southend Times* that care homes are closing because the proprietors are not being given enough money to run them at even a tiny profit. Also, as a result of the standards and guidelines imposed by the National Care Standards Commission—the regulatory body that took over responsibility for ensuring good standards in the care home sector—it has been pretty well impossible for such homes to remain viable.

We are all familiar with the story of the lady—she was well into her 90s—who went on a starvation protest a few weeks ago because she did not want to be moved from her home, and who eventually died. I served on the Committee that considered the Care Standards Bill, which eventually became an Act. We tried then to warn Ministers that most elderly people are not bothered whether their room is 2 in too small, or whether their home is the all-singing, all-dancing affair that such homes used to be; what matters is the love and care given by the proprietors. Although I have a great deal of time for the Minister with responsibility for such matters—he always tells me that he is doing his best to allow the owners of care homes to meet the new standards—I very much regret the fact that so many care homes have had to close.

In the Whitsun Adjournment debate, I raised the case of Mrs. Narwar's son, who was imprisoned in Egypt together with several other people after going on a trip there. Unfortunately, he is still in prison. Baroness Amos is dealing with the matter, and I understand that she must do so very carefully. However, I am finding it increasingly difficult to convince Mrs. Narwar that her son is being treated in the way that she would hope. Several important issues of justice are involved.

The Friday before last, I had the privilege of shadowing—in the nicest sense—a nurse at Southend hospital. I arrived at 6.50 am, when the night shift was just finishing, and for more than three hours I saw at first hand the excellent work that is being done at that hospital. Mrs. Janet Cornell, a constituent of mine, wrote recently to say that we only hear about the poor aspects of the NHS, but, she continues:

> "We as a family are so appreciative and realise the enormous cost of all the treatment extended to my husband, and we are so very grateful."

She goes on to praise the wonderful work that is done at Southend hospital. However, I also saw at first hand how pressurised the staff are.

Another constituent, whom I will not name, wrote to me recently about what he considers to be the abuse of the ambulance service. I do not mean to attack our GPs, who do magnificent work, but the constituent told me of a dialogue with a GP whom he had wanted to come out to see his wife. The doctor was a little short with my constituent on the telephone, refused to come out and suggested that he call an ambulance. My constituent eventually did so, and the ambulance driver told him that this was not a one-off event, claiming that locums are increasingly taking that course of action because they, too, are under great stress.

Just as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) thought that he would not need to mention his hospital, I did not think that I would need to mention the Palace theatre, because, as far as I was concerned, its future was not in doubt. However, unfortunately and dramatically, it has now closed. Several of my constituents feel that that is because of a lack of funds from Eastern Arts. I shall not take this opportunity to have a go at the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), but apparently Colchester theatre gets £450,000 as a subsidy, whereas the Palace theatre in Southend gets nothing. That cannot be fair.

Bob Russell (Colchester): I am grateful for that welcoming introduction. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that since Colchester is the cultural capital of Essex, it is only right that it should receive appropriate funding?

Mr. Amess: The hon. Gentleman has probably had a good dinner, but I have not yet had the opportunity to do so. Colchester is a wonderful town, but the hon. Gentleman slightly exaggerates its position. It is a disgrace that the Palace theatre receives nothing while Ipswich and the other theatres get a lot of money.

Recently, we staged an Agatha Christie festival, which was fêted not only in the UK but all over the world. It was absolutely first class. The present owners of the theatre, managers Green and Lenigan, thought that Eastern Arts would give them £250,000, but they received nothing. The Palace theatre had intended to run a young people's theatre summer school. It was fully booked, but it has had to be cancelled. I hope that the Minister will have a word with the appropriate Department to see if we can obtain some extra funding.

Several other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), have said that their towns will win the bloom contest, but Southend, which won the gold medal at the Chelsea flower show, will be a tough act to beat. I hope that hon. Members will consider visiting Southend for their summer holidays this year. I am delighted to say that the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting recently visited Southend and we are grateful for the interest that he showed in the town and, in particular, in our pier, which is the longest in the world. We have recently opened a new lifeboat station, we have millennium illuminations and a new sewage disposal system—I doubt whether that will be of huge interest to visitors. We are constructing the new pier entrance, including the installation of a lift. We are reconstructing the area of the pier head that was substantially damaged

[Mr. Amess]

by fire in 1976. There is also the renovation of walkway shelters and pier-head toilets and the installation of CCTV cameras. I hope that all these things will act as incentives to visitors.

Let me move on quickly to my three final points. Many Members feel strongly about religious broadcasting. The appropriate Department has been sending us letters with which I feel slightly uneasy. Hundreds of thousands of law-abiding tax-paying people throughout the country have been asking for Christian broadcasting for more than 12 years. Yet the Department for Culture, Media and Sport still justifies its ban by continuing to say that its aim is to satisfy as many viewers and listeners as possible. I join the organisation in asking the Government to remove the disqualification of religious persons from the draft communications Bill and to replace it with Parliament's previous provision for Christian religious broadcasting.

My penultimate point relates to Westborough's residents association, which was keen that I should raise the issue. I attended its meeting a few days ago—one of the best-attended residents' meetings to which I have ever been. Of the nine wards in my constituency, Westborough is probably—I know that no local residents will take offence—the most deprived area. When we had a Liberal-Labour council—I am glad to say that we now have a Conservative-controlled council in Southend—and we tried for assisted area status, Westborough would have been one of the two wards to receive some European funding. However, it was taken out of that.

There is a large old timber yard in Fairfax drive, and unbelievably there is an application—I understand that the council is to debate the matter at full council on Thursday—to turn it into a residential area. The one thing that Westborough does not need is more housing. There are so many people living in cramped conditions—97 people per hectare. The area is within the top 10 most densely populated wards in the United Kingdom. It is not good enough that local residents be given more housing. There is asbestos in the timber yard and there is great difficulty in getting access to the area. Many residents have been complaining that there is need for another school. We need more doctors and another community centre.

Local residents understand what the Deputy Prime Minister said about wishing to build 200,000 houses in the south-east, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will listen to the residents of Westborough. Given that the average population density is 4.2 people per hectare and that in Westborough it is 23 times that, the situation is unacceptable.

I enter the summer recess on a jubilant note, because yesterday I completed my charity walk. I mentioned on another occasion that I would walk down every road, cul-de-sac and lane in my constituency. The walk was completed yesterday. I do not quite know how the pedometer works and I am slightly nervous to find out exactly how far I walked. I have given the instrument to a council official. However, I can tell the House that we hope—I say "we" because I did the walk with my black labrador Michael—that when all the money is collected, we will have raised more than £10,000. That will be shared among three charities. I do not feel guilty about putting my feet up for a little while during the summer recess. I hope that all other right hon. and hon. Members and those who work so hard to support us in the House have a happy and enjoyable summer recess.

11.24 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I should like to make a plea for help to the deputy Leader of the House. For some time now, I have been trying to get from Ministers information, help and assistance for my constituents, but to no avail. I shall begin with an issue that the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), will find very easy because he already knows about it, and it will come as no surprise to him that I want to raise it again today.

In July 2000, the Prime Minister visited Exeter in the company of the Parliamentary Secretary, and he made a promise to my constituents about the A30 between Honiton and Exeter—a road covered in concrete that I discussed in an Adjournment debate on 16 January 2001. The Prime Minister promised the residents who live adjacent to the road that the Government would resurface that very noisy road. In fact, it is deemed to be the most noisy road in Britain.

The fact that a Prime Minister took the trouble to intervene personally in a somewhat localised matter was seen by local people as a very good sign, but I am sorry to have to report that, despite my raising the issue on the Floor of the House and having exchanged umpteen items of correspondence with Ministers, we still have no idea at all when the road will be resurfaced. So the encouragement to my constituents to celebrate following that prime ministerial promise has turned rather sour. Indeed, the Government have said that a list of all the noisy roads in Britain will be produced and that the A30 will be assessed to find out where it will come in the pecking order.

On 23 August 2000, I received yet another letter from the then Minister, Lord Whitty, who said:

> "I will ask the Agency to write to you again in the autumn when we should have further news on when resurfacing work on this length of the A30 will commence."

We are still waiting. I suppose that if I were asked to choose a title for the issues that I want to raise tonight, I would say, "Nothing to do with me, guv"—spelled either "gov" or "guv." Both spellings apply because all these are matters where the Prime Minister or other Ministers have become involved in something, made a promise and then somehow everything has run into the sand.

I tell the Parliamentary Secretary, whose constituency neighbours mine and whose beaming picture appeared next to the Prime Minister's on that fateful day in July 2000, that I know of no one in the Government who could have more influence on that matter than the hon. Member for Exeter, so I hope that I will not have to return during the debate on the next Adjournment and spoil his Christmas by asking about the issue yet again.

Mr. Tyler: As I mentioned earlier in the debate, I travelled on that the road just last weekend and, yet again, I was amazed at the surface. I wonder whether the hon. Lady can tell us when, how and why that surface was specified for the road in the first place. It is quite extraordinary.

Mrs. Browning: If the hon. Gentleman refers to the Adjournment debate on the subject that I initiated on

16 January 2001, he will see that I raised the issue before the road was built. He will also see all the detail of how I was misled, orally and in writing, by the Highways Agency and, subsequently, by the contractors, which assured me that what he travelled on last week was something called whisper concrete. *[Interruption.]* Yes, even the Parliamentary Secretary is laughing, and well he might. Nothing about that surface has anything to do with whispers; it is the noisiest road in Britain, and we would like it to be resurfaced, so I leave that with him.

I have another problem—this time, with education. Uffculme secondary school in my constituency has written to me, and I visited it as a result. We keep hearing Ministers talking about increased funding for education, yet this school for 11 to 16-year-olds, which is, I hasten to add, very good—people move house so that they can get their children into it—has very serious problems. As I was aware that the recess was coming up, I wrote to the Minister for School Standards on 31 May, asking for a meeting, but I did not get a reply, so I had to write again. Only yesterday, nearly two months later, did I get a letter saying that the Minister would not grant my request for a meeting because he did not think that it would help matters as far as Uffculme school is concerned, as the matter is really one for the LEA.

I listened very carefully to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) at the beginning of the debate, which seems almost a lifetime ago, and I recall him saying that after constituents visited him last Saturday, he had secured a meeting with a Minister for this Wednesday, just five days later. I want to put it on record that I am now monitoring the occasions on which Ministers refuse me a meeting. I say that as someone who served for three years as a Minister and never once refused a meeting to a Member of Parliament of any party who asked if they could come and see me. Indeed, sometimes, from the Dispatch Box, I would offer Members a meeting because I felt that it was in their best interests to come and discuss a matter with me personally.

I say to the Parliamentary Secretary that I do not write to Ministers for trivial reasons. Uffculme school is having severe problems. It is having to consider the fact that its statutory obligations cannot be met. Governors were told that if they did not set a balanced budget, the LEA would dismiss them and take over the running of the school. This is not a sink school; it is one of the best schools in my constituency. It has produced a budget but it simply does not provide enough money to meet health and safety requirements, to provide the statutory curriculum, to pay creditors or to meet statutory obligations on special educational needs.

The problem is not that Devon LEA has not passed on the full amount from the standard spending assessment. In his letter to me the Minister admitted that the LEA has passed on the full SSA. Clearly, something is wrong with the education system when such an excellent school, which has never had such problems before, cannot meet its statutory obligations.

I say to the Parliamentary Secretary that when MPs have these serious problems it is not acceptable for Ministers to dismiss them, two months later, by refusing a meeting and thinking that a letter will do—it will not. If I cannot get the Minister to meet me, then I may apply for an Adjournment debate after the recess. I should not have to drag Ministers to an Adjournment debate just to have a dialogue with them, but it is up to them—I am sure that they look forward to such exchanges with great pleasure.

I turn now to hospices, another matter of which the Parliamentary Secretary will be aware because he and I cover an area of Devon that shares a hospice in Exeter. Hospice care is funded by the local authorities in Exeter, Mid Devon and East Devon, and it has a crisis. I listened with great interest to what a Labour Member said about the previous Conservative Government, but I have to say that under that Government hospices in Exeter received higher funding than they do today. The situation is dire.

On 7 May, I wrote to the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), on behalf of the hospice in Exeter, and I am still waiting for a reply. I asked whether the Department would consider interim funding to help the hospice with its serious problems. Its budget has been so reduced this year that although it asked for £235,000, it got approximately £20,000, which leaves a massive shortfall. I am sure that the Parliamentary Secretary will have heard about those figures in his constituency postbag.

It is no good Ministers standing at the Dispatch Box and giving us a lot of hype about health funding if, on the ground, our hospitals and hospices cannot continue and are worried about closing. In the same way, I do not want to hear any more waffle from the Chancellor about education, education, education, when excellent schools such as Uffculme cannot meet their statutory obligations.

Ministers appear to be quite divorced. They come to the Dispatch Box to make great flowing statements, but when we get down to the nitty-gritty and say, "Yes, but what about this or that in my constituency?", the answer is, "It's nothing to do with me, guv." We are told that it is the LEA's responsibility, or the health authority's—as though Ministers do not have ongoing responsibility for what happens after they leave the Chamber. It really will not do.

There is another matter that the Government do not want to know about, which I find astonishing. When they entered office, the Government suddenly discovered e-commerce—and a lot of other e-things. The Prime Minister even introduced a whole new plan for delivering e-government. One of the keys to extending opportunities, especially for businesses, is to ensure that throughout the country people have access to broadband, which speeds up access and makes life a great deal easier. However, in my part of Devon, which is rural, small businesses situated in remote areas do not have access to broadband.

One of the problems is that BT has held back from proceeding with the changes that it needs to make. BT has told my local business community that there is not enough demand for broadband, so it will not make the investment. It is a chicken-and-egg situation: if BT does not make the investment, people will not latch on to broadband as a means of accessing the web more quickly and more extensively. There are other options, and on 21 May I tabled a written question to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry asking when broadband was likely to be made available to the 01884 exchange area in my constituency. I received a rather anodyne reply that, in essence, said that it was nothing to do with the Government; the decision was for the companies concerned.

[Mrs. Browning]

That is not compatible with what we hear Ministers saying at conferences and at the Dispatch Box, or what we read in the Government's reports. One would think that they were at the forefront—at the cutting edge. Ministers keep telling us about the Government services that are to be rolled out through e-this and e-that, but if people cannot access those services, or can access them only from certain parts of the country, it is up the Government to prod BT and other companies to make the services available and to ensure that there is equal opportunity of access throughout the country.

What I have described this evening is a mere soupçon of the dozens of cases that I could have raised. One gets the impression that the Government are at the forefront on some things, but the moment they are challenged on the detail, suddenly it is nothing to do with them; it is for someone else—anybody but a Minister. If I have to return at the Christmas Adjournment debate and raise the same cases yet again, or if I have to raise another set of cases in which Ministers have been reluctant to respond to letters promptly or to answer straightforward written questions, or they have refused meetings—I do not ask for meetings every week; I only ask when the issue is an important one, such as Uffculme school—I hope that the Speaker will take it upon himself to examine the opportunity that we Back-Bench Members of Parliament have to get the sort of service that we deserve from the Government. We are not getting that service at the moment.

I hope that it is not only Conservative Members who are not getting that service. I hope that there is no discrimination in terms of access to Ministers and prompt replies. There are Cabinet Office rules about replies to Members of Parliament, but the rules are not being adhered to, especially in respect of the most difficult questions. I hope that the Minister has a lovely holiday and that he does not have to travel too often on that noisy road, but I hope also that he will put the issues that I have raised tonight at the top of his list, because they are extremely important to the people of my constituency.

11.39 pm

David Burnside (South Antrim): Like many hon. Members who have contributed to this summer Adjournment debate, I would have liked to take some time to promote the positive aspects of Ulster, Northern Ireland and tourism in the Province. I would not, like the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), promote holidays overseas. I would promote holidays in the United Kingdom in order to help the very depressed tourism industry following foot and mouth and the events of 11 September. If I made such a speech, it would probably be more like that of the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer), as Northern Ireland has had a very wet summer. In fact, we have not even had a summer.

I would like to be promoting tourism in my constituency, encouraging people to go to places such as Royal Portrush, which makes Muirfield look like a pitch and putt course when the wind is blowing heavily off the Atlantic, and to be promoting all the great attractions of Strangford and Northern Ireland generally, but I shall take this opportunity to raise the continuing problem that depresses us and makes those of us who represent Northern Ireland constituencies more serious than we want to be and not just concentrate on constituency matters.

We are suffering a serious lack of consent and confidence among the Unionist people in the Province on the big issue of the constitutional arrangements—the Good Friday or Belfast agreement. Nearly all of us in this House have differences of opinion, but we have a basis of respect for each other. Although we question each other and argue, respect is felt in this House across all the political parties, but there is no trust left in Northern Ireland for the word of this Government.

One sees from the press over the weekend what stage that lack of trust has reached. The president of Sinn Fein-IRA, Gerry Adams, declared over the weekend—this is rich: if it were not a farce, it would be a joke—in an interview on the 30th anniversary of the terrible atrocity of Bloody Friday:

> "I have been active, and it's a matter of public record, in Sinn Fein for all of my time within Republican politics".

He then added:

> "I have not been a member of the IRA".

Is that the reality of the debate? The leader of the republican movement in Northern Ireland need only listen to the public response in the Province to such a statement. It is a con job and a farce.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister said at Hillsborough a few weeks ago that he had complete faith and confidence in Sinn Fein's commitment to the peace process. The law-abiding people of the Province do not share that sentiment, and that lack of confidence crosses the Unionist community and a large section of the constitutional nationalist and Catholic community. There is no trust any longer.

Before the House rises for the recess on Wednesday, I hope that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will have an opportunity to outline how they define a breach of the IRA-republican ceasefire. I hope that they will consider the events in Colombia since 1998; after the Good Friday agreement was struck—the sequence is important—$2 million was earned in training terrorists, and that drug money was taken to the United States of America to fund Sinn Fein-IRA.

I hope that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will make public before the recess, first through this House, the fact that Sir John Chilcot's interim report, which has been on the right hon. Gentleman's desk for more than a week, outlines only one line of inquiry into the break-in at Castlereagh special branch: Robert "Bobby" Storey, a senior commander of the provisional IRA in the city of Belfast. Perhaps the Secretary of State wants his summer recess and does not want the pressure from this House.

Let us consider everything in the four years since the agreement, especially the treatment of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. I find it rich to listen to English, Welsh, Scottish and Government Members talking about declining morale in the police and the need for more police on the beat when I see the finest police force in the United Kingdom decimated and humiliated.

All the evidence proves that the hopes and expectations of 1998 have been dashed. We need new hope and new support from democrats. We do not want to enter a spiral of depression where we constantly say that things can only get worse—they can get better. The democrats elected to this House from Northern Ireland—the Ulster Unionists, the Democratic Unionists and the constitutional nationalists, the Social and Democratic Labour party Members, who do not come to this place often—can come together and provide an alternative.

In the Liberal Front-Bench presidential address that we heard some time ago, we heard the usual claim that there is no alternative. There is an alternative to compromising the democratic process and to making it morally corrupt and dishonest to the people of Northern Ireland. We need something better.

There is another way forward. I have admired the Prime Minister's fight against international terrorism. The stand that he has taken has won support on both sides of the House. I ask him to remember the promises that he made—the promises that he has broken—and to come to the House and try to restore some confidence for the Unionists and law-abiding people in democratic processes.

It is no good supporting a flawed process that has failed, even though it received much support and consent from just over half the Unionist community and a large majority of the nationalist community. We are where we are. To keep pushing a failed and flawed process shows a lack of judgment on the part of the Prime Minister and the Government.

I ask the Prime Minister to renegotiate with the democratic parties in Northern Ireland to find something better. That means facing reality and marginalising Sinn Fein-IRA who have been exposed by their performance, by their continuation as a terrorist organisation, by their criminal activities in Northern Ireland and Colombia, by Castlereagh, by their crimes and shootings and by the lies, deceit and hypocrisy that come from the mouths of their spokesmen and women every day of the week.

Let us cut out the deceit and the lies and find a better way forward for a peace process for Northern Ireland. It is wanted by democrats and the majority of people, both Protestant and Catholic, and we are not getting it at present.

I am sorry that I had to raise this issue. All matters are important to our constituents; the smallest problems with hospitals or schools are every bit as important as the big constitutional issues in Ulster that I have been talking about. However, those issues affect the whole United Kingdom. The peace process is not working for the benefit of democracy in Northern Ireland.

The House may have to meet during the long recess. We are coming to a crunch so I hope that the House will meet again. This subject may be depressing but it will not go away. The Prime Minister must take hold of what he has let go in Northern Ireland—the trust and consent of democratic people.

11.48 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Before the House rises for the summer, I want to raise two issues. The first relates to the possible effects of recent changes to regulations governing local authority property searches. The second—to row in behind my parliamentary neighbours, my hon. Friends the Members for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for Southend, West (Mr. Amess)—is the siting of mobile telephone masts.

On 1 July this year, new regulations came into force governing property searches for house purchases. People already have the statutory right to paid access for such information under legislation such as the Local Land Charges Act 1975 and the Town and Country Planning Acts. A number of people pay solicitors or private search companies that specialise in such work to carry out property search inquiries on their behalf when buying a house. The new regulations require additional information to be made available as part of that process, particularly on the so-called CON 29 form, which is integral to the procedure. A number of local authorities, however, appear to be using the regulations as an excuse to restrict private search companies' access to their records, while offering to facilitate the work themselves for a fee.

That change threatens the livelihood of a number of successful personal search businesses which specialise in undertaking detailed property searches on behalf of prospective purchasers and now risk being shut out by the local authorities which hold the records. The Government have acknowledged that the issue is genuine, and set up a working group some months ago to draw up guidelines under which local authorities and personal search companies could agree a level playing field in light of the new regulations. Lengthy discussions, however, have still not produced a final set of workable guidelines on which both sides can agree, although the regulations are already in operation. As I understand it, that impasse has led to the prospect of legal action between personal search companies and local authorities.

If a suitable compromise cannot be reached, the matter may have to be referred to the Office of Fair Trading for an independent review and assessment of whether the local authorities are behaving anti-competitively in seeking to prevent small businesses, which are effectively competing for that work, from accessing records which are intended to be publicly available by law. That is an important matter, not only because it affects the livelihood of a number of successful small businesses across the country but because it threatens to delay the process of house purchase for purchasers and ultimately vendors too. I therefore urge Ministers to take the issue seriously and see what can be done in the near future to alleviate the problem and prevent the situation from deteriorating any further.

The siting of mobile telephone masts is of increasing concern in my constituency, as it is in many others. I have one particular case in Hockley, where local residents are very much opposed to a proposal to erect and operate a new mast in the middle of a residential area. Many Members will have experience of dealing with the problems generated by applications from mobile phone companies on the siting of telephone masts and will know of complaints and petitions from local residents strongly opposed to such proposals. They will also know that those protests are conducted against the backdrop of a set of planning rules which are heavily weighted in favour of the applicants. Masts under 15 m in height are classified as permitted development and local authorities have limited powers to object to applications, a point well made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford. They can concentrate only on aspects such as aesthetic qualities, visual amenity and environmental grounds. They are effectively prevented by planning policy guidance note 8—PPG8—from objecting to the siting of masts on health grounds, even though the vast majority of concerns relate to precisely that issue.

[Mr. Mark Francois]

Most of us are not qualified scientists, and I certainly do not feel qualified to proffer a definitive opinion on the health implications of such masts. However, because of the uncertainty surrounding the situation, the Government commissioned an eminent scientist, Professor Stewart, to look into the issue in great detail. He concluded that the evidence was not decisive either way and, as a result, recommended the use of the precautionary principle in the siting of such masts. In particular, he recommended that they should be situated away from schools and other places where young people, who may be more susceptible to the signals emitted by masts, might gather.

Crucially, however, the law has not kept pace with the implications of the Stewart report, and does not allow local authorities to adopt a precautionary approach of their own, effectively leaving them with Hobson's choice—sticking up for their residents and rejecting the application, knowing that it is highly likely that under the current guidelines, the mobile telephone companies will ultimately win on appeal, including the award of costs against the local authority, or giving in, very much against the wishes of the people who elected their councillors to represent them.

The roll-out of so-called third generation or 3G technology will only worsen the situation, with a requirement for yet more masts in residential areas. It is difficult to escape the suspicion that because the Government have accepted some £22 billion in payments from the third generation licence operators, they are particularly reluctant to change the law. However, I believe that the law does need to be changed to allow the precautionary principle recommended by the Government's own appointed expert to be taken into account, and to permit local authorities to take potential health effects fully into consideration when deciding on mobile phone mast applications. That is necessary not just to allay public fears, but to seek to restore integrity to the planning process, which is hopelessly lopsided when it tries to determine these issues.

I end by echoing the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) in support of the hospice movement, including Little Haven, which is in his constituency. It is a children's hospice, for which I had the privilege of opening a shop in Rayleigh just a few weeks ago. Hospices deserve much greater Government assistance for the very important work that they do. I add my support to the call tonight for them to receive more funding.

11.56 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I am delighted to take part in the debate. It was in danger of becoming an all-Essex affair, with so many Essex boys in the Chamber.

I want to raise an issue that is important for my constituency and for Oxfordshire as a whole: that of adult placements, the social service function that is a form of foster care for those over 18. It is provided under the aegis of social services in Oxfordshire, as it is around the country.

I cannot mention social services without making a brief reference to the funding crisis that Oxfordshire faces. "Crisis" is an over-used word, but I believe that it applies to social service spending in the county of Oxfordshire. Although we are spending £20 million more than what the Government think we should spend—the standard spending assessment—damaging cuts are being made to home care, respite centres and other support for children. Many of the most vulnerable people in our community are suffering from such cuts. We have launched a campaign in Oxfordshire, particularly among Conservative Members, to ask the Government to think again about the funding of social services. That campaign will continue. The Government must react and relent.

The issue that I intend to raise tonight is not funding, but regulation. I say to the Deputy Leader of the House on the Front Bench that it is a matter which the Government can sort out. Adult placements are a very small part of social services provision in Oxfordshire, as they are in the rest of the country. The budget in Oxfordshire is less than £1 million, and it is not being cut. There are 94 carers in Oxfordshire who take adult placements, and they look after some 250 users across the county.

Who are the users? Some are people who were previously in foster homes with families, who have now turned 18; some come from care homes; some have learning or other difficulties; and some have been referred from the mental health care trust. They are all people who have had a difficult start in life. Many cannot cope entirely on their own, and need love and care. The people who look after them are, in my view, heroes and heroines in our society.

The carers provide care and love in their homes—not in an institution, but in a family and a home setting. They provide an excellent service not only for those who are placed there—people who have had a bad start in life—but for all of us. Just consider the huge cost if all those people had to be in institutions of one kind or another. It is therefore a service that we should support.

So what is the problem? Quite simply, it is that the providers of adult placements have been made subject to the Care Standards Act 2000 and must register with the National Care Standards Commission. I do not believe that the Government intended to over-regulate the sector. Indeed, in one of their many documents, "Care Homes for Younger Adults", they say:

> "The Government is keen to support adult placement schemes and not to overburden individual carers attached to such schemes."

Those are fine words, but I am afraid that what has happened is quite the opposite. The adult placements have been completely overburdened and the situation will get worse, as I hope to show.

We all want the highest standards in social services and proper safeguards. We all know what can go wrong if the wrong sort of people are put in charge or there are no proper inspections. Having considered the problem, however, I believe that it is unnecessary for adult placement providers to register with the National Care Standards Commission and to be registered under the Care Standards Act 2000.

On Friday, I met social services representatives in Oxford. They explained what happens to people who volunteer to take on an adult placement. They must be assessed in a process that involves more than 40 hours of interviews. They supply references from two referees, one of whom is interviewed by social services. Their home is visited by social services and the decision about whether they can take an adult placement is decided by a panel.

It is right that the process is long, as those involved will be looking after vulnerable people in their own homes. Indeed, it resembles the process associated with adoption or becoming a foster parent, as it is very rigorous and involves the most rigorous checks. We can see that that already happens, even before we consider the Care Standards Act and the National Care Standards Commission—the new pieces of bureaucracy that the Government have put in the way of the adult placement service. That is why they are making a fundamental mistake. They are dealing not with care homes, but with the homes of ordinary people in which caring is taking place. Those two things are not the same.

I recognise that it is not enough to say that that extra bureaucracy is unnecessary; I want to show that it is damaging. I should like briefly to quote a letter that I received from social services:

> "As information on the National Minimum Standards for adult placements and associated regulations is becoming available to Adult Placement Carers in the county, this has been generating considerable anxiety about the degree of responsibility placed on them as individuals, and the degree of intrusiveness within their own family lives."

I repeat that these are ordinary people who are taking adult placements in their own homes. The letter continues:

> "One of the department's Adult Placement Carers has already resigned, and many more are considering doing so."

I must report that since that letter was written, we have lost six of our 94 carers. People who have been cared for in private homes will be put into institutions because of the new regulations and bureaucracy. Those are real people and they are subject to real effects. What is happening is not necessary and it is not progress.

I say to the Government that it is not too late to act and I shall suggest the remedy in a minute or two. First, I shall explain how the registration process and standards are causing the services to be withdrawn. I shall begin by pointing out the extent of the paperwork. Let us assume that we belong to a family that wants to take an adult placement. We have been in the process for many years and been inspected by social services, had the interviews and been in front of the panel. The matter has been agreed, but this new bureaucracy has suddenly come into our lives. First, we get a registration pack, which is about an inch thick. We then have to look through the national minimum standards for care homes, which are 75 pages long. We then receive the national minimum standards for adult placements, which are another 40 pages. As if that is not enough, we then have to read the care homes regulations, many of which apply to us—a further 27 pages. That is 142 pages landing on somebody's doormat. Imagine the impact on the families that have been providing adult placements for years, but suddenly face all that bureaucracy.

My next point concerns bureaucracy. At the end of the national minimum standards—I have been through them very carefully, as you would expect Mr. Deputy Speaker—there is a set of policies that someone accepting adult placements must accept. There are 33 of them. Let us remember that we are talking about a family home; it would have to accept policies on communicable diseases, infection control, equal opportunities and race equality, food safety and nutrition, individual planning and review, and whistleblowing—there has to be a policy on whistleblowing. An ordinary family must have policies on all those things.

Mr. Francois: That is madness.

Mr. Cameron: It is madness, as my hon. Friend says.

The third reason that all this is unnecessary and, more than that, damaging is the extra cost involved. I am talking about the extra cost not of bringing in the standards, but of registering. That used to be £1,000 per scheme, so the Oxfordshire scheme would have to register, and it would have cost £1,000. Under the new rules, each provider must register at a cost of £100. If there were 90 of them, that would cost £9,000. That is another extra cost for the providers of this very useful service.

Next, I shall deal with some of the policies and standards. I shall start with registration. Someone who wants to provide this service might already have been a foster parent for many years and their child might just have turned 18. They would get a document through their door from the National Care Standards Commission, which states:

> "Applicants must provide the documentation and statements asked for, they must be able to demonstrate that they are suitable to provide or manage the service, and the proposed service is suitable to meet the needs of those who will be using it."

That is tough stuff. They will have to do all those things. The next page of the document states:

> "To be sure that your service can meet the standards for registration, you need to refer to:
>
> Care Standards Act 2000
>
> Children Act 1989 . . .
>
> National Minimum Standards—Care Homes for Older People"—

and so it goes on and on. There are about 20 different long documents to which an ordinary family taking someone in would have to refer. I can think of nothing more likely to put off the people who provide that excellent service. There is evidence that that is already happening, and we are already seeing the service being withdrawn.

The rest of the standards—the minimum standards that the Government have produced—contain many sensible and good things. A lot are, I have to accept, a statement of the obvious. For example, standard 13 states:

> "The registered person supports the service user to have access to and choose from a range of appropriate leisure activities."

Those are statements of the obvious, and perhaps unnecessary if someone has already had their 40 hours from the social services department and been passed by a panel.

Some of the standards dwell slightly on the legalistic aspect and almost appear to be trying to set up a legal tension between the adult who is being placed and the person providing the service. There is a lot of talk about "Service User Plans", and I worry that the person being placed might feel that the process would be open to legal challenge. As I have said, however, it is not the standards that are wrong but the enormous amount of bureaucracy with which people providing this service will have to deal.

I say all this with some urgency, because I believe that things are going to get worse. I mentioned briefly the position of foster carers. Let us imagine foster carers with one or perhaps two children with them. When those children turn 18, the carers will suddenly have to register

[Mr. Cameron]

and do all those things. In one case in Oxfordshire, this has already happened; the parents have thrown in the towel and the child will have to go into an institution. It is a tragedy when that happens, because it is completely unnecessary.

The other reason I think things are going to get worse is—as Oxfordshire social services department has told me—that there are more standards to come. We shall have a whole new set of these things for domiciliary care—for when we are caring for someone in their home rather than in our own—and there will be yet another set of standards for day care.

Let us take the example of a registered provider who has adult placements. Let us assume that he or she cares for some people overnight in his or her own home, offers some day care, and sometimes goes to people's homes to provide domiciliary care for them. That provider will have to work through and be inspected under another three sets of standards.

The answer to this problem is simple: the Government should say that it is not necessary for adult placements to be registered under the Care Standards Act 2000, and that the Act does not apply to them. They should also not have to be inspected by the National Care Standards Commission, because they are already policed effectively by social services.

Let me give just one example—children's services. Each social services department's fostering scheme is regulated and registered by the new bodies, but that does not apply to each foster parent. Why can we not do the same in the case of adult placements? It makes sense. The services I have mentioned are dealt with in that way. Care homes, rightly, are registered nationally and must be inspected by the new bodies; foster parents are not. Surely the same should apply to adults.

I ask the deputy Leader of the House to consider this over the summer as a matter of urgency. I think that the Government have made a mistake. I do not think they meant to get it wrong; they simply opted for unnecessary over-regulation, which is damaging a service provided in Oxfordshire for some of the most vulnerable people—people who need our help. That is a tragedy that we could do without.

12.10 am

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I hope to make a speech that is rather different from those made by most Members tonight. Most of them have raised—as is their right—difficulties or worries relating to their constituencies. My purpose is different: I want to give the House some good news, which I hope all Members will use on behalf of male constituents in their early or middle sixties.

My constituent, Mr. Gordon Ashby, aged 63, falls into the group now entitled to the winter fuel payment following the ruling of the European Court on non-discrimination between the genders. On hearing that he might have a chance to claim the payment retrospectively, Mr. Ashby obtained the forms needed to enable him to make his application late in the spring of 2000. Unfortunately for him—and, obviously, for his wife—his wife became ill that year and had to go into hospital on several occasions.

Needless to say, Mr. Ashby's energies were mostly focused on looking after his wife. The forms that he had obtained in the spring were put aside until he had a better chance to fill them in and send them off. He did not send them off until July 2001, at which point the Benefits Agency turned down his claim on the ground that it was too late: it should have been returned by the statutory claim date of 31 March.

The form did not state that there was a cut-off date for the application. A letter accompanying the form sent to Mr. Ashby, dated 5 May 2000, merely said:

> "It would be helpful if you could return your completed claim form, along with any supporting documents, within 4 weeks."

Mr. Ashby allowed the four weeks to expire by a good many months, whereas the letter had merely said that it would be "helpful" for him to return the form.

When Mr. Ashby finally got round to claiming his payments in July 2001, he was amazed to find that he received his payments for the two previous years—because there was no cut-off date for those—but was denied a payment for 2000–01. It seemed logical to him that, after an initial payment had been made for earlier years, subsequent payments would be automatic, given that he had clearly reached the qualifying age. After all, sadly, none of us gets any younger as the years go by.

Mr. Ashby appealed against the decision. He went through the appeals system, right up to a tribunal. The tribunal, however—like all the earlier appeal bodies—upheld the original decision. Interestingly, in the decision made on 21 November 2001, the tribunal admitted that the explanatory note did not specify a deadline for returning the claim form. In dismissing the appeal, it nevertheless stated:

> "This might be an instance when an ex gratia payment is appropriate."

Sadly, despite that, no ex-gratia payment was made by the Benefits Agency.

In response to a letter from Mr. Ashby, who got in touch with me in January this year, I wrote to the Benefits Agency again on 5 February to raise his case. I received a reply from the Department for Work and Pensions on 14 March, but that simply reiterated the position as upheld on appeal—that Mr. Ashby's claim was disallowed because it was made after the statutory closing date.

Mr. Ashby was asked to send in the form within four weeks because it would be helpful. It was absurd that some months after that he should be told that there was a cut-off date. The next step was to take the matter to the parliamentary ombudsman, which we did on 8 April this year. By that stage, we had sent a number of letters, between us, to both the Benefits Agency and the Department; it was some eight months after the initial decision.

The ombudsman, as he always does, made some initial investigations and started talking to the Department. He has now sent me his final conclusions. I am delighted to say that he tells me that the Department for Work and Pensions has capitulated. Faced with the likelihood that the ombudsman would find this a clear case of maladministration, the Department has paid Mr. Ashby not only his £100 winter fuel payment, despite his late claim, but an extra, well-deserved £50 to compensate him for all the hassle that he has had to go through. A clear injustice has been rectified, although only after a year of trying.

Now we come to the real reason why I wanted to raise the issue. Potentially, there are implications for a very large number of other men of a similar age, who may have been misled by the Department's failure to make it clear that there was a closing deadline for claims—a cut-off point for sending applications. I hope that we can have an assurance from the Minister tonight that he will get the relevant Department to write to all the other men whose claims have been turned down because they were late, telling them that they can have their payments after all.

The Government are always keen to claim that they will ensure that everyone who should get benefit payments of any sort does so when they are due. They must know by now who all the claimants are who have been refused winter fuel payments because they made a late application for the years concerned. I urge the Government to put their money where their mouth is and to send the overdue payments to all those who so far have been wrongly denied.

12.18 am

Patrick Mercer (Newark): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). I am sorry that the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) is no longer in the House as I thought his speech was both clear and extremely powerful. I hope to be able to follow him on an issue that is not a local matter but concerns the whole of the nation—probably the whole of the world, I regret to say.

It is clear that the much vaunted and signalled campaign in Iraq seems to be grinding inevitably into action. The United States President has made it fairly clear in speeches to West Point and other establishments that he intends to go to war in Iraq. With the departure of United States troops in Saudi Arabia, their seeking to go to other countries such as Qatar, and the rapprochement between America and Jordan, it is clear that American plans are well advanced but it raises the question: exactly where does this country stand? What decisions have been made by this country? What will be the fate of this country's men and women when and if we go to war alongside America?

I want to refer to three quotes from the Prime Minister. The first is from March this year:

> "This is not something that just America is talking about. It is something we have to deal with."

The second quote is also from March:

> "I think we have got to act . . . if we don't act, we may find out too late the potential for destruction."

Only last week, the Prime Minister told the Liaison Committee that the lesson of 11 September is that if there is a

> "gathering threat or danger, let us deal with it before it materialises, rather than afterwards."

It seems clear to me that our Prime Minister has made a decision that we are going to act in concert with the United States of America in a war against Iraq. In fact, our forces are already in action against Iraq. Every day, our pilots risk their lives flying over Iraq. Every day, they come under fire to a greater or lesser extent.

Our senior military officers have made it clear to naval and other audiences that war is expected in the near future. The commanding officer designate's course, run at the school of infantry for majors and lieutenant-colonels who are going on to command battalions and regiments, was told by a senior military source that the officers must be prepared for active service within a few months.

Our troops are in the process of withdrawing from Afghanistan. I am delighted, and I pay tribute to the work done by 45 Commando Royal Marines and by the second battalion of the Parachute Regiment and the first battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment over there. The soldiers and marines are now back in this country, regrouping, we assume, for further operations.

We also hear that our garrison in the Balkans is to be withdrawn, or at least heavily run down. What exactly are the plans for Macedonia? The NATO mandate for Operation Amber Fox runs out at the end of October. It is widely supposed that the Euro-army—the European security and defence policy troops—will get their first outing at that stage. Exactly where will British involvement lie? Currently, it is planned that British numbers in Macedonia and the southern part of the Balkans will fall. Should a Euro-group go into Macedonia, surely that will mean that British numbers have to increase. That cannot fit easily with what lies ahead, one assumes, in Iraq.

We also hear that reservists have been nominated to take over from regular soldiers in Afghanistan. To my best knowledge, that has not happened since a company group of Territorials took over work in the Falklands in the late 1980s. It is a wholly unusual move for reservists to be used in a theatre that is still highly dangerous.

I want to echo the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). I am a walking example of the work of the Royal Hospital at Haslar. I may not be a very convincing instance of what it can do, but it certainly kept me up and running. I am worried by the state of the defence medical services, and he perhaps rather undersold the problem. If we are going to war in Iraq, we should have 14 field ambulances, but we have only three that are currently operational. The newspapers, at least, seem to think that a conflict is forthcoming—hence all their words about doctors and other medics standing by.

Last week, the Defence Secretary announced plans for additional defence spending. By anybody's estimate, it is a considerable tranche of money for the armed forces, not just for the war against terrorism, surely, but for whatever operations lie ahead.

I do not want to take a stance for or against the operation, but I believe that there are questions that the House needs answers to before our troops take part. For instance, what will be the size and shape of the coalition? Will only the United States and Great Britain take part? I hope not.

What form of initial settlement will there be in the middle east, before our troops sally forth into Iraq? What initiatives will come from America—and, indeed, from the Prime Minister—to solve this most difficult of problems? How will moderate Arab opinion be affected? What exactly is Iraq's involvement with weapons of mass destruction? I hear a lot and I am told a lot, but there is not actually much to see. Is there a real connection? Do we know, before the inspectors are allowed back in, what Iraq's potential is to strike with weapons of mass destruction?

What are the links between Iraq and terrorist organisations, if any? We have been told that the links between Iraq and al-Qaeda are largely assumed; they are

[Patrick Mercer]

not proven. What of the regime change of which we hear so much? If Saddam Hussein is indeed toppled, who will follow him? What treasure will it take from this country, and from the United States and the other allies, to prop up that regime? What guarantee have we that the next ruler will be any better than the one toppled?

I posit these questions for the simple reason that the House and the nation needs to know the answer to them before we take such measures any further. I understand that the alliance may well be sabre-rattling on a grand scale, and I applaud that. Bringing about defeat without destruction strikes me as both sensible and laudable, but I want to know the answers to these questions, and the House and the nation have a right to know them.

The last time that British troops were committed not to peacekeeping but to combat operations—in other words, when we sent 45 Commando to Afghanistan—the House was not consulted. I believe that that was wrong, and if we are to go down the route of war in Iraq, this House and the nation should have the chance to voice their opinion.

12.27 am

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): It is a pleasure to be able to address two issues. One is of interest to only a couple of my constituents, and the other is of interest to all of them—and, indeed, to the welfare of many of our fellow citizens on the mainland.

Mr. X, who is a United Kingdom citizen, met Mr. Y, who is a foreign national, on holiday in March 1998. They kept in touch, met again by arrangement and decided to live together. They decided that Mr. Y would come to England to study and to improve his English, and made such arrangements. Mr. Y entered this country in March 1999 on a student visa, and was given leave to remain until June 2000. Since his arrival, he has lived with Mr. X and has continued his studies.

In June 2000, Mr. Y applied for leave to remain on the basis of a subsisting relationship with a British citizen. His application was rejected, and an appeal was launched. It was rejected because, at the time that it was made—20 June 2000—Mr. X and Mr. Y had been living together in England for only 15 months. By the time of its rejection—28 September 2000—they had been living together for 18 months. They are more than able to maintain themselves, without recourse to the public purse. Four days later—2 October 2000—new immigration rules took effect. They set out 10 requirements to be met by an applicant seeking leave to remain as the unmarried partner of a British citizen.

In this case, nine of the 10 requirements were met. The only one that was not—immigration rule paragraph 295D(vi)—requires that

> "the appellant and his partner have been living together in a relationship akin to marriage which has subsisted for two years or more".

The adjudicator had no problem with the meaning of "two years"; the problem was when that was to be assessed. At the time of the adjudication, the relationship had persisted for two years and seven months. The adjudicator asked for specific assistance in identifying authority, in terms of when that period should be measured, but writes:

> "None has been forthcoming . . . I have found no authority on the issue myself."

The Home Office concedes that this is a genuine relationship. The couple have numerous letters of support from friends, neighbours, family and employers; theirs is clearly an exclusive, stable and loving relationship. The adjudicator makes the point that Mr. Y could have sought to extend his student visa, waited a few more months and then applied in March 2001. The adjudicator says:

> "I fail to see how, in good conscience, he should be penalised for rejecting such an easy subterfuge . . . Were he to apply now . . . I would expect him to be successful."

He points out that the decision was made only a matter of days before the European convention on human rights came into force. Finally, the adjudicator says:

> "It ill behoves the Government to compel couples to engage in subterfuge in order to comply with Home Office criteria . . . I would be ashamed as a representative of the British system of justice to think the Secretary of State would feel justified in taking a narrow and pointless view of this circumstance."

The implication is that ne would be doing so, were he to reject the application.

I wrote to Lord Rooker on 6 February on those two points. I wrote again on 18 March and again on 1 May, but I have received no reply. I wrote on 9 May asking for a meeting, but I have had no reply, despite the fact that I was supported by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). In a letter dated 17 May, he says that he believes that

> "a gross injustice is being done here."

I wrote to the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration on 24 June, and the right hon. Gentleman wrote on 25 June, asking for a meeting, and again I have had no reply. Still I have heard nothing.

Mr. X and Mr. Y have been very patient, persistent and wholly honourable in their use of the immigration procedures. I urge the Minister to ask his hon. Friends to get to grips with their responsibilities and make the necessary decisions.

The second issue is a much more public matter. On 8 March, a drug smuggler was jailed for 26 years for leading an operation to bring a record £90 million consignment of cocaine into Britain by yacht. He and five of his accomplices were caught by 150 Customs officers on the Isle of Wight after the smugglers' landing was hampered by storms at the end of a 3,000-mile voyage across the Atlantic from the Caribbean. They had planned to unload 879 lb of cocaine on a private beach at Orchard Bay house near Ventnor, but the weather and the failure of their outboard motor forced them to deposit their cargo on another beach at Windy bay, about a mile away. They were trapped and arrested after members of the gang had spent hours carrying large bales of cocaine along a treacherous cliff-top path to their destination.

Officials knew about the smuggling because the men had been kept under surveillance by excise men from the Cowes Customs house, among others. I understand that the smuggler had paid £657,000 for the Orchard Bay property. Customs officers on the island had been tipped off that something big was about to happen, and Operation Eyeful, which was a joint investigation with the National Crime Squad, began. It resulted in the successful apprehension of five smugglers.

The right hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) was customs Minister at the time and he welcomed the conviction, saying:

> "This is an excellent result for Customs and the National Crime Squad and demonstrates that by working abroad as well as at home, we can have a huge impact on class A drugs in the UK."

Therefore it is extraordinary that it should now be proposed that the customs facility on the island should be withdrawn to the mainland. That proposal has met with astonishment and incredulity from all quarters on the island. It is inconceivable that people who are not based on the island could have access to the intelligence that is required in that small community. Those who turn up from the mainland in a motor car with London number plates are unlikely to be as effective as island-based Customs officers in obtaining the necessary information about what is going on. That is the first point.

Secondly, Cowes is in the process of developing still further as the world's centre of yachting, and a great deal of effort is being made to build up the businesses there. The Customs officers in the Customs house do a bit of all sorts of different things, some of it related directly to Customs and some to immigration because there is no one else there. They provide Customs clearance for boats, which is especially important during the yachting season. They deal with all non-EU traffic and some intra-EU commercial traffic needs for Customs documentation, and they provide import and export document processing, which enables local businesses to have manual endorsement. Finally, the officers carry out checks on movements of small craft and light aeroplanes, using small boats. That is an important role and not one that can easily be done from a base on the mainland.

Thirdly, much smuggling still happens in the UK, particularly along the south coast through what are called non-canalised points of entry. It is easy to know when people are smuggling when they are going through channels that are conveniently marked red and green in places such as Dover. It is rather less easy to be sure of what is going on along the 57 miles of the coastline of my constituency. The Lord Lieutenant of the island, Mr. Christoper Bland, wrote in the *Isle of Wight County Press:*

> "I have no doubt we should hang on to the presence"—

that is, of Customs and Excise—

> "on the Isle of Wight. The island has traditionally been a haven for smuggling and I do not think that anything has changed. It used to be alcohol but now it is drugs and you need people on the ground to combat that. You cannot make arrests electronically."

This is especially apposite in the light of what my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said.

That has been added to by the high sheriff of the island, Anne Springman, who reminds me that in the old days the high sheriff was Customs and Excise and a great many other things besides. She points out that the Isle of Wight has been

> "a high-risk area for smuggling over the last 500 years."

That has been the position, if not for longer. A number of Mrs. Springman's forebears have been high sheriff of the island over that period. She should know. She says:

> "To remove the presence of Customs and Excise Officers for any reasons seems to be absolute madness and leaves the Island as the unguarded gateway into the UK."

It is not only in the interests of my constituents that I am asking for the Government to take action to ensure that the Customs house in Cowes remains open. That is also in the interests of citizens throughout the kingdom. I ask the Minister to promise before the House rises for the recess that the Customs house will still be open when the recess ends.

12.38 am

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I have no illusions at this hour that the House is anxious to hear what I have to say about the debate. Having listened to most of the debate, I know that questions were rightly addressed to the Minister, and colleagues will want to listen [illegible] his words. However, it has been noticeable that a number of issues have been raised again and again during the debate by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. It would be convenient—it might even help the Minister—if I took a few minutes to put these issues into their different categories.

The issue of regeneration was raised in different ways by the hon. Members for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes). The hon. Member for Hull, North asked, interestingly, for the demolition of a number of properties to aid a regeneration project, while the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire talked about the closure of a mine and a jobcentre.

The reason why those matters are important to hon. Members and their constituencies and the context in which they were proposed is that it would appear that the Government's regeneration efforts are not having the desired effect on the ground in the areas where that should be happening. It is therefore absolutely appropriate for hon. Members to raise the issue to try to ensure that what happens on the ground reflects the rhetoric that we hear nationally.

A similar thing occurs if one considers what I have broadly defined as planning issues. That definition subsumes housing and telecommunications masts, which more than one of my hon. Friends mentioned. I noted that the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) and my hon. Friends the Members for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) and for Castle Point (Bob Spink) expressed their anxieties—all in their different ways—about the possible impact of the recent rather fuzzy and ill-defined announcements made by the Deputy Prime Minister on housing, for example, and about the likely impact on my hon. Friends' constituencies in particular.

At the same time, very real concerns are now arising in my constituency about the apparently uncontrolled development of telecommunications masts—something with which the Government claim to have dealt, although it is perfectly obvious from what my hon. Friends have said that the issue is not being dealt with on the ground and that it is still causing very considerable worry.

The subject of roads came up over and again. My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) was the first to mention them. The A303 was then mentioned by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), but other hon. Members claimed some interest in the A303, and my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) then connected the A30 to that.

[Mr. Eric Forth]

I know that part of the country only slightly, but I drove down those roads recently. That was a very pleasurable experience for me, but it is perfectly obvious that it is not always a pleasurable experience. The Minister has an interest in that matter as well, so I would expect him to give a very full and informed reply about the A30, A303 and connected roads because his constituents want to hear about it, too. That matter will therefore claim the particular attention of the House.

Health—in particular, hospices—was mentioned by a number of my hon. Friends. In particular, my hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point, for Rayleigh and for Tiverton and Honiton mentioned hospices. I have a constituency interest in the issue, and it interests and worries many hon. Members because there is a feeling that the hospice movement has been shortchanged by the Government. We are repeatedly told that huge amounts of money are going into the national health service, but we would like to hear how much of it is going to hospices, because they must surely have an equal claim on the moneys that go to health and other areas—not least, to the defence medical services, which were mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) and for Newark (Patrick Mercer).

It would appear that those services are now in a state of critical decline. Again, given the boastful nature of what Ministers have said recently about the defence budget generally, I would hope that the Minister could give some reassurance that defence medical services will receive some of that money.

Under the heading of constituency issues, but rather unusually as this stands on its own, was the point about arms exports made by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). Again, it appears that the Government are getting into a real muddle about arms exports. The issue is certainly global, but my hon. Friend asked some very specific questions about two specific cases, and I hope that the Minister can give an assurance that they will at least be considered in the DTI and dealt with properly.

Schools were a subject raised by my hon. Friends the Members for West Derbyshire and for Tiverton and Honiton and by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney). There are real local problems with regard to schools. What seems to be happening is that schools are being obstructed and bedevilled by what the Opposition consider to be the centralising tendency. I am delighted to see the Minister for School Standards sitting in his place. I suspect that he is probably here to answer the short Adjournment debate, but I am glad to see him because he should know that bureaucracy is causing a number of real problems in schools, so I hope that he will study this debate tomorrow and get his official to do so.

Mrs. Browning: I think it fair to say that it was the Minister for School Standards, now in his place on the Treasury Bench, who after two months declined to see me to discuss the important issue of Uffculme school.

Mr. Forth: I am shocked to hear that. I cannot remember in my five years as an Education Minister ever refusing to meet a Member of Parliament, and I hope that it is not going to become the practice of Ministers, even keen, fresh, newly appointed Ministers—in fact, especially not them—to refuse to meet my hon. Friend. I am sure that it was an oversight and that the Minister has made a careful note—in fact, I see him doing so. I expect that my hon. Friend will get an invitation tomorrow—now that I look at the clock, today—to meet him.

I shall briefly mention what I describe as more generic policy issues that were raised by several hon. Members, confining myself to those who have had the courtesy to return to the Chamber for the winding-up speeches. We heard two particularly knowledgeable and deeply felt speeches from the hon. Members for Strangford (Mrs. Robinson) and for South Antrim (David Burnside). I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office listened carefully to their speeches. Whenever our colleagues from Northern Ireland speak, we should all listen to what they say.

The hon. Member for South Antrim made the point that those of us who represent English constituencies should be careful in our pronouncements about matters relating to Northern Ireland, and we should listen that much more carefully when we are given both an update and an analysis by Northern Ireland Members, especially in these most difficult times. I am sure that the Parliamentary Secretary listened to the points made about the Belfast agreement, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and the current extremely stressful circumstances in Northern Ireland. This debate provided an opportunity to get those messages across.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) spoke about a far more positive matter, the Commonwealth games, to which I am sure we are all eagerly looking forward, and Manchester's success in mounting a world-class sports event. Although, as a London Member, I slightly regret the comparison that he made with London, we have to acknowledge that the London aspect of our national sporting effort has gone badly and repeatedly wrong. I wish that the Government could engineer the same success for London—and, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, for Birmingham and this land's other great cities—as we have happily seen achieved in Manchester. I hope that the lesson can be learned and that we can build on it, and that Manchester can build on its success following the Commonwealth games.

Care homes were discussed by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Witchell) and others. The Parliamentary Secretary will understand that so repeatedly is that matter being raised now that it is one to which the Government must turn their attention. We do not want spin or the sort of silly assertions that have been made that everything is all right and there is more money in the Budget; our point is that it is the regulatory regime that is driving care homes out of business and denying places to elderly folk who need them so much.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark took us into foreign and defence policy, raising several important questions about our potential involvement in Iraq and Macedonia. Those matters will be raised more frequently in future, because there is a feeling of anxiety, which was reflected in my hon. Friend's remarks. With the House about to go into the long summer recess, we are all nervous that some of those matters might be progressed rather rapidly without the House being able to have any input. I hope that the Minister will be able to say something to us about that. At the very least, Members on both sides of the House would want to be reassured that such matters will not be dealt with in the absence of any parliamentary input or involvement. The subject causes great anxiety among Members of all parties—not least, I suspect, among Government Members.

If my hon. Friends will forgive me, I think I have said quite enough. I have tried to do justice to a long, good debate; I counted 27 contributions to it. The sheer scale of interest in and contribution to the debate has, if nothing else, fully justified the stance that we on the Opposition Benches took in opposing the Government's attempt to restrict this debate to a pathetic and minuscule three hours. I therefore hope that the Government, and the Minister in particular, as he has influence in these matters, will have realised the interest in such Adjournment debates and will from now on follow this example and allow the debate to find its own length.

Having said that, I look forward along with the rest of the House to hearing the Minister's detailed reply to the points made in the debate.

12.51 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): Many issues have been raised during 28 speeches and several hours of what has been a very civilised and highly interesting debate that has ranged from the future of Cyprus to the difficulty of finding health insurance for bees. I shall do my best to respond to as many issues as I can. If I am unable to do so, I shall pass hon. Members' comments to ministerial colleagues and ask for a full response to be sent to them as soon as possible.

I congratulate all those who have played their part in contributing to this evening's debate. All Members present have been prepared to stay late and wait—some for a long time—for the chance to speak on behalf of their constituents, which I hope will be appreciated.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) spoke at some length and with a depth of knowledge about regeneration in his constituency and especially the problems faced at the moment by Orchard Park. Many of us can quote examples—I can certainly do so from my constituency—of very welcome regeneration schemes over the past few years. He specifically asked about the problems with the delay of demolition of housing in Orchard Park, and asked me to draw that to Ministers' attention. I am very happy to do so.

My hon. Friend also had some words of criticism for the Liberal Democrat local council, which he felt had failed to use the LIFT scheme to improve health care in the area, which would have brought not just health benefits but a number of other benefits in a series of public sector areas. That is another question that I shall be happy to draw to Ministers' attention on his behalf.

The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) has been particularly assiduous in attending the whole of the debate given that, as I understand it, this is sadly her last Parliament, so she is not even seeking re-election. She made a number of points, mentioning along with other Members the funding formula for local government. I stress that a consultation process is being conducted; we are all faced in our various local authority areas with a number of options. I urge hon. Members to make their feelings plain to the Government during the consultation process.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has assured Members that there will be a chance to debate that matter as soon as we return in October. I am sure that Members will want to make the points that they have made today at greater length then. I simply point out that some of the changes in the margins about which people are worried pale into insignificance given the enormous overall increases in public investment that this Government have promised.

The right hon. Lady made a number of specific points about her local health service. I should point out to her that in March 1997, 31,000 patients had been waiting for more than a year. That figure had come down to 20,000 by May this year. The number of those waiting for more than 15 months was 5,000 in 1997, and was down to 334 by May 2002. As the right hon. Lady probably knows, the Government are committed to reducing waiting times to six months by 2005.

The right hon. Lady raised a number of issues: whether the Haslemere community hospital was secure; that people wanted a local care centre in Godalming; and whether the A3 Hindhead tunnel scheme was on time. I shall be happy to obtain responses from Ministers to those specific questions on her behalf. As with health, the transport decisions that she wants for her constituency depend on investment. As I am sure she and Opposition Members are aware, their party is not committed to matching our spending, except on defence and international development.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) spoke about a serious problem in his constituency—empty houses. He told us that he had raised the issue 300 times. A number of us on both sides of the House would be grateful for his problem. I hope that he was encouraged by the statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister last week and by the fact that investment in housing will be £4 billion, compared with only £1.5 billion when Labour came to power in 1997. The Government are aware of the problem. We all realise that housing has moved rapidly up the political agenda.

My hon. Friend also asked for a public inquiry into a court case in his constituency. The Government do not want to comment on the case until the outcome of the police disciplinary action is known, but I shall certainly pass on his concerns to the Ministers responsible.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) raised a number of points, including foot and mouth, which we discussed at some length earlier after the statement. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is well aware of the feeling in the House that there should be a fuller debate when we return in the autumn.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome spoke about the funding formula, which I have already touched on. I urge him to make his feelings plain as part of the consultation process. Like a number of other Members, he referred to the problems in the care home sector. He and several other Members were kind enough to acknowledge that the main problem is the level of fees, rather than—as the Leader of the Opposition suggested recently—the new standards that are being introduced. The best solution to the fee increases is more investment. That investment, too, has not so far been matched by the Opposition. Indeed when we increased real-terms investment in social services by 6 per cent. this year, it was opposed by the official Opposition.

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

The hon. Gentleman was the first of several Members who spoke about road schemes in the south-west. He spoke about the A303 and about the A350 which runs between his constituency and Taunton. He will be aware that the regional assembly in the south-west has rejected the main premise of the SWARMMS report and I am sure that the Government will listen with great care to what the assembly has said.

I was not sure from the hon. Gentleman's speech whether his point about the Sparkford to Ilchester section of the A303 was a local or a trunk spending issue. If it is a local issue, it is for his county council to order its priorities. I hope, however, that he welcomes the extra investment that the Government are making in transport infrastructure in general and in roads in particular.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) did the House a great service by reminding us that the Commonwealth games start shortly and that they are based in his constituency. Our thanks go to him for all his work both as leader of the council and as a Member of Parliament to secure Manchester's bid. The games are a huge logistical exercise, but I am sure that Manchester will meet the challenge extremely well.

It has been a great summer for British sports people in the World cup and at Wimbledon. To a certain extent, the achievements of our athletes so far have been under-reported, but I hope that Manchester will make up for that. I am sure that my ministerial colleagues will have heard what my hon. Friend said about his hope that in future Manchester may be an Olympic host.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) raised local government finance and the redrawing of the boundary of Ecclesbourne school in his constituency. He said that both the city and county councils agreed with local people, but that that decision was thrown out by the adjudicator and there was no appeal. I was surprised to learn that an appeal could not go to the Secretary of State, and I shall certainly ask my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to look into the matter, as the situation is surely not unique to the hon. Gentleman's constituency. There may be good reasons why a system was set up in which politicians are removed from decisions about education, but nevertheless that is strange, so I promise to look into it on the hon. Gentleman's behalf.

The hon. Gentleman raised the problem of the A50 link road in his constituency, which he acknowledged had brought benefits as well as concomitant problems. That tends to be a complication with new roads and improved roads—one problem is solved, but another is created. The hon. Gentleman, like my neighbour, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), raised the problem of a noisy concrete road surface. I shall come on to the specifics of the A30 a bit later, but I remind both Members that those roads were ordered in that form of concrete by the previous Government, and that this Government promised to get rid of them and have come up with the investment to do so. I am sorry that the time scale is not quick enough for the hon. Member for West Derbyshire, but we have pledged to replace those noisy concrete roads and shall do so. I will also make sure that the Minister responsible is aware of his concern about national parks and the representation, in his case, of the Peak district, where many different local authorities are involved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) raised the significant problems faced by many of our constituents in connection with obtaining visitors visas in India and Pakistan. He rightly said that that is a huge operation as it is currently the wedding season, when traditionally there are large numbers of applications. In the current tense stand-off between India and Pakistan, the measures that the Government have had to introduce have had a serious impact on our ability to deliver a good service. My hon. Friend made the point that we have set up a drop box system, and people who have already visited the United Kingdom should not experience enormous problems coming here again. However, there is a genuine problem for people who have not applied for a visa before, and I shall certainly speak to my colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to see whether the situation can be improved as the tension between those two countries eases. It is, however, the responsibility of any Foreign Secretary to ensure that the safety of British staff and their dependants is paramount. The situation between India and Pakistan has been worrying and it is by no means over yet. My hon. Friend mentioned that he would meet my successor at the Foreign Office on Wednesday, and I am sure that he will raise his concerns with him then.

My hon. Friend also raised the problem of travel advice. I agree that it is incredibly important that the Foreign Office update its travel advice quickly when a situation changes—there is no point in people being deterred from visiting a place when it is perfectly safe to do so. Again, however, the Government have a responsibility to try to maximise the safety of British citizens.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of the Hamilton estate, an expanding estate in his constituency, and planning gain. I am sure that my ministerial colleagues in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will have heard what he said, but I shall certainly write to them to pass on his concerns. Many of us have probably had a similar experience in our constituencies—we feel that local authorities have not extracted as much as they might have done from developers or that the developers have not delivered what they promised. I hope that the position will be improved by some of the changes that the Government are proposing to introduce.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) raised a number of issues concerning local firms in his constituency that had experienced difficulty in rapidly obtaining export licences for equipment. That is a serious issue, particularly where local firms are put under threat. The hon. Gentleman will understand that more than one Government Department takes such decisions, which sometimes leads to delay. The Government must adhere to the consolidated criteria. The hon. Gentleman will recall that in the Quadripartite Committee report to which he referred, criticisms were made that the Government had been too lax in their granting of export licences to India and Pakistan during the period in question.

It is important that the Government pay attention to those criteria, but it is also important that decisions be made quickly, even if they are negative. Most firms, rather than being kept in limbo, would like to know quickly whether an export licence is likely to be granted to them.

On the specific licences to which the hon. Gentleman referred, I will ask the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign Office to give him a response as quickly as possible. I know that the Prime Minister is extremely keen that the process be speeded up and that Departments keep to the guidelines that they have set themselves. We must also be aware of the concerns in many parts of the House that equipment should not be exported to parts of the world where it could be used in contravention of the guidelines to which we have signed up.

The hon. Member for Christchurch raised the problem of disease in bees, and the problems that one of his constituents had encountered in organising a voluntary insurance scheme for bee-keepers. The Government welcome the efforts of Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. to encourage bee-keepers to play their part in the identification of notifiable bee diseases, and to bring any suspected incidence of those to the attention of the Central Science Laboratory's national bee unit. Because the fragmented nature of the sector makes concerted bee health action difficult for bee-keepers, we are spending about £1.4 million in England this year on our bee health programme.

The payment of filing fees is the responsibility of the Financial Services Authority, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said. I believe that the FSA has consulted the finance industry on several occasions concerning its fee-raising arrangements. Payments of insurance contributions to the financial services compensation scheme, which was created under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, are a matter for the FSCS. The payments are applicable to all DTI-approved insurance companies. I understand that the secretary of Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. has been in correspondence with the FSCS about the matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) was exercised about the takeover of a local firm. If I remember rightly, he said that the firm had closed as a result. He was also concerned about the general health of manufacturing industry in his constituency. Manufacturing productivity is 12 per cent. higher now than it was in 1997. What matters most to manufacturing industry is a stable economy, a good regional policy and infrastructure investment, and the Government are strongly committed to all three.

My hon. Friend raised the matter of the Eckington Moorside mine and the fact that it was under threat. The Government are aware of the position and we are urgently considering possible solutions to the immediate problems of Moorside and to the general problems of the coal industry in relation to employer liability insurance. There are no quick-fix answers, but we are examining the matter closely. We are monitoring the generic problem faced by a number of sectors in securing employers liability insurance. My hon. Friend also raised the problem of the Eckington jobcentre being under threat. I will happily take that up with the Minister responsible.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) was the first of several hon. Members to raise the problem of mobile telephone masts. He referred to the Stewart report. There is some misunderstanding about that. Although there has been a report, Professor Stewart is still conducting his investigations. As and when he comes up with more hard-and-fast research, the Government will release it. This is a difficult issue for Government. A balance must be struck between consumers' desire to own mobile telephones and the environmental and possible health impacts of telephone masts. From the number of hon. Members who raised the issue tonight, it is clearly one about which our constituents are extremely concerned. I shall certainly draw their concerns to the attention of the Minister responsible.

At a recent meeting in the constituency of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton—I think that it occurred in Tiverton town hall and that she may have helped to set it up—one of the members of the committee working under Professor Stewart, Professor Lawrie Challis, said:

> "When you look at the intensity from a mast 50m away, which is the worst position for you to be in, the actual intensity . . . is 5,000 times less than that from a mobile phone."

Mrs. Browning: For the record, I think that the Minister will find that the research that is being done after the Stewart report is not on the safety of masts, but on that of mobile phones, which is very different.

Mr. Bradshaw: I think that the hon. Lady will find that Professor Stewart is not restricting himself to the safety of telephones, but I shall certainly correct myself if I am wrong by writing to her.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford also referred to housing, which was mentioned by a number of hon. Members—especially those representing constituencies in the south-east that are likely to be affected by some of the announcements that the Government made last week. Again, a balance needs to be struck between his desire to protect the environment of his constituency and the need for affordable housing, which I am sure is shared by his constituents. Most hon. Members recognise that we have a challenge on our hands with regard to housing, that more housing will be needed and that some difficult decisions will have to be made. However, I shall certainly pass on his particular concerns to the Minister who is responsible for those matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) referred to education funding and pointed out that Stafford was hoping to do well in the Britain in Bloom competition. I am sure that we all share his hopes in that regard. On his point about education funding, as I have mentioned, consultations are currently under way, and I am sure that he will stand up vigorously for his constituency. He also commended the parliamentary education unit and paid tribute to the work that it does, especially in the summer. He might like to know that I shall be involved in some of the unit's work by participating in a question and answer session, as I always do. I join him in paying tribute to the excellent work of the unit.

My hon. Friend offered to provide all hon. Members with a citizenship pack. That would be extremely useful; I know that many of our constituents and schools are very excited about the prospect of beginning the compulsory citizenship courses when they are introduced in September. I hope that hon. Members will take the opportunity to visit their schools and engage with young people. All the research shows that when MPs personally engage with young people, they tend to take a rather more positive view of politics and political engagement.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), in what I thought was an uncharacteristically partisan speech, gave us a catalogue

[Mr. Bradshaw]

of misery that her constituents were apparently suffering as a result of the Government having it in for her constituency. I cannot believe that her constituency has not benefited from some of the measures that the Government have introduced, such as the stable economy, rising living standards and increased investment in her schools, the NHS and other public services. She made similar points about local government formulae, which I hope I have already addressed. She also raised the very difficult issue of problems caused by travellers. I hope that she recognises that the Government have tightened up that issue already and are planning to take further measures that will make it easier to deal with travellers who cause problems.

The hon. Lady graciously acknowledged that burglary and robbery were down in her constituency, but highlighted a problem that a number of hon. Members outside the Met area have been having with police numbers, as they are finding that police officers are being attracted to the Met by the inducements that are being offered to solve its recruitment problems. The Home Secretary acknowledged that problem in making his statement to the House about the comprehensive spending review, so I can assure the hon. Lady that he is aware of it. I remind her that crime has fallen nationally by 23 per cent. since 1997, whereas it doubled under the previous Conservative Government. As with health, education and all the other public services, we need to invest—if we are to get crime down, we need to invest in the police. I point out to her that her party is not committed to matching our spending plans on the police.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) raised a number of Home Office issues, all of them very important. She wanted an extension for antisocial behaviour orders, and reform of rape law, about which she has spoken eloquently in the House before. She was also concerned about fireworks, as are we all. The Government are considering what further measures can be introduced to control fireworks and replica guns. I shall be happy to take up all those issues with the Home Office on behalf of my hon. Friend.

The hon. Members for Strangford (Mrs. Robinson) and for South Antrim (David Burnside) both spoke, understandably, on the future of the Belfast agreement. They spoke with passion and conviction, representing the views of at least some of their constituents, and I am sure that the Ministers responsible will read their comments with interest. There will be a statement—on Wednesday this week, I believe—by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and I hope that the hon. Members will avail themselves of the opportunity to be here and to make the same points to him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) made a passionate speech about the behaviour of oil companies in the developing world, and made specific allegations about the behaviour of BP in Colombia, based, I believe, on an article that he had read in a *Labour Left Briefing*. I shall not respond directly to those allegations, because I was not aware of them before. I shall, however, draw them to the attention of the Foreign Office Minister responsible for that part of the world, and get him to respond to them. I would say, however, that, in my experience, the role of the British oil companies in the world is a responsible one. It is not in their interests to upset local populations or Governments. From my experience in the parts of the world for which I was responsible before I took on this job, the oil companies do a very good job. They are welcomed by local people and by Governments, and they have a very high consciousness of the need to act responsibly. I shall certainly look into the specific allegations that my hon. Friend has raised, however.

The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) raised the issue of the Royal Hospital, Haslar—I hope that that is the correct pronunciation. The Ministry of Defence has provided me with a statement on this matter. It has decided to close the Royal Hospital because

> "the hospital does not have sufficient patient volume and casemix to be viable as a stand-alone facility."

The Ministry has also said that

> "Haslar will not close until the new MOD Hospital Unit is opened at the Queen Alexandra Hospital, Cosham. The MOD Hospital Unit will form part of the redevelopment of the Queen Alexandra Hospital by the Portsmouth Hospitals Trust . . . Final closure of Haslar will depend on progress on the redevelopment project, which is currently expected to be completed towards the end of 2007. The establishment of an NHS Diagnostic and Treatment Centre at Haslar does not affect the decision to close the hospital as a military facility."

All that might already be known to the hon. Gentleman, but I will certainly pass on the points that he made tonight to my hon. Friends in the Ministry of Defence, and if there are any points that I have not responded to properly, I hope that they will do so.

I agreed with much of what the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said, although I am not sure that he was right to say that there is a policing crisis in Cornwall. My constituency of Exeter is also covered by the Devon and Cornwall police and, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, we are one of the many areas of the country that is currently enjoying record numbers of police officers. Spending on policing has risen 20 per cent. since 1997 in Devon and Cornwall, and crime is down by more than the national average of 23 per cent. The hon. Gentleman also made some interesting points on the future of party funding. I welcome that debate, but I do not think that tonight is the time to have it.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) raised a number of local issues. He was the first Member to mention the situation facing hospices, which was subsequently raised by a number of other hon. Members. I know from conversations that I have had with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health that he is aware of hon. Members' concerns on this matter, but I shall certainly pass on the specific points that the hon. Gentleman raised. I think that I am right in remembering the Secretary of State for Health saying that the Government were committed to increasing the proportion of spending on hospices that comes from the public purse, but I will certainly check on that and write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as I can.

The hon. Gentleman will await the statement on airports tomorrow; I do not intend to say any more about that tonight. He went on to raise the problem of homelessness in his constituency, and of families living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. In the next breath, however, he argued against extra housing. There was something slightly contradictory about that, but let me deal with the problem of people staying in bed and breakfasts. There will be more homes and, in particular, more affordable homes. I remind the hon. Gentleman that under this Government the incidence of rough sleeping has halved, thanks to our rough sleepers initiative.

If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I will not say anything about Cyprus; I will simply pass on his points to the Minister for Europe, my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain). I am sure that my right hon. Friend will respond in due course.

The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) drew attention to early-day motion 1670, relating to care homes in Birmingham. He acknowledged that the level of fees was the problem, rather than care standards, but let me say to him and to others who raised the problem of care homes that the high capital values of the properties has also played a significant role in the selling or marketing of a number of them—as has the Government's increased use of home care packages, which many elderly people want. The answer to increased fees is increased investment in social services, and I hope the hon. Gentleman will put pressure on his own Front Bench to match our spending plans.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a social services problem in Birmingham. I did not know of it, but I will certainly draw it to the attention of my ministerial colleagues. He also asked for a specific answer to the question of home visits for pensioners. Again, I will ask my colleagues to clarify what he described as a discrepancy between what Ministers had said and what officials had said. I know, however, that a Minister has been told:

> "Where a pensioner requires a home visit, we expect to be able to provide one".

I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman somewhat.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) raised a number of issues. I apologise for not being present for all of his speech: he is the only Member to whom that applies. Let me touch on two issues he raised that were not raised by others. The first is cruelty to animals, and the fact that the police in his constituency were not taking as much action as he would like. Essex is another part of the country that has a record number of police officers. I am sorry if they are not taking the issue of animal cruelty seriously enough. I think we all know how seriously our constituents take it, and how upset they are by reports such as those that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

The second issue is that of people talking on mobile telephones while driving. That is a bugbear of mine: every day when I cycle in and out of this place I witness people driving badly—not concentrating, perhaps driving with one hand on the wheel—while speaking on mobile phones. It is very dangerous. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it is possible under existing legislation to prosecute people who use mobile phones while driving, but the Government are considering whether it would be a good idea to introduce a specific offence. I am sure that the Ministers responsible will report to the House when they reach decisions.

My neighbour, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, raised the question of the A30 resurfacing. I congratulate her on her active campaign, and that of Maureen Jones and her other constituents. Let me tell her what I told the hon. Member for West Derbyshire: a Conservative Government commissioned the building of the roads using that horrible loud concrete, and a Labour Government have said that they will get rid of them. I am sorry if it is taking too long. It is taking longer than many of us would like, but the Government have committed the money and committed themselves to the resurfacing. We all hope that that will happen sooner or later, but again let me suggest that those who want it to happen sooner should support our spending plans.

As for Uffculme school, the Minister for School Standards, my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband), who arrived in a very timely fashion, will have heard how outraged the hon. Lady was at being refused a meeting with him. Funding for schools in Devon has risen by £550 per pupil since the 1997 general election, and following the comprehensive spending review it will increase even more.

I share the hon. Lady's concern about hospice care. Hospices do an excellent job in Exeter—I know many of those involved—and I will take up not just the local issue but the issue of national funding with the Minister responsible. I think I am right in saying, however, that the Government have committed themselves to increasing the proportion of spending on hospice care from the public purse.

On access to broadband, the hon. Lady is right: it is a commercial decision for BT. However, I will speak to my colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry and see what more can be done in that respect.

All hon. Members will share the hon. Lady's frustration at the time it takes for some Ministers in some Departments to reply to letters. I would like to think that I was not guilty of that in my previous job and I hope I am not guilty of it in my current one. I do not think that the point can be made too often in this place that hon. Members should have prompt replies to letters.

The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) repeated a point he made about a week ago about search charges. The Government take that matter seriously. We are aware of the problem and have acknowledged that there is genuine interest in the matter. I will draw to the attention of the Minister responsible the more recent hiccups to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. He also spoke about mobile phone masts and pointed out that the roll-out of the next generation will cause more problems. It is something that will not go away, and I am sure Ministers' minds will be concentrated by the number of hon. Members who have raised that matter in the debate.

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) raised the general question of social services funding, which I hope I have dealt with, and then made interesting and serious points about the impact of regulation on adult services in his constituency and nationally—an impact that he felt the Government did not intend following the introduction of the Care Standards Act 2000. I will make those concerns plain to the Minister responsible and ask him to respond to the hon. Gentleman's concerns as soon as possible.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) raised the case of his constituent, Gordon Ashby, who I am pleased to say has now benefited fully from the Government's winter fuel payments. I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing the House's attention to the popularity of the payments and indeed everything else that the Government have done to help to alleviate pensioner poverty. I am glad that his constituent's story had a happy ending and I am sure that it was in no small part due to the excellent job that he did on his constituent's behalf.

[Mr. Bradshaw]

I will draw the result of his campaign to the attention of my hon. Friends in the Department responsible and ask them whether there are any implications for people who may be in the same situation.

The hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) made a speech about speculation about military action against Saddam Hussein. I have nothing to add to what the Prime Minister said at the Liaison Committee last week but he and other right hon. and hon. Friends have constantly reassured hon. Members on both sides of the House that if and when any decisions are made the House will have ample opportunity to debate them.

The hon. Gentleman congratulated our armed forces on the excellent job that they have done in the Balkans and in Afghanistan. I associate myself entirely with those remarks. I share his hope that we can make progress in the middle east peace process, which is vital not just for the region but for world security. I was pleased that he welcomed the Government's big increase in defence spending.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) raised a problem concerning one of his constituents, who is having problems getting a residency for—

Mrs. Browning: I realise the hon. Gentleman is coming to the end of his remarks. I just wanted to say how appreciative the House is of the full and detailed reply that he has given to the debate.

Mr. Bradshaw: It is very kind of the hon. Lady. One always comes under some pressure to be as quick as possible, particularly when other hon. Members are waiting patiently, but I am grateful for her remarks. I have not finished quite yet.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight raised a serious point. I was slightly puzzled, because my understanding of the new rules was that Ministers would look flexibly at the co-habitation requirement. One of the problems for unmarried couples—same-sex or heterosexual couples—is that to meet the two-year cohabitation requirement, they have to be in the same place and for many of them it is difficult under the immigration rules to be in the same place. My understanding, from cases in my constituency, was that the matter would be considered flexibly and a two-year provable relationship would suffice. I will certainly raise the issue with Lord Rooker.

I also suggest that the hon. Gentleman's constituent contact the Stonewall immigration department, which runs an excellent advice service for couples such as those he referred to. I would point out, however, that until this Government came to power, there were no immigration rights for same-sex or unmarried couples.

The hon. Gentleman also congratulated the Cowes Customs and Excise office on the excellent job that it did recently in busting a multi-million-pound cocaine smuggling operation, and asked me to promise not to close it. I cannot deliver that promise, but I will pass on his concerns to the Minister responsible and say how much he and his constituents value the office's work.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) usefully identified a number of subjects that have come up repeatedly in this debate. These debates are an excellent barometer of constituents' concerns. Ministers in all Departments should scan this debate for areas of concern. I shall certainly draw several matters to the relevant Ministers' attention.

The right hon. Gentleman was a little unfair about what happened last Thursday. I do not mind the fact that we have been here for five or six hours, but he must realise that insisting on a Division last Thursday could have meant that we had no debate at all tonight. The Government did the right thing in ensuring that we have had a full debate.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he enjoyed travelling to the south-west recently. I am sure that it was a pleasurable experience for us to have him. I hope that many hon. Members, present and not present tonight, will take the opportunity of the summer recess to visit Devon and Cornwall—which brings me to my final point.

Several hon. Members spoke about the long summer recess, without exception hoping that it would be the last one. They thought that it would be right for us to sit in September. I hope that they will support the package that we hope to propose to the House to ensure that that happens. On that note, I wish all the right hon. and hon. Members who stayed until 1.30 am for this debate a very happy recess, and happy holidays.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Ordered,

MERCHANT SHIPPING

That the Merchant Shipping (Safety of Navigation) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 1473) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

RAILWAYS

That the Railways Interoperability (High-Speed) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 1166) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Education (Castle Point)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

1.33 am

Bob Spink (Castle Point): As we have been here since yesterday afternoon, my hon. Friends the Members for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) took me to the Tea Room and bought me a mug of tea and a rock cake. I now know why they are called rock cakes, but I will try to struggle on.

I hope that we can have a positive exchange, welcoming the education successes and addressing the issues, both large and small, in my constituency. Schoolchildren and staff alike will go off for the holidays tired and happy, but also a little anxious about the results that will come out in August. They deserve a wonderful break, because they work so hard, and they deserve the excellent results that will be returned in Castle Point, where the story of education is a tale of excellence. Governors, staff, pupils and parents in Castle Point can all be rightly proud of their great achievements, and I thank them on behalf of the whole community that I represent. The results in August will show another superb year, building on previous extraordinary years of achievement. I should like to add my thanks to the lollipop ladies and gentlemen who come out in all weathers to keep our children safe. They deserve our respect and our gratitude no less than all the other members of the school staff.

I thank the Government for increasing education funding—so far as it has gone. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills told me that

> "we are already in the middle of the most sustained increase in funding we have ever had, and our new plans represent another significant step forward."

I accept her sincerity, and I do not seek to make political points, but the funds do not seem to be getting through to the schools in Castle Point, and I shall adduce evidence to that effect as the debate progresses. That lack of funds is exacerbating a serious staffing problem—if not a crisis—in those schools, which is also affecting several schools across Essex.

On funding, all Essex secondary schools are suffering in the 2002–03 financial year. In cash terms, the standard spending assessment increase is 6.7 per cent. After taking account of pupil number increases, the cash increase for Essex secondary schools is 4.3 per cent., but the actual increase in the cost of staffing Essex schools is considerably more, requiring a cash increase of approximately 9.5 per cent. As a result of interplay between the Learning and Skills Council and the local education authority, all schools for 11 to 16-year-olds, and many for 11 to 18-year-olds, have received cash increases of between 2.9 per cent. and 3.5 per cent. only. All but a minority of Essex secondary schools have a revenue budget shortfall for 2002–03 of between 3 per cent. and 5 per cent.

Many schools will be forced to divert spending from standards fund targeted allowances in order to produce a balanced budget. For other schools, it will not be possible to produce a balanced budget for this financial year. I am grateful to the Association of Secondary Heads in Essex for that information, and particularly to Ted Rowley, an Essex head teacher. The association is not a Conservative source; it is a highly independent and extremely reliable source of information.

Does the Minister agree with the idea of schools running a deficit budget, and if not, should they sack teachers instead? I shall be interested to hear his reply. I hope that he does not try to blame Essex county council for the shortfall. It was given a very limited amount of cash this year, and it has to spend an enormous amount to maintain social care of the most vulnerable people in our society. That is why it was unable to meet all schools' needs.

If that were not enough, the Government now seek to change the funding rules for next year in such a way as to remove even more cash from schools in Essex and in Castle Point. In essence, the Government propose to redistribute money from shire counties in the south of England to deprived areas in metropolitan cities in the north, and to the inner London boroughs. As the front-page headline of the 9 July edition of *The Times* says, "Labour will tax Tory voters to fund heartlands". As Lord Hanningfield, the leader of Essex county council, says, the Government's proposals

> "are crude and unjust. They are based on assumptions about South East being exclusively well off, when in reality we have areas of real deprivation."

The various Government options for change next year in education funding show a possible loss of £46.5 million in option EDU4. That is the result of a combination of the change in the education formula, plus a loss in the area cost adjustment. Teachers, parents and governors in Castle Point view the recent promise of £50,000 direct cash for schools in the context of losses of £100,000 to £250,000 for their schools. Put simply, the public, especially governors of schools, have lost trust in this Government.

It is increasingly difficult to recruit and retain teachers in Essex, without that further burden from the Government. The proposed changes in the education formula and area cost adjustment would damage Essex and Castle Point schools enormously. I hope that the Minister will say how much more the Government will give to Castle Point schools. Does he think that Castle Point school heads and governors have been incompetent in recent years, or does he think that Castle Point has a real problem?

One local special school will have a crisis in staff vacancies in December this year. Two secondary schools, one on the mainland and one on Canvey island will each lose 17 teachers in September. I recently received a letter from a Castle Point school dated 2 July. It reads:

> "Dear Bob, Thank you for coming into school last Friday and it was also good of you to come to the Summer Fayre on Saturday.
>
> I promised to write to you about the major issues facing our school. They are . . . staffing: we are having to appoint unqualified teachers because we cannot attract qualified staff . . . Housing is very expensive here . . . and a teacher's salary of £17,500 does not go far on rents or mortgage. In Basildon, staff receive a Fringe Allowance which is not available here . . . The budget reduction . . . combined with a reduction in pupil numbers, means that we are working to an impossibly tight budget . . . Ofsted will be inspecting our school shortly and it is impossible to meet all of their requirements given our budgetary constraints and the staffing crisis"—

those are the two key issues. The letter finishes:

> "Perhaps you will be able to do something to help us."

[Bob Spink]

I will not identify the school, because it could be one of many in Castle Point or in Essex. I have written to the Secretary of State and to Councillor Iris Pummell, who has responsibility for the education portfolio in Essex, and I hope that we can obtain some positive help for that school and for others. It would be a travesty of justice if we allowed Ofsted to damage that school and to set back all the excellent work done in Castle Point and on Canvey island to improve the image and profile of education in the borough, and to improve public and parent confidence in, and engagement with, education. That would be neither just nor constructive. It would do irreparable damage to our efforts to build up the importance of education locally. It would send negative signals to teachers looking for jobs and set back our ability to recruit and retain even further. It would damage local education, the community and, of course, our children.

I say to the Minister, "Let us work together now to solve this problem with that school and others." That would, first, cost less money than an adverse Ofsted report and, secondly, protect and enhance our educational achievements across the community. The teachers and public will not forgive the Government if they ignore those words and pleas and, through Ofsted, trash schools that have already suffered in terms of money and teacher vacancies through no fault of their own.

I thank the Government for some education blessings. The Deanes is an excellent specialist sports college. It has worked successfully with a large family of more than 40 schools in raising standards and developing opportunities in supporting gifted and talented performers, curriculum development, professional development, ICT development in physical education, dance and community sport. The Deanes, through its successful record, has received much interest from national governing bodies of sport with a view to their delivering their national strategy across Deanes and its family of schools. We welcome this partnership involvement.

The King John school has just been awarded specialist maths and computing college status, for which I am grateful to the Government. The school has a fantastic wide-ranging list of plans and will truly add to Great Britain plc. It achieved a 64 per cent. gold standard. That is five or more GCSEs at C grade or above in the past year. That is a remarkable achievement for a school with a very mixed intake.

Appleton school remains at the forefront of achievement as well. I hope that it will secure specialist college status in the near future.

The three Canvey secondary schools are currently bidding for joint or co-operative specialist status on a well-balanced portfolio of Castle View as science, Cornelius Vermuyden as arts—that is visual—and Firtherwick Park 11 to 18 school as maths and computing.

Canvey Island is a special and separate community. It is a close knit, supportive and friendly community with great skills and excellent head teachers across the board. I hope that the Minister will meet me to discuss how we can best promote the collaborative three-way bids. It is an excellent approach that has great merit, and success is much needed to help solve some of our local difficulties on Canvey Island, and locally in education.

We are making enormous steps forward in education on the island, and this progress must not be put at risk, especially not by Ofsted, which should be constructive. Helen Marsden, a Canvey teacher, said that

> "after just a term on Canvey Island I began to rediscover my commitment and enthusiasm . . . because teaching here is fun! . . . the staff here are experienced, dedicated, loyal professionals who have helped to instil an ethos of respect".

If that does not bring teachers rushing to Canvey Island to teach in our schools, I do not know what will.

Another local success is Glenwood school for children with complex learning difficulties. It achieved beacon status, and was the first Essex school to do so. The head, the staff and the parents are to be much congratulated on that. Essex is taking a collaborative approach with closer integration of the three agencies—education, health and social services—to help these children find the right way forward. I congratulate all those who are involved in that approach.

The Glenwood chairman of governors, Alan Bennett, and his governing body are to be much congratulated and thanked for the work that they do. We must never forget that our governing bodies are voluntary. They do what they do out of the goodness of their hearts because they passionately believe in their communities. Perhaps I should declare an interest, because Alan Bennett and his superb kids, Nickie and Jamie, who attend Glenwood school, often join me at Canvey Island football club to cheer on Britain's premier giant killers—Canvey Island, of course.

Glenwood school is not the only excellent special school in my constituency. Cedar Hall is equally excellent, under the superb headship of Chris Bent. I sometimes feel that our special school heads are some of the best heads in the country. There is a strong place for special schools. Too much inclusion would be much against the interests of the children. We need a balance. Children with global learning difficulties need their peer groups as much as other children.

I end this contribution where perhaps I should have started it: the nursery sector—the most important foundation stage, where we give children the joy of education, discovery, learning and the essential social skills and discipline to launch them successfully into their school careers. There are many excellent nurseries in Castle Point. I shall mention just one in each of the three main communities in my constituency: Pumpkins on Canvey Island, First Class in Benfleet, and Sandcastles in Hadleigh provide superb and caring environments for our young children and are a model to all nursery schools throughout Essex. There is but one cloud on the nursery school horizon: Ofsted.

Since Ofsted took over inspection from social services, things have started to go wrong. Ofsted must not seek to gold-plate regulations or apply them over-vigorously. That would be very counterproductive. Ofsted must try to work co-operatively and flexibly. In other words, it must be constructive and find solutions and stability. It must not create uncertainty or even bring about the abandonment of much-needed and excellent resources, especially when no alternative is available.

EDNA—the Essex Day Nurseries Association—has had cause for concern about Ofsted and has called a meeting to deal with the problem. For example, our most experienced and valuable nursery managers, who have qualified pre-1989 and have been doing the job for decades and are currently training and testing new staff up to NNEB level 3, must not be made to retrain so long as they have updated themselves regularly on the various courses.

Ofsted inspectors must act fairly and not seek to entrap nurseries simply to justify their own position and work, as has happened. I could give the Minister specific details if he wished to question me on them. Ofsted needs to use common sense, sensitivity and courtesy in dealing with our nurseries. I hope that we have now put a shot across its bow and that we will not need to return to the issue. If that is not the case, watch this space!

1.52 am

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): My first duty is to congratulate the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on securing this debate. In fact, I shall congratulate him on two other things: first, on persuading his two colleagues—the hon. Members for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) and for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois)—to remain with him at this late hour. If he speaks to me after the debate, I shall tell him which one was yawning during his peroration.

The second reason to congratulate the hon. Gentleman is that this is, in fact, his second speech tonight. I was recently a humble Back Bencher, so I know that it is an honour—it is humbling—to speak once a month. It is a rare privilege to speak twice a month, but to speak twice in one night suggests that one has a relationship with the Whips Office that would be a source of great suspicion among one's colleagues; but I congratulate him none the less.

I was very pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman congratulate the teachers and pupils in his constituency. It may be for the benefit of the House to know that key stage 2 results—in other words, those for 11-year-olds—in the hon. Gentleman's constituency last year were 75 per cent. in English, 71 per cent. in maths, 87 per cent. in science. There were rises across all those three categories, and those improvements in standards were reflected at the age of 14, at key stage 3.

The hon. Gentleman was gracious enough also to congratulate the Government on their £600 a year increase in funding for each pupil in Castle Point. I am very glad that he is as pleased as I am that that is going ahead. Funding in Essex has increased from about £470 million in 1998, to £630 million in 2002–03—an average increase of more than 5 per cent. a year. He will know that the standards fund has also increased from about £7 million in 1998–99, to £45 million in 2002–03. The school standards direct grant, which goes direct to head teachers, is now worth more than £7.5 million a year.

No doubt, the hon. Gentleman will be pleased that the recent spending review confirmed those record rises in investment. He congratulated the Government on how far we had gone. That sounded like a plea for even more spending, so I welcome him to the ranks of the rebels in the Conservative party. I trust that he will continue to advocate higher spending on education, despite the unwillingness of his party's Front Benchers to do the same.

The hon. Gentleman is legitimately concerned about funding being passed through to schools. He read out a letter dated 2 July; I, too, have it to hand, and I will not mention the name of the school that wrote to him either. He left out from his reading point 3 of the letter, which set out a complaint about the passporting by Essex LEA of the funds given by the Government to schools. In 2002–03 Essex county council received an increase in its education standard spending assessment in excess of £37.5 million—a boost of about 6.35 per cent., which was above the national average of 5.7 per cent. Essex LEA chose not to reflect that increase in its education budget, and that failure to passport may have prompted some of the concerns that led Essex heads to write to me and to the hon. Gentleman.

For the hon. Gentleman's benefit, I will give him a preview of the letter that will soon be winging its way to him in response to his letter to the Secretary of State. Among other things, it says:

> "The Secretary of State wrote to the leaders of all councils with education responsibilities in January urging them to make sure that all of the increased funding was actually spent on education. However, I am sure you are aware, we cannot compel them to do this. It is up to each local authority to decide how it allocates funding to the various services it provides, taking account of local circumstances. Once the Department became aware of Essex's intent, I"—

that is, me—

> "wrote to the leader of the Council expressing my disappointment at their decision."

The hon. Gentleman is concerned about proposals on reform of the funding system. The proposals that the Government have put on the table are about producing the best possible match between the distribution of funding and LEAs' relative needs and costs. The current consultation process aims to try to find a way forward that balances those two needs. He will know that the consultation runs until 30 September, and I hope that he and his colleagues will make representations to that review.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I thank the Minister for giving way, especially as I did not notify his office of my intention to intervene. I am grateful for his courtesy.

I have two brief points. First, the Minister will be aware of the great concern in Essex about the entire restructuring of SSAs. I am therefore glad to hear his comments, and we shall indeed all make representations.

Secondly, is it not a fact that Essex passes on a greater proportion of its funding to schools than any other shire LEA in the country—with the possible exception of Lincolnshire, according to last year's figures?

Mr. Miliband: I chose my words reasonably carefully. I did not want to launch an all-out attack on local government when putting forward the proposals. I believe that it is true that Essex LEA's delegation is about 87.1 per cent., which is an honourable record; however, this year the increase in SSA given by the Government was not passported on, which is a source of some regret.

The hon. Member for Castle Point expressed concern about teacher recruitment. He will be as pleased as I am that the national vacancy rate has fallen from 1.4 per cent. in 2001 to 1.2 per cent. in 2002, which is the result in part of the 9,000-person increase in the teaching force achieved over the past year—the fastest rise in 20 years—and in part of the increase in teachers' pay. In addition to the overall pay increase, teachers and heads will be especially interested in the extra recruitment and retention initiatives that have been made available by the Government.

[Mr. Miliband]

The hon. Gentleman's area, I know, falls outside the areas receiving London fringe allowances, and we recognise that that causes problems, but I hope that he will accept from me that we want to address such issues in the context of the local government funding review that we hope will come into play in the next financial year. He should know that there is a special recruitment and retention fund available for the recruitment of teachers, from which Essex received £2.1 million this year—the second-highest allocation of any LEA in the country. We are not complacent about the issue: we are working with the Teacher Training Agency and other relevant bodies to ensure that we make progress, not least on housing, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

The hon. Gentleman was good enough to pay tribute to the work of the specialist schools in his area. We know from Ofsted's evaluation that in four out of five schools, specialist designation has been a catalyst for innovation in the schooling system and has helped to sustain the momentum of improvement. The specialist school programme is about celebrating the different strengths of individual schools within a revitalised comprehensive system.

I heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the innovative proposals being developed locally for a new specialisation proposal involving several schools. I hope that he will understand when I say that, as the judge of that competition, it would not be right if I were to meet him and individual heads. However, my Department makes itself and its officers available to discuss with schools proposals that they might make, as does the Technology Colleges Trust.

I shall certainly also pass to David Bell, Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, the hon. Gentleman's concerns about early education and the Ofsted inspection regime. If he cares to write to me with the individual complaints, I shall certainly take them on, because we take them extremely seriously.

I conclude by once again congratulating the hon. Gentleman. Even at this late hour, he has held the attention of the House with his lucid exposition. I assure him that education is safe in the Government's hands. I look forward to continued support for the measures that we are taking both to invest in the educational system and to reform it in order to support high standards.

The independent inspectorate—Ofsted—reports that we have the best generation of teachers ever in this country. We certainly know from test and examination results that we have the highest scores ever. I believe that those are the result of hard-working teachers and hard-working pupils doing their best in the nation's schools. There are great things happening. I look forward to greater things, both in Castle Point and in the nation at large.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 23 July 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HSBC INVESTMENT BANKING BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Tuesday 15 October.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Zimbabwe

1. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What recent discussions he has had with his South African counterpart regarding the situation in Zimbabwe. [69576]

2. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): If he will make a statement on the impact of smart sanctions on Zimbabwe. [69578]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I met South African Foreign Minister Zuma on 20 June. We discussed a range of issues, including Zimbabwe.

The situation in Zimbabwe is serious and deteriorating, with many facing severe poverty, hardship and starvation. The principal cause is not the drought, but the policies of the Mugabe regime. Despicably, the regime is now actively diverting humanitarian food aid, with the deputy Foreign Minister telling the public that it will go only to ZANU-PF supporters.

Sanctions are having an impact. Yesterday, EU Foreign Ministers agreed unanimously to more than triple the number targeted by the assets and travel ban to 72, to cover the whole of the ruling elite.

Mr. Swayne: The extension of smart sanctions is long overdue and most welcome, but how are they to be enforced? Is there any possibility of extending the net to catch businesses that support Mugabe?

Mr. Straw: Enforcement of the sanctions is in the hands of EU member states. We have no evidence at all of any breach of the sanctions. There is a provision in the common position—this may have been implicit in the hon. Gentleman's question—for members of the ZANU-PF elite who have to attend certain international gatherings. EU member states have no real discretion over that, any more than the United States has discretion over their attendance at the United Nations. However, the system is working. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the measure, and we will certainly consider its extension.

Mr. Bellingham: Members of the ruling elite are still transiting through Europe; for example, Mugabe transited through Madrid the other day. Has the Foreign Secretary looked again at my suggestion of a ban on Air Zimbabwe flights? With the Commonwealth games coming up, has he looked at a sporting boycott? Has he spoken to the International Cricket Council about the forthcoming World cup cricket tournament in South Africa and Zimbabwe? I welcome yesterday's EU announcement, but surely it is too little, too late.

Will the right hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), the shadow Foreign Secretary, on the efforts that he made in going to Zimbabwe the other day? Will the Foreign Secretary go there himself to convey these very tough messages?

Mr. Straw: It would not be appropriate to ban Air Zimbabwe, as it would significantly inconvenience thousands of decent people from Zimbabwe—black, white and Asian—and would lead to immediate retaliation against other carriers. We would need to think carefully about that.

Spain has refused transit visas to the Mugabe regime. The result is that, quite properly, members of the regime have been humiliated and inconvenienced by having to wait to change planes in Madrid airport, rather than being allowed into Madrid. There are international obligations that we cannot avoid, but the very fact that the Mugabe regime is making such efforts to try to get around the sanctions emphasises their effectiveness and the degree to which they are leading to the regime's isolation.

I am glad that the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) visited Zimbabwe. He was able to enter incognito and, much though I would wish to do likewise, I am told by my security people that it might be a tad more difficult for me.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the EU's common position on Zimbabwe, with the stepping up of sanctions against Zimbabwe, is a vindication of this Government's constructive engagement with Europe? Will he make sure that, through the Convention on the Future of Europe, the EU's common foreign and security policy is strengthened? Does he agree that it is in this country's interests, as we see in the case of Zimbabwe, if the EU can punch its weight in the world?

Mr. Straw: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. A year ago, the clear aim of the Mugabe regime was to do its best to keep this as a bilateral dispute between the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe. As a result of action that we have been able to take, the dispute has been multilateralised to the Commonwealth and the EU.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): We understand why the travel ban cannot be applied when

President Mugabe or one of his Ministers is attending a United Nations function, but is there any reason why that latitude should be extended to his entourage of staff, bodyguards and flunkeys? Would not a ban on them deter some of the flights that are being taken?

Mr. Straw: We must act proportionately. We have now trebled the number of people subject to the ban, resulting in a list of 72, which we judge to include virtually the whole of the ruling elite of ZANU-PF. We shall certainly consider extending the ban to business men, where there is clear evidence that that would be appropriate. It is important, however, in terms of there being understanding across Africa, that it is recognised that we are acting in a proportionate and targeted way, not in an indiscriminate way.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the right hon. Gentleman cast his mind back to the post-Lockerbie sanctions on Libya? He will recall that there was a total ban on air flights to that country. Is that not a model for what we should be considering for Zimbabwe? After all, in the case of Libya, innocent people were affected by the ban.

Mr. Straw: It is a matter of proportion, but the simple fact is that, if we were to impose a ban on Air Zimbabwe flights, it would lead to a ban on flights by British and European carriers, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman will recognise. That would gravely inconvenience thousands of ordinary Zimbabweans, including 40,000 UK passport holders. These are issues that we must weigh in the balance, but my judgment is that this would hurt innocent people more than it would hurt the regime.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): My hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) and I were in Zimbabwe last Wednesday. Is the Foreign Secretary aware—as I was made aware when I was there—of the obscenity of growing famine, starvation and AIDS existing alongside acre after acre of farm land that is unprepared, unsown and not producing food? Does he also understand the obscenity of displaced black farm workers, some of whom I met, who have been thrown off their farms without hope, jobs, possessions or homes? There are now 85,000 of them, and, if the 2,900 farms are closed in two weeks' time, the number could rise to 300,000. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the despair of people in Zimbabwe is only increased when they hear reports—I hope that they were incorrect—that, while I was in Zimbabwe, he was saying that he could do nothing to help them? Will he now assure us that he can, and will, seek to help them?

Mr. Straw: I was indeed aware of what the right hon. Gentleman had to say, because I am an assiduous reader of the Conservative party website. I have therefore followed exactly what he has said, and his analysis is entirely correct. Zimbabwe under Mugabe is now the worst-performing economy in the whole of Africa, which is an extraordinary record, given that only a few years ago it was the best-performing economy. GDP is likely to have collapsed by a quarter in three years, the inflation rate is 122 per cent. and rising, and the unemployment rate is 70 per cent. and rising. We are profoundly concerned about the situation, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. We have been doing everything we think we practically can, but we are always ready to listen carefully to specific proposals for further action, including those from him.

Mr. Ancram: I will take the right hon. Gentleman up on that offer. Will he hold discussions, as I did last week, with his colleagues in South Africa and Malawi on the catastrophe that is about to spill over into those countries if Zimbabwe implodes? They are already feeling the effects of what is happening there. Does he not agree that a humanitarian disaster in southern Africa will affect us all, and that, if it happens, we will all be called on to help to end it? Given that we all have an interest in avoiding such disasters, will he seek to persuade our southern African colleagues that acting jointly to bring pressure to bear on Mugabe to hold fresh elections is in all our interests, but, above all, in the interests of the people who are suffering so badly in Zimbabwe?

Mr. Straw: The answer to all those questions is yes. On humanitarian aid, yes, there is a catastrophe, which is partly being caused by drought, but which has been greatly exacerbated in Zimbabwe and the surrounding areas by the actions of the Mugabe Government. Yes, we need collective discussions with the Southern African Development Community, and they will take place at EU level. I am glad to note that the right hon. Gentleman has endorsed that.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has already allocated an extra £45 million of aid directly to Zimbabwe, as well as other amounts to the other countries of southern Africa to help cope with this crisis.

Mr. Ancram: On the European Union, may I belatedly welcome the extension of the sanctions that was announced yesterday, six weeks after I first called for it? Is the Foreign Secretary aware that the previous sanctions in Zimbabwe were regarded as ineffective and a joke? Why did yesterday's extension not go further? Why are not spouses and families included? Why does the list—unlike that of the United States—not include the close business associates who sustain and finance Mugabe and his henchmen?

Does the Foreign Secretary not understand that yesterday's announcement goes only part of the way? This time, the sanctions must be more than just words. The loopholes must be closed, and the sanctions must be made to bite until Mugabe is forced to realise the reality of the situation, and to call for the fresh elections without which this problem cannot be solved.

Mr. Straw: Those of us with reasonably long memories will be only too delighted to note the right hon. Gentleman's conversion to the principle of sanctions. If the Conservatives had supported sanctions against South Africa, the evil of apartheid might have been ended a bit more quickly.

We are working on this issue, and one spouse was included on yesterday's list—Mrs. Grace Mugabe. On proportionality, we have judged it important to target the serious and real villains—the principals in the elite—rather than being dragged into diversionary arguments about whether it is also appropriate to target spouses and children. We are ready to consider the question of businesses, but I should point out that, so far as the right hon. Gentleman is concerned, there is always a great gap between the word and the deed. The biggest difference is that he calls for these sanctions—

Mr. Ancram: And the Americans.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman mutters about the Americans, but our total package of sanctions is tougher than theirs. He calls for these sanctions, but the one certainty is that, had he been in my position, he would never have achieved these sanctions because he would never have had the EU on his side.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

3. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): What plans he has to meet the African Union to discuss the role of the New Partnership for Africa's Development in strengthening democracy and human rights. [69579]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, along with the Minister with responsibility for Africa, my noble Friend Baroness Amos, hold regular meetings with leaders of the African Union, and the Government are active in supporting the New Partnership for Africa's Development in all its contacts with those leaders.

Mr. Griffiths: We have just discussed the tragic example of Zimbabwe, where Africa's democracy and human rights are being flouted in an almost unprecedented way. However, there have been successful elections in countries such as Sierra Leone, and others such as Angola and Sudan are emerging from terrible civil wars. In the light of those examples, will my hon. Friend ensure that our Government and the EU will provide the fullest support to strengthen democratic structures, and to ensure that human rights are observed as part of the package for improving the economies of those countries?

Mr. MacShane: The answer is yes, but let us welcome the African Union itself. The union's declaration on the principles governing democratic elections in Africa includes free and fair elections, free association and impartial electoral institutions. If only those principles had been observed in Zimbabwe, the tragedy that we have just discussed would not have taken place. It is for Africa to shape its own future; it is not for the west to impose any particular values or ideas. We welcome what the African Union is doing.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Does the Minister agree that the New Partnership for Africa's Development would stand a greater chance of success if the Presidents of South Africa and Nigeria, among others, wholeheartedly condemned the abuses of democracy and human rights, and not least the current sheer theft of assets in Zimbabwe?

Mr. MacShane: I rather think that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did just that. However, the African Union would have had a much greater chance of success if the Leader of the Opposition had made even just one reference to Africa in his keynote speech on international affairs at Chatham house earlier this year. Given that the shadow Foreign Secretary is not on holiday in Florida, I hope that he can explain to the Leader of the Opposition where Africa is.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Given the terrible situation in Africa in relation to HIV/AIDS, what role does my hon. Friend believe that the partnership can play in tackling the spread of this dreadful disease?

Mr. MacShane: That is undoubtedly the biggest single challenge facing Africa, and it is one to which this Government—along with partners around the world and in Africa itself—have pledged real material resources. The issue will of course be raised at the forthcoming Johannesburg summit on sustainable development. I can think of no greater current challenge to humanity than ridding Africa, in particular, of the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): What encouragement can the hon. Gentleman give the people of southern Africa, where there is now so much suffering, that the worthy objectives of the African Union—to promote peace, security and stability on the continent—will be translated into concrete commitment by member nations? What actions does he foresee the international community taking through NEPAD to ensure that those objectives are met?

Mr. MacShane: At the G8 summit in Kananaskis, there were commitments to a serious development partnership. I think it is fair to say that the Government have been working more seriously than any western or northern Government in supporting the world summit in Johannesburg on sustainable development. We are trying to break down the trade barriers against African goods in both the European Union and north America. Our commitment is to trade and economic growth, providing the material basis for a more secure and peaceful future for all the peoples of Africa.

Saudi Arabia

4. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What representations he has made to the Government of Saudi Arabia in respect of statements of support for terrorist activities. [69580]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The Government of Saudi Arabia are well aware of her Majesty's Government's complete condemnation of terrorism, including suicide bombings. The Government of Saudi Arabia have made clear their rejection of terrorism, including in relation to the middle east peace process.

Dr. Lewis: I agree with everything that the Foreign Secretary said, but given that our relationship with Saudi Arabia is so sensitive and important, is he not gravely concerned that on 13 April the Saudi ambassador, Ghazi Algosaibi stated:

> "When the call comes for Jihad
> There's no need for a referendum or a 'Fatwa'.
> The Day of Jihad is the Day of Blood.";

that on 9 July, he stated that Israeli actions on the West Bank were

> "far more severe than anything the Germans did when they occupied Europe in World War Two";

and that on 5 June, he stated:

> "I do not fear death—on the contrary, I long to die as a martyr, although I am at an age that does not allow me to carry out a martyrdom operation."?

How sad that he cannot do it, but how sad also that he is the ambassador of that country to this one.

Mr. Straw: As I made clear, we disagree profoundly with the Saudi ambassador and we believe that terrorism, including suicide bombing, is to be condemned and that there is no comparison between what happened during the Nazi occupation of the whole of Europe and what is happening in Israel and the occupied territories.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Does my right hon. Friend agree with the following statement made earlier this year by the King of Saudi Arabia? He said:

> "Regardless of its origin, terrorism must be eliminated and terrorists, regardless of who they are . . . must be taken to justice".

Does my right hon. Friend agree with that, and does he also agree that some of the acts that Israel has recently perpetrated in Gaza might amount to that sort of terrorism?

Mr. Straw: As I indicated in my opening statement, the Government of Saudi Arabia have made clear their rejection of terrorism, and the quotation that my hon. Friend has just read out is confirmation of that.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): In condemning terrorist atrocities in the middle east, will my right hon. Friend condemn the two terrorist acts against Israeli Jews last week, which resulted in the loss of innocent life, and, equally, the terrorist act carried out by Israeli forces in Gaza yesterday, which resulted in the death of eight innocent children as part of a state-targeted assassination? Will my right hon. Friend ascertain that no British equipment was involved in an action that was organised, to his shame, by the Israeli Minister of Defence and leader of the Labour party?

Mr. Straw: As I made clear, we condemn all terrorist acts, including those to which my right hon. Friend has just referred. I issued a statement in which I said that I regard the action taken by the Israeli defence force as wholly unjustifiable and unacceptable. It is not acceptable that innocent people, especially innocent children, should be killed as a result of military operations of that kind.

Bahrain

5. **Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): When he next plans to visit Bahrain to discuss bilateral relations; and if he will make a statement. [69581]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no plans to visit Bahrain at present. However, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I will meet His Majesty the King of Bahrain tomorrow and will discuss bilateral relations.

Mr. Clapham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer, and am pleased to hear that he and the Prime Minister are meeting the King of Bahrain tomorrow. My hon. Friend will be aware that, since 1999, Sheikh Hamad has introduced widespread democratic reforms, including greater transparency, greater accountability, equality between the sexes and respect for human rights, particularly rights for women. Women can now stand as candidates in local and general elections as well as voting in them. Does my hon. Friend agree that our close relationship with Bahrain gives us the opportunity of extending the influence of democratic development and combating the conflicts in the middle east and the Gulf area in particular, without having to enter into ill-considered meddling in other people's affairs?

Mr. O'Brien: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. It is important that we continue to support development of human rights and democratic values in the middle east. Indeed, in respect of Bahrain, we have offered advice and expertise, particularly on citizenship education. Our embassy held a conference, aimed at promoting citizenship education, which was open to the media, NGOs, Government Ministries and other bodies. We have sponsored visits to the United Kingdom for leading Bahrainis to learn about UK democracy and issues such as human rights and freedom of the press. We have provided the Bahraini Government with information on electoral boundaries, systems of government and trade unions. We welcome steps taken by the Bahraini Government to progress towards a constitutional monarchy and a democratic state. In the context of the middle east, those are very welcome developments.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): When my hon. Friend meets the King of Bahrain, will he congratulate the Government and people of Bahrain on showing that the Arabian peninsula does not have to be dominated by 14th century attitudes to women, repression of minorities and apologists for terrorism, but can be a beacon for democracy and human rights throughout the Arab world?

Mr. O'Brien: Human rights have indeed improved dramatically in Bahrain in recent years. There are now no political prisoners and exiles have been allowed to return. We maintain a constructive dialogue on a number of issues with the Bahrainis. Bahrain is in many ways providing a lead to show that it is possible to create a more democratic state in the middle east that can participate in the international community with its head held high.

Ukraine

7. **Mr. Russell Brown** (Dumfries): What plans he has to develop links between the UK and Ukraine. [69583]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): As part of our effort to support and encourage Ukraine's transformation to a democratic state, the UK is building on established links to enhance bilateral and multilateral engagement with Ukraine.

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for his response. He may be aware that Ukraine recently established a consulate in Edinburgh and that the intention is to establish a Scotland-Ukraine foundation. People are looking to Ukraine for support, advice and guidance on agriculture, farming—particularly fish farming—and forestry. Does my hon. Friend see a role for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in helping to establish and strengthen such a foundation?

Mr. O'Brien: Yes, we very much welcomed the opening of a Ukrainian consulate in Edinburgh in February 2002. A Scottish-Ukrainian foundation or society would, we feel, help to develop UK-Ukrainian bilateral links. I shall ask our new ambassador at Kiev to see what he can do to help launch a Scottish-Ukrainian society or foundation, perhaps by holding an inaugural reception, for example.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): In view of the enlargement of Europe, which we all welcome and endorse, will the Foreign Secretary ensure that Ukraine is not left out of the equation, that we will not create a new iron curtain along the Polish border and that we will recognise that communities in Belarus and Ukraine need access to their fellow kinsmen and women in Poland as well as the commerce and trade on which they depend? I am concerned that we will cut these people off if the map of Europe does not include Ukraine or Belarus.

Mr. O'Brien: We certainly do want to ensure that there are no more iron curtains. Europe has had enough of that and is well rid of it. We want to ensure that Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova—especially Belarus—all have a record on human rights and democratic values that is to some extent better than it is today. A debate on Belarus in Westminster Hall today certainly showed that that country has a very long way to go before we can say that it would be part of the European Union, or indeed Europe in a broader sense.

Ukraine is developing more democratic values, but we still need to have a critical engagement with it on the way forward to ensure that we can perform our close economic and political ties with Ukraine.

Sudan

8. **Mr. David Drew** (Stroud): What recent discussions he has had with the Government of Sudan on the renewed fighting in the Sudan, with specific reference to conflict around the oil fields. [69584]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): I am happy to welcome the agreement on the Sudan peace process announced at Machakos on 20 July, which addressed the main points made in my hon. Friend's question. I shall place a copy of the text of the framework agreement in the Library.

Mr. Drew: I thank my hon. Friend. In this rather depressing world, with all these conflicts, that is some of the best news that those of us who take an interest in Sudan could possibly hear, given that it is the world's longest-lasting conflict. As we move towards the way in which self-determination will be allowed for in the south as part of the peace formula, does my hon. Friend agree that it is even more necessary to try to get a ceasefire in the area around the oilfields, in the western upper Nile, and will the Government continue to take a leading role in trying to bring the parties together so that we end this conflict once and for all?

Mr. MacShane: It is indeed good news, but my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that this is the first major step forward in the framework agreement; there is much more to be done. The United Kingdom, together with our partners—America, Norway and Italy—will be taking an active interest. I pay tribute to Alan Goulty, the Foreign Office official who has been the Prime Minister's envoy in Sudan. British diplomacy has been shown to work, and this shows the importance of engaging with Africa.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I join the Minister in welcoming recent developments in Sudan and join him wholeheartedly in paying tribute to American efforts in the region and those of Alan Goulty and his team from our own Foreign Office.

A second round of talks is due to start on 12 August. The talks are designed to pick up the recent framework agreement and, for instance, add some constitutional arrangements that might better define relations between north and south. What prospects are there for a comprehensive ceasefire, not just around the oil fields but everywhere, between the Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army, and what is the Minister's assessment of the next steps that can be taken to achieve one?

Mr. MacShane: I do not have time to read out the text of the agreement, but there are references to the people of south Sudan, which I know will be of interest to the hon. Gentleman, who has taken a very direct personal interest in Sudanese affairs. They have the right to control and govern affairs in their region and participate equitably in the national government. They have the right to self-determination, inter alia through a referendum to determine their future status. For those hon. Members interested in Sudan, I recommend a thorough reading of the detail of this agreement. It shows that good news—really good news—can come out of Africa.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I welcome the tremendous news and the remarkable and assiduous diplomacy of the members of the Sudan unit, but does my hon. Friend accept that perhaps the key to this whole process and to the breakthrough has been the inclusion in the agreement of a decision to hold a referendum after a six-year interim period, which would include an option for secession, as well as an option for unity of the country? In pursuing the hard work that needs to be undertaken in the next few weeks and months, will my hon. Friend ensure that humanitarian access to the whole country is prominent in discussions?

Mr. MacShane: That is important to a number of hon. Members who participated in a Westminster Hall debate on the subject. My hon. Friend is right about the six-year time frame. I hope that the two interested groups in Sudan will agree that it is better to keep the country together, in line with the agreed text on state and religion. Part of that process is continuing the aid—£8 million is coming from the United Kingdom alone this year—and my hon. Friends at the Department for International Development are engaged in that. We should mention the role of President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya, whose statesmanship helped to bring the agreement to fruition.

China

9. **Dr. Stephen Ladyman** (South Thanet): What recent representations he has made to the Government of the People's Republic of China with respect to the practitioners of Falun Gong; and if he will make a statement. [69585]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): We regularly raise our concerns about Falun Gong with the Chinese, both in bilateral meetings and at the UK-China human rights dialogue. Last Monday, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did so in his meeting in Beijing with the Chinese Foreign Minister, Mr. Tang.

Dr. Ladyman: My hon. Friend's concern for the practitioners of Falun Gong is welcome. Does he agree that what is happening to Falun Gong and other religious minorities in China is extremely worrying, but that the forthcoming Olympic games provide a real opportunity for the entire international community to put pressure on the People's Republic of China to improve its human rights record and to free practitioners of Falun Gong?

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend is right; I welcome his commitment to, and involvement in, this issue. Many of his arguments were raised in an excellent debate last week in Westminster Hall on the persecution of Christians in Asia. The Olympic games are an enormous opportunity for all of us to engage in every sense with China on political democracy, human rights and economic opening. The two previous Olympic games that took place in Asia—Japan in 1964 and South Korea in 1988—helped to accelerate the process of modernisation and reform and the transition from a more authoritarian form of society in those countries. I hope that the 2008 Olympic games will do the same for China.

Israel

10. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): If he will make a statement on Government policy on arms sales to Israel via a third country. [69586]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): All export licence applications for items to be exported to Israel via an intermediate country are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated European Union and national arms export licensing criteria in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time and taking account of other relevant factors. Licence applications for goods where it is understood that they are to be incorporated into products for onward export are assessed as described in my written reply of 8 July to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping).

Ann Clwyd: Given that the Israeli defence force has admitted using more weapons and munitions against the Palestinians in the month of April alone than it did in the whole of the previous 10 years, what possible justification can there be for selling any more arms to Israel?

Mr. Straw: While I understand my hon. Friend's point of view, I do not share it. All countries have a right to defend themselves and that is made explicit by the European Union and national criteria. These are extremely difficult decisions. I had to think long and hard, as did my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Trade and Industry, who are also involved in making the decisions. They are difficult, but I am satisfied that the decisions that we made are consistent with the EU and national criteria.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Following the killing of children in a targeted attack yesterday, will the Foreign Secretary summon the Israeli ambassador and tell him that he believes that that uncivilised conduct does nothing but harm to a country that many of us hold in real affection and high regard, which we want to see survive as a thriving, prosperous, independent, protected nation, but which is not conducting itself quite as we expect it to at the moment?

Mr. Straw: I am making arrangements for the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), to speak to the ambassador this afternoon. I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's views, which I think that the whole House shares, about the unjustified and disproportionate nature of the attack and its consequences are conveyed to the ambassador and, through him, to the Israeli Government.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that Israel is entitled to defend itself from attack and that it has a specific right to defend its citizens, at least 1 million of whom are currently at threat from rockets supplied by Iran through Syria, which are ready to be fired from Israel's northern borders on its civilian population?

Mr. Straw: As I said a moment ago, I accept the right of any country, under the UN charter, to act in self-defence. Such self-defence has to be proportionate and to take account of other circumstances. That goes without saying. On the specific issue of arms exports, I say again that if my right hon. and hon. Friends and other hon. Members read the criteria, they will see that they are a complex matrix of criteria that seek to balance some very difficult and often conflicting issues.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Might I ask the Foreign Secretary to consider a specific instance? If the pilot of the F-16 that fired the missile which did such terrible damage and caused so many casualties in Gaza yesterday had been using, as he may be able to in 2003, a head-up display manufactured by a British company and licensed for export by the United Kingdom Government, would the Foreign Secretary have considered the export of that component to be consistent with Government policy?

Mr. Straw: We are still getting further information about, as it were, which F-16 was used in the attack, but the contract between British Aerospace and Lockheed Martin for the supply of head-up displays is of long standing. So it is perfectly possible—I do not happen to know—that such equipment, licensed by previous Administrations or indeed by this Administration, was incorporated in that equipment.

Of course, I share the belief around the whole House about the unacceptable nature of the attack, but there are other issues involved in the licensing decisions that we have to make, particularly when there is incorporation into a third country's products. Particularly over the past five years, all defence industries have become much more transnational—in our case, transatlantic—and what we are doing is part of a transatlantic assembly line.

Other EU countries face exactly the same dilemma. So far as we have been able to ascertain—their information is confidential on the whole, while ours is fully public—they have acted in a very similar way. At heart, there is on the one hand concern to avoid the kind of thing that happened this morning. On the other, countries have a clear right in international law to act in self-defence, not only against ~~other~~ nation states but against terrorism. In addition, we as a nation have taken a strategic decision to have a defence industry. It necessarily follows that, in properly controlled circumstances, that defence industry must be allowed to export.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): When a 150 sq m, two-storey apartment block is hit by a missile from an F-16 killing 15 people and nine children, how is it acceptable that British equipment could be supplied for that through a third party, whereas it would not be acceptable if we did it directly?

Mr. Straw: The issue is more complicated than that. The equipment appears to have been misused in this case, but if my hon. Friend looks carefully at the criteria, he will find, first, that we have applied the criteria and, secondly, that the criteria seek to take account, under criterion 7, of

> "the capability of the recipient country to exert effective export controls."

It so happens that the Quadripartite Committee itself said that the United States' conventional arms transfer policy

> "does not appear to differ in any important way from the EU Code or the UK national criteria. In some respects . . . it is an improvement".

Although in a particular instance the United States may come to a slightly different decision from us or the EU, the fact is that its arms control policy and the exercise of it are, on any basis, at least as transparent and as effective as the United Kingdom's, and certainly more transparent than that of almost all of our European Union partners.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Given that, last year, direct arms sales to Israel almost doubled from £12.5 million to £22.5 million, and in the light of atrocities such as that which occurred yesterday, how can the right hon. Gentleman, sincere as he no doubt is, be expected to be taken as an honest broker in the middle east peace process?

Mr. Straw: Interestingly enough—although, of course, this is a matter of grave concern—the suggestion that we do not have a role to play in the middle east because we supply arms is not one that has been raised with me by any interlocutor in the middle east. On the issue of arms sales to Israel, it is true that the number of licences has increased, but so has the number of refusals. While, altogether, there were six refusals of specific licences in 2000, there were 31 refusals of specific licences last year.

Ms Christine Russell (City of Chester): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the recent proposal by the Israeli Government to deport forcibly the families of suspected Palestinian militants from the west bank to Gaza will result in further escalation of violence rather than improvement in peace and security?

Mr. Straw: What I would say is that violence is never justified, but I regard the threat of deportation, still more the reality, as wholly unjustified. Yesterday, I ensured that that word, "unjustified", was inserted into the General Affairs Council's conclusions when we discussed the middle east.

Poland

12. **Dr. Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test): What recent discussions he has held with the Polish Government concerning their proposed accession to the EU. [69588]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): Foreign Office Ministers have met their Polish counterparts to discuss this matter on numerous occasions in recent months and the Secretary of State will be meeting the Polish Foreign Minister tomorrow.

Dr. Whitehead: Has my right hon. Friend had any discussions with his Polish counterparts specifically concerning the status of Kaliningrad following Poland's accession to the EU, and particularly in relation to arrangements for transits between Kaliningrad and Russia should Lithuania, too, join the EU subsequently?

Peter Hain: I am aware of my hon. Friend's close interest in, and family connections with, Poland and, therefore, of his expertise. We are in close contact with all the countries in the region, Poland included, as of course Kaliningrad, the Russian enclave, borders Poland as it does Lithuania. It is a difficult issue to resolve: meeting the Russians' concerns that citizens of Kaliningrad should have access to the rest of Russia while at the same time making sure that borders are secure and that the EU's external border—as it will be, after enlargement—is free from trafficking that might threaten extra crime waves.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): What discussions has the Minister had with his counterparts in Poland regarding Poland's expectations for receiving moneys for its agricultural policy?

Peter Hain: A lot of discussions.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Does my right hon. Friend share my disappointment that, on an issue such as Kaliningrad, which, classically and ideally, should be resolved by the EU rather than by individual member states, the French President saw fit to see Mr. Putin on Monday and therefore break ranks in many ways? That is really not helpful in terms of finding a suitable long-term solution to Kaliningrad and to a single EU external voice.

Peter Hain: I understand and agree with my hon. Friend's desire for a much stronger external policy for the European Union. It is important, however, that, in the absence of that, we all make every effort to try to crack this problem. The Danish presidency is seized of the need to engage on this matter, and the European Commission is in weekly discussion on Kaliningrad on behalf of the whole of Europe.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Further to the Minister's informative reply to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), was he misquoted when he was reported as having said that the European Union should press ahead with enlargement even in advance of prior agreement on radical agricultural reform? Surely, unless the Fischler reforms are agreed, enlargement to the east will be totally unsustainable.

Peter Hain: It is much more complicated than that. If we allow countries—some of them are in the European Union—effectively to block enlargement because they want to protect their vested interests in the bloated and inefficient common agricultural policy, we will not secure that objective. We therefore need to complete the negotiations on the agricultural chapter, which are already 95 per cent. concluded. The tough 5 per cent. concerns direct payments, which is a serious issue for Poland as well. We do not want those negotiations, which I am sure can be satisfactorily concluded, to prejudice wider reform of the CAP—that is why we asked for a delay in the decision until the informal European Council in October or November—or to prejudice the wider process of enlargement. That process is crucial to the reunification of Europe and to getting countries, such as Poland, into Europe, which is where they should always have been.

Lockerbie Disaster

13. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Pursuant to his recent meeting with the Lockerbie relatives, when he expects to make a decision on setting up a public inquiry into the international aspects of Lockerbie. [69589]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): As the Foreign Secretary told the House on 11 July, he has explained to the families of the Lockerbie victims that he does not see a case for a public inquiry. A successful criminal process has convicted an agent of the Libyan intelligence services of carrying out the attack. Public inquiries are less worthwhile when there has already been an exposition of the case in a criminal trial. The passage of time since Lockerbie would make a public inquiry of still more uncertain value. However, we are still considering whether aspects of Lockerbie, including international aspects, warrant further study. We shall inform the relatives of the victims as soon as we have come to a conclusion.

Mr. Dalyell: What knowledge does the Foreign Office have of a payment of $11 million on or about 23 December 1988 from Iranian sources via a bank in Lausanne, the Banque Nationale de Paris and the Hungarian development bank to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine? What knowledge does the Foreign Office have of a payment on or about 25 April 1989 to Mohammed Abu Talb, an "incriminee" of the Lockerbie trial and a long-term suspect?

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend's question is, no doubt, an appetiser for the Adjournment debate that we hope to hold later this evening. The answers to his questions are complex, and I hope to be able to set them out in the reply to that debate. I will happily try to cover that point and many, many others.

World Service

15. **Mr. Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds, North-East): If he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the BBC World Service. [69591]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): The BBC World Service is a vitally important asset for Britain. We want it to remain the best known and most respected voice in international broadcasting. That is why, last week, we announced an uplift of £48 million in funding for it over the next three years.

Mr. Hamilton: I am sure that my hon. Friend and the whole House agree that that is a tremendous boost for the BBC World Service. Does he agree that it played a crucial part in the recent war in Afghanistan and that it is the main source of communication among many Afghans, who listen to the World Service before any other station? Does he also agree that the Persian service has played, and continues to play, a crucial role in Iran in supporting the reformist elements of President Khatami? For example, in January 2001, 287,000 people contacted the Persian language website, but the figure had increased to 2.4 million by last month.

Mr. MacShane: I fear that my hon. Friend has answered his own question. He is right. An increase in services using regional languages—Persian, Pashtun, Urdu, Hindi, Arabic and central Asian languages—has been provided by the World Service.

I refer to another part of the world where the World Service has performed marvels: it has doubled its audience in the United States. I know that Mr. Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Fed, listens to the World

Service. People all over America download from the World Service's internet web service accurate, impartial and non-propagandist news.

Convention on the Future of Europe

16. **Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell): If he will make a statement on progress at the Convention on the Future of Europe. [69592]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): The Convention has concluded its listening phase, during which it took soundings from its members and a wide range of civil society. It is now moving into its analytical phase, including working groups on specific issues.

Mr. Challen: May I ask my right hon. Friend to contrast the almost complete absence of public debate on the Convention of the Future of Europe and on the democratic nature of the enlargement that is to take place with the £37,000 that is spent every day on euro preparations, which I estimate has amounted to £8 million or £9 million since I last raised the issue? Does that suggest that we are not really interested in encouraging public debate on the future of Europe?

Peter Hain: No, it does not. I spend quite a lot of time travelling around Britain—I have travelled to all three nations—explaining what enlargement and the future of Europe are about. It is hard to get attention in the media for that debate, but I agree that it is essential to do so.

On preparations for the euro, I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that it is important that our companies, many of which are small businesses, are properly prepared for the existence of the euro in the eurozone countries, because many of them trade in the euro. That is what the Treasury plan and the money that is being spent, under the Chancellor's supervision, are designed to achieve.

Iran

17. **Mr. Stephen McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): If he will make a statement on bilateral relations with Iran. [69593]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The UK, through critical engagement, seeks to apply a twin-track approach in respect of Iran. We support reform in Iran while maintaining a robust dialogue on matters of concern, such as human rights and weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. McCabe: The US State Department and Israeli intelligence have warned that Iran is a state that sponsors terrorism. In view of that, and of Iran's developing nuclear and chemical weapons and its appalling human rights record—with almost daily public executions and floggings, sometimes for the most trivial offences, such as playing snooker—why is Iran a friend, yet Iraq, which has a remarkably similar record, is an enemy and a threat?

Mr. O'Brien: At least in Iran, unlike Iraq, the Government are led by a reformist President democratically elected by the people of Iran. The UK supports President Khatami's stated objective of a civil society based on the rule of law. The UK remains committed to a policy of critical engagement, which allows us to support reform in Iran while maintaining robust pressure in relation to issues of concern, such as those mentioned by my hon. Friend. Those issues include Iranian support for terrorist groups in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran's reported development of weapons of mass destruction and aspects of its human rights record. We believe that constructive and critical engagement is the best way forward.

International Criminal Court

18. **Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West): What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the USA about the International Criminal Court. [69594]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had discussions with the United States Secretary of State on the ICC, resulting in United Nations Security Council resolution 1422, which was unanimously adopted on 12 July 2002 and which respects the statute of the court and allows the US to continue to participate in UN peacekeeping operations.

Valerie Davey: I welcome that reply, but there is a clear recognition that that is a compromise. May I ask the Minister whether there will be ongoing debate or dialogue with the United States so that we do not have another US stand-off position in a year's time?

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend is right. That is why the Foreign Secretary is continuing those discussions. The United States Senate, Congress and leadership have always been unwilling to sign up to the International Criminal Court. We continue to try hard to persuade them that an international rule of law in this area is the right way forward, and that will continue to be our position.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the Minister's statement. Does he agree that this is sending a bad signal to other nations, especially when we bear it in mind that there is a fall-back position: the United States could take any action against any of its citizens? In that context, would it not be better to encourage the United States to join international law enforcement as well as international law keeping?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman makes his point effectively. I would hope that every hon. Member, even those who voted against the Third Reading of the International Criminal Court Bill, now supports his position.

Future of Air Transport

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): I should like to make a statement about future air transport and airport capacity in the United Kingdom.

We have built the fourth largest economy in the world on our ability to trade. Air travel is crucial to our expanding economy and we need to plan for the future. There has been a sixfold increase in air travel since 1970, and now half the population flies at least once a year. Demand is expected to continue to grow.

The Government will next year publish a White Paper on air travel. As part of that, we will set out our concluded views on how much additional airport capacity is needed and where it should be sited. Before we do that, we need to canvass views on a range of options. So today, in advance of the White Paper, I am publishing six consultation papers covering the English regions, Scotland and Wales. A further consultation paper for Northern Ireland will be published shortly.

The key issues that we need to address are how we should respond to the continued growth in demand for air travel; how much additional airport provision is needed; and where it should be located. Just as importantly, we need to deal with the environmental impact of expansion and its effects on the people living close to airports. Providing a framework for sustainable development for the next 30 years and beyond is essential. So the consultation is the first stage in that process. It seeks views on a range of options and their implications.

I should first set out the background against which we need to plan. There has been a phenomenal growth in travel by air. In 1970, some 32 million passengers passed through UK airports. Today, that figure is 180 million. People increasingly want to travel by air, whether for holidays abroad or business travel, in an increasingly international economy. Business depends on its ability to get goods quickly to markets across the world. One third of all UK goods exported now go by air. Air travel has opened up possibilities that simply did not exist years ago.

This is not just about travel, however; the airline industry is of critical importance to economic prosperity. It directly employs 180,000 people, and as many jobs again depend indirectly on the aviation industry. Many firms choose to locate close to airports and many businesses choose to invest in the UK because of our good communications, particularly air travel.

Today we publish a range of projections of the number of people who might be expected to use each of the main UK airports over the next 30 years. Some airports will not be able to deal with even a modest increase in demand. At this time of year, of course, holidaymakers are familiar with congested airports, but this is not just a summer issue. Throughout the year, some airports, such as Heathrow, are already near their full capacity.

So doing nothing is not an option. As a first step, we of course need to do all we possibly can to make the most of existing capacity—but on any view that is not enough. The Government therefore aim to set a framework for sustainable development against which people can plan. It has to be sufficiently flexible to cater for changes in demand and in patterns of travel, but it must provide a degree of certainty too.

It is essential that we get this right, which is why we are consulting. We will be making decisions that shape the air industry and air travel for the next generation and beyond. The need to take full account of the environmental consequences of air travel is critical, which is why, for example, the consultation asks about rail alternatives in relation to domestic air travel. Where there is increased airport capacity, we need to strike the right balance between benefits from increased travel and trade and their environmental costs. As we said in 1998, we believe that the aviation industry should cover its environmental costs. Our forecasts for demand reflect that, and the proposals on which we are consulting include strict environmental controls, paid for by the air industry.

Let me summarise the options in each consultation paper before I turn to the options for the south-east. Those, for obvious reasons, have significance for the whole country. There has already been substantial growth at regional airports throughout the country, and the Government want to encourage development of such airports. As well as making travel more convenient, that is essential for economic development all over the country. The consultation looks at how to maximise the use of regional airports. For every part of the UK, we ask how we should respond to people's increasing desire to travel by air; whether extra capacity is needed and where it should be; and in every case we seek views on the environmental impact of any future development.

In Scotland in the past 10 years the number of people using the main Scottish airports has doubled to 16 million a year, and we expect continued growth as the Scottish economy expands. The consultation paper looks at making the most of existing capacity. It asks where new capacity should be situated—should it be concentrated at one or two key airports, or spread across all Scottish airports? It asks what scope there is to develop Edinburgh or Glasgow as a hub airport for Scotland, attracting new services to a wider range of destinations, and the Scottish Executive are also publishing a report on how to improve rail links to both those airports. The consultation looks at other issues of vital concern in Scotland, such as maintaining access to London and the lifeline air links to the highlands and islands.

In Wales, the consultation paper looks at what new capacity might be needed, especially at Cardiff. BMI recently announced that it will establish a second UK base there for its low-cost airline. Wales is already a major centre for aircraft maintenance, and to develop that, the consultation includes proposals for a major aerospace park. Because two thirds of passengers living in Wales fly from airports in England, the consultation covers improved surface links to airports in both Wales and England, and looks at the potential to start up internal flights within Wales, which would improve access where surface journeys are lengthy.

The north of England has seven major airports handling 26 million passengers a year, and that number is expected to rise over the next 30 years. Expansion could support many new jobs in the region. Manchester airport is by far the biggest outside the south-east of England and demand is likely to be higher there than at any airport outside London, so the consultation paper looks at how it could be developed further to become a hub airport complementing Heathrow. The consultation also asks how to make the most of other airports in the region; whether additional capacity should be concentrated at one or two airports, or spread across the region; and how far rail can substitute for domestic services, particularly to London.

In the midlands, there are now 10 million air passengers a year. The consultation paper looks at what options are available once capacity at Birmingham is reached, and it considers the role of east midlands airport, which is the third largest freight airport in the country. The consultation identifies options—again over the next thirty years—including a new runway either at Birmingham or at east midlands airport. There may be more demand for services from Birmingham than from east midlands, but that needs to be balanced against the impacts of noise and traffic congestion. A new site between Coventry and Rugby might be examined: away from houses, impacts would be less, but the cost of a new airport would of course be much greater. Decisions about capacity at south-east airports will have consequences for developments in the midlands, as elsewhere.

In south-west England, demand for air travel is growing fast. Most people living in the south-west use airports in both the south-east and the midlands. The Government are keen to ensure that airports meet as much local demand as they can, so the consultation looks at the expanded capacity that might be needed at Bristol airport and elsewhere, and asks how a wider range of services could be secured. Because vital links between the south-west and London are limited, the document looks at supporting these air links and at improving rail connections to London airports.

Development of London airports will affect every part of the country and air travel to the rest of the world. One in every six of the world's international passengers start or finish their journey at a south-east airport. So those decisions affect the whole country, and they are central to the future of our United Kingdom aviation industry.

Already, 117 million passengers a year use south-east airports, and the number is likely to grow substantially. The pressures on existing London airports today are obvious enough, so on any view doing nothing is not an option. As with the rest of the country, we need a framework to cater for people's increasing wish to travel and trade. Again, of course, existing capacity must be maximised—for example, at Luton and Stansted, which have seen substantial growth of low-cost airline travel.

With Heathrow, we have a world-class hub airport. Some 15 million international passengers transfer through the airport—the biggest number at any airport in the world—and it employs 68,000 people directly, but Heathrow is already under pressure. Airlines cannot get the runway slots to operate new services. It is already at its limit. Gatwick's single runway is full for much of the day, and Stansted is rapidly filling up, too.

In the meantime, in Europe, there have been substantial developments at Paris, Frankfurt and Amsterdam, all of which want to rival Heathrow and attract its business. If we do nothing, the United Kingdom will lose out, not just in terms of flights, but in terms of jobs. So the consultation asks about the importance of an international hub airport. We believe that it is in Britain's interests to maintain a world-class global hub airport in the south-east, not just because it is good for passengers, but because it is an essential part of United Kingdom's prosperity. The key question is where should it be.

One option is to build at Heathrow—already the fourth busiest airport in the world. That could mean an additional, shorter runway, complementing what is already there. Alongside the economic benefits, we would, of course, need to consider the environmental impact, particularly the effects on the many people who live around the airport and its flight paths.

A second option looked at is Stansted—another existing airport that could be developed to become a hub itself or to complement Heathrow. As with expanding Heathrow, costs would be less than building a new airport, but it would be necessary to improve transport links to and from the airport, and of course the impact on the local community has to be considered.

A third option is to build a completely new airport, with the option of development at Cliffe in north Kent. The advantage is the maximum flexibility to construct a new airport to meet the demands of the future. Against that, we need to consider the environmental consequences of building at Cliffe and, of course, the very substantial cost of a new airport. Those have to be balanced against the considerable benefits for jobs and economic regeneration of Kent, Essex and east London.

So the Government seek views on the merits of a new development. As well as the question of a hub airport, the consultation looks at where any other new capacity should be located.

At Gatwick, a legal agreement rules out construction of a new runway before 2019, and the Government do not propose to challenge that. So we are not putting forward any option for a new runway, but there is still some capacity that can be used in the years to come, as is already agreed locally.

The consultation also looks at the needs of other airports in the region, including Luton and an option of a freight airport at Alconbury. The consultation looks at most major airports and asks what further development is necessary and desirable and, in each case, at how to deal with the environmental effects of any development.

Air travel is crucial to our expanding economy. We need to plan for the future and to provide a framework for sustainable development for the next 30 years and beyond. The consultation is the first stage in that process. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for his characteristic courtesy in providing me with a copy of it in advance. I am very much looking forward to debating transport matters with him in the coming months, and I hope to provide him with robust but genuinely constructive opposition, since, as he will know better than any other right hon. Member, there are no easy or quick solutions to the nation's transport difficulties.

Of course the Secretary of State is entirely right to say that we must plan for the long term. As he knows, up to 500,000 jobs and something like £10 billion of gross domestic product in this country depend on the air transport industry. He will also know that there are serious concerns about the competitiveness of the UK with airports in Paris, Amsterdam and Frankfurt. He will have heard today the chief executive of BA saying:

> "We in the UK are falling behind mainland Europe."

Clearly that is not sustainable.

[Mr. Tim Collins]

The Secretary of State is entirely right to say that doing nothing is not an option. He would have been derelict in his duty had he failed to plan for growth; I am pleased to see that he did not. However, there are still detailed questions that he would expect me to ask.

On passenger number projections, the Secretary of State will know that the media today—particularly the lunchtime television bulletins—were heavily briefed about a set of figures that suggested a figure of 180 million passengers at the moment rising to an expected 400 million by 2020. Interestingly, the Secretary of State did not refer to those figures in his statement. Does he agree that straight-line predictions of growth can often be dangerous? The world has changed in recent months and will change even further in years to come.

The figure of 180 million passengers was a figure for the year 2000. Can the Secretary of State provide the House with the figure for 2001 yet? Is he aware that, since the figure for 2000 was announced, there have been a global economic slowdown as well as the events of 11 September? Is he aware that many people who earn a living predicting the future of the airline industry are not so sanguine about rapid growth as perhaps he and his officials are?

Is the Secretary of State aware that the Farnborough air show has its lowest level of commercial aircraft orders for 30 years? Is he aware that the largest airline manufacturing company in the world, Boeing, has halved production and sacked 30,000 workers in recent months? Is he familiar with the fact that Sabena has gone bust and that Swissair, Aer Lingus and BA are in financial difficulty? *[Interruption.]* I am sure that he is aware of these matters. In light of that, will he tell the House whether he is committed personally—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must allow the hon. Gentleman to be heard.

Mr. Collins: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker. Is the Secretary of State saying that he personally stands by the projected figure of 400 million passenger movements by 2020, which the Department provided extensively to the broadcast media at lunchtime today?

The Secretary of State is right to say that many residents will be affected by airport expansion. Does he recognise that there is a need for certainty? He is right to consult, but does he recognise that swift decisions will be greatly welcomed by those affected? None of us wants to see the whole procedure of terminal 5 repeated—

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Oh yes we do.

Mr. Collins: We do not want the procedure to be dragged out indefinitely. Is the Minister aware that the compensation provided to residents affected in this country is arrived at on a different basis from elsewhere in Europe? Will he look at that?

One hon. Member is clearly very interested in terminal 5. Is the Secretary of State aware that the BAA website, even today, still says that one of the arguments for terminal 5 is that it

> "would not require another runway"?

Is he aware that the website says today that BAA is

> "prepared to be legally bound that noise levels would not exceed 1994 levels",

and that it is not calling for any more night flights? Can the Secretary of State say whether the proposals that he is thinking about today relating to an extra runway at Heathrow are consistent with those assurances and undertakings?

Only last November, the Government imposed a cap on the number of flights into Heathrow. The Secretary of State will recall that the cap was set at 480,000 air transport movements. However, in the documents published today, he says that an extra runway could see that increase to 655,000 ATMs. Does the cap announced last November stand or not? Can he give any other assurances to residents living near other airports?

Will the Secretary of State address, as he did in part of his statement, the question of sharing the burden of extra capacity around the United Kingdom? He will know that a substantial proportion of passengers coming into the south-east to use airports do not actually live in the south-east. Does he have a strategy substantially to expand regional airport capacity?

At lunchtime today, I spoke with the chief executive of Luton airport, Paul Kehoe, who said that Luton airport was ready rapidly to double its existing passenger numbers from 7 million a year and could quite easily triple that figure. Has the Secretary of State taken that into account in his planning?

Does the Secretary of State believe that the Government have demonstrated joined-up government on this issue? Is he aware that, in most of the areas in which he is contemplating substantial runway expansion, the local authorities have been told by the Government in the last few days that they will also have to cope with substantial increases in the number of homes to be planted in their area, above and beyond what their residents want; and that, because of changes in the local government funding formula, they will have less, rather than more, money to help them to cope with that? How, against that background, does he expect them to expand their infrastructure to cope with extra runways?

The Secretary of State referred to the north of England, saying that the consultation looks at how far rail can substitute for domestic services, particularly to London from the north and north-west of England. Those of us who represent north-western constituencies find that a somewhat ironic observation for the Secretary of State to make in the week when the west coast main line upgrade appears permanently to have been shelved. Will he say a word about upgrading public transport access to the new runways, whether in new or old airports? Does he recognise an essential need for public transport to be upgraded?

Is the right hon. Gentleman furthermore prepared to tell the House whether the proposal for a possible new airport at Cliffe marshes is an entirely serious and worked-through proposal? The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has said:

> "in environmental terms it is hard to think of a worse site for an airport in the south east than Cliffe Marshes".

The right hon. Gentleman will also be aware that, on page 82 of his own document, he says:

> "The success of a new airport would depend crucially on its ability to attract airlines."

Has he done a feasibility study on whether airlines will be prepared to move out to Cliffe marshes? Is it not the case, as some have speculated, that this proposal has been advanced only so that the Secretary of State can look very green when he abolishes it, never having been in favour of it in the first place?

Finally—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray!"]—well, Labour Members may not think that these questions are important, but let me assure them that their constituents and others believe that these matters are important. The Secretary of State is quite right to be thinking about these issues, and I commend him on the spirit in which he has done so. He will have the constructive support of Her Majesty's Opposition in looking for sensible and practical solutions. Will he recognise, however, that it is essential that these decisions be taken in a swift but consultative manner? Will he say specifically that he does not expect the Government to take anything like as long to take these decisions as they took to reach a conclusion about terminal 5?

Mr. Darling: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his appointment to his new post. I have to say that we shall miss the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May)—for reasons that she may not appreciate—but anyway, she has gone now. I must also commend the hon. Gentleman for another reason. He flashed across my consciousness once before, when, during the Tory leadership campaign in 1995, he described the campaign team of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) as

> "a swivel-eyed barmy army from ward 8 at Broadmoor."

Hon. Members will be aware that one of the members of that swivel-eyed barmy army is now the Leader of the Opposition. Either there has been a rapprochement, or the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) has not come across this description yet.

I am conscious of the fact that many hon. Members on both sides of the House will want to ask me questions, and I shall deal with the points that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) has raised. I shall not criticise him for being light on policy, since, three hours into his appointment, it is probably a bit early for him to be anything else.

I appreciate the fact that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that the Government are consulting. He went on to ask some detailed questions about matters such as Cliffe, for example, on which, by definition, we have not yet made firm proposals because we are consulting on a principle. He asked me to reach a swift decision after the consultation, and I agree with him that that is wholly desirable. It is best for everyone concerned—residents, people who are affected by airports, the industry and the travelling public—to know what the Government are proposing, and I want to bring these matters to a conclusion as quickly as I can, consistently with doing justice to the representations that are made. Moreover, the consultation period does not end until the end of November. It will therefore be next year before we publish a White Paper, but I entirely accept the point that he makes.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned several points of detail, the first of which concerned terminal 5, Heathrow and night flights. The decision on terminal 5 holds good, and was made in the light of existing pressures on Heathrow and its two runways. The inspector acknowledges in his report that the Government are embarking on long-term consultation, looking ahead to the next 30 years. So the position on terminal 5, and on the cap on the number of flights that was referred to at that time, remains good in relation to Heathrow's current situation. Everybody knew that we would look at Heathrow in the context of the other London airports over a longer period. The Government will publish a consultation paper on night flights towards the end of this year.

As I said in my statement, there is excess capacity at Luton, and as the general manager recognises, it can be expanded. However, if the hon. Gentleman was thinking of Luton as an alternative to, say, developing Stansted, I should point out that a second runway cannot be built at Luton because of the topography, which inevitably imposes some constraint.

The hon. Gentleman asked about rail links from the north-west in particular. In developing any sensible airport policy, it is important to allow for the fact that, in some cases, people should find it easier and better to travel by rail. I accept that there are problems with the west coast main line upgrade, although as he will discover, it has not been postponed. Having discovered that Railtrack had grossly underestimated the costs and scale of the project, the Strategic Rail Authority is examining the matter from the start. So his point about Railtrack is not a particularly good one, especially as the main cause of the problem relates to Railtrack's initial setting up.

The hon. Gentleman made a general point about future projections. The document looks at the likely demand for unconstrained travel—in other words, the number of people who are likely to want to travel, or to trade, in the next few years. It also examines assumptions and options, based on constrained travel in the south-east or throughout the entire United Kingdom. The point is that, if airports are extended or new ones are built, the work will be done by the private sector, which will have to take a view on the likely levels of business. The Government are consulting on the numbers who are likely to want to fly, and how we respond. That is the point of a consultation period.

The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that, if we look ahead 30 years, there are bound to be some ups and downs. Twelve months ago—after September—people thought that the air industry would take a knock and that it would not recover. However, domestic and European travel has recovered substantially—not just because of low-cost airlines—and transatlantic journeys are also approaching previous levels. In this case, we must look ahead 30 years, which is what we are doing in the consultation documents published today. Over the next few months, the object of the exercise is to gather people's views on what they think will happen.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for recognising that doing nothing—pretending that there is no problem, or hoping that it will go away—is simply not an option. We all face this difficulty in our lives: most people want to travel by plane, and most of us have to fly from time to time, but all of us are concerned about airport expansion. Frankly, we cannot have it both ways. We must face up to the fact

[Mr. Darling]

that there is an opportunity here. There are problems to be solved, but Britain's future and prosperity depend on putting them right, and that is something that I am determined to do.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I, too, welcome the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) to his new post, and I thank the Secretary of State for his statement today. I begin by entirely agreeing with him that doing nothing is simply not an option. However, given that the Deputy Prime Minister accepted that "predict and provide" simply had not worked for our roads, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that it will not work for our airspace either? It is important to develop sustainable approaches to the difficult issues that the statement addresses.

The Secretary of State referred to rail substitution for domestic flights, but does he have any targets for the amount of substitution that he would like to see, given that there are currently some 365,000 domestic flights?

Given that the Secretary of State also rightly referred to the importance of our regional airports, both for their economic benefits to the regions and in reducing pressure on the south-east, will he acknowledge that it is vital that all airports operate on a level playing field, especially as regards landing fees? Is he aware that landing fees at Heathrow are among the lowest in the world?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that his statement, although strong on environmental rhetoric, is rather weak on the details? For example, can he tell the House his plans for the development of an EU-wide aviation fuel duty, and what action he is taking to ensure that the increases in flights do not compromise the Kyoto agreement?

Having told us that he wants to make quick decisions, can the Secretary of State tell us why we have to wait for further consultation on night flights? Could he not simply rule out any increase in night flights to or from airports in urban areas?

Why has the right hon. Gentleman given us only one option—and a highly environmentally sensitive one at that—for a new airport for the south-east, when a range of alternatives could, and should, have been provided?

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Where?

Mr. Foster: May I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman considers Manston as one possible base?

The Secretary of State said that the flight cap of 480,000, rightly imposed on Heathrow by his predecessor, is now up for grabs. Can he explain why it is up for grabs while the legal limits on a new runway at Gatwick seem to be set in stone? Why is there an inconsistency?

The Secretary of State will be as concerned as I am about the current problems with National Air Traffic Services and the various emergency measures that have had to be implemented, such as overtime working and retired air traffic controllers having to help out. Will he give us an absolute assurance that he has plans to ensure that there will be sufficient air traffic controllers to cope with the growth in flights discussed in the paper?

Mr. Darling: We are not in the business of what is known [illegible] predicting and providing; no one in their right mind would build an airport on spec. The whole point of the consultation is to obtain people's view of the likely demand and of how we respond to it in future.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that regional airports are very important. I am sure that everyone on this side of the House would like to think that when we land at a regional airport it is a level playing field—and a level landing field as well. I am aware of his point about charges. The industry is examining that, especially in the context of low-cost airlines.

On the environment, when the Government make definite and firm proposals in their White Paper, that will be the time to consider, in respect of specific proposals, what we can do to honour our international and European obligations. The hon. Gentleman asked about the fuel duty. It is not only a matter for the European Union, but for world aviation. It would be curious if there was one regime in Europe and another for the rest of the world—all sorts of difficulties would arise.

On night flights, I said that I want to consult as quickly as possible. The hon. Gentleman and the House will be aware that a court case is pending in relation to the decisions taken by the last Conservative Government. That is before the court, and we shall have to consider it, too.

The hon. Gentleman asked why we were not looking at options other than Cliffe. It would be interesting if the Liberal party could actually come up with an option—a real proposal that we could consider.

Mr. Foster: I mentioned one.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman mentioned Manston and I appreciate the interest of Kent county council in Manston. However, the problem is that it is about 60 miles further to the east and that would pose difficulties as regards journeys into London. In addition, the further east one goes, the more one has to deal with air traffic considerations in continental Europe.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman referred to NATS and air traffic controllers. NATS is addressing the matter; there is a problem throughout Europe in attracting enough people to deal with the increased demand. Generally, however, it is doing a good job and is coping with the amount of traffic. On his point about the consultation paper, NATS and the Civil Aviation Authority were of course consulted and will need to consider any concluded proposals following the consultation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I say to the House that when I call a Back Bencher, I expect only one question to be asked?

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): The Secretary of State should be aware of the sense of betrayal, anger and worry felt by my constituents who live near Heathrow. They feel betrayed and angry because at the terminal 4 inquiry we were told that there would be no need for a terminal 5. At the terminal 5 inquiry, the British Airports Authority wrote to every one of my constituents at Heathrow saying that there was no need for a third runway. Six months ago, the Secretary of State told me that the environment of my constituents would be protected by a cap on Heathrow, and now they are coming back for more. My constituents do not believe that this will be a short take-off runway. It will be a full runway, at the end of the day, affecting the homes of 4,000 families, three primary schools and villages and communities that have existed for 1,000 years.

I ask the Secretary of State for an assurance that he comes to the consultation with an open mind. Will he also give a commitment that, for the first time in 30 years of Heathrow's expansion, the interests of my constituents will be protected?

Mr. Darling: This is a consultation, and I made it very clear in my statement that the Government are looking at what we do to ensure that we maintain an international hub airport in the south-east. I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes about his constituents—I would expect that from any Member of Parliament representing a constituency containing an airport. However, he knows that Heathrow employs 68,000 people. There are about 100,000 people whose employment depends on the future of Heathrow. When we look at these matters, we must realise that although an airport's expansion or extension will cause some people concern, many people live around Heathrow and work there, while others fly from there on a number of occasions every year. It is not easy to marry those factors, but we need to consider the bigger picture.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): There will be widespread agreement with the Secretary of State that, whatever its exact path, there will be significant growth. The demand must be met, and much of it must be met in the south-east. I suspect that there is also agreement that there should be a dominant international hub airport in the south-east. However, does he accept that there is a powerful case that, to secure the long-term prosperity of Britain's civil aviation industry, with all the jobs that he rightly says depend on it, it would be better to consider the option of a new coastal airport, as other countries that have that option are doing, rather than endlessly bolting on capacity to existing inland airports? Does it not make better sense to locate flight paths over water rather than over houses? I do not know whether Cliffe is the right area, but new investment and jobs are urgently needed in the east Thames corridor.

Mr. Darling: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. It is worth bearing it in mind that 65 per cent. of passengers who use south-east airports live in the south-east of England, so the majority are local. On his point about a coastal airport, Cliffe is just that—it is an option to build a new airport on the Thames coast. There will be counter-arguments in respect of Cliffe, just as there are for every other airport. One of the problems in the south-east of England is that there is a limited amount of open space that has no complications and wants an airport. If he finds such a site, he should drop me a line, because I would be interested to see it.

The options are fairly straightforward. The advantage of Heathrow is that it is there already, the advantage of Stansted is that an existing airport could be extended, and the advantage of Cliffe is that it is a new site. However, I readily recognise that there are pros and cons for every site and airport. It is for us, through the consultation process, to try to reach the right answer.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): Is the Secretary of State aware that there will be huge opposition to the construction of a new airport at Cliffe? It will not be based on selfish nimbyism or rejection of the economic benefits but on the massive damage that will be done to the most sensitive ecological sites in Europe, which are irreplaceable. Will the Secretary of State give my constituents at least this comfort? If, during the course of the consultation process, it appears that a new airport can be ruled out on the grounds of cost or anything else, will he give swift notice of that fact, so that the blight overhanging so much of north Kent can be lifted?

Mr. Darling: It is appropriate that my hon. and learned Friend should follow the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude); perhaps they should have a conversation with each other. That illustrates the problems that we face. I say to my hon. and learned Friend that I propose to announce the Government's conclusions after the consultation period—in one announcement rather than in bits, I hope. The whole consultation period has to run.

I say to my hon. and learned Friend, as I have said to other Members, that we must put in the balance the fact that we all know that doing nothing is not an option. There are more and more people who need or want to fly, and our future prosperity depends upon it. Indeed, many people who live near airports fly themselves.

There is no easy answer and, whatever the decision, I dare say that there will be difficulties with it. But I hope that when my hon. and learned Friend approaches the consultation, he will do so in the spirit of recognising that there could also be benefits from airport development at Cliffe and in other places, and reach a final view next year.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): In his statement, the Secretary of State repeatedly suggested that environmental considerations would be of the utmost importance. As someone who has worked in the aircraft industry, supported Heathrow and always argued its merits as a premier international hub airport, may I say that constructing a new runway to the north of the existing one at Heathrow would be a development too far? Would it not be a supreme irony for many people who owe their livelihood to the airport, or who work there, to find themselves dispossessed of their homes by the construction of a runway that would fatally prejudice the environment of west London? May I therefore urge a balanced strategy, developing the London airport system as a whole, right round the capital, and the construction of crossrail through London, past Stratford, out to Stansted, to ensure the surface transport access that has so often been denied to passengers?

Mr. Darling: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point about Heathrow and I know that, over the years, he has supported development to maintain Heathrow's premier position. The question that we must consider in this consultation period is how to ensure that a major hub airport is maintained in the London area. The question is whether we extend Heathrow—I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about that—or develop Stansted or a new site instead. The consultation also seeks views on whether Heathrow and Stansted could be developed together and complement each other, so the options are all in play.

I would say to the hon. Gentleman—he no doubt does this—that he must also talk to people who currently use Heathrow, who are now taking a long-term view in

[Mr. Darling]

relation to that airport. I know that the hon. Gentleman sometimes has difficulty in looking across the channel to Europe, but he is aware that while we in this country consider these matters, major hub airports are already being developed in Paris, Amsterdam and Frankfurt. If we do not decide what to do in a way acceptable to both residents and the industry, we could be in some difficulty in years to come.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The Secretary of State will know that for decades British Governments have run away from the difficult questions in aviation, so he is to be most warmly congratulated on his statement today. He will also be aware that this is a matter of some urgency. Will he therefore give me an undertaking that under no circumstances will the decisions in relation either to extra runways, or to possibly a new airport, take place after the next general election? Will he also give me an absolute assurance that the private partners of National Air Traffic Services will be able to fund the expansion of air traffic services without which none of this will be possible? Above all, will he remember that although regional airports will certainly expand, they must have the right to come into the south-east airports protected? Otherwise, regional transport will become a pariah in terms of the development of the economy.

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her introductory words. As I said, I am determined that the Government should come to a firm view, which will be set out in the White Paper next year. It is in no one's interests that the matter should drag out. Clearly, if specific proposals are then made, some will take time to work out for obvious reasons. The uncertainty ought to be brought to an end as quickly as possible, but especially in places where there is not to be any development. She is also right that successive Governments have considered the subject and that some of them have run away from it. In the past few weeks, there have been times when I have seen why. My judgment is that in transport matters it is better to make decisions than not to make them, even though the consequences may be difficult.

My hon. Friend is also right that, on any view, we will have to cater for an increased use of air space, which will have consequent effects on air traffic control. It is important to ensure that NATS and the air traffic control system can cope with that. The consultation document touches on that. It is also important that the necessary funding comes—it is a partnership between the public and the private sectors—to ensure that air traffic control operates effectively.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): The Secretary of State will accept that it is obvious that there will be huge demand for development around any new runway or airport. With the London proposals in mind in particular, has his Department done any research into the extent to which it anticipates that happening, and if so, will it be published? If not, is such research anticipated and will it be published before the end of the consultation period?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman knows that the Deputy Prime Minister published proposals on housing last week. My Department and his remain in touch, of course, and if the hon. Gentleman has questions relating to that, he can ask them in the normal way. He is right that airport developments have consequential effects, not only for housing but for businesses.

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): My right hon. Friend is right to propose additional runway capacity, but does he agree that an equally strong case can be made for effective ground transport links to airports? With reference to Manchester, will he consider the proposal to extend heavy rail from the airport to the west coast main line? More immediately, will he continue to liaise with the Greater Manchester passenger transport executive to ensure that the Metrolink extension to the airport goes ahead as quickly as possible?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend and other Greater Manchester Members will know that my Department is in touch with Manchester council about the metro. He will know that our concern relates not to the development of light rail, which we very much want, but to the fact that the costs have escalated dramatically recently and we need to get to the bottom of that for obvious reasons. He is also right that public transport links not only to Manchester but to all airports leave much to be desired. For example, Heathrow only acquired a heavy rail link recently, which is astonishing. That is something that we need to attend to in other parts of the country too.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Given that the areas immediately around Heathrow and Stansted are congested and overheating, does the Secretary of State agree that there is a wonderful opportunity, in principle, irrespective of which site is chosen, to create jobs and investment in the Thames gateway, which is the poorest part of the south-east region?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman has a point. I said that one of the advantages of a development at Cliffe would be the gains that it would bring to the Thames gateway—an area that the previous Conservative Government and this Government have been anxious to help to regenerate. The difficulty, as he probably recognises—I appreciate his generosity of spirit in suggesting that the airport should be developed somewhere other than his own area—is that people who live in the area concerned sometimes take a different view. This will be an open consultation. There are powerful arguments for development in each and every case, but we also need to take other considerations into account. That is the object of the consultation period.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The Secretary of State reminded the House that the polluter must pay is an important principle. I disagree with him that airport communities are being compensated for the disruption to their environment caused by aviation and regional airports such as east midlands airport. Will he reassure those of us who represent constituencies near regional airports that could be expanded that he will put in place at least a minimum and decent environmental framework to protect the people who live in such communities, in particular from the corrosive and damaging effects of night noise? As he said in his statement, east midlands airport is second or third for freight carriage in this country, but it has a very weak framework indeed. I can tell him that doing nothing is not an option.

Mr. Darling: I am aware of the issue at east midlands airport. Several local authorities have asked us to designate it in terms of noise control. At the moment, we do that only in south-east England. Obviously, those are all things that we need to look at as part of the consultation in relation to any development, but just so that I do not inadvertently, not mislead, but encourage my hon. Friend to think things that he should not be thinking, I am not holding out any hope of reversing my recent decision in respect of east midlands airport.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): In examining the options for expansion at Southampton international airport, which the Secretary of State will know is in my constituency, can he tell me whether it was discovered that the M27 motorway, the main coast railway line to Portsmouth and the little matter of Southampton city ruled out the construction of a second runway, as a previous study concluded? Is that still the case?

Mr. Darling: I know Southampton international airport. In fact, a couple of weeks ago I spent some time waiting for my train looking at it and its runway. The consultation in relation to Southampton does not envisage a second runway there but considers how Southampton and other airports in the area can be developed further and what their role should be. If anything is canvassed in the consultation that the hon. Gentleman disagrees with, or if there are matters that he thinks that we should examine further, this is the perfect opportunity for him to do that.

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that devolution to Scotland was about delivering services and power nearer to the people who are represented? Will he therefore ensure during the consultation that the highly successful Glasgow airport, which is in my constituency and employs 5,000 people, is not sacrificed if the Edinburgh Parliament suddenly develops what might be described as a natural inclination to draw services to itself, and that the spirit of devolution continues to serve all the people of Scotland equally?

Mr. Darling: I am glad that my hon. Friend chose to blame the Edinburgh Parliament rather than the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, who is of course well aware of the competition or rivalry—call it what you will—between our two cities. The consultation with regard to central Scotland looks at what scope there is to develop both airports. There has been growth at both. It also raises the question whether we should try to develop a hub airport, which would probably only be at one airport. In order to make it work and to get the destinations that many people in Scotland want, not just to the south of England but to Europe and the United States, it would be necessary to achieve a certain density of traffic: it might be difficult to achieve that with a hub of two airports. I hope that as Edinburgh and Glasgow are 44 miles apart, although the airports are slightly further apart than that, all of us could see the common interest in doing that, and I say that an as Edinburgh Member.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): The Secretary of State will be aware that, given the necessary but—in transport terms—relatively modest costs of improvements to the rail service, Manston airport in Kent is about 50 minutes by train to central London. In the light of his earlier answer, does he seriously suggest that Manston's potential is not under consideration in the document?

Mr. Darling: Manston is mentioned in the document, as are most major airports. My point was that, in terms of a large international hub airport, the option in Kent that is being looked at is Cliffe. In relation to Manston or indeed other airports in the region, the whole point of the consultation is to allow people to make representations. At this stage, the Government have not reached a conclusion. We will do so when we reach the stage of publishing a White Paper but there is nothing to stop the hon. Gentleman or other Kent Members making representations if they think that there is a better solution.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I welcome the significance that has been afforded to London Luton airport, which is a particularly successful public-private partnership, one of our largest employers and handles the second largest number of business passengers in the United Kingdom. I welcome the proposals for expansion, although not for a second runway, which the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) seemed to be advocating, since that would mean tarmacking over half of Luton, probably including my house. Is my right hon. Friend aware that expansion of London Luton is predicated on the need to deal with junction 10 of the M1 and its widening? Can he advise us when a decision is likely to be made on that point?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right that, in relation to all these airports, surface communications, whether motorway or rail, need attention. I cannot tell her when a decision is likely to be made in relation to the M1. I would also say, as she raised the matter, that the options at Luton include a new runway to replace the existing runway, because, as she will know far better than I do, the topography of Luton means that it would not be possible to put a second airport there. As she will know, however, significant capacity over the next 30 years should allow Luton to develop successfully.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): The Secretary of State spoke repeatedly about the need to attract a hub operation. Does he understand that that is not entirely within his gift, and that many airports in the world with spacious termini and multi-runways have never been able to attract a hub because they lacked critical mass and the co-operation of a major carrier? Given what is happening in France, Germany and the Netherlands, and the recent failure of British Airways to create a successful hub at Gatwick, what makes him think that there is a possibility of creating an additional hub at Stansted?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is not quite right. What I said was that, clearly, Heathrow is a very successful international hub airport—one international passenger in six start and finish their journeys in the south-east, and many do so at Heathrow. The question is whether we can maintain Heathrow's position. Does it need an extension in terms of an additional runway, or would it be better to operate Heathrow in conjunction with

[Mr. Darling]

a second airport such as Stansted? Alternatively, should we accept that Heathrow cannot expand enough, for whatever reason, and move the hub airport elsewhere? I accept that that does not lie entirely in the Government's hands. The people who build the airport, operate the airport and own the airlines are not the Government. Clearly, however, Government can influence these matters. We can listen to the industry and the airlines, and, because of the powers available to us, set up a framework against which all those people, as well as residents, can plan for the future.

I accept that not all these matters lie in the hands of the Government, but the logic of the hon. Gentleman's position is that the Government should stand back and see what others do to sort it out. I do not think that he is saying that. I do think, however, that the consultation period allows time for people to focus their minds. As he raised the point. I hope that it focuses the minds of everybody concerned, as it is in all our interests that we come to a firm decision sooner rather than later.

Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): Would the Secretary of State add another telling statistic to those that he is beginning to compile? I am the third Heathrow Member to speak this afternoon. One of the other two has always opposed major developments at Heathrow, while the other has always supported them. The latter has changed his mind, and I shall add another to the list of those who have moved across: because of the people living around Heathrow, I do not agree that it is possible to expand outside Heathrow without causing dreadful damage to people's lives. People are already suffering greatly, as I hope that the Secretary of State understands, but they carry on and make a major contribution to one of the world's greatest industries. Two people have therefore switched over this afternoon.

Mr. Darling: I do not quarrel with any Member who advances a particular view because it is in their constituents' interests to do so. My hon. Friend is, therefore, entitled to take that view. All I would say to him, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), is that the three of us are concerned about the future of Heathrow. The question is whether it can continue to be the international airport that it is without extending its capacity further. If, at the end, the consensus is yes, that is fine. But if it is no, all of us—including Members who represent Heathrow constituencies—have to face up to the fact that, at the moment, the airport is responsible, directly and indirectly, for the employment of about 100,000 people. We must take decisions in the next year or so that will determine the future of Heathrow over the next 30 years. There is not an easy answer, as I have said time and again, and all of us have to consider both sides of the argument before reaching a view.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Just 12 months after the opening of the second runway at Manchester airport, the possibility of further development would cause real concern among the communities living around it. Will the Secretary of State take on board the fact that when an airport, such as Manchester, is so close to a conurbation, there must be an upper limit on development? Does he accept that the airport cannot continue to grow indefinitely?

Mr. Darling: There is not a proposal to build another runway at Manchester. The view is that the existing runway capacity will be sufficient throughout the 30-year period. There is, however, an option to extend terminal capacity.

I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, but it reflects a common theme in our exchanges. Everyone agrees that something has to be done and that more and more people want to travel. However, when it comes to the particular, people naturally say, "Not here. Somewhere else." As he knows, I do not represent a Greater Manchester constituency, but I speak to quite a lot of Greater Manchester MPs, not least because we have rather more of them than he has. My impression is that opinion is somewhat divided.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): People in the south-west make fewer air journeys than anyone else in the United Kingdom. That could be because we have the lowest number of airports and slots into the south-east. The situation was not helped when, in the mid-1990s, British Airways withdrew the slot into Heathrow from Plymouth and Newquay. That was bad for the economy of Cornwall and Devon. Will my right hon. Friend seriously consider this issue in the consultation?

Mr. Darling: I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about not just air links but other links from the south-west. I have used Plymouth and Newquay airports on several occasions, and I am aware of the problems that she has encountered. The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), keeps me right about the south-west of England at every possible opportunity.

The consultation documents consider options for increasing links and for extending capacity at Bristol. I appreciate that Bristol is quite a long way from Cornwall, but I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) accepts that some things can be done with the smaller regional airports whereas other things cannot. However, I assure her that I perfectly understand her points and, as I suggested, my ministerial colleague will ensure that I consider all the issues.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): How substantial and significant to the Secretary of State's plans is the contribution made by outstanding regional airports, such as Southend, which are anxious to expand and develop? As we are heading for a period of expansion, will he make it clear that the CAA will adopt a positive and constructive attitude to airport expansion and that it will not be unduly bureaucratic?

Mr. Darling: I hope that the latter will not be the case. The difficulty at Southend is just how much more scope for expansion there is without encountering real problems. However, it is a pleasure to hear an hon. Member say that he wants a bigger airport in his constituency. I assure him that Southend is one of the options considered in the consultation document, but it is not down for development as a major London airport. It is being considered in its own right.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): I want a bigger airport in my constituency. My right hon. Friend will recognise that

Glasgow and the west of Scotland are served by two airports, one of which is Glasgow Prestwick in my constituency. It has a rail link and capacity for growth, so what does he say about that in his scenario of a hub for Scotland? Glasgow Prestwick excels at freight, so will he say something about the consultation on freight in relation to Scotland? Finally, does he agree that the consultation document underlines once and for all the need for the Scottish centre at Prestwick?

Mr. Darling: I agree with my hon. Friend on that point. She will know that I plan to visit Prestwick in the summer. No doubt, I will see her there.

I know that Prestwick has been through a difficult time over the years. There has been some welcome expansion brought about, for example, by the low-cost airline Ryanair and by the development of freight. My hon. Friend will see from the consultation document that the future development of Prestwick is being examined. On her point about whether it is possible to promote a passenger hub airport at Prestwick, the consultation document suggests that the development of Glasgow and Edinburgh is more likely. However, she will clearly want to make representations on behalf of Prestwick.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Given the potential threat to the Inverness-Gatwick air link, does the Secretary of State recognise its vital importance to the economy of the highlands? Notwithstanding the clear hints that a public service obligation will not be forthcoming, can he assure the House that the Government remain committed to it?

Mr. Darling: Having been in touch with Iain Gray, the Minister with responsibility for transport in the Scottish Executive, I am well aware that the links between Inverness and London are very important. British Airways has said on a number of occasions that it intends to continue with the link, and our discussions and consideration continue. The hon. Gentleman should be in no doubt that the link is critical.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement. He is aware of the mass protest—indeed, he has had a flavour of it in the Chamber—that will result from expansion in the south and south-east. In Doncaster, not only are the vast majority of the population in favour of the project at RAF Finningley, but tens of thousands of people have signed a petition asking for an airport there. Will he agree to meet a delegation of Doncaster and south Yorkshire MPs so that we can tell him in detail about the benefits of having an airport in Doncaster?

Mr. Darling: Over the past 10 years I must have met my hon. Friend on many occasions, mostly informal rather than formal, and I know of his long-standing interest in Finningley and the development there. There has been an inquiry. The inspector is due to report in October or November—I hope that he will do so—and a decision then has to be made by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. That is why the proposal does not appear in the consultation document. As I said to the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), it is nice to find an hon. Member who wants an airport in his constituency. Although all hon. Members recognise the need for airport capacity to be increased, they are generally wary about where it should go.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): The Government's proposals for new runways at Birmingham international airport will cause great concern to my constituents because of the environmental consequences. The Department's summary document states that improvements would need to be made to the road network and the west coast main line. Does that constitute a wish list or a commitment to do something?

Mr. Darling: We are committed to upgrading the west coast main line. Unlike the party that the hon. Lady represents, we are prepared to put in the investment to make that possible, so she is in no position to criticise us on railway development.

The hon. Lady has a more substantive point about Birmingham. The consultation document recognises the fact that extending the development of Birmingham airport could have implications for people living around it. It also makes the point that jobs are associated with the airport. One of the options that was considered as an alternative to the expansion of Birmingham and east midlands airports was a new airport between Coventry and Rugby.

We all recognise the need for good air links, and Birmingham airport is a very good airport that provides links throughout and beyond Europe and is extremely popular. The hon. Lady must weigh in the balance the advantages of Birmingham and the possible need to extend it with her concerns for her constituents. None of us can have it all ways. There is no such thing as a cost-free airport with no implications one way or another.

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): The people of Rugby will be devastated by what they have heard today and to know that two historic villages—Church Lawford and King's Newnham—will disappear under runways. If one had said to anybody in Rugby yesterday that there would be a new airport in Rugby and Birmingham airport will close, they would not have believed that it was humanly possible. My right hon. Friend said that Birmingham is a very successful airport. I believe that it should continue to be so and that the people of Birmingham would not want to lose their airport. Will he meet a delegation of the people of Rugby within the four-month period? *[Interruption.]* Four months is not long enough, because it will take them four months to get over the shock of hearing about it.

Mr. Darling: I always knew that being Transport Secretary would be good fun. Just before my hon. Friend causes himself a lot of difficulty, I must tell him that we are not proposing a new airport between Coventry and Rugby. We are saying that there is likely to be an expansion in the numbers of people wanting to fly from midlands airports. The options canvass is on whether we expand capacity at Birmingham or east midlands, or both. Alternatively, the option is whether it is worth building a new airport. No decisions whatever have been made.

I strongly urge my hon. Friend, not for my good but for his, that before he tells his constituents that they will be getting a new airport—*[Interruption.]* I got the

[Mr. Darling]

impression that he was to tell them. Let us exercise a little caution. I say to him as I have to others this afternoon that all of us as a country know that our future prosperity depends on our ability to trade and travel. That means that difficult decisions have to be made. Let us for goodness' sake look at the options rationally, weigh them in the balance and then come to a conclusion. No decision at all has been reached on any development. Everyone should look at the consultation documents bearing that very much at the front of their minds.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Will the Secretary of State give an undertaking to look very seriously at the role of airport consultative committees, which to local people at the moment give an illusion of consultation? Will he particularly consider the issue of vectoring, whereby aircraft move from approved routes purely for time reasons?

Mr. Darling: Those are two separate matters. If the hon. Gentleman has a particular point about a consultative committee, perhaps he would let me know. I am not aware of a general concern. I am not saying that there is not one, but I am not aware of it because representations have not been made to me.

Aircraft go off route—presumably with the permission of air traffic controllers—from time to time for perfectly good operational reasons. Again, if the hon. Gentleman has specific concerns or thinks that it is happening too often above his constituency, perhaps he would let me know.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I warmly welcome the statement as it relates to Wales: the recognition that air travel will be at the cutting edge of business communication in Wales; the concentration on development at Cardiff international airport rather than building a new airport at Severnside; and the emphasis on surface access to the airport in order to develop it. Will my right hon. Friend work closely with the Welsh Assembly to progress that excellent agenda?

Finally, may I remind right hon. and hon. Members to wear flight socks when they fly on holiday this summer? Apart from saving lives, they can be very fetching.

Mr. Darling: I will bear that in mind.

As I said in my statement, I know that the announcement by BMI to establish a second base for its new low-cost airline in Cardiff is very welcome. I have also said that surface links, not just to airports but for passengers living in Wales who want to travel from airports in England, need to be improved. I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said, and we are of course working closely with the Welsh Assembly.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The Secretary of State should know that my constituents are not saying, "Not here"; they are saying, "Not any more here." We already have four terminals at Heathrow and do not want any more, although one is to be imposed on us. If he cannot guarantee that air traffic movements will be capped at 480,000 a year and that there will be no third runway at Heathrow, which were both conditions imposed by the inspector on the granting of permission for terminal 5, what is the use of public inquiries in the first place?

Mr. Darling: As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins), who speaks for the Opposition, the decision on terminal 5 was recognised as one in relation to the airport as it is now. It needs a fifth terminal to deal with the airport as it is now. The inspector noted and acknowledged in his conclusions the fact that the Government would consult on what was necessary for the next 30 years. The decision made by the Government at the time made that clear.

I appreciate the point that the hon. Lady makes on behalf of her constituents, and the subtle distinction between "Not here" and "Not any more here", but no matter what part of the country we live in, we must acknowledge that people fly. Many of her constituents fly—from Heathrow. Indeed, I would guess that the propensity to fly in the south-east of England and in Richmond is rather greater than that in some other parts of the country. It is necessary to strike a balance. As I said before, the one thing we cannot do is ignore the fact that over the next 30 years conditions will change. We need to plan for those changing conditions and we need to do it now. Pretending that there is no problem gets us nowhere.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): May I remind my right hon. Friend of Heathrow's importance as a premier airport to jobs and the economy in west London? If it were to decline seriously, the impact on the region would be at least as devastating as was the closure of the docks on east London. People need to understand that when making this judgment on air transport. As one who has lived under a flight path for much of my life, I admit that it is not easy to live with the noise, but I think that if Heathrow went into decline, the devastation wrought on west London would be extremely serious.

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because he has put his finger on the problem. He rightly draws attention to the concerns of people living at or near Heathrow and its flight paths, but that airport employs, directly or indirectly, more than 100,000 people. It is therefore critical that we get the decision on the future of the London airports, in particular Heathrow, right, and we need to get it right fairly soon. To leave the decision to someone else—to say that I want nothing to do with it—is not the right approach, so I welcome my hon. Friend's comments.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I have important business of the House to protect. No one understands better than I the importance of the issue, but experience suggests that it is one to which the House will return.

Older People's Services

4.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement on services for older people.

As the House will recall, the Budget made available substantial increases in funding, not only for the national health service, but for social services. In due course, I will outline how some of the major increases in resources for the health service will specifically assist older people. Today, I can outline to the House how older people will benefit from the extra resources for our country's social services.

Older people are the generation who created our great health and social services. They, above all others, deserve to get the best from them. The mark of any civilised society must surely be how it treats its most senior citizens. Labour Members take pride in the Government's commitment to help to secure dignity and security in old age. Increases in pensions make the average pensioner household £840 a year better off today than in 1997, and there is also special help to lift pensioners out of poverty.

It is for others in the House to explain their opposition to reductions in VAT on heating, extra winter fuel payments and free television licences, given that more than 11 million pensioners have been helped by those measures, which were introduced by the Labour Government. Eye tests are now free, whereas older people used to have to pay for them. Nursing care is now free for older people; they used to have to pay for that, as well. Breast screening is being extended to women aged over 65. Last year, the number of knee operations on older people rose by 7 per cent., cataract operations by 11 per cent., and heart operations by 13 per cent.

None the less, there is much more to do to provide services that genuinely offer security, promote independence and widen choice for older people. Ours is an ageing society. We should not fear that—in my view, it is something that we should celebrate—but it means that our public services must now rise to the challenge of delivering better, faster care with higher standards for older people. Indeed, securing improvements in older people's care is one of the key priorities of our 10-year NHS plan. Today, I can announce how we intend to take that commitment forward.

Social services have for too long been the poor relation to health services. Between 1992 and 1997, real-terms funding for social services rose by only 0.1 per cent. a year. Today, it is rising by 3 per cent. a year, and from next April that rate of growth will double to an average of 6 per cent. a year above inflation. I can confirm today that older people will be the principal beneficiaries not only of those extra resources, but of the reforms that we are introducing to secure improvements in social care, working with our colleagues in local government, the private sector and the voluntary sector.

By 2006, compared with the resources available today we will provide an extra £1 billion a year in real terms for social services for older people. Reform will be required to get the best from these extra resources. The extra £1 billion—combined with the reforms that we will make—must guarantee for older people not more of the same but faster access to a wider range of services, offering older people greater choice.

First, we will guarantee older people faster assessment of their needs. Reforms are already in train to bring local health and social services together and to ensure that they provide a single seamless assessment process. Older people, above all others, need a one-care system, not competing care systems. Older people also need faster assessment. Some councils currently delay assessments for older people for up to nine months. That is completely unacceptable. I can tell the House today that by the end of 2004, all assessments will begin within 48 hours and will be complete within one month. Following assessment, the services to older people in need will be in place within one month. All equipment needed to help people live independently in their own homes will be provided within just one week.

These shorter waiting times will be accompanied by major reforms to ensure that older people are able to leave hospital when they are ready to do so. To accompany these extra financial resources, which will increase capacity in all aspects of older people's care, local authorities will gain the financial responsibility for older people once they are ready to leave hospital. I can tell the House that we intend, subject to legislation, to introduce this reform by April next year.

Secondly, there will be more support to help more people who need care in residential and nursing homes. For many frail or disabled older people, care homes—thanks to the efforts of care home staff—offer the best security and support. The size of the care home market peaked in the mid-1990s. Since then, it is true that the boom in the property market—especially in the south of England—combined with low increases in fee levels paid by local authorities, has led to a fall in the number of care homes beds. Laing and Buisson, perhaps the foremost analyst of the care home market, says that ideally occupancy levels in care homes should be at about 90 per cent. It estimates that occupancy levels are now running at about 91 per cent., suggesting that a modest increase in bed numbers from current levels is what is needed. We will now plan to increase the number of care home places supported by local councils.

Since last November, when we made available an extra £300 million to social services, fee levels have risen—by up to 10 per cent. in some parts of the country. The resources that we are providing from April next year will allow local councils to pay higher fees still if that is what is needed to stabilise their local care home market.

Greater stability must be accompanied by higher standards. That is what care home providers called for and, indeed, it is what the Care Standards Act 2000 enshrines. For the first time, clear national standards are in place, but we always said that we would keep the new standards under review.

The size of rooms and doors, the availability of single rooms and the number of lifts and baths are important, but they should not mean good local care homes having to close. We will therefore shortly issue for consultation an amended set of environmental standards to remove them as a requirement on existing homes, instead making it clear that they are good practice to which all care homes should aspire. We will require care homes to spell out whether they do or do not meet those standards and let those who are choosing homes make an informed choice for themselves.

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

Other standards—for example, those covering qualified staff—make a greater contribution to the quality of care provided for older people. I can therefore tell the House that we will make £70 million available by 2006—ring-fenced—to support training for social care staff, most of whom currently do not have a qualification, and many of whom are employed in the care home sector.

Thirdly, we will guarantee greater choice for older people in the services that they receive. Care homes are a good option for some older people, but not for all. They are not, and must not become, the be all and end all of elderly care services in our country. Our objective is to broaden the spectrum of services available for older people to widen choice and promote independence.

To enable local councils to provide more rehabilitation services, we will earmark resources to ensure an extra 70,000 older people a year get those services to avoid them going into hospital unnecessarily or to help them leave hospital speedily when it is safe for them to do so. I can tell the House today that I intend to legislate to ensure that those and intermediate care services will be free whether they are provided by the health service or, indeed, by social services.

We will also invest in new models of supported care for older people. We will therefore resource a 50 per cent. increase over the 1997 total in the number of extra-care housing places—very sheltered accommodation—available for older people, and we will work with local authorities, housing associations and others to bring that about.

Fourthly, more older people will get the support that they need to continue to live in their own homes if they choose to do so. The choice that too many older people have faced in the past is between going into care homes or struggling on in their own homes. Just like everyone else, older people want to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible. As a result of the investment that I am announcing today, by 2005 there will be twice as many older people receiving the intensive help that they need to live at home than there were in 1995.

Charges are currently made for community equipment, such as hand rails or hoists, which can make the difference between older people becoming dependent or remaining independent in their own homes. So I can tell the House today that—again, subject to legislation—from April next year, I plan to remove those charges altogether. Through ring-fenced funding, up to 500,000 extra pieces of community equipment will be provided free of charge to an estimated 250,000 more older people.

Fifthly, older people will be given a direct choice over their own care. Direct payments have already given younger disabled people the chance to spend for themselves the resources that they are assessed as needing. Now, in line with our manifesto commitment, I can tell the House that we will make it an obligation on every local authority, for the first time, to offer older people access to direct payments. Every older person assessed as being in need of care—whether for rehabilitation after a hip operation, or for a bit of help with household chores—will be given the choice of receiving a service or, instead, receiving a cash payment to purchase care for themselves that better suits their individual needs.

We will work with older people's organisations to make that choice a reality for tens of thousands of older people. I believe that that reform will empower older people, their families and their carers in a way that has never been possible before. Direct payments will give older people direct choices over the services that they receive.

Finally, many older people rely on more informal care from their family, their friends or their neighbours. Without the millions of carers in our country the services provided by the NHS or local councils simply could not do their job. In my view, the whole country owes our community of carers an enormous debt of gratitude. They are living proof that there is such a thing as society.

In recent years, we have provided more help to carers. Now we plan to build on that. So I can tell the House that I intend to more than double the carers grant to £185 million by 2006. As a result 130,000 additional carers will get help not just with short breaks through respite care, but with the extended care that they need so that they can continue caring. Carers put so much into the community, so it is right that they should get something back.

That is a major package of investment and reform to the services older people receive. The proposed new independent commission for social care inspection will be responsible for ensuring that councils in every part of the country deliver for older people. I can inform the House that the new commission will start operating in shadow form by the end of this year, so that it can inspect and audit how those extra resources are being used. The councils that do best will get more freedoms and greater rewards. There will be intervention for those that fail.

Those reforms and those resources will increase capacity to make choice a reality for hundreds of thousands of older people. There will be more places in care homes and sheltered housing. There will be more intermediate care services. Crucially, there will be more support for older people to live at home and for their carers. More older people will be able to gain access to more services and exercise more choice.

Increasing choice for older people is possible only because of the choice that this Government have made to put sustained levels of investment into our health and social services. As Labour Members, we know that resources plus reforms deliver results.

Our commitment is to deliver for this generation of older people and future ones. It is for those who oppose both the investment and the reforms to explain now how they would go about delivering dignity and security in old age. For our part, the emphasis must now be on helping more older people to live more independently for more of the time. When these reforms are fully implemented, there will be a greater proportion of older people being cared for at home than there is now.

After all, that is the choice most older people say they would prefer. That is what older people have every right to expect. It is what we intend to deliver. I commend the proposals to the House.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his statement, and for making a copy available in advance. As ever, the statement is strong on rhetoric and well-delivered, but lacking in substance. It is largely a set of re-announcements and U-turns and seems to be timed more to avoid embarrassing headlines generated by tomorrow's report from the Select Committee on Health than anything else. It is more about managing news than managing patients.

The statement is a wish list that rings hollow when compared with the Government's record. It is littered with some real gems. We heard that "Nursing care is now free for older people"; try telling that to our constituents up and down the country. The Government might be making a contribution, but care is anything but free. We were told that "We need to stabilise the care home market"; what an incredible statement from the Secretary of State. We have been telling him that for the past three years. It is his failure to listen not only to the official Opposition and other parties, but to those involved in the care home industry that has led to the loss of more than 60,000 care home places. It is a failure entirely of the Government's own making. As patients are discharged too quickly from our hospitals to relieve the bed-blocking crisis, the number of re-admissions within 28 days is rocketing. It is a revolving-door policy for our elderly people—some dignity or security that provides.

As the number of blocked beds rises, the number of cancelled operations is going up, many of which were intended for elderly patients—some dignity or security. Perhaps the Secretary of State can tell us how many of the 100,000 extra admissions to accident and emergency departments in the past two quarters have been elderly patients denied dignity and security as a result of the Government's failure.

When the Secretary of State has the gall to stand up and say that the size of rooms and doors is important but should not mean good local care homes having to close, I have to ask where he has been for the past three years. It is too late for many homes, which have already closed as a result of the very legislation and regulations that the Government brought in. They are now telling us that they will have another look at the matter and that they will have a more flexible approach. That is too late for many homes. The damage has been done, just as the damage has been done to the security and dignity of many older people in those homes.

It is wonderful what the Secretary of State believes now, but it was not what he believed when the Care Standards Act 2000 was being rammed through both Houses of Parliament. The only word missing today was sorry. Today, he has talked about the quality of care given by care homes, but only recently he was talking about people being "banged up" in care homes. The rhetoric is different today.

We heard the right hon. Gentleman's interesting pledges on equipment, but we have heard them before. When the Audit Commission produced its report on equipment provision in March 2000, the Secretary of State said:

> "It paints a very stark picture of frankly a second-rate service in some parts of the country. What we have to do now is ensure that the Audit Commission's recommendations are actioned in every part of the health service."

Of course, it became "a priority" for the Government to improve the service. We have just had the Audit Commission's follow-up to that report. After the Government making it a priority and such an important part of their programme, the Audit Commission found that users

> "continue to report long delays for equipment of dubious quality . . . many who could benefit from equipment services are excluded by stringent eligibility criteria . . . waiting times for some equipment is up to six years . . . a mood of despondency is common among managers running equipment services . . . no progress has been made in integrating mobility services, leaving the wheelchair and orthotics services marginalised."

[Interruption.] The Government Chief Whip says that there was no money. Why was there no money if it was a Government priority to improve those services? They have been in office for five years and it has been a priority in their programme for two years. They promise so much and deliver so little.

What the Government have said about domiciliary care is unbelievable. Of course, Conservative Members welcome the introduction of what will effectively be care vouchers, which the Secretary of State mentioned today. He has, however, a stark reality to confront. When the Government came to office, 479,000 people were receiving domiciliary care. That figure has now plummeted to fewer than 400,000 in the last year. The number of people receiving care has therefore gone down dramatically under the Government's domiciliary care programme, and the shortage of capacity will limit any plans that the Government may have.

Where are all these extra care workers to come from? How will they be employed? Has the Secretary of State actually tried to find a carer for an elderly relative recently? Has he tried to find respite care? Where are these people to come from? Are they to be plucked from the carers' tree, or bought from the carers' supermarket? How are we going to attract people into these jobs? Who will carry out the assessments that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned? How many extra staff will be required for that? Who will initiate the assessments? How will urgency be accommodated within a guaranteed time?

This is certainly not good enough. The Government are making promises yet again, even though they have not kept them in the past. The good points in the proposals are those that abandon Government policy and make U-turns. This is the initiative du jour, and the elderly will see through it for the sham that it is.

Mr. Milburn: I was pleased that the hon. Gentleman was grateful for getting a copy of the statement in advance. I was even more grateful for getting a copy of his press release in advance. In fact, I got a copy of his press release even before he got a copy of my statement. Perhaps it is not surprising that he has remained on the Tory Front Bench, with such extraordinary powers of extra-sensory perception.

The hon. Gentleman said that this was a wish list for older people. It is actually a delivery list for older people. He said that the number of people being delayed from discharge from hospital was rising. That is not true; it is falling. He said that the number of cancelled operations was rising. It is not; it is falling. He said that the number of people being helped to live at home by social services was falling; it is, ~~in~~ fact, rising.

On the issue of community equipment, the hon. Gentleman continually bleats about the lack of provision of services yet he is never prepared to commit the necessary extra resources and earmark them for the purpose for which they are needed. That is precisely what we are doing with community equipment. One of his hon. Friends asked earlier from a sedentary position whether much of this money was earmarked. Yes, it is. Two thirds of this £1 billion package for older people is ring-fenced and earmarked specifically for the purposes that I have outlined today.

[Mr. Milburn]

The hon. Gentleman is opposed not only to investment but to the earmarking of investment. He wants to see extra resources going in somehow, but I am afraid that the invisible hand of the market will not deliver extra handrails, extra support, extra care home places, more intermediate care, or more domiciliary care. Those are provided only because of the investment that we are making. The hon. Gentleman's problem relates not just to what the Conservatives did when they were in government but to what he is saying while they are in opposition, and to their abject failure to match either our investment or our programme of reform.

Does anyone seriously believe that the Conservatives who landed pensioners with more poverty, VAT on fuel, and charges for eye tests that used to be free, have somehow been regenerated and reborn as today's caring, compassionate Conservatives—the sort of Conservatives you could take home to meet your mother without fear of her being mis-sold a pension? Nobody believes that, not even the hon. Gentleman. We know that public services, social services and elderly care services need both resources and reform, and that is what we are committed to delivering. The problem for the hon. Gentleman is that he cannot commit to either.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): By a strange coincidence, the Health Committee is delivering at midnight a report that has direct relevance to the statement made by my right hon. Friend this afternoon. Obviously, I am precluded from referring to the conclusions of the report, but I can refer to evidence that is in the public arena. I was struck by the evidence from a particular witness, who suggested that the entire debate on the care of older people has been hijacked by the interests of the private care home sector.

I have listened carefully to my right hon. Friend's statement, and he is clearly setting out an agenda to move away from dependence on residential and institutional care. I welcome that, but I would also welcome a commitment that he will work with the private care sector to encourage it to move away from the outdated institutional models of care that countries such as Denmark abandoned many years ago.

Mr. Milburn: As always, I pay heed to what my hon. Friend says—as Chairman of the Select Committee on Health, and as a friend of mine. His comments make perfect sense. It is obvious that, at some point in their lives, some older people may well need residential or nursing care in a care home. Some may require supported or sheltered housing, and others may require intermediate care. However, survey after survey has shown one simple thing about older people's needs and desires: they want to live as independently as possible for as long as possible. Surely, we have got to get the pendulum swinging in the right direction. That means moving away from institutional forms of care, wherever they are provided, towards a new emphasis on more individualised forms of care that support people for as long as possible in their own homes.

A moment or two ago, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) described these measures as a series of re-announcements, but real money backed by real reforms means that, for the first time—certainly since my Department has collected such figures—the number of elderly people supported by social services will rise to more than 1 million. The proportion of older people cared for in their own homes will also rise. That is getting the pendulum swinging in precisely the right direction. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that, to deliver these changes and resources, we need to work in concert not just with our friends and colleagues in local government and the voluntary sector, but with the private sector too. That is precisely what we will do, but let there be no doubt: the direction is now firmly towards more individualised care, and less institutionalised care.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I thank the Secretary of State for giving us an advance copy of today's statement. The Liberal Democrats certainly welcome the extension of direct payments, putting cash into people's hands so that they can buy for themselves the care that they think that they need most. However, will he ensure that those who organise the purchasing of their care in the independent sector do not then find that a VAT bill has been slapped on top, and that the money given therefore goes back to the Treasury? Will he also consider ensuring that direct payments are made to those currently in nursing homes or care homes? They expected a reduction in their fees to reflect the fact that they were receiving free nursing care, but that has not happened. Will he therefore create a direct payment scheme to ensure that they get the money themselves, rather than passing it on through care home owners?

In his statement, the Secretary of State described giving councils a financial responsibility for delayed discharge as if it were some form of new privilege. Is there not a danger that, rather than delivering better care, the culture of mutual blame and buck passing between the NHS and social services will be reinforced, with patients being yet further victimised as they become parcels bundled between the two? Does the Secretary of State share the concern that the Government's over-concentration on delayed discharge is leading to a rise in the numbers discharged prematurely, only to be re-admitted as emergencies? Can he confirm that the targets set for emergency re-admissions in the implementation programme for the NHS plan have been comprehensively missed, and that a growing number of elderly people are turning up in accident and emergency departments just days after their discharge?

Carers are the backbone of our care system. Given that the oldest carers tend to have cared for the longest time—and often at the greatest cost to their own health—will the Secretary of State offer carers a direct payment to enable them to purchase respite care for themselves, rather than running the risk of those payments being held up by social services departments that are ill able to pay for such care? Does he accept the findings of the Rowntree report, "Calculating A Fair Price for Care", which points out that there is a £1 billion black hole in the finances of the care home sector? Given that the latest figures from Laing and Buisson show that a further 13,100 beds have been lost in the last year alone, just when will the free fall in the care market end? When will the Government take the actions that are necessary to stop it?

The Secretary of State made much of the extra places that would be available in care homes. His own Department's figures show that 109,900 fewer people are receiving home care today than five years ago. Is that because cash-strapped social service departments have been shifting the goal posts, disqualifying the frail elderly and casting them out because they can no longer afford to provide the care that those people need?

The Secretary of State has told us that there will be real-terms growth in the future, but in the first three years of the Labour Administration there was a real-terms reduction in funds for social care. There is a huge legacy of underfunding to be made good. Will the Secretary of State say a little more about the baseline for his spending plans? Is he assuming that the extra services he has announced today will receive funds on top of the £1 billion that local authorities already spend in excess of what the Government consider necessary for social services?

The Conservative party has rightly identified over-regulation in the care homes sector as an issue, but the key issue was underfunding of the sector, and today's statement did not address that. What the Government have done is say that they are prepared to trade off the vulnerable young—not to give them the resources necessary for their protection—in return for looking after the elderly better, and giving them dignity. Such a trade-off should not be accepted.

Mr. Milburn: I suppose that that counts as a warm welcome for the package of measures for older people.

It is nonsense to suggest that just because we provide extra support for older people, we cannot provide extra support for working-age adults or indeed children. As I said at the outset, we will announce further measures in due course, and further resources for precisely those groups who need help from social services. The hon. Gentleman will find that for them, too, extra investment is being made and reforms are being introduced. I know that he opposes those reforms, but he will note that the overall volume of care is increasing dramatically.

When the hon. Gentleman spoke of the number of older people being helped to live at home, he was counting a partial figure. He was counting people who receive some form of home help and some form of personal care. He was not counting those who receive, for instance, meals on wheels or community equipment assistance. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) smiles, but for literally tens of thousands of older people, that means the difference between independence and dependence. The number of people receiving support of that kind from local authorities is not falling but rising, and it is set to go on rising as a consequence of the extra resources being provided.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) asked whether direct payments would be made to carers. Yes, they will. We will consult in August on changes to regulations on such payments, and we intend the new regulations to be in place by the end of the year. He is welcome to respond to the consultation, and of course we shall listen to what he has to say.

The hon. Gentleman commented on the reform contained in the package. I know what he wants: he wants to snaffle the resources, but he does not want any reform. For older people, that will mean more of the same. Not a single older person whom I have met—and probably not a single older person whom the hon. Gentleman has met—wants more of the same. Older people want change in the services delivered to them. They want more power, more say, more direct control and a wider spectrum of choice. Of course they want a working partnership between the health service and social services, but partnership is a fudge unless it is clear who takes responsibility for each aspect of an older person's care, and that is precisely what we will make clear.

As always, the Liberals bleat nationally about shortages of resources, but the story is rather different when it comes to the position locally. When, before the last local election, I visited Liverpool—whose council was controlled by the Liberal Democrats—what was planned then was not increases in services or resources for vulnerable older people, but cuts in those services and resources.

As always, the Liberal Democrats tell one group of people one thing, and another audience another. In fact, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) says different things to the same audience. That is the Liberal Democrats—no more believable than their friends on the Conservative Front Bench.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I warmly welcome today's statement by my right hon. Friend, and especially those measures that will enable elderly people to stay in their homes longer. However, will he look carefully at areas such as mine, where housing costs are high and unemployment is low? The supermarkets can always afford to pay more than social services departments, which is causing real recruitment problems. That will not change if people try to recruit help through direct payments. Will my right hon. Friend see whether extra help can be made available for areas such as mine?

Mr. Milburn: It is very important to get the resources to the right parts of the country. As my hon. Friend knows, proposals already exist for redistributing resources within local government, and there will soon be proposals for redistributing resources in the NHS. However, pay rates are not a matter for me but for negotiation between local authorities and the trade unions.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I have difficulty in understanding how any hon. Member can disagree with the spirit and sentiments of what the Secretary of State has announced. Problems of detail remain, and it is right for my Front-Bench colleagues to mention matters of concern, but the general spirit of the statement must be right.

I draw the Secretary of State's attention to the problem in Devon. There, elderly and frail people who are homebound have a supply of deep-frozen food delivered every month, which they cook in a microwave supplied by the authority. They are like homebound Boy Scouts, or participants in an outward bound scheme. Every 28 days, another crate of deep-frozen food arrives. The idea of hot meals on wheels is disappearing, as are chiropody or home help services. The elderly people involved are going into residential care prematurely.

The Secretary of State says that he will ring-fence the package that he is offering, but is he aware that the Government have ring-fenced rumble strips, road widening and traffic humps, but not social services? As a result, money is going to pay for humps and road widening, but not for hot meals.

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome to the announcement. The £1 billion that will

[Mr. Milburn]

go into social services for older people is a real-terms figure, not just a cash figure. I think that I am right in saying that, of that, some £650 million will be ring-fenced for specific purposes, with a strong emphasis on ensuring that there are appropriate home-care services for older people. I cannot comment on the position in Devon, but in general it must be right that older people being cared for at home get an appropriate range of services. I hope that the package of measures that I have announced will help people to receive precisely that.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Gentleman has announced a very welcome package this afternoon, but severe problems can arise when elderly disabled people living in two-tier counties—where there are both shire and district councils—need adaptations made to their homes. Can we iron out such problems? In Lancashire, there has been a major consultation exercise about care homes, and a decision is imminent. Should not that decision, which is for the county council to finalise, be deferred, so that close consideration can be given to the many important announcements that my right hon. Friend has made today?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is tempting me astray, and I want to avoid that at all costs. As he said, the decision is the county council's responsibility, but the Minister of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), is keeping a close eye on the situation in Lancashire.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) makes an important point about the relationship between district councils and county councils. I understand the problem, as my area of Darlington suffered from precisely those difficulties before it became a unitary authority. It is incumbent on all parties involved, especially when they are of the same political persuasion—and I do not know whether that is the case in Lancashire—to sit around a table with their partners in the private and voluntary sectors and work the problems through. In that way they can ensure that no institutional barriers, of any size or shape, stand in the way of older people getting precisely those seamless services that they need.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Secretary of State has announced a range of measures today relating to, for example, equipment, support for carers, support for people at home and for those going into residential care. What plans has he to make any changes to the means-testing that affects all those measures?

Mr. Milburn: As I said in my statement, overall there will not be changes to the means test. I think that the hon. Lady is aware that we issued guidance in November last year about domiciliary care services, suggesting new guidance to local authorities. However, one aspect of the means test is about to disappear altogether—again, subject to legislation—and that is charging for community equipment. The hon. Lady will be aware from her constituency, as I am from mine, that as well as having a long wait for assessment and for getting equipment, older people often face a charge for it. The equipment can be simple, like a pressure mattress, a hoist, a minor ramp or even help with toileting. If imposing those charges deters more older people from being cared for at home, we must address that.

Let me give the hon. Lady a gentle warning. It is all very well and good for Conservative Back-Bench Members to give long wish lists of improvements they want to see. They cannot have the wish lists unless they are prepared to commit the necessary investment.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and warmly welcome his statement. On direct payments, will individuals be precluded from selecting from whom they wish to buy services? Many of my constituents from the ethnic minorities live in extended families where no one person cares for elderly parents and no one is registered as a carer as such. Will it be possible for them to obtain the direct payment, which would be of enormous benefit?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, in those circumstances, they can. We know that where the direct payment system has been implemented, it has worked. It has not meant that local authorities incur more costs than they do in providing a mainstream service. Disabled people who have a direct payment have chosen to appoint a personal helper from a variety of places and have been able to tailor the care that they need to their own circumstances. That seems to be the right principle.

We are moving towards a care system, I hope in both health and social services, in which the needs of the individual come first. The system is designed around the needs and comforts of the individual rather than the individual always having to fit around the needs of the service.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Since it is essential to maintain public confidence in private care homes, can the Secretary of State explain why his Department is blocking the release of an independent inquiry into Lynde house in my constituency, which is owned by the leading private provider, Westminster Health Care? Given that I wrote to him about that six weeks ago as a matter of urgency, why have I still not had a reply?

Mr. Milburn: I do not know about the individual details but I am informed by my hon. Friend the Minister of State that she intends to write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I agree with everything that my right hon. Friend has said. The majority of elderly people do not want to go into care if they can manage to stay at home, because home is where their memories and friends are. From what I have seen of my own relatives, sometimes when an elderly person is released from hospital, a care package is set up. Unfortunately, however, social services departments often do not have the time to check that the arrangements are carried out satisfactorily. The service provided could be the delivery of meals or it could be someone getting an elderly person up in the morning and putting her to bed in the evening, doing the cleaning, ironing or laundry. No check is carried out on such arrangements until someone such as myself telephones and moans about something.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It often happens, day in, day out, that there are good intentions on the part of those concerned, but unfortunately those intentions are not always carried through. That means that we need a better system for assessing need and then implementing the services that arise from that assessment.

None of this stuff is glamorous, but it is hugely important to literally hundreds of thousands of older people. We do not want to have an endless procession of professionals—the health visitor, the GP, the district nurse, followed by the social worker and others—trailing to the older person's door. We need one single assessment process, so that the older person's needs are assessed holistically at the point at which they enter the care system, a clear decision is taken as fast as possible, and then the services are put in place. That is what we intend to do.

As my hon. Friend well knows, none of that comes for free. It is useless to pretend that we can reform the system without investing in it, and that is the problem for Conservative Members. What they want, if they would—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I have let the right hon. Gentleman go on to subjects that Mr. Speaker has taken a restrictive view on in the past. The right hon. Gentleman is also lengthening his answers when other hon. Members are trying to speak.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Does the Secretary of State accept that his statement this afternoon will have been listened to with particular interest in Birmingham, and that there is huge cross-party concern that Birmingham's social services are in chaos? Will he give the House an undertaking that he and his Ministers will follow very closely what Birmingham social services do to pursue the laudable objectives that he has set out tonight? If he finds that they do not pursue them in the way that all of us would expect them to, will he and his Ministers intervene directly, either by using the powers that they already have from this House or by taking the additional powers that they need to ensure that Birmingham social services deliver a decent service to elderly and vulnerable people, which they are not doing at the moment?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, of course we will keep under active review our monitoring of social services in Birmingham. That is what we are doing and we shall continue to do it. I think that the hon. Gentleman is aware that, as a consequence of that active monitoring, extra resources have been found for the social services in Birmingham, which I am sure that he will welcome. I do not want to incur your wrath any further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the problem for the hon. Gentleman is that he cannot commit to the resources.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the efforts that have been made in Tameside, where the hospital, the social services and the mental health trust agreed a long time ago to pool staff and resources so as to create a one-stop shop for older people? Will he consider the fact that that has increased and improved services available to older people? Is not that the type of bottom-up reform that we should be trying to encourage, and will he reassure me that this money, which is very welcome, will be aimed at the reformers and not just at bailing out the under-performers?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Throughout the country, the examples are now legion of much-improved co-operation between the health service and social services. That has come about because we have provided the legal vehicles to enable the local authorities that want to co-operate and the health services that want to co-operate to do so, whether they are pooling budgets or establishing care trusts.

My hon. Friend is right that we must ensure that we get the best use of the money by ensuring that there is greater, not less, co-operation between health and social care. Why? For the very simple reason that the older person who by and large needs the health service will very often also need the support of social services or indeed housing services, and we need to see all these public services working together.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Minister will be aware that South and East Belfast HSS trust has developed a very fine partnership, which allows both domiciliary care and respite care for the elderly. I welcome the further advance in his statement today, because I remember the days when a young woman whom I can think of, who worked in the city hospital laboratory, had to pay superannuation while she went out to look after her mother. Caring for carers is important.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned assessment. Can he assure the House that there are enough occupational therapists in the country to do the assessments in adequate time, thus encouraging the providers of the equipment and those who make adjustments to houses to get on with the work much earlier than they have been doing?

Mr. Milburn: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on both counts. On the model of care, Northern Ireland has had the distinct advantage for many years of combined health and social services. As he is aware, we are moving towards that in England and we need much more of it. He rightly made a point about the number of people needed to staff social care services for older people. There too, there is good news. For example, the number of physiotherapists entering training has increased by 62 per cent. since 1997 and the number of occupational therapists has increased by 63 per cent. and there are increases in the number of staff employed. As he is aware, that is partly about ensuring attractive careers for those people, but also about ensuring that there are adequate resources for the services that they provide.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, which set out a range of services that will ensure that most elderly people can stay at home, where they want to be, rather than go into residential or nursing care. I welcome in particular the statement on the speed of assessments for equipment and the provision of equipment. Can my right hon. Friend tell me whether that includes minor adaptations to people's homes, which can often be crucial to ensuring that they get home quickly?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend speaks with real knowledge of these issues from her previous occupation

[Mr. Milburn]

outside the House. As she is aware, there are basically two strands of resources: community equipment grants, which we are going to enhance as I described and, for larger adaptations such as ramps or walk-in showers, the disabled facilities grant, which is operated by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. There too, there is good news, because the resources committed to the disabled facilities grant are, or will be, 50 per cent. higher, I think, in the next financial year than they were in 1998–99. She is right to issue a note of caution that we need a greater alignment between the resources available for small pieces of equipment and more major adaptations to housing. I can assure her that my hon. Friend the Minister and I will discuss those issues with colleagues.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Secretary of State said that one care system was required, not competing systems, and I welcome what he said about intermediate care services being free, whether they are provided by the health service or social services. That principle being established, will some thought be given to those people who require long-term care?

Mr. Milburn: I know the hon. Gentleman's position and that of the Welsh National party on this matter. We studied the issues around personal care at the time of the Sutherland commission and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I did so again in the lead-up to the Budget. In the end, we decided that that was not the right way forward for a simple reason: if we went down the personal care route, it would involve spending substantial extra public resources on the minority of better-off pensioners. Perhaps that is what the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) want to achieve; I want to commit those resources to more services for more older people, in particular for poorer older people.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I commend my right hon. Friend for the good sense and compassion of his statement—allied to investment and modernisation, that is four ways in which the Labour party differs from the Opposition. In welcoming his response to the question about Lancashire, will he agree that this statement offers the opportunity for the private sector to develop services creatively in partnership with local authorities? It certainly gives organisations such as the Lancashire Care Association the opportunity to refrain from the very destructive industrial action that they have in effect been taking over their care home fees and to come together to create a much better service for elderly people.

Mr. Milburn: I think that I had better keep out of that particular local dispute. In general, my hon. Friend is right. As he is aware, it is a condition of the building capacity grant that we issued in November 2001 not only that this money should be spent wisely—the £300 million—but that in addition it should foster much closer co-operation between local authorities and between those authorities and the independent sector, including the private and the voluntary sectors. That is precisely what we would expect to see, not only in his part of the country, but in every part of it.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): The Secretary of State has bandied about a number of figures: thousands of people will gain; 70,000 would receive some free services and tens of thousands more would receive direct payments. Can he be more specific? Precisely who will receive that assistance, particularly direct payments? If he is not going to alter means-testing levels, can he be more precise? Who will not be entitled to direct payments?

Mr. Milburn: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was here when I made my statement but that might have been in body rather than in spirit. I said that henceforth every single elderly person who is assessed as part of the reformed, faster assessment process that I described will be offered the choice of a direct payment. In terms of the number of people offered that choice, that is liable to run into many hundreds of thousands.

I personally think that that is a good thing, not a bad thing. I want to empower older people. People should not be just passive recipients of services. They should have the choice and ability to shape services for themselves. I cannot think of a better way in social care services than direct payments. There will be direct payments on offer for all. Of course it is for the elderly person, their carers and families to decide whether to take advantage of that.

The hon. Gentleman asked how many other people would benefit from the package of measures that I have outlined. In terms of the number of households receiving intensive home care support, an extra 30,000 will benefit. In terms of extra rehabilitation services, an extra 70,000 will benefit. In terms of the number of people who are supported in residential and nursing care homes, it will run into several thousands.

Overall, this package of measures will benefit approximately 440,000 people. On top of that, it will benefit the 230,000 old people who are currently supported in the care homes sector. That is because we have committed the investment. The issue for the hon. Gentleman is whether he or his Front-Bench team are prepared to match it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must now move on.

Points of Order

5.42 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that you will be aware of the correspondence between the Speaker and me on Rhondda Cynon Taff county borough council's practice of circulating letters to councillors that I had written confidentially on behalf of my constituents and addressed directly to council officers. I am grateful to the Speaker for his robust written correspondence with me on the matter but for further clarification can I check whether you feel that that practice is right and proper? It is a clear breach of the confidentiality that a Member of Parliament should be able to expect in relation to correspondence on behalf of his constituents. Do you hope that the chief executive of Rhondda Cynon Taff will ensure that that practice will end as soon as possible?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving notice of his intention to raise the point of order this afternoon. Mr. Speaker has asked me to say that constituents who approach their Member of Parliament are entitled to expect that the issues raised will be dealt with in a confidential manner. Where the Member considers it appropriate to refer the issue to a local government officer, it is Mr. Speaker's view that the correspondence should remain confidential between the constituent, the Member and the local government officer to whom the case has been referred, unless specific permission to make it available to other parties has been granted by the constituent. I hope that that makes the position clear to the hon. Gentleman and to the House.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have just come from another place, where I was observing proceedings on the Education Bill from behind the Bar. I was surprised to hear in a response given by the Minister, Baroness Ashton, reference to a written answer supposedly given to me following a question that I tabled on Thursday—I have not yet received the answer to that question.

I make no complaint about Baroness Ashton, who gave a courteous apology in another place for the breach of courtesy, but I want to raise with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I think is a gross breach of courtesy. Members in another place were given information contained in a written answer for my attention before that information had been provided to me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will understand that I am not in a position to give him an instant answer to that point. I am sure, however, that Mr. Speaker will examine the matter, and I hope that, if an omission has taken place, it can be put right as soon as possible.

BILL PRESENTED

LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

Sue Doughty presented a Bill to require the drawing up and implementation of strategies for promoting and increasing local or regional sustainability; to require the setting of targets for the implementation of those strategies; to specify the functions of the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 14 November, and to be printed [Bill 188].

Redundancy Payments

5.45 pm

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to remove the maximum amount of a week's pay for the purpose of calculating redundancy payments.

When the Redundancy Payments Act 1965 was introduced, the Government restricted the amount of statutory redundancy pay per week and the maximum number of weeks to 30. The cap on redundancy payment currently stands at £250 a week, and I am delighted to be given the opportunity to introduce this Bill, which is designed to eliminate the injustice faced by those who suffer the pain and anguish of redundancy, many of whom have previously earned above the £250 a week cap only to find that their redundancy pay entitlement is limited to £250 a week.

I am grateful that the Employment Relations Act 1999 ensured that a limit on a week's pay would increase in line with inflation. In a growing economy, however, wages inflation will inevitably run higher than the retail prices index, and the relative value of a week's pay calculation will fall further and further behind. I am not, of course, asking for a limitless amount, as that would be ridiculous in the case of those who are in receipt of tens of thousands of pounds per week. The cap should, however, be aimed at the level of average earnings, and it should be linked to increases in the average wage.

The Redundancy Payments Act 1965 was introduced to compensate workers who had lost their jobs. It was set up with a maximum payment of 30 weeks' pay after 20 years' employment. The effect of the maximum weekly payment is to limit the level of compensation to £7,500 to an employee who, for example, is aged 60 and has worked for the company concerned for as many as 45 years. With five years to wait for a pension, £7,500 is little enough on which to exist. When the earnings of the individual concerned have previously been above the £250 cap, however—say £500 a week—the redundancy compensation would consequently be reduced to 15 weeks' pay instead of 30 weeks' pay.

It should be obvious that, for elderly workers with little chance of further employment, those levels of redundancy compensation are derisory. A maximum weekly payment cap was included in the 1965 legislation, when employers received a rebate of 40 per cent. from the Government, and the Government of the day undoubtedly wanted to restrict the Treasury's exposure to such claims. That has now changed, with the rebate that employers received being reduced initially and then removed entirely. Employers were properly compensated for the removal of the rebate by a reduction in national insurance contributions at the time. That was done because some people considered that it was too easy for certain employers to use redundancy as a first option and to claim a rebate from the Government subsequently.

In its day, the Redundancy Payments Act was an important and welcome step forward for workers' rights. It has barely changed in nearly 40 years, however, and advances in employees' rights in other countries have passed by the British worker. To be fair, whenever there are major high-profile redundancies in this country, political pressure is inevitably exerted to provide help for those affected. However, the problem comes with small-scale redundancies. When added together, they are just as damaging to the community. As with a large-scale factory closure, they are just as traumatic to the individual who suffers the loss of his or her job. The time has come for the working people of this country to be paid by right simply in relation to what they have lost. They should be compensated at least at the levels that their counterparts in Europe enjoy.

I argue that point not just from the standpoint of more financial compensation, but as much in the cause of deterring multinational employers from selecting British workers simply because it is cheaper and easier to make redundancies in the UK than it is elsewhere. For example, in the Netherlands and Spain, regional employment offices must authorise redundancies. In France, Germany, Austria and Luxembourg, employers are required to fund a social plan that may cover both financial compensation and measures to alleviate the impact of redundancies.

In France, employers must consult works councils or staff representatives and send a note of the consultative meeting to the labour inspectorate. They must consider retraining, shorter or reorganised hours and two consultation meetings are required with a gap of 14 to 28 days. In Italy, employers must inform workers and, within seven days, a joint review of proposals that can last 45 days must consider alternatives to the redundancies. Individual notice is then governed by collective agreement, which involves a two-stage procedure whereby workers are covered by lay-off provisions and then by mobility provisions. Faulty procedure can mean reinstatement. The House of Commons Select Committee on Trade and Industry considered the relative UK position in January 2001. Its report said:

> "The suggestion that it is easier and cheaper to dispose of employees in the UK than elsewhere seems to us to have been shown to be factually correct."

I do not want to put excessive burdens on British employers, especially those in manufacturing industry. They need all the help that they can get in the current circumstances. However, the truth is that UK law gives poor protection in comparison with legislation in other countries. The French courts clearly demonstrated the difference, to the cost of Marks and Spencer when the company announced the attempted closure of its continental branches in March 2001. Our colleagues and competitors in Europe are unlikely to allow employers to make redundancy easier, and neither should they. It is therefore intolerable that, in the event of a need for a reduction in the number of employees, the burden should be disproportionately shouldered by the British working man and woman.

We could, of course, pursue justice through European legislation so as to level the playing field, but our Government argue that subsidiarity should apply and that such matters should be left to national Governments. That is fine just as long as we do not allow British employees to miss out and remain the poor, redundant employees of Europe.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Crausby, Jim Dobbin, Syd Rapson, Mr. Michael Clapham, Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, Geraldine Smith, Mr. Kevan Jones, Mr. Bill Olner, Mr. George Howarth, David Wright, Mr. Anthony D. Wright and John Mann.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. David Crausby accordingly presented a Bill to remove the maximum amount of a week's pay for the purpose of calculating redundancy payments: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 14 November, and to be printed [Bill 189].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Local Government Finance

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 106) (HC 1019) on Special Grants for Performance Pay Progression for Teachers on any Qualified Teacher Pay Scale, for Performance Pay Progression for Teachers on the Leadership Group Pay Spine, and for Threshold Payments for Teachers Employed by Local Authorities in Children's Homes, which was laid before this House on 10th July, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

Public Expenditure

[Relevant documents: Minutes of Evidence taken before the Treasury Committee on 17th and 18th July on the Spending Review 2002, HC 1092-i and ii.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

5.55 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): At the heart of this spending review is a passionate belief in the value of public services and in the potential of the British people. It also shows a passionate belief in the value of education in achieving that potential and of health in maintaining it. It recognises the need always to drive forward, with an emphasis on science, the creation of a competitive and productive economy with enterprise at its base. It also recognises, however, that common sense demands that, to deliver the outcomes that we desire for our country, there must be new investment. Common sense, too, dictates that this investment will not be enough without reform. Passion and common sense, investment and reform are the linchpins of this spending review.

Compare and contrast that with the approach of Conservative Members, a dispirited and lacklustre bunch still reeling after the letting of much blood. By the look on their faces, I fear that some of them are a little crazed by it all. The chairman of the Conservative party has gone; the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury has gone. Both have apparently been promoted. However, let me send my felicitations to the former shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). We will miss him; they do not often make them like that. That at any rate was clearly the view of one of the shadow Chancellors, but I will come to him in a minute. I genuinely want to congratulate the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on what is a genuine promotion. He has worked hard for it, and I hope that he lasts a little longer than his predecessor.

There is something of the night about recent events. For instance, why is the shadow Chief Secretary, whoever it was to be, not opening for the Opposition in this debate? That is the precedent in the House. [Hon. Members: "No."] Opposition Members must get their facts right. The previous debate on the spending review, the one before that and the one before that were all led by the Chief Secretary and the shadow Chief Secretary. A week ago, why did we discover that the shadow Chief Secretary, whoever it was to be, would not lead for the Opposition? The shadow Chancellor was going to lead, so could it be that he was absolutely determined that, whoever was to be made shadow Chief Secretary, there was no way that person would lead for the Opposition?

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Since the Chief Secretary asks the question, I will give him the answer. We were told that, if I opened in the debate, the Chancellor might speak in it. It is a matter of great regret that he is not coming to the Dispatch Box to defend his spending review.

Mr. Boateng: They were never told any such thing. Let me suggest a reason—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. It would be a good idea if Members settled down. This is an important debate that is unfortunately taking place in restricted time.

Mr. Boateng: I am much obliged, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The reason why the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs was not allowed to speak for the Opposition on this matter—

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you rightly said, this is an important debate. The Minister has been speaking for five minutes, yet so far he has not begun the debate. Do you not think that that is an abuse of the House and, more to the point, an abuse of Back Benchers?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Fortunately, the Chair has no responsibility for the content of the speech of any right hon. or hon. Member. I was merely suggesting that the debate on public expenditure can occupy only just over four hours, so Members should quieten down so that we can listen to the arguments.

Mr. Boateng: It was the shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs, who rather gave the game away as regards the Conservative approach to the spending review. In a memo to the shadow Chancellor, he said that the reforms that the Tories would be proposing would end the NHS monopoly and entail those who can afford it making some payment for health care services. That is the view of the new shadow Chief Secretary about the NHS and about charges. That is the truth of the matter.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Will the Minister add that the Government came by that confidential memo by improper means?

Mr. Boateng: I can understand why the hon. Gentleman deny the accuracy of the quote. I shall give him the opportunity to deny either that that was his view then or that it is his view now. He is not doing so. We know, then, that when Conservative Members talk about reform, they mean charging.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Have the Government ever put up prescription charges? Do you charge for spectacles, dental checks or dental care, or are there no charges in your NHS?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are none in mine.

Mr. Boateng: The reality is that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs was talking about private insurance, which is the reform that the Conservative party has in store for this country should it ever again have the opportunity to exercise power.

The spending review is focused around four key objectives: raising productivity so that Britain can be more prosperous; extending opportunity by investing in education; creating strong and secure communities matching rights with responsibilities; and, in relation to Britain and the wider world, maximising the opportunities for our country and for managing globalisation and minimising the insecurities of the world in which we live. Economic stability and sound public finances are the basis upon which better public services can be delivered.

Difficult decisions had to be taken in the first term—the independence of the Bank of England, tough fiscal rules and strict control of the public finances. No one could pretend for one moment that any of that was easy, but it worked and it provided the basis on which to build. Five years on, the state of our public finances is sound and, despite uncertainties in the global economy, inflation is under control, interest rates have been low and stable, and employment and growth continue to rise. Over the economic cycle, we will meet our fiscal rules even on the most cautious case. We are saving £20 billion a year on debt interest and a further £10 billion through cutting the cost of unemployment. Those extra resources have made it possible to recruit more nurses, doctors, teachers and police officers than at any time in the past two decades.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Boateng: In due course.

We have never entered a period of global uncertainty in a stronger position than we do now. We will steer a steady course with the strength to make decisions for the long term. That is what the spending review is about. Holding strictly to the total spending envelope that the Chancellor set out in the Budget, we are raising departmental spending from £240 billion this year to £263 billion next year, to £280 billion in 2004–05, and to £301 billion in 2005–06—in total, by 2006, that will be £61 billion a year more for improved public services. That is what Conservative Members cannot bear to hear.

Mr. Redwood: Can the right hon. Gentleman explain to my constituents in Wokingham why our primary care trust has just received a letter saying that instead of the 76 general practitioners that we currently have, we should have only 63, and that funding is to be adjusted on that basis? Is not that a cut rather than an increase?

Mr. Boateng: The right hon. Gentleman is calling for more, not fewer, resources. He and his right hon. and hon. Friends must answer these questions. If they oppose our spending plans, what are theirs? What are their priorities and policies? What would they cut? How would they raise the money? They say absolutely nothing about that. The right hon. Gentleman knows that in supporting the money that we are passporting directly to schools on the front line, he is opposing the policies, such as they are, of his Front Benchers. He should have the honesty to say as much.

The increased investment must be matched by real and radical reform. In each area of service delivery, we will ensure that new resources are tied to reform and results. We are setting demanding national targets; introducing independent and open audit and inspection; giving frontline staff the power and flexibility to deliver; extending choice; and rewarding success and turning round failing services.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Boateng: In due course.

In the Budget, we set out our programme for the NHS. None of us can know when we might need the NHS. All of us are entitled to use it without fear of charges and without having to worry about the consequences for our loved ones when we do. That is the great success of the NHS. It is an act of collective will on the part of the British people that we will all take responsibility one for the other to relieve us all of the fear and pressure of growing ill and growing poor at the same time. That is what we owe to the founding fathers and mothers of the NHS. That is the legacy that we inherited and are determined to take forward, and that is what Conservatives opposed in 1945 and would wreck now if given half a chance.

In April, there was a Budget for the NHS. Now, there is a spending review for education. That is as we promised: schools and hospitals first. The only guarantee of prosperity in an uncertain world is the skills that are needed to cope with change. Investment in education and skills—investment that was neglected by the Conservative party—is the best guarantee of families' future prosperity, and that is the guarantee that we give to the people of this country. However, resources must be tied to reform. Reform of the primary school system has helped teachers and children to achieve a step change in standards. Today, 75 per cent. of 11-year-olds achieve the expected literacy standards, compared with just 57 per cent five years before. The work goes on. Our next task is to extend those improvements to secondary schools. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills has announced her reforms to raise standards, to enhance choice and diversity and to tackle poor pupil behaviour in our secondary schools, so that schools can develop the talents of all.

We are already delivering real results. There are more teachers, class sizes have fallen, more than 125,000 adults have been helped to improve their basic skills, and the number of students in our universities has increased by 87,000. However, there is no room for complacency. We want a culture of continual improvement. We want more children to achieve higher standards of literacy and numeracy, more teenagers to get five good GCSEs, and more young adults to stay in education and training—50 per cent. of them with experience of university by 2010.

Education is the best defence against changing circumstances; it is the best hope of future prosperity. Investing in the children of today is investing in the productive potential of tomorrow. This spending review not only divides up the cake within closed national boundaries, but seeks to make the cake bigger in an open, global economy. That is true in education, science, competition, planning, knowledge transfer, enterprise and regional development.

In each of those areas we are providing increased resources: a 10 per cent. real-terms rise in the science budget each year; and an increase in the budget of the Office of Fair Trading, from £34 million this year to £55 million by 2005–06. We are promoting independence and delegating responsibility; there are independent competition authorities, and new powers for regional development agencies over planning, transport and tourism. This is about the enterprise-driven economy—one in which competition and productivity go hand in hand.

There is investment in each of those areas and in housing, neighbourhood renewal, transport, the countryside, and resources to assist the implementation of the Curry report. There are resources to assist the voluntary and community sector, and the police and the Prison Service. There is investment in defence to combat the insecurity of an interconnected world, and in development as we take up arms in the war against want. That is investment that must be matched by reform.

Mr. Osborne: I am grateful to the Chief Secretary for allowing me to interrupt his pocket-book sloganising to answer my question. While he is talking about spending increases, will he put this debate in context and tell us which taxes have gone up to pay for them—and where those tax increases were spelled out in Labour's manifesto?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman normally does better than that. There were many of us who were glad that he was not on holiday and hoped for his preferment. *[Interruption.]* Let me answer his question. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor laid out our policies for taxation in the Budget. As a result of the decisions that he has taken, our rates of company taxation are lower than those of all but 12 of our partners and competitors in Europe. It is because of his decisions that this country is now a preferred destination for inward investment, second only to the United States. That is because of his fiscal policies. They are the envy of the world, and the hon. Gentleman ought to have the grace to accept that.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Boateng: No, not at the moment.

It is important that we ensure that investment is linked to reform. That is the significance of the public service agreements. There has been much interest in the past few weeks in PSAs, and it is right that there should be. It is important that we have a proper debate, but there should not be any great party political difference on the subject. PSAs are about transparency, accountability and good governance—an agenda to which we can surely all sign up.

The charge is that PSAs are in some way a manifestation of this Government's supposed centralising tendencies, but in fact the reverse is true. By setting clear and measurable targets, publishing information on those targets, and collating the information in one easily accessible location, we empower not the Government but the people who elected us and who can use the information to hold Departments to account.

The National Audit Office has said:

> "the introduction of Public Service Agreement targets, and in particular the move to outcome-focused targets, is an ambitious programme of change which puts the United Kingdom among the leaders in performance measurement practice."

Even right hon. and hon. Members who represent the Liberal Democrat tendency ought to recognise and welcome that. [Hon. Members: "Where are they?"] At least one of them is present, and that is more than enough. *[Interruption.]* Good, another one has joined us.

[Mr. Boateng]

We must take this debate forward on a clear understanding of PSAs. They set out a Department's plans to deliver results in return for the investment that it receives. They are focused on outputs and not inputs. They provide a clear statement of priorities and a clear sense of direction around which all those involved in delivering can focus. They are part of a culture of transparency and accountability, but require an attitudinal shift: that all of us engage and recognise the need for continued improvement.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will the Minister explain why the Lord Chancellor's Department's PSA target of paying small businesses within 30 days had to be dropped after conversations with the Treasury?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that the inclusion of such a target is designed to drive forward performance.

Mr. Cameron: So why was it dropped?

Mr. Boateng: If the hon. Gentleman examined the Department's performance, he would see that it is the Lord Chancellor's Department's intention and practice—it has delivered on that intention and practice—to provide a better service to small businesses. The whole point of such a target—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members who question the need for targets and their value should give some credit where there has been achievement. They need also to understand that the whole point of the targets is not that they should run in perpetuity. It is rather that they should provide a focus for improvement and that that improvement should be delivered. That is the case for the example that the hon. Gentleman has cited.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boateng: No, not at the moment.

As part of the spending review process, Departments set out alongside their bids their proposed PSAs. They are discussed along with the Departments' track record of delivering against existing targets, and once agreed, Departments are then responsible for reporting progress and delivering on their PSAs. The advantage of that approach is that it addresses precisely the question on Departments' performance that hon. Members on both sides of the House have raised on behalf of their constituents: they provide the opportunity to examine whether there has been progress.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): While the Chief Secretary is on the subject of PSAs, will he explain how the Foreign Office will meet its top PSA, which includes a target of reducing poppy cultivation in Afghanistan by 70 per cent. within five years?

Mr. Boateng: The reason why such a target exists ought to be self-evident to anybody who is concerned about drugs on our streets. When we are applying large sums of public money in order to enable the Foreign Office, the MOD and agencies that have responsibility in this area to take forward our anti-drugs policy, it is absolutely right that we should be able to demonstrate at the end of a prescribed period that that has made a difference.

Mr. Davey: That is stupid.

Mr. Boateng: There is nothing stupid about it. It is clearly important that Departments understand that they need to work in ways that deliver results and that those results should be measurable. Those who cry out against such targets have to explain how they intend to ensure that value for money is secured and that Departments respond in a way that is capable of demonstrating that they are making best use of the money available to them.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Boateng: No, I will not allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene at the moment.

This is our responsibility, and it is ultimately for the House, on the basis of the evidence approved by the National Audit Office and the Office for National Statistics, to judge whether targets have been met and to hold Ministers and Departments to account for their successful delivery. That is about transparency and accountability, and it is a vital part of good governance.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): My right hon. Friend is right to stress the importance of public service agreements, which will help the public, above all, to see that the extra money that the Government are putting into public services is being wisely spent. Under the Conservative Government, public service agreements—had they existed then—would have helped the public to register the fact that no investment was being made.

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Alongside PSAs lie independent audit and statutory inspection. Departments and agents are fully accountable for their performance against those targets.

Mr. Bercow: I am extremely grateful to the Chief Secretary for giving way to me. Unfortunately, his rhetorical overload cannot camouflage the Government's dismal record of underperformance. Can he answer this very straightforward question: why did the Treasury set itself a public service agreement target and guarantee to measure the level of Treasury output, only to announce now that

"it has not proved possible to measure aggregate Treasury output"?

Why should we have any confidence in the Government's performance on other public service targets if the Treasury cannot even identify and meet its own?

Mr. Boateng: Because we have met our other targets, and because 90 per cent. of all the targets set by the Government for delivery in 2002 have been met or are on the way to being met. The reality is that all the huff and puff in the world cannot hide the fact that we need to make sure that resource delivers improved performance. We have to have a transparent and accountable system, and PSAs are the best way to achieve that.

PSAs are also about devolving responsibility from Whitehall. They are about empowering primary care trusts, head teachers and governors in schools, police commanders and local service providers—all people to whom the Opposition would deny resources and who saw the very infrastructure within which they work eroded under 18 years of successive Conservative Administrations. We are about ensuring that by working with new partners in the private, voluntary and community sectors we create a system of public service delivery that is focused on outputs and reform and which delivers a better quality of service to all our people. We want a strong, vital and independent voluntary and community sector delivering public services in a way that promotes choice, flexibility and consumer focus, reaching out to disadvantaged groups and tailoring services to their needs. Sure start and the children's fund demonstrate how much the public and voluntary sectors working together can achieve.

It is no use the Opposition describing partnership as cliché. We have made available a significant increase in child care provision. Our approach has created and is in the process of delivering 250,000 child care places by 2006, targeted on the most disadvantaged areas. That is not only about ensuring that children get a good start in life, but about bringing women back into the workplace and enhancing and improving productivity—all things that the Conservatives failed to do when they had stewardship of our economy.

We want to build on the partnerships that have been created between the voluntary and community sectors and Government. In the course of the cross-cutting review of the delivery of public services by the voluntary sector, it became clear that there were still areas in which improvement was needed and that barriers needed to be removed. As a result, I can announce that there is to be a new one-off three-year fund worth £125 million to help such organisations in their public service work. Called futurebuilders—[Hon. Members: "Oh dear."]—the aim of the fund is to increase the scope and scale of voluntary sector service delivery, to remove obstacles in the path of organisations that want to deliver services, and to provide the means to modernise operations in the long term.

It is no use the Opposition saying, "Oh dear," because as we speak voluntary organisations such as the Leonard Cheshire fund are out there, working with local authorities—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. May I say to the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) that that is the second time his phone has gone off in the Chamber? As far as I am concerned, that is one of the most serious crimes that an hon. Member can commit.

Mr. Boateng: Voluntary organisations are out there, working with local authorities and community groups, to deliver a better quality of service to some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of our society. We are about making sure that such organisations have at their disposal the means to deliver and take forward their plans, thus empowering and enabling local communities to take responsibility for the vulnerable, the disabled and the disadvantaged in ways that enable better delivery of public services than has hitherto been provided.

Public services exist to serve the public. When they are underfunded, as they were under the Conservatives, the people are the poorer. When they underperform, as they do when management is weak and the right systems are not in place, the people are let down. High performance must be rewarded with more responsibility and more resources. Failure cannot and will not be tolerated, so in the present review, for the first time, Departments are to introduce effective sanctions against failing institutions—not withdrawing resources and so punishing the public, but bringing about that attitudinal, cultural and systematic shift to focus attention on performance and deliver against targets of continual improvement.

That is not something to be rubbished or decried. Failing schools, education authorities, colleges, social services, local authorities, police forces and prisons—all will be enabled and empowered to deliver, but all will understand that if they fail to do so, there will be consequences. We cannot allow resources to be wasted.

We have set out a framework for progress—a framework in which resources are tied to reform in order to deliver results. It is a vision for public services that has at its heart the concrete steps that it is necessary to take to enhance opportunity and security for all in this changing world. Above all, it is about bringing together people in partnership for change—[Hon. Members: "No!"] The Conservatives do not like the notion of partnership—they do not accept that there needs to be a change in the way in which we deliver services. They do not accept that because they do not trust the people and they were never prepared to make the resources available. They do not accept that because, fundamentally, they do not like public services.

We believe in public services. We believe in the values and ethos of public service. Only the Labour Government can be trusted to protect that and take it forward. That is why we are sitting over here, and the Conservatives are condemned to remain over there.

6.29 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Unlike the Chief Secretary, who took eight minutes—almost a quarter of his speech—before he got round to the spending review, I want to talk about the review. Last week, the Chancellor had the opportunity to signal real improvements in public services to end the crisis in the national health service, to bring order to classrooms where, too often, disruptive children prevent standards from rising for all and to get the police back on the streets fighting crime. Our public services can and must be improved, but to improve them requires vision, leadership and real reform. These things the Government have constantly promised, but last Monday the Chancellor once again failed to deliver them. Today, despite the fact that he has taken personal charge of delivery in this area, he has not even come to the Dispatch Box to defend the Government's record.

Perhaps that is no surprise. Last week—

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: No. The hon. Gentleman will have to wait.

Last week was not the Chancellor's first spending review, but his third. The country can be forgiven for a sense of deja vu because his recipe is always the same. First, he announces record amounts of money. We have his word for that. In 1998, the extra money was said to

[Mr. Howard]

be the biggest ever investment in health and education. In 2000, it was record investment. Last Monday, it was more of the same.

Then comes the spin. With the Chancellor, not everything is what it seems. *[Interruption.]* It is no good the Chancellor chuntering away like a man possessed on the Government Front Bench. He should listen.

The Chancellor refuses to update his growth forecasts, even though most commentators think that they are optimistic. However, he is quick to take credit for changes in forecasts of unemployment and interest rates. If new forecasts help his presentation of public finances, he does not hesitate to use them. If they do not, he ignores them. Why did the Chief Secretary not explain why the Chancellor has ducked repeated requests to say whether he envisages yet further tax rises, even in this Parliament? He avoided the question six times on "Today" and he did so again last week in response to questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). Despite repeated questions, he did so yet again before the Treasury Select Committee. Why cannot the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary come clean on that?

Secondly, there are questions about the way in which the public debt is classified. Both the National Audit Office and the Statistics Commission have queried the way in which the Chancellor proposes to deal with the £21 billion borrowing of Network Rail. Why are not the Government including that borrowing in their accounts? Why is it being taken off-balance sheet? Is that not a classic case of Enron-style accounting?

The third ingredient in the Chancellor's recipe, after more money and more spin, is that he flunks real reform. Real reform means allowing teachers to restore discipline in the classroom, police officers to get back on the streets to fight crime, and doctors to treat patients without constant diktats from Whitehall. It means trusting professionals to get on with their jobs. It also means being willing to learn from success in other countries. Measured against those benchmarks, real reform of our public services has not taken place, is not taking place, and never will take place under this Government.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): The right hon. and learned Gentleman rightly says that reform is key. Does he agree that new funding is key? Will he commit himself to matching the extra funding that has been provided by the Government?

Mr. Howard: We will not be bound by the spending commitments that derive from policies that are failing. In due course, we shall bring forward our own spending commitments, which will derive from our policies, which will succeed. That is the difference.

David Wright (Telford): Since 1996–97, spending per pupil in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency has risen by 18.9 per cent. Will he be writing to every head teacher in his constituency to say that that cash will disappear?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman may have overlooked this, but we are talking about the Chancellor's spending review and his plans for the future, not about what has happened since 1996–97. We are concerned with the future, rather than the past.

The truth is that Ministers want to improve public services. Of course they do. I understand that and I give them credit for it, but they simply do not know how to. As a result, they can only spend more money each year. However, more money without real reform will not work.

The Chancellor's substitute for reform is targets, about which the Chief Secretary waxed—I cannot say that he did so eloquently, but he waxed. Last week, the Chancellor gave us a new batch of public service agreements, and they are worth looking at in a little detail. For the past four years, we have been told that they lie at the heart of the Chancellor's strategy, that they are central to his drive to improve public services, and that they form the very bedrock of his agenda. He announced them in his very first spending review in a fanfare of publicity, saying that they were an "essential change", helping to ensure that the Government would do what they did "to the highest standard".

What has happened since? One independent analysis found that no fewer than 44 per cent. of the targets set by the Chancellor had not been met by the required deadline.

Four years ago, the Chancellor placed particular emphasis on targets for efficiency improvements. The purpose of these, he said, was to

"ensure that more resources go directly to front-line services."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 188.]

If the Chancellor places such great emphasis on these targets, why was he unable to tell me last week why the 3 per cent. health efficiency target was first failed and then cut? Will not that lead to £890 million less in resources for patient care in the health service?

What about the Chancellor's own target for efficiency gains? The Treasury efficiency target has itself been dropped altogether. The reason given is that the Treasury could not measure its own output. Was it not possible for the Chancellor to think about that before setting the target in the first place? How can he lecture other Departments about meeting efficiency targets when he cannot meet his own?

The efficiency targets are not the only targets to be dropped or cut as a result of the Government's failure to deliver. The Home Office target on the removal of failed asylum seekers has been cut. The measurable target on fear of crime has been dropped. Instead, the Home Office will aim to increase to 1.2 million the number of crimes for which offenders are brought to justice. Presumably, the latest rise in crime will help the Home Office to achieve that goal.

In education, the failed targets on truancy have been cut, and so has the national vocational qualification target for 19-year-olds. The Government say that both were subject to "slippage" or "increased room for catch-up", as, according to the Chancellor's advisers, that should now be known.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): What are the right hon. and learned Gentleman's targets for the national health service charges to which my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary referred?

Mr. Howard: I am astonished at the extent to which Labour Members constantly refer to charges in the health service. In the Chancellor's speech last month, he said that it is entirely unacceptable for the sick to pay for being sick. Are he and other Government Members completely unaware that, last year alone, about 250,000 people who had no sort of insurance cover had to pay for their own operations because they could not face the delays that they would have experienced with the national health service, which is in crisis under the Government's stewardship?

Mr. Boateng *rose—*

Mr. Howard: No, not at the moment. The Chief Secretary will have to wait.

Gone is the work and pensions target for promoting security and independence in retirement for tomorrow's pensioners. After the Chancellor's pensions tax, the crisis in pensions and the lowest ever savings ratio, it is not hard to see why.

What became of the Chancellor's promises over the past five years—there have been enough of them—to provide "skills for work" to invest

"heavily in education and skills"?—[*Official Report*, 14 December 2000; Vol. 359, c. 785.]

What happened to the right hon. Gentleman's promise to provide "new support for skills"? Does he agree with the Government's better regulation taskforce, which said last week that Government delivery of local economic development and skills training is a bureaucratic nightmare involving a maze of more than 50 Government agencies, Departments and other organisations, and 52 funding streams? Why does a training co-ordinator have to fill in up to 26 pieces of paper before starting a trainee on a work-based programme? Is that the way to encourage skills?

What of the targets that remain? The Government describe them as SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed—so let us see how smart they are. The Department of Trade and Industry has the target of bringing United Kingdom levels of competition and consumer empowerment and protection up to those of the best by 2006, but the level of the best is not defined, so how will the DTI or anyone else know whether consumer empowerment has reached the required level by 2006?

Roger Casale: On the subject of "how smart you are", may I ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman a question? Does he believe that it is possible for public service reforms to be successful if those reforms are not supported by appropriate financial resources? How does he imagine that those financial resources can be released if the share of Government spending were reduced to 35 per cent. of gross national product, as he wishes to do?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman attends these debates, he will know perfectly well that I do not wish to do that. *[Interruption.]* Does the Financial Secretary to the Treasury wish to intervene? I do not wish to do as the hon. Gentleman suggested, and I have answered that question many times before.

James Purnell: I have attended many of these debates, and I find it impossible to find out what the right hon. and learned Gentleman's position is on tax and spending because he will not tell us, so I have had to read articles in which he has discussed his position. When asked whether he would match our NHS spending in the last Budget, he told *The Scotsman:*

"There are times when other things have to take priority over tax cuts. The crisis in the public services in this country means that this is such a time."

That was six months ago; now he will not even say whether he will match our NHS spending increases. What has happened? Have our reforms been so successful that the NHS is not now in crisis, or is his agenda really about tax cuts and reducing public spending to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product? He will not admit that because all he is interested in is spin.

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman really thinks that the Government's attempts to reform the NHS have been successful, he must be living on a different planet. What I said in the article that he quoted is entirely consistent with what I am saying now. Our spending plans for the NHS will be derived not from the Government's failed policies on the NHS but from our policies on health care, which will deliver the ideals of the NHS and succeed.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I want to return to the Government's targets. I quite understand why Government Members do not want to talk about the targets, but I do.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) referred to the targets set by the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office is meant to contribute to a 70 per cent. reduction in opium production in Afghanistan within five years. Is achieving that really within the power of the Foreign Office? If not, how on earth can it be judged to have succeeded or failed?

What of the framework the Chancellor established for his targets? He solemnly told the House in 1998 that public service agreements were a contract for the renewal of public services and that results would be demanded. He said:

"Money will be released only if Departments keep to their plans."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 188.]

So how many Departments have not had money released because they did not keep to their plans? After all, the then Chief Secretary, now the Secretary of State for Transport, said:

"in both health and education, money will be released only if the Government are satisfied that we are getting the returns that we want."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 597.]

Last week, the Chancellor made no reference to the possibility of funds not being released. Treasury officials at a sitting of the Select Committee could not think of a single example of a departmental budget that would be different if that Department had performed better or worse against its PSA targets.

When the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was asked by the BBC whether any Department had yet had money withheld as a penalty for not meeting its targets, he replied:

"We are not in the business of holding money back in that way."

Not only has that policy been dropped, but the current Chief Secretary does not even know about it. He has been at the Treasury for more than a year and no one troubled

[Mr. Howard]

to inform him of that policy, which was meant to be at the heart of the Chancellor's strategy to improve the public services.

It is little wonder that the Chief Secretary, in his *Financial Times* interview this morning, said:

> "Gordon called for a debate about targets and PSAs, and I think we should have one, because people often don't understand what they are there for."

Andy Burnham (Leigh): A moment ago, the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to Conservative health policies. To my knowledge, the only one that has been explained to us so far was the four-phase policy that the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) outlined a few months ago. Phase 1 is to persuade the public that the NHS is not working. Phase 2 is to convince people that the NHS will not work. Phase 3 is to introduce themes on learning from other countries. Phase 4 is to produce policy detail—ultimately the most difficult phase. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us which phase the Conservative party has reached?

Mr. Howard: May I give the hon. Gentleman a little advice? Next time, he should ask his Whips for better material. He and they need to do rather better than that.

I know that Labour Members do not want us to talk about their targets, but I do. What other sanctions are in place when the targets are not achieved? How are Ministers held to account for results? We have looked at the fate of some of the Cabinet Ministers from 1998 whose Departments now have the fewest targets described as "met", "met and ongoing", or "on course". What has happened to the Cabinet Ministers with the worst records in meeting their targets?

It is true that one of them—the then Secretary of State for Health—was indeed punished for his failure. He became Labour candidate for Mayor of London. Another Minister who achieved fewer than seven in 10 of his own targets was the Chancellor himself. As far as we know, he is still in post. The third, the Minister who achieved one of the worst results of all, was promoted to his current post of Home Secretary.

Meanwhile, one Cabinet Minister achieved in full more than nine out of 10 of the targets set. He had the best record of the lot, so surely he must have been promoted. Well, actually he was not—he was sacked. The right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) now sits on the Back Benches—a permanent reminder to his colleagues of the danger of over-achieving on the Chancellor's targets. So there we have it. So much for the Prime Minister taking the Chancellor's PSAs seriously. So much for their claim to reform.

Is it any wonder that Professor Colin Talbot, in evidence to the Treasury Committee, described the PSA mechanism as deeply flawed and as "a topdown, opaque process"; or that Tony Travers of the London School of Economics says that the targets represent "rigid centralisation"? Is it any wonder that even the BBC, on the night of his spending review statement, compared the Chancellor's approach with the 10-year plans of the Soviet Union?

Is the Chancellor aware that the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury has said that there are so many targets that it reminds some people of Stalin's Gosplan? Is the Chancellor proud of the fact that he is becoming known as Gosplan Gordon? Why does he not understand that the result of that ever-tightening leash is that innovation and improvement are being strangled?

In today's NHS, doctors cannot treat patients in pain because they are not in the right Government category to fill empty hospital beds. Instead of recruiting an extra 2,000 GPs by 2004, as the Government promised, in each of the last two years, they have managed just 18.

Mr. Boateng *rose*—

Mr. Howard: I shall certainly give way to the Chief Secretary. I hope that he will explain why the Government have managed to recruit just 18 GPs in each of the past two years, instead of the extra 2,000 that they promised.

Mr. Boateng: Talking of GPs, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman still adhere to the view that the NHS is

> "a Stalinist, centralised, monolithic, bureaucratic creation, which is failing the nation"?

Mr. Howard: We are going to find a better way of living up to the ideals of the national health service. The Chief Secretary ought to pause here. Does he really think that the best way to deliver health care to the people of this country is through a centralised organisation that employs 1.3 million people, the biggest employer in the world outside China, with the possible exception of the Indian state railway? The Chief Secretary ought to reflect on the implications of his question.

In today's schools, teacher vacancies have more than doubled and more than one in two trainee teachers walk away in their first three years because they do not have enough classroom time with children. What does the Chancellor fall back on? No longer able to offer hope, the Labour party now tries to win votes through fear. The Chancellor and his colleagues try to scaremonger, based on our refusal to be bound by their figures. Yet that, of course, was precisely the position that he took in opposition: it was not until January 1997 that he described his party's spending plans.

We, too, will outline our policies before the next general election. But one thing is certain: we are determined to move away from the Chancellor's policy of money without real reform. It does not mean that we are against spending more on health, education and other services but that we are determined to break with the Chancellor's legacy of failed promises and dashed expectations. We are determined to offer something better.

Gregory Barker: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that after five years of increased Labour spending on health, and 53 tax rises to pay for it, bed blocking at the Conquest hospital in Hastings over the last 12 months has risen by 130 per cent., so that now one in nine beds have elderly people trapped in hospital? In East Sussex, the waiting time for women with breast cancer to receive radiotherapy—the Chancellor should be interested in this because he has been confronted on television by one of my constituents, since when the situation has got a lot worse—has risen from 12 weeks 12 months ago to 23 weeks? Where has the money gone? That is what my constituents want to know.

Mr. Howard: I am not astonished by my hon. Friend's figures. I was not aware of the precise figures for East

Sussex, but I fear that they are typical. But that, I am afraid, is what counts as success for Labour Members. That is what they mean when they talk about the success of their policies to reform the health service. Those are the kind of figures that they have in mind.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give the House an assurance that his party's plans for improving the national health service will not include levying any charges on services that are currently available to patients free at the point of use?

Mr. Howard: I know that the hon. Gentleman is impatient to see our plans for the health service, and they will be worth waiting for. He will just have to wait a little longer and contain his impatience until we produce them. I am sure that if he is entirely objective when they are produced, he might even like them. We will have to wait and see.

The Chancellor promised the country in the run-up to the 1997 election:

> "We have an instinct to serve the public interest, which is not the same as an instinct to spend."

But now the country is all too painfully aware of the instincts of this Chancellor and his party: an instinct to spend, an instinct to centralise and an instinct to interfere. It is as a result of those instincts that they have failed to deliver on the public services.

There is a better way. There is a way to achieve safer streets and better hospitals and schools. But it will not come about through more of the same. It will come about through leadership, imagination, vision, and real reform. That is what the Government had the opportunity to offer, but they have failed. That is precisely where we intend to succeed.

6.54 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The shadow Chancellor made himself politically infamous when, on "Newsnight", he refused 14 times to answer a question from Jeremy Paxman about Derek Lewis. He has now refused to answer about 14,000 times questions about where he will get the money from for his plans. The question I have for the right hon. and learned Gentleman is this: how can he maintain the present level of public services without spending any money? Credibility and honesty in politics is all and, sadly, the shadow Chancellor is a sham because he gives no indication of how his party would govern this country. Until he does, he has no credibility whatever.

Mr. Howard: Can the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury explain why my party should produce its spending plans now when his party did not produce its spending plans until four months before the 1997 election?

Mr. McFall: I have a simple explanation. The shadow Chancellor has stood up and, for half an hour, criticised the Government's policies rotten. If he is going to do that, he must give us an alternative vision. All we have at the moment is a blank sheet; frankly, that is not good enough for this debate.

Mr. Tom Harris: Does my hon. Friend agree that, even before the 1997 election and before the Labour party had published its specific spending plans, our values and core aims were well known, which is the complete opposite of the Conservative party's position?

Mr. McFall: I agree. In my position as Chairman of the Select Committee, it is important for me and the Committee to analyse the Government's spending targets and plans and, as the shadow Chancellor has said, we did that in the past week.

I thank the Chancellor for his appearance at the Select Committee last week and for the extra money provided. However, I have to say that six days' notice of an event of such significance at the end of the parliamentary Session is not good enough. If we are to take the comprehensive spending review seriously as part of a transparent and well-managed process, we have to ensure that there is more time for discussion.

I suggest also that given that the envelope for public services was announced in the Budget some time ago, it might be a good idea to have a White Paper on the draft proposals so that the Government could consult on the issues and so that we knew where the money was going to be spent. There is a two-year process associated with the review, so there is no reason why we should not have the issues up for public discussion. After all, the United States federal Government do that annually. The British Government have a way to go on that.

I welcome the substantial increase in public spending. As has been mentioned, the total level of public spending will be £511 billion by 2005–06. That is £61 billion extra for public services over the next three years and, in cash terms, it is the biggest rise ever. It is reassuring to know that 75 per cent. of that spending will be focused on the key areas of education and health. It is the biggest rise in spending that we have witnessed and the annual rate of spending will be 4.3 per cent. over this year's forecast.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Is there not a massive irony in all of this? When new Labour came to power in 1997, we were told repeatedly that they would never be a tax-and-spend Government because that had been the failure of all previous Labour Governments since the war. Now, that is exactly what they have become.

Mr. McFall: I shall answer that in two steps. The Treasury Select Committee had a number of experts before us last week, one of whom—David Walton, the chief economist of Goldman Sachs—said that, on the average growth trend of 2.5 per cent., the Government's projections looked very reasonable and their fiscal rules would be met comfortably.

A further issue for the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues who go on about tax and spend is that, as a share of national income, public sector spending is set to grow from 39.8 per cent. to 41.8 per cent. in 2005. That is still lower than the average of 44 per cent. of national income spent over the 18 years of Conservative Government from 1979 to 1997. The figure is also low by international standards. I would remind the hon. Gentleman that his heroine, now Baroness Thatcher, presided over public spending of 48 per cent. of national income in 1982–83, three years after the previous Labour Government. So this is far from tax and spend—indeed, I would refer to it as fiscally conservative.

Mr. Bercow: I am sure that all democrats share one goal, which is to increase the engagement of the public

[Mr. Bercow]

with the democratic process. I put it to the hon. Gentleman that the question of the share of national income spent by the state is very important, but that it is not much discussed in the Dog and Duck. Will he tell me how, in practical terms, the increase in expenditure on education will either reduce the appalling truancy levels from which we suffer or counter the 300 per cent. rise in assaults by pupils on teachers?

Mr. McFall: I speak from experience here, after a lifetime in teaching. We have to progress the priorities. I do not know about the hon. Gentleman, but I have visited every primary school in my constituency since 1997. Without exception, every head teacher has told me that they have extra resources and that they are happy with them. The step change is taking place in primary schools, and I urge the Government to ensure that it also takes place in the secondary schools and elsewhere.

Mr. Salmond: Public spending as a proportion of gross national product might not be discussed in the Dog and Duck, but the hon. Gentleman is undoubtedly correct in what he is saying. I am not altogether sure, however, whether it places a Labour Member in a comfortable position to say that Baroness Thatcher was spending a higher percentage of GNP on public spending. The hon. Gentleman also talked about the trend growth rate of 2.5 per cent. being met. Is he saying that the bulk of the evidence before his Committee suggests that, in the current international environment, that trend growth rate is likely to be met in the next three years?

Mr. McFall: On the hon. Gentleman's first point about the previous Conservative Government's spending, this Government have increased employment by 1.5 million and cut the national debt, giving us the opportunity to spend on things that were previously a burden. On his point about the 2.5 per cent. growth trend, the Chancellor has historically always underachieved in his growth targets. This is the first occasion on which people have said that he is getting near his target. Certainly, from a macro-economic point of view, the economists who have come to the Treasury Committee have said that that target represents a reasonable proposition. We are aware that the global situation is not favourable but, as one of the economists said to us, the money is in the books until 2006; that is reassuring.

James Purnell: Does the Chairman of the Select Committee agree that the key difference between spending under Margaret Thatcher and spending now is that, under Margaret Thatcher, the money was being spent on 3 million unemployed people? Does he remember the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) writing in *The Guardian* that he accepted that it was desirable to underspend on welfare payments so that more money could be spent on hospitals and schools? That is exactly what we have done.

Mr. McFall: Those points have been well made.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): I have listened to all this and reached the conclusion that many people on the Front Bench just do not live in the real world—*[Interruption.]* I meant people on the Conservative Front Bench, not that there are very many of them there at the moment. I visited a primary school recently, and the headmistress told me that, five years ago, the only extra resources that they had were felt tip pens. She said that they now had new buildings, new computers and nine classroom assistants, and that standards were rising all the time. She said, "If that's spin, can we have more of it?"

Mr. McFall: That is a very good anecdote. And talking of felt tip pens, I give way to the hon. Member for Buckingham.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee for giving way; he has been extremely generous. I am glad that the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) reads my articles in *The Guardian*. That is flattering, but I do not think that it greatly advances the debate. I asked the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) what the effect of increased education expenditure would be on the truancy problem and on the problem of assaults on staff. Asked what the effect would be, he said that the spending was welcome. I hope that he will forgive me, but I want to ask him the question again, because this is important. How will the increased expenditure serve to reduce truancy or assaults by pupils on staff? Those two matters are of pre-eminent concern to thousands of teachers and parents.

Mr. McFall: Speaking of *The Guardian*, I read about the hon. Gentleman in that newspaper, and about his fiancée who has different political views from him. Perhaps she will balance him from here on, and perhaps that will help him with his new portfolio.

I shall refer again to my own experience. For a while, I was in charge of a truancy unit in a Glasgow school, and it was very hard keep the kids in school. One way of doing so was to enhance the status of the truancy unit, and to get more resources, teachers and classroom assistants into it. The only way to achieve that was through extra resources. The hon. Gentleman asks me how the extra resources will help. They will help in modifying behaviour by providing adequate staffing for young people; that is a good way forward.

David Wright: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in Buckinghamshire, about 220 more teachers have been employed under this Government since 1997?

Mr. McFall: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I think that that must be the last intervention that I take. It is not often that someone from the Back Benches says that, but I shall say it just in case. Other hon. Members want to speak tonight and it is important that they should be able to do so.

I welcome a number of aspects of the Government's commitment. One relates to the aid budget. I know that some of my colleagues will devote a large part of their speeches to that subject tonight. It is reassuring to find that the aid budget will be increased by £1.5 billion to reach the target of 0.4 per cent. of GNP by 2005. I am one of those who wish to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent., but we will have to do that in stages. To come from 0.2 per cent. to 0.4 per cent. in seven or eight years is a welcome development.

The shadow Chancellor and other Members referred to targets. The Treasury Committee has looked at that issue, and I want to ask the Government whether the services will improve, now that we have the funding. Vast sums of money have been mentioned in the spending review. The individual in the local pub might not recognise those sums, but they will want to see the improvement in their services at local level. They will want to see a transformation involving shorter waiting lists, better education for young people, criminals being locked up and social nuisances on housing estates being eliminated. That is the key for the Government. Targets are extremely important.

If I have one criticism of the Government, it is that they have perhaps inflated expectations, and that the end result has been less than it was expected to be. These processes will be undertaken using targets. I note that, when the Chancellor introduced his spending review, he introduced 130 public sector agreements. That is down from 160 in 2000, and from more than 300 in the comprehensive spending review of 1998. I have described the targets as a bit vague and, perhaps, bland. Is the Chancellor satisfied that these targets will allow Parliament properly to monitor Departments' performance? Until we have a clear and unambiguous answer, we will ensure that the monitoring process takes place.

On the Treasury's public service agreements to achieve year-on-year improvements in public services' value for money, the latest Treasury annual report simply states that matters are on course, without providing any measurement. Table A2, on page 67 of the report, merely states:

> "These value for money targets are monitored as part of the Treasury's Spending Review 2000".

I suggest to Ministers that we need to do more to ensure that those targets are met. If they are to be of value, they need to be simply expressed, transparent, believable and credible. Some hon. Members have mentioned poppy growing in Afghanistan, but are the Government going to report on progress on making the world a safer place—one of the seven Foreign Office targets—daily, hourly, or every five minutes? Let us ensure that the targets have a wee bit more credibility.

Do centrally determined targets that rely on command and control work? I want the Government to confirm that the targets are not centrally imposed and do not rely on command and control. Central Government must allow local initiatives to engage in diversity, but historically, Governments have not been good at that. I am talking about Whitehall and the associated culture, which must be broken. Devolution of power is essential if we are to ensure that long-term goals and proper accountability arrangements are put in place.

The targets also depend on the credibility of independent audits. We must ensure that the money does not disappear down black holes. One issue is public sector pay increases. Public sector workers have rightly made some demands, but if we allow most of the money to be spent on extra pay, we will not achieve the targets. Let us strike a healthy balance. It is important that we ensure that the money is put in, that we bring about reform, and that we achieve the required outcomes.

The Chancellor also placed a great deal of emphasis on productivity. In the past, productivity has been somewhat disappointing, with a figure of 1.3 per cent for the past four years. Public sector productivity has lagged behind the private sector. Value added per employee in the public sector was almost £30,000, but in the private sector it was £41,000. In the past six years, productivity in the private sector has been running at 25 per cent., compared with only 17 per cent. in the public sector. In transforming the public services, we must be very aware of productivity issues. Otherwise, international competitiveness, profitability and investment will be eroded.

When the Prime Minister appeared before the Liaison Committee, he spoke of three tough long-term issues: transport, housing and pensions. He said that he would like all-party support on those issues, and I echo that sentiment. If we are to bring about improvements in these three crucial areas, there must be some political consensus. On pensions, we have the combination of an ageing population and a trend towards economic growth in future years. However, the clash that will arise between an ageing population and the demands of the public is not peculiar to the United Kingdom.

A few months ago, I was fortunate enough to attend a meeting involving the budget chairman of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in Washington. David Walker, of the general accounting office, said that every country in the world will experience such problems. There are several things that can be done. There could be a reduction in the provision of services, but that is very hard for politicians of whatever party to accept. *[Interruption.]* I note that Liberal Democrats are nodding furiously. Taxes could be increased—again, that is unpleasant medicine—or growth could be increased, and that is where productivity comes in.

I shall leave Ministers and the House with a sense of the difficulties involved. When I pressed the general accounting officer in Washington for the growth figure that will ensure that American targets will be met within 25 years, he mentioned figures of 8 to 10 per cent. Our current annual growth figure, however, is about 3 per cent., which shows the scale of the problem. This is an issue not merely for the Government, but for the entire political process and the country as a whole. Such tough long-term decisions need cross-party support, and I seek the support of the shadow Chancellor and others. Would he like to respond?

Mr. Howard: I am very happy to respond to the hon. Gentleman. When we see particular proposals for dealing with the crisis in pensions, we will of course consider them. We are prepared to look at all proposals on their merits. We are determined to provide the people of this country with public services of which they can be proud, and which they need and deserve.

Mr. McFall: That is what I call a first step towards partnership, and I welcome it.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury mentioned the Government's four main priorities. The first is a sound economy, and we certainly must not do anything to jeopardise long-term stability. The second is good public services, and the country and our constituents deserve no less. The third is the need to recreate communities that, as our daily constituency experience shows, have been shattered. It is extremely important that we build strong communities. The final priority is the United Kingdom's place in the world in the provision of overseas aid, and I am reassured by the Government's commitment to such targets in the spending review.

[Mr. McFall]

I am also pleased that such means have been provided in handsome measure, but the slogan here should be not education, education, education, but delivery, delivery, delivery. Back Benchers and Treasury Committee members will monitor these developments, and ensure that the Government are held to account for these huge—and hopefully beneficial—sums of public money.

7.18 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) said. It is clear that he has been listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), who serves with him on the Treasury Committee. I congratulate them both, along with other members of the Committee, on their work in scrutinising the spending review. However, it is a great shame that, because of the truncated timetable that the Government have instigated, we cannot consult their report in order to enhance our debate.

It is a genuine pleasure for a Liberal Democrat to be able to say in a public expenditure debate, "At last!" *[Interruption.]* One of my hon. Friend's says I should say "I told you so". I was trying to be gracious at the beginning of my speech. After three successive election manifestos and more than a decade of hard campaigning, key Liberal Democrat demands for investment in education and health at last look like they have begun to be met. The Government have U-turned on public spending, at last. No one in British politics today is in any doubt that the Budget and spending review for 2002 mark historic shifts in public investment, and Liberal Democrats welcome that unreservedly.

At last, the Government have stopped copying the Conservatives—on some things, at least. The days of adopting Conservative spending plans lock, stock and barrel appear to be long gone. At last education is receiving something approaching the scale of funding for which Liberal Democrats have long campaigned.

Of course we will question individual priorities in the education budget. We have huge concerns about the approach, and no doubt my hon. Friends will identify education needs unmet over coming months. Tuition fees are one example. But at last we can begin to shift from a debate about how much to spend to a debate about how best to spend, and that is the debate in which I intend to engage.

First, however, let me make an observation about public expenditure during Labour's first five years in office. It is directly relevant to this debate. For the record, Liberal Democrats believe that Labour made a huge strategic mistake in failing to invest properly in our public services during those first five years. Much of today's extra expenditure is necessary simply to rectify major errors of the past. It would have represented much better value for money had it happened earlier. Labour's bust-boom approach to public spending has been bad for patients, bad for pupils and bad for passengers. In his first five years the Chancellor, far from being an iron Chancellor, has been a corroding Chancellor, allowing our public infrastructure to rust away. Whatever his party political reasons for that, it was a huge financial and social mistake.

Hugh Bayley: The hon. Gentleman reminds us of the Liberal Democrats' pledge to raise income tax, if necessary—their qualification—by one penny, thus raising some £2.5 billion a year. Would the hon. Gentleman have put that drop in the ocean towards the Labour Government's increased investment in education, in health spending, in fighting crime or in transport? It would not have gone very far if he had tried to spread it across the total of Labour's increased spending.

Mr. Davey: Some interventions take one by surprise. That was not one of them.

We have always said in our taxation plans that our spending proposals will be fully costed. Because our proposals were covered by tax increases, they were over and above what the Government were proposing at the time. The cumulative tax rises in the alternative Liberal Democrat Budget of 2002 are very similar to the rises proposed in the Government's Budget, although obviously they would apply to different things. We would therefore have had the same resources at our disposal as the Chancellor had for the purposes of his spending review. The hon. Gentleman's point, therefore, does not take us very far.

To be fair, it must be said that where we had new Labour, now, with this extra spending, we have new Gordon. The problem is that, whereas new Labour promised us that it would not spend anything, new Gordon promises us that he will not allow anyone else to spend anything. The Chancellor must micro-manage everything. New Labour had reviews; new Gordon has regulators. New Labour had taskforces; new Gordon has targets. New Labour had new ambitions; new Gordon has new auditors. New Labour created Tsars; new Gordon is the Tsar.

Some of us here are genuine admirers of the Chancellor. He has done some very good things—establishing an independent Bank, tackling third-world debt and sorting out the Conservatives' debt mountain. All those are great achievements. However accomplished this Chancellor is, however, he simply cannot run Britain's public services from Whitehall. He must learn to let go, and to trust others.

David Wright: During our debates on the Finance Bill, the hon. Gentleman made a number of additional financial commitments on behalf of his party. Does he think that he will have to put another penny on income tax to pay for them?

Mr. Davey: If the hon. Gentleman were being fair, he would also say that I opposed some of the Government's tax reductions because they were very unwise. An example is the reduction in the starting rate of corporation tax to 0p, which the Institute for Fiscal Studies says may lose the Exchequer as much as £2.9 billion. According to the hon. Gentleman's logic, we could pocket that money for our purposes.

The Chancellor talks of a new localism, but it is a new localism that his Whitehall controls. Outside Scotland and Wales, there is precious little new democracy in Labour's new localism. The Chancellor effectively said that himself in his statement. Poor-performing local education authorities would be subject to takeover; poor-performing councils would be subject to new managers, or to takeover.

What happened to local democracy? Does the Chancellor not trust the voters? Does he not see how sensible were the voters of Hull when confronted with the waste of Hull Labour party and the scandal of the failed Gypsyville project? They kicked out the Labour council after 50 years.

The Chancellor should talk to the Deputy Prime Minister. Has he not seen how Islington is being transformed now that the Liberal Democrats are running it? He should also talk to the Prime Minister. Instead of being the man in Whitehall ordering takeovers, he should be empowering voters; but instead of democracy we have a new battery of centralised targets, the new public service agreements.

Mr. Tom Harris: The hon. Gentleman's personal tirade against the Chancellor is all very interesting, but do the Liberal Democrats now support failing schools?

Mr. Davey: I thought that the hon. Gentleman would do rather better than that. What the Liberal Democrats do in power, having been voted into power by the electors, is tackle such problems with proper investment, making education a priority.

What our party supports is local democracy. We oppose the idea that the man in Whitehall knows best, because so often he does not.

The new public service agreements now contain 130 targets—admittedly fewer than the 300 in 1998 and the 160 in 2000, but there are still plenty of centrally imposed targets. And what a reassuring set of targets this is. The No. 1 PSA of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is "Promote better policy integration". I am not sure how "better policy integration" will be measured, and when we will know that we have reached that nirvana. Perhaps it will be like the "better transport policy integration" provided previously by the Deputy Prime Minister; let us hope not.

The Home Office has a particularly good public service agreement:

> "Increase voluntary and community sector activity—including community participation—by 5 per cent. by 2006".

We all look forward to seeing the Chancellor Tsar measure community activity and community participation up and down the country. Perhaps the Chief Secretary to the Treasury can tell us how it will be measured. I have an image of bowler-hatted man with clipboards touring village fetes. Presumably their first question will be "Has the number of stalls gone up this year, vicar?" As for increasing community participation, perhaps the Government have plans to slow hand-clap volunteers into joining the Women's Institute.

I would be fascinated to learn from Treasury Ministers how they plan to increase community sector activity by central diktat. We all agree with the aim—I am sure that scout and guide groups throughout the country are crying with joy at the prospect of having adult volunteers to help them—but the idea that a central Whitehall Department should target an increase in community and voluntary activity across Britain is a sign of the unbelievable hubris of this Government.

It does not end there. I discussed this earlier with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Part of objective 1 of the Foreign Office simply does not make sense. It states:

> "Contribute to the reduction of opium production in Afghanistan, with poppy cultivation reduced by 70 per cent. within 5 years and elimination within 10 years."

That may be an excellent idea. Indeed, we can all agree that it is a worthy aim. But can Treasury Ministers tell us how they will obtain the data? Is the source, perhaps, the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture? It is an entirely innocent question.

I presume that some of the extra cash given to the Foreign Secretary has been earmarked for the purpose of destroying Afghan poppy fields; but the National Audit Office will want to audit the data that the Government use to calculate their success in approaching that ambitious target. We need to know the answers to such questions.

The key point is that the Treasury wants us to take PSAs of that kind seriously. Page 11 of the spending review White Paper states:

> "PSAs are central to the Government's strategy for improving public services."

We as parliamentarians, therefore, are right to ask questions. The problem is that when we do the Treasury does not answer them. Liberal Democrats have asked the Treasury to publish a list of the PSA targets from the 1998 and 2000 spending reviews to show which targets were passed, which were failed, which were revoked and which were amended. The Treasury has refused to answer. How can we hold Ministers to account in regard to PSAs when they do not answer parliamentary questions about them? The Chancellor, when asked about them by the Select Committee on the Treasury, also refused to give a straight answer.

We have therefore conducted our own analysis, which the shadow Chancellor used in his speech. We have consulted departmental annual reports to try to establish what progress has been made on PSAs. Unfortunately, the annual reports are not terribly helpful, but we have managed to make some progress. The record is not very good. The Foreign Office has missed 47 per cent. of its targets, the Department for Transport has missed 57 per cent., the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has missed 83 per cent., and the Home Office has missed a staggering 89 per cent. of its PSA targets. It met only four of the original 37 targets: all the others have been missed, dropped or revised.

We do not know, now, what happens when Departments miss their targets. The Chief Secretary said today that they will not be penalised, but will Ministers be sacked, or—as the Chancellor implied to the Select Committee—will the pay of permanent secretaries be docked? We just do not know.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Nothing will happen.

Mr. Davey: My hon. Friend is right—nothing will happen. We have heard that the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has been penalised. It has been renamed, and is now the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. If that is the sort of penalty that the Government have in mind, the focus of the PSAs will be lost.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Chancellor, when asked by the Treasury

[Mr. David Laws]

Committee about that point, said that the only sanctions would be those imposed by the Prime Minister or the electorate? Does he think that that will be good enough?

Mr. Davey: On current performance, it clearly will not be good enough. My hon. Friend is right to make the point. The Government's feelings about the purpose of PSAs seems to have changed. When they announced their PSAs in 2000, a press release issued on 3 November of that year stated:

> "action will be taken where there is a risk that a Department's performance is off track."

Is that still so? What has changed? Given that so many targets in the 2000 spending review have been missed, will the Chief Secretary say what actions have been taken in the past two years? Why have they failed?

James Purnell: The hon. Gentleman's relatively thoughtful speech should embarrass the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). However, what is his view about targets and objectives? Is he completely opposed to them, or does he agree that they are worth setting? Does he agree that general targets that cannot be measured have to be set for some items, whereas clear measurable targets can be set for others? Is not it slightly foolish to pretend that everything can be measured specifically, as counterproductive targets could be set as a result?

Mr. Davey: I agree that targets are justified in some circumstances. We have argued that output and outcome targets are necessary in many areas, but the hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point about how targets should be used in different circumstances. The Government's performance should not be determined according to measurable targets, but by the degree to which they look at intangibles that cannot be measured.

My hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil and I went to New Zealand to find out how targets were used there. We were told about the dangers that arise when targets are too specific. The police in Wellington had a target for the number of breathalyser tests undertaken. Towards the end of the year, the force realised that it had not performed anywhere near the number of tests that it had contracted to do. As a result, Wellington was brought to a standstill for two days as breath tests were taken by every driver.

Government policy must be sensible and sensitive, and not driven only by targets. That is our concern today, especially as many of the targets are centrally imposed on bodies that are asked to meet them having had no part in deciding what they should be.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Is not the hon. Gentleman trying to have it both ways? He is making fun—perhaps justifiably—of the Treasury's target-setting process. However, he seems to classify quantitative targets as irrelevant, unachievable or capable of being fiddled, yet, if asked, he would no doubt describe qualitative targets as vague, waffly and imprecise.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is putting words in my mouth. I did not say that there was no case for qualitative targets, or that there was a case only for quantitative ones. Clearly, Government objectives must be scrutinised, and we must try to find a way to ensure that we can "focus minds" on that, to use the Chief Secretary's phrase. However, in this speech I am looking at the Government's published targets and attempting to find out what the Government's intentions are. I am also trying to discover what happens when Departments do not meet their targets.

We are told that the targets are important and crucial to public service reform, but the Government have so far failed to make that case in this debate. The Chancellor was asked about the Treasury's performance in relation to targets, yet he and the Chief Secretary have failed to explain why the key target on efficiency had been missed. The Chancellor set himself a target of delivering efficiency gains of 2.5 per cent. a year. He agreed that target with himself, but he missed it, and has now dropped it.

The Treasury has other targets, such as that for underlying growth. Originally set in the 1998 spending review, that target, we have been told, has been achieved. The Chancellor forecast trend growth at 2.5 per cent. a year, but this year—hey presto!—the estimate is of 2.75 per cent. The Treasury seems to have hit that target, but a closer examination reveals that that has nothing to do with higher productivity. The Treasury has hit the target only because of higher than expected labour force growth, fed by higher than expected immigration.

At least, that is what the relevant Treasury document states, but a deeper inspection shows that the Chancellor has pulled off a nice little trick. In the past, the Treasury used to take the principal forecast of the Government Actuary to determine population growth and labour force growth. This year, for the first time ever, the Treasury has decided to override the Government Actuary. Unilaterally, the Chancellor has decided to forecast labour force growth at a higher rate than the Government Actuary. Miraculously, Britain's trend growth appears to have risen. The Treasury has hit its PSA target because it has fiddled the figures.

We have tried to investigate the matter. We are not obsessed with PSAs, but the matter is critical to the Government's forecast of public finances. By increasing by 0.25 per cent. his trend forecast for growth, the Chancellor has given himself a fiscal windfall of an extra £4 billion a year.

In the interests of fiscal prudence, therefore, we have been asking some questions about the change in the forecast. It turns out that the Treasury has done little work to justify it. It published a report at the time of the Budget entitled "Trend Growth: Recent Developments and Prospects", but a close reading of that document reveals only how little work the Treasury did to justify what was a very significant change.

The formal justification for the change was that the Government Actuary department had underestimated the extent of net immigration and that increased net immigration has raised the size of the labour force. However, the Treasury has offered no analysis of the longer-term determinants of immigration, and no justification has been given for assuming that a recent upturn of immigration will be sustained in the longer term. After all, the Home Office has a PSA that requires it to enforce

"the immigration laws more effectively."

Even the major driving forces behind recent immigration flows will be cut, according to other PSAs. The Foreign Office has a ludicrous PSA, requiring it to

"reduce tension in South Asia, the middle East, Balkans and elsewhere."

That is not to be achieved through the employment of masseurs, but—presumably—through diplomacy. Yet, if the Foreign Office succeeds in reducing tension in those parts of the world, future immigration flows will presumably fall. Perhaps the Treasury has little faith that the Home Office will reduce immigration, or that the Foreign Office will reduce the tensions that create it. If the Treasury has a target to increase immigration, there is no PSA for that.

Our analysis shows that the targets are nonsense. The key weakness of the PSA system is that Departments are, in effect, judge and jury when it comes to their performance. They decide the targets, and measure performance. The targets are not agreed with Parliament, and there is no discussion with Select Committees about what they should be. They are not agreed with an external body such as the National Audit Office. Of course, Select Committees and the NAO may look at performance against targets, but most PSAs rely on data provided by—guess who—the Government.

After the Sharman report, we were promised that PSAs would be externally validated. The Chief Secretary's predecessor told Parliament on 13 March that he accepted the external validation of PSAs. He said:

"we are taking measures that add to the substantial external validation that is already carried out by the Office for National Statistics and the Audit Commission, the ability of the Comptroller and Auditor General to oversee the data systems as a whole.—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 893.]

That is a very welcome development, but what does it mean in practice? According to the Office for National Statistics, PSA data come from various sources: 43 per cent. of it comes from departmental surveys or statistics, 18 per cent. from agency data, 12 per cent. from local authorities and the NHS, while 13 per cent. comes from other organisations. Only 14 per cent. comes from national statistics. So Ministers retain control, directly or indirectly, of 86 per cent. of the data going into the PSAs. The National Audit Office will have a tough time giving any meaningful external validation to these statistics.

I make just one challenge to Treasury Ministers. If they are so confident that they have their own PSAs right, and, specifically, if they truly believe that underlying growth has increased from 2.5 per cent. to 2.75 per cent., let the Treasury ask either the NAO or the Statistics Commission to review the revised estimate for underlying growth. While they are at it, let them review the analysis that the Treasury has presumably done on long-term immigration determinants. The NAO did neither when it audited the Budget assumptions before the Budget. Will the Minister ask the NAO or the Statistics Commission to do that as one of their first tasks in auditing PSA data? I hope that she will give me that commitment, but I very much doubt it.

My worries in this area are profound and they have got worse as a result of the spending review statement. One of the key elements of that statement, supposedly to ensure that extra cash is well spent, was the development of so-called independent auditing and inspection. New audit arrangements are to be established, according to page 12 of the White Paper, to hold Departments and agencies accountable for performance against the PSA targets. In other words, five new central quangos are to be set up—a commission for health care audit and inspection, a single independent inspectorate for social care services, a single housing inspectorate, a new police standards unit and a modernised inspection regime for the criminal justice system.

These new auditing inspection regimes raise profound questions for the House. First, why do we need these new bodies at all? What was wrong with the Audit Commission? What was wrong with the National Audit Office? Why could not these experienced and well respected bodies have been enhanced and expanded? Both have value for money remits and both have experience auditing the services that the new quangos will audit.

David Wright: Of course, these new bodies are not new. In respect of housing, we are bringing together inspection regimes that are currently in place, so the hon. Gentleman's comment is false.

Mr. Davey: I was quoting what the Government were saying. I am sorry if their spin was new; the hon. Gentleman's spin is not new, but I can only quote from what the Government say in their own press release.

My second point concerns the extent of the independence of the "new"—that is a Government word—quango audit bodies. The status of the NAO and the Audit Commission were carefully debated in this House in the past. The NAO has genuine independence from Government Departments, and while it has independence from this House too, it is, in statute, a creature of Parliament, working for the Public Accounts Committee.

This plethora of new auditors will not be based on the NAO system. They will have a degree of independence but there will be no parliamentary involvement in agreeing who should head them up, as there is for the NAO. They will not report to or work closely with the Public Accounts Committee in the way that the NAO does. These independent bodies will have their budget set by the Treasury, not the House of Commons Commission, in the way that the NAO does. So these independent bodies will not have the independence of the existing audit bodies, which perhaps explains why they have been set up.

There is a third question, which is perhaps more politically profound. Will this panoply of new central auditors make any real difference? Will they not simply soak up many talented individuals who would be better employed in the front line? Will they not soak up large amounts of cash to duplicate controls on auditors elsewhere? Will they not waste the time and efforts of the professionals? We do not have to look far to see their future. Local government is already subject to an equivalent audit exercise through the comprehensive performance assessment. Anyone in local government will say what a waste of time and money that exercise is. It disrupts the work of the Audit Commission, not to mention councils around the country. The exercise looks set to waste more than £100 million. People in local

[Mr. Davey]

government say that the Audit Commission's increasing concern is simply to avoid the danger of a council judicially reviewing the report made on it because of the link to future freedoms and future cash.

The comprehensive performance assessment is just a taste of things to come. Whitehall regulators, auditors and inspectors will have to be trained in their thousands to do a job best done by existing national bodies and, at regional and local level, through existing and new democratic structures.

James Purnell: The same point applies to the comprehensive review by the Audit Commission, the whole point of which is to bring together previous reviews by different sector-specific auditors in local government such as social services, education and others. In that way, we can reduce the burden of auditing for very good councils and concentrate on those which have problems. That is all about reducing the burden of auditing. Does the hon. Gentleman worry that the Tories appear to be opposing the spending while the Liberal Democrats appear to be opposing reform? Will he make any positive recommendations about reform, which is a good tradition in his party?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman anticipates what I am about to say. He should talk to local authorities in his area regarding the comprehensive performance assessment. The message that I am getting clearly is that the burdens are being increased, not reduced.

The Government talk about new localism and new local discretion while at the same time setting up new quangos, new central bid funds and new central targets. I think that their approach on new localism lacks credibility.

Liberal Democrats are concerned that far too much of the welcome increase in public spending could be wasted because of how the Government intend to manage that spending. The Government are trying to reassure us that we can trust them to spend this money wisely because they have these PSA targets but the targets are a real cause for concern. The Government also try to reassure us that value for money is guaranteed because they are establishing these new bodies. We do not believe that these bodies are a necessary or sensible way of auditing public services. We do not see how creating a new army of central auditors and regulators will help turn round public services.

Liberal Democrats have a positive alternative to ensure that we get value for money from these welcome billions. Rather than making contorted attempts to win trust for the Treasury, the Government should trust others. They should trust the people on the front line—the professionals; they should trust local communities. Above all, the Government should trust local voters. Huge tracts of public spending need to be devolved, not to quangos, for which the Treasury set a multitude of PSAs, but to democratic bodies responsible to the communities they serve. With the Conservatives against the extra spending, and given their history of destroying local government and opposing regional government, the Liberal Democrats, who welcome the money, will be the only party capable of arguing for the democratic way to better public spending.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I make a plea for shorter contributions to the debate? An awful lot of hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye, and unless contributions are considerably shorter, an awful lot of hon. Members will be disappointed.

7.47 pm

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I shall be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I welcome the Chancellor's public expenditure review and the extra resources that will be put into public services. I do not think that any sensible person can believe that money alone will reform our public services, but without the money, there would be no hope. As the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said, we must see that reform goes hand in hand with the money that is put into the services. That will not be easy, but I believe that if it happens, the money will eventually find its way into the improved services we all want.

Ever since the Chancellor announced the totals of public expenditure in his Budget, various financial commentators have tried to cast doubt on the Government's ability to fund the totals without, in some cases, hefty increases in taxation. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), the chairman of the Treasury Select Committee pointed out, the Chancellor's forecasts of growth for the next three years, for the purpose of the public expenditure totals, are reasonable and conservative. The forecast is a growth of 2.5 per cent. That is a prudent figure and the Chancellor has probably been more successful in the difficult art of forecasting than many in the private sector, certainly over the past few years. Therefore I believe that there is a good chance of achieving the 2.5 per cent. growth on which the public expenditure totals are based.

However, as the Chief Secretary said, nothing is certain in the kind of global economic system with which we have to live. Growth could still, for external reasons, fall short of that 2.5 per cent., although I hope that it will not. If it were to fall short of 2.5 per cent., the response should certainly not be to put up taxes, as some commentators seem to imply. Nothing could be worse for an economy. One need not be an economist, like the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), to realise that an increase in taxes against the background of a lower growth rate would merely do damage and reduce growth even further.

If there were a funding deficit—I do not believe that it will happen—I suppose that public expenditure could be cut, but that is not easy either. It is not easy in practical terms when one sets out a programme for three years, and cutting public expenditure against a background of reducing growth or a reduced rate of growth would make matters worse. Therefore the point that I wish to make to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is that, as I am sure he is well aware, the only sensible way of funding a shortfall in growth and funding the present public expenditure totals—I have to say it, although perhaps it is not fashionable these days—would be to increase Government borrowing.

The Chancellor, in the Red Book, proceeds on the assumption that what I will call the old PSBR—public sector borrowing requirement—will be about 1.2 per cent. of gross domestic product over the next three years, should the growth rate be 2.5 per cent., the basis of the public expenditure assumptions. There is a new, fashionable phrase for PSBR these days—it is not borrowing but a cash requirement, I believe, but let us just call it the old PSBR. Those of us who have been in this place for a long time, at least, should be allowed to call it the old PSBR.

A PSBR of 1.2 per cent. is not, I suggest, very high, so I would suggest to the Chancellor that if growth were to fall there is plenty of room to increase the PSBR as a percentage of GDP, bearing it in mind that the chances are that, with a lower growth rate, inflation would be very low, so the inflationary consequences of borrowing an increased percentage in respect of a PSBR would not have an inflationary effect.

In my view the main threat to growth, should it come, would be a fall in the rate of inflation into what I would describe as the danger zone of deflation, caused by the relentless pressure of the global economic system—call it global capitalism, if you like—on prices, then on costs, and ultimately on profits. Over the past few years, this pressure has been going on and on. Perhaps we have underestimated it, or perhaps economists prefer to turn a blind eye to it, but those of us who have constituencies where a substantial proportion of the work force—in my case about 30 per cent.—is still employed in manufacturing industry, producing goods, can see clearly, after talking to employers and employees, that the pressure is relentless. Prices cannot be increased; they must be reduced. If prices must be reduced, costs must be cut, but eventually a point comes where they cannot be cut further and profits are squeezed relentlessly. That is what has been happening, and is happening, especially in manufacturing industry.

Recently I read in one of the American newspapers that an American commentator was predicting a profitless growth over the next few years. I am still trying to work out what sort of concept a profitless growth is and I do not suppose that it really means very much. However, talking of the United States, we are obsessed with the scandals of Enron and WorldCom. Now Dr. Alan Greenspan—that wizard of central bankers, apparently—has come up with a new soundbite. A few years ago it was "irrational exuberance" when the stock market was going up. Now that the stock market is going down, it is "infectious greed" that is causing all these problems. Perhaps so; perhaps Enron, WorldCom and some other companies are going into liquidation because of the original sin of human venality, and no doubt that is there.

However, we should not forget—this is not to excuse any of these scandals or any of the people involved—the relentless pressure on profits, because prices are squeezed and costs cannot be reduced any further. The relentless pressure on prices is making people overturn or short-cut what could be called, if this is not a contradiction, the orthodox rules of accountancy. It seems quite easy for central bankers to point to original sin as the reason, but perhaps there is a problem with the system. I do not want to say it too loudly, but perhaps the present capitalist system can no longer cope with capitalism. I do not know. It is a very real difficulty, which we shall have to face.

In Britain in the last month, one of the two inflation rates—I am never quite sure whether it is headline or underlying—was 1.5 per cent. The other was 1 per cent. but let us focus on the 1.5 per cent. While reading American newspapers, I noticed that in the United States in the last two months—this is not an annualised figure—consumer price inflation, or the consumer price index, was increasing by just over 1 per cent. That is a very low level—almost as low as, perhaps lower than, what we have in this country, and of course in Japan it is lower still.

I return to the British figures. Given that private sector services in Britain are very prone to inflation because the service industry—or parts of the service industry—does not have to face the kind of competition that manufacturing has to, it has been estimated that, again taking the annualised figure for last month, private sector services inflation was about 4 per cent. in Britain. Public sector inflation is probably also about 4 per cent. While we have an underlying rate of 1.5 per cent., then clearly, over a whole range of manufactured products, prices must have actually fallen. That creates this enormous pressure, especially on manufacturing industry, but ultimately on the rate of growth if the trend continues, because we could move into the danger zone of deflation.

The Chancellor, when this matter is raised—I make no criticism of my right hon. Friend—tells us that the Bank of England's target is asymmetrical. It is one of those words that I have some difficulty with, but I think I understand what is meant: that if inflation is increasing—getting worse—one increases interest rates, but if inflation is falling, or falling too far, one reduces interest rates. I am not sure whether we are comparing like with like, because I suspect that when an economy moves towards very low inflation, or deflation, cuts in interest rates possibly have very little effect. I do not know how effective interest rates are anyway. I suspect that for certain major, or multinational, companies the cost of money is not a major factor, although I accept that the situation is very different for small companies. In any case, it has been clearly shown that if inflation is falling, and approaching zero, the efficacy of reducing interest rates becomes less and less.

I suspect that in a world of deflation, Dr. Alan Greenspan and many other central bankers would be redundant. The British economy, with its sadly declining manufacturing base, which is producing fewer goods domestically, with a growing—still inflationary, I think—private services sector and with the public expenditure boost that the Chancellor has now given the economy, may be able to withstand that sort of global pressure, which is driving economies towards deflation. Indeed, the Chancellor and our services sector may be able to put enough inflation back into the system to stop us getting to the danger zone of deflation. I do not know.

In that case, however, and I hope that it is the case, the Chancellor will be able, through the measures that we are debating today and his totals, not only to lay the foundation for the improvement in public services but, perhaps as a side effect, to stave off recession and deflation in the British economy.

8.1 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I shall begin with the nature of the comprehensive spending review process. The Chancellor often likes to make out that he has pioneered the concept of a long-term rational basis for public spending, but it is not quite like that. This spending review is the third in only four years. It comes just 15 months after the last spending review came into effect. Add to that the constant topping up of public spending programmes in each successive Budget and, indeed, in each successive pre-Budget report and we are a long way away from the sort of three-year fixed programme that the right hon. Gentleman likes to convey.

[Mr. Michael Fallon]

The public spending arrangements that we now have are not, as the Chancellor maintains, so very different from the ones that we did have. Of course, it is true that since Plowden we have had annual reviews, but even those reviews posited figures for years two and three. Now, it is true that the third year of each successive CSR is simply rolled into the first year of the next one. The Chancellor would be more convincing had he started off by saying that he would put this process on to a two-year framework into which much else was added in between.

This review has one odd feature, which is that the Chancellor was boxed in from the start by the enormous hole that emerged from the last review—the need to set up and implement the Wanless report and to yank up health service spending to the European averages. That meant in turn that he became in hock to the Department for Education and Skills and to the Home Office, which looked for similar increases. In turn, that has clearly skewed spending increases elsewhere.

When we get into the detail of the announcements that are following the spending review, it may well be that the increases for defence and for local government are not really as generous as they might at first appear. That would not matter so much—the national health service, schools and crime would be top of anyone's list and, indeed, they would be top of mine—if Ministers had not pretended that this entire process was the result of rigorous, rational review that really did match results with resources and reform with money. In fact, as we discovered in the hearings of the Treasury Committee last week, no Department was penalised and no money withheld. Even the much-disgraced Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food received a substantial increase in funding.

Fundamentally, politics has driven this spending review: how to square the large post-Wanless increases given to the health service with the obvious commitment of the Government to make education a top priority and the equally obvious need to do something about rising public concern about crime. Let us not be under any illusions: this was a very political spending review, driven entirely by new Labour preoccupations.

On the spending programmes, the first and most obvious comment—it has already been made—is that much of the extra spending will go on people. If it goes on front-line people, that is good news, obviously. We are desperately short of nurses. To confirm that, we have only to look at the use of agency nurses and their predominance on night shifts as well as the ridiculous state to which the Government have reduced the health service—flying nurses in at the same time that they are flying patients out.

Of course, every head teacher would like a greater choice of teachers when selecting for a particular post. Every area commander wants more police in his division and out on patrol. If the money goes on those front-line people, I for one will be cheering. I have two great fears, however. First, the extra spending that is already flowing through from the last review seems to be going on the back line—on advisers, liaison people, co-ordinators and systems managers. If our public services really are in the firing line, one only has to pick up the Wednesday jobs section of the Guardian to see that there are some pretty well-staffed chateaux right behind the front lines.

Some of those jobs are very worthwhile; others are more dubious. The one thing that we know for certain is that every pound spent on advisers, or administrators—on their cars, conferencing and so forth—is a pound less that is spent in the classroom, the hospital ward or out on police patrol.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) has already articulated my second great fear. The Chancellor is overdoing it on inspectors. There are far too many inspectors. Of course, the public services should be accountable, but we will end up destroying any sense of profession—the element of trust that supports the sense of profession—if we over-inspect. The Chancellor set up four new inspectorates. Someone pointed out that they would amalgamate other inspectorates. The Government have already created dozens of new commissions and inspectorates. Far from amalgamating them, I would have liked him to ease off.

Mr. Salmond: I have been looking up the hon. Gentleman's background. Apart from working in the Conservative research department, he was a director of European Consultants Ltd. When he was doing that, was he working in the front line or the back?

Mr. Fallon: I was working in private industry and contributing to the funding of public services. I think that I have as much business experience as the hon. Gentleman, whom I am glad to see back in the Chamber.

On targets, the claim that these are actual programmes rather than simply political decisions rests fundamentally on all those public service targets. There is nothing wrong with performance targets. Any business needs and has performance targets, business plans and personal performance measures in place, as I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree. Here as always, however, the Government blunder along. First, we had more than 600 public service targets, which were introduced a couple of Secretaries of State ago. Just a year later, those were thinned down and now they have been changed again.

What is wrong with those targets? First, they are ludicrously imprecise. Indeed, the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee gave us some examples from the Foreign Office. Some of them are woolly and they are easy to implement or they are incapable of measurement. Secondly, as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton said, they are not yet properly externally audited. It is by no means clear how the Audit Commission will ensure that that external audit is put in place. That still means that the Treasury can virtually audit itself at the moment. Thirdly, the targets are always being changed. The White Paper that sets out public service agreements for 2003 to 2006 states:

> "A small number of headline targets will not be carried forward as either new PSA or SDA targets, where they have . . . been superseded by new targets or events."

That shows that the targets are simply what the Government say they are. They mean what the Government say they mean. Given that no penalties apply, we are in "Alice in Wonderland" territory. The targets mean only what the Treasury says they mean and at the end of day, no one loses any money—all shall have prizes.

Finally—I know a lot of other hon. Members want to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I want to look at the impact of the public spending programmes in west

Kent. We have some of the most expensive housing outside London. It is difficult for us to recruit and house key public sector workers. I welcome the key workers scheme but I would have welcomed it even more if the Government had not in the first five years cut housing association budgets by almost exactly the amount that they have put into the scheme.

The Deputy Prime Minister has announced swathes of new housing for north Kent. The new housing will have to go somewhere. We have to take our share of it but I would have welcomed that announcement if it had been accompanied by a proper recognition that one cannot announce thousands of new houses without first considering the infrastructure. If the Government are going to go down the route of huge new towns, they have to look at the way in which the money is allocated and ensure that the schools, roads and surgeries are put in place first. If there is to be a big increase in housing, they need to look again at the rules governing spending to ensure that the houses are not built and occupied before the infrastructure and support for communities are put in place. At the moment, it is the other way round.

Mr. Tom Harris: I do not want to pre-empt the climax of the hon. Gentleman's speech but would I be right in saying that his argument is leading us implausibly but inexorably to the conclusion that a future Conservative Government—sorry, a hypothetical Conservative Government—will be able to maintain public spending at the levels set by the Chancellor simply by cutting bureaucracy?

Mr. Fallon: It is certainly one of the conclusions that the hon. Gentleman should draw. I have always thought that cutting bureaucracy is important. It is important for central Government above all to keep bearing down on bureaucracy if we are going to get the money into the front line.

The next example from west Kent is law and order. We need more police on patrol. Last Saturday evening, I was in West Kingsdown, a village on the A20; some hon. Members may know it. The village was delighted that a new rural warden had been appointed to help with community safety, but that warden was paid for by Kent county council. The police authority does not have sufficient funding. We need more police locally, not just rural wardens, and more police on patrol.

The impact on council funding is perhaps the biggest threat of all to the successful implementation of some of the spending programmes in my part of west Kent. As hon. Members will know, particularly those representing southern England, another review was slipped out just a few days before the spending review: the formula grant review, under which—the Government are honest enough to put the figures in the illustrative tables at the back of the document—southern shire counties such as Kent and Essex could lose substantial funding. Indeed, the Government recognise that to the extent that they have already proposed damping mechanisms to ensure our councils in the south do not lose more than a specific amount in any particular year.

Mr. Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: No, I must be fair to other hon. Members who want to speak.

There is a best case, there is a worst case, but Kent county council, for example, has estimated that in mid case it will lose around £62.4 million—a budget cut of around 6 per cent., a loss for Kent schools of around £20 million, a loss for social services in Kent of around £5 million. These are the examples set out in the illustrative tables for the formula grant review. I do not want funding for Kent to be cut, as it is being cut at the moment. I make it clear that I will oppose those particular cuts.

It is odd for the Government, at the same time as announcing all this spending nationally and having taken the political credit for it, to be consulting on options for transferring that spending from the south to our friends in the north. It is particularly odd to be doing it now, before we have the results of the census next year.

The spending review clearly is not just about more money. It is driven fundamentally by politics rather than economics. It is unaccompanied by serious reform of public services. It is based on made-up, moving targets. Nothing in it convinces me that public services in west Kent will get any better.

8.15 pm

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): The spending review, with its focus on education and research, promises well for our country. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his announcement about funding for science has provided an excellent first instalment. We must now wait and see what improvement the Government make in their support for the university system as a whole.

The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) and other right hon. and hon. Members have ranged broadly and fascinatingly. I would like to concentrate on one particular issue: public expenditure on university museums and galleries and—the other side of the coin—their liability to value added tax.

The university museums deserve the Government's support, benefiting as they do so many aspects of the public good. The university museums are custodians of the oldest legacy of publicly accessible collections. They have a long and distinguished history of public engagement as well as being repositories of scholarly expertise.

The nation's first museum education service was established 90 years ago in the Manchester museum, part of the university of Manchester, a service that is now provided to 25,000 children each year and reaches out into a culturally diverse local community. University museums are particularly well placed to help to widen access to higher education. They contribute to economic regeneration as important elements in regional tourism and cultural strategies.

I refer those who wish to know something of the history of the university collections to various excellent studies by Ms Kate Arnold-Forster, who was once a pupil of mine. The Ashmolean was the first museum in England to be opened to the public, in 1683. Colleges, universities and learned societies were institutional recipients of gifts of collections from an early date. The Hunterian museum of the university of Glasgow is based on the bequest of William Hunter in 1783, and is Scotland's oldest museum. The Fitzwilliam museum derives from the legacy of Viscount Fitzwilliam, who died in 1816. Other magnificent benefactions were the Courtauld Institute of

[Alan Howarth]

Art collection, established in 1931, and the Percival David collection of Chinese art, presented to the university of London in 1951. Other collections were developed by the universities over centuries as resources for teaching and research, particularly in the natural sciences.

The Sedgwick museum of geology, for example, stems from the collection of Dr. John Woodward, bequeathed to the university of Cambridge in 1727, together with detailed instructions for its preservation and educational use. Important anthropological and archaeological collections came from great scholar collectors—for example, W. M. Flinders Petrie, whose Egyptology collection belongs to University college, London.

The movement to create new public museums, national and municipal, in the 19th century did not displace the tradition of university collections. In 1868, Owen's college, later the Victoria university of Manchester, accepted the collection of the Manchester Society of Natural History, which had been rejected by the city of Manchester.

What should the Government's responsibility be in regard to the university collections? We look to Government to do their best to ensure that the universities have, all in all, sufficient funding to fulfil their and society's expectations of them. Guardianship of our cultural heritage, and the provision of access to learning about it, are among those expectations.

Some university collections are admirably managed and presented; others have been sadly neglected, with their parent universities unable to provide the necessary resources, and survival of the collections effectively depending on the devotion of volunteers. We read recently, in *The Guardian* of 16 July, of admirable efforts at the university of Leeds to rescue and display collections in the fields of chemistry, biology, Arabic and textiles.

The old University Grants Committee used to provide so-called "non-departmental special factor" funding to universities in recognition of their collections, but as that came through the general block grant it is not clear that it achieved any more than to stabilise existing levels of funding. To the credit of the current Government and the Arts and Humanities Research Board, a substantial proportion of the AHRB's resources—almost £8.5 million in 2001–02, rising to nearly £9.15 million in the present year—is now channelled to 52 university museums and collections. Resource, funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, also contributed just over £3,850,000, to 16 university museums with collections designated as outstanding between 1999 and 2002. I very much hope that we will shortly hear of further grants through the designation challenge fund to this group of university museums containing pre-eminent collections.

The number of visits to the university museums with designated collections in 1999–2000 was almost 1.5 million. They are an important and much valued source of pleasure and instruction for the public. My own passion for museums began with childhood visits to the Barber Institute of the university of Birmingham. The recent study, "Renaissance in the Regions", commissioned by the DCMS, made it clear that the university museums should play an enhanced role in strengthening the cultural life of the regions, as well as in support of tourism and the creative economy.

There is one particular anomaly in the financial regime for university museums to which I want to draw attention. As long as the university museums refrain from charging the public for access to their collections, they, alone among museums, cannot recover input VAT. As the House knows, other national museums and galleries were, until last year, in an invidious position. Those museums that wished to retain free access found that the VAT rules gave them a perverse incentive to introduce entry charges, since by doing so they were able to recover the VAT that they paid on expenditure incurred in providing services. By contrast, the museums that did not charge for admission were unable to recover the VAT on any associated expenditure, resulting in considerable additional cost, simply because they were not charging admission fees.

That presented an impediment to the fulfilment of the Government's policy to secure free entry to the national museums and galleries, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and I, as Minister for the Arts, were pursuing. It took us a long time, between 1998 and 2001, to achieve what we sought. We were stalwartly supported by the directors of the non-charging national museums and galleries. We had endless discussions with Customs and Excise and the Treasury, which did not want any chipping away at the splendid edifice of VAT and, as always, prided themselves on their resilience in the face of lobbying. I was closely in touch also with some of the great benefactors of our public collections, the National Art Collections Fund and Sir Denis Mahon, who felt very strongly about this and added their voices to the cause.

The Treasury adduced a variety of objections, both general and technical. I was particularly indebted to Ms Helen Donoghue, whose help we enlisted and who found a solution which was technically sound and at the same time protected the Exchequer's interest against a proliferation of concessions. I was even more grateful to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for agreeing that the Finance Act 2001 should, at section 98, amend the Value Added Tax Act 1994 to include a new section 33A. That empowered the Government to specify, by statutory instrument, individual museums which, while not "engaged in economic activity," should none the less be able to recover all the previously irrecoverable VAT that they incurred. The Government duly, by order, relieved the national museums and galleries of this burden and disincentive to maintain or create free entry. I was delighted to note that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, in his announcement of the outcome of the spending review last week, stated with satisfaction that

> "since museums were opened free to the public, attendances have risen by 75 per cent."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 27.]

We have the anomaly, however, following the order, that the university museums that offer free entry are the only remaining category of public museums liable for irrecoverable VAT. I should explain to the House that the term "national", as applied to museums and galleries, is an administrative term of art referring to a limited group of some 13 institutions that, for reasons of history, fall within the category. The group does not include the university museums. I should also explain that there has not been a similar problem in relation to local authority museums and galleries, as they already enjoyed VAT relief under section 33 of the 1994 Act, and have therefore suffered no tax penalty should they offer free entry. The rationale for the concession to local authorities was that it did not make sense for Government to fund bodies to pay tax—a rationale that applies equally to university museums. Again, private museums, which are independent of public funding, do not have a problem in this respect because they need the income that they receive from charging and can recover their input VAT.

I had argued that the university museums should be included within the scope of the new concession, and I discussed the problem with the AHRB. However, lead responsibility in Whitehall for the universities, including their museums, rests not with the DCMS, but with the Department for Education and Skills, and the university museums were not included in the order. I would ask my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, together with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, to reconsider their position on the matter.

I do not propose that the relief should apply to every university collection. Because of the manner in which some of them are housed, it would, in practice, be impossible to separate the costs associated with them from other costs of their institutions. My proposal is that, in England, the concession should be extended, by order, under the powers already established in last year's Finance Act, to those university museums that have collections that are formally designated by Resource, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, as outstanding. There are 16 of those. In addition, the Sainsbury centre at the university of East Anglia, which receives AHRB funding in recognition of its quality, should be included, making it possible to abolish its entry charge.

Although there are no equivalent schemes of designation in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, a limited number of university museums of appropriate quality in these territories should also be selected for relief. In Scotland, those might be among the six distinguished museums and collections, most notably the Hunterian, in receipt of funding from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council's minor recurrent grant stream of nearly £1 million for museums, galleries and collections. In Wales, significant collections at the universities of Swansea, Aberystwyth and Glamorgan are for consideration. The forthcoming survey by the Northern Ireland Museums Council of the university collections in Northern Ireland will provide a basis on which to judge eligibility there. The Government would wish to agree the list with the devolved administrations.

I do not see any significant objections to my proposal, which, of course, is along the same lines as recommendations that have also been made by the universities. Representations to the Government have, I know, been made by Professor Sir Martin Harris, vice-chancellor of the university of Manchester, on behalf of Universities UK, by Professor Paul Slack, pro-vice-chancellor of the university of Oxford, and, jointly, by Dr. Christopher Brown, director of the Ashmolean museum, and by Dr. Duncan Robinson, director of the Fitzwilliam museum.

There is no technical difficulty. The Government have the statutory power to extend the list by order. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, when he was Financial Secretary, met Sir Martin Harris, and in uttering a charming but categoric "no" to Sir Martin's plea, said that the European Union might have difficulties with the proposal. In fact, we have the words of the President of the European Commission, in a letter to Sir Denis Mahon:

> "As to the question of bodies that qualify under Section 33 of the 1994 VAT Act, this is, of course, a purely national matter to be decided by the UK authorities."

Very recently, Mr. Stephen Bill, the head of indirect taxation in the European Commission, has confirmed that there is no technical objection to the original scheme or to its extension to university museums.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) also wrote to Dr. Brown on 9 May. He did his duty in devising arguments to oppose our case, but he was in some difficulty. My right hon. Friend said that extending the concession beyond the national museums and galleries would

> "undermine the stated rationale for the scheme and be unfair to other cultural and heritage bodies."

I submit that the rationale could not be undermined by admitting to the list specific bodies that provide identical services and which, like the national museums and galleries, are substantially funded by the Government. No other cultural or heritage bodies are analogous.

My right hon. Friend's letter went on to say:

> "it is not for the Government to dictate to these independent institutions whether or not they should charge for admission. That is ultimately a decision for them to make, and it would not be appropriate for the Government to interfere in that decision, because it has made no commitment to ensure universal free access to these institutions."

Of course, it is not for the Government to dictate, but they should cease to discriminate against these institutions and they should remove from them the pressure to charge for entry.

It has not been suggested that the Government ever committed themselves to ensuring free entry. There have, however, been endless statements from Ministers about the desirability of matching excellence with access. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts wrote to me on 8 May saying:

> "DCMS and Resource are working in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Board to encourage university museums to deliver increased public access at the same time as achieving high standards of scholarship and collections care."

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor himself said plainly in his Budget statement last year:

> "The Government's policy is for free museums".—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 301.]

The Government need not fear the cost, either. The combined turnover of the 16 university museums with designated collections in 1999–2000 was just over £18 million. The Treasury was unable to tell me, in answer to a parliamentary question, how much irrecoverable VAT was paid in respect of these museums in the past three years, but the best estimates from university sources that I have been able to obtain indicate that, setting aside any exceptional building costs, the annual aggregate is unlikely to have been much more than £500,000. Occasionally, if it was lucky, a university museum might find itself in a position to undertake a substantial new building project or refurbishment that would produce an exceptional increase in the VAT figure.

[Alan Howarth]

We are looking, however, at costs affordable to the Exchequer by any standard, yet truly significant as relief for the university museums.

There is no danger that universities would seek to smuggle in other items of spending to exploit the concession. The accounts are entirely distinguishable, and Customs and Excise officials have recently made it clear that they regard the activities of university museums as being sufficiently removed from the main educational activities of the university not to be caught by the university exemption.

Nor is the designation scheme a Trojan horse. The chair of Resource, Lord Evans of Temple Guiting, has assured the Treasury that, after a minimal addition to the list in 2003, it will be closed. In any event, the Government have the safeguard that they nominate individual institutions to be added to those given relief from VAT under section 33A.

The VAT concession that I seek for university museums is feasible within existing legislation; it is affordable; it is consonant with the policy and values of the Government; and it would put an end to an injustice. My proposal provides an opportunity that should always be welcome to a tax authority—to get rid of an anomaly.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor once fought a notable battle in the cause of free access to a university collection. As rector of the university of Edinburgh in 1972, when the then Government proposed to bring in charges for entry to museums, he insisted that the university should require that its paintings on long-term loan to the national gallery of Scotland should continue to be shown free to the people of Scotland. I hope that he, recalling that spirit in these no less heroic days, will once again raise the banner.

8.32 pm

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): It is impossible to have an efficient economy if the biggest single spender in that economy is itself grossly inefficient. Last week's comprehensive spending review will pour billions of pounds into an unreformed leaky public sector bucket. It will pour an extra £10 per household in real terms per day, or £3,650 a year, in extra money. Spending as a share of national income in this country is rising at precisely the time that it is falling in other European Union countries. If the Chancellor carries on in the way that he is doing, within 10 years, the share of national income taken up by public spending will converge with the EU average. That is not in the national interest.

I want to show that, behind the tiresome rhetoric of money for modernisation and investment tied to reform, lies an old Labour model, not a new one. The Chancellor's model is, in fact, about 50 years out of date. I also want to suggest a modest and positive Conservative proposal as an alternative, in which the state remains the key funder—although not on the incontinent new Labour levels that we saw last week—but not the central provider chasing ever-illusory national targets. The Conservative vision will demand more genuine competition and choice for the citizen and the reform that is essential for a more responsible civil society and a wealth-creating economy. Above all, it will produce a set of reforms that never forgets that those most let down by failing public services are often the poorest in society, who have the least opportunity to opt out, unlike the middle classes.

The great public services were designed in the decade after the second world war, when resources were very scarce. For practical and moral reasons, a consensus arose across society whereby the state would be the prime funder and intervene to ensure that rationing was delivered equitably across all sections of society. That consensus was of its time, and it has broken down and been overtaken by the realities of modern life. With increasing prosperity—driven, I am delighted to say, from 1979 onwards by the necessary supply-side reforms of Mrs. Thatcher—living standards rose. That brought a rise in consumer culture, which is desirable, and a rise in voters' demands for more responsiveness and flexibility from the great public services. Those voters now know that those services are failing.

In his statement last week, the Chancellor invited us to believe that the wants of our citizens can be met by huge public spending increases. Sadly, that logic is hideously flawed. The Chancellor is shifting the balance of the economy in favour of public sector activity at the expense of private sector activity, and in so doing he is going against international trends.

The International Monetary Fund's economic outlook report, published in May 2001, states:

> "on average general government expenditure in the advanced economies (excluding Japan) declined by close to 6 per cent. of GDP during 1993-2000 with the sharpest reduction in the northern European countries."

In the 1990s, the gap between the United Kingdom and other European Union countries in terms of the share of GDP accounted for by public expenditure was high, peaking at 9 per cent. at the end of the 1990s. Now that virtuous gap is closing, and closing fast. Between 1998 and 2003, our public spending ratio rises by 1.3 per cent., but for the EU as a whole, it falls by nearly 2 per cent. Between 2000 and 2003, the gap between the UK ratio and the EU spending ratio will fall from 9 per cent. to just over 5 per cent. On current trends, British public spending will grow by 1 per cent. of GDP every five years, while the EU ratio will fall by 2 per cent of GDP every five years. If those trends continue, spending at this rate will mean that the EU's and the UK's share of GDP accounted for by public expenditure will converge by 2013. I contend that that is the Chancellor's secret agenda.

Mr. Salmond: Before the hon. Gentleman leaves that point, can he tell us whether the current percentage of public expenditure in relation to GDP is higher or lower than it was in 1983 during the golden age of Baroness Thatcher?

Mr. Ruffley: It is roughly the same, or perhaps even slightly lower, than in 1983. The hon. Gentleman must stop picking convenient dates. When my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) left office after his hugely distinguished tenure as Chancellor of the Exchequer, with record low levels of unemployment and inflation, falling debt and growing employment, the share of GDP was just under 40 per cent. That is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, but he must stop being selective about his dates. He is getting like Government Front Benchers in that respect, and I do wish that he would grow up.

The Chancellor's secret agenda in the medium to long term is to move the share of GDP accounted for by public expenditure up to EU levels. Moreover, there is more spending in the pipeline for this Parliament over and above that which was announced in the comprehensive spending review. We know that for one simple reason. Next year, the increase for transport, schools and hospitals is a whacking 7 per cent., but it is front-end loaded. We are invited to believe that, in the second and third years of the spending review, the rate of spending will decelerate.

Unfortunately, most commentators—and I am included in this list—look at what the Chancellor did in his two preceding comprehensive spending reviews. What has he done? In the middle of the so-called three-year fixed period, he has added more money to the totals that were allegedly fixed. No one believes that this Chancellor will stick to the same figures for 2004–05 and 2005–06 that were published in his documents last week. Why should anyone believe him this time when he has bust the limits in the past two spending reviews? As Andrew Dilnot of the Institute for Fiscal Studies has said:

> "The three year expenditure plans are supposed to set fixed and firm limits but so far they have been floors."

This spending review is not about catch-up; it is more of a first downpayment, with more spending to follow.

It is also regrettable that this Chancellor publishes no assessment of the benefits of increased spending as against the full economic cost of that spending in lost output caused by the higher taxation that he has had to levy to finance the high spending. The United States Joint Economic Committee of Congress has done some interesting work that the Government choose not to do for this country. It notes that, in the United States, the economy loses 40 per cent. in economic welfare per tax dollar levied at current levels. The Centre for Economics and Business Research in this country has done a similar calculation, and argues that each pound raised in tax in the UK reduces national income in the medium term by more than £1.

That defect is compounded by the knowledge that the extra spending announced last week is to go into state monopoly enterprises, where, as we know, competition and proper price transparency do not exist. Instead of real reform to address those problems, the Chancellor offers us more centralised command and control state planning, which frankly owes more to eastern bloc ideas before the wall came down than to the marketised disciplines of the United States to which the Chancellor so noisily and disingenuously pays homage whenever he talks to City audiences—but not to anyone else.

The subtitle of last week's spending review should have been, "Welcome to Gordon's Gosplan", where we will have more auditors to audit and more inspectors to inspect, we will have more targets, commissions and delivery units worrying about more OPAs, PSAs, SDAs, more general targets and a hundred more pen-pushing, paper-chasing initiatives—a public spending inspector perched on the shoulder of every hospital manager, school head teacher and police inspector and every manager of our prisons and transport systems.

Unfortunately, the Government are obsessed with national standards and national targets. They think that that is the answer. The problem, as we all know, is that national standards eliminate diversity; they are its enemy. New Labour national standards are code for, "Here is what you must deliver because we say so, if you want Government funding."

Private sector disciplines set minimum quality requirements. Those standards are a safeguard and are not used to create norms and standardised products. Individuals choose from a wide range of different products. Choice is the mechanism that they use to satisfy their needs. They set their own standards by what they choose to buy and what they do not want to buy.

A state-led, national standard—a one-size-fits-all approach—is convenient for central Government but less good for local head teachers, NHS hospital trust managers and police inspectors, because funding is allocated to them on the basis of a centralised decision. The standards that they are told to implement are not local. Their activity will be continuously monitored centrally in a way that will undermine their freedom to innovate. Talk of devolution is therefore a cruel and empty deceit.

As evidence for that proposition, we have only to look at the wise words of Sir Steve Robson, who until recently was the second permanent secretary at Her Majesty's Treasury and, I understand, a man who thanks the Chancellor for his knighthood. A moderately dispassionate observer, he said that the forest of new targets creates

> "a blame culture which stifles local initiative. Central directions are no substitute for empowerment of individual consumers which would create real incentives to create better services."

That is the comment of a highly distinguished figure—an adviser to the Chancellor, who left but 18 months ago.

What is truly astonishing is the Government's apparent belief that this year's—the 2002—model of public sector reform should be taken any more seriously than the 1998 version, or the 2000 version. In 1998, at the time of the first review, the Prime Minister stated:

> "'Money for modernisation' is a contract."

In the 2000 version, the Chancellor said:

> "it is by tying new resources to reform and to results and by locking in incentives, penalties, inspection and information that we ensure that . . . investment goes to the front-line services . . . At every stage, money will be tied to output and to performance."—[*Official Report*, 18 July 2000; Vol. 354, c. 220.]

Finally—and my personal favourite—the Chancellor, with even more breathtaking hyperbole, said in *The Sun* on 13 November 2001:

> "There is not going to be one penny more until we get the changes."

The use of the word "contract" in those contexts must have some metaphorical significance. It certainly has no purchase on the way in which public services have been managed since 1997, under the current Chancellor. That is because the main existing set of so-called contracts—public service agreements—remain largely unenforced and unenforceable. Take the Department for Education and Skills, whose first PSA objective is to

> "ensure that all young people reach 16 with skills, attitudes and personal qualities that will give them a secure foundation for life long learning, work and citizenship in a rapidly changing world."

As far as I am aware, no Minister has resigned as a result of that objective not being met. The Department failed to reach its target of reducing by one third by 2002 the number of half-days lost to truancy, even though a budget had been specifically allocated to that purpose. The only result of the failure to hit that target was—wait for it—the reduction of the target by 10 per cent. and the date being moved to 2004. Moving the goalposts in that fashion has been a deplorable feature of the wretched and useless PSA target regime.

Some of the targets are rather arbitrary. No one seems to understand where the percentages come from or what cost-benefit analysis has been carried out to produce the

[Mr. Ruffley]

figures. Suicides are to be reduced by 20 per cent. by 2010, cancer deaths by the same percentage, and deaths from heart disease by 40 per cent. Desirable though those objectives are, what is not clear is how they were arrived at.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is offering a penetrating dissection of the failures and absurdities of the Government's performance. Does he agree that the Government are guilty of the targets they have not met, the targets they will not set, and the targets that are meaningless? Does he also agree that if Government Departments have public service agreement targets simply to publish White Papers when they have obviously already decided to publish them, it is no great achievement when they do so?

Mr. Ruffley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making the point that I was about to make. Let me remind him of a figure that he brilliantly exposed: 43 per cent. of the 1998 PSA targets were not met in full by June 2002. I am grateful to him for disclosing such interesting facts, which were buried away in all sorts of annual reports; clearly, the Government hoped that we would not unearth them.

Were any of the funding allocation decisions in this year's spending review the result of PSA failures? In other words, did failure inform any of the allocations? Were financial penalties imposed on under-performing and offending Departments? Professor Colin Talbot, in evidence to the Select Committee last week, said no, there were not. I thought that I would go to the horse's mouth, and I put the question to the Chancellor last Thursday. He was typically evasive and would not give a straight answer. However, we know that he was unable to name one Department that had had its spending allocation adversely affected in the new spending review as a result of failure to hit any of the PSA targets. That is eloquent testimony to the futility and utter uselessness of the Chief Secretary, his predecessors and the Chancellor. So much for the tough talk of the martinet grinning on the Government Front Bench and his predecessors.

It is clear that the present regime, which has attempted to raise productivity and activity rates in the public services, has got virtually nowhere, despite the Herculean efforts of many of the dedicated public servants in our schools and hospitals, for example. I include the nurses, doctors and support staff and everyone else in the caring professions. Has the money that the Government have devolved been properly spent so far? Have funding increases for the NHS worked? I fear that the answer is a resounding no.

Between 1997–98 and 2001–02, the total health budget in England has risen by nearly one third. However, the number of patients treated in hospitals rose by an amazing 5 per cent., from 1,211,000 per quarter to 1,267,000. The failure in productivity means that waiting lists remain above 1 million. They have remained at that level since 1993 despite a public spending increase over that period, over two Governments, of two thirds.

What about the new money promised in the spending review? No one would doubt that some earnings catch-up is important if we are to recruit and retain good quality public sector workers. However, the evidence suggests already that the well-being of providers, and that of the unions at the forefront, is ranked ahead of increasing capacity and activity. In the year to last March, earnings grew, according to the Office for National Statistics, by more than 5 per cent. in the public sector, outstripping private sector earnings growth for the first time in nine years.

In the NHS, during 2001–02, 40 per cent. of the budget increase went on higher pay for existing staff while only 11 per cent. went to pay for new health workers. It is not immediately obvious to anyone that this is merely a one-off catch-up for past losses. Presumably, that is why the respected and independent director of health systems at the King's Fund, Mr. John Appleby, says that a similar proportion of the new NHS spending increases will also be consumed in higher salaries.

The other problem with public sector pay is that managers in the health service and elsewhere have not been given the necessary freedom by the Government to set pay according to local conditions and to chip away—indeed, abolish—national pay bargaining. Higher salaries are, of course, necessary in certain parts of London and the south-east to ensure that workers are recruited in areas where housing costs especially are very high. However, it is madness, under national pay bargaining rules, that such increases must be reflected in other parts of the country where the cost of living, especially in terms of housing costs, is much lower.

The Secretary of State for Health trumpets his new foundation hospitals. He says that these are the best performing hospitals that will be given greater autonomy. He does not tell us whether the hospital managers involved will have responsibility for staff working practices and the setting of staff remuneration levels. The answer is almost certainly not. That is why the Government have got it all wrong. We know in advance what the results will be.

What about failing schools? In his statement, the Chancellor seems to believe that local authorities or nearby more successful schools will be able to take over failing state schools. He seems to think that that is the way to improve productivity. We have heard that for five years now, but what is really required is the threat—the stick—of private sector providers being allowed to take over the management of a failed school. However, under the review last week, private providers will have no such freedom to come in, sack, put in their own management and remove failing teachers, without the unions invoking employment law. That is a bar to innovation and to increasing productivity, but the Chancellor did absolutely zero about it in his spending review last week.

An alternative to Gordon's Gosplan form of government could begin with reforming Whitehall. I worked in Whitehall for five years before 1997, with a very distinguished Secretary of State—my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). In those years, I saw that career civil servants could do things a lot better. They need to change, and they need to change fast.

I suggest that we as a country urgently consider the lessons that can be learned from the fantastically successful public sector reforms in New Zealand, where Ministers are chiefly responsible for the strategic direction of policy, but they have contracts with new-style chief executives, who are responsible for achieving the outputs and for the financial performance of the Departments. That involves removing the financial control from the Treasury and giving it to those chief executives.

The chief executive has control over departmental inputs. He can employ whom he likes. He can hire and fire. He can determine the procurement policy. He can even buy and sell departmental assets, provided that that is within the capital limits as described by the departmental balance sheet. Better chief executives are employed. There are fixed-term contracts, good bonuses and remuneration.

All those things are supplemented by the complete abolition of any requirement—implicit, or otherwise—that Departments have to procure services from central, monopoly providers. That is where we should start. That is what I believe the Opposition should, and will, be considering. We need a route map of the New Zealand kind to begin a long march through the public sector culture, which so desperately needs revolutionary change.

I conclude by saying that the Chancellor's brazen tossing of taxpayers' money into what too often seems like a bottomless pit, or even a leaky bucket, is behaviour that in the private sector would put him in breach of fiduciary duty at best, or put up on a charge with a court appearance next week at worst. He has tried to bamboozle the country in saying that money will be tied to reform when it patently has not been—not this year, not the year before and not the year before that.

The Chancellor has no concrete proposals for raising productivity in the public sector, and that is why many of those services will remain in relative crisis. He is reheating failed Labour polices from yesteryear, with some new Labour topspin added for good measure, as a substitute for the serious debate about the practical solutions that this country's public services are crying out for. Someone obviously told the Chancellor that he could be the new Nye Bevan. Unfortunately, he has believed it.

8.58 pm

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): May I begin, as other hon. Members have done, by acknowledging the importance and timeliness of this debate? Five years ago, we had an election dominated by tax pledges, which resulted in a new Government committed to keeping within inherited spending limits. I would be the last to hide from the fact that that involved very tough discipline during the first two years, but, unlike the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), I can identify the benefits that that policy created.

In particular, the policy helped to bring about financial stability, together with the reductions in debt interest, to which the Chief Secretary referred in his speech, that are now worth £20 billion a year and an economy in which 1.5 million more people are now working and dole queues are shorter than they have been for 25 years.

During that Parliament and, indeed, in the first year of this Parliament, it has become clear that, after years of underinvestment in education, health and transport, many of our public services are failing to keep pace with the capacity demands and the expectations of quality that are placed on them. People, rightly, want better services and—this is every bit as important—there is increasing evidence that people are prepared to pay for them. It is this shift in public attitudes that has assisted the Chancellor in allocating the £61 billion extra for spending on our hospitals, schools and public transport by 2006. This is not funny money, or double counted; it is real and people do not want it back in tax cuts. But both the public and the Chancellor demand that the money is accompanied by real reform and change.

Over a fifth of the new money is to be allocated to education. I was reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) of a visit I made 10 years ago to a school in Germany, where I looked enviously at the state-of-the-art classrooms, computers and other modern equipment in the school. With this new money, and the money allocated by the Government in previous Budgets, classrooms like that are becoming a reality in my constituency and in those of all hon. Members. That is happening not only in the leafy suburbs, but in some of the least advantaged communities in the country.

I also welcome the £1.5 billion invested in the complete roll-out of Jobcentre Plus, not least its introduction in my constituency from next April. At the moment, the Benefits Agency deals with benefits in an office that is close to the town centre, but the Employment Service runs the jobcentre two miles away from the town centre on the periphery of our community—frankly, in the place where the Tories put it in the 1980s when their policy was to get jobcentres off the high street and out of the town centre.

From next year, Jobcentre Plus will operate in the town centre. It will provide an integrated service and will use the best of new technology to transform not just the way in which the job is done, but the life chances and opportunities of those in my constituency who are still looking for work. That is a real example of investment accompanied by reform and change in the way in which we deliver services.

I welcome also the extra money for housing, an area that has been neglected too often over the past 20 years. I welcome the money for transport and for law and order, which will deliver more police officers and speed up the criminal justice system. There can hardly be a more important issue for our constituents.

One aspect of public expenditure announced last week by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that has been welcomed on both sides of the House—it was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall)—was the increase in development assistance. In the early 1970s, the UK and others signed up to the UN pledge that 0.7 per cent. of gross national product would be spent on development aid. The original idea was that that target should be reached by the end of the decade. By 1979, we had not fulfilled that pledge, but we had at least got spending up to 0.52 per cent. Since then, countries such as Sweden, Norway and Denmark have met the target and, in some cases, exceeded it.

By 1997, our contribution had fallen to a miserable 0.26 per cent. This subject has been a priority, I am proud to say, for Labour in government. The proportion is now 0.34 per cent and the announcement made by the Chancellor last Monday was of a figure of 0.4 per cent. by 2006. That will be just above the European average, which was promised at Monterrey. In real terms, that means a doubling of the amount that we spend in this country on development assistance since 1997.

[Paul Goggins]

Again, it is investment accompanied by reform. Untying of aid, which began in April last year, is critical in getting better value for money out of what we spend on development assistance. Of course the stronger focus on poverty is moving us closer to the millennium development goals to which the Government are committed. Of course, 0.4 per cent is still not the 0.7 per cent. level that we need and there are still many problems in the world to overcome—the conflicts in Africa, the problem of HIV/AIDS and the continuing difficulties faced by heavily indebted poor countries as a result of the collapse in commodity prices.

If the rate of increase announced by my right hon. Friend last Monday can be sustained, however, it would bring us to 0.7 per cent. by 2012. That would fulfil the hopes of the 240 Members who have signed early-day motion 386, and it should evoke support and welcome on both sides of the House. I say in all sincerity that, despite the neglect in the 1980s and 1990s, this ought to be an area of policy on which there is no division across the House.

There is a great deal to be optimistic about, but we also face three significant challenges. The first, to which other hon. Members have referred, is the need for an open and honest debate about the balance of benefits to be gained from the extra money going in. How much will go in extra pay for existing staff? How much will go in higher charges to private sector suppliers and contractors? And how much will go in extra and improved services for our constituents?

I do not hide from the fact that those questions are complex, or that they overlap. Nor, indeed, should we hide from the tough questions raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies), when he spoke of the global economic pressures that are building up. I am very clear, however, that the biggest winners must be our constituents, who, of course, fund public services through their taxes. I am not against public sector workers having a decent living wage. I am in favour of a campaign to try to eradicate low pay from our public services and elsewhere. Frankly, however, we need to ensure that a disproportionate amount of cash does not go to middle and higher earners in our public services who already benefit from the low-interest mortgages on offer and have the prospect of decent pensions in retirement. They cannot have the first call on the extra money.

David Taylor: My hon. Friend rightly details some areas of expenditure that might well soak up some of the Chancellor's good intentions. Does he accept that the private finance initiative and public-private partnerships fit exactly into that category, and that, as the years roll by, they will absorb greater and greater sums of money and crowd out the ability to expand infrastructure and up the rate of activity in the public sector? Does he recognise that as a real risk?

Paul Goggins: I suspect that my hon. Friend and I have slightly different views about public-private partnerships. He has, however, anticipated my next point, which is that a strong message needs to be sent to the private sector that we are not prepared to pass on the extra money in the form of higher charges for medicines, for example, or more expensive contracts, to which I am sure my hon. Friend was referring. We have a three-year time frame for improvement and, over that period, all those who are engaged in or supportive of public services must fight for the principle of public services funded by taxes rather than fees, and for the practical improvements that will justify that principle. That is a fight that we have to win.

The second challenge is to change the way in which our public services are delivered. Developing capacity alone is not enough; more of the same is not enough. We have to do things differently. For example, older people often need better physiotherapy in a primary care centre rather than a long wait to see a consultant who might not be able to do very much to help them. Doing things differently also means introducing neighbourhood wardens and community support officers to complement the vital work of the police. It also means introducing better intermediate and community care for older people, to avoid delayed discharges or lengthy residential care placements that are not always appropriate. We must encourage those who run our public services to be innovative and to ensure that those services are accessible and user-friendly. We do not just need more services; we need more effective services.

The third challenge is nothing less than to bring about a change in the culture of our public services, particularly in the way in which they are planned and delivered. It was right that, in the first term of this Government, there was a huge push from the centre to bring about the kind of rapid and dramatic changes that were required in certain areas. That meant that more patients were treated and, as the Chief Secretary pointed out earlier, that primary school pupils were leaving schools with better levels of numeracy and literacy.

For long-term change to be sustainable, however, we have to have a different approach. We have to match rising national standards with a greater sense of local ownership and control. Unusually—I hope that I do not vex my right hon. and hon. Friends in saying this—I agree with the words, at least, of the shadow Chancellor. In a speech last Monday, he said that we should be

> "moving decision making closer to the people, the families and communities affected. It means trusting people to know what is best for their area".—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 32.]

Those are noble sentiments, and as I say, I agree with the words, but there are two reasons why I doubt the spirit behind what the right hon. Gentleman said, the first of which is the small matter of the 18 years in which the Conservatives were in power. During that time, they did precisely the opposite, centralising a great deal of power and doing much to undermine local democracy. The second reason is my strong suspicion that, in the shadow Chancellor's view, "local" means cheap. It does not.

For example, in my constituency we are about to introduce a demand-responsive bus service. Minibuses and people carriers will help to get people from home to hospital, the shops, transport links, and so on. That good and effective local initiative has come about only because central Government are providing £750,000 to make it happen. A local housing trust, Willow Park, is encouraging greater tenant participation at board level, but it began with £20 million of public funding from the Government. It is assisted with funds for closed circuit television schemes and for neighbourhood warden schemes. Another example is the panel of 300 local people who are helping to set local health priorities in the

South Manchester primary care trust. Indeed, primary care trusts are another example of Labour reforms. We need to push power and decision making downwards, but let nobody be mistaken—it is not a cheap option.

If we achieve that greater sense of local and public participation, this Government will have created a distinctive feel-good factor; not the so-called feel-good factor of the 1980s, which was based on narrow self-centredness and the exclusion of the poorest in our society, but a feel-good sense based on communities that meet needs and foster inclusion and cohesion. I believe that the money is now in the system to give us real hope that we can achieve such a society.

9.12 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me at the climax of this debate. I have sat here for some four hours plus, and I have listened to the debate ebb and flow, although I should say that it has mostly ebbed. *[Interruption.]* It is going to get better. At times, the Scottish Grand Committee has taken on a new and attractive light. If I followed the example of some hon. Members, I would leave precious little time for the Front-Bench spokesmen to sum up. I do not intend to do that, but I am strongly tempted, given the length of some of the contributions, particularly from those who discussed "productivity" in the public sector. I found that somewhat amusing.

One of the "flows" in this debate was the first class contribution from the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). His was the most thoughtful speech by a mile. He argued that the Treasury forecasts are believable because public investment is very low as a percentage of gross domestic product—much lower than in the glorious reign of Baroness Thatcher, some 20 years ago. When asked whether that is a good thing for a Labour Member of Parliament, in particular, to be saying, the hon. Gentleman said that, in the Thatcher years, public investment was wasted on unemployment, but now it is diverted towards much more useful things. To some extent that is correct, but it is not the only point about the decline of public investment in the economy.

One example is gross public investment—investment in capital infrastructure in the public sector. In 1975, gross public investment in the UK was 8.9 per cent. of GDP; by 2000, it was 1.7 per cent. Even if we include private finance initiative schemes, that figure increases to only 2.1 per cent. The Wanless report was predicated on the argument that there had been £200 billion of underinvestment in the national health service over a generation. One difficulty that I have with the Treasury team's credibility as they deal with such points is that, for the past five years, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has argued that public investment and public spending has increased when it has not, and that taxation has not increased when in fact it has.

Mr. Tom Harris: I will keep this brief. The hon. Gentleman rightly referred to a low percentage of gross national product. Is he claiming that that represents a real-terms decrease? A percentage of a pie that is becoming bigger is not the same as a real-terms decrease. I hope that *Hansard* gets that right.

Mr. Salmond: Which is more than the hon. Gentleman did, but never mind.

What I am saying is that by double-counting, triple-counting and quadruple-counting the Chancellor pretended that public spending increases were greater than they were over the past five years. Now we have reached a point at which there really are substantial increases in public spending, of which I approve. Indeed, I fought an election in Scotland on the principle of direct taxation leading to direct increases in public spending. I approve of the policy. I am merely saying that this Treasury team, and the Chancellor in particular, have a track record that does not necessarily lead us to believe everything that they say, given the experience of the past five years.

The hon. Gentleman put his finger on one important point, however. The argument relating to the credibility of these figures is not to do with the balance between the public and private sectors; it is to do with whether the rate of growth will hit the Chancellor's targets and make the public spending increases affordable, or whether the international situation and other factors will crowd in and cause difficulties.

One of my reasons for being critical of the Chancellor and the Treasury team for missing the boat is that over the past five years the international economic environment has been much more benign than it is likely to be over the next few years. It will be much more difficult to sustain substantial increases in public spending in that difficult and uncertain environment.

The Chairman of the Select Committee spoke of a trend growth rate of 2.5 per cent. That is not a fancy figure in international terms. In the past 10 years the Irish economy has grown at a rate of 7 per cent., the Norwegian economy at a rate of 4 per cent., the United States economy at a rate of 3.3 per cent. and the Dutch economy at a rate of 2.7 per cent. As for the revised figure of 2.5 per cent. over the past 10 years, there was a higher average growth rate during the last five Tory years than in the past five years under the present Chancellor. The trend figure is already modest; if it is "crowded in" further, the public spending increases will be extremely difficult to meet. However, I approve of the Chancellor's conversion to the notion of honest direct taxation—a "Penny for Britain" in national insurance—as a means of financing such increases.

I am glad that the Chief Secretary has returned. He made an uncharacteristically rude, windy, feart, faint-heart, evasive and thoroughly disreputable speech, during which he refused to give way to me. I must confess that that contributed to my interpretation of his speech. I wanted to ask him a very simple question: is a review of the Barnett formula under way in the Treasury or not? Three Treasury Ministers are present, including the Chancellor. I merely ask for a reasonable "yes or no" answer, rather than an impassive scrutiny of papers.

I am tempted to say that when three people are silent a number of possibilities come to mind. Certainly silence speaks volumes on this occasion.

In the *Western Mail* of 10 July the Deputy Prime Minister clarified matters, saying that no review was in progress, but he conceded that information-gathering might lead to changes. Let me ask the Treasury team this: what is the difference between a review and information-gathering that may lead to changes? That is a perfectly legitimate question—one that a Chancellor of the Exchequer should be able to answer, and one that any member of the Treasury team should be able to answer. I hope that the Financial Secretary will manage to answer it when she winds up the debate.

[Mr. Salmond]

The importance of the question is obvious when one compares the comparable Barnett-affected figures for Scotland and the increases announced by the Chancellor. The review includes a 6.5 per cent. increase in money for health, education and transport, whereas the comparable Scottish figures show an increase of 4.5 per cent. That is the reality behind the spending review, and of the Barnett squeeze.

The irony is that many hon. Members believe that the Barnett formula protects Scottish public spending. However, at a time of increased public spending, the formula will result in rapid convergence to the average. The same thing happens in Northern Ireland, as the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) knows. It happens in Wales too, as hon. Members from that country know.

The Chancellor will have been following closely the evidence on identifiable public spending that has been given to the Treasury Committee. I was interested to note that, according to the analysis by Professor Ian Maclean—and leaving aside the unidentified spending going to huge Government Departments, to transport infrastructure and elsewhere—even identified public expenditure per head in London is almost identical with that in Scotland.

If that is regarded as unfair, why is there not a Barnett formula for London? Why is there a Barnett formula to converge spending in Scotland with the rest of the UK? The questions are not inconsequential. If the Scottish increases were on a par with the UK total that the Chancellor has announced, there would be additional spending in Scotland of £1.5 billion over the next three years. That would be worth £300 for every man, woman and child in the country.

The question therefore requires an answer. I do not favour having the Barnett formula squeeze Scottish spending, but neither do I agree with the Deputy Prime Minister, who wants to squeeze Scottish spending further and faster.

I see that the Chancellor himself is informing the Financial Secretary about what to say in her reply. I look forward to hearing it.

I do not approve of the argument that Barnett should be replaced by something even worse. That would have serious consequences for Scottish spending levels.

Many hon. Members might approve of a solution that made the Scottish Parliament responsible for raising its own revenue, and for making its own expenditure decisions. The most recent Conservative Member to adopt that position was the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis). Perhaps his fate today would render inauspicious any attempt to convince independent-minded Conservative Members about that solution, but a growing number of Labour Members of the Scottish Parliament can see the sense of not being at the mercy of a convergence formula such as Barnett. They do not want to be at the mercy of the Deputy Prime Minister either, but want a Scottish Parliament robust and responsible enough to make its own expenditure decisions.

That might not be the most popular notion with the Chancellor, who does not believe that any Government Department—or school, or hospital—should have real discretion. However, such a power would be good for the Scottish Parliament and for Scottish spending decisions. It would be good also for the growth rate in the Scottish economy—the key economic variable determining whether increases in public expenditure can be sustained in the long term, or whether this Chancellor is offering, in this spending review, a boom and a bust in public expenditure.

9.23 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I welcome the spending review and the overall spending allocations announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. I especially welcome the increased spending on education and health, which are two of the Government's priorities. In the short time available, I shall dwell briefly on those two areas.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on his bold commitments and on his stewardship of the economy which, despite the current economic climate and the uncertainty in the stock exchange, has made the spending increases possible. However, my main question with regard to the spending review has to do with how money is allocated and distributed to areas such as mine. The failure of some of our distribution formulae and systems has meant that some of my constituents will not benefit from the total amount announced by the Chancellor in the review. We will continue to struggle to provide better standards of education, an improved health service and better public services administered by local government simply because the distribution mechanisms are unfair in my area. The funding mechanisms for health, local government and education are biased against my constituency and other metropolitan areas.

Areas such as mine are receiving less money for health this year than they were last year, and we must address that anomaly. In 2001–02, Barnsley health authority was funded at 98 per cent. of its target. This year, it will be funded at 97.2 per cent. of its target, so technically, the money available to my local health authority is decreasing because it is funded below that target. Unfortunately, no one has an answer to this; it is not just this Government who have consistently underfunded Barnsley health authority. There was a long period under previous Governments, especially the Tories, when the funding received was considerably less than our funding target.

In its franchise plan, the strategic health authority for South Yorkshire gives the figures for the funding targets for my local health authority. As I said, funding at 97.2 per cent. means that we are 2.92 per cent. short of our funding target. Our two neighbouring authorities, Rotherham and Doncaster, are funded at 99.8 per cent. and 99.1 per cent. Even local authorities close by get more money than we do—there is no rationale behind that funding structure.

In reply to a questions that I asked the Secretary of State for Health recently, he said that Barnsley received an uplift of something like 10 per cent. at the last funding allocation. That money is going to fund that gap between 97.2 per cent. and the 100 per cent. target. The funding gap equates to something of the order of £6 million. The 2002 settlement of 10 per cent. was generous, but my health authority has had to use the increases awarded to fund the year on year gap in health funding.

The initiatives and targets placed on my health authority make up part of the problem. It cannot meet those targets because the funding is ring-fenced and has to go to initiative targets when the authority needs to spend money on closing the funding gap. Simply as a consequence of the lack of funding to cover that gap, my health authority is likely to be described as a failing health authority and have restrictions imposed on it. Yet a further new target has been imposed by the comprehensive spending review to cut accident and emergency admission waiting times to no more than four hours by 2004, and other targets have been reaffirmed.

My health authority, struggling as it is, 3 per cent. short of its funding target, is still already close to meeting even the new targets that my right hon. Friend has imposed because of the effort and hard work of its staff. It is not that the health authority is badly administered but that the funding is being diverted into meeting the historical underfunding in my area. My health authority will not have the money to reach the new targets, however, because it cannot keep using scarce resources to bridge the funding gap while still trying to meet the targets imposed on it.

Why is my health authority historically funded at such a low level? Why cannot the money be made available under the distribution formula to bridge that gap to give us the funding that we require in Barnsley?

On education, I welcome the increase of 6 per cent. in overall funding and the direct payment to schools. My local authority has consistently passported the extra money on education standard spending assessments through to schools and made sure that education is a local priority. Once again, funding is largely ring-fenced in terms of education initiatives and other initiatives, whereas the other services block—for example, to provide a range of other services apart from education and social services—is squeezed, again because the distribution formula does not work for my area.

I know that the local government review has been announced, but the material issued with that review says:

> "Since the system can only distribute the available resources, it must be based on comparisons between authorities rather than absolute measurements of need to spend."

My local authority requires an assessment based on its needs. It requires a distribution formula based on the needs of the area; otherwise, it will simply lose out again and again. Again I ask, why is it that my local authority can get 70 per cent. less funding than other authorities, such as Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool? There is absolutely no reason for such a shortfall in funding.

I shall bring my remarks to an end, because unfortunately, in this short debate, some hon. Members have probably been less considerate than others in taking such a long time over their speeches. My message is that unless we get the distribution formulae correct and address historical underfunding anomalies, the welcome news of the extra money for all our public services will not be recognised by the wider public.

9.31 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): It has been an excellent and sometimes highly charged debate, to which there have been several first-class contributions.

My starting point is simple. In the year 2005–06, the Government anticipate spending £511.4 billion; we need to know what that means. It means that the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposes to spend no less than £16,216.39 for every second. Translated into a meaningful statistic—on the strength of the lamentable speech by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury tonight, I think that the House and people outside will want to know what it means—it means that for the 34 minutes for which the Chief Secretary to the Treasury expected us to listen to him, we were charged a bill in public expenditure of £33,081,435.60. So when 34 minutes is taken up by the Chief Secretary, that is what the Government are spending, supposedly on the public services of this country.

The central thrust of the speech by my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor was that simply to boast about the level of expenditure without securing the detailed constructive and effective reforms of the way in which public services are delivered will not produce the results on which the people of this country depend, and which they are entitled to expect from a Government who have had two landslides and enjoy an impregnable parliamentary majority.

As my right hon. and learned Friend said on Monday 15 July, we have heard it all before; we have heard what the Government say and seen what they fail to achieve. The truth of the matter is simply stated. In 1998, the Government promised improved public services to renew Britain. In the year 2000 spending review, the Chancellor committed himself to achieve—I quote, so as not in any way to be unfair to him—service improvements, key reforms and much-needed modernisation. No amount of flannel, no amount of rhetorical verbiage, no amount of typically aggressive and meaningless posturing from the Chief Secretary can conceal the reality that in terms of the quality of services, the Government have not delivered.

It really will not do for the Chief Secretary to fail to answer the central challenge: why have the Government now decided that the Treasury itself, which is the architect and arbiter of public service agreements, cannot measure whether it has achieved its own? To bluff, to bluster and to disdain criticism, but to fail to respond to that central challenge was a searing indictment of the generally poor speech that we heard from the Chief Secretary.

Mr. Tom Harris: The hon. Gentleman is very generous in the number of times that he gives way. At the start of this debate, his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the shadow Chancellor, told the House that he could not commit a future Conservative Government to matching the spending committed by this Government because he was not confident that the reforms presented were adequate. Last Thursday, however, his hon. Friend the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) not only committed a future Conservative Government to matching defence spending, but to improving on that spending. What reforms have been implemented at the Ministry of Defence that have so impressed the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman?

Mr. Bercow: Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman has totally misunderstood and misquoted what my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) said. The shadow Secretary of State for Defence has certainly not committed himself to increased resources beyond those that the Government have already pledged. The hon. Gentleman is wrong. I know the facts, I have seen the evidence, I have read the speeches and I have had the

[Mr. Bercow]

discussions. I know the position of my hon. Friend: it is a commitment to secure the quality of protection for the people of this country that we need. We are not pledged to increase resources but to devise a new, credible, effective and attractive alternative to Government failures for the delivery of public services. We are not prepared to be hidebound and narrow in our approach or to be restricted to the low-level terms of debate on which the Government insist.

The Government are stuck in an old-fashioned mindset, which says that all that matters is money. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because he spurs me to invest my speech with additional vigour. The people of this country are interested not in words but in deeds. They are interested not in inputs, but in outputs—not in promises, but in performance. When the people of this country make a judgment about the effective use of public expenditure, the question in their minds will simply be this: are we getting the three things that we want from the money that the Government spend, which we have given them in our taxes? The three things that the people of this country will tell the hon. Gentleman and the Chancellor of the Exchequer that they want are: results, results, and results.

In the past five years, the people have heard the promises, seen the spin, observed the misrepresentation and, above all, they have been disappointed by not merely the gap but the gaping chasm between the words that Ministers utter and the deeds that they do.

Roger Casale *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: I will not give way at the moment.

The conflict that exists now between the rhetoric and the reality is so stark that it ought even to embarrass the normally unembarrassable hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale).

Warming to my theme, I will deal with the specific public services. Frankly, the Chief Secretary, who is an intelligent and often an amiable man, debauched the currency of this debate from the outset. The right hon. Gentleman, who is justifiably proud of his recent promotion, seemed to forget that we are here to identify ways to improve the quality of the lives of our constituents and our fellow citizens as a whole. The reality of the Government's performance is a dismal catalogue of under-performance: of hopes destroyed, promises broken and trust betrayed.

Let us take the example of the national health service. I do not need to misrepresent the Government's position because the track record is poor enough studied according to its own lights. The Government have increased public expenditure on health since they took office by approximately 30 per cent. During that time, we had nearly 78,000 cancelled operations last year and we have witnessed that, on average, it takes four months to get an in-patient hospital appointment compared with a maximum wait of four weeks in France. As anyone who studies the situation should be appalled to discover, in today's national health service, under a benighted Labour Government who have taken more and more of our money in taxation since they took office, there are more administrators than there are beds.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee, made a potent contribution. He drew attention to the danger of wage demands. He recognised the need for local involvement in the delivery of public service agreement targets. He was chary, and with good reason, of some of the rhetoric of Ministers, but the one thing that he did not appear to recognise was that, in Scotland, a constituency within which he ably represents, we see evidence of the mismatch between money spent and improvement delivered. He knows that since his party took office expenditure in real terms on health in Scotland has risen by 28 per cent., but simultaneously the average waiting time for treatment in Scotland has risen by 25 per cent.—more money spent but not a better performance delivered. That deals with health.

Roger Casale: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: No. The hon. Gentleman may tempt me in a moment or two if he is patient but there were other contributions. I might want to refer particularly to the excellent contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), who was rightly sceptical of the Government's position, and the truly devastating critique of Government performance that came from the lips of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley). Not for nothing are they the twin terrors of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the Treasury Committee.

Let us talk about the quality of the education system. The Government have increased expenditure on education since they came to office by about a quarter. What do we see in terms of Government performance? We see that on a typical day 50,000 children play truant from our schools. We know that there has been a 300 per cent. rise in the number of assaults by pupils on staff. We observe a doubling of teacher vacancies in our state schools. We recognise the appalling burden on teachers, who have to put up with 17 pages of paper spewing forth from the Department for Education and Skills every day, amounting to no fewer than 4,440 pages a year. That is the reality of Government performance in education. Last year, fewer people achieved the Government's numeracy target than the year before.

It is no good the Chief Secretary saying that all is well and dandy when the truth is that 43 per cent. of the Government's own public service agreement targets have not been met. As I have had reason many times to observe, for the Government to fail to achieve public service targets set by independent experts would be disappointing. To fail, however, to achieve the targets that the Government have themselves set requires incompetence on a truly spectacular scale.

Of course, it is true in relation not just to health and education but to transport. Last year, one in five trains failed to arrive on time. People who experience the public transport system at the grass roots know that delay, congestion, cancellation, danger and vandalism is the regular diet. It is the normal state of affairs. It is not the exception; it is all too commonplace.

Roger Casale: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: I want briefly to point out the serious failings in Government performance in relation to law and order but if the hon. Gentleman is that keen, I shall be my normal indulgent self.

Roger Casale: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his new appointment. His contributions to debates on public expenditure will be greatly missed on the Labour Benches. Before he takes up his new appointment and shuts down his Treasury brief, perhaps he can tell the House whether there are any aspects of public expenditure other than defence and international development where a future Conservative Government would match the increases that the Labour Government announced last week.

Mr. Bercow: That was very disappointing. I blame myself. My natural generosity of spirit got the better of me. It is a pretty rum individual who expects the Conservative party to produce the details of its manifesto for the next election precisely 13 months after its devastating defeat at the last.

David Wright: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: I recognise the impatience of the hon. Gentleman. He will have to be patient.

In relation to law and order, the Government have spent more, trying, honourably and decently but unsuccessfully, to fight crime. They have increased resources by 25 per cent. in real terms. Now, crime is rising by 7 per cent., violent crime is rising by 11 per cent., robbery is rising by 28 per cent.—

Hugh Bayley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: No, I will not. Street crime is rising by 31 per cent. The central proposition that the Government have not been able to answer is this: for the last five years, they have spent more money, promised reform, failed to deliver it, and presided over a continuing deterioration in the quality of public services on which the citizens of the United Kingdom depend. We are not going to be trapped in that discredited gobbledegook that says more money alone will solve the public service ills from which this country suffers. We are determined instead to listen, to look and to learn. Labour Members may be all in favour of giving power to people in European Union institutions whom we do not elect and whom we cannot remove. What a pity that they do not want to learn from the practical experience of countries that are more successful, in their public services, at translating care from a word to a deed. They have failed to do it. They have closed minds, closed ears and closed intellects. We have opened minds, opened ears and opened intellects.

We will fashion a credible policy. We will communicate it honestly. We will subject it to the scrutiny of the electorate. We are determined to get rid of the highest-taxing, heaviest-regulating, most pompous, sanctimonious, politically correct sisterhood called new Labour, and to get a Conservative Government in office led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), who will promise less and deliver better in the interests of people who have suffered too much too long from a Government who have nothing left to offer.

9.47 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): We have had an interesting debate this evening, with useful and—may I say?—measured contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), my right hon. Friends the Members for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) and for Newport, East (Alan Howarth), and my hon. Friends the Members for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) and for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley).

We have talked about choices—political choices. We have made ours. In our election manifesto, we promised to put schools and hospitals first. In the Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced the largest sustained increase in spending on the NHS since it was founded in 1948. We now have an unprecedented opportunity to re-establish the historic consensus in favour of the NHS: free at the point of use to all who need it. The Tories oppose our funding and seek to unravel that national consensus, which has endured for 50 years, in favour of charges and cuts.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) appealed to our compassion this evening. Why should he set out his spending plans for our scrutiny? Why, indeed. We learned two important and interesting facts this evening. First, we found out from his answer to one of my hon. Friends that he stands by his earlier comments that the NHS is a Stalinist creation. We also found out that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), the new shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, does not deny that he wrote in a memo to the shadow Chancellor:

> "The reforms which we will be proposing will end the NHS monopoly and will entail those who can afford it making some payment for health care services".

No wonder he is hiding behind the camouflage of reform. They talk about reform; instead, they mean cuts. They talk about learning from abroad; instead, they mean charges. They talk about consultation; instead, they mean forcing the sick to pay for being sick. Let them explain why they do not support our health service reforms and our money, and why they are considering charges for visits to hospitals and GPs.

In the spending review, my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary set out their commitments to education. Over the next three years, there will be a 6 per cent. real rise in education in England—the biggest sustained rise in a generation. That will include £165,000 direct to secondary school heads, rising to £180,000, and £50,000 direct to primary schools. There will be more resources for further and higher education. That is what we mean when we say "education, education, education".

I defy Conservative Members to go back to their constituencies to tell head teachers why they do not support the extra money that we are giving to secondary schools and directly to primary schools, or the 6 per cent. real terms increase in education spending. Why did the Conservatives say in their manifesto at the last election that they would support our education and health spending and our reforms, and why have they turned away from that now? What has changed? Do they believe that they were being too generous just a year ago?

Five years ago, when we came to power, we inherited a legacy of economic failure and social decay. Money was being wasted on debt and debt interest, and high unemployment was a further drain on the Exchequer. Public services were starved of resources and public servants were starved of support. Because we have cut public sector debt from 44 per cent. of national income to

[Ruth Kelly]

30.4 per cent. last year, and have cut unemployment by more than 700,000 and created a new framework for monetary policy and tough new fiscal rules, we are now in a position to build on the successful reforms of our first term and to introduce the investment and the reform that the public sector desperately needs.

Debt interest is at its lowest as a proportion of gross domestic product since the first world war. Debt interest payments have fallen by more than £6.5 billion since 1997, so more money has been freed up for investment every single year. Britain's debt has been reduced to the lowest level of national income in the G7 and to the lowest of all our major European competitors.

Within that framework, we have the strength to invest for the long term and to reverse the chronic underinvestment of the 18 years under the previous Conservative Government. The investment has already started to go in and we have already seen the results. Instead of 500,000 children in classes of more than 30, there are none today. There are 20,000 more teachers in schools, and 100,000 more students in universities. We have 10,000 more doctors and 39,000 more nurses, but there is still a lot to do.

Holding strictly to the public spending totals that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set out in the Budget, we are raising departmental spending from £240 billion this year to £263 billion next year, to £280 billion in 2004–05 and to £301 billion in 2005–06. By 2006, we will have increased public spending by £61 billion, and that is £61 billion a year more for improved public services.

In each area of service delivery, we are tying new resources to reform and results, developing a modern method for running efficient public services, setting national targets with performance monitored by independent and open audit and inspection. Front-line staff will be given the power and flexibility to deliver, thereby extending choice, rewarding success and turning around failure.

There has been much discussion in the debate, not least from the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), about the new inspection regime. We as a Government are determined that the extra £61 billion allocated to public services will deliver results. We are tying the resources to reform and results through streamlined arrangements for accountability and audit. I would have thought that the Opposition would welcome our new inspection regime.

Those of us who believe in public services know that we have a special duty to make sure that public money is well spent and spent efficiently. We are as determined to secure value for money as we are to secure money for services. *[Interruption.]* I hear jibes from those on the Opposition Front Bench, but this Government want value for money, whereas the Opposition seem to want value without money.

Points have been raised about the inspection regime, but I must point out that the National Audit Office's responsibilities are completely unaltered by the new inspection arrangements. The new bodies will amalgamate and streamline existing performance and value-for-money work, so the National Audit Office will continue to have an important and valuable role in monitoring the new arrangements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton made some interesting comments about public service agreements. I am extremely pleased to hear that the Treasury Select Committee will continue to take an active interest in monitoring the Government's performance against our performance targets. By setting clear, measurable targets, publishing information on each of them and collating that information in one easily accessible location, we empower not the Government, nor even the Treasury, but the people who elected us and who can use that information to hold Departments to account. The National Audit Office has said:

> "the introduction of Public Service Agreement targets, and in particular the move to outcome-focused targets, is an ambitious programme of change which puts the United Kingdom among the leaders in performance measurement practice."

This is about transparency and accountability as a necessary component of good governance. We are learning from best practice in the private sector and applying it for the first time to the process of government.

Alongside the new performance targets, each Department will publish separately detailed implementation plans as to how they intend to meet those targets. They will be open to public scrutiny and debate, and I am sure that they will monitored by many hon. Members, not just those on the Select Committee. I look forward to that.

We heard several interesting contributions. I am sorry to have missed the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East, who gave a passionate and erudite exposition of the case for university museums and collections and for making a change to the VAT regime. I remind him that the impact of tax changes is already included in spending allocations, although I take his point as an early representation on the next Budget.

I also enjoyed the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East, who agreed that money has to be accompanied by reform, and gave specific examples of reforms that are making a real difference in his constituency and others.

On the comments of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), with whom we have had some dealings in the House over the past few weeks and months, I may say that they might have had more credibility had he not opposed the extra money that is coming through the taxation of the North sea oil regime. He cannot stand up in the House and argue for more resources for Scotland if he does not back the revenue-raising measures that go alongside that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central made an impassioned plea for his local authority and for others in the north of England. The options are currently being discussed and I look forward to his active participation in those consultations. I am sure that my ministerial colleagues with responsibility for local government will take that into account.

As for Liberal Democrat Members who suggested that in the comprehensive spending review we have succumbed to the demands of the Liberal party for extra resources to be put into our public services, I should like to point out a couple of facts. By comparison with what the Liberals promised at the last election, by 2006 we will be spending £9 billion more than they promised on education, £25 billion more on health, £6 billion more on transport and an extra £1 billion on international development. From a sedentary position, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton refers to the trend rate of growth. I know that he made that point during his contribution. We base our fiscal forecasts on cautious estimates for the trend rate of growth, and all those estimates have been audited by the National Audit Office.

By 2006, we will be investing a total of £61 billion a year in public services. We have established testing targets, independent audit, new powers, new flexibilities, new responsibilities for front-line agencies and systems of sanctions for those who fail to deliver. We are building on the successful reforms of our first term to deliver improvements in education, housing, defence, development and productivity. Resources matched by reform to deliver results—that is what the spending review sets out. I commend it to the House.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

PETITIONS

Ian Stillman

10 pm

Hugh Bayley (City of York): As I rise to present a petition calling for the release of Ian Stillman from prison in India, I notice in the Chamber my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) and the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley), who have played a prominent part in pressing for his release. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Hamilton) and for Reading, West (Mr. Salter), who have also taken up the case of Mr. Stillman.

The petition is addressed to the House of Commons and comes from readers of the Yorkshire *Evening Press*, which ran a campaign pressing for Ian Stillman's release. It notes that Ian Stillman is an inspirational aid worker who has given 27 years of his life to working with the deaf of India. It declares that he has been wrongfully imprisoned in India, and expresses concern that no provision was made for his own profound deafness at his trial—a fundamental abuse of his human rights. It also expresses great concern about his health and the fact that he has been denied appropriate treatment while in prison.

The petition is signed by Liz Page, editor of the *Evening Press*, Monica Stillman, my constituent and Ian Stillman's mother, Roy Stillman, my constituent and Ian Stillman's father, and a further 5,474 people from York and surrounding areas.

The petition states:

> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Foreign Secretary to make representations to the Government of India to arrange for Ian Stillman's immediate release.

To lie upon the Table.

Carlisle United

10.2 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I rise to present a petition signed by 14,991 supporters of Carlisle United football club. The petition was drawn up because the owner of Carlisle United declared that he was to withdraw the club from the football league. Since that statement has been made, however, it appears that there could be a change of ownership of Carlisle United—and we hope for that.

The petition states:

> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons make strong representations to the Football League to ensure that Carlisle has a club with a place in the League. If the Football League fail to do this, the Petitioners request the House of Commons to consider legislation to change the rules regarding ownership of football clubs to ensure that they recognise they are a community asset that cannot be extinguished by the wishes of an individual owner.
>
> And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Manslaughter (Sentencing)

10.3 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I have the petition of Mrs. Pat Cager and some 4,451 others. It states:

> The Petition of Mrs. Pat Cager and others declares that her husband Tony Cager was kicked to death at their thirtieth wedding anniversary party; that Tony Cager's killer also kicked the son in the face and rendered their daughter unconscious as they went to his assistance; that the killer had thirty-two previous convictions and was out of custody on bail at the time of the killing; that the killer was convicted of manslaughter but, despite the circumstances, only received a prison sentence of four years four months; and that the Petitioners believe that this is a travesty of justice.
>
> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Home Department to review the criminal law of manslaughter and the principles relating to sentencing to ensure that manslaughter sentences adequately reflect the seriousness of the offence.
>
> And your Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Pensioners (Free Travel)

10.5 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): In presenting this petition to the House, let me give its background. The people of Chorley and old-age pensioners in my constituency, and people in other constituencies whose pensioners suffer the same fate as those of Chorley, feel disadvantaged by comparison with pensioners in London, Wales and other places where there is free travel for old-age pensioners. That should not be, which is why I bring this petition to the House.

My hon. Friends the Members for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) and for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) also support the petition. In common with hon. Members on both sides of the House, they have campaigned strongly in support of the petition's aim of ensuring a level playing field for all old-age pensioners.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Chorley and others,

Declares that all old age pensioners should have free off-peak travel on buses and trains.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Transport to make it his policy to allow all pensioners to travel on buses and trains free of charge after 9.30 am.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Lockerbie Disaster

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

10.6 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I start my 17th Adjournment debate on the appalling crime that was Lockerbie with a personal word of explanation? Alongside some British relatives dedicated to truth and justice, and other people, not least Nelson Mandela, I helped to persuade the Libyans to surrender Mr. Fhimah and Mr. Megrahi for a trial under the Scottish judicial system in a third country. In good faith, we believed and hoped that the trial at Zeist would be satisfactory and convincing. Alas, it was not.

For an adversarial system of justice to arrive at the truth requires both of the adversaries to place before the court all information available to them. In the Lockerbie trial, the defence team of Abdel Bassett al Megrahi chose not to do so. In such circumstances, the adversarial system does not work if we want to arrive at the truth. I therefore ask the following questions.

Does the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have any knowledge of an $11 million payment having been received by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command on or about 23 December 1988, evidenced by a credit to a bank in Lausanne, and moved from there to an account at the Banque Nationale de Paris, and thence to the Hungarian development bank?

Or does it have knowledge of a payment of $500,000 made on or about 25 April 1989 to the Degussa bank of Frankfurt and Mohammed Abu Talb, a convicted murderer, incriminee of the Lockerbie trial and a long-term suspect in the Pan-Am 103 bombing?

Secondly, if the Security Service had any knowledge of either payment, did it communicate that knowledge, in whole or in part, to any police force in the United Kingdom and/or to the Crown Office in Edinburgh? If such knowledge was imparted, when was it imparted?

Thirdly, did the intelligence services discover the identity of "Abu Elias", which is believed to be the nom de guerre of the person who, according to the Goben memorandum, conspired to place a bomb aboard a plane in Frankfurt on 21 December 1988, and who, according to Marwan Khreesat, was part of the Autumn Leaves conspiracy uncovered in Germany in October 1988? If so, what is believed to be the name of that individual, and were his movements between October and December 1988 detected?

Fourthly, when Mr. Alan Turnbull and Mr. Norman McFadyen went to the US embassy in The Hague on the Lord Advocate's behalf on or about 1 June 2000 to view unredacted CIA cables—recording meetings with the prosecution witness, Jiacha—was an assurance or undertaking, whether written or verbal, given by them to British intelligence or to the US authorities that they would not disclose what they had been shown?

Fifthly, on what date did the Crown witness, Mohammed Abu Talb, arrive at Zeist, and on what date did he depart? During the period he was incarcerated at Zeist prison, was he visited by Crown-listed witness Jamilla Mougrabi, his former wife, or any representatives of the prosecution, or the US Department of Justice?

If so, who authorised such vi[illegible] when were they made and what was their approximate duration? What was the purpose of any such visits, by either the prosecution or the US Department of Justice, and was there any record in audio, video or in writing of them?

Sixthly, was the Crown witness Jiacha interviewed by, or did he meet, any representatives of the prosecution or the US Department of Justice, outwith the witness box during the period when he was a sworn witness? If so, who authorised such meetings or interviews, when and where did they take place, and who was present?

Seventhly, did the UK know of any inducements or undertakings given to Crown witness Mohammed Abu Talb to encourage him to give evidence for the Crown at the Zeist trial? If so, what is that knowledge?

Eighthly, was Crown witness Tony Gauchi, the Maltese shopkeeper, taken to the USA or to the UK at any time before he gave evidence at the Zeist trial? If so, when did such visits take place, who instigated them and what was their purpose?

I believe that there has been a catastrophic miscarriage of justice and that an innocent man is in Barlinnie tonight and every night for more than 19 years.

10.11 pm

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I support the Father of the House and congratulate him on securing the debate. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will respond to a principal issue that concerns one of my constituents, Dr. Jim Swire, who, I believe, is listening to these proceedings. His daughter, Flora, was murdered on the night of Lockerbie in the aeroplane. He has been campaigning for a long time for a public inquiry into the circumstances of that night.

I agree with Dr. Swire that, of the many incidents that have occurred in the UK, Lockerbie is the biggest mass killing that has ever taken place. There have been public inquiries into other incidents, but there has still to be a public inquiry on Lockerbie. Successive Governments have said that there should not be such an inquiry due to the legal proceedings that were taking place against suspects. Irrespective of the guilt or innocence of the individual who has been found guilty of the Lockerbie bombing, judicial proceedings are now completed and there is no prospect of anyone else facing charges. The view of the Foreign Office that there should not be a public inquiry because it might prejudice the judicial proceedings now lapses.

When the Minister answers the points raised by the Father of the House, I should be grateful if he would take up the issue of the Government holding a public inquiry into this important issue, not least in the light of the circumstances of 11 September. There is a greater need for people to feel reassured by airport security. The lessons that might have been learned from the Lockerbie incident might well be relevant a decade later. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point.

10.13 pm

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on securing the debate. I was a local councillor in the area when the tragedy happened. As time progressed and we moved towards trying to secure the arrest of two individuals who were suspected at that time, I was heavily involved as chair of the police authority in my area. I did not receive regular information about how the case was proceeding or evidence was being drawn together. I was fairly confident that the process of pulling together evidence and pursuing the case was fairly straightforward and above board. We have been dealing with probably the worst terrorist tragedy that this country has ever seen. Heaven forbid that that tragedy is ever exceeded in any shape or form.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow had the confidence at the time to plead the case for a trial to be heard under Scottish law. That trial has been heard. An appeal on behalf of al Megrahi has also been heard. If the defence team representing that individual chose not to put forward an appropriate defence, little can be done about that. I am not convinced, however, that those in his defence team did not advance the appropriate defence to try to secure the release of their client.

Having said that, there are a considerable number of unanswered questions, to which the families need answers—only time will tell whether they will be as detailed as some of the questions that my hon. Friend has asked this evening.

I, like others, have asked about the possibility of holding a public inquiry into the incident. I have met the Foreign Secretary. On a further occasion, I met him and some of the relatives, and he clearly explained that, although a public inquiry is being called for, there is sometimes more than one way to get answers. Sometimes, public inquiries have not delivered what people have sought: truth and justice into a number of incidents that have tragically befallen families.

I hope that the Minister can give us an indication at least about whether we are moving towards a public inquiry and—if not a public inquiry—about how families in this country, America and other countries who lost loved ones can, at the end of the day, get answers to some of the basic questions that arose on the evening of that tragic event.

10.17 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): As the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) rightly points out, what the families want above all else is the truth. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride), I represent a couple of constituents—Martin and Rita Cadman—who lost their beloved son in this appalling murder, and what they want above all else is the truth.

There are a number of loose ends, and we have not had answers to our questions. There will be many excuses as to why they have not been investigated hitherto, but the time has now come to have a proper, full public inquiry. I very much hope that the Minister will be able to answer the questions posed by the Father of the House.

This is the first time for some months that we have discussed this subject. Obviously, until fairly recently much of what has been said tonight would have been considered sub judice because of the ongoing legal action. I congratulate the Father of the House on this debate, and we must have answers to those questions.

I wish to put a couple of other questions to the Minister. First, we know that the hangar in which the luggage that was in transit was being transferred on to the fatal flight

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

was broken into, but we have not yet had an explanation of why there has not been a proper investigation into what happened that evening during that break-in.

Secondly, the scene of the appalling crash obviously covered many square miles, but it is common knowledge that, within hours of daylight, dozens of CIA agents were crawling over the site. We have not yet had an explanation of what they were doing there, who had liaised with them, who had given them the authority to go on to the site and exactly what they were doing.

I would just add those two questions to those posed by the Father of the House. We must have answers to those questions, but, above all else, we need a full public inquiry into this appalling murder—the worst in the country's history.

10.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I congratulate the Father of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), on obtaining this debate on an enormously serious issue.

The destruction of Pan-Am 103 at Lockerbie, with the loss of 270 lives, was the most horrendous terrorist attack ever carried out in the United Kingdom. For everyone involved in the attack, particularly those whose loved ones were murdered, the horror and tragedy of what happened on 21 December 1988 can never go away. Dr. Jim Swire wrote to the Foreign Secretary this week:

> "Fourteen years ago I looked into the dead eyes of my dearest eldest daughter."

Confronted with such a savage attack on its citizens, the British Government have a moral and practical imperative to answer key questions. Who was responsible? How did they do it? Could we have stopped them? How can we make sure that it never happens again?

Despite the cynicism of those who thought we would never make progress, the Government have responded to these imperatives and these questions with an unprecedented police, diplomatic and legal mobilisation. Those efforts have produced results. Last year, the unique format of a Scottish court sitting at Camp Zeist in the Netherlands convicted Abdel Basset al Megrahi, an agent of the Libyan intelligence services, of conspiracy to bomb the plane. The conviction was upheld on appeal in March.

I am assured that the conviction answers many of the key questions. How did it happen? A bomb was loaded on to a plane at Frankfurt, concealed inside a cassette recorder. The bomb was set to explode while the plane was en route from Heathrow to New York

Who did it? One or more officers of the Libyan intelligence services, including Megrahi. We know a good deal about why. The court established that the murders were carried out:

> "In furtherance of the purposes of the Libyan Intelligence Services."

I do not know what motivated the Libyan intelligence services to carry out such an attack, nor whether the attack was carried out with high-level authorisation. But we are clear that for a number of years in the 1980s, Libya used terrorism as a foreign policy lever. The destruction of Pan-Am 103 was followed by equally savage attacks on UTA flight 772 and the La Belle disco. The international community showed its detestation of those attacks by applying a comprehensive sanctions regime to Libya for much of the 1990s. Those sanctions demonstrated Libya's separation from the civilised world and were intended to penalise Libya economically.

In response to those sanctions, Libya has, since the early 1990s, radically changed the basis of its foreign policy. It no longer uses terror as a tool. The UK has responded to this—and particularly Libya's surrender of Megrahi and another suspect for the Lockerbie bombing—by re-establishing diplomatic relations and agreeing to the suspension of the UN sanctions regime.

However, it remains essential that Libya makes amends for Lockerbie by satisfying the requirements that the United Nations Security Council has set out. Libya took a crucial step by releasing two suspects for trial, but only when all the requirements have been met will we support the final lifting of sanctions.

The four requirements are that Libya should renounce terrorism, agree to co-operate with further police inquiries into Lockerbie, pay compensation and accept responsibility for the actions of its official. We are talking diplomatically, at senior official level, with the Libyan and American Governments about those requirements. Our discussions are progressing well, but are not yet finished.

We wish to see our relations with Libya improve and to see United Nations sanctions lifted as soon as possible. However, realising these benefits will be possible only once Libya has wholly satisfied the requirements. We will, of course, keep the relatives and this House informed of future progress on the diplomatic track.

That is our current approach to Lockerbie. I now turn to the two specific questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow asked during Foreign Office questions this afternoon. First, he asked whether British security and intelligence services have any knowledge of an $11 million payment, having been received by the PFLP-GC on 23 December 1988.

Various reports of PFLP-GC funding emerged after the bombing of Pan-Am flight 103. The intelligence agencies investigated all those reports and found none to have any relevance to the attack. I am informed that there is no connection between the payments and Lockerbie. Indeed, I have been told that the intelligence services are not aware of any payment that corresponds with the details given in the question.

I am informed that a similar amount was paid 18 months before the Lockerbie attack, but that there is no connection between the two. The Government's view is that the PFLP-GC did not carry out the Lockerbie bombing. If that payment was related to other issues, we do not know precisely what they are, but it is our view that the lapse of time between the making of the payment and the eventual outrage suggests that the two were not linked.

My hon. Friend's second question was whether the security and intelligence services had any knowledge of a payment of $500,000 to Mohammed Abu Talb on 25 April 1989. I am advised that the answer is no; the services have no such knowledge. There were references to money in Talb's evidence given at the Lockerbie trial—$5,000 in relation to the Copenhagen bombings, a bank loan of 45,000 krone that Talb secured to start a video business, and a sickness benefit payment of 4,000 krone—

but I am advised that the services have no references from this or any other source to amounts or dates that correspond to those mentioned by my hon. Friend.

I am aware that during the intelligence services debate on 11 July, my hon. Friend raised a number of other detailed questions. It remains the Foreign Secretary's intention to write to him with a full reply to those and the further questions that he has raised. I would say to my hon. Friend that the Lord Advocate is responsible for the Turnbull matters, and I understand that he will write to my hon. Friend about them. In relation to any possible further charges, Dumfries and Galloway police have complete freedom to investigate and bring charges as they see fit. Part of our diplomatic effort is to ensure Libyan co-operation with these inquiries.

I would like to address one other issue that my hon. Friend raised on that previous occasion, namely, the role of Eliza Manningham-Buller. The Security Service announced to the press at the time of Ms Manningham-Buller's appointment as director-general that she had previously been head of the section responsible for counter-terrorism. She held that role at the time of the Lockerbie attack—a time when that section's work was, of course, dominated by that awful event. She was head of counter-terrorism and worked on the Lockerbie case. So what? What else would she have done?

I turn finally to the important issue of a public inquiry. The Foreign Office has had regular contact with the relatives in recent years. The Foreign Secretary has met them twice in the last year to brief them on the progress of diplomatic talks with the Libyans and to discuss their interest in a further inquiry. I say "further inquiry" because there have been several inquiries already. There has been a hearing of the air accidents investigation branch, a fatal accident inquiry, an inquest, a criminal trial and an appeal. The Select Committee on Transport has reviewed aviation security in the light of Lockerbie. Numerous Departments and agencies of government have reviewed their workings to ensure that the lessons of Lockerbie have been learned. Much has been learned and many procedures have been changed. Aviation security has been entirely overhauled since 1988.

On 21 May, the Foreign Secretary met the relatives and ran through the reasons why the Government do not favour a public inquiry. Above all, we cannot see any areas of uncertainty that such an inquiry could effectively address. The trial has, as I have explained, clarified a great deal. The exact motivation for the attack is something that perhaps only Megrahi can fully explain. I hope that he will do so at some point.

Mr. Dalyell: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. O'Brien: We are pressed for time, but I will give way briefly.

Mr. Dalyell: I saw Megrahi for two and a quarter hours, and he explained everything. He told me that he was a sanctions buster for Libyan Arab Airlines, which is a bit different from being a mass murderer.

Mr. O'Brien: Being a sanctions buster may well be somewhat different from being a mass murderer, but it is not my role as a Minister of the Crown to second-guess the finding of a court that has heard all the evidence and looked at all the circumstances. These issues have been looked at very thoroughly and, in my view, so far as we can evaluate this, the conviction was made as a result of the evidence put before the court.

I cannot imagine how a public inquiry would compel Megrahi to set out the details of the motivation that allowed him to act as he did. Public inquiries are poorly adapted to the handling of intelligence material, particularly material obtained through liaison with foreign services. Of course, it must be accepted that those services might not agree to disclose such material. Furthermore, a great deal of time has passed since Lockerbie. Many potential participants in an inquiry will have retired, died or lost detailed recall of some of the issues of the 1980s, even if the tragedy itself will always be burned in their minds.

As the Government cannot see the potential benefit of an inquiry, it is hard to justify such a lengthy and expensive process. With regret for the disappointment that this will cause to the families, I therefore have to repeat the Foreign Secretary's message—the same has been said in the Chamber on several occasions—that we will not be calling a public inquiry.

However, as I told the House this afternoon, we remain open to other forms of review, inquiry, scrutiny or study that will add to the families' and our knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the Lockerbie bombing. We will continue to consider the options. If we can find a focused approach that offers insight, without the shortcomings that I have mentioned, this Government will pursue it. I will seek to keep the House and the families informed, as will my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

This is a matter that we are deeply and seriously concerned about, but we want to consider it further. We want to ensure that, when we do make some judgments on how to take the matter forward, they are the right ones. We owe that to the families and, indeed, to all involved.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 24 July 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Barclays Group Reorganisation Bill *[Lords]*
(*By Order*)

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Wednesday 16 October.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

AIDS Pandemic

1. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What help she is giving to Botswana to help it tackle the AIDS pandemic. [69873]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): Botswana is one of Africa's economic success stories, with a per capita gross domestic product of US$3,070. However, it is also the country most badly affected by HIV in the world, with 38.8 per cent. of adults infected. The Government have launched a national anti-retroviral programme with $100 million assistance from Merck and the Gates Foundation. My Department is supporting the national response as part of a regional HIV/AIDS programme. It includes support for the management of sexually transmitted infections, access to condoms, promoting behaviour change, and supporting non-governmental organisations including the Soul City media programme.

Mr. Prentice: That is encouraging news. When I was in Botswana last year, the Health Minister showed me sex education material that was being provided for schools. It was incredibly explicit—really "in your face" stuff. Yet, as my hon. Friend said, nearly 40 per cent. of the adult population are infected and life expectancy is now below 40. If that is happening in Botswana, which is a well-run, well-governed, relatively rich country, what is the prognosis for other countries in southern Africa where an AIDS pandemic is wiping out whole populations?

Ms Keeble: While there are major AIDS problems in Africa as a whole, Botswana is the worst-affected country in the world. Although it has some problems, it has two things going for it in terms of dealing with HIV/AIDS: a high level of political commitment and a high level of funding. It is trying to tackle both the need to lower the infection rate and the need to extend and improve the lives of the many people infected.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I am sure that the Minister, like me, was shocked to note the collapse in life expectancy to—unless I am much mistaken—27.9 years in Botswana. A United Nations report predicts that up to 70 million people may die of the disease. Does she agree that at a time like this it is morally suspect that Britain recruits thousands of African nurses, including 100 from Botswana last year?

Ms Keeble: The hon. Lady is right to speak of the awful collapse of life expectancy, which will also have a long-term effect on the prospects of further development in Botswana.

Of course the recruitment of professionals is a problem if there is a drain and they all come here, but there is also a much bigger issue. HIV/AIDS is affecting professionals disproportionately in Africa, including both teachers and health workers.

A recent conference considered the way in which HIV/AIDS affects teachers. Teachers in southern Africa said that while there were problems over recruitment, they did not want their freedom of movement to be curtailed because they come from countries with a high incidence of HIV.

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the United Nations Fund for Population Activities on its excellent work on HIV/AIDS prevention and reproductive rights throughout the world? Should we not regret President Bush's disgraceful decision yesterday to end its funding?

My hon. Friend is well aware of the report of the recent visit of Members of Parliament to China to observe the UNFPA's work there. Is she also aware of the subsequent visit and report of a Bush Administration team? Is she aware that both reports conclude—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think the Minister now has enough to go on.

Ms Keeble: We are certainly aware of the issues raised by my hon. Friend, and will consider how we can make progress on this important matter.

Mrs. Spelman: As the Minister has said, it is a hard fact that the levels of replacement of training for the professional classes are not keeping pace with the pandemic. It is also a hard fact that a teacher in a country such as Botswana would have to spend most of his or her salary to purchase anti-retroviral drugs, even at the subsidised rate. Does the Secretary of State support our call for the global health fund to be focused on the provision of free anti-retrovirals, especially for pregnant women to prevent maternal transmission?

Ms Keeble: Botswana has made the decision to provide access to anti-retroviral drugs, but it can do so for two reasons: it has the money and it has the health system. Some countries do not. The Government support appropriate national programmes, which may include the use of anti-retroviral drugs. In some countries there has been a high level of success, for example, in Uganda, Senegal and Brazil. Incidence rates have been stemmed and in some cases they have dramatically declined—for example, in Uganda, they are down from about 30 per cent. to about 5 per cent. That is the sort of progress we want in Africa and throughout the world.

2. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What action her Department is taking to relieve the AIDS pandemic in Africa. [69874]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): HIV/AIDS is deepening poverty in Africa and undermining development. It causes great human suffering and loss of life but also has deeply destructive economic effects due to loss of life and skills among the economically active generation and leaving elders and children unsupported.

My Department committed £180 million in HIV and sexual health programmes in Africa last year. We also made significant contributions to the global health fund, which provides commodities for the treatment of HIV, tuberculosis and Malaria. We are supporting programmes to develop a vaccine and microbicide. Our work focuses on prevention, treatment and care.

Dr. Lewis: The Secretary of State's record in trying to combat this catastrophe is second to none. Does she agree that even if there were unlimited quantities of anti-retroviral drugs, all the problems of expense were solved and they could be supplied free of charge in unlimited quantities, the main problem that Africa would still face would be distribution to the people who need them? What practical steps is she proposing to take to engage non-governmental organisations, international organisations and any other agencies in building an effective distribution system for those vital drugs?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, except on one point—I do not agree that the provision of anti-retrovirals is the most important thing—the most important thing is prevention. Uganda needs to happen across Africa; its prevalence rate decreased from 35 per cent. to 5 per cent. That is a great achievement. Every country in Africa and, indeed, China and India need to achieve what has been achieved in Uganda.

On the availability of anti-retrovirals, obviously people are morally entitled to them, but even at cost price they are very expensive. As the hon. Gentleman says, distribution systems are not in place so even if the drugs were free most people in Africa would not get them. They would need regular treatment, good food and a good quality of life because they are very toxic drugs.

UNAIDS has a system whereby reduced price anti-retrovirals provided by the drug companies can be made available to countries. UNAIDS helps countries to make use of that provision; 13 have done so. We are busy trying to build basic health care systems for the immunisation of children and for other purposes across Africa. We must do that, but prevention, care and anti-retrovirals should be our order of priorities.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I very much welcome all that the Government are doing in both west Africa and the whole of southern Africa, and obviously I fully support my right hon. Friend's comment that prevention is clearly the most important thing. Does she think that the ABC message that so many countries are spelling out—abstain, be faithful and use condoms—is a simple message? Does she also think that one of the difficulties in South Africa is that the president somewhat confuses the message? Should we not try to make him understand exactly what the problem is and spell it out clearly in South Africa?

Clare Short: I agree with my hon. Friend, except that the decision of the courts in South Africa that testing of pregnant women across the country to prevent mother-to-child transmission must be provided has solved the big row in South Africa, I am happy to say. It can now get on with rolling out an appropriate programme.

We must all remember that the speed of the increase in infection is fastest in Russia. It is spreading quite rapidly in India and in China, although China is now taking action. It is a serious problem in the Caribbean. Africa's crisis is bad and more advanced than elsewhere, but there is a danger throughout the world. The Ugandan lessons need to be learned throughout the world. Infection rates must be brought down as rapidly as possible. This crisis goes beyond Africa, although it is hitting Africa hardest at the moment.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): One source of funding for the HIV/AIDS programmes in Africa is the World Bank's International Development Association loans. However, under the 13th replenishment, all loans for HIV programmes will be turned into grants. Is the Secretary of State not concerned that, in six months' time, the shortfall in the resources available for HIV/AIDS programmes, and for grants in particular, will be significant? Can she tell the House how that shortfall will be accounted for?

Clare Short: The hon. Lady is half right. The IDA loans—the most concessional arm of the World Bank—last for 40 years, and nothing is paid back in the first 10 years anyway. The big argument against turning part of the loans into grant was somewhat theoretical, and many who advanced it—most of whom were in the USA—did not understand how IDA worked. None the less, we have had to compromise, as one does. The grant element in the new programme has not been funded; it will bear down in years to come, not in six months. We pointed out in the mid-term review that we must cover that; otherwise, over time, the value of IDA will go down and down. However, it will take more than six months to have an effect.

Afghanistan

3. **Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): What steps she is taking to support the Afghan Interim Authority in its efforts to meet *(a)* humanitarian and *(b)* longer-term needs. [69875]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Our objective is to help build a stable and secure Afghanistan with a growing economy and reducing poverty. Progress has been made, but the needs are massive and improved security is vital. There are still very serious problems with malnutrition.

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, with very high infant mortality rates. We are channelling humanitarian support through the appropriate agencies, and financial support through the Reconstruction Trust Fund. We are focusing our technical support on building capacity for economic management, a reformed security sector, and better livelihoods for poor people.

Linda Perham: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply, and for what she is doing. Does she agree that realising the rights of women is fundamental to the future of Afghanistan, and could she comment on what her Department is doing to support the women of Afghanistan?

Clare Short: I do agree. In Afghanistan as elsewhere, as Kofi Annan said so tellingly:

> "Poverty has a woman's face."

Some 70 per cent. of the world's poor are women and their children. If we cannot educate girls and empower women, we cannot reduce poverty in the world. That is particularly true of Afghanistan, given the behaviour of the Taliban. Some very brave Afghan women made their contribution at the Loya Jirga by challenging the warlords. That showed the value of having those voices in politics. The schools are reopening and girls are teeming back to school, but it remains a desperately poor country with terrible malnutrition rates. Many children—I think one in four—die before the age of five, so we have a long way to go. Empowering women is a major part of the answer.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Has the Secretary of State tracked how much of the £200 million that she channelled from the taxpayer has been allocated to primary health care projects, particularly those relating to women's health issues? How much of it is being spent on practical infrastructure such as water, drainage, waste and refuse disposal, and electricity?

Clare Short: In fact, we have not allocated any of the £200 million. We have allocated £60 million since 11 September, but that was not part of the £200 million pledge. In the early stages, we are focusing on keeping the humanitarian effort going. Before 11 September, 5 million people a day were being fed by trucked-in food; now, that figure is 9 million. We must keep that effort going as we build up the capacity of the Afghan state to take forward self-government and self-empowerment. We also need order across the country, and the creation of a new Afghan national army—which can disempower the warlords and address their taxation of local people—is crucial to the creation of a united Afghanistan. We are making progress, but we have not made as much as we would like. There remains an awful lot to do.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): As my right hon. Friend knows, members of the International Development Committee will visit Afghanistan in October. When we were in Pakistan last year, we were told by the Pakistan Government that they were receiving insufficient help in respect of the tens of thousands of Afghan refugees in camps in Pakistan. What are we doing to help them? As my right hon. Friend knows, if the refugees return too quickly to Afghanistan, it simply will not be able to cope.

Clare Short: I am aware that three members of the Select Committee, including my hon. Friend, are going to Kabul. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to travel outside Kabul because of security concerns relating to other problems in the country. None the less, I hope that it will prove a useful visit.

There are some 4 million Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan; in comparison, the numbers in countries such as ours are tiny. Through the UN system, we and others have been providing support, but life is tough in the camps, as my hon. Friend testified when she returned. A million Afghans have returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan, yet the situation is still bad, which shows how difficult life in the camps is. Support is being provided, but I strongly believe that no one should tell refugees when to return; they should decide themselves. If they decide that life is better in Afghanistan, we must help them to get home and to start to rebuild their lives.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does the Secretary of State agree that there can be no long-term reconstruction in Afghanistan until the security situation improves? An enormous amount has been said about the fight against al-Qaeda, but the international community must not lose sight of the fact that there is an enormous way to go if the security situation in Afghanistan is to improve. The fact that, a year on, we are unable to move not simply beyond Kabul but beyond the boundaries of the UK embassy, is a demonstration of how much the situation must improve if there is to be any long-term improvement in Afghanistan.

Clare Short: I agree absolutely with the hon. Gentleman. Earlier there was talk of an international security assistance force going to all the main cities of Afghanistan, but it was decided that that was not to be done. If that is not to be done, we need to get on speedily—I agree that this should have started already—with building a national army and recruiting fighters who are currently paid by warlords into a national multi-ethnic army that can produce order throughout the country. We must also help to produce a proper tax system to provide revenue to the proper Government. I very much regret the delay in making progress on this and we must all do what we can to press the United States to help us to start to make progress.

Poverty Reduction

4. **Mr. Andy Reed** (Loughborough): What steps she is taking to monitor and improve poverty reduction strategies in countries receiving debt relief. [69876]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The UK worked hard to reshape IMF and World Bank relations with developing countries through the creation of the poverty reduction strategy process. This puts developing country Governments—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber.

Clare Short: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The process puts developing country Governments in the lead in bringing together economic policy and the distribution of debt relief, aid and local revenues in order to reduce poverty. The strategies are publicly debated and scrutinised before they are agreed. We are monitoring progress and believe that this approach is leading to improved economic management and social reform.

Mr. Reed: Does my right hon. Friend agree that poverty reduction works only if it is not an accounting method, but improves the lives of the poorest in the countries involved? Does she agree that civil society must be involved in the production of those poverty reduction plans, such as in Uganda? Will she try her hardest to ensure that the World Bank and the IMF includes civil society in the outcomes of all poverty reduction plans, so that they make a difference to the poorest in the country and not just to the bankers and the leaders?

Clare Short: I agree with my hon. Friend that poverty reduction means improvements in people's lives. The shift of the measurement of progress by the IMF-World Bank programmes to poverty reduction means that they must focus on people's lives and not on some theoretical economic reform. That is one of the improvements that has been made. It is a requirement of poverty reduction strategies that they are openly debated with civil society. We must make sure that it is not just a few groups who are capable of applying to agencies such as mine for grants, but that representatives of the people, such as churches, women's organisations and village groups, can apply so that the real poor get a say in the priorities of their country. That is improving, but there is a way to go. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must ask the House to be quiet. There are hon. Members who are interested in this matter.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Secretary of State agree that poverty reduction strategies can be severely compromised by arms export deals that entail debt obligations? As the Export Control Bill comes to the House for the last time this afternoon without a sustainable development clause, can she say what action she can take as a Minister to minimise the damage?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. My aspiration is that we should learn the lessons of the Tanzania air traffic control case, whatever side of the argument one might be on. Such a contract will not be made again. We helped Tanzania to have procurement, financial management and scrutiny systems, and I am confident that those systems are now in place in Tanzania. The way in which we apply criterion 8—not giving a licence to something that would threaten the sustainable development of a poor country—must be tightened up and improved, and there has been an internal review.

Personally, I do not think that we need the amendment—although I respect those who fought for it—to achieve a tighter and better application of the sustainable development rule. But I agree that that is what we should achieve, and then good will have come out of bad.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the House will welcome the apparent easing of tension between India and Pakistan, but will be gravely concerned about the humanitarian problems in Bangladesh, in view of the flooding that has led to 1 million becoming homeless, affected 30 per cent. of the country and left 50 dead? Will my right hon. Friend continue her excellent efforts and encourage the European Union to emulate her actions?

Clare Short: I agree with my right hon. Friend that it is welcome that the tension has reduced between India and Pakistan. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has put a lot of effort into that. However, I do not think that the crisis is by any means over. We still have 1 million men on the line of control and elections are due on the Indian side of the line, in Jammu and Kashmir. If we have any crises, we could have an escalation, and then it could easily go nuclear. We should not take our eye off the danger there.

I also agree with my right hon. Friend that Bangladesh copes enormously well with its floods, but it deserves more support and help because so many poor people there deserve a better chance in life.

Socially Responsible Behaviour

5. **Mr. Dai Havard** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): What steps she is taking to support socially responsible behaviour by companies operating in the developing world. [69877]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We are strongly supporting initiatives to progress socially and environmentally responsible business practices, and many leading companies are committed to significant reform. Our largest UK initiative, which is supported by my Department, is the ethical trading initiative, which is a partnership of trade unions, development charities and British retailers with an annual turnover of £100 billion. Together, they are monitoring respect for core labour standards throughout their supply chains across the world. That is potentially an enormous force for good in poor countries.

Mr. Havard: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I especially welcome the establishment of the business partnership department in her Department and the appointment of a Minister for corporate social responsibility in the UK. What action will she take to ensure that her Department works closely with other Departments and the devolved Administrations and further develops relationships with the trade union and co-operative movement in monitoring—and developing—policy, activities for which that movement is well qualified?

Clare Short: I agree with my hon. Friend. In the past, funnily enough, we did not have a private sector department in my Department. A healthy private sector is crucial to the reduction of poverty, as is a healthy and effective government system. We are putting much more effort into that area. I can confirm that we work strongly across UK Departments because we want to be part of a Government who are committed to sustainable development across the world, not just one Department in the Government. We have partnership programmes with the Transport and General Workers Union on shop steward education. We are about to organise a programme with the Trades Union Congress, and we are trying to deepen the understanding of development in all sectors of British society so that we can make a better contribution.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

6. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): If she will make a statement about her policy on the provision of aid towards heavily indebted poor countries. [69878]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): There are 37 countries that are eligible to qualify for debt relief under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative, because they are so heavily indebted that their debt can never be paid and is creating a barrier to reform. Some 26 countries have qualified and receive $62 billion of debt relief. The process has led to improved economic management and increased social spending. The remaining 11 countries have serious problems of conflict or bad government, but we hope to make progress with them, too.

Mr. Swayne: I thank the Secretary of State for her answer. Does she agree that improvements in trading arrangements for those countries will be of much greater benefit than any direct aid that can be given? What is she doing to improve the rules that govern world trade to the benefit of those nations?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that improved trading opportunities for poor countries are crucial to their economic growth, which is essential to the reduction of poverty. I do not agree that improved trading opportunities are an alternative to aid. Aid to help countries build up the capacity of their Government systems, increase their capacity to negotiate trade agreements, and have a thriving private sector that can take up those opportunities is also key. We are doing what was agreed at Doha. A deal was agreed that would really enhance the training opportunities of developing countries; now we must ensure that that is delivered.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [69903] **Matthew Green** (Ludlow): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 24 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

Matthew Green: With hours to go before the summer recess, the Prime Minister may be aware that some Members may be planning to take holidays in Florida. Despite the Prime Minister's dangerously close relationship with President Bush, does he think, in the light of yesterday's shuffling of the deckchairs on the Titanic by the Conservative leader, that Florida is still a safe place for British politicians to go, and should they take their mobile phone?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is out of order. John Mann.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): A recent internet poll suggested that few or no young people were using heroin in Britain—well, they obviously did not poll anybody in my constituency. If it can be shown that there is a particular problem with heroin abuse in former mining villages, will the Prime Minister look at finding additional resources to tackle that problem?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly look into the point that my hon. Friend makes. I think that he knows that a lot of money is going in, through the new deal for communities for example, to regenerate former mining communities. Part of that money is put into the community infrastructure, and obviously some of that can be used to help tackle problems of drug abuse, which, as my hon. Friend rightly points out, are not confined to the inner cities but are in parts of our rural and former mining areas as well.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): No doubt the Prime Minister will already have seen today the report of the all-party Select Committee on Defence, on domestic preparedness, in which the Committee says in the conclusion that

> "the Government has"

not taken the

> "opportunity to conduct a proper and comprehensive examination of how . . . the UK . . . would manage the consequences of a disaster on the scale of 11 September."

Does the Prime Minister agree with that?

The Prime Minister: We shall obviously make a full and detailed response to the Defence Committee report, but I do not accept that we have not made the most urgent preparations following 11 September. Indeed, the report begins by saying:

> "Since 11 September . . . much has been done to strengthen the UK's defence and security against the terrorist threat."

We shall, of course, study carefully the additional things that the Committee says that we should do.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister is right; the Committee does not take issue with the fact that there has been work done, and much good work too. But the Select Committee did go on to say—this is the critical bit—*[Interruption.]* A lot of it is quite critical, but this is very critical. It says that

> "a great deal of"

work

> "has been expended . . . without clear strategic direction. It seems to us that, in many areas, the Government has confused activity with achievement."

Surely the Prime Minister can see the relevance of that, and hopefully he will agree with that particular conclusion.

The Prime Minister: What we have done is that all the emergency services have reviewed their capabilities. A massive amount of training of police officers, ambulance staff and people in the health service has gone on to ensure that we are prepared. In addition, just within the last year we have allocated from the reserve about £250 million extra for all sorts of things from the Ministry of Defence through to the Metropolitan police and to strengthen the UK's anti-terrorist-financing regime. So an awful lot has been done, but of course we shall consider carefully what further suggestions the Defence Committee made.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The point about the Select Committee report is that, as the respected Labour Chairman of the Committee, the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), said on the media,

> "there has been a lack of grip and direction"

from the Government on this matter. The crucial point is not that there has been activity but that, as they said, it is a mistake that activity supplants real direction and real drive. So will the Prime Minister, to reassure the country, which will rightly be concerned, now take personal charge to ensure, as the Committee says, that there is adequate "central co-ordination and direction", and bring it under his control, not leave it to others to war and fight with one another?

The Prime Minister: Of course, as Prime Minister I am always ultimately responsible for making sure that these things are done properly, but the whole purpose of setting up the civil contingencies secretariat and the recent appointment of Sir David Omand as the permanent secretary to co-ordinate the security and intelligence work was so that we brought together the various bodies and made sure that we had the best possible preparations for whatever potential terrorist attack we may be facing.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is not happening.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says that it is not happening; it is happening actually, but of course we have to make sure that we try to do everything that we can to strengthen that capability. I would say to him that—although he says that the activity is there, but not the actual direction—the money, for example, that we have allocated to the Ministry of Defence or to the Metropolitan police is precisely for real activity on the ground to strengthen our defences against whatever might be done. But I hope that he would ultimately agree with me that the best defence is, in fact, what happens with our security and intelligence services. For that very reason, the intelligence agencies will increase their spending by 6.4 per cent. in real terms annually.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I support that.

The Prime Minister: I am delighted that the right hon. Gentleman supports that. We can add that to the list of the spending that he does support. It is important to make sure that we have the best possible security and intelligence capability, recognising as I think everyone does post-11 September that there is a limit to what we can do. As I said in front of the Liaison Committee a short time ago, we are in a dilemma between protecting ourselves against every potential threat and possibly spending millions or billions of pounds to do so, and making no proper preparations at all. We believe that we have got the balance right, and with the additional appointment of a specific permanent secretary to co-ordinate this issue right at the heart of Government, we have done as much as we possibly can at this stage, but we will consider carefully the specific recommendations of the Committee.

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): Following the publication of Dame Janet's interim report on Harold Shipman last Friday, will the Prime Minister join me and other hon. Members in expressing sympathy and support to the victims' relatives? Does he also agree that the failure of the General Medical Council to strike off Harold Shipman following 77 counts of drug misuse and prescription fraud in my constituency led to many more deaths in Hythe? May I ask the Prime Minister to take a personal interest in the final report when it is published in the autumn and to expedite the recommendations as urgently as possible?

The Prime Minister: Of course we should study carefully and learn the lessons of the inquiry report, and I join my hon. Friend in expressing our deep sympathy to the families of all those who lost their loved ones as a result of the murderous activities of Harold Shipman. I am sure that the General Medical Council and everyone will try to learn the lessons that the inquiry has established for us. I would just like to say at the same time as mentioning the horrific case of Harold Shipman and all the evil that he did that it is worth paying tribute, however, to the vast majority of our general practitioners who do excellent work for our constituents up and down this country.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): In the very happy absence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy), who did not need to leave a phone number, may I ask the Prime Minister about the fact that the Chancellor announced a major increase in the ability of central Government to take over local services last week? Failing schools will be taken over. Poorly performing social services departments will have new managers sent in. Failing local authorities will be taken over. The Home Secretary wants to do the same to the police. Is the Prime Minister not worried that those powers will destroy accountability to the local electorate and stifle local initiative?

The Prime Minister: First, perhaps on behalf of the House, may I send congratulations to the right hon. Gentleman's right hon. Friend on his marriage and best wishes for his honeymoon?

Secondly, we have in fact devolved more money to front-line schools and devolved a greater percentage of their budget for them to spend, but I make no apology for saying that, where schools are failing, it is important that there is intervention because every single failed school means that children in that school are being deprived of the chance of a decent education.

Mr. Beith: Bearing in mind the devastating criticisms made in the Anderson report into the foot and mouth outbreak about the performance of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the fact that DEFRA has failed to meet 83 per cent. of the performance targets set for it by the Government, can the Prime Minister tell us who takes over a failing central Government Department?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept what the right hon. Gentleman says about DEFRA—*[Interruption.]* From that cheer, perhaps he will be doing rather more of these Question Times in future. On the DEFRA targets, he is wrong; it is not the case that 83 per cent. of them have not been met. It is precisely because of the problems that were associated with foot and mouth that we set up the civil contingency secretary and that we changed the Ministry of Agriculture. As my right hon. Friend made very clear, we accept responsibility for the mistakes that were made. Let us be clear, however: we managed to get rid of this outbreak within six months—less time than the 1967 outbreak—even though it was the worst outbreak that this country or any country had known. I hope, at least, that the right hon. Gentleman will accept that there were many people, not least in the Army and in the Ministry of Agriculture, who worked extremely hard to bring the epidemic under control.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): In the eventuality of the United States commencing military action in the middle east during the recess, will the Prime Minister undertake to recall the House before any British forces are committed?

The Prime Minister: I have to say that we have not got to the stage of military action. If we do get to that stage, at any point in time, we will, of course, make sure that Parliament is properly consulted.

Northern Ireland

Q2. [69904] **Lady Hermon** (North Down): When he next plans to visit Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Lady Hermon: I thank the Prime Minister for that response. Obviously, the people of North Down will be disappointed that he is not coming there on his holidays.

The Prime Minister will recall that, when he last came to Northern Ireland, he took responsibility for laying down clear principles for those who are moving from violence to peaceful democratic means. He also gave an undertaking that he would spell out the consequences for those who did not abide by those principles. Republican violence has continued, and loyalist violence has continued, including the appalling murder of a young Catholic this week. Will the Prime Minister please tell the House what the principles are and what the consequences are of breaches of those principles?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise this issue. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will make a statement in great detail on this later today. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will give a more extended answer than I would do normally.

We all signed up, in the Belfast agreement, for a transition from violence to democracy in Northern Ireland. We did not expect it to happen overnight, but neither is it acceptable that this transition should now stall. Now, more than four years after the agreement was signed, it is increasingly urgent that it should be clear that paramilitary organisations are not engaged in any preparations for terrorism and that they should be stood down altogether as soon as possible.

It is also intolerable that paramilitaries should have played a part in recent sectarian disturbances, which have brought localised violence to the streets of Belfast and elsewhere, including the shocking murder of Gerard Lawlor to which the hon. Lady referred. These disturbances call for and will be met with a strong and effective security response. My right hon. Friend will spell that out in his statement later.

It is no longer sufficient just that there should be no terrorist violence. We have to be clear that preparations for violence have also ceased. My right hon. Friend will make it clear that, in reviewing the ceasefires, he will give particular weight to any substantiated information that a paramilitary organisation is engaged in training, targeting, acquisition or development of arms or weapons, or any similar preparations for terrorist violence in Northern Ireland or elsewhere.

We should not forget the enormous benefits that the agreement has brought to the people of Northern Ireland. All of us have a lot to lose if it fails. If, however, there are in future such fundamental breaches of the commitment to exclusively peaceful means, they will be taken into account in assessing the ceasefires. It is right that, with the passage of time, these judgments should become increasingly rigorous.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Does the Prime Minister agree that the credibility of the Government has been greatly weakened by their equivocation in attributing violence to particular paramilitary organisations? Could I advise that he calls the sheet absolutely clean to give confidence to the communities of Northern Ireland, particularly those communities that are under siege at the moment, night after night, especially in north and east Belfast? They need protection, assurance and some understanding that their plight is recognised and will be addressed as a matter of grave urgency.

The Prime Minister: I understand exactly what my hon. Friend says. It is for that reason that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make a statement later today. I hope that what he says will go some way to convincing my hon. Friend and other hon. Members that we intend to take very seriously what are appalling breaches of security at the moment. The truth is that, for many people in Northern Ireland, the agreement has brought enormous benefits. I know that my hon. Friend believes that, and so do his constituents. However, there are people in north Belfast, east Belfast and elsewhere for whom the whole concept of a peace process must seem very far away indeed. We must make sure that the small number of paramilitaries on both sides do not wreck what is the one decent chance for a good future for Northern Ireland that we have.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Does the Prime Minister recall using almost precisely the same terminology in an article in the Belfast *News Letter* on 22 May 1998 when he was campaigning for a yes vote in the referendum? Four years of violence from the Provisional IRA has not seen any action from him whatever. Would he take the word of a serial promise-breaker if he were a Unionist in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: First, I do not accept that nothing to the good has happened in the past four years. I do not accept either that nothing has happened on the republican and IRA side. There have been significant steps forward. However, I also accept—this the purpose of what I have said today and of the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—that it is not enough for people simply to be on ceasefire and think that there is some tolerated level of violence. It cannot be tolerated; no level of violence can be tolerated.

People in the House will remember that there have been times when the whole process has been disturbed and even times when the Executive bodies in Northern Ireland have had to be suspended as a result of the difficulties in making the transition. However, I say to the hon. Gentleman and to the colleagues in his political party that I still believe that the Belfast agreement in 1998 represents and continues to represent the best chance of a peaceful future. Let us be clear. The terrible things that are happening in north Belfast at the moment have been happening for a long time in Northern Ireland—for far too long. Associated with them are a whole lot of other acts of violence. We have now made substantial advances in Northern Ireland and I will defend this agreement to the utmost, because it has given people in Northern Ireland a chance for the future. However, I accept entirely—that is why we have to return to the issue again today—that there cannot be some accepted level of paramilitary violence on the ground. Ordinary, decent, law-abiding people in Northern Ireland—that is the vast majority, whether they are nationalist, Catholic or Protestant—have to be protected, and that is why we will adopt the measures that we will set out later today.

Engagements

Q3. [69905] **Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it will be a bad day for English football when Wimbledon FC is moved to Milton Keynes? Is not the best way to harness football's potential for good in our society by strengthening, and not by severing, the links between football clubs and their local communities? Will he do what he can to make sure that no new public money is given to sponsor the move to Milton Keynes? Any such money should go to the newly formed AFC Wimbledon which may, one day, find its way back to Wembley as well as finding its way back to Plough lane. *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: Opposition Members may complain, but I recognise a Member of Parliament with his finger on the pulse about the things that matter to his constituents. It is not my decision as to whether Wimbledon FC moves to Milton Keynes, but I pay tribute to the stoicism and determination of the club's supporters, who have been stoical and determined through some difficult times.

My hon. Friend asked what we can do. We can put more money into grass-roots football and sport, and that is what we are doing—£62 million to be precise along with the Football Foundation and others. That is an important contribution to allowing clubs, such as Wimbledon, to thrive.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I welcome what the Prime Minister said about Northern Ireland, but I hope that the Secretary of State will spell out without obscurity the clarity of the new action that the Government will be prepared to take to deal with those who commit terrorist acts.

On the subject of education, in 1998, the Government limited the right of schools to exclude disruptive pupils. Since then, there have been four times as many assaults on teachers. Does the Prime Minister accept that undermining the right of head teachers and schools to deal with disruptive pupils has plunged them into serious difficulty?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that. We have made it very clear to head teachers that they have and must have the absolute right to exclude pupils, particularly for violent assaults upon teachers. We have made sure that that message is understood by schools. I do not accept what the right hon. Gentleman says.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister knows very well that head teachers find it impossible to deal with disruptive pupils because they have been undermined by appeals panels. Eight out of ten teachers now say that they have been physically threatened by pupils, and a third of all teachers have had to deal with offensive weapons in the classroom. Does not the Prime Minister see the obvious connection between his decision in 1998 to undermine head teachers' powers and the terrible problem that now exists for teachers in schools?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that we have undermined head teachers' ability to take action against pupils who are violent towards teachers. That is complete nonsense. We have always made it clear—and let me make it clear again now—that of course head teachers must have, and do have, the power to exclude pupils who have been violent towards their teachers. Violence against teachers should not be tolerated in any shape or form. Importantly, as a result of the measures that we have taken and the investment that we have put in, we are ensuring that pupils who are permanently excluded receive full-time education—as opposed to the situation that we found in 1997 whereby they would end up with perhaps a couple of hours schooling a week, then be out on the street. That is the right thing to do, and we will extend it to temporary exclusions as well. In my view, the most important thing is not just to give teachers protection against violence, but to ensure that pupils who are excluded are not out on the street, but in full-time education.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The fact is that as a result of the Government's action fewer pupils are being excluded. A third of all decisions by appeals panels now go against schools. In a recent case, it cost £10,000 for the school concerned to fight the appeals case. Many schools will not even take cases to appeals panels because they cannot afford to. We know that half the teachers who leave the profession do so because of poor discipline. In a recent trade union report, a teacher is quoted as saying:

> "I am leaving the profession. I love teaching and I am good at it, but it is getting far too dangerous."

Surely the Prime Minister can understand that if he prevents head teachers and governors from having the power to get rid of disruptive pupils, they will be undermined and teachers will fail to teach in the classroom.

The Prime Minister: Let me repeat to the right hon. Gentleman that of course head teachers have the power to exclude disruptive pupils who are violent against their teachers, and that happens. Where head teachers take that action, we support it and support it fully. We have made that clear on every occasion.

As for the numbers of teachers leaving the profession—yes, it is true that teachers have left as a result of discipline problems in the classroom. That is precisely why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced the measures that she did. Let us be clear that as opposed to this time last year—never mind five years ago—there are 9,500 extra teachers in our schools. What is more, as result of major investment there has been the biggest increase for many years in the number of teacher trainees. Again as a result of investment, we are providing pupils who are excluded with the proper schooling that they never used to get. That is all down to the investment that we are putting in, which helps teachers in our classrooms. It is investment that we are committed to, and investment that the right hon. Gentleman is not committed to. I therefore suggest to him that over the holiday period—I recommend that he does not spend it in Florida—he decides to come back in September and agree to the investment programme in schools, hospitals and elsewhere, because if we want to put our public services right, cutting the money that goes to them is not the right way to do it.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Prime Minister will be aware of the concern throughout the country that by the time the House returns in the autumn we will be at war with Iraq. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may groan, but many millions of people are concerned. Does he take seriously the view, which was most recently expressed by the new Archbishop of Canterbury, that it would be wrong to go to war with Iraq without a fresh and distinct UN mandate?

The Prime Minister: As I have made clear on many occasions, the position set out by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is right, in that whatever action we take must be legally justified, and we will ensure, if we get to the point of action, that it is. However, I reiterate what I said a moment ago: we have not yet reached the point of decision, and should we do so, of course the House will be properly consulted. People are perfectly entitled to express their views on these issues. But my view remains that weapons of mass destruction are a serious threat, and it is important that we deal with it. How we deal with it is an open question. If decisions are taken, there will be ample opportunity for the House to be consulted.

We cannot have a situation where Iraq continues to develop weapons of mass destruction. In respect of UN resolutions, I simply point out to my hon. Friend that the UN has passed 27 resolutions on Iraq and its programme for weapons of mass destruction, and Iraq is in breach of almost every one.

Q4. [69906] **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): Given that the Deputy Prime Minister is about to force an extra 200,000 houses on local communities in the south-east, when my constituency's infrastructure is already overstretched, does the Prime Minister accept that in a truly democratic society, local people should decide the right level of local development, not politicians sitting in Whitehall?

The Prime Minister: Of course the views of local people are extremely important, but I hope that the Conservative party realises that in circumstances in which it is necessary to develop housing in the south-east, but in a manner consistent with the split between brownfield and greenfield sites and with the preservation of the green belt—which we have increased by some 30,000 hectares since we came to power—it is important to try to balance concerns. That was precisely the reason for the Deputy Prime Minister's statement. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has his constituency angle, but the Opposition do themselves no favours by pretending that this is not a serious issue that has to be addressed.

When my right hon. Friend made his statement last week, he stated the situation correctly. The House should understand that we have to deal with this problem. How it is dealt with should be a matter for debate, but it is not responsible of the Conservative party, even as an Opposition, to pretend that there is not a problem that needs to be dealt with.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Although many areas in the north of England face the serious problem of low demand for social housing and abandonment by existing tenants, there are a very few authorities in the north which face higher rising house prices and lengthening waiting lists than the south. In the City of York, house prices and rents have risen by 20 per cent. in the past year and homelessness has risen by 60 per cent. Will the Prime Minister have a word with the Deputy Prime Minister and ask his Department to consider whether those few authorities in the north could be treated in a similar way to authorities in the south which face the same problems?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes the entirely sensible point that not all local authorities in the north are in the same position. He will know that the

Deputy Prime Minister is due to make a statement on these issues in the autumn, and I have no doubt that he listened carefully to what my hon. Friend just said.

Q5. [69907] **Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): Can the Prime Minister tell me the average level of NHS funding for children's hospices and how much his national insurance rise will cost them?

The Prime Minister: I do not have those figures, but I shall certainly send them to the hon. Lady. However, I am sure that she will agree that the investment in the NHS, whether in the hospice movement or elsewhere, is important. It is important for hospices because the greater the ability of the NHS to cope, the less the pressure on the hospice movement. That is why I should have thought that if the hon. Lady wanted to raise this issue, she, unlike some of her hon. Friends, would have at least supported the additional money going into the health service.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the consultation with the House of Commons to which the Prime Minister referred in his answers to my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) and for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) take place before or after the commitment of British forces to military action in Iraq?

The Prime Minister: As I have already said, we have not taken the decision to commit British forces. When that decision is made, we will consider the best way to consult the House in the normal way and in the normal circumstances.

Q6. [69908] **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): The Prime Minister will recall that on 3 July at column 222 of *Hansard* I asked him whether he would review the working of the Care Standards Act 2000, which has led to the closure of 47,000 beds. He refused. Yesterday, his Secretary of State for Health reversed that policy. Will the Prime Minister now apologise to all those elderly people who have suffered because their care home has closed?

The Prime Minister: We have listened to the concerns expressed; the hon. Gentleman should be pleased about that. As for saying that 47,000 places have closed because of the regulations, that is complete and total nonsense. Yes, it is important that we deal with the regulation issue, but that is not the only problem that care homes face. As they said yesterday, they also face the problem of low fees. That is why we have increased by 6 per cent. in real terms the funding that goes into local authority social services. It is complete hypocrisy and opportunism on the part of the Conservative party to complain about the closure of care homes when it opposes the investment that those homes need.

Northern Ireland

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): With permission, I wish to make a statement—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members please leave the Chamber quietly?

Dr. Reid: After the meeting that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach had with the parties at Hillsborough on 4 July, he said that we would reflect on what had been said about continuing levels of violence in Northern Ireland and consider what could be done to restore confidence in the political process.

As my right hon. Friend said, there can be no acceptable or tolerable level of violence. The principles of democracy and non-violence, which were laid down by the international body under Senator George Mitchell in 1996 and formed the basis on which the political negotiations took place, are as relevant now as they were then. As a signal of shared purpose in eradicating violence, I have today written to all the parties asking them to reaffirm their total and absolute commitment to those principles.

In recent weeks, in particular over last weekend, we have seen serious disturbances that have brought violence to the streets of Belfast and elsewhere, culminating in the appalling murder of Gerard Lawlor by so-called loyalists early on Monday morning—a young man who was barely in his teens when the peace talks started, and not out of them when his life was so cruelly taken. I am sure I speak on behalf of the whole House when I send our sympathy and condolences to his family and our deep regrets to all the families of the injured and murdered in Northern Ireland. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear"] That was not an isolated incident. Over the previous 72 hours, there had been five attempted murders, eight shootings and five other violent attacks. Those disgraceful events benefit no one, and have been a source of anguish to victims, families and all those who live in the areas concerned.

I said recently that we would oppose by all means those who remain wedded to violence. The security forces are bearing down on the paramilitaries to deny them the freedom to operate in order to prevent murders, shootings and pipe and petrol bomb attacks. More than 250 additional police officers and soldiers have been brought in to dominate the interfaces in north Belfast. They are stopping and checking the movement of individuals and vehicles to prevent armed gangs entering and leaving the area. Known paramilitaries are being kept under close surveillance.

This means that more police and Army resources are now deployed in north Belfast than at any point since the beginning of the ceasefires in contrast to routine patrolling elsewhere in Northern Ireland, which has been dramatically reduced. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is pursuing a variety of proactive and reactive methods to disrupt paramilitary movement in the area. I am sure that the House will give its total support to the arduous and courageous task that it is fulfilling.

Since violence flared in Belfast at the beginning of May, the police have made a number of arrests of terrorists, and for public order offences ranging from riotous behaviour to possession of petrol bombs. Since 4 May, in north and east Belfast, 21 loyalists have been arrested, with 15 charged. Over the same period, 12 republicans have been arrested and all were charged.

The police are determined that the perpetrators of the violence should be brought to book and will pursue them by every means available to them. I share that aim. I have asked my noble Friend the Attorney-General to lead an examination of police powers, bail arrangements and the scope for additional criminal offences. He will also examine whether any changes in the criminal law could be made to facilitate successful prosecution for acts of terrorism, violence and organised crime. All that would complement not only the enhanced activity of the police and the Army, but the Proceeds of Crime Bill, which we hope will receive Royal Assent today and which will give us a powerful weapon to hit paramilitary finances and the greed of individuals.

However, security measures alone will not solve the problem. That is why I also said recently that we would work in partnership with those who wanted to engage in local dialogue. Following the meeting at Hillsborough, I met several of the political parties, and encouraged closer and more systematic dialogue at local level.

In the light of recent events, at my request, the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne), has initiated further urgent discussions with local representatives, including those with links to paramilitary organisations, in an attempt to develop the kind of local partnership structures that will help prevent such disturbances in future. We are willing to spend as long as it takes with those who want to work in partnership with us and with each other. Those who do not want to do so should face the full force of the law.

I cannot emphasise too strongly that it is essential now that things should calm down, and that we should have a settled summer. It would be intolerable for the political progress on which the future well-being of Northern Ireland depends to be held to ransom by the murderous activities of paramilitaries of either side. It would be equally intolerable if the progress valued by the many in Northern Ireland were to become hostage to the few who are still committed to violence.

People want us to face up to these problems honestly. It would, I believe, help us and the public in Northern Ireland to have more transparent information about the involvement of paramilitary groups in such activities, and the general pattern of paramilitary activity in the community. On the related area of the involvement of paramilitaries in racketeering and organised crime, I have already asked Professor Ron Goldstock to assist me in assessing the scale of the problem. He brings to that task his experience as a former head of anti-organised crime activities in New York state.

I can see a case for doing something similar, to shine a light on levels of paramilitary violence in the community, both loyalist and republican, and to supplement the judgments that I make about the ceasefires. I will consult widely about the idea and how it might best be done, and make my views known after the summer break.

It is now four and a half years since the second IRA ceasefire. The ceasefires have made a huge contribution to political progress in Northern Ireland in addition to reducing the appalling human cost of the conflict. This is

[Dr. Reid]

the 30th anniversary of the worst year of the troubles, when 470 people lost their lives. Even 10 years ago, the annual figure was nearly 100. Last year it was 16; so far this year, six people have lost their lives. We should never forget in the midst of all the problems that we face, and in all our debates in Parliament, just how far we have come. Nevertheless, six is still too many. Of course things are a lot better than they were, but that is not the only test. The real test is whether things are as good as people in Northern Ireland have a right to expect them to be.

The people expect of all paramilitaries and all parties that they contribute to improvement, but there is a particular responsibility on any party participating in the government of Northern Ireland. They must appreciate that operating jointly in government, as the agreement requires, calls for a measure of responsibility and trust, and trust depends on confidence that the transition from violence to democracy continues apace, has not stalled, and will be completed without delay.

The recent statement by the IRA acknowledging the grief and pain of the relatives of those who died at the hands of the IRA—

David Burnside (South Antrim): Non-combatants.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. Reid: That statement, which also reaffirmed the IRA's commitment to the peace process, was a welcome step in the right direction. There may be those hon. Members who reject any overture of any nature, but I think that it would be unwise of the majority of us to do so. However, we also have to acknowledge that more than four years after the agreement was concluded, welcome though it is, it is simply not enough for paramilitary organisations on ceasefires to have brought an end to their terrorist campaigns.

Confidence in the process requires confidence that there will never again be a return to those dark days, in particular that preparations are not going on under the surface for a resumption of a terrorist campaign, and that paramilitary organisations will be stood down altogether as soon as possible. Whatever their real intentions—and in the case of the IRA I share the assessment of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that it has never been further from a return to its campaign—nothing could be more damaging than the sense that the options were being kept open in that way.

The judgments I make about ceasefires have to be made [illegible] the round, taking account of all relevant factors, including those which the statute obliges me to take into account. That is what I will continue to do, but with the passage of time it is right that those judgments should become increasingly rigorous. In reviewing the ceasefires, I will, as the Prime Minister said, give particular weight to any substantiated information that a paramilitary organisation is engaged in training, targeting, acquisition or development of arms or weapons, or in any similar preparations for a terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland or elsewhere. I say to the House, lest there be any doubt on the matter, that I will not hesitate to use the powers Parliament has given me if the circumstances require it.

There is also still a threat from organisations, both loyalist and republican, that are not on ceasefire. The Irish authorities have already had some notable successes against the dissident republicans. Separately and together, we will continue to counter those who cling to violence, using all the resources at our joint disposal.

I hope that I have made it absolutely clear that violence is unacceptable. This is not the first time that I have said that, but I repeat it lest there is any illusion in any quarter. I pledge once again that the Government will do all in our power to achieve the elimination of violence, but I will not pretend to the House that it is within the Government's power to solve all the problems on our own, or by security measures alone.

That is why we must keep in mind the enormous benefits that the political agreement has brought and will continue to bring as we contemplate its implementation. Those benefits include government of Northern Ireland by the people of Northern Ireland, with local elected representatives in a cross-community Administration.

The stability of those institutions is not a concession to paramilitaries or paramilitarism. On the contrary, it provides a platform for putting their activities in the past, where they belong. The steps that I have announced today [Hon. Members: "What steps?"] are most definitely not intended to threaten the democratic institutions, but to buttress democracy against violence. We should never forget how much we have to lose, and it is essential that the political representatives on all sides who have done so much to create and sustain the agreement should, by reaffirming and observing their commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic means, ensure its continuation.

I have, despite the interjections, set out a range of measures in response to the violence in Northern Ireland. However, the success of the peace process will require courage, patience, endurance and a willingness to compromise from everyone involved. It will be a long and, at times, a difficult haul, but that could not be otherwise in what is an historic attempt to end what is at heart an ancient conflict.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in letting me have a copy of his statement just before Prime Minister's questions. I fully associate myself and the entire Opposition with his comments about the appalling cold-blooded murder of Gerald Lawlor, and the other acts of violence that the right hon. Gentleman has listed. The statistics that he has given the House give us a clear impression of the depth of the crisis that we face. None of us should have any illusions about that.

Precisely for that reason I want to make a desperate effort to be as positive as I can in responding to the Secretary of State. Nevertheless, will he accept that I cannot in all honesty avoid expressing the profound sense of disappointment that I feel, and I believe so many people will feel in Northern Ireland, throughout the rest of the country, in the Irish Republic, in the United States and elsewhere, at the extraordinary vacuousness of the right hon. Gentleman's statement.

The statement was full of fine words with which no one would want to disagree for a moment, but in terms of actual decisions or action, the bravest thing that the right hon. Gentleman seems to have done this afternoon was to repeat words which the Prime Minister used four years ago, and to say that he might in certain circumstances be prepared to use powers that he has never used but which have been available to him for four years.

I shall remind the House of what the Prime Minister said on 14 May 1998 at Balmoral by way of defining the ceasefire and the agreement. He said that the ceasefire would be

> "an end to bombings, killings and beatings, claimed or unclaimed; an end to targeting and procurement of weapons; progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures actively directing and promoting violence"

None of those things has happened. What is more, there have been spectacular breaches exactly of the sort that the Prime Minister mentioned—targeting, for example, and procurement of weapons. Nothing whatever has been done about it by the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister said four years and two months ago in Belfast on the same matter—exactly the same words were used this afternoon—

> "These factors provide evidence upon which to base an overall judgment—a judgment which will necessarily become more rigorous over time."

It has not become more rigorous over the past four years. We can only pray that the Government will genuinely now become more rigorous at the eleventh hour. It is indeed the eleventh hour.

We welcome any improvements in police powers, in bail arrangements and in increasing the number of available criminal offences for the police to use against perpetrators of violence. However, may I again say how disappointed I am that after all this time, after several weeks of hype—Hillsborough, before Hillsborough and after Hillsborough—all that the Secretary of State can do is to promise to look at these matters. Even these matters are not promises.

If the right hon. Gentleman really wants to do something to improve policing and law and order in Northern Ireland, would it not be a better idea to accept the proposal that I put to him last Tuesday in our debate, that the Government should make a commitment to prevent police numbers falling further? Police numbers are falling the whole time. Would it not be a better idea to remove the uncertainty surrounding the future of the full-time police reserve in Northern Ireland, by making a commitment to continue with that reserve as long as is necessary?

On the vital matter of the peace process, on which all our hopes for the future of Northern Ireland depend, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there will be profound disappointment that all he said was that in future he would not hesitate to use powers that he has had and never used, despite blatant abuses of the ceasefire and breaches of the agreement? Does he not owe the House an explanation of why he did not use those powers when there were spectacular breaches, such as Florida, the FARC and Castlereagh, to name three? Does he accept that he has a real credibility problem, and that the only way he can overcome it is to answer clearly now the questions that his statement this afternoon raises?

First, what criteria will the Secretary of State use in future to trigger those powers? Will he accept the Chief Constable's determination that a breach has occurred? So that there is no doubt in the mind not only of the House, but of the people of Northern Ireland that the Government are turning over a new leaf, will the right hon. Gentleman tell us that if, in the future, events such as Florida, the FARC, Castlereagh and the targeting about which we heard in March and April come to light, those incidents would fall within his definition of breaches of the ceasefire and would in future, though they did not in the past, trigger his use of the powers which, up till now, he has left unused?

Secondly, if the right hon. Gentleman uses those powers—he is referring to introducing a motion in the Assembly to exclude from the Executive a party which is associated with a paramilitary organisation in breach of the agreement—what will he do if he does not get cross-community support in the Assembly? I asked him that question last Tuesday. He is depending on the Social Democratic and Labour party and Sinn Fein, for example, to exclude Sinn Fein. What will happen if they do not support him? Will he give up and say, "Well, I did what I could. There is nothing more I can do", and go back to the state of indecision and funk that we have had for far too long?

Thirdly, will the Secretary of State now explicitly reject the revolting idea that there is some difference between violence perpetrated by paramilitary organisations on their own communities and violence directed at, for example, policemen, soldiers or politicians? Will he reject that? Will he state clearly that all violence is equally unacceptable, and all violent breaches of the ceasefire and the agreement will equally qualify to trigger the powers that he has belatedly promised to use?

Fourthly, will the Secretary of State deal with another question left untouched by his statement? What will he do when breaches of the ceasefire or the agreement, or threats to peace in Northern Ireland, come not from organisations connected with parties in the Executive, so the idea of excluding the party concerned from the Executive would be an irrelevance? What will he do to gain greater leverage over such organisations?

I revert to the point that I made in our debate last Tuesday: will the right hon. Gentleman urgently concert, as I asked him to do, with the Irish Government and the American Government to put in place real financial and other penalties for any organisation that he may specify as being in breach of the agreement and the ceasefire? At present, as he knows, the entire specification system is a paper tiger—a sword of clay, I called it the other day. That is not good enough. Will he do something about it? [HON. MEMBERS: "This is not very positive."] I wish I could be more positive. I was hoping desperately for some real decision, for some real new move forward, for some new boost to the peace process. It is disappointing to us all that we have not had that.

Finally, in a spirit of constructive co-operation, I put five proposals to the Secretary of State last Tuesday, and we got no response at all to any of them. The Secretary of State was not able to refute the good sense of any of those proposals, but he was not willing to take them on—perhaps because of the "not invented here" syndrome. If he will not accept my proposals, does he accept the Taoiseach's suggestion—which the Taoiseach referred to as a determination—that decommissioning should be completed by next May? Will the right hon. Gentleman state unequivocally that no party will be allowed to serve in the Executive after the legislative elections next May if it has not fulfilled its obligations under the agreement or if it is associated with a paramilitary or other organisation that is in breach of those obligations?

The Opposition have always said—I repeat it now—that no peace process can succeed anywhere unless two fundamental principles are observed. First, there should be

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

balance, fairness and even-handedness between the parties. There should be no perception that one side is getting all the benefits and the other is being taken for a ride. Secondly, there should be a proper and rational structure of incentives. Rewards should follow performance. If there are breaches, there should be penalties, which should be enforced. I believe firmly that we have been right all along to state that the peace process will make no progress except on the basis of those principles.

I take comfort from the fact that there have been moments this afternoon when the Secretary of State sounded as though he accepted the good sense of that approach, at least in theory. More is required than to accept those principles in theory. They must be put into practice, which requires real toughness, sustained political will and a robustness that we have not seen from the Government over the past four years. That is why we are in this terrible position. I hope and I pray that at this eleventh hour and 59th minute the Government will show those qualities from here on.

Dr. Reid: If that is the hon. Gentleman speaking in a spirit of constructive co-operation, I would not like to see him when he is trying to be bombastic and pompous. He used the word vacuous. I listened carefully to his proposals, and I am afraid that vacuous would be too substantial a word to describe them. I did not pretend that I could solve this problem, but he omitted to mention that I made a number of proposals. He may not accept some of them, but they included new security measures, more troops on the streets, additional bearing down on armed gangs, the investigation of new legislative powers, a political initiative at a local level, the mechanism for shining light on paramilitary activity in the community, and an attempt to clarify the items that would be considered in a judgment on ceasefires. He may regard those proposals as inadequate, but they hardly bear comparison with his own suggestions, which as far as I could make out were to discuss matters with the Irish.

The hon. Gentleman's most offensive accusation concerned our promise and belief that the peace process would bring an end to deaths. It is true that there has not been an end to deaths. There have been six deaths this year, and that is six too many, but to act as though that is no different from 106 or 406 does not do justice to the people of Northern Ireland or to their achievements.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about police numbers. I wish he would study the facts. I have increased police recruitment by 60 per cent. above the envisaged target. I would increase the numbers even further if we had the physical and training capacity to do so. He also asked about the full-time reserve. He should understand that part of the process is to pass decision making to people in Northern Ireland. The Policing Board is discussing with the police a complete human resources strategy.

What the hon. Gentleman wants us to do with the Policing Board, however—which is to overrule it, and dictate—is exactly what he wants us to do with the membership of the Assembly itself. He does not seem to understand that the decision on exclusion lies with the Assembly, not with the Executive and not with the House of Commons. He suggested that we should simply ignore and overrule the Assembly.

I am empowered by Parliament to require the Assembly to consider the relevant motion on the holding of ministerial office—a point that has been put to me continually by the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). Following a breach of the ceasefire by the IRA, I would be ready to use that power as a means of enabling the Assembly to address these matters. I wish that the contribution of the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) had been slightly more constructive and slightly more related to reality.

Let me make two final points. First, I omitted to congratulate the hon. Gentleman on being reappointed to his position on the Front Bench, and to tell him that that probably brought me even more joy than it brought him. Secondly—this is a more serious point—I wish that he would remember that part of the reason why we have been successful in the peace process, in so far as we have been, is the bilateral way in which Members have supported it.

People will recall the days when, in the midst of a terrorist campaign and murder and mayhem on the part of the IRA, the last Conservative Prime Minister, John Major, conducted secret talks with the IRA. He denied that in the House. It would have been easy for the Labour party to make mischief on a parti-pris basis, which the hon. Gentleman sometimes gives the impression of doing. We did not do that. The magnitude of the project on which we are embarked is such that all of us should do all we can to keep partisan political point-scoring quite separate from genuine criticism. Not for the first time, I think that the hon. Gentleman failed to do that.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call another Member, let me ask for calm. I well understand the difficult situation and the emotions that we feel about Northern Ireland, but I ask for calm.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): There was one sentence in the statement with which I particularly agreed. The Secretary of State said,

> "People want us to face up to these problems honestly."

I think it would be a very good thing if there were frankness, openness, honesty and transparency in the Government's approach. In particular, although it is an uncomfortable fact for him, the Secretary of State must understand and appreciate that there is and will be no credibility—certainly in the Unionist community—in any judgment by any Secretary of State on whether there has or has not been a breach of the ceasefire. If such judgments are to be credible, we definitely need another mechanism. The Secretary of State has hinted that there may be one. A provision is essential to introduce an objective element, and to enable an audit of paramilitary activity to be conducted at regular intervals. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will undertake to propose such a provision as a matter of urgency.

The Secretary of State told the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) that in the event of a breach of the ceasefire by the IRA he would use his power to require the Assembly to consider a motion for the exclusion of Sinn Fein. I want the Secretary of State to reiterate that, and indeed to link it, as he should, with matters that he mentioned in his statement. He said that he would give particular weight to any substantiated information that a paramilitary organisation was training, targeting, or acquiring or developing arms or weapons. I ask him for a clear, unequivocal undertaking that if there is substantiated information about such activities, he will send the Assembly a motion of that kind to consider.

How many police officers have had to be relocated under the special purchase of evacuated dwellings scheme because of a terrorist threat arising out of the Castlereagh incident? How many have been relocated in the past couple of months? Is the figure not now well over 100? Were they not relocated because there was substantiated information on targeting? I ask the Secretary of State to respond specifically to that.

On police numbers, is it not for the Secretary of State to decide on the future of the full-time police reserve? Will he give an undertaking that, if he gets a request from the Chief Constable and from the Policing Board, to prolong the full-time police reserve, he will immediately and unequivocally respond positively to that request and continue the police reserve? I am fairly confident that he will get such a request.

Dr. Reid: The right hon. Gentleman asks four questions. I will take them in reverse order.

Precisely because I ultimately have the decision on the full-time reserve, I cannot say that I will always do everything that I am asked by the Policing Board. If the police and the Policing Board agree on a given course of action, I, as Secretary of State, would extremely rarely take exception to that action. That has applied in every instance that I can think of since the Policing Board was formed. I see no reason why there would be imminent exceptions to it. I hope that that gives the right hon. Gentleman some reassurance on the way in which I would view any recommendations from the Policing Board.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the number of police officers. He will forgive me if I cannot give him an exact number—I will write to him. I can say only that I think he is around the right mark. The last figures I heard were around 90, but they may have moved up to over 100. There is a range of reasons, but the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct: they are directly related not to substantiated evidence but to the main line of inquiry that has been followed into the break-in at Castlereagh and the—*[Interruption.]* I know that the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) is keen to speak. I am keen not to respond to all his sedentary comments. If he will encapsulate them in a question, I will respond to him.

The issue is connected with the line that has been pursued by the police. The major line of inquiry remains that the break-in was committed by republicans.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me two other questions, one on the ceasefires and the other on sanctions. On the ceasefires, I think that I have been as plain as I can today in outlining the circumstances under which these judgments are made. They have to be made in the round. By definition, they have to take account of information, sometimes information that has been upgraded to intelligence—there is a difference. Sometimes, for very obvious reasons, that information cannot be made public because it would put other lives at risk.

Obviously, a number of unforeseen factors have to be taken into account, but I have made it plain today, lest any clarification were needed or anyone were under any illusions, that I will take into account subjects such as targeting, weapons acquisition, development and the others that I outlined.

If there were evidence that a ceasefire had been broken, the right hon. Gentleman asked me whether I would be prepared to put a motion, as I am empowered to do by this House, before the Assembly. I have said that in those cases my general aim is to let the institutions flourish, to give them stability—that is my purpose; I am sure it is the right hon. Gentleman's too—but obviously the breach of an IRA ceasefire would constitute very grave circumstances indeed. Under the Belfast agreement it is for the Assembly to decide who sits in the Executive, but I am empowered by Parliament to require the Assembly to consider the relevant motion on the holding of ministerial office. In circumstances in which I decided that the IRA had broken the ceasefire, I would be ready to use that power, and to place such a motion before the Assembly to require it to address the matter.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Many Labour Members will have welcomed the statements—made in measured terms—by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State. In particular, we welcome the fact that not many new hoops have been created for pro-agreement parties to jump through to prove their bona fides. Will the Secretary of State explain what he means when he talks about "local political initiatives"? Are they coupled with his writing to the parties, and has he considered asking them individually—and collectively—to meet him to discuss how stalling can be prevented, and how they can co-operate to show the great advantages that have been achieved in Northern Ireland as a result of the agreement?

Dr. Reid: Yes, the two things are separate. It is not the only action that we are taking, but I thought that, in view of the debate and discussion that has occurred, the simplest way to begin was to write to everyone, asking them to offer reassurances in unequivocal language about their commitment to the principles on which they entered into the agreement.

My hon. Friend also mentioned trying to get local politicians, particularly at the interfaces, to establish a structured partnership or process, so that there are fewer surprises, earlier warnings and attempts to restrain both communities. That is a political local initiative, which I have asked the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne), to undertake. He began that process several days ago. It will be long and difficult because, whenever acts of violence are committed—whether here or in other difficult conflicts abroad—it is difficult to get people to speak to each other. However, it is worth undertaking that process. A level of good will exists on the ground among all the parties, and I hope that all parties that have committed to seeing the peace process work will be involved.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Will the Secretary of State accept the Liberal Democrats' continuing and, as I hope he will agree, consistent support—as a critical friend, but a supporter all the same—for the Good Friday agreement and the Government's sincere efforts to try to make the peace process work? Does it not strike him as curious that the Conservatives are taking such a hard line,

[Lembit Öpik]

given that their time in government proved unequivocally that they made significant progress only when they showed considerable flexibility in terms of their public comments and private actions?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the recent outbreak of violence and the deterioration of the situation in Northern Ireland should concern us all? He said that six deaths were too many, but I am sure that he will agree that one is too many, and that to that extent we have urgent and pressing business to attend to. Although it is of course sensible to deploy police and Army resources in areas of greatest difficulty and stress, does he accept that doing so nevertheless puts particular strain on those forces, particularly the police, who feel overstretched in other areas? Is he willing to listen to further representations—I know that he has already received some—about the police's resourcing requirements, in order to maintain overall and normal, as we might call it, policing of Northern Ireland in these difficult times?

Does the Secretary of State accept that, although there is always a strong case for increasing police powers, bail arrangements and so on, simply increasing the reach of the law will not in itself directly address the problem? In effect, it deals with the symptoms but not the underlying cause. Will he consider the fact that dialogue in the local communities of which he spoke is much more likely to address attitudinal difficulties? In the eyes of many who are motivated by those views, and the individuals who promote violence, the answer lies much more in the local communities, which are not being listened to, than in simply increasing the reach of the law.

On racketeering, will the Secretary of State consider increasing resources to prevent organised crime—for example, the ongoing haemorrhaging that is affecting the legal fuel industry in Northern Ireland as a result of illegal racketeering from the south, which unquestionably does, in large part, fund the paramilitary activities that he has been describing? Will he acknowledge, as I have, that the IRA statement—the so-called apology—limited though it was, was nevertheless an important statement? Does he agree that there are grounds for reciprocity in de-escalating a situation that has remained tense with little variation since the signing of the Good Friday agreement?

In that context, does the Secretary of State agree that trust and responsibility are extremely important, not only in this House but among the parties in Northern Ireland and that hon. Members have a responsibility not to destabilise the situation by trying to score cheap or opportunistic party political points? *[Interruption.]* If no party is guilty of that, why did Conservative Members start shouting when I made that point?

Finally, the Secretary of State said that he had written to the political parties in Northern Ireland to secure their commitment to the principles that he outlined. Would it be possible for him to share a copy of the generic letter that he sent to them? Fundamentally, does he agree that the letter and the response will have real teeth only if people and organisations in Northern Ireland are clear that they are not able to push this matter indefinitely and beyond unspecified parameters? In that context—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying the patience of the House. I must be fair. There is another statement and only a few Members have participated in questions on this one. I ask the Liberal Democrat spokesman to leave it at that and to let the Secretary of State reply.

Dr. Reid: I shall do so as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker.

It is true that all of us have a responsibility in this matter. I pay credit to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) for the contribution that he has made not only publicly but privately, behind the scenes, in a helpful manner. As far as the police are concerned, we are always open to representations and my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for security will no doubt be able to discuss that subject with him. On racketeering, he will know that the organised crime taskforce has scored some significant successes under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Minister. We have tried to supplement our efforts by bringing in Professor Goldstock. We have the police, the organised crime taskforce and Ron Goldstock, but if the hon. Gentleman has any ideas I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister would be happy to receive them.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that despite all the measures that we could introduce, security on its own will not solve the problem, nor will everybody in this House solve it. It has to be addressed by the parties in Northern Ireland, at a leadership and community level. If people such as me could solve the problem by going across that stretch of water and telling people what to do, it would have been solved a long time ago. I know my limitations, but I am committed to do what I can, as are the Government.

Finally—with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker—on paramilitary attacks, it is important, as the hon. Gentleman said, to recognise the level of violence on both sides of the community. Since the signing of the Good Friday agreement, there have been about 1,100 attacks of one nature or another, more than 700 of which have been committed by loyalists. It is essential to say that it is loyalist and republican paramilitaries who are involved and, very often, dissident republicans as well. It is wrong to give the impression that this is only a problem of the IRA. It is not. It is also wrong, however, to forget that the republican movement is in government in Northern Ireland. It therefore has an even greater responsibility than others to tackle this within its own movement, for its sake as well as for the benefit of the community in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I wish to join in the Secretary of State's message of sympathy for the bereaved family from north Belfast. I also welcome the right hon. Gentleman's statement today and the limited measures that he is capable of introducing to address the problem in Northern Ireland.

I endorse the answer that the Secretary of State has just given—that, primarily, the resolution of conflict in Northern Ireland is up to the Northern Ireland parties. That resolution will not be furthered or helped in any way by the fall of the democratic institutions in Northern Ireland. Does the Secretary of State agree that a threat to bring down the institutions that we have so carefully nurtured in Northern Ireland, on the basis that to do so would in some way assist security and the abolition of violence, is inexplicable? I endorse the increased forces being sent to the interface, because the people need some assurance that the terror that they suffer every evening will be ended. They need to see that the perpetrators are being pursued, and that it will result in prosecutions by the security forces.

The people of Northern Ireland are looking to the House today for a message of hope. The abandonment of the bipartisan approach and the debate that we have had today will do nothing to address the problems that we have. Will the Secretary of State ensure that our people can more easily believe that the Government treat loyalist and other paramilitary activity for what it really is? He said in his statement that he wanted action to be increasingly vigorous and more transparent. If that happens, it will provide an additional measure of confidence. I hope that today's deadline of 24 July and dissatisfaction—for good or bad reasons—with the Secretary of State's answer will not herald the collapse of the institutions that we have carefully built up in Belfast.

Dr. Reid: On the last point, I hope that it will not, because my purpose in saying what I have said today—with all the limitations that any Secretary of State must have—was not to undermine the institutions. My purpose was to buttress democracy. Herein lies a paradox that frequently confronts everyone who is involved in politics in Northern Ireland. Demands are made for more information, greater scrutiny, transparency and honesty and for the placing in the public domain of more information on levels of violence and paramilitary involvement. Although all violence is intolerable, it is at the same time feared that people will think that any incidence of violence should have the same consequence. It is difficult for people to address the issue, because they fear that the consequence for any act of violence would undermine the very institutions that were meant to replace the violence.

Several hon. Members have raised the issue of greater transparency, including the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, and I read in the papers that that is considered a sop to Ulster Unionism. In fact, the same matter has been raised by the leader of the SDLP and the leader of the Alliance party. Therefore, I was saying today not that I would substitute my judgment—which, ultimately, only I can make—but that I would try to find ways to place further information in the public domain that will allow the public in Northern Ireland to know exactly what is going on, in so far as we can do that.

I regret the drift away from bipartisan support for the agreement. One week we are told that the Opposition are supporting us in a bipartisan spirit, and the next week we are told that they are not. Another time we are told that they support the peace process as a whole, but that they object to all the bits of it.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): This morning, I stood in the home of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Lawlor, whose son Gerard was murdered in the early hours of Monday morning. Yesterday, I had the sad job of standing in the home of Mrs. Morgan, the widow of William Morgan, who was done to death by sectarian killers in the Tigers Bay area of my constituency.

I welcome the Secretary of State's comments, and the Prime Minister's earlier, joining us in sending condolences and sympathies to those families. It is only by the grace of God that some of the other victims of shootings in north Belfast were not murdered.

Does the Secretary of State agree that people look to Government in north Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland for leadership on what will happen to paramilitary organisations, and that they look not only for words but for tough and effective action? They will look today at this statement and hear these words, and there will be grave disappointment, even despair, throughout Northern Ireland, at the lack of any effective action to deal with the corruption of government in Northern Ireland, whereby a signal is being sent that it is all right to be democrats by day but to murder and be on the streets causing disturbance by night.

Does the Secretary of State further agree that it is incongruous to have [illegible] Government—an organisation, Sinn Fein-IRA—who refuse to support the police? I welcome the extra resources for the police and the Army, but that organisation refuses to support the police, refuses to recommend that information be given to the police, and refuses to condemn attacks on the police—the other day, its national chairman refused to condemn a murderous attack on a recruit to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Does the Secretary of State accept that all those reasons render Sinn Fein-IRA unfit for government in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Reid: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's opening comments, and the whole House shared the condolences and sympathies for Gerard Lawlor, and for the others who have been injured or murdered or who have suffered family pain.

On the question of leadership, yes, it does take leadership. Leadership is not always saying no. Leadership is not always shouting at the highest decibels. Indeed, in my experience, the effect and influence that one has is often in inverse proportion to the decibel level of the rhetoric that one uses.

I would venture to suggest to the hon. Gentleman that, since Gladstone, no one has given more time and leadership on this issue than my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I truly think that when the books are written, however much we may succeed or not, they will say that he gave a gigantic measure of leadership.

The hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) is a leader himself. He is a Minister; he is a Member of the Assembly as well as a Member of Parliament. I cannot remember whether he is a councillor, but he certainly has at least a duopoly, if not a triopoly, of capacity to lead. One of the great things about leading is that one must reach out beyond one's own base in order to lead, and it is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman, by the way he puts his arguments, sometimes gives the impression that he would want Sinn Fein excluded from government, not as a consequence of anything but as an objective of his own politics. I believe that when that is posited in that fashion, it is an abrogation of leadership in the context of Northern Ireland.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, despite all the setbacks, it is very disappointing indeed that the negative critics refuse to

[David Winnick]

recognise the amount of progress that undoubtedly has been made in the past four years, and the number of people alive in Northern Ireland who would not be if no agreement had been signed in 1998? Does he agree that it is unfortunate that the negative critics always harp on the negative, not the positive?

Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is an obligation on all the parties in Northern Ireland, including Sinn Fein, to denounce violence from whatever source it comes and to do so on every occasion, and to do so in practice?

Dr. Reid: I certainly hope that they will do so, and I agree with my hon. Friend. We can all complain that the rose bush has a thorn, but sometimes we should just rejoice that the thorn bush has a rose. On Northern Ireland, we have to appreciate just how far we have come, as my hon. Friend pointed out.

However, that is not the real test. As I said earlier, the real test is not, "Are we better?" because, for all the rhetoric that we sometimes hear, everyone in their senses knows that we are in a better position than we were once in. The real test is, "Are we in the position that the people in Northern Ireland have the right to expect us to be in?" They should have a right to expect, if we have not arrived at the destination, that we will at least still be travelling, and be seen to be travelling, towards the destination that gives them the same comfort, security, rights, equality and way of life as those that the rest of the people of the United Kingdom have.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Will the Secretary of State reflect that his statement was a woefully inadequate response to a desperate situation, not least because all the measures that he announced should have been common practice all along? Will he further reflect that the Government's failure to act decisively against paramilitaries and their political representatives can only increase the despair and disillusionment of law-abiding citizens in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Reid: Well, I will certainly reflect on what the hon. Gentleman asks me to reflect on. If he asks me for my instant reflection, I would say that, however bad the situation is just now, if it is a commentary on the inadequacy of the Government, then when we were 10 times worse in terms of killings and injuries, it must have been a fairly critical commentary on the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported for almost 20 years.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is not the honesty that we need about the situation in Northern Ireland the recognition that there are clear sides to the coin? On the one hand there are all the achievements that have been put in place since the Belfast agreement, and on the other, there is the continuing paramilitary activity, which is degenerating even further into Mafia-type activity. Perhaps all of us should try to ensure that we do not use a one-sided die of examples to push one matter or the other. Is not one way in which we can advance the principles involved in the Belfast agreement and ensure that peace is finally established in Northern Ireland action to cut off paramilitary funding? The House will consider the Proceeds of Crime Bill later today, and there is the work of the organised taskforce. That type of work shows that we are being tough on terrorism and taking action that should satisfy or bring on board those who are disgruntled with the developments that have taken place.

Dr. Reid: I agree with every word my hon. Friend said, and I do not need to add anything at all to it.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): This statement may offer security measures, and I welcome that, but in political terms it offers absolutely nothing new. There is no proposal in this statement to deal with the political crisis in Northern Ireland—and it is a crisis.

The Secretary of State says that there is no acceptable level of violence, yet he ignores Colombia, he ignores Castlereagh and he ignores the violence on the streets of Northern Ireland when he decides that the IRA ceasefire is still intact, so clearly there is some acceptable level of violence if the IRA ceasefire is deemed still be to be intact. So what confidence can we have that the Secretary of State will make a ruling in the future that the violence that has occurred, or that may occur in the future, represents a breach of any of the ceasefires? I must say personally that I do not have the confidence that the Government will act.

The Secretary of State says that he has written to all the political parties asking them to reaffirm the Mitchell principles. Can I ask the Secretary of State what the Ulster Unionist party, the Democratic Unionist party, the Social Democratic and Labour party or the Alliance party have done that requires us to reaffirm the Mitchell principles? Why is he putting those parties on a par with the paramilitary-related parties? That is an insult to the integrity of the democratic parties in Northern Ireland, which have forsworn violence and opposed violence at every turn. Why does he need us to affirm or reaffirm the Mitchell principles?

Dr. Reid: On the second point, no one is questioning the integrity of the hon. Gentleman or his party, but he will know that, throughout this process, we have used a combination of individual and collective approaches to problem solving, to overcoming challenges and to putting forward new proposals. On this occasion, it seemed sensible to do things collectively. I have no doubt that a reaffirmation for everyone committed to the principles would be a useful starting point.

As regards the hon. Gentleman's other comments, I will be quite honest with him. I owe that to him, as he owes it to me. Nothing I said today short of putting Sinn Fein out of government would have satisfied him. He has made that absolutely plain, as have several of his colleagues. His solution to moving the republican movement away from violence and into politics is to exclude them from politics. That is not to me intuitively a position that should be pursued at all times, given all the consequences that it has. I respect the hon. Gentleman's position—we have a disagreement over it but I do not question his integrity in reaching that judgment and I hope that he does not attack my integrity in reaching mine.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Does the Secretary of State not think that there should be some form of independent mechanism that would examine breaches in the ceasefire? Given the increasing violence in parts of Northern Ireland, does he not think that he should be sending out a message today that the full-time reserve will be maintained, and that that would be a very big confidence boost?

Dr. Reid: On the first question, my answer is no. I have the duty and the obligation to make the decision on the ceasefire. It will be my decision—I will maintain, not abrogate, that duty. As regards whether we can find a mechanism for putting into the public domain further information on these matters, that is another question on which I said I would consult. On the question of the FTR, the Police Service of Northern Ireland is already in consultation with the Policing Board. I have no intention of overruling the Policing Board, pre-empting it or taking away those rights—we have waited almost 80 years to get a cross-community board of elected representatives, and I will not pre-empt their decisions.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman pause for a moment and consider—if he wishes to buttress democracy and to increase confidence in the peace process, in which I wish him well—appointing at least an advisory committee on the ceasefire, consisting of Privy Councillors and perhaps chaired by somebody like Lord Bingham, the former Lord Chief Justice, who would bring an objectivity and a credibility to this whole process?

Dr. Reid: Having paused and reflected on the matter, were I to have such a committee, the hon. Gentleman would be a marvellous chairman. I am afraid, however, that I will not abrogate that decision. I will make the decisions, either de jure or de facto, as the law prescribes, as empowered by Parliament, and as obliged as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the measured way in which he has approached the subject. I also congratulate him on the amount of work that has been done. I find it disappointing that the Opposition take an opportunist attitude in relation to what has happened. As someone who has been to Northern Ireland on several occasions—the last occasion was just over a month ago—I have met many of the victims, including Omagh victims. I would suggest two or three small measures that may be of help.

The Prime Minister gave a pledge that he would meet the victims of Omagh after the bombing there. During the recess, during these difficult times, that promise could be kept. That may be a way forward. The people of Northern Ireland feel isolated—on the one side, there is a community who want a united Ireland, and on the other, a community who feel betrayed, for whatever reason, and who feel that the Government have let them down. I do not believe that that is the case, but during the recess, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland team, who have done a tremendous job, should pool all their resources to make sure that the people of Northern Ireland know that as long as they wish to remain British, they will continue to remain so.

If things deteriorate during the recess—I have a sense that things are very difficult at present—the House should be recalled. That is an important move that would identify—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I call Dr. Reid.

Dr. Reid: I thank my hon. Friend. I agree with many of his points. He makes a point of which it is worth reminding everyone. Northern Ireland is not only part of the United Kingdom but a greatly valued part—*[Interruption.]* Sorry about the distraction, Madam Deputy Speaker. I repeat that Northern Ireland is not only a part but a greatly valued part of the United Kingdom. That is one reason why I want all the representatives from Northern Ireland taking part in the debate here, which is where it should be held.

I also want all the representatives here to consider whether they should go to Northern Ireland to discuss matters with people locally. I know that my hon. Friend has done that, as have many Labour Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) has been across, and I hope that Conservative Members will also continue to make visits. Not only is that good for the House's knowledge of events in Northern Ireland, it is good for the people of Northern Ireland to see that representatives in the House exercise a continuing close interest in their affairs.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): May I gently put it to the Secretary of State that, in the light of the level of paramilitary violence in both communities in north and east Belfast and following the robust comments again from the Prime Minister a few minutes ago, it is inevitable that there will be great disappointment that no concrete proposals have been made this afternoon? We should particularly bear in mind the fact that the very limited apology that we had from the Provisional IRA last week took us only a tiny way forward with its weasel words about non-combatants. Does the Secretary of State agree that it should have said that the war was over? Then we would be making real progress.

Dr. Reid: Of course I would like the IRA to say that the war is over. I suspect, however, that the British Secretary of State demanding that would make it rather less likely to happen than the other way about. None the less, we would welcome such a statement. I welcomed last week's statement because of the strength of the apology and, if it was not an apology, it was at least an acknowledgement of the suffering of what it called the non-combatants. It is a step in the right direction.

Many little steps are being taken in Northern Ireland, including by the republican movement and by the loyalists. I am disappointed that, after the no-first-strike statement and my visit to speak to a Loyalist Commission audience, the events of the weekend should have happened. They were dreadful, and I am sure that everyone else regrets them.

If that process continues, it will bring lots of disappointments to lots of people, and I will perhaps be one of those who has my fair share of them. Finally, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for approaching me "gently" for the first time in his parliamentary career.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Was my right hon. Friend as sickened as I was by the comments attributed to the so-called Ulster Freedom Fighters that the murder of Mr. Lawlor at the weekend represented a measured

[Kevin Brennan]

military response? Was it not, in reality, a brutal and blatant attempt to wreck the peace process and the Belfast agreement? Is it not the responsibility of every democratic politician to work in a quiet, statesmanlike and calm way to ensure that such groups do not succeed?

Dr. Reid: I agree entirely. It was, to use the words of an Ulster Unionist Member, an act of pure naked sectarianism. It was an appalling act, and several appalling acts were committed over the weekend by the loyalist organisation that my hon. Friend mentioned or, in the case of another shooting, possibly by the Irish National Liberation Army. All were dreadful acts and they were motivated by the cancer of naked sectarianism that so often afflicts Northern Ireland society.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State will be aware of the promise in 1998 that was given in my constituency, and I know just how folk have reacted to the failure to live up to it. The right hon. Gentleman paid tribute to the Prime Minister by comparing him to Gladstone, but to whom would that give comfort in Northern Ireland?

May I press the Secretary of State specifically on the statement which talks about preparation for a terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland or elsewhere? In a recent answer that I received from the Prime Minister, I was told that home-bred terrorism is not looked upon as international terrorism. International terrorism is just al-Qaeda. Does "elsewhere" refer only to the United Kingdom or to those who are engaged in sharing as they prepare for campaigns in other places?

Dr. Reid: First—the hon. Gentleman may have misheard me—I did not compare the Prime Minister to Gladstone. Even I would not be as sycophantic as that. I said that my right hon. Friend had shown more leadership on this issue than any Prime Minister since Gladstone. I can see how the hon. Gentleman's mind is working: Gladstone—home rule; Blair. I must clarify the point that I did not compare them.

On terrorism at home or abroad, I have been as clear as I can. What has been suggested, not least by the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, is that the Government have been encouraging a belief in certain quarters that certain types of activity would be acceptable. The reason why we made today's statement—which I hope gives him a little more confidence—is that my publicly declaring my position means that anyone who required clarification or had suffered from any illusions in the past need do so no longer.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): The Secretary of State referred to Back Benchers who have recently had the chance to visit Northern Ireland, of whom I am one. I visited Stormont to speak to members of all the parties and visited the police. I also visited both sides of the divide in east Belfast to speak to community activists and representatives. Having been involved in community activity in my constituency in Scotland, I was very much taken by the need and ability of those people enthusiastically to discuss the prospects for peace in both their communities.

Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a wider role for Back Benchers of all parties in visiting Northern Ireland, taking the message of peace, acting as a catalyst for discussions and encouraging people from the parties that are represented by Members here at Westminster—irrespective of whether they take their seats—to act as a joint body to discuss the prospects for bringing the two communities together by building bridges instead of sheltering behind the peace barriers, which actually separate them?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend illustrates how much he has benefited from not only taking an interest in, but visiting, Northern Ireland. It is beneficial to the House when hon. Members can bring to it the experience that they have gained from doing so. It is also reassuring to people in Northern Ireland that, having achieved the principle of consent in deciding their constitutional status, and being a valued part of the United Kingdom, hon. Members take the time and trouble to visit Northern Ireland as they would other parts of the United Kingdom.

Accounting and Auditing Issues

4.48 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the interim report of the co-ordinating group on audit and accounting issues, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I are publishing today.

The world's capital markets rely on timely, true and fair financial reporting, underpinned by high standards of auditing and accounting. We have all been shocked by the major corporate failures in the United States at Enron and WorldCom. It is incumbent on the Government to be vigilant and to take the necessary action where required.

Audit and accountancy standards in Britain are different from those in the United States: different and, as is now widely acknowledged, in some respects better. That is partly the result of changes made here following the UK's own corporate scandals of the late 1980s. However, there is no room for complacency. The millions of people who invest in our companies, whether as individuals or through their pension funds, look to the Government to ensure that our own financial reporting regime is as transparent and effective as possible.

That is why the Chancellor and I set up a co-ordinating group on audit and accounting issues in February, chaired by the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), who has responsibility for competition, consumers and markets, and by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, and comprising the principal regulators. The interim report shows clearly what needs to be done to build on the strengths of the current system. The Government welcome the group's proposals.

We are extremely grateful to the group for its hard work in producing the interim report, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

In responding to the interim report, let me stress that this is not about piling unnecessary regulation on the vast majority of companies that are honestly and properly run. But the actions of a few are damaging the reputation of all, and by taking sensible steps to strengthen corporate governance and financial reporting, and thus to restore investor confidence, we will benefit business and our economy as a whole.

I turn now to the proposals contained in the interim report and the Government's response. A key recommendation is for tougher mechanisms to reinforce auditor independence.

First, the group proposes, and we agree, that we must strengthen and enhance the role of audit committees. The audit committee should act more clearly on behalf of the shareholders. It should make recommendations to the shareholders on the appointment of the auditors, and underpin auditor independence; for example, by approving the purchase of non-audit services from the auditor. We welcome the work that the Financial Reporting Council will oversee to develop improved guidance in the combined code.

We need to ensure that audit committees are effective and can act independently of the executive directors. Audit committees should therefore be made up entirely of independent non-executive directors. Derek Higgs's review of non-executive directors is obviously crucial in that respect. We need also to develop the competence of audit committee members; for example, by developing available training.

Secondly, we agree with the report's conclusion that the principle of audit partner rotation should be extended to other senior members of the audit team and that the time scale for rotation of the audit partner should be cut from seven to five years. On the rotation of audit firms, the Treasury Committee, whose report was published yesterday, argues that there is a strong case for the mandatory rotation of audit firms, as well as audit partners and teams. We, and the group, will want to consider its report very carefully. The Chancellor and I are therefore asking the group over the next few months to look more closely at audit firm rotation, including the possible implications for competition in audit services, and to report by around the end of the year.

Thirdly, the group says that we need to look in more detail at the need for a further tightening of the rules governing the extent to which auditors can provide non-audit services to audit clients. We agree, and I have asked for recommendations on that important point in the group's final report. I have also asked my Department to consult on changes to regulations under the Companies Acts to improve the disclosure by companies of the nature and value of non-audit work provided by their auditors.

The group also wants to see much greater openness and transparency by the major accountancy firms in relation to their own processes, practices and structures. We agree with that too. One approach under serious consideration is to make such transparency compulsory for those audit firms undertaking the statutory audit of major companies. We will consider that with the recognised audit supervisory bodies by the end of the year.

We also agree with the group that there should be an early review of the way in which the accountancy industry as a whole is regulated, including the role of the recently established Accountancy Foundation and its related bodies. Despite the efforts of Lord Borrie and his colleagues in the Accountancy Foundation, the new arrangements have not progressed as rapidly as we had hoped. The Chancellor and I have therefore decided to conduct an immediate review of the regulatory arrangements to see whether there are sensible structural improvements that should be made. That will include the question of future funding arrangements for the foundation and take into account the work to be undertaken by the review board on the arrangements for monitoring the work of auditors.

The group also highlights the importance of proper international accounting standards. Given the increasing globalisation of capital markets, it is essential that our own Accounting Standards Board works closely with the international board to improve the transparency of company reporting. It is particularly important that such standards are developed to address share options and other share-based payments systems, which have played a significant role in the current concerns. That issue can be dealt with only at an international level, so I welcome the fact that the international board is giving priority to developing such standards.

Of course, standards, whether national or international, must also be effectively enforced. I agree with the group that the financial reporting review panel should develop a

[Ms Patricia Hewitt]

proactive role as well as simply responding to complaints. I know that the panel is already looking at such a change, and we fully support moves to develop current practice. The group suggests that the Government should consider the adequacy of the current enforcement arrangements more widely, and we will do that as a matter of urgency.

Finally, the group recommended, and we accept, that the Department of Trade and Industry and Treasury consider with the Office of Trading whether there are any competition implications arising from the high concentration in the market of audit and accountancy services for the largest firms, and whether any of the other proposals in the report have competition implications.

I also remind the House of the important provisions contained in the Government's White Paper on company law reform, which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary published last week. In particular, we have decided to introduce a statutory statement of directors' general duties; to require large companies to provide an operating and financial review, covering non-financial areas also, such as strategy and risk; and to place a legal obligation on directors to volunteer relevant information to the auditors and to give auditors the statutory right to ask for company information from employees and certain contractors.

In preparing its interim report, the group was mindful of the fact that high standards of financial reporting and audit regulation are promoted in the United Kingdom in a number of ways, ranging from statutory or independent regulation to self-regulation, voluntary codes of best practice and market pressure. The effectiveness of the UK's arrangements must be judged by considering the combined effect of those various elements. The group's recommendations, too, must be seen in the same light, as a package of measures.

This is only an interim report. The Chancellor and I have asked the group to carry on its work and to deliver a final report around the end of the year on progress made in all those areas. For our part, the Government will act quickly in response to the recommendations that fall to us to take forward. But success will require action from everyone—from the regulators and the profession. I also challenge UK companies to make a difference, and welcome the fact that many are already doing so.

As the co-ordinating group and, indeed, the Treasury Committee have both said, the status quo is not an option. The measures that I have announced today will ensure that the UK has the best possible regulatory regime that will benefit our companies, our capital markets and our economy alike.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I welcome this early opportunity to address some of the issues that have recently caused great concern on both sides of the Atlantic. I am glad that the Secretary of State decided to announce the publication of the interim report by way of an oral statement to the House, a practice that I hope she will continue to follow wherever possible. I am also grateful for a copy of the statement, which I received about an hour ago, and for the chance to glance at the report. I have obviously not had time to read the report from cover to cover but, from what the Secretary of State said, I am sure that there is much on which we will agree. I welcome the broad tenor of those aspects of the report to which she referred.

For the sake of clarity, will the Secretary of State confirm that what she said today refers only to listed companies? I hope that before long she will be able to say whether the Government accept the need to raise the turnover threshold above which unlisted companies are required to undertake an audit to a more realistic level.

Events in the United States have inevitably caused anxiety in Britain among employees, shareholders, creditors, customers and the general public. I agree that our accounting and auditing practices are sufficiently different from those followed in the United States to give us confidence that the problems that have arisen there are less likely to occur here. The vast majority of British businesses are honestly run and the vast majority of audits are responsibly conducted. We should not proceed on the assumption that the actions that occurred at Enron, which are the subject of criminal investigations in the United States, are widely practised in Britain.

It is right, however, to review matters from time to time. We should never be complacent about the risk of uncovering a damaging financial scandal in this country. The restoration and maintenance of full trust in accountancy, reporting standards and audit procedures is important to ensure that business continues to have access to the funds that are needed to sustain growth.

The overriding need is for the response to the current anxieties to be proportionate to the risks involved. It is important to distinguish between the more onerous requirements rightly imposed on listed companies and other categories of companies which, although subject to audit, do not need to meet similar demanding standards.

On the specific issue of audit firm rotation, we should proceed with caution in considering the Treasury Committee recommendations.

I have reservations about the idea that firms should be compulsorily rotated after a relatively short period. The costs would be substantial and would fall on the businesses concerned, and therefore on their shareholders and customers. Furthermore, an audit firm taking on an audit for the first time is not necessarily better able to scrutinise the operations of its client. However, rotation of audit partners and senior staff is a very different matter, and, subject to proper recognition of the special or different circumstances of smaller accountancy firms, I welcome the report's recommendations.

I agree with the concerns that have been expressed about separating audit work from consultancy. It is important that there should be a clear statement, breaking down into individual categories of work the fees that are received for non-audit work, which are paid to firms that act as auditors. I hope that the Secretary of State will give her support to that.

With reference to the Secretary of State's decision to conduct a review of how the accountancy industry is regulated, will she indicate its likely terms of reference and the timetable that she envisages for its completion?

On the development of international accounting standards, does the Secretary of State accept that however desirable that may sound, Britain should not abandon our principles-based approach in favour of a rules-based system merely in pursuit of harmonisation? I would welcome a review of the accounting treatment of share options, however, and I hope that that would reflect the fact that share options are effectively a form of employee remuneration.

Giving audit committees more responsibility seems sensible, although perhaps the Secretary of State could enlarge her comments about training for non-executive directors.

Where the employees of an audit firm wish to join their client's payroll, proportionality should again be the watchword. It is clearly right that partners in charge of the audit should be subject to a cooling-off period before being able to move across to the former client. Restrictions on more junior staff who have worked for an auditor would not be justified.

On the question of whether there is sufficient competition between accountancy firms, I am sceptical about the value of an OFT inquiry. It would be expensive, time consuming and possibly unproductive. Will the Secretary of State say whether her Department has received any complaints from businesses about the alleged inadequacy of competition between accountancy firms?

The Secretary of State rightly distinguished between the United States' approach, which is rules-based—as long as all the boxes have been ticked the requirements appear to be satisfied—and the British approach, which requires the auditors to present a true and fair view. Does she agree that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has adopted the United States' rules-based approach in his concealment of substantial public liabilities arising from PFI and PPP schemes? That dishonesty and off-balance-sheet accounting sits ill with the Chancellor's consistently repeated claims that large sums of public debt have been repaid. Surely the British people as shareholders in all public projects, however financed, deserve to be treated in at least as open a manner as shareholders of the companies about which the Secretary of State has spoken.

More generally, the loss of trust in the audit process, whether in the public or the private sector, weakened confidence when financial markets were already vulnerable. The effects of that weakening of confidence range widely, extending to pensions, jobs, endowment mortgages and many other matters. Nevertheless, despite those risks, our response should always be in proportion to the dangers involved. The essence of what is now needed is not necessarily more regulation but better regulation.

Ms Hewitt: May I begin by welcoming the hon. Gentleman to his new portfolio on the Conservative Front Bench? I am grateful for his general support for the statement.

On the issue of large versus small companies, some of the proposals that we are making apply only to large companies—for instance, the proposal for an operating and financial review, which will really apply only to the 1,000 largest companies. Of course, the greatest impact of the proposals that I have announced this afternoon will, rightly, be felt by the listed companies. I remind the House that a few years ago we raised the threshold for statutory audit to exempt a large number of small firms from that onerous requirement.

I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman that we do better to have a principles-based approach to accountancy standards than the detailed check list of rules that has been adopted in the United States. I think that the United States is likely to move more in our direction in that respect, but I agree that we should not sacrifice our own approach even if doing so would achieve greater international harmonisation.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are arguments for and against rotation of audit firms. I observe that the Australian and the Irish Governments, who recently reviewed that issue, both came down against proposals for mandatory rotation of audit firms, but, as I said, we will consider that in more detail before arriving at a final view.

I hope that I made it clear in my statement that I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for much greater transparency about the purchasing of non-audit services from the audit firm. We will consider that matter further, but I think that the proposal that we have already accepted—that audit committees should approve the purchase of non-audit services from their auditors—will be helpful.

When reviewing the regulatory framework we shall look at the entire structure. I shall in due course publish more detailed terms of reference, but we want to conduct that review as quickly as possible, building on the work that is already being done by the various bodies. I hope to be able to report on that piece of work around the end of the year.

Of course, share options should properly be regarded as part of the pay package of employees and directors of a firm, but it would be wrong of our country to act in isolation in that respect. That is why I welcome the fact that Sir David Tweedie and his colleagues at the international board have said that they will deal with the issue and propose appropriate standards.

The hon. Gentleman raised the specific question of skills and training for non-executive directors. As part of his wider review, Derek Higgs is to consider the skills required for non-executive directors and how we can widen the pool of appropriately qualified people. However, it is disturbing that there appears to be no properly agreed definition of the competences that are required of members of audit committees in particular. That is certainly a matter to which the regulatory and professional bodies should pay attention.

On the issue of competition, the Office of Fair Trading will, naturally, want to consider both the report published today and the Select Committee's report published yesterday. As far as I am aware, no complaints about lack of competition in the market for audit services have been made to my Department.

On the hon. Gentleman's final point about broader Government issues relating to accounting practices and public finances, let me make it clear that since he became Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend has ensured that, for the first time, the assumptions that underpin each year's Budget are independently audited by the National Audit Office. Public-private partnerships are properly accounted for in line with international best practice. When it comes to transparency and robustness of the fiscal framework, we are among the best in the world, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman—in an otherwise welcome response—did not acknowledge that.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I welcome the statement, as far as it goes—which is not all that far—in making proposals on the tightening up of audit and accounting practice, especially the tentative moves towards rotation of auditors and separation of audit and consultancy practice. However, does the Secretary of State agree that if changes such as rotation are to be meaningful, there must be far more competition? It is impossible to envisage real competition in an industry dominated by only four companies. I welcome the move to the Office of Fair Trading reference, but does the right hon. Lady agree that the only logical outcome that would increase competition is the break-up of one or more of the large accounting companies? Is that an outcome that she would welcome?

I welcome also the move to strengthen the independence of audit committees in companies. Does the right hon. Lady agree that for that to become effective, there must be much more far-reaching reform of independent directorships following the Higgs review? Does she agree also that at present the largely self-selecting group of non-executive directors means that a few individuals hold far too many directorships and are unable to provide the focus and professional supervision that companies need?

The right hon. Lady has not referred to fraud. Is she consulting the Law Officers on how to introduce a tougher approach to real financial fraud? Are there not still too many cases, such as Allied Carpets a few weeks ago, where crooked directors who steal from their shareholders are treated far more leniently by the criminal justice system than criminals who rob the same amount from a bank? There must be a tough and consistent approach.

Finally, I turn to international standards. If it is correct, as the Secretary of State says, that British standards of practice are exceptionally high, how does she intend to protect those standards when harmonisation takes effect in 2005? Will she explain why it is, if British standards are relatively high, that in the months that have passed since the Enron crisis, the FTSE index in London has fallen even more precipitately than the Dow Jones index in New York?

Ms Hewitt: We shall reduce the period for audit partner rotation from seven years to five, and extend the requirement of rotation to other senior members of the audit team. Those are two specific and, I believe, thoroughly desirable actions that we are taking as a result of the interim report.

On competition, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Office of Fair Trading recently conducted a review of the market for audit and accountancy services. It reported on that in its report on competition and professions. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge, it found that small and medium-sized companies in the United Kingdom have an extensive choice of auditors and accountants. As the hon. Gentleman and the OFT acknowledge, there is much less competition in the market for large company audit and accountancy services. However, there was no indication in the OFT report that that produced a problem of inadequate competition.

It is worth stressing that when we talk about this relatively concentrated market, we are talking about the largest firms—some national, but most of them international—that increasingly buy their audit and accountancy services from multinational firms in an increasingly global marketplace. It is not an issue for the United Kingdom alone, but one which the OFT will be examining and which I and my colleagues in the Treasury will be discussing with it.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need to broaden the pool from which companies recruit their non-executive directors—far too few are drawn from too narrow a pool. That is precisely why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I invited Derek Higgs to conduct a review of the role and recruitment of non-executive directors. We await his findings with interest, and I shall return to the House on the matter in due course.

As for fraudulent, criminal behaviour by a small minority of company directors, my Department acts with great vigour in investigating complaints that are brought to us, or of which we have become aware. Where necessary, we disqualify directors whose behaviour makes them unfit to hold such office. In the past two years, we have disqualified a couple of thousand company directors in pursuit of our powers.

The hon. Gentleman referred to international standards. Our own Accounting Standards Board is already working closely with the international board, and with our partners on that board, to ensure that we get the best possible standards at an international level so that companies in the UK, in an increasingly global and interdependent economy, have the benefit of best-practice standards at an international as well as a national level. In this global and interdependent economy, although the problems on which we are particularly focused have arisen in the United States, the shock waves are felt in stock markets right across the world, and despite the underlying strength of our own economy here in the United Kingdom our own stock market is not immune from those shock waves.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement. It is important that we all recognise that the Government are being seen to try and restore a sense of confidence and trust in a profession that has taken, perhaps, an undeserved battering, but a battering none the less in recent months.

On the rotation of auditors, we must also take account of the audit office with only one client. Over-dependence on the one office was part of the problems of Enron, apart from the illegality involved. In Italy, firms are rotated for auditing purposes, but often the staff remain the same, because in a particular location there are not the people to undertake the work. We must be sensitive to the problem. It is not just a matter of partners and senior staff; there must be a more comprehensive look at the issue to avoid that situation.

Lastly, does my right hon. Friend hope to incorporate in the new companies legislation, which has been circulated in draft form, the constructive proposals that will come out of the consultative process? Is it intended that before this time next year, we may have a companies Bill nearing Royal Assent, which will include the very creditable proposals that she made in her statement today?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. On audit rotation, he is right to draw attention to the practical difficulties, in some cases, and the competition implications of the proposal for compulsory firm rotation. That is why we want to consider that and have the group consider it in more detail before we make a final decision. In any case, it is very important that commentators do not get fixated on one particular item that is being considered, when there is a package of measures that needs to be considered as a whole, because that is how it will have its effect.

On the companies Bill, the Minister with responsibility for competition, consumers and markets, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), published the White Paper last week, including 200 or so draft clauses for a future companies Bill. We will, of course, examine closely the responses to that consultation and we will move ahead as speedily as we can to publish further draft clauses for what will be a major piece of law reform—certainly, one of the largest Bills that my Department or probably any other Department will have introduced. My hon. Friend will understand that I cannot pre-empt future Queen's Speeches, but I can say that we are determined to introduce that Bill as soon as we can, and to make that law reform in this Parliament.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): There is much to welcome in the right hon. Lady's statement. She will be aware of the report of the Select Committee on the Treasury this week, and its proposals on audit committees. We proposed that audit committees should be required every five years to consider whether the audit firm should be rotated, and that if the audit committee decided that there should be no such rotation, the reasons for that decision should be made clear to shareholders in a statement. Is the Secretary of State attracted to that proposal, and if not, why not?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the statement. He is a long-standing member of the Select Committee. We will want to respond in detail to the Committee's report, which was published yesterday. I noticed in particular the proposal that the audit committee should consider rotation of the audit firm after five years and should report fully on why, if it does not do so, it has chosen not to do so. That seems a helpful and practical suggestion, and I have no doubt that the group will consider it carefully, as we shall.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and I am pleased that she has found time to read the Treasury Committee's report, as it has only just become available. We took important evidence from Sir David Tweedie, who chairs the International Accounting Standards Board, especially on the way in which the industry is financed, which is by raising income from companies. He gave examples of companies that have tried to put pressure on accounting firms, because they are paying the fees for the operation. That led us to conclude that an alternative structure for financing the accountancy industry should be examined, and we suggested that it be done on a similar basis to that which applies to the Financial Services Authority. Has my right hon. Friend had time to think about that recommendation?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. We shall closely consider the Select Committee's proposal. I shall certainly not make a snap judgment on it, any more than I would on its other proposals. The Select Committee drew an analogy with the FSA. As I said, we will consider the funding arrangements for the Accountancy Foundation as part of the review of the regulatory structure.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the Secretary of State accept that her proposals are greatly welcomed in the round by Conservative Members, but company law reform is a matter of enormous importance for capital markets and for the true value that can be placed by shareholders and others on the public interest. Does she agree that, in reviewing the duties of directors, auditors and others, it is imperative that an arrangement is made in company law to protect those people? They know what is going on inside a company at a given time, and they know in good time what is going wrong. They should be protected and insulated if they whistleblow and tell shareholders or the public in general what is going on. That was the key problem with Enron. Accountancy firms often have an intrinsic interest in the fee structure, and the Secretary of State could reflect on that. Would she be good enough to give me a response?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. A crucial part of our proposals for company law reform is to spell out in statute the duties of directors. One of the deeply unsatisfactory features of current company law is that it is almost impossible for a non-executive director to find out what his or her legal duties are, because they are buried in several different statutes and in case law. We are also proposing that independent directors should be able to get advice from Companies House about the application of those duties.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific point about how we protect directors who are whistleblowers, we will consider whether the legal protection that we have already put in place for whistleblowers needs to be strengthened through company law.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is it generally true, or is there a soupcon of special pleading in relation to small auditors, that if non-audit services are divorced from auditing, the cost of auditing goes up not marginally but significantly? That problem affects many small companies.

Ms Hewitt: I am not sure whether the provision of non-audit services is an issue for small audit firms. It has been raised as a matter of concern in relation to large audit companies that can secure substantial fees for non-audit services to clients for whom they also provide audit services. I am not sure that the same concern applies to small audit firms, which tend to concentrate on purely audit and accountancy services.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The Secretary of State is right to eschew complacency, but does she accept that doubts will persist for as long as the accountancy profession is effectively judge and jury in relation to complaints made against it, meeting behind closed doors so that there is no opportunity for the quality and extent of investigations to be evaluated?

Will the right hon. Lady accompany her rather timid proposals with an undertaking to consider more radical ideas for reform, including the establishment of a fully independent regulatory system, a complete separation of audit and non-audit practice, making the issuing and audit

[Adam Price]

of defective accounts an offence in law, and the imposing of fines commensurate with the financial costs of malpractice—to be paid to those affected rather than, as is currently the case, to accountancy bodies themselves?

Ms Hewitt: I have already made plain our approach to the separation of non-audit from audit services. As for the investigation of complaints and breaches of the disciplinary rules, following the creation of the Accountancy Foundation we have seen a strengthening of the independence of the investigatory system. Nevertheless, I am not satisfied with the present position, which is why I announced this afternoon that we would review the entire regulatory structure. One option that may be considered is a move to the fully independent regulatory system that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests as a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her statement, and on the priority she is giving to driving up standards in corporate governance and financial reporting? However, following the remarks of the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—a preface that I never thought I would use in this place—I think there is a case to answer in relation to the treatment of the private finance initiative and public-private partnerships. I think that the question of the National Audit Office, and that of the international standards of best practice that my right hon. Friend mentioned, need to be re-examined.

Of course it is a bit rich for the Conservatives to talk of something that originated in the dying days of the Major Administration when they had lost control of public borrowing, but—as is made clear in early-day motion 1668—there is great unease in the profession, which fears that this is a device to wipe legitimate Government debts from the Government balance sheet. If we are to have a greater effect on the matters that my right hon. Friend has cited, our own house ought to be clean and clear.

Ms Hewitt: Public-private partnerships are not, as my hon. Friend seemed to imply, a way of trying to keep public sector debt off the balance sheet. PPPs are designed to add private finance to infrastructure investment where it is badly needed, and to introduce more innovation in the provision of public services along with better management of, in particular, large-scale infrastructure projects.

Complications arise when it comes to assessing the risk-sharing that takes place in PPPs, but I think we are getting better at that. I entirely endorse the principle of transparency commended by my hon. Friend, which is precisely the principle that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has adopted.

Increasingly, PPPs are fully reflected on the public-sector balance sheet. The Office for National Statistics, which helps to audit the risks and the accounts, has been placed on an independent footing by the Government.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I do not think that that will do. Everyone who has looked into the matter knows that the treatment of the PFI and PPPs in the public accounts is manifestly inadequate. Everyone knows that a number of contingent liabilities should almost certainly score in the accounts, but they do not. Following the many letters of comfort that have already been written, surely some value should be placed on them and they should score above the line, as they would in many cases in the private sector. When I raised this matter with the Chancellor, he said "We are following best private-sector practice." The obvious rejoinder was "We have just had some Enron economics."

In every other respect, unfortunately, I rather agree with what the Secretary of State has said. I thought her statement excellent, and I feel able to support it. My only question is this: a number of the proposals will involve a substantial increase in the compliance burden on firms so when the proposals are presented, will the Government publish a rigorous assessment of the full compliance burden?

Ms Hewitt: I simply do not accept the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the standards of public accounting. The fact is that we are one of the very few countries that fully comply with the international, generally accepted accounting practice standards for public-private partnerships. We are following international standards and international best practice in that respect.

On the hon. Gentleman's other point, which was rather more relevant to my statement, we are looking and will look carefully at the compliance costs. But I repeat what I said in my statement, and I hope that he will accept it: a more robust regulatory framework and a system of financial reporting in which people can have full confidence is hugely to the benefit of our businesses, our investors and our capital markets alike.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I particularly welcome what my right hon. Friend said about strengthening the rules on the consultancy work that auditors can undertake, at least in the case of larger companies. I urge her to give guidance to the working group to make those rules as strong as possible and to move to a position where the general rule is that auditors should not carry out consultancy work for the firms for which they carry out an audit. Does she accept that there will always be a problem with public confidence and a risk of conflict of interest when an accountancy firm receives large fees from a company to act as an auditor while receiving fees for non-audit services whose very continuation depends on the audit wing of the firm giving the company a clean bill of health?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Some principles are already in place, in particular the rule that auditors should not make management decisions or audit their own work, but I think that the group's approach is sensible. It will look at a much more careful definition of the kind of non-audit services that it would not be acceptable for auditors to provide—those that do not cause any threat to the independence of the audit and those that may be acceptable but only with proper safeguards. A more careful analysis of the different kinds of non-audit services that may be provided by audit firms will provide the basis for much better and more transparent decision making in the sector.

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): As a chartered accountant who qualified through the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland, I support the proposals in so far as they are set out here today. Does the Secretary of State agree that regulation of the profession is the key to restoring public confidence in financial statements? Does she accept that the current situation is a mish-mash—not even the accountancy bodies and professionals understand how it operates—and that until we have Government-sponsored regulation, the confidence of those who use accounts will not be regained?

Ms Hewitt: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the current situation is pretty complicated. That is one reason why we are taking a fresh look at the whole structure of the professional oversight of accountancy, the regulatory framework and the oversight of that regulatory framework. I am not particularly attracted by the idea of the Government becoming, presumably, the sole supplier of audit regulation, but we will look at that as part of the review of the regulatory framework that I have announced this afternoon.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): Will the proposals to have only independent non-executive directors on audit committees apply only to companies on the full list of the stock exchange? Generally speaking, I am concerned about the consultation period, in so far as it looks as though the proposals are being to some extent bundled up with the companies Bill. That Bill was sent out for consultation for several years and I am sure that it will be a lot better because of that. There is concern that the time in which these complicated issues will have to be reviewed by the profession and by other stakeholders will not be adequate.

Ms Hewitt: Obviously, the proposals relating to audit committees will apply only to those firms that have to have audit committees, and clearly that does not include every firm.

On the speed of decision making, as I have said before, we should not rush into knee-jerk reactions to a problem that has arisen in the United States, where there is a somewhat different framework. At the same time, it is important that we build on the work already done—in some cases, over a significant period—by the various existing regulatory and professional bodies. Where there is a clear recommendation from our co-ordinating group that action is desirable, we should take it. The measures that I announced this afternoon fit well within the much broader framework of company law reform that we are pursuing, and which was preceded by extensive consultation.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Some have suggested that a WorldCom or an Enron could never happen here. It is instructive to note that the further away the proponents of that proposition were from the City of London or from company management, the more certain they were of it. I am less sanguine. Does the Secretary of State accept that accountancy standards bodies should look at the treatment of goodwill and capital asset valuation, particularly by those companies that have grown through multiple acquisitions?

Does the Secretary of State understand that an accountancy firm acting as an auditor has a principal responsibility to the shareholder, whereas an accountancy firm acting as a consultant has a responsibility to the company and its directors? As the interests of directors and shareholders often diverge, I am disappointed that she has not made rather more clear the view that there should be a separation of those two provisions.

Ms Hewitt: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's first point—we certainly should not be complacent about the situation here. We are not, and that is why we are taking the action and commissioning the further work that I announced this afternoon.

The issue of how goodwill and capital assets are valued has not so far been raised in the reviews, but I am certainly happy to look further at it. On audit and non-audit services, it is precisely the different interests and responsibilities, and the conflicts that can arise between them, that give rise to people's concerns about the fact that audit companies are making so much money from selling non-audit services to their audit clients. There are arguments on both sides of this complicated issue. Not every non-audit service necessarily raises a conflict of interest with the provision of audit services as well. That is why we have asked the group to look at the matter in more detail and take further evidence before we make a final judgment on whether there should be tougher regulation.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Further to the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie), does the Secretary of State agree that the Government should lead by example on transparency of audit? Is she aware that the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee, on which the Financial Secretary sits, are both very concerned about the fact that Network Rail's huge liabilities do not appear on the Treasury's books? When it comes to stamping out Enron-style accounting, should not the Government practise what they preach?

Ms Hewitt: As the hon. Gentleman will doubtless be aware, the judgment of the Office for National Statistics—which recently looked at precisely this issue in respect of Railtrack—has been backed by Eurostat, an independent international body.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Does the Secretary of State accept that, contrary to the impression given in the press and in her statement today, the Treasury Committee came out in favour not of mandatory rotation of audit firms, but of the principle of rotation, saying that the decision should be left to strengthened audit committees? Is that not precisely the sort of third-way solution that should appeal to the Government and to her?

Ms Hewitt: Of course it is already open to audit committees to choose to rotate audit firms but, as I said, there are strong views for and against mandatory rotation of audit firms. There is, on the one hand, a suggestion that some of the worst problems arise in the early years of a new auditor; on the other, there is the assertion that one finds what is going wrong with a new auditor or financial director.

[Ms Hewitt]

It would be sensible for us, through the co-ordinating group, to look at the evidence more fully before judging whether to make the rotation of audit firms mandatory as well as the rotation of audit partners and senior audit teams, on which we have already decided.

Points of Order

5.40 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish to raise an issue of which I have given prior notice to Mr. Speaker. I have also given prior notice to the hon. Member for Strangford (Mrs. Robinson), in contrast to her attack on my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) in her speech on Monday night.

On 18 July this year, the *Newtonards Chronicle* published an article entitled, "Robinson lashes Belfast agreement in Commons", in which she also attacked my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann, the leader of the Ulster Unionist party. The piece began:

> "Strangford MP Iris Robinson has addressed the House of Commons on the Opposition day debate on the Northern Ireland peace process."

I was most confused when I read those words because, having attended the debate, I had no recollection of the hon. Member being called. In fact, a later close inspection of the *Official Report* confirmed that she had not been.

The hon. Member for Strangford did speak in Monday evening's summer recess Adjournment debate. Another inspection of the *Official Report* revealed that her remarks were almost identical to the speech that the *Newtonards Chronicle* obviously believed she had delivered to this House almost a week ago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek your ruling on two specific matters. First, do you consider it appropriate for an hon. Member to claim to have delivered a speech in this House when that was not, in fact, the case? Secondly, is it not a serious breach of parliamentary convention for an hon. Member to release to the press a word-perfect copy of their intended remarks to the House in advance of them actually being delivered—at least four days in advance, in this case?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): On behalf of the Speaker, I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving Mr. Speaker notice of his point of order. Mr. Speaker has inquired into the matter.

It appears that the speech quoted in the press was given in the House after it had been printed in the newspaper. What is published in the press is primarily a matter for the newspaper and for the hon. Member for Strangford (Mrs. Robinson). But this is not a practice that the Chair would encourage.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): On a point of order Madam Deputy Speaker. This is further to a point of order that I raised yesterday about an incident in which a written answer to me was read out by a Minister in another place before it had been delivered by the Department to me. Baroness Ashton has written me a letter of apology, which I fully accept—I do not regard her as in any way responsible. None the less, may I seek a ruling from the Chair that such conduct is unacceptable and that Departments are expected to achieve a better standard in dealing with answers to right hon. and hon. Members?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is most unfortunate that the terms of the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question were given in the other place in the way that he described yesterday, before the question had been answered in this House. As he has said, he received a holding answer to the question on 22 July and the Department is to reply fully today. The Minister concerned has written to the him. May I suggest that he leaves it at that?

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It has been reported in the press that a number of questions tabled by right hon. and hon. Members have been lost, mislaid or just not answered by Ministers. Will you inquire of the Government during the recess how many questions are outstanding and check that all those questions have been answered by the end of the recess?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I regret to inform the hon. Member that that is not a matter for the Chair. Perhaps hon. Members who have outstanding questions will pursue that with the Departments or the Table Office.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I draw your attention to the increasing practice of releasing unfortunate announcements on the last sitting day? There are 170 planted questions on the Order Paper today. One of them is the announcement of the loss of 400 jobs in the defence industry, including 100 at West Freugh in Scotland, 150 at Aberporth in my constituency, and the closure of Llanbedr in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). The arrangement of the business has been such that we do not have a motion for the Adjournment of the House today under which we could raise the announcements that the Government like to release on the last sitting day. Is it in order to describe that arrangement of the business and the way in which that announcement—which will affect 150 of my constituents—has been made today as a despicable act?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman will be disappointed with my reply, because I must tell him that the practice is entirely in order.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Chancellor announced the outcome of the comprehensive spending review on Monday last week and I presumed that "comprehensive" meant that it covered the whole of Government spending. Following the statement, on Tuesday the Secretary of State for Education and Skills said next to nothing about spending on higher and further education. I tabled a written question for answer on Monday of this week asking how much spending was expected in the HE and FE sectors for the current year and next year according to the previous CSR, and for the next three years according to the new CSR. On Monday, the Secretary of State's answer was the standard one that she would reply as soon as possible. This afternoon, on our last sitting day, I received a further answer, which gives the figures according to the previous CSR, but says that figures for the present CSR will be announced later. Neither part of that answer can conceivably have been unknown to her when the answer was provided on Monday. Moreover, the actual figures that she says will be announced later must have been calculated long since. Is it acceptable for the Secretary of State to refuse to give out figures in response to a Member's written question simply because it would be embarrassing for her to do so at this stage and because she would rather hide them until a time of her choosing?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am somewhat pleased to say that the content of answers from Ministers is not the responsibility of the Chair, but I note that the Secretary of State is in her place and has no doubt heard the hon. Gentleman's comments.

BILL PRESENTED

DOMESTIC COMBINED HEAT AND POWER (REDUCTION IN VAT)

Alan Simpson, supported by Sir Sydney Chapman, Mr. Andrew Stunnell, Dr. Brian Iddon, Llew Smith, Sue Doughty, Dr. Ian Gibson, Mr. Simon Thomas, Mr. David Drew and Julia Drown, presented a Bill to reduce the rate of value added tax levied on domestic combined heat and power units and on the costs of their installation: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 14 November, and to be printed [Bill 192].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 105) (HC 1069), on Invest to Save Budget Round 4 Projects and Local Government On-Line, which was laid before this House on 9th July, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Education

Lords Reasons for insisting on certain of their amendments to which the Commons have disagreed, considered.

Clause 10

POWERS OF GOVERNING BODIES TO FORM OR INVEST IN COMPANIES TO PROVIDE SERVICES ETC

Lords Reason:

The Lords insist on their Amendment No. 12 and disagree to the Commons Amendment No 12A for the following Reason—

Because the provisions on the formation of companies are not good practice and have not been thought through.

5.49 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): I beg to move, That this House insists on its disagreement to Lords Amendment No. 12 but proposes the following amendment (a) to the words restored to the Bill by that disagreement, in page 7, line 12, at end insert—

'(6A) In exercising the power conferred by subsection (5) the governing body of a maintained school shall have regard to any guidance given from time to time (in relation to England) by the Secretary of State or (in relation to Wales) by the National Assembly for Wales.'

I am delighted to welcome back the shadow Attorney-General, in his new roving brief, to his now frequent place on the Front Bench in an education debate.

I first wish to put on record our regret at the unfortunate incident yesterday when the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) heard an answer to a question to which he had not yet received a reply. That was an administrative slip by the Department and we are sorry about it. I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that no discourtesy was intended.

I shall now focus on the substance. We shall be disagreeing here, in the next hour, on one simple issue: whether we turn agreement in principle to support innovation, into practice. The issue is whether maintained schools should have the same freedoms to form and participate in companies devoted to educational purposes as private individuals, the private sector, independent schools and city technology colleges already do. This is a matter of freedom and of fairness. We often talk about both those areas; now we can legislate for them.

These clauses will put at the disposal of schools a convenient legal form to buy services at keener prices or sell goods and services to spread best practice, and the gainers will be pupils. The question is not whether there are any activities for which it is essential for schools to form companies, but whether the company structure can make it easier for schools to do so. The clear answer is that it can.

Companies enable groups of schools to establish a single legal identity, overcoming the problem of multiple contracts that would otherwise exist. They provide a vehicle for schools to share expertise with other schools; to benefit from economies of scale; and, crucially, to limit their liability. They are a trusted means by which some of our best schools can spread good practice and good ideas around the education system.

Labour Members believe that if schools think that it will be useful for them to form companies, they should be free to do so, subject to some important safeguards. They must not be compelled to, but they can.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Would the hon. Gentleman clarify for the House whether a company that is set up under the Government's proposals can trade outside the education world; in other words, can it sell services into the private sector?

Mr. Miliband: I am happy to answer that question. The matter was discussed at some length in the other place, where it was made absolutely clear that the purpose of setting up a schools company was to trade educational services if it was a service delivery company. If it was a purchasing company, obviously it would be purchasing services for the benefit of schools, but this is for educational purposes.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because it is an important point. Would he regard, for instance, a grounds maintenance contract as such, and if so, would the company set up to offer a grounds maintenance service to a group of schools also be able to offer it to the local hospital, or to private residents?

Mr. Miliband: The potential for private companies to offer ground maintenance contracts already exists. The measure that we are discussing now would allow schools to do that. It would not allow them to offer such services to hospitals or to other bodies, as the hon. Gentleman said; this is about schools coming together to offer services, of a widely varied nature, to other schools. That is the point that we are making. I think that that is a clear answer to the hon. Gentleman.

Let me consider the four objections that have been raised in the nearly 10 hours of debate on these issues. The first objection is that these clauses might be a means by which the private sector could take over schools, but that completely ignores a fundamental point: there are clear restrictions on the role of any company in schools. The fact that a school may be a member of a company does not loosen these restrictions in any way, and where schools contract with companies, they work under the orders of the governing body.

For a very long time, governing bodies have had the power to contract out many things, such as catering or teacher supply. What they cannot do is relieve themselves of their duty to "conduct the school". The fundamental duty to run the school always remains with the governing body, which retains the overall responsibility for who works at the school. The school company clauses do not change that a bit. School companies will be able to supply services to schools in the way that private sector companies currently do—neither more nor less. Schools run schools. Private sector companies can currently help them. In future, if this legislation is passed, school companies will also be able to do so.

The second objection that has been raised is that in some way the existence of companies will increase the liabilities that the public sector might face. But that ignores the fundamental point that one of the main advantages of companies is the limitation of liability. If a group of schools conducts an activity as an unincorporated association, they face unlimited liability. If they incorporate as a limited company, they can limit that liability.

In that context, it has been said that the LEA will be liable for a company's debts. Let me address that point. That is true only of purchasing companies. The key point is that that is no different from the current position. LEAs are already liable for the purchasing decisions of schools. There will be no change—LEAs will remain liable for purchasing debts of schools, whether the schools purchase individually, or through a company as an intermediary. The only difference is that in purchasing with other schools through a company, a school can benefit from economies of scale to get better prices.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Minister is talking at some length, and I have no doubt that he will develop this point, with regard to the statutory liabilities of a local education authority. In fact, in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), he says:

> "It would not . . . be possible for a company or . . . other body to 'take over the running of the school', because the governing body cannot contract out the duty to conduct the school."

Moreover, he seems to avoid the fact that this provision in clause 2 clearly enables the Secretary of State by order—by statutory instrument—to confer on the applicant "exemption from any requirement", including statutory duties imposed by education legislation, or to relax any such requirement. I am sure that the Minister would appreciate that in fact this provision, in this Bill, is new and novel, and is not dealt with under clause 20, and that therefore there will be a significant difference, once this Bill has passed, in relation to the statutory liabilities of education authorities. The Government have it in their own Bill and there it is in the proposed statutory instrument.

Mr. Miliband: The first thing that I should point out is that I was criticised on the last occasion for not speaking for long enough, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not chiding me for detaining him for too long.

Secondly, the running of a school does remain the responsibility of the governing body—that is an important point—whatever contracts a governing body enters into. That is the situation now and that will be the situation in the future. In relation to the liabilities—

Mr. Cash: The Minister really cannot get away with that. He talked about "in the future", but in the future, under the provisions of clause 2, it is quite explicit that there is the capacity for the Secretary of State to make provision exempting applicants—which includes local education authorities or qualifying schools—

> "from any requirement imposed by education legislation;"

or

> "relaxing any such requirement"

and it applies also to statutory instruments and all subordinate legislation. It cannot apply in future because we do not know, unlike the Minister, how the Government are proposing to apply the legislation.

Mr. Miliband: Unquestionably, now and in the future, governing bodies are the people who will remain responsible for running schools. There is no disagreement about that. As we discussed last week, the issues in relation to clause 2 refer to exemptions that relate to education law. The situation—*[Interruption.]* Will the hon. Gentleman let me finish my point? The situation in relation to governing bodies remains. The statutes governing the role of the governing bodies are laid out and they will continue to be in force. So I do not think that the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman is unhappy with the detail that I have given him, I would invite him in his speech to develop his point at some length; I will certainly come back in my winding-up speech to any new issue that he raises.

I was explaining about the issue of liability. Any company wishing to borrow money will need the LEA's consent—we discussed that point at some length on a previous occasion—so the prospect of any company getting into debt is minimised by the sensible provisions in the Bill.

Let me deal with the third objection that has been raised by hon. Members. It is argued that these clauses provide new ways for profit to be taken from the education system—a point that has been raised by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis). In fact, the purpose of these clauses is to do the opposite—to allow any profit that is gained from selling services to remain in the education system, rather than going out of that system into the private sector.

Mr. Willis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Miliband: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, we have only an hour to debate this and I shall be criticised later for taking too much time if I am not extremely careful. Will the hon. Gentleman let me make my point? I promise him that I shall return to it once he has made his speech.

Mr. Willis: That will be too late.

Mr. Miliband: No; the hon. Gentleman has already had one bite at the cherry. I shall see whether I can answer his point later.

What the clauses do allow for the first time is that where a school has a valuable idea that could benefit other schools, it can get a proper return for its idea. For example, if a school develops some curriculum materials and wants to market them, it can do so. It can go into partnership with others and sell a CD-ROM, and can make a profit. There is nothing new about companies selling CD-ROMs to schools to make a profit. What is new is that the school can share in that profit. These clauses introduce new ways to make a profit.

Finally, it is said that in some way these clauses will increase the work load of governors or head teachers. But I simply say that whether or not to get involved is entirely at the discretion of the schools themselves. We trust them to make the right judgment about whether getting involved in such ventures is an intolerable imposition on them. If a school decides that getting involved will be beneficial, it is taking the decision that any work involved will be worth while given the return on the investment.

6 pm

Against all that we have heard no substantive objections in principle. In fact, we have heard protestations of support for those clauses. A number of detailed points have been made to us. They are mainly utterly spurious, but I should just run through them. It has been said that the Government have a hidden agenda to have companies take over the operation of schools—wrong. It has been suggested that those proposals will, in some way, increase the exposure of schools to liability for sports injuries—completely wrong. It has been suggested that these proposals might create liabilities in relation to school trips abroad—wrong.

It has been said that school companies might be able to start trading with the public—wrong. It has been suggested that disreputable persons, in the words of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), might somehow get their clutches on schools—wrong. I do not know whether he was thinking of some of his Opposition colleagues when he was spoke of disreputable persons, but I promise him that there will be a proscribed list, and he can send a long series of suggestions to add to it.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the Minister in the other place made it quite clear that, in fact, the Government would respond to the proposals that we made last week, and they have done so by proposing that there will be changes in those persons who can become members of companies. I think that we won that point, does not he agree?

Mr. Miliband: If the hon. Gentleman consults the record, he will see that I answered him very fully, and I look forward to his list of proscribed persons, or that of any hon. Member, when the time comes.

To pick up the hon. Gentleman's last point, we have listened carefully as these debates have gone on over nine and a half hours—nine hours and 31 minutes, in fact—and important changes have been made, as a result of points made in the House and in the other place. We believe that we have met the concerns that have been raised.

I believe that this now boils down to a question of trust. The Opposition may think it a question of trust between them and us; it is actually a question of trust between central Government and schools—whether or not we trust our schools to do sensible things with the freedom that we propose to give them.

It is impossible and undesirable to legislate for every possible eventuality. It is much better to put in place a sensible framework to manage risks and to leave our schools and LEAs to the task of making the proposals work. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) has now joined us. We have not had the pleasure of his contributions so far during this debate, but he arrives at a very opportune moment.

Although the Opposition talk about free schools, they argue against this perfectly sensible freedom. They talk about enterprise, but they vote to deny opportunity to enterprising schools. They say that they want less bureaucracy, but they oppose a simple option for schools that want to work together. They say they want innovation, but they deny schools the chance to develop and share new ideas.

When we decide the question of school companies today, we decide also whether schools and the public sector should have the same ability to gain from good ideas as the private sector already has. It cannot be right that, while the private sector can profit from its ideas, schools are not even allowed to compete. These proposals put that right. So the dividing line today is trust. Do we trust our schools? During a Committee sitting that I remember well, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West described these proposals as "exciting", and he was absolutely right.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister was not excited; he was signing his letters.

Mr. Miliband: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I was extremely excited when he said that in Committee.

Lord Baker of Dorking—a figure who should bring cheery smiles to the faces of Conservative Members—described these proposals as "a very welcome development", and he was right. I do not want to scare off too many of my hon. Friends by continuing that litany, but there has been cross-party and Cross Bench support for these proposals. The issue is: do we now trust our schools to make a reality of the freedoms that we wish to give them?

Do we allow them the opportunity to decide for themselves; or do we prevent them from doing so now, before we have even given them a chance? The Government say, yes, we should give them the freedom; the Opposition say no, even though they claim to say yes. I hope that the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West and other hon. Members will join the House in voting to trust schools today.

Mr. Cash: I think that the Minister is perhaps in danger of misleading himself a little bit. For example, these proposals have been rejected twice by the House of Lords for extremely good reasons. I pay tribute again to the shadow Ministers in the House of Lords and, indeed, to my noble Friend Lord Kingsland, who came in and buttressed our arguments. This is not just a matter exclusively for the Conservative party because we have had significant support from the Liberal Democrats. Indeed, the arguments that have been developed have further endorsed those that we have put forward over a prolonged period.

I have to say that, yet again, I am disappointed by the Minister's response. He is not dealing with the mechanics; he generalises and says that this is what the Government would like to try to achieve. He talks about trust; but, in fact, the Government are not telling us why we should trust them. Why should we trust a Government who are clearly hiding behind the Bill, to which they have proposed to make changes without coming clean? For example, the Minister still has not answered the question that I asked with regard to clause 2.

It is absolutely crystal clear that, under clause 2, the Government propose to make exemptions and disallow the statutory liabilities that currently apply to schools, including all qualifying schools and local education authorities, and to enable them to be exempted by statutory instrument from their statutory requirements relating to education, and the Minister knows that. He has just referred to the question of what would happen in the future, but he also knows that he has given me no answer at all about whether the question of the application of those statutory instruments would apply to school companies.

Furthermore, the Minister may be aware of the article in *The Observer. [Interruption.]* This Minister is very extraordinary; when he comes up against something that he does not like, he either smiles disingenuously or he waves his hands in an extraordinary fashion. The fact is that in an article headlined, "Blairite blueprint to turn schools into companies", Gaby Hinsliff dealt with a very substantive issue. She said:

> "The plans for a range of new non-profit-making companies across public services have been drawn up by Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt with three other Cabinet Ministers."

I should like to ask the Minister whether he will deny that. The articles says that

> "Hewitt is working with . . . the Education Secretary . . . and the Home Secretary on a consultation paper to be drawn up".

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): A secret plan.

Mr. Cash: It is not a secret plan; it is out in the open now.

The Minister for School Standards knows perfectly well that such proposals apply not only to the Bill, but to Network Rail, the tube and hospital contracts as well. The bottom line is that the article says:

> "It is seen in Downing Street as a 'third way' between part-privatisations that have infuriated trade unionists, and the old model of a public sector too closely run by Whitehall."

The fact is that the Bill is intended to try to allow people to dodge their educational liabilities, as laid down by statute up to and including the Bill, and to try to create what we regard as perfectly reasonable proposals if only they could be made to work.

Commercial freedom for school companies would be proper only if they could overcome the obstacles that we have already described. I set out those obstacles in the debate last week, and they include the problems of over-regulation, the problems of companies having to employ accountants and lawyers and the problem of liquidation when a company goes bust. Neither the Minister nor anyone in the other House has yet addressed those questions.

I should be grateful to the Minister if he would address the points that I made last week with regard to what happens when a company goes bust. We have had no answers to those questions. No answer has been given by the Government to explain how LEAs will carry out their obligations to support any school that goes bust. There is no indication whatever about how the redundancy will be dealt with, about whether the creditors will be paid out or about the impact on small businesses.

We have asked the questions, but we have received no answers. The plan fact is that the Minister and the Government are incapable of answering those questions; otherwise, by now—this must be the third, fourth or fifth time that we have put them—they would have come to the House and attempted to explain them.

There has been no explanation. When the Minister talks about the meaning of the words in the Bill, he should be reminded of Lewis Carroll, whose character Humpty Dumpty said to Alice that words mean what we choose them to mean, and that the question is who is to be master, that is all. That is what lies at the root of this problem. The Government have a Bill, they have a majority, and they will, one might assume, get the Bill through this afternoon. It will then go back to the House of Lords, where they have been defeated twice. The schools company provisions go to the heart of the manner in which the Government intend to carry through this Education Bill. We accept that it applies to groups of schools, but the bottom line is that it is an inadequate way of dealing with the problems that have arisen, as expressed repeatedly in both Houses in previous months. The Government have not given us any answer whatsoever. No answers have been given to me, to my noble Friends Lord Kingsland and Baroness Blatch, or to the Liberal Democrat spokesperson in the House of Lords, Baroness Sharp.

In her answer to the proposal in another place that this matter should be considered again, Baroness Ashton of Upholland said:

> "I shall make the positive case for allowing schools the freedom to join companies. The argument is simple and one in which another place sees considerable merit. It is that this is another way of giving schools more freedom, more opportunities for partnership and more room to share good practice."

That is what the Minister said just now. The problem is in relation to Baroness Ashton's comments that the general powers are already contained in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and that companies can already be created to facilitate the running of schools. What the Minister completely fails to understand is that the change that the Bill introduces does not simply allow groups of schools to join together. The combination of clause 2 and clause 20, which is prefaced by the words,

> "Subject to any other statutory provisions",

leaves a hole with which the Government are not prepared to deal. They cannot and will not tell us how in future—to use the Minister's words—they propose to use the powers to exempt local authorities from their current statutory liabilities. Were the Bill to go through with these clauses in it, a new regime, of course, would arise. The Minister has a responsibility, however, to explain to the House exactly how clause 2 will work, and to put that in the framework of these provisions.

Turning to the objections that were raised in debate in another place, Baroness Ashton said that

> "there is nothing in the creation of a limited liability company that would increase the liability for the public sector—quite the opposite."

Again, the Minister referred to that in embryo. The problem is that it is not the creation of a limited liability that would increase the liability for the public sector necessarily but the consequences of going bust. That is our point. Baroness Ashton continued:

> "Schools may not transfer assets to any other body or person without receiving proper consideration."

If a company has gone into liquidation, however, it will not, of course, transfer its assets. It will be dealt with by the consequences of liquidation. The Minister owes us an explanation on that account, too.

In relation to a school company failure, Baroness Ashton stated:

> "If a school company fails, the liability of the company member is, in the case of a company limited by shares, limited to the unpaid amount on the shares—if any—or to the nominal amount of the guarantee, in the case of a company limited by guarantee."

[Mr. Cash]

She continued:

> "During our debate, there seemed to be a sense that there was something surprising about that. There is nothing in any way unusual about it".

What she completely failed to appreciate, however—I shall ask the Minister to respond to this—is the impact on the schools. That is the real difficulty. She went on:

> "Noble Lords will know that, to minimise the likelihood of a company's getting into difficulty, we said that the LEA would have a role as supervising authority for the companies."

Again, that does not deal with the fact that it is not a question of minimising the likelihood of a company getting into difficulty; it is a question of whether we can prevent the company from getting into difficulty by taking appropriate action at the right time.

6.15 pm

I must now admit that some progress was made—the Baroness offered a further safeguard, to which the Minister did not refer, which greatly surprised me. She stated:

> "We have decided that, under the regulations, companies will provide an interim financial report to the supervising authority as well as annually audited accounts."

I welcome that. It reflects to some extent, perhaps, my remark that we had to know before a company went bust what its financial position was. It is certainly true that an interim financial report and audited accounts would be a step in the right direction. That does not, however, alter the ultimate question: if a company goes bust, what will happen?

The question of profits, which the Minister raised with my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West, was dealt with in the other place in previous debates. We have still not had a proper answer to the question—several contradictory answers were given—of where the profits would go. One Minister says that the profits will go back into the school, while the other says that the profits will be shared. Baroness Ashton stated:

> "The profits will be shared, and school members of companies will receive their due amount."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 July 2002; Vol. 638, c. 220–23.]

Will the Minister explain exactly what the Government's position is on the question of profits, and for what purpose those profits will be used? Will he also deal with the question of what would happen if there are losses? That is the other side of the equation.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Does my hon. Friend accept that what the Minister seems to misunderstand in saying that schools should be able to make a profit is that the other side of a profit is the risk? People and private companies who make profits generally do so by risking some of their assets. If, for instance, a school company were to publish a CD-ROM, it would risk money in publishing that CD-ROM, which it may not recover. That loss—the company may even have borrowed money to pay for it—has not been explained by the Minister.

Mr. Cash: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point, which also relates to a point that was raised by the noble Lord Dearing. He asked what would happen in relation to the capital and the servicing of these companies. He asked a very important question, which has not been answered, and which I ask the Minister, again, to answer. What skills will be available to these companies? From where will they get advice? Do they have the kind of skill to be able to assess the risk to which my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) refers, which, in certain cases, could be very considerable in terms of capital outlay? Are they capable of making the right decisions? Furthermore, will they be able to get access to the capital? I think that the noble Lord Dearing stated that he, or somebody that he knew, had come across circumstances in which someone who had engaged in CD-ROM activities tried hard to transfer the project into the private sector, but, unfortunately, had neither the capital nor the skill to be able to do so. My hon. Friend therefore asks an important question.

The Minister also referred to insurance liability in his opening remarks. We do not need to go into all the points that I placed on the record in the previous debate that we had on this issue. However, when a company overtrades or faces legal liabilities, he simply cannot say, "Oh, well, insurance and school trips do not come into this." The fact is that liabilities can accumulate from a variety of sources and a company could be afflicted by substantial liabilities. If it gets into difficulties, what will happen in practice?

The Minister also touched on the membership of the companies. We have made slight progress on this issue. Lord McIntosh was replaced by other Ministers after a long stint dealing with these issues.

Mr. Miliband: It will be the hon. Gentleman next.

Mr. Cash: There is no prospect of that. We are dealing with the issue extremely effectively, and the Minister may find that he is replaced if he does not do a bit better.

The bottom line is that Lord McIntosh referred to crooks, but the Minister seemed to dismiss that suggestion. He seems to think that there is no question of crooks taking over schools, but Lord McIntosh clearly thought that that was a possibility. I will not repeat what went on in another place, but it is clear that the Government have conceded that the individuals who will not be able to join companies will be those who are not currently permitted to be school governors or to teach. That is a step forward in response to our representations, and we are partially grateful. However, it took an intervention from me for the Minister to recall what was said in the other place. As we are now dealing with the same clauses, I presume that what was said in the other place will now be binding on him. I would be grateful for confirmation of that.

The Minister also has a responsibility to explain the manner in which governing bodies will operate. In exchanges with my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West and in relation to the written reply that was held up, the question of whether the governing body can or cannot contract out of the duty to conduct the school raises an issue in relation to clause 2. The Minister therefore has an obligation to the House to explain it. In particular, how can anyone prevent a school from delegating functions to a company? If it did, what would happen? That also raises the question of who foots the bill. Is it intended that staff will be brought in—supply teachers and others—and, as a matter of principle, do the Government intend to dispense with existing staff when, for example, they find that the school does not operate in a way that they would like? Is it possible that the school would end up with locums and supply teachers? What do the unions think about that?

Throughout the entire proceedings on the Bill, Ministers have completely failed to answer the questions that I have put in this House or in relation to issues raised in another place. For example, Lord Northbourne asked the Minister in the other place

> "whether the companies, if they are to be limited by guarantee, will be supervised by the Charity Commissioners".

We have not had an answer to that question because, as far as I can see, the Minister in the other place did not reply to it.

The question of whether the local education authority would be a fall guy if things went badly wrong was raised in the same debate. The Minister in the other place again did not answer that question except by reference to the simple statement that the Government keep on making. She said:

> "It is important to understand that the Government do not seek to do anything that would force anyone to set up a company."

The bottom line is not whether anyone is forced to do that, but whether the powers are available. Presumably the Government intend that those powers will be implemented. If they are implemented, will the Minister be good enough to explain what will happen and on what scale? Is it intended—I would like him to give a straight answer—that companies at large would be created under the Bill's provisions? Is it intended to use the powers to deal with a problem that the Government believe already exists in education, or have they been introduced simply because the Government think that they might be a good idea but are not prepared to issue the guidelines or code of practice to ensure that they are implemented?

The debate has gone on between the two Houses for a long time and it has raised questions that the Government are not prepared to answer. That has been the prevailing characteristic of our debates from beginning to end. The Minister says that there is no hidden agenda, but he does not attempt to answer the questions. He hides behind provisions that are so wide that my noble Friend Lord Kingsland referred to the Government view in his concluding remarks to the debate in the other place. Referring to Baroness Ashton, he said:

> "What the noble Baroness thinks Clause 10(1) does and what it does are two entirely different things."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 July 2002; Vol. 638, c. 230–36.]

He is completely right. Clause 10(1) states:

> "The governing body of a maintained school may form . . . companies . . . (a) to provide services or facilities for any schools . . . (b) to exercise relevant local education authority functions."

As my noble Friend said, it is clear from the Bill that services can be provided because "relevant education authority functions" are teaching services. Indeed, there is no limit to the extent to which that can be done.

The plain fact is that the Government are not prepared to answer our questions or to explain the Bill properly. That is why we will persist in opposing these provisions. They are not in the interests of schools, governing bodies, teachers or children. They are our first priority. There may be something to be said for giving more freedom, but the manner in which that is being done, the mechanism that is being employed and the complete void that is left in the absence of the Government providing clear answers ensures our continued opposition to these provisions.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). He should abandon his European campaign and work full time on these issues. As ever, he made an incredibly valuable contribution. I shall not go over the issues that he raised, particularly that of liability, in respect of which we have still not had a satisfactory answer.

The Minister says that this is ultimately a matter of trust. Lord Dearing referred to that point in the debate in the other place yesterday. I accept that it is a question of whether we trust the Government, but the Liberal Democrats do not, simply because far too many questions remain unanswered.

I wish to raise the issue of individuals taking out profit—a subject on which the Minister would not allow me to intervene. He cannot have it both ways. In Committee, the Minister then responsible for the Bill—now the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness—made it clear that it was possible for the individuals who had put capital into the company to take out profit. That is in direct contradiction to what the Minister has said in this debate. The Government cannot have it both ways. Such contradictions are totally unacceptable.

The Minister says that there is nothing new about this—that schools have been involved in such activities for as long as he can remember. I can remember a little further back than he can, and he is right. One has to ask why we need this huge sledgehammer to crack a relatively small nut. For example, charitable status is not covered anywhere in the Bill. Why is it possible for some of the largest independent schools in the country to be run on the basis of charitable status when it is not possible for a small company set up by a school or a group of schools to do the same?

6.30 pm

As regards the governing body, Baroness Ashton of Upholland endeavoured to be helpful in another place yesterday, and genuinely tried to answer the questions, but in so doing she created more confusion. As the Minister said today, the governing body plays an important role. The hon. Member for Stone is right—clause 2 cannot disregard all educational legislation. I presume that would include provisions in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, which sets up the current basis of governing bodies and, indeed, the provisions in the Bill that supersede them. The Minister should look at what has happened in Guildford in the case of King's college and 3E's Enterprises. That involves a private company running King's college with the responsibility of putting a majority of its people on to the governing body. Irrespective of whether we agree with that, that is the reality. The Government want to set up more academies that will be semi-independent schools with their own boards of governors, which can be run by a company, and the company can put its own shareholders on to that governing body. That is a huge contradiction with what the Minister said today.

On teaching, Baroness Ashton said yesterday:

> "My Lords, the governing body could not bring in wholesale teaching."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 July 2002; Vol. 638, c. 234.]

[Mr. Willis]

But it can. There is nothing to prevent a school from saying to a teacher agency such as Select, "We want you to provide all the teachers for our school." So it was frankly dishonest to say that a company cannot do that. That is why we do not trust the Minister—we are not getting the right answers. *[Interruption.]* Well, perhaps it is that we cannot get the answers that we want.

Mr. Brady: Before the hon. Gentleman moves on, the now famous written answer that I received today suggests that the Government are trying to hide behind a very precise interpretation or legalistic use of words. It says that

> "the conduct of a maintained school must be under the direction of a school's governing body."

It is perfectly possible under the direction of a governing body for the services of the school—the provision of education in the school—to be provided by a company.

Mr. Willis: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, that is exactly the point that we have been making for the past three and half months. The Government seem unable to grasp that simple point. Whether it is right or wrong, we simply want them to accept that it is the reality. We can debate the merits of it until the cows come home.

When we debated the amendments last Monday, we talked about a backstop and the responsibilities and duties of the local education authority. The Minister said categorically that if the LEA did not agree to one of these companies being set up, it would not be set up. I was reassured by that until I read page 9 of the guidance to the Lords, regarding clause 11. It says:

> "Regulations will set out the basis on which an LEA may refuse consent."

In other words, the Government are going to introduce a set of regulations that will tell local authorities the grounds on which they can grant or deny a company permission. But clause 11 contains nothing relating to regulations being introduced afterwards. That is an example of the double standards to which we are referring. Whatever the rights and wrongs of these clauses—or at least the one we are debating—we have received unsatisfactory and conflicting explanations from the Minister, the former Minister, the hon. Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), and the noble Baroness in another place. That has created confusion around what was perhaps a noble objective. It is now ignoble, and I hope that it will be resoundingly defeated in this House and in another place.

Mr. Miliband: The debate has been wide ranging, as always with debates about school companies. On the one hand the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) says that we have not covered any of the issues that he has raised, but on the other he wants to claim credit for all the improvements that have appeared in the Bill. Meanwhile, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) gives us great credit for our attempts to cover the issues that have been raised, but believes that we have made the situation worse with every such attempt. I hope that that does not suggest that the new entente between the two Opposition parties is breaking down. Perhaps they are simply attacking from different points of view.

Mr. Cash: It is called a pincer movement.

Mr. Miliband: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not going to engage me in a Gramscian endeavour concerning the difference between a war of position and a war of manoeuvre. Perhaps we can do that on another occasion.

In the course of the debates in this House it has been argued that although there is no objection in principle to schools having the freedom to set up companies, there are risks attached—that although schools may well make creative use of the freedom that we are giving them, they may make mistakes. On that basis, it is argued that schools should not be given the power in the first place. We believe that that is wrong. If we want innovation in our education system, we must give schools the freedom to make their own decisions about the best ways to raise standards, build partnerships and share their strengths with others.

I shall address yet again some of the issues that have been raised. A new element that has been put into the debate concerns the now notorious figure of Ms Gaby Hinsliff, who is traded across the Dispatch Box in a way that she has not had the privilege of enjoying before. I am pleased to say that her story in Sunday's edition of *The Observer* has absolutely nothing to do with our proposals to allow schools to set up companies. As my hon. Friend Baroness Ashton said yesterday, the proposals will not allow schools to contract out their responsibilities for the conduct of the school to a company of any sort. In fact, the article was about the announcement of the Government's strategy on social enterprise—an extremely worthy and important development. I am pleased that the official Opposition are embracing the third sector, as it is known. The two initiatives that were outlined yesterday were a Bank of England review of finance for social enterprises and a new social enterprise accreditation scheme. Far from it being a secret plan, it was launched yesterday.

I shall try to tackle some of the serious points that have been made. The hon. Member for Stone referred again to clause 2. The first point to make, which has been accepted on both sides of the House, is that clause 2 does not provide a blanket power to exempt schools from legislation for any purpose. It is important that hon. Members understand that it applies only to projects that raise standards. It is inconceivable that standards could be raised by voiding the responsibility of governing bodies.

In Committee, the Opposition's criticism was not that the clause is too wide ranging but that the power to decide whether exemptions should be granted, which will be held by the Secretary of State, advised by Ofsted, is part of a centralising tendency. In fact, a backstop is built in.

Mr. Cash: The Minister refers to the question of whether projects will raise educational standards. Under clause 1, that is determined by

> "the opinion of the Secretary of State",

but the question of whether schools companies will raise educational standards is implicit in the arguments that the Minister has been putting forward from the beginning. The two things obviously run together, and the hon. Gentleman is trying to pick and choose between different expressions in an attempt to get himself off a very difficult hook.

Mr. Miliband: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I am not trying to pick and choose, as he puts it. Last week, we discussed the LEAs' role in deciding whether the plans for a school company should go ahead.

We have a second safeguard in clause 2, which is that the Secretary of State, advised by Ofsted, will be in a position to decide whether the proposed scheme will raise standards. Last week, hon. Members asked whether failing schools should be able to foist their failure on other schools, and I was able to provide reassurance. I have explained why clause 2 will not have the disastrous consequences to which the hon. Member for Stone referred.

I turn now to several points about liability which I was busy scribbling down as the hon. Gentleman spoke. If a company gets into significant debt, the supervising authority, which in most cases will be the LEA, will know about it through its receipt and assessment of the company's accounts. The supervising authority will then notify the school members and the LEAs of the member schools that, in its view, the school company had not properly managed its debt position.

It will be difficult for a company to get into debt through borrowing, which was also mentioned, and to be unable to repay its debts out of future income. We are building into the regulations a requirement for the company to seek the supervising authority's permission before it can borrow.

The hon. Gentleman also asked what will happen if a company goes bust. If a company becomes insolvent, its staff are likely to be laid off and its assets sold. However, there will be no risk to the school's assets or to the employment of staff at member schools, as the company does not own the member schools' assets or employ their staff.

Two hon. Members asked about profits. We believe that it is wrong that only private sector companies should be able to sell services to schools, and it is beneficial if other schools are able to do so. Where a company consists only of members that are education institutions, all its profits will be used for education purposes. Hon. Members asked whether a person—for example, a head teacher—could take a stake in a company and make a profit for himself. The answer is no, regulations will prevent that.

The hon. Member for Stone asked about the regulations proscribing what he called "disreputable persons" from participating in school companies, but we have not changed our plans on that—such proscription was the intention from the start.

The Charity Commissioners were mentioned, but they have absolutely nothing to do with these issues. They have no involvement in schools because most schools are not charities. It is worth adding, in parentheses, that schools would end up paying 20 per cent. of their rates if they were deemed to be a charity, so it is just as well they are not.

As a new Member of the House, I rather expected that at this stage of the proceedings we would be debating some important clash of principle between this House and the other place and that we would be fundamentally at odds over what we are trying to achieve. Instead, we are debating issues of detail which we have been over many times, and Ministers have provided answers many times.

If the House believes, as I do, that our best schools have remarkable expertise that deserves to be widely shared, it will support the concept of school companies. Companies will provide a means for our best schools to support and advise others in their areas of particular strength. We should not allow that potential to be lost. It simply does not make sense to argue that this idea has the potential to do good in a range of circumstances, but because it is conceivable, to use the hon. Gentleman's words, that there are circumstances in which it will not work, we should not allow it to be put into practice.

The House should decisively reject the Lords amendment. On this side of the House, we support innovation, more freedom for schools and decentralisation. We support the light touch bureaucracy that the official Opposition often claim to support but do not like when we put it into practice. They are stuck in what can only be described as "rejection mode". They reject without principle; they reject without reason; they reject simply for the sake of rejection. They are so busy saying no that they even say no to ideas that they claim to support.

I remember that a right hon. Lady once stood here and said "No, no, no". She may not be here, but her legacy lives on in the official Opposition, who insist on saying "No, no, no." On this side of the House we say yes, and I urge the House to support the Government.

Question put, That this House insists on its disagreement to Lords amendment No. 12 but proposes amendment (a) to the words restored to the Bill by that disagreement:—

The House divided: Ayes 260, Noes 160.

Division No. 317] **[6.45 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*

Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. John Heppell.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver

Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McDonnell, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson
and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

It being more than one hour after commencement of proceedings, pursuant to Order [15 July], MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put the Questions necessary to dispose of business.*

Amendment (b) to the words restored to the Bill by motion to disagree to Lords amendment No. 12 agreed to.

Amendments (a) to (f) to the words restored to the Bill by motion to disagree to Lords amendment No. 13 agreed to.

Lords amendment in lieu—a new clause—

Page 23, line 44, at end insert the following new Clause—

"Control of regulation (No. 2)

(1) In considering whether to issue any guidance or other circular to the governing bodies or head teachers of maintained schools in the exercise of functions relating to education, the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales shall have regard to—

(a) the desirability of providing information about good educational practice, while recognising the professional expertise of teachers,

(b) the benefits that are expected to result from the issue of the guidance or other circular, and

(c) the desirability of avoiding—

(i) the sending of excessive material to governing bodies or head teachers, and

(ii) the imposition of excessive administrative burdens on governing bodies or head teachers.

(2) In pursuance of the duty in subsection (1) the Secretary of State shall in respect of each academic year—

(a) prepare a report listing—

(i) documents sent by him during the year to all governing bodies of maintained schools in England or to all head teachers of such schools,

(ii) documents (not falling within sub-paragraph (i)) sent by him during the year to all governing bodies of maintained schools in England of a particular kind or to all head teachers of such schools of a particular kind, and

(b) lay a copy of the report before each House of Parliament, and include within it comparative statistics in respect of each of the two preceding academic years on documents falling within this subsection sent out by him.

(3) In pursuit of the duty in subsection (1) the National Assembly for Wales shall in respect of each academic year prepare and publish a report listing—

(a) documents sent by the Assembly during the year to all governing bodies of maintained schools in Wales or to all head teachers of such schools,

(b) documents (not falling within paragraph (a)) sent by the Assembly during the year to all governing bodies of maintained schools in Wales of a particular kind or to all head teachers of such schools of a particular kind.

(4) The documents referred to in subsections (2) and (3) do not include any document sent by the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales—

(a) otherwise than in the exercise of functions relating to education, or

(b) at the request of the person to whom it is sent.

(5) Each document issued by the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales and falling within subsection (2)(a)(i) or (ii) or (3)(a) or (b) shall list within it previous relevant documents issued by the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales and shall state clearly those documents which are superseded by the current document.

(6) Each document issued by the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales and falling within subsection (2)(a)(i) or (ii) or (3)(a) or (b) shall state clearly the persons for whom any advice and guidance is intended.

(7) In this section "academic year" means a period beginning with 1st August and ending with the next 31st July.""

Motion made and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment in lieu:—

The House divided: Ayes 249, Noes 154.

Division No. 318] **[7 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne

Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*

Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian

Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*

Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. John Heppell.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Collins, Tim
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark

Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*

Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson
and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

DEFERRED DIVISION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I have now to announce the result of the Division deferred from a previous day.

On the Question on the business of the House, the Ayes were 13, the Noes were 289, so the Question was negatived.

[The Division Lists are published at the end of today's debates.]

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that you can confirm that the deferred Division whose result you have just announced, whereby the Question was negatived by a very large majority, was on a Question that referred to business conducted on Monday 22 July; therefore, we were voting today on the nature of the business that took place two days ago. I think that that is an accurate account. Is that not the ultimate absurdity and does it not bring the House into disrepute?

Is it not also the case that, although the motion was in the name of the Leader of the House, it was negatived, I am told, at the behest of the Government Whips? Has not the Leader of the House been undermined by his own Whips for the second time in only a few weeks or months, and do we not therefore face a crisis in the House of Commons? The Leader of the House is being systematically undermined by his Whips and his parliamentary colleagues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the more important question is, can you now refer the matter of deferred Divisions to the Procedure Committee? Surely you, as a staunch defender of the House, its procedures and its rights, cannot accept either the position in which we find ourselves—that of voting today on a matter that was dealt with two days ago—or that the Leader of the House has been put in a position of such embarrassment. This situation must be of as much concern to you as it is to my colleagues and me, and I hope that you can assure us that something will be done about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Today's circumstances might demonstrate that there is a problem with the House's present rules on deferred Divisions. The Sessional Order resolved on 28 June 2001 requires the Speaker to defer a Division if his decision is challenged after 10 o'clock, or after 7 o'clock on a Thursday. The deferred Division must then take place on the next Wednesday on which the House sits. That is what happened today in conformity with the House's rules. The Speaker has no power under those rules to cancel a deferred Division. It is up to any right hon. or hon. Member to refer to the Procedure Committee any matter which it is thought deserves careful consideration.

As for whether the ultimate absurdity has been reached, I think that we will have to serve many more years in the House before that happens.

Mr. Forth: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am most grateful for your response, and I am certainly prepared to rise to the highly acceptable challenge that you have laid down. However, may I press you a little further? Can you say whether Mr. Speaker or you, as Chairman of Ways and Means, are sufficiently concerned about the issue—given the difficult position in which, I fear, you and Mr. Speaker have been placed by it—to give the House or me a little encouragement to refer the matter to the Procedure Committee?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not for the Chair to encourage or discourage any Member of Parliament to raise a matter with the Procedure Committee. Right hon. and hon. Members have sufficient wit and savvy to know when it is proper to take up a matter in that way, and I am sure that it will be done. What has happened is instructive and it will, no doubt, be noted by members of the Procedure Committee.

Export Control Bill

Lords Amendments in lieu of an Amendment to which the Commons have disagreed, considered.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 10B, in lieu of Lords amendment No. 10, to which the Commons have disagreed, after clause 6, to insert the following new clause—*Protection of certain freedoms*—

(1) The Secretary of State may not make a control order which has the effect of prohibiting or regulating any of the following activities—

(a) the communication of information in the ordinary course of scientific research,

(b) the making of information generally available to the public, or

(c) the communication of information that is generally available to the public,

unless the interference by the order in the freedom to carry on the activity in question is necessary (and no more than is necessary).

(2) The question whether any such interference is necessary shall be determined by the Secretary of State by reference to the circumstances prevailing at the time the order is made and having considered the reasons for seeking to control the activity in question and the need to respect the freedom to carry on that activity."

7.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 10C and the Government motion to agree thereto.

Nigel Griffiths: Hon. Members will recall that on 24 June, the House disagreed with a number of Lords amendments that aimed to provide protection for academic freedoms, but would, in fact, have opened several extremely damaging loopholes in the Bill. At the same time, the Government introduced in the other place a clause that was designed to provide explicit protections for certain freedoms which are of particular concern to the academic community. However, the Opposition considered that the clause did not go far enough to protect those freedoms.

In spite of those differences, it was clear that all concerned—the Government, the Opposition and the universities' representative bodies—shared essentially the same aim: to find a way to provide protections that would prevent a future Government using the powers in the Bill in ways that could damage freedoms that are important to the academic community and others, and at the same time ensuring that the Bill provides the Government with the powers they need for an effective export control regime. Necessarily, any such solution should not contain loopholes that could be exploited by the unscrupulous.

Discussions were held with the Opposition parties and Universities UK to see whether we could reach agreement on the text of a revised clause that all were content would protect the freedoms about which concern had been expressed, while avoiding the creation of loopholes in the Bill. I am pleased to say that we were able to obtain agreement, and the amendment proposed in the Lords message [illegible]s that agreement.

The revised clause that the amendment would insert deals with two of the concerns that the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) expressed about the clause it would replace. The first was the issue of interchanges of unpublished research between academics. The new clause, in subsection (1)(a), introduces a reference to a new activity to be protected by the clause, namely

"the communication of information in the ordinary course of scientific research".

That is in addition to the activities of publishing information or communicating published information. The House will have noted that the clause included in the message from the other place applies to all those engaged in scientific research. Thus it meets one of the Government's criticisms of the Opposition's new clause with which this House disagreed on 24 June.

The second concern voiced by the hon. Member for Salisbury was that the previous clause required the Secretary of State to consider only the matter of academic freedom, and no more. While the Government did not accept that that was a fair description of the clause's effect, we did accept that there was scope to strengthen the requirements placed on the Secretary of State. The revised clause therefore states that it is for the Secretary of State to determine whether interference in any of the freedoms described by the clause is necessary in the light of

"the circumstances prevailing at the time . . . and having considered the reasons for seeking to control the activity in question and the need to respect the freedom to carry on that activity."

That formulation in the clause makes it explicit that the Secretary of State must form his or her view of the need for the interference in the light of all the relevant facts and other surrounding circumstances. Those will include international obligations and commitments undertaken by the United Kingdom. It also makes explicit the balancing exercise that must be carried out by reference to those circumstances and the need to control the activity and to respect the freedom to carry on that activity. This means that the Secretary of State will have to identify the ways in which particular proposed controls are likely to impinge on the freedom to communicate in the ways that are specified in subsection (1), and the reasons for that interference. He or she will then have to decide whether that control is necessary.

These procedures will require the Secretary of State to consider the proportionality of the proposed controls to be able to conclude that the degree of interference is no more than is necessary to meet the identified reasons. This places a stronger duty on the Secretary of State in terms of the requirements on him or her to ensure that the freedoms described in the clause are not interfered with except for good reason and, where necessary, when drawing up control orders. Therefore, the procedures give the court more ability to strike down unacceptable provisions in a control order than does the clause that is being replaced.

At the same time, the proposed clause avoids creating the sort of loopholes in the Bill that the Opposition amendments would have created and with which the House disagreed on 24 June. I am pleased to say that, in the light of the agreement reached with the Opposition and Universities UK on the revised clause, the Lords have not insisted on their amendments with which the House disagreed. I therefore invite the House to agree to both amendments as proposed by the Lords in lieu of Lords amendment No. 10, to which the Commons have disagreed.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): The Opposition wish to agree with the Lords and with the Minister. We are delighted by the outcome of sensible negotiations, which have demonstrated that Parliament can work in both Houses when it tries. I think that the outcome has been widely welcomed by the academic community. For the reasons that the Minister has explained, we think that academic freedom will now be guaranteed—as far as these things can be guaranteed. That is because a Secretary of State could no longer make arbitrary decisions that could not be challenged in the courts. We warmly welcome that.

These matters have been through the determination of many Members in both Houses. When my noble Friend Lady Miller of Hendon introduced her amendment in the other place, which was designed to protect and preserve academic freedom, she was supported by Cross Benchers and by Lady Sharp of Guildford for the Liberal Democrats. In its present form, the amendment is accepted by Universities UK, which represents the vice-chancellors, by Lady Warwick of Undercliffe, who has worked hard on these matters, and by the Association of University Teachers. We are glad to come to such a happy conclusion.

I must pay particular tribute to my noble Friend Lady Miller. I record my gratitude to Lord May of Oxford, the distinguished president of the Royal Society, who has similarly worked extremely hard on these matters. I pay tribute also to the Information Policy Research Foundation and to Dr. Ross Anderson of Cambridge university, as well as to Mr. Nicholas Bowen, who is a solicitor. He is a member of the electronic law committee of the Law Society. Similarly, I pay tribute to others who wish to remain anonymous. I record my gratitude to Professor David Vincent, the deputy vice-chancellor of Keele university, whose common sense has illuminated the argument.

A happy conclusion has been reached, and the Opposition are happy to speed the Bill on its way. We are grateful to the Government for seeing sense and coming to a happy conclusion.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): Happily, this is not the occasion for a substantial speech. I want to express my gratitude to the Government, and in particular to the Minister responsible for science, for heeding the legitimate concerns that were expressed by Universities UK and by more and more in the academic world as they became aware of the possible consequences of the legislation as previously drafted in terms of jeopardising academic freedom.

Those of us who raised concerns during parliamentary consideration of the Bill—I speak for myself, but I imagine that this applies to us all—had no desire to frustrate the Government in their effort, vital in every sense of the word, to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. I recognise that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government had no malign or, as the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), has just put it, unscrupulous intentions towards academic freedom. However, it is always a prudent principle for Parliament not to confer on Governments unfettered powers that may—much more often as a result of a fit of absence of mind than of any deliberate intention—be abused.

After all, Departments are focused on their particular departmental preoccupations. Other Departments do not like to interfere with them, and perhaps do not even notice the consequences of the policies of a neighbouring Department until it is too late, when some damage has been done. Academic freedom is fragile, and in the past Whitehall has from time to time been a little crude, even cavalier, in its attitude to academic freedom. However, academic freedom is crucial to a liberal society and to the advancement of knowledge.

It is therefore to the Government's credit that they have listened and recognised that there was a legitimate problem. They took it seriously and acted on it. They have revised the proposed legislation to strike a balance that we can regard as satisfactory between those imperatives that were liable to be in tension, the Government's desire to protect our lives and our security, and the fundamentally important need to preserve academic freedom.

We should acknowledge that the main debates on this issue occurred in the other place. The other place is yet not much reformed, but on this occasion at least, and from time to time on other occasions, it has been more vigilant for our freedoms than we have been in this place. I conclude by noting that it is important that further reforms of the other place do not impair its capacity to exercise that vigilance, by strengthening the grip of the party machines, for example.

7.15 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I endorse the spirit of the remarks of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and those of the right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth). I appreciate that the Government have listened and that we now have an improved piece of legislation. The amendment that has been agreed to is a model of brevity and clarity compared with what went before.

We must praise the effort that has been made in the past few weeks. As the hon. Member for Salisbury acknowledged, the campaign was a cross-party effort. I acknowledge the role that Lady Sharp of Guildford played from the Liberal Democrat Benches in another place. She fought for academic freedom and then helped to forge a compromise with the universities and the Government.

It has always been our view on the Liberal Democrat Benches that, in this instance, academic freedom had to be qualified. There had to be some qualification because military technology transmits itself through ideas as much as through hardware. I recall one of my distinguished academic constituents—he was engaged in material science—telling me about the evening when he lost his innocence in that field when working late at night. He went to the laboratories and saw one of his Iraqi PhD students making off with key documents from the department. That is the sort of practice that the proposed legislation is designed to guard against.

One of the positive outcomes of the exercise is that we shall see the passage of the Bill into law. We welcome that. It is half a loaf, or even a third of a loaf, rather than a whole loaf, but it is welcome none the less. We regret that the Minister did not listen to our suggestions on sustainable development, on brokerage and on parliamentary scrutiny. However, we welcome the overall thrust of the Bill. We also welcome the compromises that have been reached on academic freedom.

Nigel Griffiths: I am pleased that we are all agreed that the text provides proper protection for important freedoms while

[Nigel Griffiths]

avoiding the creation of loopholes. I think that Members on both sides of the House agree that the Bill is to be welcomed, because it provides powers that are needed for a more effective and comprehensive export regime, while at the same time providing for greater accountability to Parliament for the use of the powers contained within it, as Lord Scott of Foscote recommended.

I look forward to the Bill receiving Royal Assent shortly. This is landmark legislation and I am grateful to all Members, Peers and others who have a strong interest in these matters. I am proud of what we are achieving, and I urge the House to agree to the Lords amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendment agreed to.

Norman Baker (Lewes): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A parliamentary written question from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) was answered today. It relates to the record of ministerial travel over the past 12 months. Some of us believe that such questions should have been answered throughout the parliamentary Session, but in any case they have all been collated for today, the last day that Parliament is sitting before the recess.

The answer is thin, and the detail is contained in a document which, we are led to believe, is in the House of Commons Library. Ten minutes ago I went to the Library again, and staff there confirm that no such document has been received, some four hours after the original parliamentary question was answered. Indeed, the Library staff are in some doubt as to whether the document will be received today, which leaves open the prospect that the House will be in recess when the detail becomes available to hon. Members, although I understand that, in typical style, the media have copies of the document.

Is it not an affront to Parliament first, that the questions are not answered regularly throughout the Session, and secondly, that the information that which is now available, apparently, is not in the Library, contrary to the implication of the parliamentary answer given today, and may not be there until the House is in recess? Surely it is not beyond the wit of the authorities to ensure that documents are sent on time—electronically, perhaps.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice that he would raise this matter and put it on the record. Obviously, the Chair has no responsibility for the wider issue that he raises about the way in which parliamentary questions are answered. I refer to what Mr. Speaker has said on a number of occasions, and his hopes that Members' questions will be answered as promptly as possible. If the hon. Gentleman is correct about the sequence of events today, there would certainly appear to have been a slip-up, which is a serious one. As the matter has been raised, Government Front-Bench Members will have notice of it. I hope that the omission can be put right as quickly as possible.

Proceeds of Crime Bill

Lords Amendments in lieu of certain Amendments to which the Commons have disagreed, considered.

Lords amendment: No. 4B, in lieu of Lords amendment No. 4, to which the Commons have disagreed, in clause 75, page 48, line 4, at end insert—

"(3A) But an offence does not satisfy the test in subsection (2)(d) or (e) unless the defendant obtains relevant benefit of not less than £5000.

(3B) Relevant benefit for the purposes of subsection (2)(d) is—

(a) benefit from conduct which constitutes the offence;

(b) benefit from any other conduct which forms part of the course of criminal activity and which constitutes an offence of which the defendant has been convicted;

(c) benefit from conduct which constitutes an offence which has been or will be taken into consideration by the court in sentencing the defendant for an offence mentioned in paragraph (a) or (b).

(3C) Relevant benefit for the purposes of subsection (2)(e) is—

(a) benefit from conduct which constitutes the offence;

(b) benefit from conduct which constitutes an offence which has been or will be taken into consideration by the court in sentencing the defendant for the offence mentioned in paragraph (a).

(3D) The Secretary of State may by order vary the amount for the time being specified in subsection (3A)."

7.32 pm

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to take the following Lords amendments: No. 4C, in clause 341, page 200, line 3.

No. 4D, in clause 348, page 203, line 18.

No. 4F, in clause 353, page 206, line 41.

No. 4G, in clause 360, page 211, line 19.

No. 4H, in clause 366, page 213, line 44.

No. 4J, in clause 451, page 260, line 25.

No. 4K, in page 260, line 36.

No. 43, in clause 94, page 56, line 7.

No. 43B in clause 145, page 89, line 23.

No. 43C, in clause 375, page 218, line 6.

No. 43D, in clause 382, page 221, line 3.

No. 43E, in page 221, line 17.

No. 43F, in clause 386, page 223, line 35.

No. 43G, in clause 393, page 227, line 47.

No. 43H, in clause 399, page 230, line 21.

No. 43J, in clause 451, page 260, line 32.

No. 43K, in page 260, line 39.

No. 73, in clause 161, page 96, line 13.

No. 73B, in clause 229, page 140, line 4.

No. 73C, in clause 451, page 260, line 25.

No. 73D, in page 260, line 36.

Mr. Ainsworth: I think that we are all agreed that one of the requirements for the granting of the investigatory powers and warrants in part 8 should be that it is in the public interest for the court to grant the order or warrant.

When the Bill was introduced, the Government took the view that it was not necessary to replicate in the Bill the provisions in the previous legislation. That was because the Human Rights Act 1998 requires a judge to comply with all the safeguards that are provided by the European convention on human rights, and the Government were satisfied that that would cover the consideration of whether the granting of an investigatory power was in the public interest.

We recognise, however, that there have been continuing concerns, and we therefore decided to introduce an amendment in the other place to make it explicit in the Bill that the public interest test must be an integral part of the court's consideration. Lords amendments Nos. 4C to 4H and 43C to 43H do precisely that.

On Lords amendments in lieu Nos. 4B to 4K, 43B to 43K and 73B to 73D, last Thursday we discussed mandatory as opposed to discretionary confiscation. We cannot agree with the Opposition on that matter. We are determined that the confiscation system remain mandatory, and that we do not go backwards in that regard. The criminal lifestyle tests set out in parts 2 to 4 in theory expose a defendant to the criminal lifestyle regime where that defendant is convicted only of a trivial offence or offences that are not inherently indicative of a criminal lifestyle.

It would be possible for the court to apply assumptions where an offender is convicted of one acquisitive summary offence of any description that lasts for more than six months, or four summary offences of any description, from which only a very small amount of benefit had been derived. The same would be true where an offender was convicted of one offence of any description, from which he had benefited, and had two past convictions of any acquisitive offence. The benefit might be trivial, but a criminal lifestyle confiscation order could still be made.

In practice, the director or the prosecutor would never mount a confiscation proceeding in such an inappropriate case. There is a presentational issue here, however. We have reached the conclusion that it would be better for the Bill to impose a formal threshold before the criminal lifestyle tests can be applied. That will make it clear in the Bill that the authorities will not be able to apply for confiscation orders in trivial cases against offenders who are not convicted of offences specified in the criminal lifestyle schedules.

That is why we tabled these further amendments in lieu in the Lords. They aim to address concerns about the breadth of some of the criminal lifestyle tests, yet they preserve the integrity of confiscation as a mandatory procedure. We are making absolutely no change to the criminal lifestyle regime as it will apply to anybody convicted of one of the scheduled offences. There will be no financial threshold in such cases. But in relation to the other criminal lifestyle definitions, we are content to see a financial threshold imposed.

What we are saying is that for the criminal lifestyle tests to be satisfied, the total benefit from the triggering offences and any other offences taken into account for sentencing purposes will have to be £5,000 or more. The amendments introduce a power for the Secretary of State to change the £5,000 threshold by order. This power will be used, both to take account of inflation, and to respond to different patterns and trends of offending. It will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

I invite the House to agree with their Lordships in their amendments in lieu.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): It is with some pleasure that I welcome the amendments that were tabled in the Lords in lieu of their previous amendments, and which the Government are willing to accept as Government amendments.

There is a long history to the matter. On a number of occasions in Committee we expressed concern about the threshold by which people went into the confiscatory regime and were deemed to have a criminal lifestyle. I must say to the Minister, and it would be wise for me to put it on the record, that there is a certain irony in the way in which the Government have finally seen fit to approach the matter. It lacks the flexibility of the judicial discretion route which, as the Minister knows, we preferred.

For instance, if the prosecutor and the Assets Recovery Agency took the view that an individual had committed a number of very minor offences but was nevertheless known to be a serious criminal, under the earlier amendments they might still have been able to initiate the confiscation regime—the Al Capone clause, as it has sometimes been called.

In this case, the Government have refused to go down that road, because they did not want judicial discretion. They have fettered the mandatory provisions in a minor way. In the circumstances that I have just described, the person would be able to escape the confiscatory regime. I accept that, as a matter of principle, it could be argued that that is the appropriate way to proceed, as in those circumstances he would not be deemed to have a criminal lifestyle.

Nevertheless, I entirely welcome what the Government have done in respect of the £5,000 threshold. They are absolutely right that that should not cover the schedule offences—that would go a long way to defeating the Bill. The Government have taken the appropriate course of action. In respect of the other offences, this measure finally lays to rest that much-debated subject of the person who has three convictions for not having a rear light on his vehicle in the previous three-year period. That could be construed to be an offence for gain—indeed, it would be because it would save them the cost of replacing the light bulb—and so would expose them to a parallel world in which they had to run the risk of having their assets confiscated, having been deemed to have a criminal lifestyle. To avoid confiscation, they would have the onerous burden placed on them of having to prove that they did not have a criminal lifestyle and having to show where their assets came from.

I welcome this measure. Of all the concessions that have been gently wrested from the Government during the passage of the Bill, this is the most significant. I am delighted that the Government have finally seen sense on this issue. As the Minister knows, we share with him the desire that this legislation should work. It will work only if it commands widespread public approval and is seen to be fair. This is a major step in that direction, and I am grateful to the Minister that, in the light of what happened in the Lords and the serious reservations that were expressed, he has seen fit to introduce this amendment.

[Mr. Dominic Grieve]

Before we move on to the other matter that falls to be considered—*[Interruption.]* I did not think that the Minister went into any great length on the amendment of Lord Lloyd of Berwick. If he intended to cover it in this group, I shall reply to it at the same time.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I did not comment on that.

Mr. Grieve: I assumed that the Minister had not spoken to that amendment, and that he was going to do so subsequently. If not, I shall deal with it now.

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall seek clarification, but I thought that we were going to discuss that amendment separately when we had disposed of this one.

Mr. Grieve: I apologise to the Minister. That is what I had assumed, and that was how I was treating the matter, but I wanted to make sure that I was not failing to take the opportunity to deal with it.

I shall refer to the other amendments in the group that the Minister has spoken to, which relate to the public interest tests that he introduced in respect of investigatory powers. *[Interruption.]* Again, the Minister will remember that in Committee we went to great lengths to point out that we did not think that the Human Rights Act 1998 on its own should be relied on. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. To avoid any further exchanges and confusion, I refer hon. Members to the list of amendments that was published. These two matters are put down separately.

Mr. Grieve: The issue of the public interest test is simple. We think that there should always be a public interest test, and the Human Rights Act should not be used as a fallback position to justify passing legislation that does not include the safeguards that would ordinarily apply. I am extremely grateful to the Minister that, having debated that subject at enormous length in Committee and on other occasions, he has now provided those safeguards. I believe that that greatly improves the Bill. I am delighted that the other place saw fit to introduce that measure through the Government, and that we can accept it.

7.45 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): I welcome the amendments tabled by the Minister and his colleagues that have been brought back from the House of Lords. It is sensible to have a £5,000 de minimis level. The Minister neglected to mention that that was in amendment No. 280 that was discussed on Tuesday 4 December 2001. If I am not mistaken, it was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) and me. *[Interruption.]* The Minister laughs, but the record will show that to be the case.

On that occasion, when I suggested that £5,000 was not a large figure, he said:

> "I am always staggered by the affluence of other hon. Members. The hon. Gentleman has stated that £5,000 is a low figure. If I had obtained £5,000 by committing a crime, I would not consider it to be a low amount.
>
> I shall not say any more, except that I acknowledge that hon. Members are genuinely attempting to steer the legislation in the right direction. However, I cannot see how we could do that without providing escape routes for serious criminals."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 4 December 2001; c. 446.]

Clearly, the Minister has accepted the thrust of my comments on that occasion, although he did not care to mention that in his introductory remarks. Perhaps he was concerned that the Prime Minister would accuse him of wrecking the Proceeds of Crime Bill, as he has accused others who have sought to improve it.

This is a sensible measure. A de minimis level is the right approach. I shall not wind up the Minister further for fear that he will withdraw the amendment or do something else with it.

While on de minimis levels, it is a pity that the Minister did not find a way of dealing satisfactorily with the points that we raised the other day on secure creditors. I shall be out of order if I go on about that for too long, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I would just say that a de minimis provision would meet some of the concerns that Members have expressed. I hope that, even now, the Minister will consider whether that is a practical way to deal with that point.

The public interest provisions are equally welcome, and it is sensible to introduce them at this stage. Without wishing to be unkind to the Minister, I must say that had the provisions on the £5,000 de minimis level been brought forward earlier, there might not have been the amendments in the House of Lords that have caused him and his colleagues some difficulties. I hope that that shows to the Minister that he should sometimes pay attention to the wisdom that comes from Opposition Members. When he was making his comments about the £5,000 de minimis level, I noticed that his colleagues were nodding sagely as if it were a wonderful proposition. They are the same Members who howled down the proposal when it was made in Committee.

On that note of agreement, I am happy to support the Government in this group of amendments.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I welcome hon. Members' comments as far as they go. They are right that this is the most significant amendment that they have achieved, but its significance should not be exaggerated. As I said in my opening remarks, and as was said in Committee—I cannot remember in what context the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) raised the £5,000 de minimis issue and I cannot be bothered to check—in practice, confiscation proceedings for offences such as a missing rear light, which was repeatedly mentioned in Committee, would never be used. This measure puts that assurance in the Bill. If Opposition Members want to believe that it does something significant, they are welcome to do so.

With regard to the public interest, the situation would have been covered by the European convention on human rights. It is now in the Bill. If that makes hon. Members here and in the other place feel more comfortable and able to drop their more significant objections that would have seriously damaged the Bill, I welcome that as well.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Clause 375

MAKING OF ORDER

Lords amendments Nos. 43B, 43C, 43D, 43E, 43F, 43G, 43H, 43J and 43K in lieu of Lords amendment No. 43 to which the Commons have disagreed, agreed to.

Clause 229

CRIMINAL LIFESTYLE

Lords amendments Nos. 73B to 73D, in lieu of Lords amendment No. 73 to which the Commons have disagreed, agreed to.

Clause 2

DIRECTOR'S FUNCTIONS: GENERAL

Lords amendment: No. 110B, in page 2, line 21, at end insert—

"(6) The guidance must indicate that the reduction in crime is in general best secured by means of criminal investigations and criminal proceedings."

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment addresses the feeling that the bringing of criminal prosecutions is preferable when normal evidential and public-interest tests have been satisfied. We have always said that prosecution will remain the priority, and that the director of the new agency will pursue civil recovery or use his taxation powers only when prosecution is not appropriate. There has, however, been nothing in the Bill to that effect.

The amendment will ensure that the guidance given to the director by the Secretary of State under clause 2 will make clear that criminal investigations and criminal prosecutions will in general best secure the reduction of crime. I hope that that will allay any fears that civil recovery might be used in cases in which criminal proceedings should properly be brought.

Mr. Grieve: I welcome the amendment without hesitation. It is clearly a step in the right direction, as it would insert in the Bill a hierarchy of preference, thus providing at least some leverage to ensure that the civil recovery system was not abused in certain circumstances. I am thinking of circumstances in which it might have been open to the prosecution to go down a criminal route but it chose not to do so, for reasons relating not to the quality of evidence but simply to the ease involved in carrying out recovery measures.

As the Minister will know, what exercised those in the other place and, indeed, those of us who served on the Committee was the enormous problem—I think that it is still an enormous problem—that it would be possible to make an allegation of criminality against the person in possession of the money in some if not all cases. If the allegation were proved, that person might face all the opprobrium involved in having committed, or being held to have committed, a serious criminal offence that would result in confiscation or civil recovery of his assets, even if he had not been convicted of any offence. I feel that what has returned from the Government in the Lords is second best.

Given the way in which the House of Commons handled the matter, the Minister should count himself fortunate that we got anything back from the Lords. If he read the *Hansard* report of the debate there, he will know that there was amazement and criticism about our success in rejecting the original amendment moved by Lord Lloyd without any debate in this House. I say that to the Minister in all friendliness, as he had no part in this—save, I suppose, for his role as a Minister.

I must say that I was a little surprised to read that Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney-General in the other place, had said there that a programme motion had been agreed with the Opposition here before the debate took place. It was an agreed programme motion, he said; the Government had not insisted on it or forced it on us. It is true that we did not divide the House. If we had, we would have been fiercely criticised for reducing yet further the time available for us to consider these important amendments.

I hope that, when he has an opportunity to do so, the Minister will tell his noble Friend about the normal procedure in this House, and about the fierce criticism that he and other Ministers—and Whips—have heaped on the Opposition for dividing the House on programme motions. There was no agreement: it was the Government's decision to take the risk of trying to get the business through in the very short time available.

For that reason, it is especially regrettable that we have exposed ourselves to ridicule during our dealings with this important Bill because of the way in which an extremely serious amendment moved in the other place was treated here. It is lucky for the Minister that the other place, respecting its constitutional duty, decided that in the circumstances it would seek another amendment to which we could agree.

Let me put this on the record. I understand that such was the anger generated in the other place by the lack of scrutiny, it is rumoured—obviously I cannot speak for those in the other place—that if the same thing ever happens again the Lords will reject any amendment to a Lords amendment rejected by this House without debate. That was communicated to me, and the Government may have to heed it if they wish to achieve compromises at the end of the passage of long Bills.

As I said, I welcome the amendment, although whether it is sufficient only time will tell. Whether Lord Lloyd was right in his original amendment—to which he adhered, but which was defeated when it returned to the Lords—will have to depend on the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords. All I can say is that following the statement on the front of the Bill—couched in such redolent terms—that the Home Secretary is satisfied that the Bill complies with the Human Rights Act 1998, he may have to eat humble pie. Indeed, I will go further: given that he was put on notice repeatedly during our debates on the Bill about anxieties in regard to whether it complied with the Act, he might see fit to resign. If I were in his shoes, I would feel that that was the only course open to me.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): I believe that Lord Lloyd grossly overstated the position. This is the procedure whereby a court will determine whether property is seized on the balance of probabilities. I have dealt with the courts professionally in the past, and that is a determination, and a process, which occurs every day in the civil courts. I

[Ian Lucas]

have acquired considerable respect for the hon. Gentleman over a long period, but he is over-egging the pudding.

Mr. Grieve: I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said, and I greatly respect him for his contribution during the Bill's passage. He and I, along with a number of Members who are present, have lived with the Bill for a long time—and, I think, will part company with it shortly. I merely say to all who participated that our scrutiny here was, in many ways, a model of its kind. Having said that, I can only refer the hon. Gentleman to what Lord Lloyd said in the other place. He presented an extremely persuasive argument, which ought to make the Government reflect that the legislation as drafted in respect of civil recovery might not comply with the Human Rights Act.

Lord Lloyd may be wrong. The Government must believe that he is wrong, or they would not have persisted. It is clearly a genuine belief, and I appreciate the Minister's position. Lord Lloyd, however, has a far more considerable legal brain than I have—and, I suspect, a better legal brain than any other Member of the House of Commons. His was not an individual view, but one backed by a number of their lordships—including, I noted, Lord Goldsmith's head of chambers. That may give the Government pause for thought, but the matter will be tested as and when the time comes.

In the meantime—the other place having deferred to the will of this House, according to constitutional convention—it remains for me only to thank the Minister for his courtesy during the passage of this long Bill, and to wish the legislation well. Time will tell whether the House, by failing to consider carefully what Lord Lloyd had to say, has shot itself in the foot. I hope that I am wrong, but as I have said there is much good in the Bill, and by making this addition we are undoubtedly improving it.

8 pm

Norman Baker: I can be brief on this amendment as, to a large degree, I echo the points made by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve). The amendment seems reasonably inconsequential. It reiterates a comment that the Minister made on a number of occasions throughout the Committee. I was personally in no doubt that the hierarchy to which he referred was in place. Indeed, I remember asking him about it at an early stage. My personal view, if it is not unconstitutional, is that the House of Lords has been bought off rather cheaply with this amendment. All credit to the Minister if that is what he has achieved. It is welcome so far as it goes but it just confirms what the Minister has already told us.

We were happy as a party to support Lord Lloyd's amendment in order to keep the ball in the air; there were issues to be considered. Had it come to the final decision, the amendment's impact may have gone too far for us. It may have weakened the legislation in a way that was beyond what was acceptable. However, it raised serious issues. The issue about human rights compliance is a genuine one. Doubtless the Minister has had advice on that from his officials and we will find out in due course whether any action will be taken and whether it will be successful. We wait to see what the outcome is.

The amendment is welcome so far as it goes. No one could possibly object to it. It is motherhood and apple pie. It is perhaps a nice way to end the Bill. As this is probably the last time that I shall speak on the Bill, I thank the Minister for his contributions and good humour throughout its passage, if not on other occasions. I thank the hon. Member for Beaconsfield and his colleagues for their contributions, too.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We have been over the substantive issue before. Serious allegations about individuals are regularly made in civil recovery—that point was made by the Attorney-General in another place—so we do not accept Lord Lloyd's amendments, but I hope that this measure helps in the passage of the Bill. Again, I do not think that it is of huge significance, as the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) said. The Committee was assured that this was the intention, this was the hierarchy and these were the priorities that should be given in relation to the different powers in the Bill. We have now put that in the Bill. That makes it clear.

On timetabling, I was surprised by the comments of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) because I think both he and I thought that we had allocated sufficient time to discuss the three Lords amendments. We then had two statements on that day. I think that I am not misrepresenting the position when I say that we both still thought that we had sufficient time. I do not think that anyone filibustered or wasted time last Thursday afternoon, yet we did not manage to get to that third important group of amendments.

That was not deliberate. I do not think that anyone meant to slight the other place in so doing. It shows—I hope that a degree of consensus is possible on this point—that if timetabling is to work, and I believe that there are great advantages to such procedures, great care and consideration need to be given as to how timetables are structured. In retrospect, if we had broken it down to ensure that the three substantive issues all received a degree of time, perhaps we would not have upset the Lords as we did. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that it was not deliberate. We thought that we had allocated sufficient time, and I think that he did.

Mr. Grieve *rose—*

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath) *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: I will give way to either one of the hon. Gentlemen.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the Minister understand that while of course there was no deliberate filibustering on the matter—we accept entirely that there was a genuine attempt to debate it—one of the things that caused problems on that day, which he can discuss with Government business managers, was the fact that there were two statements that seriously cut into the time? When the original programme motion was discussed we were not anticipating that. I hope that he will take that message back clearly. His point about splitting the matter so that there is separate timetabling for all the important issues is helpful and could be taken forward.

Mr. Ainsworth: I acknowledge that point.

Mr. Grieve: I accept that as originally programmed there would have been ample time to debate the matter if there had not been the two statements. Once the two statements came in, we were faced with an impossible choice. I am sure that the Minister accepts that. To vote against the motion when the time came would have been to diminish the amount of time available. One simply had to hope for the best and hope that we could get through it. It was going to be touch and go. As it turned out, we did not get there, through no fault of anyone—sensible contributions were made on both sides of the House. It reflects the need for much greater flexibility if we are to do our job properly.

Mr. Ainsworth: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. The only thing that remains to be said is that no insult to another place was intended by anyone in the House. I congratulate the Opposition Whip on the way he exposed the problem to maximise the difficulty that we had in another place. I thank hon. Members for their courteous remarks about me and everyone else who served on the Bill. A lot of Members put a lot of effort into it. I appreciate that.

Lords amendment agreed to.

POLICE REFORM BILL [*LORDS*] (PROGRAMME) (NO. 4)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Police Reform Bill *[Lords]* for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 7th May 2002:—

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

2. Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

Police Reform Bill *[Lords]*

After Clause 4

Lords amendment: No. 2A to Commons amendment No. 2, after (1)(b), leave out paragraph (2) and insert—

"(2) If the Secretary of State considers that remedial measures are required in relation to any matter identified by the report, he may direct the police authority responsible for maintaining the force to submit an action plan to him.

(2A) An action plan is a plan setting out the remedial measures which the police authority proposes to take in relation to the matters in respect of which the direction is given."

8.6 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 2B and 75A to 75D.

Mr. Denham: I hope that I can be brief. These amendments made in another place reflect the constructive exchange that I had with the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on Report on 10 July.

By Report, I think that a consensus had been reached that the Home Secretary of the day should have the power to intervene in a force when all other local avenues for addressing poor performance had failed. We had also reached agreement that in order to ensure that effective remedial measures are taken, the Home Secretary should be able to call upon the police authority to submit an action plan.

The intention behind the Government amendments, agreed on Report, was that while the Home Secretary should be able to direct a police authority to submit an action plan, he should not be able to make a direction as to the remedial measures to be contained in the plan. However, it was evident from the debate that that intention did not come through sufficiently clearly in the revised clause 5.

The amendments made in another place simply seek to put beyond doubt that the content of an action plan is entirely a matter for the police authority, in consultation with the chief officer. The Home Secretary will be able to comment on the plan if he thinks that it does not adequately address the failings identified in the report from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, but he cannot insist that changes be made.

Incidentally, the amendments also correct an infelicity in the drafting of subsection (10) of the new section 41A of the Police Act 1996 inserted by clause 5. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I thank the Minister for the way in which he has handled this legislation all the way through and the constructive way in which he has approached disagreements, which these amendments, as he says, seek to deal with. The House is aware that clause 5 was originally removed in the other place as a result of widespread concern expressed on both sides of the other place, from all levels of the police force and from the Association of Police Authorities. All of us

[Mr. James Paice]

believed in the importance of the tripartite arrangements and of keeping the police separate from Government. As the Minister rightly said, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) made it clear on Report that the Government amendments tabled then, welcome as they were, did not go far enough.

The House will be unsurprised to know that we welcome these amendments, but it must be said that they represent the Government's final retreat from the swingeing powers of intervention that clause 5 in its original form represented. We said from the outset that the Home Secretary should not be able to require action plans purely on his own whim; now, he will not, as such a requirement must be the result of an inspection report. We said that he should not be able to direct chief officers; now, he will not, as we have re-interposed police authorities. We also said that he should not be able to dictate the content of the action plans. Now, these amendments remove the final vestige of those powers, so they are welcome.

However, let no one be in any doubt about the huge effective power that the Home Secretary has, and which he will continue to have as a result of the Bill. The Home Secretary himself seeks to underestimate that power, yet it is obvious on looking at the street crime initiative. We welcome the amendments, but despite them, it will be a brave chief officer who goes against the declared wishes of the Home Secretary. Although I wish the legislation well when it is enacted, I hope that there remain some such courageous chief officers.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): This is an unusual event for me, in that I happily delegated Police Reform Bill responsibilities to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), and I pay tribute to him and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) for their work.

As the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) and the Minister suggested, we are left with one issue. As the Minister knows, the reality is that many issues were bounced around in respect of a Bill that was generally acceptable; however, accountability remained a big issue throughout its consideration. To be honest, it took a lot of effort on the part of both Houses to sort out the central issue—the relationship between the Home Secretary of the day, police authorities and the chief officers.

The provisions are the result of efforts on all sides to try to understand that the Bill ought not to change the constitutional position. Chief officers, once appointed, have operational authority, and they are accountable to police authorities, not to the Home Secretary. I pay tribute to my colleagues, and to Conservative and Labour Members, for understanding that point in the end, and for trying to ensure that some agreement was reached. The provisions are the result of that process.

It is good, too, that the same relationship is understood in respect of the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad—the two bodies with national policing responsibility. The reality in Britain at the moment is that we have two national squads in England and in Wales, a regional police force for London—the Metropolitan police force—and other territorial forces. There is also an entire range of additional forces, such as the British Transport police. In general, we do not have regional policing, but it is important that all such bodies are accountable, and this is a welcome step down that road.

8.15 pm

We are left with areas in which, to our sadness, we still do not have accountability. The Minister knows what they are, and we are still sad to note that the option remains of the police accrediting people who are not police officers to do their support job. That is not truly accountable policing. In effect, such people constitute privatised, private sector support for the police. Instead, they should be accountable to local authorities or to central police authorities. We tried hard to amend the Bill so that both transport and special community support officers—accredited officers—and accredited officers in general, were covered by the complaints system. In other words, if a member of the public was concerned about the activity of somebody who was not a police officer—but who was working for, or accredited by, the police—they could raise them in the same way. We regret that these amendments do not go so far as to include that provision.

That is not to say that progress was not made, of which these amendments are the last symbol. There were significant achievements, such as the removal of the Henry VIII clause. The principle of no detention for community support officers was also dealt with at the end of the negotiations. Also, the giving of directions directly to chief officers gave way to a much more proper relationship between the Home Secretary and the police authorities, leaving the authorities to decide what they should do.

We accept the amendments and we will not divide the House today. As the Minister knows, we did not press other matters in the Lords on which we disagreed with the Government because we accepted the merit of getting this legislation on to the statute book before the summer recess. However, I hope that two messages have come out loud and clear from our deliberations—one for the Government and the other for the police. I hope the Government have got the message that Parliament will resist policing becoming a tool of central Government. We have made that point in both Houses and preserved the proper status quo, and I do not believe that Parliament has the will to change that. The message that I hope the police have got from this legislation is that, in certain respects—particularly now—they must do better. The Bill—this is the last piece of the jigsaw—has given the police the power to employ many additional people, as civilians, to assist them. They now have the power to accredit other civilians as support officers to help them, and to employ community support officers to work for the police. Potentially, the police have another army of people, in addition to specials and to full-time officers.

To the Government's credit, there are now more police officers than at any stage in recent history, and more money has recently been provided for policing. With all that on the table, the public expect two things. They expect a better clear-up rate—on average, the current rate is under 25 per cent., and in places such as London it is only 11 per cent.—and they expect a better response rate. Those messages, which have come out in all the debates on law and order in our communities and across the country, should be heard loud and clear by the police. We respect them and we are grateful for them, but we have now given them significant extra tools to do their job, and at a local level we will look to them to deliver. In that regard, both individual officers and chief officers will be accountable to their police authorities in the weeks ahead. I hope that the Government and those who run police forces and police authorities have got the message that the public expect them both to do their job properly. The public also expect the Home Secretary to let the police get on with the job, and not to interfere in the way in which they do it.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I wish to thank everyone who has served during the Bill's passage, which has been a great pleasure. I had one question at the end of Third Reading and I hope that someone will be tolerant enough to answer it. What accountability will there be for the fines imposed by accredited safety officers? Where will the money go? How will the chain of accountability work between various employers in the public and private sectors—including a halfway house or a housing association—and the respective police authority?

Mr. Denham: I apologise to the House for temporarily stepping outside for a moment, but I have been briefed on the issues that were raised. I am grateful to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) and, in particular, the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). I am sure that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) will not mind if I congratulate his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) and the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) on their constructive role in the Bill's passage.

I do not want to over-rehearse the arguments, as I could do were I to respond to talk of a "final climbdown". I seem to remember that, six months ago, the Conservative party said that there were no circumstances whatever in which this type of interference could be justified. Now we find that the point has been conceded.

We have found a sensible way to address effectively the small number of cases where those responsible locally for ensuring that we have good policing have failed to do so. That is the defence against the argument—which I refute utterly—that asserts that we have been responsible for trying to undermine the tripartite arrangements. We are great believers in that arrangement as a balance between the Home Secretary, police authorities and chief officers. The importance that we attach to the relationship should not blind us to the possibility of circumstances where one or more legs of the arrangements fails. In those circumstances, the public—who, after all, the relationship is there to serve—must be protected.

That part of the Bill has attracted the most attention during its passage. Interestingly, it will be used far less than other parts of the Bill that received less attention and which will have a greater effect in raising standards. If we have to use the power, it can only be because the other things that we have set in place, on which there has been agreement, have failed.

Mr. Paice: I do not wish to take issue with anything that the Minister has said. I want to place on record that I was briefed as to why it was necessary for him to leave the Chamber. I think that it is a tribute to his dedication that he came back in to reply to the debate, which, in my view, was unnecessary. I pay tribute to him for showing such commitment to the House.

Mr. Denham: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman, whose remarks are very much appreciated.

We are bringing discussions on this Bill to a close. There is a real commitment among those who have participated in the debates to support the police in serving communities up and down this country. We have provided a Bill that will support the police as they do their job. I am grateful to everyone who has participated.

Simon Hughes: I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), and I am grateful to the Minister. Before the Minister utters the final words on the Bill in this House, will he answer my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke), who deserves an answer for her persistence? Her question is a good one that is relevant to the matter being debated. If he cannot answer now, will he promise that she will be answered before he goes on holiday? If so, we will go away even happier than we might otherwise have done.

Mr. Denham: I am in the odd position, as sometimes happens with Ministers, of having in front me an answer for which I cannot locate the question. With that in mind, it is probably better if I write to the hon. Lady, as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Mobile Telephones (Re-Programming) Bill *[Lords]*

Considered in Committee.

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

RE-PROGRAMMING MOBILE TELEPHONE ETC.

8.24 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): I beg to move amendment No. 1, page 1, line 2, after "if", insert—

'personally or through an agent and whether in the United Kingdom or abroad'.

With due respect to the Bill, which is important, we have reached the fag end of this parliamentary Session, so I shall not delay the House for very long. I suspect that I would become deeply unpopular if I were to do so on this occasion.

The Minister will know that, on Second Reading on Monday, I said that there was strong support for the Bill among Members on both sides of the House and that there was no dispute about what the Government were trying to achieve. However, Members were concerned that, unless the Bill could be enforced more widely, it would lose some of its effectiveness.

The Bill would not curtail the big fish who are making multi-million pound sums from sending phones abroad for re-programming. They could simply circumvent the Bill by moving their activities abroad and bringing the phones back; as a consequence, they would carry on regardless. The Bill would pick up the small fry—the youths or others engaged in this activity—but not the big fish. The Government, to their credit, have sought to try to pick up the big fish, not just under this Bill but under the Proceeds of Crime Bill that we debated earlier.

The amendment is an attempt to ensure that the seriousness of the issue is not neglected and that the Government pursue thoroughly contact and discussions with their EU counterparts to find a way of ensuring that people simply cannot disappear to another EU country and re-programme phones. Two days ago, I gave the example of people in Northern Ireland—where the law is meant to apply, should it be passed—who simply cross the border to the Republic, where they are beyond the jurisdiction of the Bill. It is not simply about the EU; we need an international agreement.

I hope that the Minister has sympathy for the amendment. He may find reasons why he cannot accept it—I shall not lose any sleep if that is his view—but I hope he understands that we feel strongly that it is in the interests of the Bill, which we support. We must ensure that people engaged in this activity—a multi-million pound fraud—are stopped in their tracks. We do not want them to circumvent the Bill. If he cannot accept the amendment, I hope that the Minister will identify ways in which he is seeking to deal with the loophole.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I have to tell the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) that before the Committee stage of the Bill I went to the Library to see whether it could be improved. I read what was said in the other place in Committee and I have to inform the hon. Gentleman that, in my view, there was little more that could be done to improve the Bill, although there is one matter that I shall raise in due course.

The scope of the amendment is hair-raising. If the House were to accept it, we would be legislating on unique device identifiers on behalf of the entire world. I know that at times a certain degree of megalomania prevails in this Chamber, but it would take our powers too far to criminalise the actions of those living in Borneo, the Fiji islands, central Africa or wherever else, by saying that they have no right to tamper with a unique device identifier, even if the laws of their country say that that is acceptable, so that the moment they stepped off an aeroplane on a visit to the UK the hon. Gentleman could whiz off to a magistrate and insist on the issuing of an arrest warrant. I hope that the Minister will reject the amendment in short order.

8.30 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) anticipated that I might find reasons not to accept his amendment, which suggests that I have form on these matters. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) for his comments. This is a short Bill, but it has been worked on by my officials, by the mobile phone industry and by the police who will be responsible for enforcing it. Much work has gone into getting the drafting right.

The amendment would add the words "through an agent" to the Bill. Of course, anyone who personally carries out reprogramming in the United Kingdom would commit an offence under clause 1. We believe that this will have a deterrent effect on those who would carry out that work, whether or not they were acting as an agent for someone else. If a person asks another, his agent, to carry out reprogramming, depending upon the precise circumstances of the case, he will be guilty of one of the offences of aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring the offence of reprogramming a mobile phone. The punishment for that is identical to that for the main offence under the Bill. Furthermore, if the person asking an agent to carry out the reprogramming supplied the equipment for that purpose, he would be committing an offence under clause 2. The words suggested in the amendment are unnecessary.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield was right about international enforcement. On Second Reading, the Member for Lewes made a legitimate point about the international trade—and I agree with him—but the Bill cannot be used to tackle that. It would be a very big step to extend the jurisdiction of courts in the United Kingdom to cover reprogramming when it is carried out abroad. Some very serious offences—such as piracy and aircraft hijacking—can be tried in the United Kingdom wherever they occur and whatever the nationality of the ship or aircraft, or defendants. Other offences may be tried in the United Kingdom if the defendant is a British citizen or resident. Those include murder and manslaughter on land, bigamy, offences under the Official Secrets Act 1911 and, under the War Crimes Act 1991, offences of murder committed in Germany or in German occupied areas during the second world war. The Sex Offenders Act 1997 also dealt with sex tourism by making it an offence in the UK to commit certain serious sexual offences abroad that involve young children.

It should take nothing away from the importance that I attach to the Bill to say that mobile phone reprogramming does not fall into the same category as the other offences that have international jurisdiction. Moreover, the hon. Gentleman omitted to include the usual safeguards that are put in place when extending jurisdiction. It does not, for example, limit proceedings to British citizens or residents and it does not require the conduct to be an offence under the laws of the foreign state.

I must resist the amendment, but we need to build on what we have done. As I said on Second Reading, my officials are involved in discussions about how our work can be replicated as best practice across the European Union. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Ireland, with which we share a land border, and we will have discussions with the Dublin Government to seek ways forward. It is important to tackle this as an international problem, but I invite the House to resist the amendment.

Norman Baker: After that, I am tempted to ask the House to resist the amendment myself. I do not want to sound too demob happy, because the amendment has a serious point. I am happy to have had the opportunity to express that point and the Minister answered it in his remarks. I am grateful for his assurance that he will take the matter forward at European and international level, which is what I wanted placed on the record tonight. In drafting the amendment, we had little confidence that it would be accepted and therefore we did not pay as much attention as we normally would have done to its wording. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

POSSESSION OR SUPPLY OF ANYTHING FOR RE-PROGRAMMING PURPOSES

Norman Baker: I beg to move amendment No. 2, page 1, line 18, leave out from "which" to "and" in line 20 and insert—

> 'in conjunction with equipment capable of interfering with the operation of unique device identifier may be used for such purposes'.

The amendment seeks to reactivate the issue raised by the Minister's colleague, Lord Campbell-Savours, in the House of Lords, which I mentioned briefly on Second Reading. I remind the Minister that Lord Campbell-Savours was concerned that the word "anything" in clause 2(1)(a) would allow innocent parties to be subject to the legislation in a way that the Government did not intend. He gave the example of a cable that could be held by someone and which would leave him or her liable to action under the terms of the Bill.

Lord Campbell-Savours sought to amend the legislation in a way that did not find favour with the House of Lords, and the amendment seeks an alternative way. The object of the amendment is to prevent innocent parties from being wrongly caught up in the legislation, without weakening the purpose of the Bill which, as I have said, we entirely support. I do not know what the Minister will say in reply, but if he does not like the amendment I hope that he will at least recognise the point behind it. I would be grateful if he would respond to the point made by Lord Campbell-Savours that the terms of the Bill leave open the possibility that someone could be wrongly caught up in the legislation.

Mr. Grieve: In a spirit of co-operation with the Government, I have to tell the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) that although I have greater sympathy with the intention behind this amendment, it does not take matters much further. Clause 2 as worded clearly requires the prosecution to prove two things, the second of which is the intention

> "to use the thing unlawfully for that purpose".

Therefore, it is inconceivable that a person could be convicted on evidence of possession of a cable in the absence of other evidence. There would have to be a causal connection between having the cable, a screwdriver or some other implement and some other evidence that tied it in with the altering or reprogramming of telephones. In those circumstances, and subject to anything that the Minister might say, I hope that he rejects the amendment.

To save debate on clause stand part, I may say that my only query is about the heading of the clause:

> "Possession or supply of anything for re-programming purposes".

However, the clause refers to a person having something

> "in his custody or under his control".

That is the correct terminology, because it has always been my understanding that the courts and Law Commission have expressed increasing unhappiness about the use of the word "possession". It may mean something more or different from having something in one's custody or under one's control. In those circumstances, I wonder why we continue to use the word "possession" in the clause heading, when it has properly been removed in the body of the clause. I am aware that it is the text of the clause that matters and not the heading, but is not it time that we buried the word "possession", because it causes some difficulties of understanding and interpretation?

Mr. Denham: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the seriousness with which he has approached what is, despite its significance, a brief Bill, and the amendments to it. In his analysis of the amendment, he could have been reading almost directly from my brief about its legal implications. He is absolutely right that the structure of the clause relies on the necessity to prove intent. The consensus of everyone who was involved in helping to shape the legislation was that to try to define this provision in terms of specific types of equipment, whichever words we used, would create more problems than using the wording that is in the Bill. There is a further concern that, inadvertently, the amendment might narrow the offence unacceptably, making it more difficult to secure prosecutions.

I believe that the balance is about right. I am certain that no innocent party could be caught up in this legislation, because of the way in which it is phrased and the fact that knowledge or belief of intent would have to be proved. However, I consider that it is a reasonable point for the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) to explore.

As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said, the title of the clause has no legal effect. I am advised that the term "possession" appears in the title of

[Mr. Denham]

the clause as shorthand, and no more than that, for what the clause is about, in the same way as "telephone" appears in the title of the Bill and that of clause 1. That is what I am advised, so I shall share my advice with the hon. Gentleman. I hope that, in light of what I have said, the hon. Member for Lewes may feel able to withdraw his amendment.

Norman Baker: I probably do feel able to withdraw, as the Minister gently puts it. I am grateful for his considered assurance that he is certain that no innocent party will be caught up in the legislation. That is the assurance that I wanted and I am happy to have that on the record. In the circumstances, I happily beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clauses 2 and 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Order for Third Reading read.

8.43 pm

Mr. Denham: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This is a brief but important Bill. I am grateful to hon. Members for their support for the Bill, for their contributions to the debate and for their sensible co-operation in securing the Bill's passage.

As we have established, and as the Government have said, the Bill is not a panacea. It is one of a comprehensive package of measures that the Government are putting in place to tackle mobile phone theft and, more broadly, street crime. I can reinforce that. I will not name the operator because it would be unfair—a number of companies have written—but one of the mobile phone operators has written, setting out all the measures that it has taken in terms of its own operations and in co-operation with other companies, and has told my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in that letter:

> "To simultaneously tackle the problem of IMEI re-programming,"

the company

> "has supported the Home Office with the introduction of suitable legislative changes. We were delighted to see the early introduction of the Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill and very much hope that this bill will receive Royal Assent before the summer recess. The fact that it will then be a criminal offence to either alter the IMEI of a handset or to be in possession of the necessary equipment to do so (with intent) will send out exactly the right messages."

That company is also backing up what we have all been doing with its own crime prevention campaign, which I also welcome.

The Bill has an important role. It is welcomed by the police and the mobile phone industry. I believe that it will also be welcomed by consumers and customers, who will know that they will be better protected as we reduce the value of a stolen mobile phone.

There are issues to take forward in the wider campaign and on the international front. There are important issues to be developed in relation to the effective enforcement of the Bill—an issue that was also raised during the earlier stages. Looking to the future, as the third generation of mobile phones comes in, we will continue our work to ensure that security devices are built into phones from the beginning, so that we do not have to address any problem after it has occurred. We have done a useful piece of work with the Bill tonight.

8.45 pm

Mr. Grieve: I am delighted that the Bill should pass through the House so quickly and, I hope, with proper scrutiny. There is always a slight anxiety that legislation that commands universal approbation often causes problems later on. This Bill is the complete antithesis of the Proceeds of Crime Bill, on which we laboured for so long and which we only concluded this evening.

The Minister is quite right that the Bill is not a panacea. There will a be considerable onus on the industry to ensure that reprogramming becomes more difficult in future; otherwise we shall put a large number of people in the way of temptation to do just that, and they may be willing to incur the possible criminal penalties.

It may well turn out to be very difficult to detect and arrest those who re-programme because it could turn from being a high-street activity into a back-room industry. That is plainly undesirable, but the Bill is at least a step in the right direction. On behalf of the Opposition, I welcome it, and I congratulate the Government on getting it on to the statute book so quickly.

8.46 pm

Norman Baker: I, too, welcome the position in which we now find ourselves and look forward to Royal Assent being forthcoming before very much longer. I very much hope that it happens within the next couple of days. I also welcome the starring role of the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin), who made his contribution from the Treasury Bench between Committee and Third Reading. He used to make much larger contributions when he was leader of Hove borough council. He is now constrained to make much more formal contributions to the House in a much more limited fashion. No doubt his constituents will reflect on that famously at the next election.

As hon. Members have said, the Bill is not a panacea. It is a good Bill; it will go a long way to deal with the problem, and I shall not repeat the arguments and points that have been made. However, I want to raise one substantive issue with the Minister on Third Reading. It is important to try to monitor how effective the legislation is when it comes into force to find out whether it has had the effect that we all hope it will have, or whether it has not because of the international dimension or for other reasons. I sometimes think that we are very good at passing legislation, but not very good at measuring it subsequently to find out how effective it is.

I wish to refer to the reasons why someone might want to steal a mobile phone. When we began to consider the Bill, I certainly thought that the reason for stealing a mobile phone was simply to acquire it for use. That may seem rather obvious; but, on Second Reading, we were given three other reasons why such a theft might be reported. The obvious reason is to acquire it for use. The second reason is that someone might want to steal a mobile phone for the accessories around it—a point made on Second Reading by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson). The third reason is to prevent someone who was subject to an attack from using it to call the police; in those circumstances, the mobile phone itself is not wanted and is subsequently discarded. The fourth reason is that the phone was not actually stolen at all but is part of a fraudulent insurance claim.

I do not know whether this would be practical, but it would be useful to try to analyse the reasons why allegations of mobile phone thefts are made. That would be helpful in analysing how effective the Bill is when it becomes law, as it will very shortly. It would also be helpful in identifying whether any further measures are necessary subsequently to plug any loophole that may transpire.

This is a short but useful Bill. I very much hope that it will be as effective as the Government wish it to be, and I wish it well on its way.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

8.49 pm

Sitting suspended pursuant to Order [1 July].

9.45 pm

On resuming—

PETITION

Ancient Forests

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): In the final minutes before Parliament closes for the summer recess, and on the day when the Environmental Audit Committee has published its report on timber and the Government have published their response to the Select Committee report on preparations for the world summit on sustainable development, I am pleased to present this petition from Stephen Tindale on behalf of Greenpeace.

It is vital that our Prime Minister leads the way at the world summit in Johannesburg next month. We wish him well. The petition declares:

> that since the Rio Earth Summit ten years ago an area of ancient forest bigger than France or Spain has disappeared; that today we are losing an area of ancient forest the size of a football pitch every two seconds; that as this destruction continues thousands of plants, animals and indigenous communities will be put at risk; and that 49,000 individuals have contacted the Prime Minister expressing their concern about the destruction of ancient forests and asking him to take action to save them.

The petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons urge the Prime Minister to push for strong international action to end the trade in illegal and destructively logged timber.

To lie upon the Table.

EU Age Discrimination Legislation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

9.48 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): It is agreeable to have the penultimate word before the summer recess begins in this Session of Parliament.

A humorous story was current in my youth at Oxford about the attempts of his colleagues some time in the late 1950s to persuade the last of Oxford's professors with life tenure to retire from his chair. That was Canon Claude Jenkins, Professor of Ecclesiastical History. He was a self-confident nonagenarian, well known for his donnish wit. A great dinner was organised in his honour, at which lavish valedictory encomia were pronounced. But when the great man rose to his feet, he dashed the hopes of his friends with the opening phrase of his speech. He said he was

> "of a modest, but not of a retiring disposition".

I have sought an Adjournment debate because I fear that if the Government and Parliament are not careful, scenes of that kind, entertaining but also a bit disturbing, will be a feature not just of the past but of the future.

The Government are consulting on the implementation of a directive adopted by the European Union in November 2000

> "establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation".

That directive requires national legislation in each of the member states to give effect to its objectives, which include the imposition of legal penalties against discrimination in employment on a number of grounds, including age. The Government have said that they intend to proceed by way of regulations and guidance to give effect to that portion of the directive at some point before the end of 2006.

As I hope to show, the directive has potentially profound and wide-ramifying implications for an important sector of our national life—our universities. It also has serious implications in many other areas such as the judiciary, the civil service, the military, and the medical profession. In these circumstances, the Government should think again about the way in which they propose to handle this legislation.

There is a serious case, which I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench, for its being treated as primary legislation. Certainly, it should be considered by the relevant Select Committees, and I shall write in that sense to their Chairmen. If it is to be treated as secondary legislation, to attempt to pass it by way of the negative resolution procedure would be an abuse of Parliament. Assurances from the Minister on those points would be very welcome at this stage.

My purpose in seeking this Adjournment debate is to draw the attention of the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, at this very early stage to the serious implications that the regulations and guidance will have for the universities of the United Kingdom. My standpoint is not one of outright opposition to the abolition of mandatory retirement ages in academe, or to other age-based mechanisms that have been evolved in

[Mr. Robert Jackson]

our universities to try to manage the process of academic succession. These are arrangements that it may be right and proper to review, but I want the Minister and her officials in the Department for Education and Skills to take the seriousness of this issue on board;, to reflect on the problems which may arise; to listen to the universities, and to ensure that their interests are properly taken into account alongside the myriad of other interests that will be affected by this far-reaching legislation, which will of course be handled by another Department with its own agenda.

My anecdote about Canon Claude Jenkins should remind us that this question has a long history. Mandatory retirement ages in the universities were a 20th-century phenomenon; Canon Claude's leaving dinner in the late 1950s was necessary because his appointment to his chair preceded their introduction.

At the beginning of this discussion, I want to make a fundamental point. The introduction of mandatory retirement was, I believe, closely bound up with the professionalisation of university life. In the early 20th century, professionalism and corporatism—a word that is somewhat discredited nowadays—went hand in hand. Professionals were understood, by themselves and by wider society, as having a shared responsibility for the future of their disciplines, and for the institutions in which they worked. They accepted that those wider collective or corporate interests might give rise to constraints on their personal interests. For example, they could be expected to retire at a time not of their choosing, in order to assist the timely renewal of the personnel of their profession.

Mandatory retirement was made possible by the introduction early in the 20th century of pensions for retired academics. In the United States, the first academic pension schemes were a private initiative. The great philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who was responsible for this initiative, explained his purpose in these important words. In the absence of a mandatory retirement age,

> "able men hesitate to adopt teaching as a profession and many old professors whose places should be occupied by younger men cannot be retired".

Thus there is at stake in this debate not only the question of whether a mandatory retirement age and other age-related discriminations are still necessary for the proper management of academic succession, but the more fundamental question of the future of the corporate professional ethos in university life.

Over the past couple of decades, the corporatism of professional life in general—in the universities and elsewhere—has been challenged from many different directions. Thatcherism might be said to have been one such challenge. One other is the spread and intensification of the philosophy of individual human rights. This is the ideology which underlies the European directive whose effects we are considering tonight, which is aimed at protecting the right of individuals not to be discriminated against, inter alia, on the ground of age.

Let me say in passing that I believe that this directive ought to have raised questions of subsidiarity which the Government should have pressed harder in the Council of Ministers. But having made this point, I want to stress that the issue here is not essentially one of European intrusiveness. Legislation to protect the right of individuals not to be discriminated against on the ground of age is not a supposedly alien "continental" phenomenon. It originates in our Anglo-Saxon culture of fundamental rights. Germany and France have mandatory retirement policies which, like ours, will have to be modified as a result of this directive.

The true origin of this directive is to be found in the United States, in the Age Discrimination in Employment Act 1986. Similar legislation followed in Canada, and in Australia and New Zealand in the late 1990s. I want to urge the Minister to ensure that the experience of these other English-speaking countries is carefully evaluated as the Government proceed to implement this directive. In 1990, the Canadian Supreme Court found that it was constitutional in Canada to retain mandatory retirement for the university faculty. The arguments there repay closer study.

Above all, the Minister should reflect on the experience of the United States. There, a temporary exemption from the provisions of the 1986 anti-discrimination law was granted to post-secondary institutions so that a mandatory retirement age, raised to 70, was permitted. This exemption was reviewed by Congress in the early 1990s, and the exemption was dropped in 1994.

I have a copy of an important study published in November 2001 by Ashenfelter and Card—I would be happy to give it to the Minister—addressing the question,

> "Did the Elimination of Mandatory Retirement affect Faculty Retirement Flow?"

Among other findings, this study concluded that there has been a marked increase in the fraction of faculty who continue working into their seventies.

> "In the mandatory era, the average retirement rate of 70-year-olds was about 75 per cent, while the rate for 71-year-olds was about 60 per cent. Immediately after the prohibition of mandatory retirement contracts both rates fell to under 30 per cent".

The Minister should look at this study, and others. They will not, of course, tell us precisely how legislation of this kind might impact upon the particular circumstances of British universities. But she might like to reflect on the implications of this sentence in the study I have been quoting:

> "consistent with simple models of retirement incentives . . . people with higher salaries or lower pension wealth are less likely to retire at any given age."

As it developed in the 20th century, the regime of mandatory retirement ages was associated with the development of salary scales that rewarded older workers to help them prepare for retirement. When there was no mandatory retirement, academic pay was typically a fixed value emolument, or an entitlement to a variable dividend. I do not suppose that the universities or their staff would want to go back to those arrangements, but the fact is that under our current arrangements—developed as a consequence of mandatory retirement—older staff are more expensive and, if the American experience applies, will accordingly have a greater financial disincentive to retire if they have a free choice. This is a general point, applicable to both the UK and the US.

More particularly, in the UK, the academic profession is less well paid and endowed with less generous pension schemes than in the US. The disincentive here to retire will therefore be greater, and the incentives to carry on, in terms of pension access, will be less.

I want briefly now to draw attention to the possible consequences for the Government, some way into the future, if this legislation and the current structure of economic incentives result in many more academics staying in post for rather longer. In my own time as Minister for Higher Education in the late 1980s I saw at close hand the expensive and painful consequences of trying to put right imbalances in the age structure of university employment. The financial rigours of the early 1980s impacted on universities which had recruited a large cohort of young staff in the early 1960s. Those were men and women who were growing older together and also becoming more and more expensive to employ. The result was a series of early retirement programmes, funded by the state. Those were clumsy in their application and perverse in their effects—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Mr. Jackson: As I was saying, the best staff, those most capable of finding employment abroad, were often the ones who signed on for the packages. The programmes—and I stress this to the Minister, because her colleagues will be interested—were also very expensive for the Treasury. New blood had to be paid for, and it was not cheap. If the Government proceed with legislation that abolishes mandatory retirement ages in universities, I foresee a requirement for further and repeated new-blood schemes.

I hope that the Government will bear those points in mind as they reflect on the legislation that they are committed to bringing forward. The directive provides that discrimination may be acceptable, when it is

"objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary".

It also makes reference to justification on the basis of "legitimate employment policy" and in the light of

"labour market and vocational training objectives".

The Government may be tempted to leave the interpretation of those exemptions to the courts.

I do not expect that the Minister tonight will be able to express a view on that point, but I want to counsel the Government against yielding to any such temptation. If the Government do not give legislative guidance to employers on those points—especially, I might add, to university employers—they will certainly be advised to minimise the risk of legal challenge, and maximise the changes proposed by the directive. Important socio-economic and political judgments are involved here, and it would be an abuse not only of Parliament but of the courts to remit those questions to unelected judges.

I therefore put it to the Minister, first, that it is for the Government and Parliament to determine whether mandatory retirement can have a "legitimate aim" in universities, which is "objectively justified" on grounds of "legitimate employment policy"; and, secondly, that it is for the Government and Parliament to consider whether that instrument, which has helped to realise that aim through most of the 20th century, remains "appropriate and necessary".

People today—especially middle-class people—are living longer and more productive lives. Quite apart from the application of ideologies of individual human rights, that is bound to present a challenge to the institution of mandatory retirement in every walk of life. We do not have mandatory retirement for Members of Parliament of course, but it may be an issue with our electorate.

I want to make just two final points before sitting down. Both of them have to do with the nature of intellectual work—the teaching and the research that are the business of universities. The first is that there is no reason why a compulsorily retired academic with an adequate pension and appropriate access to the necessary facilities should not continue to research and to write, and even to teach. The life of the mind does not have to be lived in and through a university job. A gentle separation from university employment does not entail a separation from one's discipline. The second and concluding point is that, more than in most walks of life, the work of universities requires that the wisdom and experience which often come with age should not be allowed to crowd out the innovativeness and flexibility of mind which is generally the prerogative of youth. Socrates needed his young companions, and let us not forget that one of those young companions was Plato.

10.4 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education (Margaret Hodge): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) on giving the penultimate speech in the final debate before the recess, and it falls to me to respond to it. Both the hon. Gentleman and I—and perhaps you, too, Mr. Speaker—have a little bit of self-interest in the issue of age discrimination, in that we are of an age when we might suddenly start facing discrimination everywhere, probably, except in the House. However, I like to think that, as someone said to me when I reached my 50th year, the 40s are the old age of youth and the 50s are the youth of old age, which means that we have a long way to go.

Unfair discrimination is intolerable, as I hope the hon. Gentleman agrees. We need to tackle the unthinking prejudice that blights lives and is a cost to the economy. Older people form a major and growing section of the population, and our skills, talents and contributions needed if we are to create a successful society and economy. That applies as much to universities and other institutions of higher education as to manufacturers of widgets.

Although it is fair to say that the over-50s suffer the most from age discrimination, it is not the exclusive province of older people; younger people can also experience ageist practices. We have all heard of whiz kids doing well in the City, but we have also heard of people who cannot get jobs in IT at 30 because they are over the hill. Talented, qualified and ambitious young people are discriminated against in the labour market because they are deemed to be too young and too inexperienced. Thus age discrimination can hit the old and the young.

Employers who discriminate on the grounds of age not only miss out on the skills and experience of a diverse work force, but harm their bottom line. Government estimates of the annual cost to the economy range from £16 billion in the Cabinet Office report, "Winning the Generation Game", to £31 billion in a study by the Employers Forum on Age, "Ageism: Too costly to ignore".

[Margaret Hodge]

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that ageism in the workplace is wrong. Fairness at work and productivity go hand in hand and the best employers already know that they need to use the skills of all sections of their work force, irrespective of age. Universities are not in a special bracket that puts them beyond the reach of good practice.

Too often in the past, older workers have been written off, even though they have much to offer. About 70 per cent. of people aged 50 or over are in employment, but the remaining 30 per cent.—which is a lot—find that getting and retaining a job can still be a serious problem.

The Government are committed to introducing legislation that will outlaw discrimination. In November 2000, the European Union Council of Ministers, together with the Government, adopted the employment equality directive. That will require all 15 EU member states to introduce legislation prohibiting direct and indirect discrimination at work on the grounds of age, sexual orientation, religion, belief and disability.

We welcomed that employment directive from the outset, partly because it reflected much of our legislation, and because we thought that it was an important step towards ensuring equal opportunities for further sections of our communities, whether in this country or elsewhere in the European Union. However, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, legislating against age discrimination is not simple. There are many complex and sensitive issues, which we need to address and resolve so that the eventual legislation is practical and helpful to both employers and employees.

The directive recognises that differences of treatment on grounds of age can sometimes be justified. For example, it may sometimes be necessary to make special provisions for younger or older workers to protect their safety and welfare. Retirement age is another possible area of justification.

The challenge that we face on implementing that directive is to identify which types of differences or treatment are acceptable, and which are not. That obviously requires very sensitive consideration in the light of the responses that we are receiving to our consultation.

We in the United Kingdom have a fixed age for eligibility to the state pension, but that does not mean that we have a national mandatory retirement age. However, many sectors have established their own individual mandatory retirement ages, typically 60 or 65, but there are variations.

A mandatory retirement age is an example of direct discrimination, which is prohibited under the directive. Article 6 of the directive, however, allows member states to implement legislation to provide exceptions to the general principle of non-discrimination on grounds of age if they are justified by reference, as the hon. Gentleman said, to objective, reasonable and legitimate aims.

As the hon. Gentleman may know, we have already consulted on issues surrounding that difficult directive. We sought preliminary views on the retirement age, and the consultation was completed at the end of March. Analysis of some of the key responses to the consultation, which was called "Towards Equality and Diversity", showed, unsurprisingly, that opinion on retirement age was evenly split, with employers and employer organisations generally favouring the ability to set the retirement age, for many of the reasons that the hon. Gentleman set out in his speech, and organisations campaigning for age equality preferring no retirement ages. However, even in those two broad groups, opinion was divided within some organisations.

Some respondents thought that set retirement ages had advantages. As the hon. Gentleman said, they help personnel planning and create recruitment and promotion opportunities. But there were also disadvantages; they can contribute to creating a skills shortage, and they are unfair to competent staff who want to work beyond the normal retirement age.

By far the most significant emerging view was that retirement should be more flexible, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees. That view was certainly shared by all sides and by those respondents with a more neutral position. Some thought that the retirement age should be raised—suggestions ranged from 65 to 75—with flexibility to retire before or after, depending on agreement between the employer and employee.

Fifteen universities responded to the consultation, a narrow majority of which were in favour of employers being able to require employees to retire at a certain age. The responses of those who were in favour reflect the responses from others: they said that retirement ages were necessary to manage their budgets and pension schemes, to help succession planning, and to avoid having to keep on poorly performing staff.

Universities that thought that mandatory retirement ages should be abolished recognised the need to value diversity and the benefits of having access to greater experience for longer. They also recognised the need to judge people on the basis of their performance, rather than arbitrarily on their age, and acknowledged the contribution that older people can make to the economy.

The responses suggest that these are complex issues, as the EU has recognised. For that reason, the directive allows member states up to 2006 to implement its provisions on age discrimination. The Government will take full advantage of the time available. That is the only way to do justice to the complex issues and to allow full consideration, in consultation, of the best way forward. We shall, therefore, bring legislation into force by December 2006, but we aim to have it in place in good time before then so that employers have sufficient time to make their preparations to comply.

We are addressing those complex issues through a two-stage consultation process. First, we had the consultation, "Towards Equality and Diversity", which finished at the end of March. From that consultation, we wanted to established what people thought about mandatory retirement ages, for example. As for justifications, we aimed to find out what practices employers have, why they need them and why they need to retain them.

Now that part of the consultation has ended, we are in the process of developing specific proposals in the light of the responses, and we shall consult on them early in 2003. Of course, we are continuing to talk to stakeholders [illegible] we consider the options on which we shall consult formally next year. Officials have a programme of seminars with key stakeholders, such as big and small employers and trade unions, and I have asked them to engage with the higher education sector.

The hon. Gentleman asked that we take account of the experience of other countries, such as the United States of America and Australia. When I had some responsibility for this issue, I visited people in both those countries to talk to them about their legislation on discrimination. The Americans have a different set-up in their country, and their Age Discrimination in Employment Act has been on the statute book since 1967, with various subsequent laws amending it.

Although the American experience can provide us with useful lessons, experience from abroad also suggests that there are no easy off-the-peg solutions. The path to legislation, and the legislation itself, differs from country to country. Overseas experience suggests that age discrimination law is an evolving business. The case law in America bears that out. Although legislation introduced there in 1967 covered employment only, there have been several exceptions that restricted, for instance, the scope of the legislation to those aged 40 to 65. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, we want to tackle age discrimination against young people, too.

Another clear message from overseas is that we need to find the solutions that best fit our particular experience. That view is reflected in the EU directive itself. Recital 25 of the directive refers to the fact that provisions in respect of age discrimination may vary in accordance with the circumstances in member states. That is our view. This is complicated business, and we need to get it right for our particular circumstances.

We cannot tackle age discrimination through legislation alone, however. We must promote a change in the culture in the workplace. We need to get rid of those false stereotypes that characterise older workers as incapable of learning new skills, slow to adapt to change, and likely to take more sick leave—stereotypes that universities, I am sure, will not want to perpetuate. Such stereotypes would undermine the very professionalism that the hon. Gentleman says—rightly—that universities have striven to achieve and wish to maintain.

Other countries that have age legislation, such as the United States and Australia, have found that the effectiveness of legislation is greatly helped by operating it in conjunction with other policies that promote equal rights and educate employers about their obligations and rights. To help bring about that culture change, we introduced the code of practice on age diversity in employment, which was launched by what is now the Department for Work and Pensions in June 1999. It was produced in partnership with organisations such as Age Concern, the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry and the Employers Forum on Age. It features practical guidance for employers, backed up by good case studies. It sets the standard for non-ageist approaches to recruitment, training, development, promotion, redundancy and retirement. I commend the code to universities and others.

This is not legislation that employers should fear. It will not require any employer, let alone universities, to recruit or keep on someone who cannot do the job. It does not replace competence with age. In fact, recital 17 of the directive says:

> "This Directive does not require the recruitment, promotion, maintenance in employment or training of an individual who is not competent, capable and available to perform the essential functions of the post concerned or to undergo the relevant training".

I reassure the hon. Gentleman that I shall consider carefully all the points that he has made. We shall ensure that the higher education sector is fully engaged in the consultation process as we develop our proposals. Like all stakeholders, it will be able to let us have its views when responding to the next consultation exercise.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Finance Act 2002

European Parliamentary Elections Act 2002

Copyright, Etc. and Trade Marks (Offences and Enforcement) Act 2002

Justice (Northern Ireland Act) 2002

Divorce (Religious Marriages) Act 2002

Export Control Act 2002

Proceeds of Crime Act 2002

Police Reform Act 2002

Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Act 2002

Education Act 2002

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes past Ten o'clock.

Deferred Divisions

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

That, at the sitting on Monday 22nd July, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House in the name of the Prime Minister relating to matters to be considered before the forthcoming Adjournment may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours, and the Motion shall then lapse.

The House divided: Ayes 13, Noes 289.

Division No. 316]

AYES

Cranston, Ross
Dodds, Nigel
Drown, Ms Julia
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Khabra, Piara S
Lloyd, Tony
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Öpik, Lembit
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Winnick, David

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
B[illegible]s, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*

Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Question accordingly negatived.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 16 July 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Development Strategy for London

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Jim Murphy.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): They say that timing is everything in politics, so it is just my luck that this debate should fall between yesterday's statement on the comprehensive spending review and the more detailed statement that the Deputy Prime Minister will be making on Thursday.

The debate is about the spatial development strategy for London, but I share with the Mayor of London the belief that those words are probably the biggest turn-off. I note that the Mayor calls it the London plan. I used all my endeavours to change the title of the debate. The draft London plan was published on 21 June, but it is subject to a three-month consultation, so this is the only opportunity we have to discuss it before the summer recess.

The plan has to rise to the considerable challenges that will face the capital. London is a city of great contrasts. It is a city of extreme wealth and great poverty. It is a city of divisions; it has areas of great opportunity in the centre but also areas of great poverty and blight. London is a world city—it compares with New York and Tokyo—which gives it a reach both global and European, but it is also national and regional. It is a dynamic city; it is changing continuously, perhaps faster than any other part of Britain, or even of Europe. Its population changes. The services that it provides to the country and internationally change, as do its employment structures. London is also a city of great diversity: a third of its population is now estimated to come from one or other of the ethnic minorities, and more than 300 languages are spoken in the capital.

The plan provides two things: an ambitious vision of the London of the future, and alongside that a much more practical land-use strategy, of which the document says:

> "planning has to be realistic, responsive, enabling and work with the grain of the future".

Such planning is undoubtedly needed, mainly to guide the public and private investment that will be required during the 15 years of the plan. However, I believe that there is an inherent tension in the plan: whether the practical land-use strategy can deliver the plan's ambitious vision. I shall address that, first by considering the document itself, and secondly by considering what role the Government ought to play in the delivery of the strategy.

We must recognise that the Mayor and the Greater London Authority have few formal powers and even fewer resources to deliver the sort of infrastructure mentioned in the plan. It should therefore be recognised that there must be a partnership with Government; it is they who have the powers and who can provide the funding not only for the transport infrastructure, housing and regeneration that are the main objects of the plan, but for health and education and for public services generally.

The plan is based on a number of core assumptions, the first of which is population. Currently the population of London is about 7.4 million but if we project from recent population trends we may predict a population of 8.6 million at the end of the 15-year period. The Office for National Statistics carried out a study some years ago that suggested a much lower figure of 7.6 million. However, the most recent research, conducted by the GLA, puts the figure at 8.1 million. That seems a reasonable assumption, although we must be cautious about accepting that figure as time goes on. It would mean an additional population of some 700,000 people—or, as the Mayor likes to put it, a population approximating to that of Leeds.

The second assumption is about employment creation. It is expected that around 630,000 jobs will be created during that period, the vast majority of them—more than 450,000—in the finance and business sectors. Sadly, it is predicted that manufacturing employment will continue to fall from 320,000 to less than 200,000. However, there is some good news in that the high value-added sectors of manufacturing should be maintained.

The report draws on several experiences that have occurred in London over the past 20 years, when the growth in population and jobs was approximately what is expected during the period of the London plan. What happened in London during those 20 years is instructive. There was a dramatic increase in inequality in the capital, including a housing crisis—there was not only rampant house-price inflation such as we have now, but record levels of homelessness, which have continued to be a problem. There were severe capacity constraints in transport as major infrastructure projects stalled, which limited the capital's development potential.

If the plan is to achieve some of its joint objectives, to improve social inclusion and economic sustainability, specific areas must be considered.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The hon. Gentleman is making a thoughtful and useful speech. I agree that there is not enough affordable housing in London, but does he think that the Mayor's target of 50 per cent. affordable or low-cost housing is correct and that it will encourage developers to build all the necessary housing?

Mr. Love: Yes, I do. I should point out that the 50 per cent. that is mentioned means 50 per cent. in some parts of London; it is 35 per cent. in others. A detailed study was conducted across London about the acceptability of that target as a standard. It concluded that in most parts of central London 50 per cent. would be a reasonable target, although in other parts, such as my own, a lesser target would be more practical. Later I shall ask whether the Mayor could introduce that target as early as possible.

The report is predicated on several points that address the problems of the past. There must be a radical improvement in the public transport infrastructure; that goes without saying. For example, crossrail 1 is the only way in which we can unlock the potential of the east end,

[Mr. Love]

and reduce social exclusion there. A focus must be put on brownfield developments—that is generally accepted—and every attempt will be made to resist the development of the green belt. There must be greater density of development and a more intensive use of those areas that have not been adequately used in the past. Although I accept those aims in principle, I have several concerns about whether the land-use strategy can adequately deliver the ambitious vision set out in the London plan. These are not objections. Planning issues are a question of balance, with no "yes" or "no" answer.

The obvious question is whether the plan can be achieved and whether it is feasible. We have witnessed population growth and the creation of new jobs, which I hope will result in new infrastructure. Those developments must be accommodated within London's boundaries without encroaching on the green belt. We shall therefore be talking almost exclusively about brownfield development, but we know that there are problems with assembling the land and with remediation strategies, and services must often be provided on such land. That reflects the concerns that the Opposition spokesman mentioned among developers. I suspect that they will also be concerned about greater density and intensity of use; although it is easy to talk about such things in the plan, it will be much harder to deliver them. The first thing that we must do, therefore, is to recognise that the plan must be flexible if we are to get anywhere near achieving its objectives.

The next issue that I want to consider is capacity constraints and, in particular, land availability. The plan predicts the need for 23,000 housing accommodation units each year, yet that figure reflects the constraints on land availability for new housing development. It is predicted that there will be an 8 per cent. increase in the number of pupils, and we shall require schools if we are to educate them. It is suggested that there will need to be about 500,000 sq m of additional office space each year, which must be accommodated. It is also suggested that there will be a 35 per cent. increase in space requirements for hotels and catering during the period of the plan, which must be accommodated. The question is whether the land is available in London to accommodate all those developments and to implement the plan. There are major land availability issues, which we urgently need to tackle.

There is also an imbalance in the economic development that the plan proposes for inner and outer London. If we closely examine what is suggested, we find that two thirds of the new jobs that will be created in the period of the plan will be in inner London, and I include Canary wharf in the definition of inner London. Additionally, most of the job losses in manufacturing will occur in outer London, which poses a difficult problem. Housing development will be concentrated in east London in the latter part of the plan, but it will generally occur across the whole of London. That will place additional pressures on the transport infrastructure, and the problems of moving people form outer to inner London will become intolerable without major infrastructure improvements. We need to reconsider the balance between the jobs that are created in inner and outer London.

Another concern is whether the plan can meet the capital's housing needs, and I come to the conundrum mentioned by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). At present, we have a combination of the largest house-price inflation since records began in the late 1980s and the lowest level of house building since 1924. Many reasons are given for that, and some people blame the developers. I do not want to get into a debate about that, but we must recognise that there are problems with site assembly and brownfield land development. Although the plan suggests that there should be 23,000 additional homes with 10,000 of those being affordable units, we need to recognise that that is probably an underestimate of the real need. The Association of London Government figures for what needs to be achieved, and those produced by the commission that the Mayor set up last year, are much higher.

In recognising that the figure of 23,000 is a minimum, we should also recognise the traditional tensions surrounding house building in London—the competition among different local authorities and the tensions between inner and outer London about where affordable housing should be built. All those traditional tensions still exist and if we are to achieve the plan's objective, we need two things. First, we need significant additional resources to build those houses—a statement was made yesterday in relation to that and there is another to come, Secondly, we need a streamlined planning process to deal with the structural difficulties in the London market.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I agree totally with the hon. Gentleman—housing is the key issue for London. Is he aware that the House Builders Federation has estimated that if all the brownfield sites within the M25 were developed, there would be enough land for London's housing needs for the next 10 years? Is not the reason why a lot of those sites are not being developed the fact that they require Government pump-priming to clean them up and remedy them? Is it not a tragedy that we have lost the gap funding from Europe that was so successful in doing just that?

Mr. Love: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on gap funding and I hope that the new measures that I understand will be introduced in the near future will deal with the need for that type of Government support to ensure the development of sites that need remediation.

In relation to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, although I accept that there are real difficulties with brownfield development, the problem is much more complex. That is not the entire reason why those sites have not been developed. There are many more reasons, not least the unwillingness of the developers to develop what are, in their terms, difficult sites. They would much prefer to develop greenfield sites.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I bring the example closer to home. In the hon. Gentleman's own borough—the London borough of Enfield—there has been high-profile concern during the past half decade in relation to a brownfield development site at the Royal Small Arms factory. He referred earlier to the idea of the planning process being streamlined. How would he envisage, in practical terms, that type of development being streamlined? Presumably, the aim would be to avoid the long delays that occurred because a number of local residents felt aggrieved by the process.

Mr. Love: I could go into the history of that factory site, its sale and the involvement of various agencies, but I shall not. The site lies not in my constituency but in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan), so I defer to her. I say only that the existing planning process is clearly inadequate to develop a site as large as that of that factory, which has such a history, in the time scale necessary if we are to deal with the problems in London.

Another area that causes me concern is the low priority that is given in the plan to manufacturing in London. As I have already mentioned, it states that manufacturing employment will reduce from 320,000 to less than 200,000 during the period of the plan. I am concerned about that, not least because it would reduce the diversity of the London economy and make us even more dependent on the financial services sector than we already are. People should be worried about that.

However, my major concern about this document is that it does not seem to include a strategy to deal with the issue of manufacturing. Yes, overtures are made to the high-tech end of the market, and there are suggestions that that specific part of manufacturing can be maintained by a combination of clustering and proposals to train high-tech workers, but little is said about the rest of the manufacturing sector, which is still significant in some parts of London, including my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North. The document is light on tackling the need to find some strategy to sustain manufacturing in the capital.

The Mayor asks in the strategy for a partnership with Government to try to achieve his objectives. Given the level of powers and resources available to him, he needs that partnership, so I support his call for it. He highlights two major areas where concerted action is needed to achieve the objectives of the London plan, one of which is increased public investment. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced considerable increases in almost every aspect of public investment yesterday in the comprehensive spending review, and I want to touch on a couple.

In relation to affordable housing, we have a target of 10,000 additional dwellings. The approved development programme to achieve that would cost about £500 million or £600 million a year, increasing by approximately 35 per cent. the existing sum spent on the programme. The announcement yesterday suggested that about £6 billion would be spent on housing. As I understand it, that suggests about £1 billion extra for new development, so we are beginning to address the need. I hope that the Deputy Prime Minister's statement on Thursday will go into the matter in much greater detail.

We also need infrastructure investment, especially in schools to deal with increasing pupil population during the period of the plan. That matter was addressed in the comprehensive spending review. However, we are not dealing with the developing acute shortage of skilled labour in the building industry, and nor is the plan. That is a serious problem in the capital for two reasons. First, it inevitably has led and will lead to cost increases, so all the cost floors included for development in London will need to be thrown out of the window. It will cost us a great deal more to develop a hospital or new housing because of such restrictions. Secondly, the problem will undoubtedly lead to delays. If we want to stop the delays and cost increases, we need to tackle that severe shortage. As is always the case, the problem is much more severe in the capital than anywhere else.

Transport investment is critical. It is almost the crux of the development plan. We must recognise that there is a long lead-in time for such developments. I do not want to go into the subject of the London underground today, because we have done so on numerous occasions. Everyone has their own view of the public-private partnership, and the one issue in relation to it on which all hon. Members are united is the need to get the investment under way as soon as we can. It is two years overdue, and it is needed immediately.

We have discussed crossrail 1 for 10 years. It is vital for the future of the capital, yet we failed to get the relevant Bill through Parliament. As well as the Government, Parliament needs to give priority and its full backing to the development. The plan suggests that crossrail 1 should be completed by 2010. If we are to open up brownfield development in the east end of London, a substantial commitment from the Government is needed. I was pleased to see additional resources for the 10-year transport plan announced in the comprehensive spending review.

The Mayor said that change was needed in the mechanism used to implement development, not only in London but throughout the country. The existing system, with minor changes, has been in place since 1948 and is long overdue for reform. In December 2001, the Government issued a Green Paper, the objective of which was to streamline the planning process, and the subsequent consultation exercise went on until the end of March 2002. In the words of the London plan document, we need to "promote vigorous development." I was pleased to hear the Chancellor announce yesterday that the Deputy Prime Minister will introduce some reforms of the planning system. I suspect that the Minister will be unable to say anything about that today, but any early indications that he can give us would be welcome.

We should also consider whether we need a special sort of development body to deliver the plan. My impetus in securing the debate was that almost everyone recognises that local authorities have not proved to be the most effective bodies to get development under way. That is especially true where a development area covers more than one local authority area. At the same time, our experience of development corporations has not been that good. The word "remote" comes to mind when one thinks of the London Docklands development corporation, which almost totally ignored the population of the area in which it was carrying out development. If one reads the recent National Audit Office report on the Teesside development corporation, one sees that the chief executive ran the corporation as if it was his fiefdom, ignoring his board of trustees and everyone else. Ultimately, he did not deliver the strategy. Therefore, the development corporation model is not very good either.

[Mr. Love]

I noticed that in his statement on the comprehensive spending review, the Chancellor announced the creation of business planning zones, which he said would

"ensure development and create jobs in high unemployment areas."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 21.]

Therefore, I ask the Minister whether he can tell us anything today about how the zones will operate and, more importantly, whether he would like to set up a pathfinder for those zones in some area or areas of London.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that point. Surely that proposal goes in a different direction from the plan before us. As I understand it, the number of planning rules and guidance in those zones would be reduced, whereas the plan tries to set a raft of new guidance.

Mr. Love: I am not sure that I can comment on that because I do not know how the business zones will operate. The hon. Gentleman is obviously privy to more information than I am. Of course we want to streamline the planning process, but that should not be done at the expense of the needs of the local community in the zone. While we speed up the process and change the planning regime, we must take account of the local community as part and parcel of the process.

The Mayor has suggested several changes to the planning regime that would increase his influence over development in greater London. Without going into all the issues about planning gain and affordable housing, I commend those changes as a mechanism by which we can help to achieve the plan's objectives.

This is a good plan. It is very ambitious—one could be critical and say that it is too ambitious but I am not sure that one can be too ambitious for a capital city. It is informed by London's city-wide government and the leadership of the Mayor, and is based on the statutory consultation process, which is welcome, giving a London-wide accountability that did not previously exist. Its vision is that of the partnership that we can offer the Mayor and the Greater London Authority, and I hope that it will deliver a successful and sustainable city that is much more socially inclusive. If we can achieve that, we shall have done a great deal not only for our capital city but for our constituents.

10 am

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) not only on having secured the debate but on the rational way in which he delivered his thoughts. That was in distinct contrast to our previous London debate, which demonstrated the split between various factions of the Labour party.

The strategic development plan proposed by the Mayor reflects the fact that London is largely a victim of its success. It is a case of motherhood and apple pie; nobody can argue with the thrust of the points that are made. There is a need for sustainable management of the economy and its growth—London is growing rapidly—for regeneration, transport and schools. We need to tackle poverty and social exclusion and to improve the quality of the environment.

The only part of the report that refers to my constituency—if anybody in the Mayor's office ever reads such documents—mentions the need to develop the science park at Cane Hill and its being hampered by the lack of transport links. As the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) will know—she approved the link before she handed the matter to the Mayor—the only reason why the links are not being developed is that the Mayor is not doing it, so there is some inconsistency in parts of the report.

I should like to touch on three controversial areas, which are the test of the Greater London Authority Act 1999. They are development, the need for social housing and planning reforms, to which the hon. Member for Edmonton alluded.

I turn first to office space development. There is a need, as the report says, for some 600,000 new office spaces in London. It is proposed that they will largely be in high-rise blocks. The Canary wharf development and the way in which it is being integrated is a good thing; those who say that we shall have another 75 Canary wharfs are probably exaggerating, as politicians tend to do. Companies clearly like that type of block and, provided that we watch out for bad architecture—the skyline of London is something that everyone will be lumbered with and the vistas should be protected—I shall have no difficulty with more such developments.

One point that touches on the effectiveness of the Act is that much of the discussion between the Mayor and the developers has taken place in private. That is not acceptable. The Mayor's excuse is that, as he alone is the planning authority—to that extent he is right—why should he not conduct discussions in private? They should be conducted in public because then there could be no controversy about the link between the Mayor and the developer when he gives permission for large blocks. The Government should consider amending the Act or the regulations to reflect that point, otherwise questions of corruption can creep in, even if completely unfounded.

The hon. Member for Edmonton dwelt on the need for affordable housing. Discussion about the need in London tends to focus on public sector workers. There is a need for housing for the low paid, whether they are in the public or the private sector. There is a graduated scale of demand, depending on income. We all agree that there is a need for more land. So far, the Government's response has been weak. I suspect that that will change when the Deputy Prime Minister makes his statement—at least I hope so.

The Government's starter home initiative was inadequate and needs to be beefed up. We also need hundreds of thousands of more affordable houses. The difficulty is that the plan is not in the Mayor's brief. As the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate will know, it was made clear during consideration of the Bill that it was not envisaged that it would be. That is why the Bill did not give him the powers. He has half a power—a negative power: he can direct a local authority to refuse permission for a development that does not have adequate social housing, but he cannot do anything about it. What is happening now is what we always said would happen: the boroughs and the Mayor have different ideas. The question arises of who decides London's requirements: is it the Mayor, or the boroughs?

On Second Reading, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

> "The strategic plan will be based on the boroughs' views".—[*Official Report*, 14 December 1998; Vol. 322, c. 633.]

The position shifted slightly when the guidance came out, which stated:

> "The Government expects the Mayor and the boroughs to work collaboratively in the development and review of UDPs".

Newham, which is in the east end of London where most of the development is happening, is resistant to social housing. It would rather have people on middle-class incomes bringing a lot of revenue into the borough. There is therefore a stalemate. The developers are resistant to having 50 per cent. social housing in a development, and will wait until the next Mayor or the next elections, as will the boroughs. The result is that nothing will happen.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is making a good point. Will he contrast what is happening in London—the lack of any real action to tackle the severe problems that London faces with social housing and transport—with the powers of the Mayor of New York and with what Mayor Giuliani managed to achieve in New York to revitalise it?

Richard Ottaway: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The difference between the governments of New York and London is that the Mayor of New York has more powers. However, that was a conscious decision by our Government. I suspect that they thought that Mr. Livingstone might end up as Mayor, and wanted to keep the ball and chain on his leg. I agree with them, which is where I must disagree with the hon. Member for Edmonton, who suggested that the Mayor be given more powers. In fact, the Mayor wants to have a say in section 106 agreements. I urge the Minister not to go down that road. If the Government went down that road, the Mayor of London would become the housing authority for London. That would emasculate the London boroughs, which is not what the people of London want. During consideration of the Bill, we were warned that that would happen. This sort of issue is a test of the legislation.

Mr. Edward Davey: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the Mayor is going down that route because his financial powers in other areas have been severely limited? Surely it would be more rational to allow more financial decentralisation and, as he says, to prevent the Mayor from getting his sticky fingers on greater planning powers?

Richard Ottaway: I agree. That is why the Conservative party proposed during consideration of the Bill that the London Assembly comprise representatives of London boroughs, rather than being a bridge between the people and the Mayor, which it is at the moment. We are being proved right as the legislation is tested.

The hon. Member for Edmonton made the point that none of it will happen unless the infrastructure is put in place. We need more transport infrastructure, we need crossrail, and a variety of other projects. I detect signs that the Government are hesitating before announcing more transport infrastructure projects because London is working pretty well as it is. The economic prosperity being created by London is dramatic; it is fizzing at the moment. There is enough regional imbalance already. If more money is put into more projects in London and it becomes even wealthier there will be a greater imbalance. I suspect that the Government, as ever, will try to find something between the two positions and come up with a third way.

The comprehensive spending review statements will be the real test. There is an opportunity for the Government, but it is essential to resolve the conflict between the Mayor and the boroughs and the boroughs and the Government. If the Government make it clear exactly how the decisions are made—the process of doing so—the plan will be even more effective.

10.10 am

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on securing the debate and on relieving the burden of delivering the undoubtedly necessary statistics in the Mayor's London plan from the shoulders of every other contributor to the debate. He made it interesting, too.

I question whether my hon. Friend was entirely right in averring that he had chosen the wrong time for the debate in the light of the Chancellor's statement yesterday and the statement from the Deputy Prime Minister on Thursday, which we await with bated breath. I have little doubt that the Minister will draw the Deputy Prime Minister's attention to this debate. A great deal in politics can happen in a day, as well as in a week.

I declare an interest inasmuch as I am a member of the Mayor's advisory cabinet on rough sleeping and homelessness. I want to touch briefly on the points made by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway), who said that no one could argue with the London plan because it was essentially about motherhood and apple pie. I remind him that during the passage of the Greater London Authority Act, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues argued ferociously against a mayoralty even being instituted.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned issues relating to planning, housing, transport and more money for London. In the days of the Conservative Government, I distinctly remember that planning was completely outside the remit of local communities. It seemed that the Secretary of State with responsibility for planning under the Conservative Government simply rubber stamped every major development in the teeth of furious opposition—certainly in my constituency—on certain big developments. They did absolutely nothing to support social housing. They were the architects of many issues on which London now has to carry the burden: not only the lack of affordable housing but the destruction of communities.

In respect of money for transport infrastructure, the Conservative Government's response to the difficulties of creating a properly integrated public transport system for London was simply to sell it off, usually to the detriment of taxpayers, who until privatisation, certainly as far as surface rail is concerned, owned that infrastructure. The Conservative Government proposed to sell off London Underground, too. The argument is

[Glenda Jackson]

about how London can create sustainable development, based on one of the Labour Government's great pluses: giving the people of London a direct voice in who is democratically accountable for London as a whole.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton put his finger on the issue that must be clarified if the plan is to succeed. I agree with him that the plan, which is based on the most comprehensive consultation, not only of those directly elected to the Greater London Authority, but of the population of London as a whole, deserves Government support and partnership. Achieving the plan's targets will depend on partnership with central Government and with the London boroughs. My hon. Friend referred to a conflict between inner and outer London boroughs over employment prospects, but the borough structures themselves might be a problem for the sustainable development of London, which also depends on the economy of the United Kingdom plc.

People far more expert than I have demonstrated that the creation of a job in London is directly linked to the creation of two other jobs in the wider national hinterland. Apart from being the capital city of this great nation—and a great city by virtue of its variety and energy—London is the engine room for the sustainable development of the United Kingdom as a whole. It is vital not just for Londoners, but for everyone who lives and works in this country that the Mayor's plan works. However, it will not work without commitment and agreement to the plan's overriding essentials and to creating a desperately needed infrastructure. We now have the opportunity to see it happen through central and local government, the voluntary sector, the private sector and others working together.

The city cannot sustain itself if the people necessary to its sustainability find it impossible to rent or to buy a decent home. In fact, that is over-egging the pudding: nowadays it is increasingly difficult to find any home at all. We face the absurd paradox of the worst housing in the country being the most expensive—often for the public purse, which is a clear waste of money. We are doing nothing to maintain our national housing stock and nothing to broaden the aspirations of London's people. In the main, we are leaving them in unsuitable accommodation in unacceptable surroundings.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton pointed out, London's wealth, which is not exclusively financial, is not evenly spread throughout the city. My constituency, which comprises one of the two parliamentary seats in the borough of Camden, is invariably misrepresented in the popular press as being exclusively populated by millionaires living in leafy roads who do nothing except sip champagne and chatter. In fact, my constituency includes two of the most deprived wards in the United Kingdom and the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has two more. Pockets of severe deprivation can be found throughout the whole of greater London.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that, although the Government have been successful across the country in tackling the crisis of child poverty, child poverty in London has not reduced? That must be tackled by using all the measures outlined in the plan. The housing crisis, the inability of families to enter employment because of the housing benefit trap, the high cost of child care and so forth have made it difficult for families to move out of child poverty at the same rate as elsewhere.

Glenda Jackson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who leads me neatly on to my next point. Undoubtedly, 40 per cent. of London's children live on or below the poverty line. We have heard much about the wealth of this great city. Indeed, I have contributed to that idea in my speech. However, the Association of London Government has issued interesting and detailed briefing papers highlighting its concern that London may lose out at the time of the next standard spending assessment review if the Government change the structures that they are examining in the desperate and entirely laudable attempt to make the process fairer. We may lose the finance that is necessary not only to move forward the Mayor's plan, but simply to keep London ticking over.

The streets of London are not paved with gold, but it is undoubtedly possible to increase the capacity of people who live in the city to make a larger contribution to its economy and the country. They will be only too willing to do that if the proper infrastructures are in place to enable them so to do. I urge the Government to approach seriously and across the range the partnership to which my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton and I have referred.

The Mayor, the GLA and, indeed, the hon. Member for Croydon, South have pointed out that the Mayor has no direct responsibility for the delivery of housing, inasmuch as he has no powers or money to build. However, I argue strongly against any diminution of the Mayor's powers over the planning process with regard to the contribution of affordable social housing.

We know from the Mayor's housing commission that the city should be building simply to catch up and to take more than 50,000 families out of temporary housing and more than 8,000 out of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We should also be building to tackle hidden homelessness in London, which is estimated to affect 106,000 to 160,000 people, many of whom are among the most frail and vulnerable of our citizens.

Simply to put those people in some form of decent housing, we should be building at the rate of 28,000 properties a year for the next decade. If we are to put some slack in the housing system, we should be building 46,000 properties a year. However, that will not be possible, given the scarcity of available land in London. The concentration will have to be on brownfield sites, unless the Mayor, working in partnership with the boroughs, has the power to insist that 50 per cent. of developments consist of affordable social housing.

The hon. Member for Croydon, South referred to the Government's approach to starter packs. There has been movement by Government to attempt to tackle the difficulties experienced by nurses, teachers and police officers in trying to find somewhere affordable to live in London. I can understand why the Government did what they did, but it achieves nothing. All it does is pour money into what is clearly a seller's market. We must put more properties into the equation or we will see ever greater inflation of rents and house prices, and an ever greater reduction in the number of people on whom the city depends day in, day out, because they cannot find somewhere to live.

That is one group of workers whom the Mayor and Government have defined as key workers, but other key workers in London do not feature in the starter packs. The people who sweep the streets, who push trolleys round our hospitals, who clean our hospitals, doctors' surgeries and schools, and the groundsmen in schools need to live in this city, too.

I hope that the Government will enter into the partnership that the Mayor has called for to deliver on his London plan. I hope that they will look kindly on the financial necessities for delivery of the plan, not least on housing, but also on the transport infrastructure. The Government have made a commitment to invest in transport over the next decade, but what is even more vital to London than the money, curiously, is the prioritisation of which scheme will start first. Otherwise, we will waste more years, and costs will inevitably increase before any project gets under way because of parochial arguments about what is necessary in certain parts of this capital city.

That brings me back to my central point. The Labour Government's great step forward in creating a mayoralty and the Greater London Authority was an acknowledgement that London, in certain basic essentials, must be viewed as one city. We had to move from the situation that had prevailed for too long in which borough was set against borough. I referred earlier to the mess in planning under the Conservative Government. It was acknowledged that because boroughs desperately needed money and work opportunities for their people, planners would hold them over a barrel and say that if they did not give them permission for a particular development, they would move five miles down the road where another local authority would. That situation had to stop. We are suffering from that inability to recognise the long-term planning and development needs of London.

The mayoral plan sets out a framework that can deliver a sustainable, developing and infinitely fairer, healthier and more equitable capital city. As I have said, the Mayor and the GLA cannot deliver the plan on their own and will need partnership from central Government. The boroughs will also need to work in partnership and be open minded, as will all other parts of London life that can make a positive contribution, including the public, private and voluntary sectors.

This is a great city, which can be infinitely greater. Its greatness has always depended on the energy, creativity and commitment of the people who live and work here. Far too many of them are still excluded from making their proper contribution, and we owe a duty to them to ensure that the Mayor's plan can and will deliver.

10.26 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on securing this important debate. We go back some five or six years. Hon. Members may have wondered earlier how I could talk about the intricacies of the London borough of Enfield. The reason is not only that I am a bit of a political anorak, but that I was a candidate—sadly unsuccessful—in the 1997 election in Enfield, North.

I remember meeting the hon. Gentleman when he was a mere prospective parliamentary candidate. It struck me then how firmly he felt about the importance of housing and homelessness issues. During the year that I have been in the House, he has become a leading light in discussing the issues, although he is sometimes a thorn in the side of his own party. It was not a great surprise that a debate on a development strategy for London would concentrate on the issues in the draft London plan and effective housing.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said that London is a wonderful place in which to live, and I agree. All London Members recognise London's brilliance, history and vibrancy and the fact that it is a melting pot for people from different cultures and for the young and the old. Equally, it cannot be denied that London has deep-seated problems, and I hope that we can play our part in solving them. We must confess that the role of the 74 London Members is limited. A London Mayor is in place, and we must ensure that we do not obstruct what he is trying to do.

I welcome the publication of a visionary strategic plan for London. This might make me sound a little like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) discussing the Maastricht treaty, but I must confess that I have not read the document throughout. I suspect that reading the draft plan in order to contribute to the consultation process will take up a disproportionate amount of my summer recess. Nevertheless, it makes important comments on the sustainability agenda and transport, in particular crossrail.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Will the hon. Gentleman take time during the summer recess to go through the Mayor's development strategy in detail and consider it in the light of a possible bid to host the Olympic games in 2012 or 2016, something that I have long believed London should do? In considering that will he recognise that one of the reasons for making such a bid is to help stimulate the investment in infrastructure and affordable housing that London so desperately needs and that were features of both the Commonwealth games bid in Manchester and the Sydney Olympic games bid?

Mr. Field: I fully accept those comments. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be talking to his constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner). Perhaps looking at these large-scale sporting complexes has not been the Government's greatest hour. An Olympic bid for London may be a bit further away than 2012 or 2016.

I shall keep my comments brief, as I know we have to move towards the winding-up speech. I want to make a few points about affordable housing. The policy of 50 per cent. affordable housing in central London, which has been calibrated on the basis of 35 per cent. affordable housing and 15 per cent. for key workers, may have unintended consequences. If we have a tightly prescriptive policy from the Mayor on affordable housing, developers may think that it is not financially

[Mr. Field]

viable to go ahead and build, particularly in central London. We will suffer because of a lack of flexibility on rules in that regard.

Ms Buck: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Field: I am sorry, but I have to finish in a moment or two.

It is questionable whether this very ambitious agenda, or indeed any part of it, can be driven through by the current incumbent of the mayoralty. Like many other London Members I receive a positive blizzard of publications almost daily from the GLA and from Transport for London, the headcount of which has leapt from 2,257 to over 3,100 in the past year alone. Much of it is virtually irrelevant propaganda on an array of policy areas outside the work of the Mayor and the GLA and is produced by the Mayor's policy unit.

I hope that the Minister will have something to say about ensuring that there is no centralisation by Government on a number of the planning aspects that several hon. Members have dealt with today. We need to put our trust in Londoners. My concern is that if we have a regional government whose raison d'être is to have a large-scale planning power, the 33 London boroughs will suffer. Effectively, planning decisions will be made up on high and will not be responsive to the interests and needs of local people in all the villages that make up London as a whole.

10.32 am

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on the main thrust of his speech, which highlighted the fact that the London plan is predicated on the idea that the land will be available for all the building, both office and residential, that it envisages. Scarcity of land goes to the heart of the debate. I will focus on that, but I should first like to welcome the Minister to his new position. Some of us were very disappointed that he spent such a long time in the Trappist world of the Whips Office. We look forward to his contributions to the parliamentary dictionary over the next few weeks and months.

I welcome the plan and the debate. It is important that we have such a plan for London. For far too long development in the capital has been chaotic and has had no overarching strategy. To that extent the plan is a welcome contribution to a debate that we have been unable to have for a decade or two. Hon. Members have not so far stressed the fact that this is now a legal document. When boroughs consider their planning applications and review their unitary development plans, the plan will be a material consideration. It will affect the lives of our constituents. It is very important that we and our boroughs debate it. Clearly, if it survives all the consultation and becomes a formal London plan, it will have a significant effect on planning across the capital.

As other hon. Members have said, the plan has many good aspects, such as the focus on affordable housing, which must be right and is in many ways the major challenge facing the capital. The focus on east London and development in the east in that regard is very important. That part of our great city has more land available and there is an urgent need to develop it. The Mayor adopts a cross-party belief that much development can take place there.

I welcome an innovative part of the plan, the blue ribbon network. During the proceedings of the Greater London Authority Bill, we debated the various strategies that the Mayor would be statutorily required to produce. The Liberal Democrats argued that he should be required to produce a strategy for the River Thames. Many of the thousand or so amendments that we tabled to that Bill were not successful but I am delighted that the Mayor has taken the kernel of that idea and expanded it to incorporate all the waterways and watercourses across the capital. That is very exciting.

However, I have some concerns about the plan. I am gravely concerned about its underlying assumptions, about some of the delivery mechanisms that the plan skates over and about some of the omissions, particularly the impact on the suburbs—areas such as my own—and the impact of orbital transport networks, which are becoming a theme of Transport for London. On behalf of hon. Members whose constituencies would be affected, I am also concerned that the plan does not state more clearly that a third runway at Heathrow is a bad idea.

I also worry that much of the research underpinning the document has not yet been published. I hope that the Mayor will publish it quickly so that it is available during the consulation period and the examination in public next year. Chapter one of the plan paints four scenarios. The Mayor has gone for what is described as the high-demand, high-supply scenario. I am concerned that the plan is predicated on that; other scenarios may turn out to be correct. We obviously hope that it will not be the case but, for example, growth in the capital may not be as strong as the plan suggests.

Those scenarios are built on the presumption that London is in equilibrium but it is not. We have much demand but insufficient supply, particularly in the infrastructure. We need supply to catch up with the demand. I am concerned about the general view from the Mayor's office that we will take as much growth as can be thrown at us, and about the idea that population growth can and should be absorbed. That is not a sensible way of planning. Some population growth may need to be encouraged in other parts of the country. The Mayor should take a leadership role in saying that he will work with other regions and areas to try to ensure that growth, particularly population growth, is more widely spread. Saying, "We will predict and provide" is not necessarily the right assumption on which to base the plan.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton said, the more optimistic plans for affordable housing do not relate to land availability. Interestingly, the plan uses target figures from a recent housing land capacity study, drawn up in close co-operation with the boroughs, which was more pessimistic than the plan. That raises serious questions. Much extra research, which has not yet been published, has been undertaken to try to work out whether more land can be used. In table 3A1, the plan suggests that my borough will be able to find another 6,710 homes by 2106. I know my constituency very well, and that will be enormously challenging, although it is a relatively modest target compared with those in other boroughs. It is worrying that some of the targets do not seem to be linked to where land is available.

I am concerned about the details of the plan. Norbiton is a deprived ward in my constituency, but from reading the plan, one would imagine that Kingston's needs were non-existent. It mentions one or two areas in the south sub-region that require regeneration, but, apparently, not one single area in Kingston requires regeneration. I invite the Mayor and his advisers to visit the Cambridge Road estate and Cambridge gardens, where he will see the need for regeneration. I hope that he will amend the plan so that Norbiton ward becomes a high priority for regeneration.

The plan does not clearly set out how it will deliver some of its aspirational objectives. It says too little about how the Mayor will work with boroughs, such as the royal borough of Kingston upon Thames. Such partnerships will be crucial because the Mayor does not have the money or power to achieve the plan's objectives by himself and he needs to engage more. That is a major omission. The Mayor should be working with borough planning departments, which are under-resourced, in spite of the excellent work carried out by officials in those departments. The Mayor could play a significant role in supporting and strengthening those departments.

In conclusion, I welcome the plan. There is much to be debated before its final adoption, and I hope that the House will have the opportunity to revisit the subject, perhaps for an even longer debate.

10.41 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) for introducing the debate in a calm and sensible way. In fact, all the speeches so far have been constructive. The problem is that this is such a big subject that we can only skirt around it in an hour and a half. We would all like to devote more time to the issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) made a good point. The Mayor's plan is visionary; the question is whether it can be implemented, given what powers he has. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) made that point very clearly.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) was slightly wrong; this is not a legal document, as yet. As the hon. Member for Edmonton said, the plan has been put out for consultation until 30 September, whereafter there will be a public examination until early 2003, followed by a recommendation to the Secretary of State in late 2003. Thereafter, hopefully, we shall begin to see some action.

It is vital to the future of the country to ensure that London retains its world status as a vibrant city, so it is important that we should think about these matters and slightly worrying that a survey by William Mercer for the BBC puts London 34th in its ranking of world countries. The top four cities were Vancouver, Zurich, Vienna and Bern. The reason given for placing London so far down the list was that quality of life there is deteriorating. In particular, the survey cited traffic and congestion, to which list I would add crime. Interestingly, the lowest ranked city was Brazzaville, in Congo, which Mr. Mercer perceptively says came bottom of the list because of the civil war in the region.

Some interesting statistics were quoted in the report, some of which were referred to by the hon. Member for Edmonton. When I first said that London's population would rise by 700,000 over the next two decades, the equivalent of the population of a city such as Leeds, hon. Members derided me. I am interested to hear that hon. Members now accept that there will be a huge growth in population in London in the next two decades. Contrary to what some hon. Members said, I think that it will be a good thing, as it will keep the city vibrant. About 516,000 people will be of working age. More importantly, more than 500,000 will be of school age. Unlike the populations of many countries and cities, the population of London is getting younger on average, which we must consider in the facilities that we provide and in planning the city.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton said, it is reckoned that the population will grow from 7.4 million to 8.1 million people. The economy supports a wider area with about 18 million people, so the city is extremely big in world terms. There is huge disparity in wealth, as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said, which is clearly in no one's interests. We aim to bring the level of some of the most deprived areas, such as parts of her constituency, up towards that of the best.

I was interested to see that the Mayor predicted in his plan that the highest levels of housing growth would be in deprived areas. For example, Tower Hamlets will have an extra 2,070 dwellings, Southwark 1,480 and Lambeth 1,450. However, as I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster is aware the City of London will have only 110. Richmond, which is near the constituency represented by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton, will have 270, and Bexley 280.

That may not be sufficient to meet London's severe housing problems. After crime and transport, housing may be the third biggest problem and challenge; all problems are challenges. I welcome the Mayor's statement that we will have an extra 23,000 homes in London, which is a 22 per cent. increase and a challenging target. However, as I said in my intervention on the hon. Member for Edmonton, I have questions about the Mayor's 50 per cent. target, because 50 per cent. of nothing is nothing. It would be far better to get the houses built with perhaps a lesser proportion of social housing. We all accept that we need social housing, but we need housing—full stop.

The hon. Member for Edmonton was right to refer to points that were made in an article in *The Observer* that I have previously quoted in this Chamber, which states that the 2000 figure of 161,000 homes is the lowest for house building since 1924, excluding the war years. It is too low. We need to work on some of the brownfield sites mentioned by the House Builders Federation. I repeat that it estimates that if we developed all the brownfield sites within the M25 corridor, there would be enough housing land provision in London for the next 10 years.

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

We are not making the progress in housing that we should. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate rightly drew attention to the appalling waste of human resources that is putting people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I think that the figure she gave was 8,000 people in London alone. It is a tragedy, and we should do something about it. We need to build good-quality housing in London in the right places.

The debate has skirted around the fact that we need to consider the planning system carefully. The Government have proposals to make on planning in the autumn. I hope that they have been properly thought out. The Mayor has proposed to aggregate all planning gain together. His desire for that power begins to worry me. Would it be used properly? The Government have made proposals on tariffs, which also concern me. If we are not careful, they will simply amount to a development land tax, yet another tax on developers.

I want the Government to go forward with inner-city regeneration. During the Conservatives' 18 years in government, we had some superb regeneration schemes. However, the Government's policy on urban regeneration seems fragmented, with many different schemes, many budgets underspent, and money not getting to the areas that it should. I want large enough parcels of land aggregated together so that we can have some really imaginative urban regeneration schemes.

There is not enough time in the debate to discuss all London's severe problems. It is an important world city, and it is vital to the success and continued growth of the economy that we ensure that all Government Departments use their powers to work in partnership with the Mayor. We have not discussed the fact that all Government Departments are involved in London's problems, which are not limited to crime, transport, housing or urban regeneration. The Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health have a vital part to play in the future of London. I look forward to what the Minister has to say about finding solutions to the problems.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on not only securing the debate but the manner in which he opened it. His comments were profound and thoughtful and showed a strong grasp of all the subjects in the plan. I hope that the Mayor takes his comments as seriously as they were intended, and as the first of many responses in the consultation process.

Without seeking in any way to add a partisan note to our deliberations, I heard more of substance from my hon. Friend in his half-hour speech than I heard in any of the speeches made by members of the official Opposition. That is a shame, given the significance of the plan and of London as a city—rather than a country, as the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) had it. I would be surprised if London came 34th in a list of countries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton bemoaned his sense of timing. He was right to do so, in light of the fact that there was a statement on the comprehensive spending review yesterday and my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will give his response on Thursday. We are about to respond to the consultation process for the Green Paper on planning, and we have a statutory duty to respond to the Mayor's plan by 30 September.

Sadly, my comments will be couched within my hon. Friend's distressingly bad sense of timing. I hope the debate is the first of many on the plan and its surrounding issues, but it may have an entirely different tenor by next week, let alone by October or November. However, he was right to draw attention to the issues.

We welcome the plan, although there seems to be some confusion in the Chamber about its status. Essentially, it is the successor document to the strategic planning advice for London. It is the strategic planning framework and, when it is adopted, all boroughs will have to use it as a touchstone for the development of their community development plans or local development frameworks. By definition, it is part of a hierarchy of plans. From the comments of some hon. Members, one might get the idea that the Mayor is planning a land grab and that he will be a monolithic superpower in terms of planning for London, but that is far from the case.

At the risk of entering the realm of semantics, the plan is not a legal document—the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) was wrong. From its publication, it represents a material consideration in the planning process. In that sense, whether it is legal is a significant point.

I do not have time to make the speech that I had intended to make or to reply to all hon. Members' remarks, but I shall throw out a few ditties. I take seriously the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton about the balance between outer and inner London in the document. For my sins, I served on the London planning advisory committee, which was the body responsible for strategic advice between the demise of the Greater London council and the rise of the Greater London Authority. There was an ongoing debate about not only north, south, east and west London but inner and outer London.

One thing underlay all hon. Members' comments. It is time for government from the boroughs upwards and for central Government downwards to treat London as one living, organic entity, a city in which what happens in one part has a profound impact on other parts. The notion—both simplistic and complacent—that if we utilise every single brownfield site inside the M25, London's housing problems will be solved has been repeated a couple of times. It is nonsense. It gives the impression that all that is inside the M25 ring, which in some places is 25 to 30 miles from the GLA's boundaries, is a land bank of pristine, clean brownfield sites just waiting to be turned into housing by nice, magnanimous developers. Even the developers recognise that that is profoundly wrong. It is equally wrong to cast doom and gloom by suggesting that every site is so poisonous and contaminated that the poor developers cannot do anything with it without Government assistance.

The hierarchy of land use that is the core of the plan has been at the core of planning since the 1980s and 1990s: brownfield, urban fringe, then greenfield, which itself has various degrees. Urban fringes and greenfield may be used, and it is misleading to suggest that there is a massive stock of brown field inside the M25 and that the problem will be solved if it is utilised. A recent report—I am not sure whether it was commissioned by the Government or by the GLA—said that to solve some, if not all, of our difficulties, we should look upwards. If the plan suggests anything it is that a portfolio of solutions to housing, planning and developmental issues in London is needed.

We should go to our local shopping centres and see how much single-storey, ground-level development there is. A recent report said that we could secure close to 25,000 units simply by building upwards—perhaps above railway stations, certainly above petrol stations. That has happened in the centre of London to some extent. At this stage in London's growth, single-level developments are a woefully inefficient use of the precious commodity of land. That is not the whole answer, but part of it.

I take the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton about manufacturing in general, rather than the specifics of the plan, but it is not enough; throughout London, despite the plan, a UDP, local development framework-led planning process remains. We should exhort each authority, whether it is in inner or outer London, to consider every single designation of land. Elected members must now say to the borough valuer who has been marketing a particular site for 25 years with B1 or B8 use—it may be the only bit of the precious manufacturing base left in his outer London borough—that he should take a step back and be creative. He could say that it should be given over either to mixed use or to housing. Every borough must review the land use of each of its sites during the consultation, using the plan as a touchstone. Residents deserve no less.

It has been a good debate, despite my earlier partisan comments. In part it has been a nice déjà vu. Many who are present lived and breathed with me and others in a dusky Committee on the Greater London Authority Bill. The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) was there and he has not changed at all. It is still all doom and gloom and the GLA Act is nonsense. I shall look again at our proceedings for the exhaustive amendments tabled by the hon. Gentleman to develop a Rudy Giuliani figure for London—I suspect that there was none. In three months, Opposition Members were for the Mayor, against the Mayor, half for and half against. In the end they were not sure at all but would have preferred group leaders on a borough-wide basis, and then they were not sure about the Assembly either.

The important point is that the London plan is an important contribution to our deliberations. Whatever people think of its author or anything else, it matters for the future of London and it will inform the planning context. I look forward to being party to the Government's response, and I urge every London Member and every hon. Member who has London's interests at heart to read it thoroughly and to respond to it.

Flooding

11 am

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): First, I thank Mr. Speaker for enabling me to raise this subject. I cannot say that I am an enthusiast for the present procedure, which is yet another way of conning the public, rather like early-day motions. It is rather depressing that we suggest that something will happen after such debates. By ensuring that more happens in the House of Commons, while taking less notice of it, the Government are doing great damage to our parliamentary democracy. These debates are another such con, but one must use what one has.

I am making use of the present procedure because my constituency has 74 miles of coastline. I am honoured to represent a large number of people, but my constituency also contains many rivers, such as the Blythe, the Alde, the Orr, the Orwell, the Deben and their numerous tributaries. I have therefore witnessed the problems of coastal erosion, rising sea levels and fluvial flooding. In one way or another, the constituency of Suffolk, Coastal is well named.

My personal interest in this issue does not cloud my mind to the fact that 10 per cent. of the population in England and Wales live in areas that are at risk from flooding. That affects 1.8 million properties.

Why should one be concerned about this issue now? The reason is that there is growing evidence that the threat is increasingly significantly. The distinguished Halcrow report suggests that the problems with our coastal defences are so serious that approximately one third of east coast defences, two thirds of south coast defences and half of west coast defences are expected to fail in a serious flooding incident. When one realises that about £207 billion worth of property and possessions—I am not even talking about the people—is threatened, one sees the seriousness of the matter.

In case anyone ever listens to what we say in this Chamber or, indeed, in any other, I should remind hon. Members that Hull is one of the key locations at risk. I hope that the Deputy Prime Minister recognises that his city is at risk, along with Blackpool, areas around Great Yarmouth, Bristol and Dungeness power station.

Some 47 densely populated locations face high risk, and about 397 sq km of urban areas are at risk in aggregate. Some 98 km of coastal defences were assessed as being likely to fail in the event of a relatively small incident, and they are mainly in the Anglian, north-west and southern regions. We are therefore in a pretty serious situation.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He is right to raise this important subject, and I want to put his words in context. He will be aware of the 1953 flood that occurred at little way round the coast from his constituency, and 53 people from my constituency perished in it. Is he also aware of the great danger of high sea levels later this year and of the fact that global temperatures for the first three months of this year were the highest ever recorded?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right to raise that question. We may commiserate with those who still remember the deaths, but we should also remember that

[Mr. Gummer]

the cost of the damage done by the 1953 floods was the equivalent of 10 per cent. of the country's gross national product. That is in the region of £25 billion after inflation. Although those floods were serious, they were unexpected; this is an opportune moment for the debate because such incidents are becoming more regular, more likely and less unusual.

When I had the job now held by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), I made the first step in recognising the impact of climate change. It caused a good deal of controversy because people did not believe in climate change in those days, and it was extremely lucky that two members of the Government did believe in it—I was one; the other was the then Prime Minister. It was a useful combination because, without her, I would not have been able to do anything. I raised the specifications for coastal defences because flooding seemed a probability. That was a useful thing to do, but it is some 10 years since I had any connection with the issue, and I started on that course a good five or six years earlier. However, it was the beginning of a realisation, which is now much more widespread, of the impact of climate change.

That is the first reason why the situation has changed. The Government now accept the importance of climate change, and the science is universally accepted. The only argument is whether, and if so by how much, human beings have contributed to it. I believe that the case has been clearly demonstrated and that no Government have the excuse not to take into account at least the median line of what climate change may do.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The right hon. Gentleman has a credible and creditable track record on these matters and he is right to raise them. Does he agree that not only do we need protection from possible flooding, but we need to do more to prevent it? One serious problem is that the Environment Agency has no right to object to developments on flood plains, which could disrupt drainage and increase the likelihood of flooding.

Mr. Gummer: I entirely agree. I hope to come to that point later. First, however, I want to explain why we need to move on to a new stage.

The first reason, which I have already mentioned, is climate change. The second reason is the huge change in agricultural practices over the past 10 to 15 years. There is now a great deal more drainage, so that when water rolls off the fields onto the roads it causes a huge build up of water in the drainage pipes. That causes floods in places that never had floods before.

One agricultural change that we have gone in for involves what are called welfare pigs. I have doubts about the principle of welfare pigs because, as I hope everyone knows, pigs do not sweat, and the last thing that we should do is put them out in open fields. Historically, pigs wandered about in oak forests and other woodland areas. That is how they should be kept, but the driving force behind pig welfare comes from people who live in towns and have never seen the animals, so they do not understand what happens. Nevertheless, welfare pigs is the great thing, so out in the open air they go. The trouble is that it creates circumstances that cause increased run-off. The village of Blythborough in my constituency is being tormented by the effects of run-off from open-air piggeries, and there are many like that around the country. However, that is not the only cause; there have been several significant changes in arable and husbandry practice over the past 15 years.

The third reason for needing to move on is our ageing sea defences. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) spoke about the floods in 1953. Much of the work that has been done as a result of those floods is coming to its end, and those sea defences need to be replaced.

The fourth reason that this is the moment to talk seriously about the issue was supplied by the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), in the previous debate, when he was busy promoting the Government line that we should go back on the question of building on greenfield sites. Such references drop into every speech and are designed to change people's attitudes. We all know what the Government are about—building large numbers of houses out in the countryside. They are building up to it, turning their backs on 20 years of environmental battling and returning to a position that obtained before I—when I was a Minister—had the opportunity of stopping out-of-town shopping centres and the like.

That is what they will try to do, so into the Under-Secretary's little speech was dropped the sentence, "There really are not enough brownfield sites in London." There are enough brownfield sites in London to meet our needs if we spend time and money on preparing them and making them available. That is the fact of the matter.

In opposition, Labour Members said that the Conservative Government were mad to suggest that we needed 4.6 million homes during the next 25 years. We were told that that was all wrong, quite unacceptable and nothing to do with the facts. Now, of course, they have accepted it, but in order to hide that fact, they do not use the figure spread over 25 years, but the equivalent figure over 10 years, pretending that that makes it different.

The Government know very well that a huge number of new homes need to be built. If 40 per cent. of them are to be built on greenfield sites, as they have already accepted and which is far too high a proportion, that will cause even greater pressure to build on the flood plain and in areas threatened by floods, as the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said.

We know that flood-generating rainfall events, as they are called, are increasing. The nature of rainfall is changing. Scattered showers through the summer have been increasingly replaced not just by more rain, but by more continuous and driving rain, which is much closer to tropical rain. We know that that will increase and that its results will be very serious, as will those of river canalisation, which has created other problems in order to defeat particular ones in certain areas.

We know that it will happen, so we should examine what the Government have done about it. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who will reply to the debate, is one of the

Ministers that I most admire in this Government. In many areas he has actually got things done. Having been a fisheries Minister myself, I honour him particularly for the brave position that he has taken on fishing. He is one of the first people to do that and therefore if I have some unkind things to say about the Government, he must not take them personally.

I will say one unkind thing about him, however: his position on hunting is wholly unacceptable and has damaged what would otherwise be a real power in the countryside. He is one of the few Ministers with some credibility in the countryside and I am sorry that he has adopted a ridiculous and totally urban view of hunting. Apart from that, I am pleased to be able to debate with him.

The risks of flooding are increasing considerably and the Government have admitted that. The consultation paper clearly states that

> "because there may be many years between major floods, there is a risk of complacency setting in, and of flood defences being neglected."

The Government should bear those words in mind. The Prime Minister, who got himself rather caught up in the floods, went around saying,

> "We used to consider these flood events as relatively rare occurrence, but over the next few years we can expect to see these types of situations."

I do not know what that means, but that is what he said. He went on to say:

> "We have to put a lot more investment in."

I want to emphasise that the Prime Minister's only answer was more money. The trouble is that more money alone will not solve the problem.

The first difficulty is the incredible complexity of the way that we in England and Wales handle the matter. The Scots are much more sensible, and I will come to that later. The hon. Member for Gordon will be pleased to know that I am to make my first recorded statement in favour of devolved Government. It may be a moment worth waiting for. Let me tell the Committee what the steering group said. As we know, the steering group was a collection of middle-ranking apparatchiks from the Departments—God knows how many Departments there are—who are interested in flooding. Paragraph 20—a serious paragraph from the steering group's background paper for the consultation—stated:

> "The steering group also concluded that evidence indicated"—

it did not give any evidence, by the way—

> "that the combined use of the existing strategic framework (supported by the Agriculture Select Committee in its 1998 report) and High Level Targets (HLTs) backed up by ongoing reviews and research projects, was an appropriate means to implement and prioritise flood and coastal defence functions subject to refinement and extension in the light of the experience and the outcome of reviews and research."

That is the policy of Her Majesty's Government, and how it will be carried out. You may understand what that means for management, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I know that you are a remarkable man—but no one else does.

Can we imagine any business announcing to its shareholders that this is how it will deal with its most pressing risk? This "management of risk" is endangering property worth £207 billion, let alone human beings. We will have something that is backed up by ongoing "reviews and research". We can tell that the paper is new Labour: it has all the phrases. The steering group were civil servants, but they seem to have caught the phrases. Interestingly, they did not believe it either. Three lengthy paragraphs later they say:

> "The Steering Group concluded that it would be of most value to consider a framework which would both support an integrated, strategic and streamlined approach to flood defence but would have the flexibility to recognise and react appropriately to specific local needs."

A system that is integrated, strategic and streamlined, but has some clear connection with local issues, is a sensible concept. That is totally different from what we have and what the steering group suggested that the evidence indicated was still sensible. It is also interesting that the Under-Secretary does not believe that either. When he appeared to be trying to explain why the Environment Agency had not been quick off the mark in dealing with the floods in Northampton and Kidlington, he said:

> "As a starting point, Lord De Ramsey"—

the chairman of the Environment Agency—

> "and I agreed that there must be a seamless and integrated service of flood forecasting, warning and response."—[*Official Report*, 20 October 1998; Vol. 317, c. 1080.]

The flood forecasting, warning and response must be seamless and integrated. However, protecting us against flood depends on a range of different organisations that are largely unaccountable to, and unconnected with, each other, and on hoped-for reviews, research, projects, ongoing this and ongoing that. That is what we have, and it is supposed to defend us. This is a sandbag culture: we wait for the flood, rush out with sandbags, and then row about who should pay for them. In my experience, that is another thing that always happens with sandbags. The sandbag culture must stop, but it will do so only if the Ministry starts by refusing to be complacent, which it is, and if it stops believing that money will solve everything.

In case the Under-Secretary thinks that I have been unfair about complacency, I will give him an example. On 18 March 1999, I asked the Under-Secretary, who was still in his place then—he is a man of considerable continuity—when would he publish the flood and coastal defence project appraisal guidance notes. The relationship between local government, the other agencies and the Government is crucial and what holds all this nonsense together. He told me that there would be six instead of one, which I suppose is some help. The six would be published separately, and altogether would be completed within 18 months. It is now three and a half years later and we still have not seen the last one. In all that time, and doubtless for some time to come, nobody has had the guidance notes. It is not that we do not have an integrated system; we do not even have the guidance note to run an unintegrated system. This is nonsense; it is not sensible.

One has to assess the complexity. The Government believe that if the money goes up—I am glad that marginally it will—everything is fine, but it is funny that the amount is exactly what the insurance companies demanded under threat of withdrawal.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): It is more.

Mr. Gummer: With great respect, that is wrong. The more does not come until later. I have worked out that it is £12 million less; the more does not arrive until three years from now. I have also taken into account the lowest feasible rate of inflation.

Mr. Morley: The right hon. Gentleman knows from his experience in government and with the Environment Agency that this substantial increase in flood and coastal defence funding cannot be delivered in one year. It will take three years to put the planning, the schemes and the rest of it in place: £150 million of additional money is a considerable amount. The right hon. Gentleman is right that it finally falls into place by the third year, but there has to be some ramping up, as it cannot be spent in one year.

Mr. Gummer: I do not disagree, but the ramping up has to be to the level agreed in the first place; one cannot ramp up to a lower figure, which is what it will be by the time that inflation has cut into it. It is one of the fundamental rules of accounting that one should ramp up to £162 million if one wants to meet the figures provided by the Association of British Insurers. The Government decided on this figure for the simple reason that the insurers said that they would otherwise not continue to insure. It is straightforward blackmail. I do not blame them because we had turned insurance into assurance: it is virtually certain that many areas of the country will be flooded, so it becomes closer to life assurance. The Government know perfectly well that had they not acceded, they would have been in a severe mess.

Nick Pearson, the head of household products in the Norwich Union, made an interesting comment in response to the Government's decision:

> "Flooding is a complex issue, where not only funding but organisation, prioritisation and land use management"—

about which the Minister has been talking—

> "need to be overhauled to help reduce the problem."

The Government believe that by bellyaching about how difficult it all is and then providing some money, they have solved the problem—but the problem is much more complex than they allow. A throwaway line in the consultation paper says that

> "social and environmental concerns are given insufficient weight"

by the Environment Agency and

> "there should be a commitment to provide consistent standards of flood protection for similar urban communities and within communities."

However, that has not been agreed: it appears there, but the rest of the document ignores it. The Government are not prepared to face the complexities of the issue.

We have to face increases in cost, but the money has to be spent differently. Is the Minister going to spend this money more sensibly? The Oxera report points to the distortion between expenditure on capital projects and operational expenditure to reduce flood risk. That will be worsened by some of the Government's plans, so what is the Minister going to do about it? What about the necessary reallocation of flood management expenditure to ensure more sustainable flood management, or are we merely going to rush after saving flood protection places that have already been undermined?

Cost seems to be the Government's single response, so how can we ensure that the money goes where it should? The system of getting it to local authorities, where it becomes their responsibility, is at best flawed and at worst totally arbitrary. People find themselves saddled with a level of support that is unconnected to their needs and seems to change at the whim of the Government. Insurance is important, and the Government, as I have suggested, have given the money because they want to buy off the insurance. However, there is so much to do because severe weather and floods in 2001 led to insurance claims of £1 billion, and insurance claims during the past five years have run at about £400 million a year.

The Under-Secretary should come down with me to Aldeburgh and see the difficulties in the areas by the Rivers Alde and Ore and the complexity of the relationships between English Nature and the Environment Agency for England and Wales. What are the Government doing about the constant inability to get anyone to take responsibility? I had to bring representatives of the Environment Agency, English Nature, the local council and the protection body together on the foreshore of Aldeburgh to get them to talk to each other and tell each other what they intend to do. That shows our current lack of integration.

There are several things that we can do. We should stop building on flood plains and introduce a system in which part of the house building costs or house rates refers to the cost that the developers will impose on the public. Therefore, if we are going to have any building on flood plains or areas liable to flooding, the developer should meet the costs, if that is possible. If it is not, I would much prefer it if such developments were not built at all.

We must take that step, but the Government's recent planning document does not mention the issue. It talks about a lot of other nonsense, but does not address the planning biggest issue or explain what they will do. The Department of the Environment as was has been split up, and as I understand it the planning document was produced by Lord Falconer without any discussion with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The only meeting that took place was with the Minister for the Environment after it had been written to have a nice chat about how good it was. DEFRA had no say in it, and nor did people concerned with flooding, which is the problem with joined-up government.

We should also do proper research to understand the real problem, and a great deal of work is still to be done. Two points from Scotland are important. First, why do bodies in Scotland have a duty to protect people from flooding? In England, they have the power to protect people, but not a duty to do so.

Mr. Morley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I shall be in trouble for taking too much time.

I know what the Under-Secretary usually answers: it is a much smaller problem in Scotland, so they can handle it.

Mr. Morley: No.

Mr. Gummer: Well, that was his answer last time. The point is that the bigger the problem, the more one should want to solve it. It should be the other way round, and I do not understand it. It is no good saying that we will not solve the problem in England because it is so big, but they can solve it in Scotland because it is just small. That does not seem a sensible answer.

It cannot be right that those responsible for flood prevention do not have a duty to prevent floods and protect property and people. It cannot be right that they merely have permissive powers. It cannot be right that the policy system in Scotland means that all local authority chief executives are directed to take climate change into account in all their policies. No one has said that in England, Wales or, as far as I know, Northern Ireland. Why are we not telling people that they have to do it? They should have the responsibility, not just permissive powers.

The second point about Scotland is that the Scottish Executive try to protect because it is dangerous, not because they have the cost-effective figures right. They say that one of their duties is to protect Scotland from flooding, so they will do it. In England, they say that one duty of the English authorities is to see whether, in an entirely cost-effective way, we can find a mechanism to allow people to spend such money as is available to protect people from flooding where there is enough noise and trouble. Those are two different approaches and—it hurts me to say this—I prefer the Scottish approach.

The Government stand in the dock for complacency, for failing to understand the complexity of those issues failing to do for England and Wales what Scotland does, and for not being prepared to admit that climate change has a cost that must be borne in protecting our people from flooding inland and by the sea. The Government stand condemned on those issues. I would understand if this were merely a rural issue—I say "merely" because that is how the Government think about rural areas—but it also affects many urban areas.

I exclude the Minister from those criticisms. I am sure that he is doing his best, but the Government believe that they have only to throw money at the problem. In fact, they have thrown very little money at it, and what they have offered is pretty small. However, that will not work in any case unless we stop building where we should not be building; we do the research that we need; we make permissive powers compulsory duties; and we take a large leaf out of the Scottish book and recognise that on this issue, unlike on many others, we are behind our neighbours north of the border and others in the European Union, who have a great deal to teach us.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I remind right hon. and hon. Members that it is common practice in such a debate to commence the three winding-up speeches 30 minutes before its conclusion. In other words, we must hand over to the first Front-Bench speaker at 12 noon. I ask right hon. and hon. Members to be clear, to make pertinent points and to bear that time constraint in mind when making their contributions and accepting and making interventions.

11.31 am

Mr. Michael Foster (Worcester): I welcome the opportunity to debate flooding. October is an important month in the cycle of flood events, because as far as Worcester is concerned, it is the first month of winter, when flooding is likely to occur. I also welcome the spending review announcement of £150 million to be spent on flood defences by the end of the three-year period. Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary give more details about how the money will be broken down over that period? What will be the breakdown between major capital projects for flood defence, and revenue expenditure, for example to improve flood-warning systems throughout the country?

As a result of the good will shown by the Government in the extra investment plans, I shall take this opportunity to put some pressure on the Association of British Insurers—which was mentioned in the previous contribution—to extend for at least a further three years the moratorium that is due to end in December. For those who live on flood plains, who have properties that would probably be unsellable without insurance and who would face huge bills year on year, the prospect of no insurance is too much to bear. I hope that the Minister will put pressure on the ABI to come up with the goods and continue with household insurance cover.

In Worcester, we have three main types of flooding. As the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said, it is a complicated issue. The most obvious cause of flooding is the River Severn, which flows through the city centre and usually floods because of rain falling in the Welsh hills and mountains. That affects properties on Hylton road, Waterworks road, Diglis avenue, the cricket ground and the racecourse.

We have a minor river course, Barbourne brook, that is prone to flooding and flooded in April 1998. The householders of Beechwood Park estate awoke one morning to find that things were not quite as they would have expected. Sewerage flooding has also become an increasing problem in the city. Sewerage systems that were built in Victorian times—combined surface water sewers—simply cannot cope with the volume of water that now goes through them.

I believe that major flood defences are needed along the banks of the River Severn, similar to the ones that have been pencilled in for Bewdley and Shrewsbury further upstream. I am worried about the number of separate zones that have been identified when assessments have been made of whether flood defences are viable. I have some experience of how the cost benefit system works. I was lucky to pick up in my in-tray in May 1997—the world was not all rosy before that date—an outstanding issue along the Diglis avenue area. A project had been identified, but under the cost benefit rules it was not viable.

I am pleased to say that the project has now been completed. Concrete was poured into the floors of Victorian houses to raise them by 18 in. It makes the bay windows look a bit odd from the inside looking out, but it stops the more regular flooding that takes place along the Severn. I worked with those residents to see how the system works. That is why, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary knows, I am a great critic of the current cost benefit rules. I was pleased to hear him say on the programme "On the Record" that from April onwards

[Mr. Michael Foster]

the number of people involved in those assessments would be taken into account. Could he give us an idea how that will take place so that we can look ahead in Worcester to maximising the opportunities for flood defences?

I am also keen to bring in a number of temporary defences in the city for isolated properties. The Severn View hotel stands alone on the banks of the Severn. It is surrounded by roads and car parks. There are no other properties nearby, yet it is in need of some form of flood defence. I understand that some temporary measure was being considered over the winter. Luckily we did not have to use those schemes, but again I urge that money from the spending review be used to provide temporary defences. Let us find out whether they work.

Worcester city council provides the duck boards, the breeze blocks and the sandbags for properties that flood. The sandbag culture is a difficult one to understand. Sandbags do not solve the flooding problems, although they offer residents some reassurance. The council provides sandbags for properties on major roads such as Hylton road, where the biggest problem is caused by lorries ignoring the flood warning signs and going down the road, creating bow waves that then spill into properties. Sandbags can help to prevent such flooding. What advice or guidance will my hon. Friend's Department give to residents in places like Upton-on-Severn? It is not in my constituency, but the Environment Agency has concluded that the geography of the land does not allow permanent flood defences to be installed.

The problem of minor river systems has been far more difficult for people to understand. The Beechwood Park estate is in the centre of Worcester and is about 30 years old. It is two miles from the Severn and yet in Easter 1998 it flooded to incredible depths. There was heavy local rain and the culvert that runs underneath the estate could not cope with the volume of water that was flowing through it. Residents had to be rescued from their first floor windows by an inshore lifeboat. I pay tribute to the Environment Agency for the work that it has done since then. It has improved upstream holding capacity through a penstock valve, which, by increasing the height of the dam by a couple of inches, can hold back a tremendous amount of water to manage the flow through the culvert. It also cleared out the culvert and was surprised to find a concrete blockage, which restricted the flow by 70 per cent. It was no wonder that those houses were at risk. Since that blockage has been cleared, touch wood, there has been no flooding on the Beechwood Park estate. I ask the Minister to do what he can to put pressure on those responsible for maintaining watercourses like that to take the issues seriously, because that block of concrete was not put there over night. It had been there for a while and was restricting the use of that culvert.

Sewerage flooding was one of the worst flooding experiences in the city of Worcester. In the autumn and winter of 2000, Waverley street and Cavendish street, which are miles from the river although they are in a low-lying area, were flooded. The combined Victorian sewer was unable to cope with local rain and the river at high levels and water, and sewage backed up along the system until it came out at the nearest exit point, which in some cases was in people's houses and gardens. Hon. Members who are not aware what that is like should imagine papier mâché floating in front rooms. That is the horror that people were faced with.

The River Severn at high level floods the pumping station near the river that deals with the sewage. After a strong campaign, led by a local resident, Mary Dhonau, the Severn Trent water authority put in place plans to improve the pumping station and work is ongoing to enable more sewage and flood water to be pumped under the River Severn to the sewerage works.

In the light of my experience of dealing with sewer flooding, I want to know what the Minister thinks about non-return valves, which can be used in sewerage systems that developers could install in new properties. They might be inconvenient to householders, who may not be allowed to flush their toilets during a period of flooding, but that is a darn sight better than the alternative.

I want to raise a couple more matters, one of which is similar to that mentioned by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal. First, how will PPG 25 be enforced? Building on flood plains is a cause for concern. Many residents of Beechwood Park estate, where the houses are 30 years old, probably did not know that they were living on a flood plain until they woke up to find several feet of water in their front rooms.

In Worcester, we want to develop the city further along the riverside and in the Diglis docks area, which is alongside the River Severn and the canal, which is just above the flood plain, but there is anxiety about how to do so. I fear that with climate change and the increased frequency and severity of flooding, there may be difficulties.

My last point is about insurance. Insurance companies are doing a great deal, digitally mapping flood plain areas to find out which individual properties are affected by flooding rather than using the post-code system. Does the Minister share my anxiety that the insurance companies may use that information not to help households but as a tool for withdrawing cover from properties that are most prone to flooding from sewers and from major and minor rivers? I should like to hear the Minister's thoughts on that matter, especially on how properties shown on digital maps to be in high-risk areas will keep insurance cover to enable residents to maintain their standard of living?

11.43 am

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) on securing the debate and on the manner in which he opened it.

The debate refers to the potential for flooding in October 2002 and from my point of view it is important that we remember that fact. In October 2001, south Cambridgeshire was subject to some of the worst flooding for generations and more than 400 homes in my constituency were flooded. Although there may be a small probability of a repeat of that event, many people in the constituency will live in fear of what may happen in October 2002 unless and until measures are taken that substantially reduce the risk. They will ask what has been done in the past year. I shall concentrate on a few things that have been done and on some that I hope will be done between now and October 2002.

I shall not detain hon. Members at length on what we have done locally but I hope that the Minister and hon. Members will acknowledge the achievements of the local authority, with the Environment Agency, parishes, the county council and Anglian Water, particularly in terms of sewer flooding; I hope that in due course OFWAT, when it does an interim price determination, will allow additional funds to help Anglian Water do more in respect of sewer flooding in my area. Many such initiatives have been taken on a district-wide and individual parish level so that we do all that we can to minimise risk.

Many actions, however, are beyond the scope of individual local authorities or constituents. I shall focus on some of those. When I had my own debate on the subject on 20 November last year, the first of the 10 points that I made related to the availability of additional funding for investment. It has taken eight months, but the Minister has today said that there is to be additional investment, broadly in line with what the Association of British Insurers recommended last year. As the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) said, that takes the issue on to whether we can have greater assurance about the availability of insurance. I hope that, in responding to the debate, the Minister will make clear the Government's targets. The ABI was not asking for £145 million of investment but for a Government commitment to provision, over a reasonable time scale, of flood defences against a probability of flooding of up to 0.5 per cent. for any significant number of properties and, as an interim measure, for a short-term Government commitment to meeting the 1 per cent. probability in densely populated urban areas and 1.3 per cent. probability in less densely populated urban areas. The first question is: are we now at the point where the ABI and the Government can be brought together so that there is a long-term Government commitment to the 0.5 per cent. standard of defence which gives the insurance industry the degree of comfort it needs to continue to offer insurance? If that cannot be met for a substantial period, will the Government talk to insurers about trying to offer short-term support for the insurance industry, as contemplated in the Government's consultation on the flood defence review, so that insurance continues to be available for householders who have taken all reasonable steps to protect themselves but who would not for the time being be protected against such flood risk?

I hope that other initiatives will be in place before October. The Government have published several reports and the flood and coastal defence funding and organisation review, to which hon. Members, the public and others have responded; the Government have not yet responded to that. I hope that by October we will have such a response from them, before we debate the issues again. I also hope that we will be told whether there is a prospect of a development connection charge—the Government left that open as a possibility yesterday. However, I do not stress that too forcefully because in places where development is occurring—much of it in south Cambridgeshire—demands on it are already very high. Affordable housing, infrastructure costs and meeting the direct drainage and flood defence charges associated with such developments are factors that are substantially affecting costs. The scope for additional connection charges may therefore be modest, but may exist. I hope that in places such as south Cambridgeshire, where we have both substantial development and substantial flood risk, those two factors can be closely related at a local level.

I also hope that we will have substantial additional progress on catchment studies. The catchment for the Cam, in the first instance, and also for the Great Ouse and so on—my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) who will respond on behalf of the Opposition will speak about those rivers—is a matter of the greatest importance to people around Cambridge. The catchment studies have to be the starting point for identifying where the risks are and how we can deal with them. We cannot make good progress without them.

Linked to that is the point that rural areas will not necessarily need costly physical flood defence barriers, but their requirements may be beyond the investment measures that the Government announced yesterday. In the context of reform of the common agricultural policy, one of the principle measures that we can achieve using agricultural support to the farming industry is to encourage farmers to make land available for flood storage and reservoirs up stream, so that rural areas can be defended in ways that are sympathetic to the environment. Those of my constituents in the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds would also say that there could be substantial wildlife benefits. We have identified two locations in my constituency where flooding could have been prevented last October if such flood storage areas had been created, or in some senses re-created as compared with what happened in recent years when flood plains were lost.

I shall mention two other matters that should be in place by October. We should know where the responsibilities lie for managing the watercourse, warning people about flood risk and taking action when required. I shall not dwell on who should have the responsibility, but I shall say that action cannot be removed from first-tier local authorities. They have a substantial role to play and are accountable locally to their voters for delivery of that service. However, they need the resources, which brings me to my last point.

In the context of the local government review of funding—it is now no longer part of the Minister's Department—we will know by October the shape of the new structure of revenue grant funding to local authorities and how it is to be calculated. I have considered the relevant document, which suggests several options. However, I must confess that I have not yet found any reference to flood defence as one of the factors that must be included in the calculations. I cannot believe that it would not be there, so I hope that it is and that it will be prominent among the measures that will lead to additional needs-related block funding to local authorities.

All such measures could be in place by October. On the basis of some of them being implemented, I could return to my constituents and say that some measures had been taken by the Government and Parliament to make the repetition of the flooding last October and the risk to them a great deal less likely.

11.52 am

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), not only on securing the debate, but on the passion with which he spoke. He brings a great deal of experience and expertise to the issues. I will not detain hon. Members long, because my right hon. and hon. Friends have covered the subject so comprehensively and with such expertise that I will largely repeat what they said, and so shall curtail my remarks.

It was the flooding in autumn 2000 that enforced my interest in the subject, especially because of my constituents' experience. We have two problems in the New Forest. One is the coastal problem of the western Solent and the Lymington river, which is protected to an extent by Hurst spit. However, it is subject to tidal flooding, especially when it is exacerbated by high river levels with increased rainfall. Further along the coast, we have the erosion of the cliffs at Barton-on-Sea. That is a well- known phenomenon. I once met someone from New Zealand who explained that they knew all about the problems of Barton-on-Sea because they had read about it in textbooks at school.

An equal if not greater problem is flooding on the Avon valley, which affects towns such as Fordingbridge and Ringwood, and villages further south. Increased rainfall leading to high river levels is exacerbated by a high water table when there has been a persistently wet period before the immediate flooding. That means that the ground simply cannot absorb any more water. In that respect, I was interested to hear what my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal said about pigs. In the autumn of 2000, the run-off from pigs caused a substantial problem. I was unaware until he mentioned it that pigs are like ladies in that they do not sweat. I am not sure what bearing that has on flooding, but it was news to me.

After the experience that we had in the autumn of 2000 and the winter of 2001, there is a certainty that the problem will get even worse. The Henley centre, which is attached to the Meteorological Office, estimates that the sea level will rise by some 24 cm in the next 50 years. That is about 9 or 10 in. That rise in levels will have a different effect on different parts of the United Kingdom, and the Scots have less of a problem in that respect. Extraordinary as it may seem, Scotland is rising as England is sinking; the entire United Kingdom is pivoting. The sea level will rise on average by 16 cm in Scotland but by 31 cm in England. When one adds to that effect the other phenomena associated with global warming, such as increased and more persistent rainfall, storms and winds and so on, we can expect flooding problems to increase.

That begs the question whether we can continue with a legal framework that merely permits local authorities to take action over flooding rather than imposing duties on them. That approach might have been adequate in the past, but will it be adequate in future? Equally, can we go on with fragmented responsibilities and the lack of clear lines of accountability, with responsibility spread between local authorities, DEFRA, the DTLR and so on?

Finally, I entirely support the changes made with respect to PPG 25. That is a highly desirable development, and the proposal that building in the flood plain should be entirely exceptional should be rigorously adhered to. However, I wonder whether it is sustainable when unrealistic targets are imposed on local authorities. Huge pressure continues to build on greenfield sites, which is entirely out of keeping with the guidance note. I suspect that that contradiction will be the greatest source of continual flooding for many of our constituents.

Those three areas should be addressed.

Bob Spink: My hon. Friend has made some interesting points. He identified global warming as an underlying cause of flood risks. In the light of the performance and innovation unit report on the energy review from earlier this year, does he accept that replacing the 25 per cent. non-carbon nuclear capacity with carbon generating capacity for our energy source over the next 10, 20 or 30 years will add to global warming, increase sea levels and river levels and add to the flood risk? It will be a disaster for this country, and we shall miss our Kyoto targets.

Mr. Swayne: My hon. Friend is right. It is not simply a question of cutting back—we must put the process into reverse, because even if we stop generating carbon at present levels, the problem will persist for many years. The problem will have to be addressed in future, but it needs to be addressed now.

11.59 am

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): First, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) on securing this timely and important debate. As I said in an intervention, his reputation in the area is not in dispute and is well regarded both inside and outside the House. As he also said, as he represents Suffolk, Coastal, he has a direct concern and responsibility to ensure that these matters are discussed.

At the Liberal Democrat party conference last September, I co-chaired with the Environment Agency a breakfast on flooding. The Environment Agency was then and remains extremely concerned about the fact that it has some responsibility but insufficient control to be able to prevent, and protect people from, flooding. The sad truth is that the risks of flooding are likely to be as great or even greater than they have been in recent years, and nothing has really changed during the past year. Flooding may occur in different places, but certain pressure points will be overwhelmed.

The Minister will, no doubt, make much of the spending review's commitment to provide more money. That is, of course, welcome, but he must accept that it will take time, and therefore more floods, as well as more money, to deal with the problem. Even then, we are unlikely to keep pace with the increasing pressure to build, which will create floods, so we are chasing a target that is moving away from us faster than we are moving towards it. There is a lack of control and co-ordination, as well as a lack of funding, which together reduce our protection against floods. As has already been mentioned, it will soon be 50 years since 300 people lost their lives in the coastal flooding that occurred on the night of 31 January and 1 February 1953. In the money of the day, there was £5 billion-worth of damage. As the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal said, the scale of damage and loss of life would be far greater were such an event to happen now.

Coastal defences were strengthened after that event, but unfortunately the circumstances that conspired to cause it have worsened in the ensuing 49 years, and the coastal defences are now at the end of their useful life. The severe weather that arises from climate change—not an issue in dispute in this debate—means that catastrophic tidal surges are more likely to happen and on a greater scale, not least because weather patterns are becoming more extreme. I saw a photograph in my local newspaper, *The Press and Journal*, of a tornado in Aberdeenshire. Such an event has never been heard of before, let alone photographed for the local paper.

Coastal erosion has also accelerated along the south and east coast and sea levels are rising. It has been estimated that, in the south of England over the next 50 years, the rise could average 0.6 mm a year. That means that existing sea defences, including the Thames barrier, will be overwhelmed in just a few years. Cities, such as Cardiff, Swansea, Bristol, Hull, Grimsby and Manchester, all face major flooding risks. I am afraid that, in my view, it is a matter of when, rather than if, such a major inundation of the east coast will happen, and it is by no means clear whether we could cope with coastal flooding on such a scale. Some 5 per cent. of England's population—more than 2 million people—live in the 2,200 sq km of land most at risk of flooding from the sea, but five times as much land is at risk of flooding from rivers in England and Wales, and more than 1.3 million properties are at risk. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman suggested that the combined flooding risk affects more than 2 million properties.

In both cases, it is likely to prove more expensive and less effective to spend money purely on flood protection rather than on prevention. The Association of British Insurers has said that it needs £145 million—it is funny how that figure connects—if it is not to withdraw the insurance. I have seen its press release, and the association has not said that the deal is done, only that it will consider it.

I accept that work needs to be done and, of course, protection mechanisms must be put in place. I am not suggesting that the money is unnecessary for physical protection, but I hope that the Minister accepts that we must think more deeply about how to deal with flooding, because we must address the issue of prevention as well as protection. We should not be concerned only about development on flood and coastal plains, although that is an issue. We must also ask whether we should continue building on land that is at risk from flooding from the sea, from rivers and from natural drainage patterns while recognising that development on other land, including farming practices, disrupts natural drainage patterns and increases flood risks, sometimes in unexpected places—including some of the brownfield sites that the Government want to develop, many of which have not been properly assessed for their contribution to floods.

I speak from personal experience as well as that of a constituency MP. I suffered a couple of years ago as a result of very localised flooding. After three and a half days of continuous rain, the water had risen until it came up through the floor of my house. My concern, like anybody's, was not only how to prevent it, but how to ensure that it did not happen again. Things happened by serendipity: my next door neighbour but one put down hardcore and gravel for his car—that flooded the lane, but not my garden. A house was built two doors the other way that cleared some natural drainage obstructions that we had been trying sort out for some time, and another neighbour, as a precaution, put a submersible pump in her garden in case the water level rose again. We have not had a puddle, never mind a flood, since, despite fairly heavy rain. That revealed to me that there are natural mechanisms, if one knows what one is doing. We did not know what we were doing; it was serendipity. Nevertheless it solved the problem without transferring it to anybody else and the water was diverted to the local burn.

Inverurie, the main town in my constituency, has repeated flood problems. It has not been foolish enough to build on the flood plain, although a recent development plan review suggested that it should. A more sensible suggestion was that the flood plain should be changed into an ornamental lake—I should say loch, but they call it a lake—with houses and recreational facilities built around it. That seemed a better idea. The problem was the houses that were built up the hill.

Major developments on former farming land meant that where water had previously fallen on fields and had leached away slowly in a natural drainage pattern, it now hit tarmac and tiles, overwhelmed the drainage system and inundated the centre of the town. The force of the water was so great that one constituent described to me having seen a manhole cover blown 20 ft in the air by the force of water after a cloudburst. We must recognise that we build at our peril. Any new development can have unexpected effects on drainage. We need more research and more control. If we are to build the 4.4 million homes—an astonishing number—planned for England and Wales, it is difficult to see how, under present planning rules, we will not contribute to new flooding problems that are on a scale that we have not previously experienced and that we shall have enormous difficulty preventing.

We need to take positive action to change the planning rules. I accept the role of English Nature, in terms of both wildlife and biodiversity and drainage patterns. When I say that the Environment Agency should be given overall control of flood management, it should be in partnership with English Nature. In Scotland, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage work together in that way. The hard standing for my neighbour's car demonstrated in a very local and specific way that sustainable urban drainage systems can make a major contribution to preventing rapid run-offs. I suggest that the Minister tell the Department that is responsible that they should be made mandatory for new developments—they work and make a real contribution.

Reference has been made to the practice and experience in Scotland. We do not have England's scale of coastal threat or the pressure of development in so many areas that England and Wales experience. However, we have had serious problems in places such as Paisley, Perth, Inverness, Elgin and Inverurie. That has contributed to what the Scottish Parliament and the Executive have done. I shall not read it, because of the time constraints on me, but I have a checklist that draws a sharp contrast to the mandatory practices adopted in Scotland, where all local authority chief executives are directed to take climate change into account and to take

[Malcolm Bruce]

responsibility for flood prevention measures. There is a series of mandatory requirements on local authorities and other agencies to ensure that they take all relevant factors into account in assessing the possible impact of development on flooding. In England, however, there is no such mandatory requirement; particular practices may be voluntary, advisable or encouraged, or there may be endless consultation about what should happen.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he must conclude.

Malcolm Bruce: I will. In conclusion, if we do not take such issues into account, we shall be unable to tackle a problem that has been bad enough over the past few years, but which will get worse in the coming years.

12.10 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) on introducing the debate, although I have one complaint. He brings such knowledge, fluency, humour and passion to such important subjects that he is an extremely difficult act to follow. Indeed, he makes so many of one's own points so much more effectively that I sometimes feel like a man with a very large brush and a very large bucket following a resplendent cavalcade. However, I shall do my best.

The floods of 2000 demonstrated the disaster that inundation can be for people and their property. Some 700 locations were flooded, 11,000 people had to evacuate their homes or businesses, 10,000 properties were damaged and 37,000 others were saved only by prompt local action.

This October, there will be an unusually high tide. Rainfall has been high this year, the aquifers are full and much of the ground is saturated. We continue to build on water-absorbing land, however, and 5 million people, 2 million homes and 130,000 commercial properties in England are in areas at risk from flooding. In a normal year, with existing defences, flood damage costs about £600 million. In 2000, the floods cost insurers £1.3 billion, and uninsured losses may take the cost to £2 billion. This October, matters could be much worse.

It is therefore right to ask how the Government have prepared the nation. Although they cannot turn back the tide, stop the rain or immediately reverse rising sea levels, they can do much to protect us from something that is foreseeable and which may be a calamity. However, they have not prepared very well, according to a March 2001 National Audit Office report called "Inland Flood Defence". The report found that flood defences have remained constantly poor because of a continued lack of funding. In a condition survey of the Environment Agency's flood defence assets, which was completed in 2000, 43 per cent. of structures and 36 per cent. of linear barriers in England were categorised as very poor, poor or only fair.

I am sorry to say that little has changed. Indeed, the complacency of new Labour's attitude to coastal flood defences is clear from an examination of the figures supplied by the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in July 2001. In 1997-98, MAFF allocated £46.8 million to local sea defence projects. The following year, the figure dropped to £36.5 million. In 2000-01, when there was £2 billion of flood damage, a mere £25.7 million was earmarked for spending on coastal flood defences. Over three years, central funding for sea defences dropped by almost 50 per cent.

Mr. Morley: It may assist the hon. Gentleman if I say that it is question of interpreting the figures. There has not been a drop in expenditure. Everything very much depends on the capital programmes and engineering schemes that are in place, and those vary from year to year. Sometimes slippage occurs on projects, and sometimes the amount of money allocated for ongoing projects may vary. In themselves, the figures do not indicate a decline in investment in flood defences.

Mr. Gummer *rose—*

Mr. Sayeed: I give way to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Gummer: May I point out that the Minister always gives that answer. The truth is that, at the same time, the proportion of support given to coastal authorities had been cut, and the result was that many coastal defence projects did not go ahead because local authorities like mine could no longer afford them.

Mr. Sayeed: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The figures show that the Government have cut the amount being spent on protecting us from flooding. It does not matter how one cuts the cake—that is the reality. The 2001 Labour party manifesto stated:

> "The dangers of coastal and inland flooding are now widely appreciated,
>
> and we are committed to investment in preventative solutions."

A £21.1 million reduction in grants for sea defences over three years is an odd way to demonstrate that commitment.

In the aftermath of the catastrophic events of autumn 2000, the Association of British Insurers called on the Government to increase spending on all flood defence measures in England and Wales by at least £145 million. However, when increased Government funding finally arrived last year in the shape of additional subsidies from DEFRA, it did little to help a deteriorating situation. Money allocated for flood warning and flood defence programmes increased from £66 million in 2000-01 to £114 million in 2003-04—a nominal increase of £48 million, when insurers had asked for a minimum of £145 million a year.

The Minister may tell us that yesterday's comprehensive spending review will provide an extra £150 million, but my right hon. Friend has dealt effectively with that figure. True, it is to be welcomed, but how much of it will be used to maintain or improve defences; or will a third once again disappear down a bureaucratic black hole? Will the Minister confirm that none of that money will avert the effect of possible floods in October?

The Government have responded to requests from Conservative Members— which we have been making for many years—to curtail development on flood plains, yet their house building targets include the construction of 40 towns the size of Slough, which will invariably mean building on water-absorbing greenfield land.

I acknowledge that the Government are considering whether the Environment Agency should take responsibility for critical rivers, yet operational responsibility for flood alleviation measures currently lies with local authorities, the water companies, riparian owners, the Environment Agency, the internal drainage boards and a host of other bodies. That is a recipe for evading responsibility, until a problem becomes a disaster. That is why, yet again, I ask the Minister to consider appointing a body to take overall responsibility for flood defence systems. That body, which may be an expanded Ofwat, should have no direct financial interest in the provision of defences, for that may give rise to accusations of conflicts of interest. It should be empowered to act as an independent adjudicator and enforcer, so that it can order emergency works to be carried out before a problem becomes a disaster, determine who should do them and, once the division of responsibility is clear, apportion the costs.

In a Westminster Hall debate on 10 July, at column 288, I raised the need for natural or what are known as soft defences, because inland hard defences often tend to shift the problem up or down stream. The Minister acknowledged the value of natural defences but neglected to say what the Government were doing. I would ask him today to remedy that. I also pointed out the need for better dredging. He replied that

> "it is not that useful in tidal estuaries. Whatever is taken out of a tidal estuary is simply filled up by the volume of the sea and has a limited effect"—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 10 July 2002; Vol.388, c. 289WH.]

I will be charitable: that was clearly an off-the-cuff remark to which the Minister had given little thought. One does not have to be a hydrologist to recognise that the reason that water flows from rivers to the sea is because there is a difference in pressure. A dredged river mouth permits the passage of a greater volume of water over a period of time, particularly at the twice-daily low tide levels. This time, I hope that the Minister will tell us what dredging operations are being undertaken and at what cost, or at least agree to write to me and place a copy of that information in the Library.

Finally, the Government have been in power for five years. What they have proposed is likely to be too little and is certainly too late.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I also congratulate the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) on securing this debate. He is acknowledged for his interest in the environment and for his work in the previous Conservative Government. He put his case in his usual flamboyant manner, which I enjoyed listening to very much. However, I do not necessarily agree with all his points, and there seems to be something of a schism among Opposition Members who have accused us of throwing money at the problem and of not providing enough money in the first place. Their approach seems confused.

Our approach has been sensible in recognising what is needed. The amount of funding that we have provided is based on independent reports that we commissioned. It is worth spelling that out and I know that the right hon. Gentleman expected me to do that. The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed), however, seems to have written his speech before the announcement of the comprehensive spending review.

It is worth bearing in mind that the funding comes from several sources. We provide capital funding and funding for other expenditure on forecasting and early-warning systems. Funding comes from local authorities in the standard spending assessment and through the levy that they pay, and the internal drainage boards also provide some.

Total funding has risen from £312.4 million in 1997, the year when the Halcrow report was written, to a projected £564.2 million for 2005. During the three years of the previous comprehensive spending review, there was a real growth rate of 3.2 per cent. in the money invested in our flood and coastal defence. In the new comprehensive spending review, covering the next three years, there will be an increase in real terms of 8.6 per cent. in funding for such defence. That represents a real average increase over the period of 15.02 per cent. Those are substantial sums of money and are in line with what the ABI has been asking for and with our own independent assessments of the investment that we need to make.

I accept the right hon. Gentleman's point that it is not just an issue of money. Money is important when dealing with such matters, but doing so involves a package of measures. We recognise that flood plain development is an issue in itself. It did not feature very much in the recent planning Green Paper because it has already been addressed in PPG 25, which was referred to by some hon. Members.

I accept that there are large communities living in flood plains. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned Hull, which has invested substantially in reducing risk. I myself opened the Saltend flood defence scheme, which protects the outskirts of Hull. One of the rocks in that scheme has my name on it, as do several pumps that I have opened over the years in various obscure places in the Fens. That is part of the substantial investment in such schemes over the past few years. Since 2000, the Government have approved 274 schemes, at a total cost of £386 million.

On some of the comments about Scotland, it was conceded that Scotland has a smaller problem in that regard—it has approved 60 schemes in the past 40 years and has an annual spend is £12 million. I must correct the right hon. Gentleman: there is no statutory obligation in Scotland to provide flood defences. The situation is no different from that in England. There are statutory obligations in regard to maintenance but that is not quite the same.

Changes at sea level are taken into account in the projected changes in our planning and forward proposals, in the research that we have commissioned into shoreline management plans and strategies and in the fully integrated research programmes that we have with the Environment Agency. I accept that in some cases factors such as changes in agricultural practices have not helped in regard to water run-off, although I gently remind the right hon. Gentleman that the grassland environmental impact assessment, which is a

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

significant study of the impact of change in land use, was not implemented for more than a decade under the previous Administration. However, I am glad to say that we have administered that environmental impact assessment; although it might have had more effect if it had been done many years ago, it is still helpful in understanding the effects of important changes such as ploughing up downlands and converting grassland into land for cultivating potatoes, for example.

We have set targets on a range of issues, including brownfield sites. We are ahead of target on the proportion of brownfield sites used for development. We are looking at ways of raising other income. The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire mentioned connection charges; we can look at that, not only in terms of raising additional money for flood defence but of making people think carefully about development in flood risk areas. A flood plain levy was also suggested but it is clear from our consultation that that is not a favoured option and we will take that into serious consideration.

We recognise that there has to be a range of elements in this package of measures. We are streamlining capital, maintenance and operational funding into one fund, as the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire requested; we have announced warning systems; we have improved forecasting; there is stronger planning guidance and long-term strategic planning; we have a foresight programme, overseen by the Government chief scientist, which is a 100-year assessment of need; high-level targets have been set; there is investment and research into climate change; there is streamlining of institutions in our study of the funding review; there is support for self-help publicity through flood awareness campaigns; catchment study plans; and support for new technology and mobile schemes, as my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) mentioned. Those are all substantial areas of investment and no one can accuse the Government of being complacent.

Since 1998, when we commissioned the Bye report after the floods in Northampton, there has been a revolution in the provision of flood and coastal defence in this country, in terms of the number of reviews that we have initiated, the actions that we have taken to enhance flood warnings and to strengthen our response to flooding and our substantially increased investment. We have also introduced a points system to try to ensure a transparent method of determining priority in flood defence schemes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester said, we will review that next April, to emphasise the number of people who are affected.

One cannot ignore the issue of cost benefit, which was introduced in the flood defence strategy in 1993. We accept cost-benefit analysis as part of our approach. We also recognise that we need to look at planning and that includes sustainable urban drainage. We are in close discussion with insurance companies and we listen carefully to what they say. We welcome the development of digital mapping, for example, and understand that there is a potential risk in using such mapping to exclude property. We hope that that will not happen. We hope that insurance companies recognise that only in exceptional circumstances will properties be unable to get insurance. Our dialogue on that will continue. Sewage flooding is also important, and the impending waste water directive will cover that. Those are all substantial investments that will help us examine how to reduce the flooding in this country. Huge sums of money are being invested, and our record on the problem is good. There is no complacency in the Government, and we will continue to work to reduce the risk.

As time is short, I will be happy to write to hon. Members who asked questions that I was unable to answer.

Endowment Mortgages

12.30 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): I am particularly pleased to have secured today's debate because the question of shortfalls on endowment mortgages is raised regularly in my constituency surgeries. Such shortfalls are causing real hardship, often to some of my constituents who are least able to bear hardship and who are approaching retirement. The problem is of a big scale, and about 6 million householders in the UK—about 61 per cent. of mortgage endowment holders—are facing shortfalls on their endowment mortgages. The issue has been raised regularly because it is serious for those who are affected. It cuts across a large group of people.

It is necessary to remember the past position to understand some of the present difficulties. I refer back to the 1980s, when the industry was poorly regulated. Indeed, there was simply no regulation of the sale of endowment mortgages between 1982 and 1988, during which there was a substantial increase in the sale of endowment mortgages. It was a time when many people moved into the property market and purchased their own home for the first time. Some of those first-time buyers were young couples who had no experience of purchasing properties, while others were people who had lived as tenants for many years and were given big discounts to purchase their council houses. Sadly, in 2002, the chickens are coming home to roost, and the mis-selling that occurred at that time is causing real hardship.

It is important to recognise that the sale of endowment mortgages in the 1980s increased substantially. The proportion of endowment mortgages increased from 60 per cent. of mortgages in 1982 to 84 per cent. by the end of the decade, despite the fact that life assurance premium relief was abolished. That happened in 1984; I remember that particularly well because I was an articled clerk to a solicitor's firm at that time. We had a yearly panic at the time of the Budget, and that year people were rushing to secure endowment mortgages before the Budget took effect because they feared that they would lose the relief on endowment mortgages that was offered at that time. Those people felt that the loss of relief would be the death of the endowment mortgage because it could not logically continue after the tax relief given on premiums paid on an endowment mortgage was removed. They believed that the move would make endowment mortgages more expensive, and that is what happened.

During the decade, endowment mortgages became more expensive, but sales increased. Why was that? I am afraid the answer is largely due to ignorance on the part of those who bought the mortgages. A lot of money was made in the 1980s from the sale of endowment mortgages based on commissions that were paid to the people who sold them and those who benefited from them.

First, the commissions were paid to the life companies. They secured a great deal of money because the commissions paid were not disclosed to the individuals who bought the endowment mortgages. Secondly, the building societies that benefited from the endowment mortgages also received large amounts of commission throughout the 1980s. For example, in 1989, Abbey National building society received £95 million in commission payments; the Halifax building society received £113 million; the Nationwide building society received £109 million. The public were ignorant of those payments. They were not aware that many of the payments made in connection with their mortgage gobbled up all the premiums that they paid in the first year. That disgraceful situation meant that people were buying endowment mortgages that were more expensive than the ordinary repayment mortgage because the situation was misrepresented to them when they originally purchased the product.

Endowment mortgages—especially with-profits funds—were presented to people as nest-eggs. People were told that taking out a life policy at the time of their mortgage would ensure that the mortgage was paid off and provide them with the bonus of an additional sum left over at the end of the term after the mortgage was paid.

Ironically, with-profits funds were presented as the safe option. At the time, if someone wanted to take a chance on the markets, index-linked endowments were presented as more risky, but with a greater benefit in the longer term. From my experience in the 1980s, when I qualified as a solicitor, I know that with-profits funds were presented to the consumer as safe bets. Regrettably, that was entirely untrue.

The safe bets led to hardship in individual cases, which, when one hears about it from the people involved, becomes difficult to bear. A couple who came to see me recently—a manual worker and his wife—purchased an endowment mortgage in the 1980s to buy their council house. They saved £6,000 during their working lives from their small income and have now received correspondence telling them that the endowment mortgage that they were sold in the 1980s will fall short by about £3,000. Half of their life savings—money that they had put by for their retirement over 30 to 40 years—will have to be used to pay off their mortgage. That situation is not untypical.

I am proud that the Government have taken positive steps to improve the regulation of financial services and I commend them for that. It was ironic that when we were discussing the matter last week, the Conservative party was commending deregulation. I have heard from my constituents the effect of that policy on individuals' lives. If beggars belief that that policy is still promulgated.

We have taken steps to encourage the building societies and the life companies to be proactive in their approach to consumers receiving compensation, but the existing system is not satisfactory. It depends upon those who were mis-sold these policies in the 1980s themselves being able to establish that, some 15 to 17 years ago, statements were made that misled people and persuaded them to purchase products that they would not otherwise have bought. The onus rests upon the consumer, which is very unfair, as many of those who sold the policies between 1982 and 1988 are no longer in the industry. In many cases, they received no training because, at that time, they did not need it. I suspect that most of them have left the industry, and it is difficult for individuals to contact brokers who sold them their policies. It is also difficult for individuals to record details of conversations that took place 15 to 17 years

[Ian Lucas]

ago. It is an unreasonable burden for consumers to bear. It is unsatisfactory to place on them the burden of proof—to use another legal phrase—in these circumstances.

Last week in the Chamber in answer to one of my questions, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary referred to the expense of a full compensation scheme for endowment mortgages, referring, I believe, to a figure of £5 billion. Such a scheme would be extremely expensive, partly because the building societies, life companies and brokers benefited substantially in the 1980s from the hundreds of millions of pounds that they received in commission. The compensation would be at the levels to which my hon. Friend referred because those companies profited hugely in the past. The resulting hardship is difficult to bear for some people who come to my surgery.

I want the Government to consider reversing the burden of proof because of the money that various companies in the industry received. If someone is notified that there will be a shortfall on their endowment mortgage and makes a complaint, they should be able to assume that unless the company can establish that the policy was properly sold to them, they will receive an appropriate amount of compensation. The onus should be on the companies that made the profits to establish that the policy was properly sold. It is also incumbent on those companies to show the profits that they made in each case. Unfortunately, because of the rules at the time, people who took out the mortgages do not know how much they paid to the companies in commission. It would be a positive step if companies were obliged to disclose the commission that they received. That should extend not only to life companies, but to building societies that took the commission at the time.

The Government have taken steps, and some compensation has been paid. I know from answers to parliamentary questions to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary that that some £151 million has already been paid in compensation. However, the scale of the mis-selling in the 1980s, and the extent of the hardship that it caused, outstrips the compensation that has been paid to date.

The obligation to compensate and to pay shortfalls does not rest with those who took out the endowment mortgages, but should be shared between those who took out the endowment mortgages and those who profited by them when they were sold. That would be fair, and it is right and proper that we focus not only on the life companies, but on the building societies and brokers who made substantial sums of money when the policies were mis-sold. I ask the Government to accept that there was comprehensive and institutional mis-selling in the 1980s. They should strengthen the scheme and simplify the method of compensation that is required to put those people who are suffering so much hardship in the position that they would have been in had they bought the right product 20 years ago.

12.45 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I am very pleased to see you presiding over our deliberations, Mr. O'Brien. This is an important subject in which my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) takes a keen interest. I am sure that he is not the only hon. Member to have received many representations from constituents on this matter. Before dealing with the specific issues that he raised, I should like to say a few words on our policy towards making the market for retail financial services work better for both consumers and the industry.

The Sandler report—which was published last week and which the Government endorse—sets out a vision of a simpler, more transparent and more competitive medium and long-term savings industry. Ron Sandler's recommendations have the potential to benefit consumers and the retail investment industry and to improve the operation of the market. They will bring greater competition and efficiency and more productive investment. If we can produce, for example, simpler, safer products that consumers can understand and that are economic for providers to sell, we will be able to boost the level of saving without compromising consumer protection.

We welcomed the main conclusions of the review. It contains important proposals that will be of benefit to consumers, the industry, and the economy as a whole. I will be asking my officials to begin work on designing standards for those, consulting the Financial Services Authority, the industry and consumers. The FSA has indicated that it, too, will be consulting on other aspects of the review such as, for example, the reform of with-profits policies. By increasing the level of investment and channelling it towards productive uses, we can drive higher levels of growth across the economy, while at the same time ensuring consumer confidence in the financial services required to operate in the modern world. I am sure that that is an agenda to which we can all sign up.

I should like to point to a couple of recommendations in the Sandler report that bear closely on what my hon. Friend said. First, Ron Sandler commented on commission and how it is disclosed by financial advisers to consumers when they borrow on financial products. He recommends that during that process consumers should be advised up front as to what commission is paid, if it is to be paid. If financial advisers label themselves as independent, they would not be able to charge commission for their services. He also suggests that when simple, transparent products are sold to consumers, there should be a system of warnings that flag up the fact that investments products that invest in the equity market may not be suitable for someone who wants to pay off a specific liability at a specific date in the future. As he rightly says, we have to restore consumer confidence in the savings market.

Consumer confidence is a prerequisite for progress. Trust is the most important commodity that the retail financial services industry can possess. Pension mis-selling is a scandal that still reverberates around the financial services industry, and rightly so. Some 1.7 million pension mis-selling cases have been examined. Offers of redress, totalling £11.5 billion, have been made in more than 1 million cases. That represents a serious breach of trust and it is understandable that concern has spread to other areas, such as endowment mortgages. The problems consumers have experienced with endowments have undoubtedly shaken the essential bond of trust on which financial services depend.

I should like to set out first the background to the endowment issue, and then the actions the FSA are taking to address it. The Government have been successful in achieving low, stable inflation. Low inflation has meant that nominal forecast returns from investments have fallen. Industry and others no longer need to pay out a premium to investors for economic uncertainty. But the wider benefits that lower inflation has brought include, for many borrowers, welcome reductions in their monthly mortgage payments as the interest element has fallen.

The recent falls in financial markets globally have also had an impact, although it is important to keep these in perspective. Endowments are a long-term investment and should be judged against long-term trends. Lower cash returns on investments have meant that, in some cases, the return on the endowment is no longer enough to cover the outstanding mortgage at the end of the term. That is unwelcome news for any homeowner, and I can certainly understand the concerns that have been expressed and the hardship experienced by my hon. Friend's constituents.

However, there are three points to bear in mind when comparing the problems with endowments with, for example, the scandal of personal pensions mis-selling. First, a shortfall does not necessarily mean that someone has been mis-sold a product or an endowment, provided that the risks were clearly explained and the investment forecasts used to illustrate the investment reasonable. Unhappily, in many instances, that was not the case or the policy was manifestly unsuitable. I shall outline later the steps that the FSA is taking to ensure that people can claim any redress owed.

Secondly, even where there is mis-selling, there is not necessarily financial loss. This is a hard point to grasp, but falling interest rates have meant that endowment holders have often done better overall than those who took out the alternative of a repayment mortgage.

Thirdly, because the FSA has taken swift action, endowment holders not due redress can take remedial action themselves by increasing their payments or renegotiating their mortgages now, so that they will not face a terrible outcome when their policy matures.

None of that should downplay the seriousness with which we take the problem of mis-selling; it merely puts it in its proper context. Problems with endowments emerged in the late 1990s. After discussion with the FSA, the Association of British Insurers developed a code of practice to ensure that adequate premium reviews were undertaken. The ABI began to send reprojection letters to policyholders, setting out the status of their investment.

A further round of such letters has started, showing shortfalls in more cases, and the issue has returned to prominence. Included in the reprojection letter to endowment holders is a fact sheet that explains the background to the endowment issue and sets out how to complain. The FSA has taken the view that the right way to address the problem is to tackle directly the pockets of mis-selling and to give other endowment holders the information that they need to complain and secure any redress that is due.

That strategy has had considerable success. First, the FSA has identified, and required firms to resolve, a number of areas of significant consumer detriment caused by pockets of mis-selling and mis-pricing of products. As a result, to date, 20 firms have agreed proactively to compensate policyholders who were mis-sold their products. That involves about 218,000 policies, and total compensation of about £315 million is currently due. Public enforcement action has been taken against two firms so far, and investigations are continuing into a number of others where there is evidence of potential mis-selling. Where mis-selling is established, steps will be taken to ensure that consumers receive appropriate redress. Disciplinary action against the firms may also result.

Secondly, as a result of the first reprojection exercise, firms have received just over 100,000 complaints since April 2000. That represents about 1 per cent. of all policies. The firms upheld about a third of the complaints, with an average redress of £3,000. Consumers who are not satisfied with how firms have dealt with their complaint have a channel of complaint through the financial ombudsman service. In the past two years, some 23,000 complaints went to that service, 45 per cent. of which were resolved in the consumer's favour.

My hon. Friend suggests that the onus is on the consumer to prove mis-selling. However, if a consumer complains to the financial ombudsman service, the firm, not the individual, must provide the paperwork, which makes the process much more straightforward for the individual. Although the ombudsman's ruling is incumbent on the firm, if the consumer still feels dissatisfied, they always have the right to take the matter further, to the courts. Various options are available if people feel that their complaint has not been satisfied straight away.

My hon. Friend mentioned the £5 billion figure, but that is the administrative cost of running a full-scale review, rather than the cost of tackling pockets of clear mis-selling. Administrative costs come before any potential compensation, which, because of the greater number of holders of endowment policies, will be much greater than the £2 billion costs for the administration of the pensions mis-selling scandal.

The FSA's strategy strikes the right balance between informing consumers to help them to take the right decisions and ensuring that firms do the right thing. Learning from the past should help us to build for the future a more efficient system with proper processes of consumer protection and redress in place.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Many reputable high-street companies have decided not to sell endowment mortgages, but the less reputable ones continue to sell them. The Financial Secretary talks about the future, but is it not worrying that, in the first quarter of this year, one in 10 of all mortgages were still endowments?

Ruth Kelly: Some categories of consumer may decide to invest in the equity market, despite the fact that they have to pay and cover their liabilities at a certain date in the future. Such consumers may be prepared to accept the risk. However, that is clearly inappropriate for the vast majority of people when they have no other sources of finance to cover them. I shall not comment on the precise number of endowment policies sold at the moment, but some people, perhaps with other sources of

[Ruth Kelly]

finance or funding alongside their endowment mortgage, might want to invest in the stock market as a means of paying off their mortgage. I would not say that endowments are never appropriate for consumers. The vast majority of consumers, however, clearly want to pursue another option. Ron Sandler's report sets out a variety of simple and transparent products with warnings about when they may be inappropriate. We endorse his general vision of the future.

Paul Flynn: Is it not more likely that endowment mortgages are still being sold in such large numbers because of pressure from the salesmen? As we know from the past, salesmen profited hugely from endowment mortgages because they gained seven times the rate of commission than they would have gained from a redemption mortgage.

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend is right to point to commission as an incentive to make sales, which is why Sandler's proposals have strict caps on charges and are sold free of the previous regime's dependence on commission. We must try to restore confidence and trust in the financial services industry, which plays an important and valuable role in allowing people to save and allocating savings efficiently across the economy. We have a shared interest in encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their own future, increasing their levels of saving and employing the savings pool to enhance the productivity of the UK economy. We need to create a virtuous circle of saving, investment in economic growth and enhanced incentives to save.

Consumer protection will remain a top priority for the Government. The FSA will continue to act in the public interest, protecting and educating consumers, policing the retail market and ensuring appropriate mechanisms for review and redress when things go wrong. The market will continue to be responsive to consumer concerns. Reputational risk has assumed a much greater importance these days. Firms know that if they want to prosper in the future, they cannot afford to repeat the problems of the past.

Child Support Agency

1 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): It is a great pleasure to introduce this Adjournment debate. This is my fourth such debate, and the first not to be on a specific constituency interest.

The previous Conservative Government set up the Child Support Agency with cross-party support. The CSA currently has 1.1 million clients, and its caseload is being added to at the rate of 300,000 new applications a year. It deals with many vulnerable people throughout the country, although they are mainly mothers who are seeking maintenance payments for their children. The CSA employs 12,000 part-time and full-time staff. Many of them do an excellent job in difficult and trying circumstances, and I want to place on record my thanks to them.

On 20 March, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced in the House that the child support reforms that were due to be implemented on 1 April would be delayed because of problems with the computer system that the agency had hoped would be up and running by that time. At present, there is no firm date for the introduction of those reforms.

It is vital that the CSA maintains complete fairness in its work with fathers. I should stress that at the start, because I will be talking mainly about the plight of mothers who are unable to receive the payments that are due to them. It is important that fathers are treated fairly and that amounts are taken from them to support children by former wives or partners only where that is fair. The CSA must stick to that principle.

Many mothers in my constituency surgeries have advised me to advocate the stopping of visits by fathers who do not make their payments, but I shall not do that, because it would be wrong on two counts. First, it would be unkind to the children, who will already have endured the break-up of their parents' marriage or relationship. Secondly, the non-resident parent's contact with his children should enable the CSA to have greater contact with him. There is therefore a double benefit in maintaining contact with fathers, and it should be allowed to continue.

I want to go through, on a confidential basis, several of the case histories that have recently come to my attention, because they illustrate the scope of the concerns that I am discussing. A few months ago, a mother came to my surgery to tell me that she was absolutely fed up with receiving official CSA statements telling her how much money would be paid into her bank account and when. She showed me the statements, saying, "I don't want to receive more bits of paper like these. I find them so upsetting, and I have had them so many times. I go to the bank on the date specified and ask the people behind the counter whether the money is there. But, time and time again, it isn't."

Another lady told me that her ex-husband was living in a four-bedroomed house in another part of the country in much greater style and comfort than she and her children were. That was because his new partner had moved out, and the CSA had said that he needed all his available money to meet his housing costs. Unsurprisingly, the mother who came to see me found that unacceptable.

Another lady told me that she was on the verge of losing her home, as she and her new partner were unable to meet the rent. If even a proportion of the money from the CSA and the considerable arrears due to her were paid, she would be able to keep her children in the home that they were used to. In that case, the father—the non-resident parent—was able to buy expensive clothes for the children on a weekly basis. Unpleasantly, he insisted on keeping the clothes in his house rather than letting the children take them to the mother's home. However, he was not prepared to make any child support payments.

Another mother complained to me about the expensive presents showered on her children by their father, who drove a T-registration car that was much smarter than any car that she could muster. She told me that she could not afford swimming lessons for her children, and sometimes even found the weekly food bill a struggle to meet. The father clearly had no such restrictions on his lifestyle.

I was told by another mother that her application had at one point been closed by the CSA. There had been a brief reconciliation, but it did not work, and she then found that the whole application had to be reopened and all the forms filled in again. She felt that that procedure caused unnecessary delay.

I also think of the mother who came to me several months ago, whose ex-husband had been at the other end of the income scale. He had substantial assets and income, and she had not received a penny from him. Apparently he had several bank accounts, moved money around and kept money in different names. He enjoyed a high quality of life and did not give a penny to the large number of children that his former wife looked after.

Yet another lady told me that she had first taken her case to the CSA in 1995, and in the seven years up to 2002 had received only £500 in payment. She wrote to me about the effects that her battle with the CSA had had on her children and herself, saying that her children

"have had to go without so many things that are considered to be an entitlement for children . . . they have been under considerable stress because their father has not taken his parental responsibilities; this has particularly affected them when they have been taking their school examinations . . . they have found preparing for university life stressful because of their financial insecurity . . . ongoing worry and stress . . . has adversely affected my health and can be confirmed by my GP".

She also said that she had had

"to give up my employment as by working five and a half days a week I was never able to speak to my caseworker, who only worked two days a week at the CSA unless I took time off work, which I could not afford".

I hope that those examples have been useful to put a little flesh on the bones of individual CSA cases. I understand the importance of computer systems that work well. We all know the benefits in working life of computer systems. My central contention is that the CSA can run a more efficient enforcement system even without the new computer system for which it is waiting.

We know that the CSA payment compliance rate is around 72 per cent, with payments not received in 27.1 per cent. of cases. If we take the current stock of cases, at present some 300,000 clients are not receiving payment. CSA statistics suggest that more than 80,000 out of every 300,000 new cases every year will not receive the payments to which they are entitled.

How can we improve matters? I shall make several suggestions, which I ask the Minister to take back to the Department and to consider seriously. I should be grateful if she could respond, now or later, to my suggestions or proposals, because there is huge cross-party concern about the issue. Many vulnerable mothers are not receiving the entitlements that they should receive.

First, we should ensure that CSA procedures are tighter. A time scale should be laid out for applying to letters, chasing up phone calls and making sure that forms have been sent out. There should be a two to three week maximum period before clients are chased so that the agency can make progress with their case. Basic procedures should be set up to ensure that cases progress more quickly.

People have suggested to me that P45s and national insurance numbers could be tagged so that the Department and new employers would realise that a new employee had a CSA payment liability. A new employer would straight away be able to action the payments and contact the agency to ensure that the money went through.

There are huge difficulties in relation to businesses that pay cash to their staff. Again, there should be a much stronger onus on companies that pay cash, whether in the building trade or elsewhere, to ensure that they ask all their employees about potential CSA obligations. They should not be allowed to treat the subject lightly simply because they pay their employees in cash. I know of cases of non-resident parents who invoice companies for their services rather than receiving a salary for their services. That is a method being used by non-resident parents to avoid their liabilities. Legislation should be imposed on employers so that they have a duty to check whether an employee who takes that route has a CSA liability. Non-resident parents should not be able to avoid their liabilities in that way.

Mothers—or, rather, parents with care—tell me that when the non-resident parent has his own business or is self-employed, there is even greater delay in the process. I realise that assessments have to be made and that the area is complicated, but I urge the Department to consider how estimates might be made more quickly. It is a common pattern that, as soon as an order arrives for deductions of earnings, a non-resident parent leaves the firm that pays him on a monthly salaried basis and becomes self-employed or asks to be paid in cash. That makes the trail much harder for the CSA to follow. More thought should be given to that problem.

The CSA does not have the same surveillance powers as the former Benefits Agency. I would not normally advocate greater surveillance of the citizens of this country, but what signal are we sending by depriving the CSA of those powers? Are we saying that abuse of the benefit system that costs the state money is a worse offence than failing to pay mothers with children the money to which they are entitled? That sends out the signal that we are not serious about supporting mothers and children.

The National Canine Defence League has as its slogan "A dog is for life, not just for Christmas." How much more that slogan applies to our children. We must send a clear signal that having children is not merely a

[Andrew Selous]

lifestyle choice or an obligation that lasts for a few years while the relationship between the parents is going well; it is a commitment for life. We need to send that message more clearly and loudly so that it is readily understood by everyone, especially younger people, so that they understand what commitments they are taking on when they have children.

Above all, prevention is better than cure, and we should do all that we can to reduce the agency's additional caseload of 300,000 a year. I urge the Department, in its broader thinking and wider policy, to have the greatest concern for building up the stability of family life.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): I first congratulate the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on securing the debate. He raised some important issues, which have caught the concern of people throughout the country. Many of us meet people like the parents to whom he has referred in our surgeries when we are out there trying to discover what is going on in the world, so interest in the subject is not confined to south-west Bedfordshire.

The hon. Gentleman gave some indication of his concerns by referring to cases in his constituency. Naturally, he did not mention specific details, and I would not expect him to, but given that he did not tell me all the details of each case, I hope that he will understand that I cannot answer his questions on the cases that he mentioned, which appear in my notes as "Mrs. A to Mrs. G." He did not even give basic details about whether the non-resident parent in each case was working or whether the constituent to whom he had spoken was working. He highlighted some interesting issues, which I cannot deal with on a case-by-case basis today, although I can make some general points.

All Members of Parliament are concerned about compliance by non-resident parents with assessments and payments. Compliance by non-resident parents is key to an effective child support scheme, and the agency was set up to ensure that maintenance payments were made and people confronted the financial consequences of bringing up children, whether or not the parents were still together. The hon. Gentleman will know—this is not a partisan point—that because of the 1992 legislation, the current formula for assessing maintenance is complicated. The agency must work out the disposable income of both parents, and take account of necessary day-to-day expenses and even a new partner's income. In complicated cases, that can mean collecting more than 100 pieces of information before even attempting to do the calculation to make the assessment. In one in three cases processed under the old scheme, no maintenance is paid, and full maintenance is paid in fewer than half of all cases. That is after the assessment has been made. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that there has been concern in recent years about the speed with which assessments are made. The new scheme will make the process simpler.

On another of the hon. Gentleman's themes, a small minority of parents simply do not want to support their children. One suspects that that lies behind some of the problems to which he referred. The current complicated process leaves those parents who want to evade their responsibilities with ample opportunity to frustrate the system and to delay the provision of information. The current formula makes it difficult for the agency to get maintenance assessments right and to pay them speedily. As some of the hon. Gentleman's constituents told him, non-resident parents can wait a long a time for assessments—as long as seven years in one of the cases that he mentioned—and they cannot be confident that the assessments are right. Many may then face having to pay off large sums of arrears, which is a disincentive; those who start with a mountain of debt will think that they will never get to the end of the payment process. The current formula is not a good way to ensure early and regular compliance from non-resident parents. That is one of the systemic problems that we inherited with the old formula.

The hon. Gentleman was right to say that we should not overlook the great improvements made in recent years. Compliance by non-resident parents has steadily improved. Since February 1997, the number who pay the full sum asked of them has increased by 32 per cent. to 53 per cent., which is a significant achievement. The number who pay nothing at all has reduced by 9 per cent. to 27 per cent. That is still too high, however, and we hope that the new formula will be able to tackle that.

The agency has put greater emphasis on customer relations, which was one of the problems of the old-style agency. For instance, telephone lines are now open for longer. The hon. Gentleman referred to a constituent who had to give up her job in order to contact the CSA—that was the lady who had been waiting for seven years for what transpired to be a small payment. She would not have to suffer such problems now because the telephone lines are open out of working hours. We should not overlook the great improvements that have been made to the scheme. When necessary, face-to-face interviews can now be conducted outside the office.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I pay tribute to the work of the agency's staff. They have a difficult job, placed as they are in the middle of relationships that have gone wrong. Those who have been in such a situation will know that that is a difficult place to be; the consequences are not always directed at those who are at fault. The agency staff have an inherently difficult job, and the improvements that have been made over the past few years owe much to their dedication and professionalism. I was pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman mention that.

Because of the complexities of the formula, there is a limit to what we can do within the confines of the scheme established by the 1992 legislation. That is why we are introducing a new and simpler child support scheme. The maintenance calculation will be based on a simple percentage of the non-resident parent's net income; it will be 15 per cent., 20 per cent. or 25 per cent., depending on the number of children involved. That is a far simpler calculation. Far less information will be required to complete the calculation. That should free the agency's time and resources; as a result, more time can be spent chasing payments and ensuring that they go to the parent with care instead of working out what the payments should be and then chasing arrears because it has taken so long.

Non-resident parents, especially those who have no intention of complying, will now find themselves with no excuse. They will be able to work out for themselves fairly accurately how much maintenance they will be expected to pay. More important, because the agency will be able to calculate their liability much more quickly, large amounts of arrears will not have built up before they know exactly what they will have to pay. The new scheme will have simplicity and clarity at its heart. It will free the agency staff and allow them to spend more time ensuring enforcement and compliance.

Unfortunately, some non-resident parents will still be determined not to make any maintenance payments. The agency has already taken steps to deal with that, and it has a range of enforcement tools at its disposal. For example, it can deduct earnings at source, get a liability order, send the bailiffs in or garnishee a bank account, which is a legalistic way of saying that it can force people to hand over money from that account. Ultimately, a non-resident parent can be committed to prison for a wilful refusal to pay maintenance. The agency is not interested in resorting to such tactics at the first stage, however, and it is always looking for ways to make it easier to collect maintenance and obtain compliance. It can, for example, require companies, employers and accountants to provide information about a non-resident parent's income. The failure to provide such information, or the provision of false information, is a criminal offence that carries a penalty of up to £1,000.

The courts can now also take away a non-resident parent's driving licence as an alternative to committing them to prison. That measure has been very successful in other countries—notably the United States of America—in getting formerly recalcitrant non-resident parents to start paying maintenance, and the early signs are that it is beginning to be effective here. So far, the courts have taken away only one driving licence, but that is because 51 non-resident parents who faced the same penalty started making regular maintenance payments, which is what we want. The measure's deterrent effect therefore seems to be working. We regard sending a parent to prison or preventing them from driving as a failure because we want voluntary compliance. If we cannot get voluntary compliance, we want compliance. We want maintenance to be paid and children to be supported.

I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's comments about some self-employed parents. Where people are self-employed, it is obviously more difficult to work out their incomes, what they should pay and what their assets are. It is not only the CSA that has difficulty in getting money from some—although by no means all—self-employed people, and the problem is familiar to revenue collectors at home and abroad. However, the measures that we have put in place, particularly those that allow us to gather information from independent sources, will help to improve our record on getting maintenance. If the non-resident parent will not tell us what the situation is, we can get information from elsewhere–the Department for Work and Pensions, the Inland Revenue, the non-resident parent's accountant, companies that have employed him, local authorities, which can provide bank account details, and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. We can now gather information from a range of organisations, and we ensure that we do. Our main concern—and the hon. Gentleman's—is to get compliance.

I turn now to some of the hon. Gentleman's specific questions. He made some interesting points, and I shall take some of them to the agency to get its comments. I shall be more than happy to drop him a line with detailed feedback, although I can deal with one or two of his points now.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a constituent who had to give up her job to contact the agency. She should now be able to contact it up to 8 pm each evening—that should deal with most problems related to working hours—and up to 5 pm on Saturdays. She will not necessarily be able to contact a named caseworker, but she will be able to make contact out of normal working hours, which should assist in some situations.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a constituent whose case was reopened after an attempted reconciliation failed. When a fresh application is made after a failed reconciliation, it is necessary to go through the details again. Maintenance must be assessed on the basis of the circumstances at the time; those may have changed considerably after a period of reconciliation, and it would not be safe to assume that everything was the same. I well understand his constituent's annoyance, given that her situation may have been the same and that it must have seemed like she was jumping through the same hoop again. I am afraid, however, that we must establish the circumstances that exist at the time; we cannot simply assume that they have remained the same.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the duties on employers to make checks. It is the responsibility of the parent, not the employer to pay maintenance. We do not want to impose additional burdens on employers who already operate deduction from earnings orders on our behalf, although we do want to ensure compliance. The hon. Gentleman ought to bear in mind that where non-resident parents hide their situation and their assets, there are other steps that we can take.

The agency aims to answer 70 per cent. of correspondence within 10 days, and we exceeded that target last year, answering 82.1 per cent. within that period, so we are tightening up on the procedures that he mentioned. In respect of his other points, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with some feedback. Finally, I would like to thank him and congratulate him again on raising the issue.

Energy Policy

1.30 pm

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): It is interesting that this debate is taking place on the same day as UK Coal's announcement of the closure of Britain's biggest coal mining complex at Selby, near York, by March 2004. The continuation of coal mining until then is dependent on productivity being improved but, regardless of that improvement, 2,000 mining and 3,000 auxiliary jobs will be lost in that area when that complex closes. Millions of tonnes of coal will be left underground. Some have claimed that the decision goes against the European Commission's policy to maintain access to our strategic reserves of coal.

Only last month, the Government gave support for limited state aid to coal producers to fund up to 30 per cent. of new investment in coal mines. Unfortunately, the Government have been reluctant to extend operating aid, which is also allowed under European Union rules. I would like my hon. Friend the Minister to consider what more can be done for the coal industry. Is it not sensible, if closure is the only option for UK Coal, for the Government to consider taking over the ownership of the mine to protect a valuable resource?

The performance and innovation unit report and energy review raises many issues that need to be considered and addressed and I believe this debate is part of a continuing process to involve the population at large. I am a member of Amicus, one of the major unions within the energy industry, and my union's record in playing a constructive role in promoting the most efficient and cost-effective methods of generation and distribution is widely acknowledged.

When the Prime Minister asked the PIU to examine the long-term challenges for energy policy in the UK, it was against a background of a number of key issues, including competitiveness, security of supply and affordability to the consumer. I believe diversity of supply should also be included.

Energy impacts on all our lives, yet we take for granted its delivery, which enables us to switch on a light, boil a kettle, switch on a cooker or a fire, watch TV or simply listen to the radio. It is only when the lights go out, as they did in California recently and in Britain during the three-day week associated with the 1974 miners' strike, which I am old enough to remember, that we realise the benefits of energy security.

There are concerns regarding some aspects of the review. At present we have a balanced energy mix of gas, oil, coal, nuclear and renewables. We are self-sufficient at present but, within the next three or four years, this will not be so. Different lead times are involved in maintaining energy security, but the building of a power station takes considerable time, from planning consent to the actual construction.

That means that the decisions reached within the near future will determine the success of any long-term strategy in energy policy. In 30 years, world oil may have become not only scarce but expensive. Over-dependence on gas imports from countries such as Russia and areas such as north Africa and the middle east might not seem as attractive as it does today. To rely on the delivery from such countries of 90 per cent. of a 70 per cent. gas component in our energy policy by 2025 would be, in my opinion, totally irresponsible.

We must remember also our responsibility concerning our international environmental objectives and our commitment to reduce the emission of CO_2 and greenhouse gases. It is logical that we should consider how best we achieve low carbon energy production in this country. The UK has done well in comparison with other developed countries in meeting our targets. The UK target under the Kyoto protocol was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels for the period between 2008 and 2012. All projections suggest that we will reach that goal. In fact, we are on target—but only just—to meet the Government's most ambitious domestic target of reducing CO_2 emissions to 20 per cent. less than 1990 levels by 2010.

I welcome the debate. For the first time in years, we are committed to a serious and wide-ranging debate on energy policy, a policy that will have a profound effect on social and economic aspects of UK life. Our thinking must not be too narrow or pushed down pre-determined routes. The beauty of the current position is that we stand on the verge of an exciting new energy era. The Government, Members of Parliament, businesses and the people of the country must engage in a proper debate to develop energy policy for future generations.

I believe that the free market panacea will not produce the security of energy supply that the country so desperately needs if it is to remain an economic powerhouse in the new century. The decisions that we take in the coming months will have a profound effect on the legacy that we leave to future generations. We must adopt policies that will maintain the security of supply, although there is increasing demand for energy.

We must meet our environmental obligations, which have grown in importance in the eyes of not only the international political community but the world population. We must also consider the future employment opportunities of the UK manufacturing industry that supplies the power industry. Research and development into expanding technologies can give us a lead in world markets. What options must we consider? Certainly, it is essential to drive forward the need for greater energy efficiency.

Pursuing energy efficiency is unique, in that it would contribute to all the UK's key energy and environmental objectives. Energy efficiency reduces carbon dioxide emissions, is a sustainable solution for fuel poverty, reduces consumers' fuel bills, helps preserve indigenous energy supplies and creates employment. That is not unproven technology, but simply common sense. The royal commission on environmental pollution has called for a 60 per cent. reduction in CO_2 gases by 2050. Some 27 per cent. of the UK's carbon dioxide comes from household use of energy.

Without sustained effort on energy efficiency from everyone, the household sector will have increased its energy use by 2010. That is why it is important that the Government make available substantial resources in order to convince not only the public but local authorities and the construction industry about their role in achieving energy efficiency.

As I have mentioned, coal at present accounts for about 30 per cent. of energy production. In an initial response to the Government's energy policy consultation, Coalpro, the Confederation of UK Coal

Producers, advocated certain policy actions. In its submission it says that we must recognise that coal, and indigenous coal in particular, has a security value to the nation beyond the commodity price it commands on the market.

Maintaining a healthy level of indigenous coal production will require Government support. Coalpro points to the range of flexible support options available to the Government under state aid rules recently agreed by the EU. It believes that the Government should establish a legislative framework that makes it attractive for owners of coal-fired power stations to maintain those assets and carry coal stocks as necessary back-up to renewables and as cheap insurance against gas supply interruptions.

The Department of Trade and Industry must start the supercritical boiler retrofit project at an existing coal-fired power station. That project was recommended in the Department' s "cleaner coal" review earlier this year, and requires that the DTI cleaner coal technology research and development programme budget be increased. Clean-coal technologies offer immediate benefits and, in the longer term, with carbon capture and storage, can help achieve—at significantly less cost than other options—the great cuts in CO_2 emissions that are called for by the royal commission on environmental pollution.

As today's announcement demonstrates, coal mines in the UK have a relatively short life ahead of them. Targeted investment aid under the new rules replacing the European Coal and Steel Community treaty would allow mining companies to access reserves from existing mines. However, any investment in coal production, whether public or private, must be underwritten by long-term supply contracts. In today's liberalised energy market, producers are often unable to negotiate anything other than short-term or spot contracts that put them in a poor position to finance capital projects.

A controversial option is replacing nuclear with nuclear. At present, nuclear power stations produce a quarter of all Britain's electricity. In Scotland, the proportion is well over 50 per cent. Under the current policy strategy, the amount of electricity produced by nuclear power will reduce to about 3 per cent. by 2025 because nuclear power stations will reach the end of their productive life and close.

For example, the Magnox stations built in the 1950s and 1960s are expected to close between now and 2010 and, a few weeks ago, the closure of the Chapelcross Magnox plant was announced, the first Magnox plant to close. The advanced gas-cooled reactors that were completed in the 1970s and 1980s will close between 2010 and 2025, which will leave one pressurised water reactor at Sizewell B that was built in the 1990s to continue until 2035. If we are to replace the plants, we must take that decision as soon as possible.

It is interesting that power produced by coal-fired power stations over the same period is expected to reduce from about 30 per cent. of the supply to a small percentage. British Energy's nuclear stations currently avoid carbon emissions equivalent to over half that produced by the UK's cars. Nuclear is the only reliable, large-scale and carbon free source of electricity and the UK will not be able to maintain low carbon emissions or have any hope of meeting CO_2 reduction targets without it.

British Energy's submission to the PIU review argued that nuclear power has a vital long-term role to play in meeting our energy needs as part of an even-handed policy that encompasses coal, gas, renewables and energy efficiency. Maintaining a balanced portfolio is the only viable solution that will deliver secure supplies and meet environmental targets. That was supported by the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union when it investigated security of supply. It recommended that the UK should maintain the share of its power produced by nuclear at no less than 20 per cent.

Other countries have assessed their future energy policy. There was a free parliamentary vote in Finland in May 2002 that gave the go-ahead to build the country's fifth nuclear reactor. In Italy, a parliamentary committee has said that the country should consider a return to nuclear power. An opinion poll in Sweden last month found that almost 80 per cent. of people supported the continued use of nuclear power. The United States Administration has set out plans in "Nuclear Power 2010" to remove barriers to enable the building of new nuclear plants by the end of the decade. Eleven countries throughout the world are presently constructing 31 reactors.

Obviously, one of the big issues is the question of nuclear waste production and waste management. Due to the political short-termism of successive Governments, the United Kingdom has lost its way on a policy for the final disposal of spent fuel and other radioactive waste products. In this country, Nirex could be the vehicle to develop a policy for the management of nuclear waste. The Government would take a massive step towards tackling the enormous problem by supporting the call from Sir Ken Jackson for its independence.

The situation in Finland is a total contrast. Finland has a fully operational underground repository for low and intermediate-level waste. That cost £10 million and was built over two years. There was governmental approval and local community support for the underground retrievable spent fuel repository.

On 9 July, the US Senate gave final legislative approval to the storage of spent nuclear fuel beneath the Yucca mountains in Nevada. That vote was the culmination of a major debate in which the US Administration viewed progress on the repository as critical to efforts on expanding domestic energy production.

The UK Government must act on nuclear waste. We must learn from other countries and thus remove some of the public's aversion to nuclear energy. British Energy is keen to replace its existing nuclear stations as they are retired. New-build nuclear plants will produce electricity at a cost of around £25 per MW after initial research and development and "first of its kind" costs have been written off. That cost is fully inclusive of all waste management and spent fuel disposal costs.

I turn to jobs and employment today. The UK nuclear industry supports some 30,000 jobs. The programme to replace nuclear with nuclear would create some 5,000 manufacturing jobs in the UK over almost two decades and would ensure that the UK remained at the forefront of nuclear technology. However, vision and leadership will be required from all involved if we

[Mr. Bill Tynan]

are to grasp this opportunity: the electricity and contractor industries, the unions, the regulators, and especially the Government.

The fourth component in a balanced energy policy is the development of renewable technology. The cost of development is addressed in the energy review. It suggests that to bring down the cost of new renewables and to establish new options, renewable targets should be expanded; renewables should supply 20 per cent. of our electricity by 2020. However, the review did not reach any conclusion about the means by which that target could be achieved; in fact, it indicated that it is by no means certain that the existing target of 10 per cent. can be achieved by 2010.

At present, Scotland is extremely well served by its existing portfolio of hydro-electricity stations. Provision within renewable obligations to support refurbished plant will ensure that hydro-electricity continues to make an important contribution to our climate change programme.

I am short of time, and I want to give the Minister as long as possible to deal with the issues that I have raised. We must continue to develop renewables; that will give us the opportunity to become a world leader in many of the methods and processes that we would create. A balanced energy policy is essential. It would be a mistake to be dependent on one source of imported fuel. Coal, gas, nuclear and renewables have served us well, and they will continue to do so if they are given a level playing field in the future.

1.46 pm

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on securing this debate. The issues that he has so eloquently raised are vital to our ongoing consultation on future energy policy, and I welcome his contribution.

Before turning to specific issues, I want to recap on where we have reached in our progress towards producing a new White Paper. As my hon. Friend said, this is an important opportunity for us to get our policy on energy right for the next 50 years. In June 2001, the Prime Minister asked the performance and innovation unit to carry out a major review of the strategic issues that surround energy policy for Great Britain up to 2050. In large part, that was a response to the royal commission on environmental pollution, which had recommended that the UK should aim for a 60 per cent. reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. The PIU energy review was published on 14 February. It is a report to Government, and it makes a valuable contribution to the debate on how best to meet our future energy needs. It reinforces the importance of environmental considerations in formulating energy policy.

In welcoming the review's publication, we made it clear that fuller consultations would be required if we were to take the issues forward, and on 14 May we launched a consultation document that initiated the next stage of the debate at the start of working towards the White Paper. That stage includes workshops with stakeholders, and seeking the views of the public. Therefore, this debate and the one that was held on the Floor of the House on 20 June are very timely.

Everyone has a stake in our consultation. All of us use electricity and transport, as my hon. Friend said. All of us are dependent on gas, either directly or through its use in electricity generation, and we, and succeeding generations, have a clear stake in the environment, and in the challenge of combating climate change. We have a range of objectives relating to the environment, security of supply, competitiveness and social issues. We have to prioritise those and, as far as is possible, make them compatible with each other.

The precise nature of the White Paper will be determined in the wake of the consultation. However, we start from the assumption that it should be broad, and that it will need to consider all aspects of energy use. The consultation will be open and—we trust—constructive.

Working on the practicalities of future energy policy is complex, and time is short this afternoon. I will now turn to the substance of some of the key issues. Energy security amounts to more than keeping the lights on, and we should not be complacent about it. We must have efficient and competitive energy markets that have the correct incentives to invest. We also need to maximize the economic potential of our own fuel sources, and to build on close relationships with fuel exporting and transporting countries. With this in mind, we will continue to press for the liberalisation of energy markets throughout the Community and will continue to work with other Government Departments in building on our good relations with fuel operators.

Last year, the Department of Trade and Industry and Ofgem set up the joint energy security of supply working group, which has brought together key indicators to monitor the security of energy supplies as part of an initiative to keep the reliability of energy supplies under continuing review. The indicators, which include supply and demand forecasts and forward prices, will provide a means to gauge possible future trends and help inform energy company decisions on future investments.

The working group's first report, published on 25 June, highlights the important role that effective competition and regulation can play together in delivering keenly priced and secure gas and electricity supplies by signalling long-term investment needs and providing the incentives to respond to them efficiently. Centrica's recent announcement of a long-term contract to import large quantities of gas via Norway is a welcome demonstration that the market is making active preparations to ensure our gas supplies.

My hon. Friend spoke with great conviction about nuclear energy. As he will know, the PIU report also raised the question about whether given the continuing aims to deliver lower greenhouse gas emissions and the uncertainties surrounding renewables, the nuclear option should be kept open. There are also issues of security of supply. As such, nuclear was seen by the PIU as a potential safety net if other approaches to low carbon generation and energy security proved difficult to pursue cheaply enough. The Government's current consultation on energy policy is seeking views on that in the light of the fall-off of electricity generated by nuclear over the next 10 years as existing nuclear reactors reach the end of their operating lives. Alongside the central question of whether we need to keep the nuclear option open is the question of how that would be done, should the need arise. We expect that the consultation responses and various stakeholder dialogue discussions in the coming months will help the Government answer some of the questions.

Radioactive waste can continue to be stored safely in the medium term using current technology, although the PIU report acknowledges that the problem is mainly an historic one and that new nuclear stations would make only a small addition to the total. In practice, it is for generators to apply for consent to build new power plants, and decisions on whether they will use nuclear technology will depend on its costs compared with other generation options and on securing public confidence about issues such as safety and the environment. The Government recently completed our public consultation on managing radioactive waste safely, and we understand that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will make an announcement shortly.

My hon. Friend made a point about the independence of Nirex; Sir Ken Jackson, the general secretary of Amicus, has called for its independence. Indeed, Nirex has recently expressed a wish for independence from its shareholders, but the only people able to do that are the shareholders themselves. The Secretary of State does not hold that power, and it is up to Nirex to convince the shareholders of the argument's logic.

On climate change, I am pleased to say that, at the end of May, the UK ratified the Kyoto protocol with the European Community and other member states, which means that the UK is legally bound to achieve its target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. by 2008-12. However, we must also think hard about what happens after the Kyoto commitment period. The challenge is that unless extra steps are taken, the UK's emissions are forecast to begin rising again in 2010.

I want briefly to mention combined heat and power. Encouraging CHP and other energy efficient technologies is an important part of the Government's strategy to combat climate change. The Government are also committed to increasing the UK's CHP capacity because of the considerable environmental, economic and other benefits that it can bring.

The PIU report concluded that promoting energy efficiency and the development of renewables should be the immediate priority of a low carbon energy policy. As my hon. Friend said, the Government have set an ambitious target of securing 10 per cent. of the total UK electricity supplies from renewables by 2010. The renewables obligation, which came into force on 1 April this year, is a 25-year commitment to the development of renewables. It requires electricity suppliers to provide a rising proportion of their supplies from eligible renewables by 2010; 3 per cent. by March next year, 5.5 per cent. by March 2006 and 10.4 per cent. by March 2011. The expected cost is an average increase in electricity prices of 4.4 per cent. in 2010 above 1999 price levels, which is a good deal all round.

We are also well down the road now on developing regional renewable energy strategies that will help renewables in the planning process, leading to a much more positive approach to planning. We also propose to revise planning policy guidance 22 to provide much more up-to-date guidance on renewables to local planning authorities.

I shall now deal with coal. My hon. Friend spoke about the sadness and tragedy of today's announcement that UK Coal is to shut the Selby complex. He mentioned taking the pit into public ownership, but I have to say that the geological position of the pit means that it will have to close. The Department commissioned its own independent study, which is available—like so many other things these days—on the internet. It was carried out by the mining consultants IMC, who endorsed UK Coal's assessment of the geological problems that militate against delaying closure beyond the first quarter of 2004.

My hon. Friend will know that the DTI announced separately earlier today a package of measures designed to soften the blow of this closure. He asked what more could be done to help the coal industry. We have negotiated flexibility to pay investment aid beyond the expiry of the ECSC treaty on 23 July, which could enable support for the development of commercially realistic mining projects and allow for coal to be treated on a level playing field with other industries.

Coal is still crucial. As the PIU pointed out, more than a third of UK electricity is currently generated from coal-fired power stations and coal is expected to continue to play a key role in the provision of secure energy supplies in the medium term. It has important advantages such as the geo-political diversity of supply sources, the relative ease with which coal can be stockpiled and the flexibility of load factors for coal-fired generation, which make it particularly useful for meeting peak demand or covering for supply difficulties in other fuels.

Environmental considerations also need to be borne in mind. If we want for security of supply reasons to continue to use significant amounts of coal in electricity generation in the longer term, we will need to adopt technological advances to deal adequately with the remaining potential environmental impacts. The DTI's cleaner coal research and development programme is supporting the necessary work.

Transport is another key sector. Vehicles are already getting more fuel efficient, and using less energy. Further substantial energy-saving developments are opening up, including hybrid electric and internal combustion cars, which simply make the internal combustion work better. Here in the UK, one of our world-class automotive companies has developed a diesel hybrid demonstration car that reduces energy use by 30 per cent. on a 1.2 litre engine. Further ahead, fuel cell vehicles will use hydrogen.

In summing up, I would like to emphasise the importance that the Government attach to the current review of our energy policy options. Some huge issues will have very considerable implications for the UK for decades to come. We shall face some tough decisions when we write our White Paper towards the end of the year. My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) will resume his normal place as the Minister for Industry and Energy. I am off the substitute's bench today. The current debate is crucial to helping us to think through the issues. I congratulate my hon. Friend once again on raising this issue; I greatly welcome his contribution to the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 17 July 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Complementary Medicines

Motion made, and Question proposed, that the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Pearson.*]

9.30 am

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I am grateful to be called to speak in this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, not least because it is in my name. The debate is on a matter that is crucial for the health of the nation, and I am delighted to see present not an Under-Secretary but the Minister of State, Department of Health. I pay that short compliment to him, because it is good to see him.

While preparing for this debate, I reflected on the fact that 25 years ago I was working in the House of Commons as a research assistant for the then Member for Hastings and Rye, Sir Kenneth Warren. I remember examining issues of police accountability and related matters, and going through *Hansard* and background papers trying to find definitive moments of change in the political process. It is my belief that, for complementary medicine, today is one of those moments.

There have been three defining moments for complementary medicine in recent years. The first was the publication of the King's fund report. Next was the Lords report. The latest is this morning's debate. It is a defining moment because this is the first time that the official Opposition have got behind this issue and started to consider it from the policy point of view. That should send warning signals to the Government, because it illustrates how the issue has moved up the agenda. I should declare an interest in the matter. Since the 1970s, when I was injured, I have been through the process of learning of just about all the therapies, some of which we shall debate today.

I believe that it is a Conservative issue as much as anything else. I can say to my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) that it is natural Conservative territory, and I am pleased that we have the party with us. It is about choice and self-improvement, as it is about the better use of resources in the national health service and better value for money for Her Majesty's Government. It is also about taking the pressure off doctors and surgeons. It is about using less invasive techniques when possible and about using less toxic treatment when appropriate. In addition, it is about giving doctors new means of treating patients. Further, it is about spreading the burden of health care.

The debate is also about highlighting Conservative achievements in the field and drawing the attention of the House to the woeful shortcomings of the Government's policies. The Conservative Government had three main achievements in this area. The first was in the 1987 Parliament, when a Standing Committee of which I was a member regulated to put osteopaths on a statutory footing, which was hugely beneficial. Secondly, we did the same for chiropractors in the 1992 Parliament; I was a member of that Committee also. Thirdly, it was decided to bring GP fundholders into being, which gave doctors new powers to decide how to spend their money, and many GP fundholding practices went on to employ complementary therapists, or to build a link. That came about because of the decision made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), then the Member for Loughborough, when he was Under-Secretary at the Dept of Health, that doctors could channel patients to complementary practitioners provided that they took clinical responsibility. That decision was supported by Tom Sackville, the then hon. Member for Bolton, West, who is sadly no longer in the House. It started the process of introducing complementary medicine into the health service.

I should say as an aside, however, that the person who really got the process going was Aneurin Bevan, who had a homeopathic doctor—the hon. Member for Watford (Claire Ward) is looking quizzically at me, but that is true. Bevan said that homeopathy would be brought into the health service and made available through doctors, and qualified doctors can now prescribe homeopathic medicines on the health service. The only slight problem at the moment is that they cannot get those medicines up on their computers, and the Minister might want to examine that problem. None the less, that was the decision that Bevan made all those years ago.

Whatever shortcomings the Government claim the GP fundholding system had, it gave doctors a certain freedom to take on complementary practitioners in the health service. That was a valuable step in the right direction, which increased supply and choice. Regrettably, the availability of complementary therapies on the health service has declined since primary care groups and primary care trusts came into being. That is because they are under other pressures and do not see integrated health care, complementary therapies and the range of treatments that come under that heading as priorities. It is rare to find a primary care trust that gives priority to such issues, although the Hinckley and Bosworth primary care trust, which is in my constituency and which will cover west Leicestershire, is seriously considering providing acupuncture for pain relief, and a qualified doctor in the constituency wants to use that treatment. The Minister should take that on board, and if he can find a way of encouraging primary care trusts to increase the supply of services rather than reduce it, he will be doing us all a favour. I have written on numerous occasions about the way in which homeopathic services especially have been cut as a result of the introduction of primary care trusts, and we should study the issue.

It is a sad fact that the Government are generally reactive, not proactive, when it comes to complementary therapies, and there is plenty of evidence for that. When the Labour Government came to power, one of the first decisions of the then right hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr, now Lord Rooker, was to restrict the available dosage of vitamin B6. That was a catastrophic decision, which was blown away in the end. The limits that he wanted to impose were based on flawed research and never came into being. There was a huge wrangle over the issue: the industry mobilised, there was an enormous amount of activity, there were parliamentary motions and much energy was expended. It was important that doses were

[Mr. David Tredinnick]

not limited to the lower level, because that would have discriminated against poorer people who would have had to buy more of the vitamins that they wanted. That was nonsensical and did the Government no credit.

Two years later, we had the ghastly MLX249 problems. It was proposed that the Medicines Control Agency should be able, on appeal, to redesignate a vitamin supplement compound as a medicine—I may not have the terminology quite right, but it is along those lines. That decision would have placed huge costs on the industry, because supplements that are reclassified as medicines must go through extensive trials, which can cost £100,000 a shot. To get rid of that ludicrous proposal, we had to march from Marble arch to Trafalgar square, where I spoke from between the lions. I heard a crowd of a thousand chanting, "Tony, we want the right to choose." That could be heard in Downing street, and I am told privately that it sent some tremors through the structure at No. 10. Action was soon taken and the proposal was knocked on the head. Now, in the year of our Lord 2002, we have a double threat—the threat to vitamin supplements and the threat to traditional remedies or medicines. The relevant European directive keeps changing its name so I might change my description of it.

I saw the Under-Secretary of State for Health in Committee the other day and I told her that I was grateful to her for having agreed to talk to me, as treasurer of the parliamentary group for alternative and complementary medicine, with an industry expert and a couple of other colleagues the day before. However, I had to warn her that if the issue was not taken seriously, there were people—I did not use the term lightly, it just came out of my head—who were tooling up for war. She looked at me as if to say, "I don't like the sound of that, and I don't like the way in which it has been put across," but when our eyes met, she knew that I was sincere. I was speaking for the vast number of people who see a serious threat to their well-being. Under this European directive, about 160 nutrients, supplements, medical treatments—call them what we might—will be removed once and for all.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire might want to develop the point further, so I shall just say to the Minister that he got it wrong on vitamin B6 and he got it wrong on MLX249. He should be careful this time; it is a big issue.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Does my hon. Friend take some heart from the fact that, about a week after the discussion in European Standing Committee C during which he made that last point, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, the health Minister who deals with such issues, called for a further round of discussions and put back the consultation period on the traditional herbal medicinal products directive until the end of this month?

Mr. Tredinnick: My hon. Friend, as ever, is right. The Government have recognised the seriousness of the situation and extended the consultation period. I shall say a word about the industry's view of the meeting that its representatives were granted with the Minister. Generally speaking, the Government are reactive and not proactive with regard to complementary medicine and integrated health care. They had to react to the Lords report. Fortunately, they took advice and the response was broadly right. The Secretary of State is very defensive on the issue. When he sees me and thinks that I am about to raise some of these points in the Chamber, I get the feeling that I should have no confidence that he is behind the idea of an integrated health service, which must have an effect on his Department and its officials.

The Lords report, the needling from His Royal Highness Prince Charles and some of the pressures in the Chamber have had an effect. I was touched, just before the last election, when the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), who is now the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety, described me as the hon. Member for Holland and Barrett. It was fun for hon. Members in the Chamber, no doubt, but it played very well on the ground because what I am sure that he did not realise is that I have the headquarters of Holland and Barrett in my constituency. I do not say that the fact that my majority doubled at the last general election was all down to the right hon. Gentleman, but I could have called him a right hon. Friend as I watched the boxes at the count.

I shall move on to the promotion of good health, which is so important. Health care should really start with the promotion of good health. If people are encouraged to take responsibility for their own health, it will prevent many patients from needing access to the NHS. People must be persuaded to change their behaviour, and that cannot be done overnight, but 5 million people each year choose to use complementary therapies. That is a way of taking pressure off the health service and getting people to take responsibility for their own health. People usually have to seek those therapies because they are not widely available, although they are sometimes recommended. One of the great challenges for the Government is to move the focus for those 5 million people to within the remit of the NHS. Surely that would be a vote winner from a political point of view.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way because I shall not be able to stay for the whole debate. Does he agree that it is important that when people develop conditions such as MS, they should pay attention to their regime and diet, which, in some instances, may reduce the costs to the health service by keeping people healthy for longer?

An extremely brave woman suffering from MS came to see me at my constituency surgery. She wanted me to pass on to the Minister the regime and diet that she was following because she was convinced that, in addition to beta interferon, it was keeping her healthy. I hope to be able to pass on to the Minister the regime that my constituent is following because that sort of complementary approach could benefit many other people.

Mr. Tredinnick: My hon. Friend is right. That brings into play another ball—the issue of diet and health. Last night, there was a meeting of the new obesity group in the House. The problems of people who are overweight largely result from the consumption of far too much fat and, secondly, from the consumption of E additives. There are far too many additives in food, many of which cause dysfunctional behaviour in school children. All the issues are interrelated, but if we are trying to reduce problems in schools, we should pay much more attention to diet and to the strange effects of additives, which can cause costly disruptive behaviour. So my hon. Friend is absolutely right.

One of the ways in which people can improve their well-being is through taking supplements. Two recent studies point to the need for something specific from the Government. The Oxford study purported to show that certain supplements had no effect on reducing the symptoms of patients with heart problems. It was a limited study and was properly carried out. It did not say that supplements did any harm, just that no benefit could be found. Contrast that with the other survey, which showed that vitamin supplements taken by prisoners were very effective, reduced dysfunctional behaviour and made them easier to manage.

The Minister must commission more research into that because there is surely some confusion there. I take supplements myself—I suppose that is no surprise—and I think that most people who take them believe, and have good reason to believe, that they help. The size of the demand and the size of the industry suggests that not everyone is an idiot, and when people have taken them, they perceive some difference. They understand that they have improved or feel better. That is why they continue buying them, but we need more research on that.

To go back to the traditional medicines directive, as I understand it, the Government's position has completely shifted. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, who was parachuted into the debate on the issue after the last reshuffle, has really tried to get a grip of the issue, but she was not well advised initially. The Department had not consulted the key people in the industry. The decision makers in the Department—the advisers—had not cast their net to ascertain what was happening. It was not until the meeting with the Department and the debate in the European Standing Committee that the Under-Secretary of State understood the sheer weight of opinion and the scale of the problem. That was when she decided to motor on the matter, and it is clear from yesterday's *Hansard* that things have moved on and that she is trying to get on top of the issue. The message that I got from the meeting with the officials of the Medicines Control Agency and the people who represent the consumer groups and manufacturers was that they feel that the Government have shifted substantially on the matter. The MCA has been pretty much instructed to work with the industry retailers and consumers over the next few weeks to quantify the problems and come up with solutions.

The future of health care is inextricably linked to the integration of complementary therapies in the health service. It is impossible for the Minister's Department to meet public demand and manifesto commitments unless it embraces more fully the integrated health care concept and draws on the 50,000 practitioners who largely practise in the private sector.

As politicians, we all look for a bit of luck. I believe that it was the Duke of Wellington who was once asked how he chose his generals. He said that he would prefer a lucky general to a good general. I had a bit of luck yesterday while wearing another hat. I am the Chairman of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, and I serve on the Liaison Committee. Colleagues may have noticed that yesterday the Liaison Committee met, and for the first time in 50 years the Prime Minister attended—not for 20 minutes or half an hour, but for two and a half hours. Luck again came to my aid, and I had the chance to ask him a question. I did not ask about statutory instruments, because I did not feel that the Committee needed to ask him about such matters. However, I asked him about complementary medicine.

The Prime Minister waxed lyrical at the meeting about how he personally—ipse, as they say in Latin—had had an influence on the primary care trust system. Yes, his hand had touched the reforms. He also admitted that there were too few doctors, nurses and ancillary nurses. I asked, "Prime Minister, in the course of your deliberations, did you consider making more effective use of the 50,000 complementary practitioners? We know that the Department has already decided to embrace—literally gobble up—all the beds in the private sector. If you are going to do that, why don't you take on the practitioners as well?" I shall be kind and say that I had a holding reply.

The Prime Minister had not been briefed on that issue, but he may want to be because in six months he will come back before the Liaison Committee. Aneurin Bevan said, "Why look into the crystal ball when you can read the book?" I cannot gaze into the crystal ball and say what will happen during that meeting. The Minister might want to tune into what I am saying because it might help his promotion. I may feel pressed to talk about the problems of statutory instruments, which is my right, but there is an outside chance that I will press him on the issue of complementary medicine.

The hon. Member for Watford is smiling again—she is always smiling, which is always good. I am trying to make a serious point in a flippant way, as it is important to try to lighten proceedings on occasions, especially in this area, which can be very entertaining and enjoyable.

I touched on the question of staff shortages, referring to the Prime Minister's comments in yesterday's sitting of the Liaison Committee. The figures involved are incredible. The Government are spending £300 million a year on agency staff to plug gaps in the health service. Hospital managers frequently tell me that the costs due to paying short-term rates for staff are huge. The Minister could make much better use of qualified herbalists and acupuncturists. He does not have to wait for statutory regulation, as many of them are regulated and properly trained. Not all complementary medicines are regulated, but he could bring some such practitioners into the health service now.

The right hon. Gentleman can help himself by proceeding with regulation at a faster pace. He might say something about that today. It is a key issue in the Lords report, and much good work has been done. Both the acupuncture and herbal medicine practitioners are in favour of such moves, although they are partly regulated under the old regime. The herbal medicine practitioners are starting on an ambitious route towards

[Mr. Tredinnick]

self-regulation. The new independent chairman of the regulatory working group is Professor Michael Pittilo. I had lunch with him, and I thank him for trying to put things in perspective. He is working on a detailed plan for herbal practitioners, and perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will say something about that. The acupuncture profession is following closely behind.

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend must not forget aromatherapists. The Aromatherapy Organisations Council has done a great deal of work to move towards regulation of the profession, and would be interested to hear the Minister's remarks on that.

Mr. Tredinnick: I have Shirley Price's international college of aromatherapy in my constituency, which is one of the leading aromatherapy schools. Regulation has been an awful mess, with five or six different regulatory bodies, so I would welcome proper regulation. Aromatherapy is extremely valuable. I was not going to talk about it, but aromatherapists can be of particular help to people before operations. By gentle massage and use of oils, they can change people's moods and reassure them. They are also important in post-operative care.

I first consulted an osteopath in the 1970s, when that was seen as completely beyond the pale. People would never tell their doctor that they were seeing an osteopath, as they would pretty much be taken off the list. Since regulation, osteopaths have become much more involved in the health service, received much more respect and set up better links with surgeons. The process has worked well, although chiropractors are a little way behind.

I have no doubt, however, that if self-regulation can be speeded up—which perhaps means that the Government will have to spend more money on it—integration of the health service can be achieved in a painless way that meets everyone's requirements. Doctors are often nervous about referring, because they are not sure of the legal status. That is becoming more important because of the litigious nature of our nation. We seem to be following in the footsteps of the United States.

A word on cost-effectiveness will illustrate my point. About 5 million prescriptions are issued for painkillers each year, at a cost of £265 million. A further £370 million is spent on painkillers in pharmacies and supermarkets. Treatment of side effects arising from painkillers costs the NHS anything between £170 million and £350 million a year. Complementary therapies often remove the need for further medical investigation or surgical intervention.

According to the CBI, back pain is emerging as the greatest health concern for employers across all sectors, causing at least 5 million adults to consult their general practitioners annually. That costs a staggering £140 million in primary care. It is estimated that the Government spend more than £480 million a year on services used by sufferers of back pain alone. That includes about 14 million GP consultations, 7 million physical therapy sessions and the use of 800,000 in-patient beds. At any one time, 430,000 people in the UK are receiving social security payments primarily as a consequence of back pain. Industry pays the bill in lost work force days, then it pays again through the money needed to fund the health service to rectify the problem. Timely and appropriate preventive care could save Britain's economy millions.

That illustration could easily be applied to many of the other complementary therapies. The Public Accounts Committee ought to examine the relationship between the costs of complementary care and those of modern medicines. Complementary therapies are often much less expensive.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Public Accounts Committee. Would he be happy for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to investigate complementary therapies in the context of current technologies?

Mr. Tredinnick: I would not disagree with the hon. Lady's point. NICE could examine the matter, but I was looking for a bigger weapon in the Public Accounts Committee, which is supposed to monitor the nation's books. It launches inquiries to establish whether the Government's spending is cost-effective. I was suggesting that that might be a way forward, but I do not disagree with what the hon. Lady said.

The health service performs more than 300,000 hip replacements each year, mainly on the elderly. Waiting times can be long, and I have received a number of complaints about waiting lists for that operation. Referral to an osteopath can help to keep patients active and mobile while they await the surgery and help to return them to health when they come out of the theatre. It takes the pressure off surgeons and the orthopaedic department. The Minister should consider the self-evident knock-on advantages in terms of reducing bed blocking in hospitals and care homes and for patients and their families.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): My hon. Friend has secured a debate on an important matter on which I have received many letters, as no doubt many other hon. Members have. He mentioned osteopaths and back pain. Is he aware of the Alexander technique and the great benefits that that can bring in prevention and in giving relief, taking the burden off the osteopathic departments in our hospitals by teaching people to use posture and to use their bodies effectively so that they avoid back troubles or minimise their consequences if they already have them?

Mr. Tredinnick: My hon. Friend raises a point that is valuable in two ways. First, he talks about a treatment and its effectiveness and secondly, he illustrates that in the complementary debate we have not really discussed many of the therapies, certainly not those in category 2 or 3 of the Lords report.

Alexander was a remarkable man. He was an opera singer who could not sing. He realised that he had a major problem and he developed a technique of breathing and relaxation particularly involving stretching the shoulders and the spine, which enables the lungs to open up. There is a fair number of Alexander technique practitioners in London and the home counties.

One of Alexander's discoveries was that, generally speaking, we do not stand properly. Most of us stand in such a way that our hips are dislocated from our back. He found that if one repositions oneself with a slight bend in the knees, one is better balanced. It takes the pressure off the spine and releases the muscles, which in turn releases the constriction across the chest and enables people to sing if they want to.

That technique, which I have studied and occasionally used, is very effective. Sometimes when I hear constriction in voices in the Chamber, I wonder whether some hon. Members would not benefit from the Alexander technique, which was intended as a solution for that specific problem. It can also release many tensions for those at work. A common problem is shoulder tension, which comes from modern working conditions and working long hours. Alexander's idea is suited to tackling that.

I cross-examined the Prime Minister yesterday—that sounds great, but is not entirely accurate. As Chairman of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, I am a member of the Liaison Committee, and yesterday I had a chance to question the Prime Minister about health care. He told us that 75 per cent. of the health budget now goes through the primary care trusts. He also said that his hand had touched the decision-making process, so I was happy to ask him about that. As I said to him yesterday, if 75 per cent. of the budget is devolved to primary care trusts, surely advice should also be devolved and that advice should be to consider different therapies.

In the west country around Devon, many herbal practitioners are considering giving up because they cannot make ends meet in the private sector. I represent part of Leicestershire, but Ottery St. Mary has always been a centre for herbal practitioners, as hon. Members who represent constituencies down there know. Some practitioners are thinking of giving up because they cannot support themselves, yet they have had extensive training in herbal therapy. I can think of one practitioner whose is qualified in phytotherapy, English herbal medicine and traditional Chinese medicine. It is a great tragedy. Those people are out there waiting to be taken on board and it would free up so many doctors and surgeons if complementary therapy was embraced more thoroughly.

Other groups have been working hard to bring complementary therapy online. The Prince of Wales set up the Foundation For Integrated Medicine and one of the programmes it set up is a primary care collaborative. The Government would do well to mark what has happened there. For some years, doctors and health care professionals have worked alongside complementary therapists and the scheme allows evaluation of the effectiveness of working together. The resultant savings shown by the survey prove my point. There are fewer demands on GP time and fewer referrals for secondary care. However, recent research shows that only one in 10 primary care trusts is seeking to establish PCT-wide complementary health care services. Many integrated services are also being established in health centres, and other initiatives are being set up to combat health inequalities. The message is twofold. First, valuable research has been carried out by the collaborative initiative, and secondly, not enough has been done to make use of that research in the health service.

The Government should introduce statutory regulation. Some work is taking place—I refer to Professor Michael Pitillo—and an easy bull for the Minister to hit is the one that moves statutory regulation along. The Foundation For Integrated Medicine has run seminars. I have attended some of them and they have been an effective force. More doctors must be trained, with courses for older doctors so that they at least know to whom to refer patients. They do not need to train in the discipline, but they should have better awareness of what is available and where to refer.

The Government must make it easier for complementary practitioners to practise in the NHS. Now that the primary care trust system is up and running, the very least the Minister should do is to send a memorandum to primary care trusts instructing them to look carefully at complementary therapies.

Finally, more research is necessary into complementary medicine generally. There was the Oxford survey on the use of vitamins and another conducted on prisoners, but if we are receiving conflicting messages, we need more research into how and where different supplements are effective. The Lords report came up with three categories, but we are really discussing only the first category here. There are many other disciplines. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point referred to the Alexander technique. I think that kinesiology, a form of muscle testing, is very valuable in establishing what the problems are. Another discipline that has not really been looked at seriously is iridology. That is about looking in the eyes in order to spot problems with various organs. I attended a demonstration at which 40 people were chosen to be studied. After a two-minute appraisal, about 70 per cent. of them said that the diagnosis was accurate.

We sometimes talk about loose cannons in the House. The origin of that phrase is 19th-century warships. A first-rate ship had 100 guns: on one side on the top deck were the 16-pounders, underneath were the 32-pounders and on the bottom deck were the 64-pounders, so called because they could throw a spherical ball of 64 lb in weight. The one thing that the ratings on those ships feared more than the French was a loose gun on the bottom deck. A gun that could fire 64 lb and that got loose—as you will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the guns had to be run with ropes—was a terrifying thing, which could kill a lot of people. The directives that the Minister's Department are considering at the moment are 64-pounders. They are not secured on the bottom deck, and if he is not careful they will cause a lot of damage.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr John McWilliam): I hope that the hon. Gentleman was not suggesting that I served in Nelson's day.

10.11 am

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on securing this debate. When we saw his name, the subject was of no surprise, but I have to admire his tenacity on the topic. I want to talk about the place of complementary therapies in medicine and briefly mention the EU directives that are coming down the tracks.

[Sandra Gidley]

We cannot get away from the fact that there has been a growing interest in the subject during recent years. Travel broadens the mind, but the biggest contributory factor has been the emerging mindset, which I welcome, that doctors are no longer regarded as gods. Patients have been helped by an explosion of lifestyle magazines, and there is also the internet, although that is a double-edged sword, because there is much rubbish on it. We question things much more nowadays and expect to have answers, and to have more involvement in our treatment.

I used to work as a community pharmacist. In the 20 or so years since I first qualified, there has been an absolute explosion of new products in the vitamins, minerals and herbal sector. I could be cynical and say that such things are sold not because they do any good but because people think that they do, but what is the harm in that? Pharmacists make a lot of money from those products. More and more, however, are also selling homeopathic products. I have taken some interest in complementary therapies, and it annoys me that homeopathic products are often sold completely wrongly in pharmacies. If one takes the time to study what homeopathy is about, one realises that it involves treating a person as an individual rather than as a case of indigestion, or whatever it might be. There must be training if those therapies are to be used properly.

If one walks into a pharmacy now, one finds aromatherapy oils and even devices based on the age-old practice of acupressure, to cure seasickness. I used to do a lot of work with pregnant women. One problem is that such women cannot take any drugs any more. Manufacturers have often not been able to trial their drugs, for very good reasons. That sector of the public increasingly looks to complementary therapies. Morning sickness is dreadful and many women try acupressure bands, ginger and raspberry leaf tea when they are approaching giving birth, and use homeopathy.

Many pregnant women enjoy aromatherapy. A good aromatherapist will not use certain oils on a pregnant woman, which is fundamental. Unfortunately, some people have the mindset that something natural must always be good and should not be questioned. The scientist in me says that if something can do good it also has the potential to do harm. In 1999, a survey of British adults showed that herbal medicines were the most commonly used form of complementary medicine. I am concerned that about one third of adults have accessed herbal medicines, because there is a large amount of ignorance. As a pharmacist, I know that herbal products can be of great benefit and much of the modern pharmacopoeia derives from them. I spent far too many hours during my three years at university doing strange things with bits of leaf.

Many members of the public are labouring under the mistaken belief that herbal medicines are safe and are without side effects. In many cases the effects of herbal medicines are more unpredictable because the amount of active ingredient in herbal material varies. Although there is some quality control, the amount of active ingredient in any particular product varies. Somebody taking herbal medicine does not always get a consistent effect and the pharmaceutical sector controls the amount of a drug more stringently than the herbal sector. That is bad enough, but there is also the mindset that natural products are without side effects, which is clearly rubbish. If a preparation has a physiological effect and has the power to cure, by definition there must be the potential for adverse effects. We have to get away from the idea that healthy products are natural. There is a huge place for complementary medicines, but we have to make sure that the public are protected.

The situation is changing. Over the past 20 years many therapies have gained a professional respect that was previously absent. Nowadays it is commonplace for pain clinics to use acupuncture whereas 20 years ago it was regarded as strange and quirky. Chiropractors now have a useful place and even homeopathy and osteopathy have gained a professional respect. That is acknowledged in the Lords Select Committee report, which is a good piece of work although some of my hon. Friends think that the Lords have been too kind in giving credence to some therapies.

I agree with the hon. Member for Bosworth that more research needs to be done. Much of the available research is conflicting and—we all do this; politicians love to do this so why should the complementary medicines lobby not do this?—people cherry pick the studies that prove their particular point. Many complementary medicines can be used as an adjunct to traditional therapy. The hon. Member for Bosworth mentioned aromatherapy, which I use. It can be used to relax patients and a strong case could be made that fewer drugs would be prescribed because if patients feel relaxed they may not need tranquillisers. There is no evidence to prove that that happens; it is just a gut feeling that I have. It would be nice to see someone carry out a trial to study the difference between two groups of people, one treated by aromatherapists and the other treated by conventional pharmaceuticals. If patients are terminally ill, why should they not be allowed to access the alternative treatment of their choice on the NHS, if they think that is going to help them? There is often little hope for some people. They may not want to go down the route of chemotherapy which, although useful, can be very traumatic. Some people do not want to do that, so the alternative route could be worth looking at.

I briefly want to consider the medicines directive. I was reassured by the approach of the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), during yesterday's health questions. The directive as it stood was overbearing. There has been quite an effective lobbying campaign organised by Consumers for Health Choice. I was taken in by this group because I thought that it was a consumer organisation. However, close examination shows that it is largely a lobbying group on behalf of the health food industry. I am not sure whether many of my colleagues who have been lobbied are fully aware of that. Even bearing in mind the fact that there are quite significant vested interests involved, the directive is a classic example of a case where some compromise should be reached. We need good evidence that some of the larger doses of vitamins are safe.

The hon. Member for Bosworth mentioned vitamin B6. I agree that we did get it wrong on that, but many people were unaware that vitamin B6 has significant side effects in large doses. Often, women were taking quite hefty doses. They thought that because it was a vitamin, it must be safe and have no side effects. They could not understand why their pre-menstrual tension or post-natal depression had eased, but they were still feeling grotty for some other reason. We must not fall into the trap of believing that vitamins are safe at all doses, at all levels. Once we have an evidence base, it would be clearly ludicrous if every individual or small manufacturer had to go through the licensing procedure separately.

I now start to disagree with the hon. Member for Bosworth. He said that better use of resources for the NHS could be achieved by using such therapies. I would like to support him, but there is a limited pot of money in the NHS, and we have to have a firmer evidence base for some of the technologies. Where there is a proof that a technology is useful, it is already being used—for example, acupuncture.

Mr. Heald: A few years ago there was a growing use by GPs of acupuncture and other complementary therapies because they had the freedom to do so. It is a matter of concern that since we have had primary care groups, and now primary care trusts, that trend has reversed, so we are now losing the use of those therapies in the NHS, which doctors find useful.

Sandra Gidley: I was coming on to primary care trusts. There is nothing to stop doctors using such therapies if they want to. A small group of local surgeries in my constituency took part in the total purchasing projects—a Conservative idea. That local group had won awards for the way in which they approached the matter. One of the innovative things that it did was to provide exercise on prescription. At the time, the group found that that led to real benefits. Having been given a free course, people very often completely changed their lifestyle and carried it on of their own volition because they realised the difference that it made to their lives. They were very upset when they were told that the TPPs were not to continue. They have been shackled in recent years, and have had to concentrate on what could be called core Government priorities. Recently, I spoke to some of those doctors and they were looking forward to 75 per cent. of the budget being devolved. They were keeping their fingers crossed that that money would not be earmarked. They want to return to having more freedom and to try prescribing some of these therapies.

We must not forget that the GP contract is being changed. It is likely that soon people will register with a surgery instead of an individual GP. That change could increase the use of complementary therapies. In the past, I worked alongside a surgery that had one doctor who was keen on homeopathy. Patients were queueing to see him because they wanted to access homeopathy first. They often found that the medicine was beneficial. I do not know whether those patients experienced a placebo effect, but they certainly did not return to that surgery for drugs of the traditional kind.

I welcome greater use of complementary therapies, but if primary care trusts and health professionals are to embrace them, it would be useful to establish a larger evidence base. I was disappointed after an earlier debate when I did not receive the evidence that the hon. Member for Bosworth promised to send me. I hope that he will put that right, because I have a genuine interest.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned supplements for prisoners. However, prisoners have an appalling diet, so perhaps it would be better to scrap supplements and ensure that they get enough fresh fruit and vegetables. There is more than one way to look at a problem. The hon. Gentleman may remember that a few years ago there was a survey of school children that showed that giving children certain blends of vitamins improved their IQ. I could say that giving them a proper diet, rather than Big Macs, would have achieved the same result. It will be difficult to find evidence, but if we want to offer choice to the public, it is well worth investing in research to establish the true place of such therapies in the NHS.

10.28 am

Bob Spink (Castle Point): It is a pleasure to follow two hon. Members who spoke with great knowledge and fluidity. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on securing the debate.

I apologise for starting on what may seem to be a discordant note, given that the two previous speakers dealt with the subject with a laudable lightness of touch. The debate is about choice and the freedom to act for one's individual needs and to make decisions about how one treats oneself, especially one's body. There is a growing and regrettable tendency for Governments to over-regulate every aspect of our lives; they want to control what people do, eat, where they go and whether they can sing in pubs. Generally, they want to dominate people's lives. The tendency is to swamp society with controls and over-burdensome bureaucracy. The present Government are one of the worst in history for doing that, and they are driven by the European Union to push forward directive after directive. They swallow them all whole. I would say, why fix it if it ain't broke? Complementary medicines and therapies are not broke. The Minister is scribbling, no doubt preparing his riposte to my attack, but I do not include him in my comments. I know him of old, and he is a good man. He is not an over-regulator by instinct, and I hope, therefore, that he will take the message to the Government.

Many doctors know how important complementary medicines can be in building a patient's confidence and self-esteem. Patients get not just choice but the important element of ownership of their treatment—they have a degree of control and choice. If such medicines are safe, use of them should not in any way be stymied, as they are very good and can help in many ways in building feelings of well-being in patients. There is much more to the treatment of disease and symptoms than any of us knows. At present, we do not understand the processes very well. Although we do not understand how, we know that the psychological effect is enormously important in the progress of disease and the effects of symptoms. If complementary medicines and therapies can help to alleviate and control the progress of disease, we should celebrate that and not seek in any way to control the process too much. All that matters is that it works.

Complementary medicines cover many areas of treatment. We have heard that aromatherapy can give relaxation and relief and help in many subtle ways in pre-operative situations, in pregnancy and so on. I have never personally used aromatherapy. I do not know whether

[Bob Spink]

other hon. Members have, but I have not had that pleasure. I was delighted to hear that the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) is an expert in the area. I would subject myself to some hands-on experience to learn first-hand how important aromatherapy is, were she willing to introduce me to it. Putting humour aside, if people enjoy it and it gives self-esteem or relaxation before an operation, why not use it?

Food supplements can be helpful, providing they are safe. I do not believe that there is any great evidence that food substances are abused. Vitamins are essential. Some people like to use vitamins to supplement their diet or as an aid when they get older. For instance, older people need more calcium to keep the density of their bones intact, and I do not see anything wrong in that. Traditional eastern medicines and therapies have been around for hundreds if not thousands of years. We do not know how they work, but we know that they have a significant effect and give great help and relief to patients. I do not understand why we should over-regulate them if it is not necessary. Acupuncture has been used for thousands of years. We do not know how or why it works, but we know that it can have an important effect on some patients. If it works, let it work.

There are several issues to be considered. If we can use medicines, including complementary medicines, in a preventive way, we should do so more. We should seek to prevent rather than to treat disease, and I hope that the health service will grow most in that area in the next 20 to 30 years. Otherwise, we will look back and realise that we did not get on with prevention soon enough or aggressively enough. Complementary medicines can be preventive. We should promote, not inhibit, the use of vitamin and diet supplements. We should also promote self-control and individual control where that is possible and safe.

We need the Government to give us advice and information, but not to over-regulate and control us. They could, for instance, give us more of a lead on diet. Hon. Members will know from my accent that I come from up north, so I feel able to say that diet is a particular problem there. The Government could give a lead on that, but I do not want them to regulate against fish-and-chip shops, or fried Mars bars in Glasgow. I am a great advocate and fan of fish-and-chip shops, although I cannot imagine why anyone would want a fried Mars bar. None the less, why should the Government regulate such things if people want them? Indeed, the Government are not rushing to regulate them, even though they probably damage the population's health much more than complementary medicines do. I do not see, therefore, why the Government should regulate complementary medicines, unless they want to develop a nanny state.

The bottom line is that patient choice should be welcomed and allowed where it is safe, because it will give patients control of their situation and self-esteem.

Sandra Gidley: I take what you said about choice, but it was the Conservative Government who reduced the number of vitamin preparations available on prescription and who put some of them on the black list.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are getting a bit slack. When the hon. Lady says "you", she is referring to me, and I have not said a word.

Bob Spink: Were you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to answer the hon. Lady, you would do so far more eloquently than I ever could. However, she makes a good point, and I do not seek to defend what previous Conservative Governments did. I would say, however, that we are listening to what the people say. We all know that our mailbags have been inundated with letters from people who want us not to stop or control complementary medicines and therapies, but to resist the European Union's rather silly directives, because they are unnecessary, smack of the nanny state, prevent choice and will, on balance, harm the health service. I rest my case, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you for hearing me.

10.37 am

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): We have had an excellent and important debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on securing it and on speaking so comprehensively.

My hon. Friend started—it is perhaps not a bad place for me to start—by noting that the period of Conservative government that started in 1979 was marked by important achievements in complementary medicine, and we do not need to apologise for what Conservative Governments did. As the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) said, the acceptance of osteopaths and chiropractors was sealed by the Acts that were passed during those years. Equally, GP fundholding, whatever the Minister's criticisms of it, allowed GPs to use complementary therapies in a way that had not been seen before. That is one reason why we now see that wide range of treatments being used in practice.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) said, it is vital to recognise that we are dealing with an important issue of individual choice. It was not by chance that 1,000 people marched to Trafalgar square shouting, "Tony, we want the right to choose." Those people felt strongly that they should be able to use certain therapies and that the Government should not interfere unnecessarily in a nanny-state way or in an orgy of regulation. My hon. Friend made a valid point when he said that the instincts of the Government are all too often to regulate rather than to allow individual freedom and choice. My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth, echoed by my hon. Friends the Members for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) and for Castle Point, also made the excellent point that there is a need to promote good health, and that diet and the way in which one approaches it are vital.

It is important to regulate professions so that they can be seen to be acceptable. That is how osteopaths and chiropractors were able to make progress. Can the Minister tell us what the proposals are for the other professions that have been mentioned during the course of the debate? I include aromatherapy, which I mentioned earlier. With regard to back pain and the Alexander technique, I know from meeting people who are involved in pain management that back pain is the largest problem of all. If research can help in that area by examining complementary therapies and providing them, that would be an economic use of resources.

The hon. Member for Romsey said that there has been an explosion in the use of complementary therapies and in the number of products that are available in pharmacies. We must not forget that we need to be careful about their use. I agree that safety is important; she made that point very fully. That does not mean that we should accept everything that is coming from Europe—the food supplements directive, the traditional herbal medicinal products directive and the European Commission's proposals to amend the EC medicines regulatory system. We have been concerned for a long time that the combination of those measures will lead to many products becoming unavailable, which will hit the retail sector. The Government have not yet given a solidly founded explanation of the dangers of these products. When we debated the matter in European Standing Committee C in June, I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Health whether she could point to solid scientific evidence that traditional herbal medicinal products were dangerous. We were given a few anecdotal examples about Aristolochia in Belgium, but that was not the sort of detailed, scientific report that one would expect from a Government who supported measures that could hugely limit consumer choice and put a number of firms out of business.

Mr. Tredinnick: The Aristolochia case is often quoted, and it is misused. That was a case of the wrong drug being over-prescribed by the wrong people.

Mr. Heald: That is the point that my hon. Friend made very tellingly.

There are some welcome signs. As I mentioned earlier, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath has called for a further round of discussions on the traditional herbal medicinal products directive, I understand that the Medicines Control Agency consultation has been extended and we hear that the Health Food Manufacturers Association is to meet the Minister on 24 July.

Can the Minister tell us what is really going on? What meetings have there been with interested groups, what meetings are planned, and is there emerging thinking from the Government that is more conciliatory on the issue? Will we see sound statistical medical evidence produced in this area? The principle should be that it is reasonable to request hard evidence if one is to outlaw products that are currently on sale; the burden should not be the other way. If something is being sold, and there is no evidence that it is doing harm, it is hard of a Government to say that they will introduce heavy-handed regulations without any sound basis. The Minister should be aware that a huge body of people are against the Government on these issues. They include the National Association of Health Stores, Consumers for Health Choice and people in the industry, as well as numerous consumers who write to Members of Parliament. The issue currently forms the largest postbag. One cannot merely say that those people have vested interests; they are the millions of people who use the products and who feel strongly about the issue. There is a burden on the Government to prove their case, which they have not yet done.

The European Commission proposes to amend the EC medicines regulatory system. The whole system seems to be becoming more centralised and the definition of a medicine is being expanded, so that it might include products from the arena of complementary medicines. I should be grateful if the Minister were to tell us whether the Government have made any progress in their opposition to the process. The Under-Secretary of State for Health told us that the Government had some concerns about the process, and I should like to know what progress has been made.

On the EU directive, will the Minister tell us the Government's view of the provisional findings of the European Union Scientific Committee on Food? The Government promised to tell us their view during the summer, once the expert group on vitamins and minerals had given its advice. We are getting into the dog days of summer in terms of parliamentary time, with only five days left, so we need to know the answer.

On the cosmetics directive, there are concerns about essential oils not being available because of new regulations on allergens. I wrote to the Secretary of State about that in June, but will the Minister tell us the Government's view of that directive?

Overall, will the Minister give us a commitment that the Government are reflecting on their strategy in this area, and will he commit himself to moving the Government's agenda towards choice and away from regulation? This is an important issue about choice and individual freedom, and unless the Government do something, they are likely to find more people marching through London shouting, "Tony, we want the choice." I am sure that the Prime Minister would not want that.

10.48 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): First, I join in the warm, generous and entirely appropriate remarks that have been made by hon. Members towards the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), not only for raising the debate today and on many previous occasions but, as the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) said, for doing so with a tenacity and perseverance that is a credit to him. People often challenge the efficacy of Members and the contribution that individual Members play. The hon. Gentleman's campaign on complementary and alternative medicine provides evidence of how wrong those people are.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) drew attention to what they described as the achievements of the previous Conservative Administration in this area. I shall not quibble with the substance of that analysis, particularly in relation to the regulation of osteopathy and chiropractic. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, measures on both were introduced by private Member's Bills, so we need to proceed with some caution in claiming them as successes of the Conservative Administration. I am sure that they enjoyed the support of Ministers, but we need to put that on the record.

I take a slightly different view of the contribution of GP fundholding, which will not be a surprise either to the hon. Gentleman or to his hon. Friends. Rather than re-run the argument about fundholding and its merits or otherwise, I should put on the record that there were

[Mr. John Hutton]

significant disagreements among general practitioners about the direction of that policy and whether it was beneficial to general practice or primary care. I shall touch on the point that the hon. Gentleman rightly raised on the accessibility and availability of complementary medicine within the NHS.

The hon. Gentleman referred to our approach to what he called integrated health care, and I agree with him in many respects on that. He will be aware that the Department now co-sponsors an award scheme on integrated health care. There have been a number of noticeable NHS achievements in that regard, of which the hon. Gentleman is perhaps unaware.

Last year, there were two winners of the award. One was the Blackthorn medical centre in Kent, which offers an anthroposophic approach to treatment, rehab and support employment for patients suffering from chronic illness. The other winner was the maternity acupuncture service provided at the maternity unit at Derriford hospital in Plymouth, where acupuncture was originally offered to provide greater choice of pain relief for women but was extended to a popular out and in-patient service for ante and post-natal problems. More than 4,000 women have been treated by that service, so there is evidence of progress.

The hon. Gentleman drew attention also to the need for more research, and I agree with him on that. I shall touch on what the Government are doing to encourage that. He stressed the importance of effective regulation, and I strongly agree with him on that.

I might have been a little unkind to the hon. Member for Romsey in our previous debate on the role of the private sector in the NHS. This time, I am happy to say that I agreed with almost all her comments. I hope that our relationship is now on a stronger footing, although if I were her I would be more worried about a relationship with the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink).

The hon. Gentleman took a perfectly reasonable position on regulation. He is against it, almost as a matter of ideology. He prefers the freedom of the market and the freedom of consumers to choose. That is a perfectly defensible ideological position, but events over the past 200 years might have provided some evidence that that is not always the best way to proceed.

The hon. Member for Bosworth, in his support for statutory regulation of some of the key therapists, takes a very different view from that of the hon. Member for Castle Point, and I agree with the hon. Member for Bosworth. The important point is that if we are to regulate, we should always do so proportionately. We should always try strongly to support the basic principles of choice and consumer freedom. Everyone would want to sign up to those basic principles, whatever side of the House they sit on.

I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Member for Castle Point, but I do not think that the positions in this instance are absolutely fixed. We need to approach this subject with a degree of pragmatism. We should be clear about our overall objectives but be prepared to regulate, to intervene and to use our powers to establish proper minimum national standards, where that is in the interests of consumers and will support the exercise of effective choice rather than undermine it. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman, however, that we have no plans to regulate the sale of fried Mars bars, if that was of concern to him.

The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire referred to several developments at European Union level, which I shall deal with in a few minutes. He was concerned about the Government's evidence on the safety of herbal medicines. He will remember, because he was present at the European Standing Committee debate, that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health pledged to place a summary of safety information relating to herbal medicines in the Libraries of both Houses. The Medicines Control Agency intends to provide that information by the end of this month, so I hope that that will clear up some of his concerns.

I am not sure that I can be helpful to the hon. Gentleman today on cosmetics, as I know diddly squat about that subject.

Mr. Heald: Will the Minister inquire into what happened to the correspondence I had with the Secretary of State in June and give it a push, so that I get a quick reply?

Mr. Hutton: I will certainly do that.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a specific question about the regulation of aromatherapists. They have set up a working group with an independent chairman. The first objective is to work together to create a system of voluntary regulation. If that can be done, we shall consider the case for any further form of regulation. Any scheme that they put in place themselves as an initial first step would form the basis of further progress.

Unfortunately, I have only five more minutes in which to respond to this important debate. First, I should say that there is no question in my mind but that evidence-based complementary and alternative medicine treatments provided by properly qualified and regulated practitioners can make a positive contribution to improving the health and well-being of people in this country. That is the Government's view. There is also no doubt that patients should always have the maximum possible choice of the range and types of treatments available; that is not only a Conservative set of principles but a Labour set of principles.

Our goal should be to support choice, diversity and safety in health care provision. As hon. Members know, primary care trusts have the primary responsibility for ensuring that that happens at a local level. It is widely accepted that people with cancer often find that complementary and alternative medicine treatments such as aromatherapy and reflexology, from which I have personally benefited and rate highly, help them to cope better with the trauma and anxiety that follow the diagnosis of that terrible disease, as well as easing the debilitating effect of the treatment that they undergo.

For that reason, the guidelines on supportive and palliative care for cancer patients that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence will publish next year will include a section on complementary and alternative medicine. I hope that the guidelines will clarify the roles that various complementary and alternative medicine therapies can usefully play in the supportive and palliative care not only of cancer patients but of those afflicted by other chronic illnesses that are difficult to treat.

The hon. Member for Bosworth was concerned about the availability of complementary and alternative medicine provision throughout the NHS. He will be interested to know that we have commissioned research from Sheffield university on the subject that shows that a small increase has taken place in the provision of those therapies. It suggests that about half of general practitioners provide access to some form of complementary and alternative medicine. The hon. Gentleman will probably say that that is not enough, but I hope that he takes some reassurance that the indicators are pointing in a more favourable direction from his point of view. When the research information becomes available later in the summer, I shall ensure that he sees it.

It is not only what we are doing within the NHS that is important. The Department is working with the King's fund on a collaborative project led by Westminster university to create a network of primary care trusts that will identify and share good practice in the clinical governance of complementary and alternative medicine as a major contributor to NHS primary care. The two-year project began earlier this year and its results are expected next year. Other organisations such as the NHS Alliance and the Prince of Wales Foundation for Integrated Health are working in partnership on the project.

Much concern was expressed about the regulation of practitioners. No debate on the subject would be complete without a proper analysis of the pros and cons of that matter. We continue to regard regulation of complementary and alternative medicine professions as an important objective, so I am pleased to be able to describe the progress being made towards statutory regulation of herbalists and acupuncturists.

The independent herbal medicine regulatory working group has been in existence since January. There are important and sensitive issues to be resolved, especially in relation to relationships between the different traditions of herbal medicine. However, I hope that all traditions represented on the working group will continue to work together to achieve a sensible conclusion. If possible, the Government would like a statutory scheme to be established that encompasses and retains the unique characteristics of all traditions of herbal medicine, including the practice of traditional Chinese medicine. With good will and constructive participation all round, we can achieve something to provide much greater protection for patients and the public generally.

On the subject of acupuncture, a new regulatory working group is being assembled and will hold an initial meeting soon. I am pleased that both working groups are led by experienced independent chairmen, and I am confident that they will lead the professions involved to a position on which we can build. Once the working groups have made their recommendations, we will use them as a basis for wider consultation before preparing a suitable legislative vehicle to put before Parliament.

There is also the important subject of product regulation. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health made it clear yesterday on the Floor of the House that our overall aim on herbal remedies is to achieve an effective balance between public health and consumer choice. They are not exclusive options, as the hon. Member for Castle Point tried to assert.

I accept that the balancing act is difficult. There are many effective advocates of consumer choice, and we acknowledge that many people have strong feelings on the issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Christian Communities (Asia)

11 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise such an important issue. Why do I bring the subject to this forum at this time? Our debate is one of several that avowedly Christian Members of Parliament have brought before the House to highlight the persecution and other such treatment of Christians. I declare an interest as a Christian, and make no apology for raising the subject. I do not pretend to be an expert on Asia—I have taken a greater interest in Africa—but anyone who has seen the number of parliamentary questions on the subject and talked to any of the relevant organisations will know that the Christian community and those of other faiths have expressed concern about what is going on in Asia.

As I said, other hon. Members have secured debates on similar subjects. They include a debate on the Moluccas introduced by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) in December 2000; and one on Sudan introduced by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) in March 2002. I want to build on those debates about the way in which the Christian community is treated around the world, but I do not intend to blame other religious faiths or those of no religion. I shall talk about why Christians are under attack—and some of the figures that I shall give make the fact that they are under attack only too clear.

I give thanks to those who have helped me to ensure that the subject is brought to the attention of Parliament. It is good to see present several hon. Members whom I know will talk about different parts of Asia. I intend to speak generally, albeit with some specific references to North Korea, about which I am especially concerned. I thank Christian Solidarity Worldwide, especially Dr. Alan Hobson; he and I have discussed the repercussions of what has happened over several months.

It is opportune that we now have time to debate this important issue. I shall cast no aspersions, but instead explore ways in which the Government can by active involvement ensure that they protect the Christian faith and Christians. That is what we, as a Christian country, want to do. In addition, the issue is true to the spirit of the United Nations. We in this country try to be religiously tolerant, although perhaps less successfully than some of us want, and the same should happen in other parts of the world.

There are good reasons to consider the plight of Christian communities. A report written in America a few years ago concluded that Christians suffered more persecution than any other religious group. That view is echoed in another report published last year, which estimates that between 200 million and 250 million Christians worldwide are persecuted for their faith, with a further 400 million living under threat of persecution and non-trivial restrictions on their religious liberty.

Statistician David Barrett estimates in the World Christian Encyclopaedia, which was updated in 1996, that each year as many as 160,000 Christians are killed for their faith. Furthermore, more Christians were killed for their faith in the 20th century than in the previous 19 centuries. If we pause to consider that those centuries encompassed the frequent bouts of persecution that took place under the Roman empire, it helps to bring home the magnitude of what has happened in the past hundred years.

Although Christians are heavily persecuted in many parts of the world, a great deal of the persecution is taking place in Asia. Asia contains a wealth of cultures and histories; it has landscapes of spectacular beauty, and much else to admire. Many of the world's great inventions and advances in civilisation have emanated from that great continent, and it has been home to some of the greatest empires and civilisations that the world has ever seen. However, despite the vast differences between the cultures, languages, histories and systems of government of the different countries of Asia, it remains true today that Christians are severely persecuted in many of them. The problem covers a wide geographical area: even if we discount the persecution of Christians in the middle east, which is technically in western Asia, there is still a wide arc of persecution, stretching from the central Asian republics such as Turkmenistan, through the Indian sub-continent, and on to south-east Asia.

The position of Christians is precarious in most of the former Soviet republics of central Asia, where Governments tend to follow an aggressive form of Islam. The worst in terms of its treatment of Christians is Turkmenistan. Last year, for example, the Turkmen authorities badly mistreated Shageldy Atakov, an imprisoned Christian. He was tortured and physically abused and, in a sinister throwback to the worst excesses of the old communist era, he was forcibly injected with psychotropic drugs. Other Christians, especially Baptists, have been targeted; if they fled because they had found out that the authorities were about to swoop, they were subjected to a manhunt.

In India, although the Government profess their allegiance to religious tolerance, Hindu militant organisations have been targeting Christians for some years. According to the Indian Government's figures, Hindu militants killed 33 Christians in just two years—1999 and 2000. In Pakistan, it is Muslim extremists who target Christians. Their attacks last year on two churches in which more than twenty people were killed hit the headlines, but many other cases of Christians facing violence and discrimination in Pakistan are less well known. Several hon. Members, including myself, have raised individual cases, and I am sure that the Minister will refer to those cases and others to show that it is a matter of ongoing concern.

In Burma, the State Peace And Development Council regime is notorious for the vicious attacks it perpetrates upon its own ethnic minorities, who include Christians as well as many other religious groups. However, some Christian churches and pastors in the capital, Rangoon, are specifically targeted by the regime.

In south-east Asia, a number of different systems of government are engaged in the persecution of Christians. Those include atheist communist countries such as Laos, Vietnam and North Korea. In Laos, many churches have been closed down, many Christians have been imprisoned in the past few years, and Christians are killed from time to time. In November last year, a Christian pastor in northern Laos was shot dead. It was unclear whether the authorities were behind the killing or whether it was the work of a relative angry at the fact that the man was a Christian—both parties had made threats. Whatever the case, the man was killed because of his Christian faith.

In Vietnam, many Christians, especially Christian leaders, have been imprisoned, and a large number languish in prison today. While we debate the issue in the comfort of our liberal democracy, churches in Vietnam have been destroyed and a number of Christians are believed to have been killed.

Highlighting one country might help to illustrate the point. North Korea is a good example of wrong, and of why this country and the Government need to do something. North Korea operates a system of absolute and brutal control over its population; even the slightest aberration from the Government line is punished with severe, sometimes fatal, reprisal, and torture, imprisonment in conditions of severe deprivation and execution are routinely used to control the population. Political prison camps are one of the key means used to deal with dissent.

Christians in North Korea are specifically targeted. That can be traced back to the 1950s, when Kim Il Sung implemented the juche philosophy in the country. The main purpose of that philosophy, which was designed to impact on every area of North Korean society and Government, was to cement the hold on absolute power of Kim Il Sung, and, later, his son, Kim Jong Il. The central teaching of juche is that there is no power greater than that of Kim Il Sung, "the great leader", and Kim Jong Il, "dear leader". Christians are a particular target of the regime because they believe in God and refuse to acknowledge that their country's leaders represent the ultimate power. Christians are the most targeted group in North Korea, apart from suspected South Korean spies, who occupy a place of comparable suspicion in the eyes of the regime.

For decades the rulers of North Korea have tried to eradicate Christianity from the country. If someone is suspected of being a Christian they are arrested, and possessing a Bible is an arrestable offence. Often when someone is arrested for being a Christian, three generations of the family are arrested at the same time, because the grandparents, parents and children within that family are just as liable as the original person. That is an attempt to prevent the spread of what is seen as the insidious influence of Christianity. Once Christians have been arrested, they are either executed immediately, or sent to political prison camps.

Those prison camps are often known—with good reason—as concentration camps. The human rights non-governmental organisation Christian Solidarity Worldwide has sent several fact-finding missions to the region in the past two years, and it has heard first-hand accounts of the treatment of Christian prisoners in the camps. The treatment of all prisoners in the camps is dire, but because Christians are seen as such a threat to the regime, they are singled out for particularly harsh treatment. Prison guards are rewarded if they manage to force a Christian to recant his or her faith, which gives them a particular incentive to target them for beatings, torture, harsh labour, rape and other such treatment. One former prisoner reported that she saw a guard pour molten iron over living Christians because they refused to renounce their faith.

Christians in the camps are also subject to a decree that their faces must permanently face the ground. Because they believe in God and would look to heaven, they are not allowed to look up. A former prisoner reports that after years of keeping that position, many Christian's necks are permanently deformed. When Christians die guards break their necks and bury them face down to prevent them from seeing heaven.

Many Christians in the camps are worked to death. According to reports from former prisoners, they are singled out for the worst and most dangerous jobs. Men are sent to work in iron foundries and other factories in which the mortality rate is high because of the dangerous conditions and exposure to extreme temperatures. Women are subjected to intense labour such as making shoes in primitive conditions, or are made to clean cesspits where they are often overcome by toxic fumes. Men and women work for 16 to 20 hours a day, seven days a week. It is not surprising that of all the prisoners in the camps, Christians tend to have the shortest life expectancy.

Much of that is not widely known because North Korea is one of the most closed countries in the world. Because the media are selective about which reports they present, we do not know as much as we could or should know. I hope that today's debate will redress the balance to some extent. Hon. Members will note that early-day motion 345 draws attention to the political prison camps in North Korea. I was happy to sign it, and was pleased to see the signatures of more than 100 other MPs. I hope that we will get further signatories as a result of today's debate.

Another aspect to the persecution of Christians in North Korea is the treatment of those who attempt to escape over the border into China. Some are captured and punished by the North Koreans, but even if they succeed in reaching China, that is far from the end of their troubles, because the Chinese do not recognise them as legitimate refugees and their position is therefore precarious. Although in the past China often turned a blind eye to such people's presence, a recent crackdown has led to many being repatriated to North Korea, where some have been executed and others brutally punished.

Even those who avoid detection are not always safe. Women are especially vulnerable to abuse. After fleeing from North Korea, women are often taken by men posing as guides to an area of supposed safety; once there, they find themselves escorted to a home where they find that unwittingly they have been sold to Chinese men as brides. Such a woman is viewed as a man's property: he can keep her locked up or even shackled, sexually abuse her, rent her out to other men as a prostitute, physically attack her, or even sell her on to another man. The woman is unable to take any action, because she can be threatened with being handed over to the authorities and repatriated. Such women often suffer enormous physical and emotional harm.

Many other North Koreans, driven either by hunger or by a desire to escape the repressive regime, attempt to flee their country, but Christians face special dangers if they are caught and repatriated, because not only have they committed the serious crime of escaping from the mother country, but they adhere to a detested and feared faith. Those are very serious issues.

[Mr. David Drew]

I turn to what I believe the Government should be doing to highlight those issues and to promote religious tolerance. On 22 January 2002, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe declared in an answer to a written question:

> "Promotion of human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience and religion, is at the heart of our foreign policy... Our approach is to treat religious freedom as an integral part of our foreign policy."—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 770W.]

That echoes statements made by other Ministers, including my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) when he was at the Foreign Office. He said:

> "Promotion of human rights is at the heart of our foreign policy and we regard religious freedom as a fundamental human right."—[*Official Report*, 27 April 2001; Vol. 367, c. 422W.]

That is commendable, but it needs to be backed up with action. North Korea is a good example of a country in respect of which action could be taken.

It is possible to envisage links between our country and North Korea growing during the next decade or so. We should be careful not to let the matter rest, but instead to push for aspects of religious liberty to be upheld. The North Korean regime needs to be made aware that Governments, including ours, uphold and believe in human rights and religious tolerance. In particular, I ask the Government to press the North Korean regime to allow human rights monitors unrestricted access to political prison camps. I draw the Minister's attention to the Chongjin and Khechen camps, which are two of the most notorious.

Will the Government allow us to include details of religious persecution in the next annual human rights report? While there was much to commend in the most recent report, it was disappointing that it reflected no real awareness of the issue, which needs to be emphasised. We must also deal with organisations such as Christian Solidarity Worldwide, which has produced accurate witness statements and a great deal of evidence to show what is going on.

I would argue that if we are to come to terms with regimes such as North Korea's and bring such countries back into the family of civilisations, we must ensure that that does not happen at any cost. We must make sure that people's human rights are defended, which involves dealing with the Chinese as well as with the North Koreans. Such regimes employ many tactics that must be highlighted. As the North Korean example shows, by holding up such regimes as examples to the world, we can do a great deal to shame them into behaving in a more reasonable way. North Korea ratified the international covenant on civil and political rights in 1981, yet among the many articles of that covenant that it blatantly ignores is article 18, which guarantees the right to choose one's religion or belief, the right to freedom of conscience in religion and the right to practise that religion in public and in private. It is about time that that issue is tackled in the North Koreas of this world.

I know that other hon. Members want to talk about similar abuses and use their chance to highlight some of the world's wrongs. I have focused on North Korea because to my mind it is the worst example of what is happening in Asia, but there are, unfortunately, many other places that could be used in evidence. I urge the Government to look for fresh ways to ensure that human rights become a reality.

I hope that the desk officers and heads of section in the Foreign Office and the ambassadors in the countries concerned make religious freedom a priority. I hope that they are aware of the mistreatment of Christians and other religious minorities in certain countries and regularly bring that to the attention of those regimes. I ask that the Government work actively to take up such issues. There are many ways in which that can be done, both bilaterally and through the multilateral agencies, specifically the UN. As I mentioned earlier, religious tolerance is a key element of the UN's charter, so will the Government raise the issue with the UN?

In conclusion, the Government should report on issues of religious persecution. Such issues are key to people who are avowedly Christian, and to all people who believe in the rights of which the House of Commons is proud and on which it has a strong record, past and present. The Government should consider regularly reporting back to Parliament, through parliamentary questions and debates such as this. That would show the Government's commitment to ensuring that religious freedom is a key element of an ethical foreign policy—something in which I hope we all believe—rather than just an idea to which lip service is paid.

11.20 am

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew)—for the purposes of this debate, he is my hon. Friend—for raising the important issue of religious persecution, in particular persecution of Christians throughout the world.

I start with two preliminary points. First, I have been a member of Amnesty International for many years. I do not agree with everything that the organisation says—that would be too much—but I genuinely believe that it has provided a real light in the darkness and a voice for people in very difficult circumstances who have been unable to speak out. Its stance on human rights and religious freedoms is to be commended. There is sometimes a danger of commentators believing that Christian-based organisations have exaggerated circumstances and examples, so to have a secular-based organisation as a second reference point is often helpful.

Secondly, as an evangelical Christian, I believe that Christians frequently speak out on behalf of others, and many have given their lives for those of other faiths. I believe that religious freedom is absolutely indivisible from other human rights and freedoms. In many countries, laws that might be used to protect Christians are there to protect other minorities as well. That is something that really does bind us together.

I echo the hon. Gentleman's thanks to Christian Solidarity Worldwide and those who have helped us to prepare for the debate. I also commend various Christian organisations for the work that they do on behalf of Christians throughout the world. The statistics quoted by the hon. Gentleman on the persecution of Christians certainly make sober reading. They are a graphic reminder of why we are discussing the plight of

Christians today. That in no way detracts from the suffering of many other religious groups in many parts of the world, and the policies that we pursue to address the plight of Christians will address their plight as well.

It is fair to say that religious liberty has not been given the same prominence as other basic freedoms that we hold dear. I make one example to illustrate that point. At the UN, a convention, a treaty body, a special rapporteur, a day, a week, three decades and a world conference have all been allocated to the important topic of racial discrimination. However, apart from a special rapporteur, the UN has no such mechanisms in place for the equally important topic of religious discrimination. Such examples help to show the extent of the problem.

Religious liberty is often marginalized in human rights discourses. That is worrying, because it is a vital issue that we need to address. I need not go into detail as to why that is so, as I am sure that hon. Members understand the reasons. As the hon. Member for Stroud has noted, the Government have publicly stated:

> "Our approach is to treat religious freedom as an integral part of our foreign policy"—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 770W.]

I commend that statement.

In a western world seemingly slavishly devoted to the commercial and the material, understanding that religion and a spiritual dimension form a crucial part of an individual's—and a people's—sense of identity is exceptionally important. Any significant curbing of the freedom to practise religion can therefore have highly detrimental consequences for individuals and for society. If a state will not respect the most intimate beliefs of individuals, it is far less likely to respect other personal rights. Religious liberty can be seen as a benchmark for how well human rights in general are flourishing.

I shall focus my remarks on Asia and the treatment of Christians there. Many of the civilisations that have emanated from the continent of Asia over the centuries have a long and honourable history. It is therefore all the more sad that severe persecution of Christians is taking place in so many countries in that continent. Broadly speaking, three types of ideology are responsible for the persecution of Christians in Asia today. The first is atheistic communism. Despite the fact that the cold war has long since ended, several countries in Asia still cling to that ideology, and all of them actively persecute Christians and other religious minorities. The hon. Member for Stroud gave the example of North Korea. Another is China, where many Christians, as well as other groups such as Falun Gong, are persecuted. Other countries included in that group are Laos and Vietnam.

The second type of hostile ideology is militant Hinduism. In India and, to a lesser extent, Sri Lanka, militant Hindu groups—some of them closely connected to the authorities—actively persecute Christians and Muslims. Many Christians and Muslims have been attacked and several have been killed. Hon. Members will not need to be reminded of the recent slaughter of up to 2,000 Muslims in Gujarat.

The third type of ideology is Islamism, which can be distinguished from Islam. Such a distinction is helpful and necessary to avoid Islamophobia. Islamism is the aggressive propagation of Islamist ideology and the attempted vanquishing of other faiths, which are seen as incompatible with Islam. It is often associated with violence and terrorism. Examples of countries in Asia where Islamism is strong include Indonesia and Turkmenistan. Christians face severe persecution in parts of those countries.

It is crucial to distinguish the faith from those who prosecute it so actively that they bring it into disrepute. All too often, we tread on eggshells when discussing religious matters, but sometimes the facts have to be faced. The world is not as nice as we would like it to be, and people are not as tolerant as we want them to be, and nor are the countries from which they come. Unless we face facts honestly, we do the world a disservice.

Amnesty International's report on Pakistan for 2001 states:

> "Despite the government's stated commitment to human rights protection, human rights violations including torture and deaths in custody increased during 2000. Minorities were not given adequate protection when religiously motivated violence flared up. Violence against women and children continued at a high level."

The background to the blasphemy law in Pakistan is, I suspect, reasonably well known, but it deserves a further hearing. The law is contained in section 295C of the Pakistan penal code and prescribes the mandatory death penalty for anyone found to have

> "by words . . . or visible representation . . . or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiled the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad".

It neither defines the terms "defilement" nor looks into the criminal intent of the alleged offender. The law has frequently been abused to imprison people on grounds of religious enmity, but it has also proved to be an easy tool to imprison people when the real motives are business rivalry or land issues.

Local human rights groups, minority rights organisations and Amnesty International have called for the introduction of procedural safeguards to protect against abuse. President Musharraf said in April 2000 that procedural changes would be introduced to lessen the possibility of abuse of the blasphemy law. However, the amendment was withdrawn a month later on the grounds that the ulema—the Islamic scholars—and the people had "unanimously" demanded that it be withdrawn.

Violence against Christians in Pakistan is all too frequent, and some of the examples are graphic and not pleasant. One case arose last year. A 14-year-old Christian girl, Naira Nadia, spoke to her friends at school about her faith; as a result, an armed group of Muslim extremists kidnapped her and gang raped her. She is still missing. In an attempt to absolve themselves of their crime, the perpetrators forcibly converted the girl to Islam and sent her parents a certificate of conversion. She has not been returned to her family, who are under intense pressure from local Muslims to drop the case.

In February this year, 16-year-old Shakeela Siddique, a Christian girl, was reportedly raped by her Muslim landlord at gunpoint. Her father attempted to confront the landlord but was badly beaten up. He noted:

> "No Christian in our village dares to raise his voice against the Muslim landlords."

[Alistair Burt]

To date, the police and the authorities have refused to investigate the crime properly. In May 2000, eight Christian girls were allegedly gang raped by six men on their way home from work. In spite of corroborating medical and police evidence, the attackers were acquitted. It is widely believed that the judgment was given under pressure and intimidation from militants who packed the courtroom at each stage of the proceedings.

Those are not isolated incidents. Crimes against women from religious minorities, especially Christians, continue to escalate. Many women who are raped are forcibly converted to Islam and married off to their rapists or sold into prostitution. In 1999 the organisation Human Rights Watch issued a report on violence against women in Pakistan, saying that there was a virtual epidemic of crimes of violence against women, with domestic violence and rape being used all too frequently in that society.

Many Christians and other minorities fall foul of the blasphemy laws. Four Christians charged with blasphemy have been killed by Islamic extremists since 1992, and attempts have been made on the lives of at least three others. In 1997, a judge who acquitted two Christians on blasphemy charges was murdered by extremists who were angry at his decision.

The case of Ayub Masih has been reported. In April 1998, he was sentenced to death for speaking favourably about Salman Rushdie during a dispute with a Muslim villager. During the hearing, a witness shot Mr. Masih in the courtroom, but no complaint was made against the assailant, and Mr. Masih was sentenced on 27 April. Protesting against the sentence, Bishop John Joseph of Faisalabad, a long-time activist for religious minorities shot himself—committed suicide—on 6 May. It was widely believed that Ayub Masih's accusers hoped to drive the Christian family from the village and gain control of their land. The Pakistan Minister for Law and Justice at the time, Khalid Anwar, acknowledged the possibility and is reported to have said:

> "There is no doubt that for personal reasons people file false claims and judges are under great pressure not to acquit the accused, no progress has been made towards reforming the laws."

The problem in Pakistan remains acute because the state seems unwilling or unable to follow the instincts of some of its leaders to amend the law. My case on behalf of Christians who are being persecuted is that they are not the only ones who stand to gain from change; others, too, would gain. I appreciate that security measures recently implemented by President Musharraf have afforded some further protection for religious minorities, but I hope that the Chamber accepts that more can be done, in view of the cases I have described. To protect against obvious abuse, the blasphemy law needs to be reformed—and, preferably, abolished. Prisoners accused of blasphemy should be housed in separate cells from other inmates. More fundamentally, much greater protection should be afforded to religious minorities throughout Pakistan and, in particular, to women.

In closing, I want briefly to mention two further issues. First, the United States is occasionally vilified over human rights. However, it has both an Office Of International Religious Freedom and a Commission On International Religious Freedom, both of which produce regular reports and have a high reputation. It also has a specific religious liberty ambassador, and every United States embassy is required to produce human rights reports in respect of their respective country. We do not have anything comparable to that. Although the annual reports on human rights produced by the Foreign Office are welcome, they lack the thoroughness and systematic sweep of their American equivalents. Can the Minister assure us that our reports will become more detailed and wide-ranging, and will he take on board suggestions to appoint a commission for international religious liberty, or at least something resembling that model?

Secondly, although I gather that some training in human rights is given to staff at the Foreign Office, there is room for improvement. One prominent NGO with which I have some links reported that whereas many desk officers at the Foreign Office are very helpful, some do not appear to make human rights and religious liberties a priority. May I ask that a prominent place is given to both human rights and religious liberty in the training programme for staff? The Minister and his colleagues have asserted that religious liberty is an integral part of their foreign policy. I look forward to renewed initiatives along the lines suggested by myself and the other hon. Members who speak today.

11.33 am

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I shall keep my comments brief because I know that other hon. Members want to speak. I am grateful for your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to leave at 11.55. As vice-chair of the all-party textiles group, I have a long-standing commitment at the Department of Trade and Industry.

I declare my position as chair of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship in the same way as my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) declared his Christianity. I congratulate him on that. I declare also that I have formally been asked to join the board of Christian Solidarity Worldwide for some of the work that we have done with it over the years. I hope to promote its work, particularly during the few minutes I have this morning.

In general, I agree with the two previous speakers: religious freedom cannot be considered in isolation from everything else. We have to recognise that it is a fundamental human right, and it must be at the centre of everything that we do as a Government. When we, as Members of Parliament, look at other countries, we must consider what religious freedom means to individuals in those countries and how we can assist them. As the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) said, this subject is not about being anti-Islam or against any other religion; we are talking about religious freedom across the board. Anything that promotes Christian religious freedom in Asian countries will, rightly, have an impact on the human rights of minorities in those countries. Freedom of expression and association is fundamental to this debate.

Before it seems as though we are being negative, we should recognise that in some parts of Asia, Christianity is flourishing. Those of us who have seen what is happening in South Korea, for example, and the number of churches that are growing, do not want to take a blanket anti-Asia tack on the subject of religious freedoms. We must ensure that we speak positively about the many countries that promote Christian and religious freedom.

The opening up of China over the past two decades has resulted in a lot more freedom in many areas. However, the Chinese Government have cracked down heavily on the underground Church over the past few years. As a country, we must work out the best way to work with each of the Asian countries. With its entry into the World Trade Organisation and its opportunity to host the 2008 Olympics, China wants to be a central part of the world community. We therefore have a great opportunity to engage positively with the Chinese Government, to ensure that some of the things that concern us are rectified.

In the past few years, hundreds of pastors and other Christian leaders have been arrested and imprisoned, with some being given long sentences. Five Christian leaders of the South China Church have been sentenced to death, although, fortunately, their sentences have been suspended for two years to allow for appeals. That demonstrates what we are up against. A number of women from the South China Church were tortured and sexually assaulted by their interrogators in an attempt to force them to testify against the main leader, Pastor Gong. Early this year, more than 50 Catholic clerics were arrested or put under surveillance by their Government. Those people were targeted because of their religious beliefs. We should deplore all such actions.

Directives issued by the Chinese Government and other documents show a targeted campaign against a number of evangelical Christian movements and—as we all know—against the Falun Gong religion. Early-day motion 975, which deals with death sentences on Chinese Christians, covers some of those issues and has been signed by nearly 130 MPs. That shows the depth of feeling in the House, across the political divide.

In the past few years, several Christians have died after being tortured in police custody. The official state Churches, both Protestant and Catholic, are subject to heavy interference from the Government. Their doctrine is widely regarded as very liberal, putting loyalty to Government before loyalty to God. Hence, many believers prefer to attend the underground churches and house churches. That makes the state even more nervous about what is happening. There has to be a balance to ensure that the recognised Church is able to flourish so that it is more open and it is less difficult for the Chinese Government and others to understand what it is about.

China is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and has ratified various UN conventions. Today, we call on the Government, through their agencies and the United Nations, to ensure that fundamental human rights—in particular, article 18 of the universal declaration on human rights—are observed in China. China's entry into the WTO and its hosting of the 2008 Olympics give us an ideal opportunity to engage positively with it and to demonstrate that Christians are no threat to the current status or the current state. We can demonstrate that permitting religious freedom and religious expression will allow problems to be worked out.

As for what our Government can do, I was heartened by the responses that I received to parliamentary questions that I tabled earlier this year. The Government are committed to ensuring that religious freedom is a fundamental part of human rights. However, religious freedom will not at present be included specifically or individually in human rights reports, [illegible] we want.

Strangely for me, I think that the Government should follow the United States' example and make religious freedom a specific part of the human rights report on each country. I know that that will entail a little more work, but it will ensure that desk officers and others who monitor what happens in other countries have a much broader understanding of why some freedoms are denied. It is important that they then see the issue in a human rights context, because once a country starts to chip away at the fundamental right of religious freedom, other freedoms will follow.

The plea from most hon. Members present will probably be that we should keep religious freedom as a fundamental right. We must keep it at the heart of our foreign policy, but we must follow up our fine words with a few actions to ensure that reports to Parliament are at the heart of the process. In that way, we will know what is going on not only in Asia, but throughout the world, and we will know where to apply extra pressure so that religious freedom remains genuinely at the heart of our foreign policy.

11.41 am

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on securing this debate and on the detailed and highly competent manner in which he introduced it. It always strikes me as strange that we congratulate hon. Members who secure debates in Westminster Hall on winning the ballot—in effect, a raffle—but that we do not comment on what they say after achieving the magnificent feat of having their name pulled out of a hat.

Like other hon. Members, I have to declare an interest. Like the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), I am a member of Amnesty International, and, like all other hon. Members who have spoken, I am a practising Christian. The hon. Gentleman described himself as an evangelical Christian; I often wonder what a non-evangelical Christian is, but I am aware that I would risk your wrath if I explored that point at any length, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I shall leave it hanging for another day.

Freedom of religious expression is a fundamental freedom. For a Christian, it must entail not only the freedom to worship, but the freedom to evangelise and proselytise. Without that second element, it is meaningless and sterile; indeed, it is no freedom at all.

Like the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed), I shall confine my remarks largely to the Chinese Government's record. I shall be able to keep my speech short because he said much of what I had intended to say. The hon. Member for Stroud said that

[Mr. Alistair Carmichael]

some Christians had fled from North Korea to China. That is ironic—indeed, the expression "out of the frying pan, into the fire" sprang to my mind.

The Chinese Government's record in respect of the Christian community's right to practise is of particular concern to me. It is especially ironic given that article 36 of the Chinese constitution guarantees freedom of religious expression. The manner in which that article is implemented and the restrictions that the hon. Member for Loughborough mentioned mean that the registered churches are unable to bear true witness. There is great dissatisfaction among many Chinese Christians because they are able to express their Christianity only in underground and house churches.

I understand that the vast majority of Protestant Christians in China have opted to join unregistered churches and that about half the Roman Catholics in China practise and worship in that way. Since 1996, that has led to a sometimes violent campaign to close down and destroy many unregistered house churches. In preparation for today's debate, I discovered that police had forced some 400 house churches to close in Shanghai alone. As a Christian, I almost envy them having 400 lively churches to suffer such persecution, but that is a side issue.

I shall not list all the persecutions that Christians, especially those who practise in house churches, have suffered, but I want to place a few on record. In May 1996, five house churches were demolished by public security bureau officials near the town of Wenzhou in the Zhejiang province. In the same month, three large churches in Yongjia county near Wenzhou city were dynamited to the ground. Two of the churches had congregations of more than 1,000 members. Another church in the suburb of Wenzhou was set upon by public security officials, who tried to dismantle it manually with axes; they gave up and instead posted a banned notice on the front of the church.

There have also been violent attacks on individuals. I think in particular of Zhang Xiuju, a 36-year-old woman from Xinhua county in Hunan and a leader of a Protestant house church, who was dragged from her home by the police during the night and beaten to death the following day. The litany goes on and on, but I do not intend to do so. It is all very well identifying the problem; the solution is inevitably a great deal more complex. To that extent, I do not envy the Minister his task.

There is impatience among Christians in this country who are aware of what is happening. We want more than fine words from the Government. We know that the Government regularly raise these matters—I know that because I have corresponded with the Minister about it. I ask the Government to use the time between now and the 2008 Olympic games to draw attention to the whole panoply of human rights abuses in China, especially the persecution of religious minorities such as the Falun Gong and the Christian community.

If we allow ourselves to be seen as tolerating such abuses, the danger is that the view from inside China will be that we are more than tolerating them—that we accept and agree with them. That would be entirely regrettable.

11.48 am

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I feel quite humble standing to speak after such eloquent, well-informed and passionate speeches. In particular, I congratulate the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on bringing this important matter before the House.

Like all the other speakers, the hon. Gentleman called on the Government to promote religious freedom, tolerance and human rights. I accept the Government's sincerity in wishing to promote human rights, good governance and religious freedom, but when I raised the matter in the House on 23 January in proposing new clause 1 to the International Development Bill, the Government opposed linking non-humanitarian development aid to human rights, good governance, religious freedom and the development of democracy. That linkage defines so-called smart aid, which was promoted by the USA in the late 1990s and is now being considered in institutions as strange as the European Union. I hope that the Government will now reconsider those Conservative proposals.

On 23 January, I spoke about the fighters of Laskar Jihad, the militant Islamic group responsible for killing thousands of Christians in the Moluccas and Sulawesi in eastern Indonesia. The conservative estimate is that between 5,000 and 6,000 Christians have been killed so far during the current problems. Laskar Jihad has recently infiltrated the Indonesian province of West Papua. The militants are training local militia who support Indonesian control of that province. The West Papuan-based human rights group, El-sham, reports that currently at least 3,000 Laskar Jihad fighters are there.

The British human rights group, Jubilee Campaign, which I congratulate on its excellent work, has long warned that Laskar Jihad's objective is one of forced Islamicisation and that that strategy is not confined to the Moluccas. It has been implemented through Laskar Jihad's extensive and systematic use of forced conversions against Christians. The militants began by invading the Moluccas in 2000. They then moved to Sulawesi and have now moved to West Papua, where there is a large Christian community. There will be much bloodshed if they are allowed to operate freely there.

Laskar Jihad sent armed fighters into the West Papua district of Fakfak and they are operating military training camps there. Some of the Indonesian authorities support the training that Laskar Jihad has been giving the pro-Jakarta, east Merah Putih militia. Unrest and fear have spread through the Christian community in the Sarong district of West Papua following the recent arrival of Jihad fighters who have been trying to provoke religious tensions there.

In May 2000, Laskar Jihad invaded the Moluccas with about 7,000 fighters to wage a jihad or so-called holy war against the indigenous Christians. That invasion caused unprecedented levels of violence and resulted in the deaths of thousands. In December 2001, the head of Indonesia's national intelligence agency, Lieutenant General Hendropriyono publicly confirmed that members of the al-Qaeda terrorist network were joining Laskar Jihad in fighting against Christians in Sulawesi. Due to pressure from fundamentalist Indonesian politicians, General Hendropriyono later retracted the statement. However, he did so only because of political pressure—the facts were totally accurate.

The Malino peace agreement, signed by Muslim and Christian leaders from Sulawesi and the Moluccas indicates that positive steps towards peace are being made. However, it is highly unlikely that there will be any long-term peace until Laskar Jihad is completely removed from that area. A massacre in Soya occurred just a few days after Laskar Jihad publicly rejected the Malino peace agreement. Jafar Umar Talib, the leader of Laskar Jihad, arrived in Ambon on 25 April and his presence added to the religious tensions in that area. During his sermon before a large crowd at the al-Fatah Mosque the next day, just two days before the massacre at Soya village, Jafar said:

> "Muslims will destroy all Christians in Ambon."

That is a statement of unbridled hatred, bigotry and incitement. Shortly after the massacre, the Indonesian Government had Jafar arrested and I hope that they keep him arrested, so that no more such massacres take place.

In Central Sulawesi, about 20,000 Christians have fled from their torched villages to Tentena, a village of about 8,000 inhabitants. The Christians in Tentena are cut off and surrounded by thousands of Islamic fighters; if the Indonesian police and military fail to protect Tentena, there will be massive bloodshed. While President Sukarnoputri's dispatch of thousands of additional soldiers to central Sulawesi is welcome, it is deeply disturbing that those troops have already been reduced in number.

Jubilee Campaign reports that the tragic injustice remains of the desperate plight of 5,000 to 7,000 Christians who have been forced by Muslim militants to convert to Islam in the Moluccas—in the Bacan islands, Buru and Seram. However, the Indonesian Government have so far refused to evacuate the forced converts to a place of safety where they can revert to practising their Christian faith if they so wish.

To prevent further violence against Christian communities in the Moluccas, Sulawesi and West Papua, I urge the Government to put strong pressure on Indonesia to remove all Laskar Jihad members and all other non-local combatants from Sulawesi, the Moluccas and West Papua and to prosecute the Laskar Jihad leader, Jafar. The Indonesian Government should close down Laskar Jihad's head office and ban the organisation. That would offer a more permanent and thorough solution.

It is important to note that it is not only Christians who want Laskar Jihad removed from the Moluccas; many moderate Muslims, including the head of the council of Muslim religious teachers, Abdul Wahab Polpoke, have similar views. They do not agree with the violent and extreme interpretation of Islam that Laskar Jihad propagates through intimidation and violence, and they realise that the Jihad wants to restrict the freedom of moderate Muslims as well.

The British Government should pressure the Indonesian authorities to ensure that there are enough police and troops in the Moluccas and Sulawesi to enforce the peace and to ensure that the security forces act neutrally. Jubilee Campaign reports that on numerous occasions Indonesian police and troops have sided with Islamic fighters against Christians, causing much bloodshed. The Indonesian authorities should also be pressured to evacuate urgently to a place of safety all forced converts from Christianity. The Indonesian Government should provide adequate funds, military or police personnel and boats for the Moluccan Church to carry out such evacuations. Failure to evacuate the forced converts to Islam is to condemn them to a lifetime of captivity and intimidation, and to give succour to Islamic death squads.

11.57 am

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): While it is customary to congratulate hon. Members on securing a debate, I have wondered for most of the morning whether this sort of debate helps. I was comforted somewhat by the remarks of the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who kept his remarks general and talked a lot about religious freedom generally, as did his colleague, the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed). However, I am uneasy about singling out a particular religion for protection, and some hon. Members have made reference to that.

We should defend the right of all human beings to religious freedom, as the Government's foreign policy states. Surely that is much more in line with the Christian teaching of loving our neighbour. *[Interruption.]* I am told that everyone has been saying that, but it would be nice if Christian Solidarity Worldwide protested against persecution of members of other religions, and not only Christians.

The hon. Member for Stroud commented on the numbers persecuted, saying that Christians are persecuted more than any other faith. I would like the Minister to comment on that, as I find it an extraordinary pronouncement. I do not think that it helps to do headcounts but, given the troubles in India between Hindus and Muslims, I wonder whether it is accurate. I endorse the remarks of the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) about Amnesty International, which does an extraordinary job. I, too, am a lifelong member. Amnesty International does an extraordinary job because it does not adhere to a particular faith; it defends all faiths and all freedoms.

It was interesting that the hon. Gentleman, talking about those responsible for persecution, simplistically listed communism, militant Hindus and Islamism, without mentioning that throughout the centuries Christians themselves have persecuted other people viciously and subjected them to all sorts of horrors and tortures. While we hope that that is not going on now, history is there, and nations and groups remember it. We hope that we do much better now, but the debate calls to mind the recent case of the children going to Holy Cross school in Northern Ireland. People who were supposed to be from one religious group were persecuting little children and terrorising them because they were going to the school of another religious group, yet both groups were within Christianity. Let us not be holier than thou.

The hon. Member for Loughborough and my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) spoke very knowledgeably about China and the Falun Gong, and about the terrible things

[Dr. Jenny Tonge]

that are going on. We also heard about North Korea. The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) spoke about Indonesia, which in recent years has become the country about which I hear most and am lobbied most. Laskar Jihad has a lot to answer for, as the hon. Gentleman said. His call for the Indonesian Government to get rid of it is no doubt supported by everybody in the House. The trouble is that that is easier said than done.

In the past three years, there have been increasing reports of persecution and attacks on Christians. I have heard most about incidents in Indonesia, which is a secular country that prides itself on having a secular Government, even though 85 per cent. of the population are Muslim. As the hon. Gentleman said—I will not repeat it all—Indonesia is infested with Islamists and fundamentalists, Laskar Jihad, with its alleged connections with al-Qaeda, being the most troublesome. I must add that it is using the reaction of the United States to 11 September as an excuse to prosecute its war against Christians in Indonesia.

I hear stories of the chaos. I came across one in *The Independent* that that

"the security forces on Ambon are reported to have given up all pretence of neutrality".

Even when the security forces go in, they divide themselves into Christians and Muslims and start fighting each other, on the pretext that they are defending the population. President Sukarnoputri has been denounced in Indonesia for visiting Hindu temples, and for consorting with Christian America. She has a difficult task to keep her Government together and to do something about the fundamentalists and Islamists, but she is afraid to take a strong line because a terrible hatred of the west, and of America in particular, is strongly linked with Christianity. That is a sad reflection on what has happened in recent years.

Mr. Carmichael: May I suggest to my hon. Friend that while there is profound hatred, and certainly distrust, of America in many eastern and middle eastern countries, that might have as much to do with America's foreign policy and that policy's double standards as with the fact that it is a majority Christian country?

Dr. Tonge: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He knows that I entirely agree with him. America has a lot to answer for. The ramifications of its foreign policies go much further than simple military action.

There are other factors in Indonesia, such as economic and educational differences, and we should not neglect them. I do not know enough about Indonesia, and I cannot go on the visit that is being arranged, but I wonder whether the Christian communities are perceived as superior or better off, with a better standard of living than the rest of the population. Perhaps the Minister can tell us. Various independence movements have been dotted all over Indonesia since the independence of East Timor. Is that something to do with the movement? Is that yet another excuse for persecution? Perhaps the Minister will enlighten us on that.

Of course, it is not only Christians who are being persecuted. Indeed, I have heard reports of Christians destroying mosques. The International Crisis Group report said last year that the conflict can be understood only in the context of entrenched rivalries between two communities, in which both sides commit atrocities against the other. We need to take a balanced view. The problem is to know what to do about that persecution, both worldwide and, for me, especially in Indonesia. I wish that the European Union would intervene more often. We cannot expect America to help—on the diplomatic front, it would be an embarrassment to many Governments in the present circumstances—but the EU could do an awful lot more. In addition, United Nations human rights monitors need to be more widespread in China, Indonesia and North Korea. They need to get in there and see what is going on. Above all, they need to look for underlying causes other than religion that might be stirring up such hatred against Christians.

What are the churches doing about the problem? Where are the bishops and mullahs, and the leaders of the Hindu faiths? What about international, interfaith meetings? Cannot people of different faiths try to put pressure on their Governments to do something about this issue? It is not a matter for Governments alone; it is a matter also for the leaders of the faiths.

In conclusion, I still wish that the debate had been about the persecution of religious communities worldwide and not only Christian communities in Asia.

12.7 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on securing the debate. The subject is on the mind of all of us and, judging from the many letters that we receive, it is also on the minds of our constituents.

We live in a fast-changing world, an ever more interconnected world in which the free movement of people and ideas is a fact of everyday life. In such a world, it is ever more important that tolerance and the rights of individuals are respected, including the right to freedom of religion. Although the debate concentrates on Christianity, I mean any religion. Not only is religious freedom a basic tenet of our way of life, it is necessary for interracial and interfaith harmony in the modern world.

We should be clear from the outset that violence against Christian communities in Asia is totally unacceptable. Indeed, all violence against any people on the basis of their religious faith should be utterly condemned. That is certainly what every speaker has said today. We fully support the right of individuals to enjoy life's freedoms without fear of persecution or violation of their most basic human rights.

Since September 11, we have witnessed an unprecedented degree of international co-operation. We should use that co-operation to condemn violations of human rights, and to raise the profile of issues such as religious freedom and put them firmly on the international agenda. It is worth noting that the terrorist attacks on 11 September cost the lives of peoples from every religion, and that the war on terrorism is not a war on Islam but a war on those who would deny people not merely the right to practise their own religion, but the right to live in peace. It is important, in a debate on religious freedom, that we should reinforce the message that war on terrorism is not a war on a religion, but on terror.

In Asia, as across the world, there are far too many examples that I could choose to illustrate the points being discussed here, so I shall be selective. It is instructive that the hon. Member for Stroud said that according to a recent report Christians suffer more persecution than any other religious group. Much of that persecution occurs in Asia. He rightly pointed out the condition of Christian groups in the central Asian republics, but I shall focus briefly on Iran, Indonesia, Burma, North Korea and India and Pakistan.

Iran has not been mentioned this morning. We warmly welcome the moves towards reform and economic and political liberalisation being undertaken by President Khatami's Government, but we should not shirk from criticism where it is appropriate. The human rights record of the Iranian Government, including on religious freedom, is depressing. A recent petition circulated among MPs points out that vast numbers of executions and violent punishments have been meted out to Iranian citizens, and calls for an end to that situation. I hope that I will be forgiven for a brief digression into human rights in general, but religious freedom is one of those. The two issues are totally interlinked. We must be firm, but fair, in criticising a record that we believe to be unacceptable.

In Indonesia, there is widespread religious strife, as my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) illustrated in such detail. Lately, many had hoped that the different communities, especially those in the Moluccas, Maluku and Sulawesi, had tired of that violence and were prepared to live together. Recently, moderate groups on both sides sought to bring the communities together again to live in peace. We also hoped that the attacks—not only those by one side against the other, but those on all moderates who talked of reconciliation—would cease. However, the attacks did not simply involve Muslims attacking Christians; the Hindu community, too, was vulnerable to violence.

Laskar Jihad, as my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point has argued, is a group that is frequently mentioned in the context of interfaith violence in Indonesia. Although it has been suggested that that group has done some social good in some areas, perhaps improving the economic position of some impoverished groups, it has also been a driving force in communal violence, intent on carrying out jihad in a violent manner that is in no way consistent with authentic Islamic conduct. On that point, my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) drew the crucial distinction between Islam, which we defend, and Islamism, which he defined as the violent assertion of Islam, holding the objective of vanquishing other faiths. The latter we condemn.

In Burma, we welcome the release of Aung Sung Suu Kyi as a step towards democracy and greater freedom, but it is only a small step, and we should be clear about the deplorable human rights situation in that country today. A lack of basic human rights tends to be reflected in the treatment of and attitude toward religious freedoms. Will the Minister elaborate on his Government's policy towards Burma and say what further steps might be taken to put pressure on the military regime and leadership there, and whether some targeted sanctions might yet be implemented?

I pay tribute to the valuable work done by NGOs such as the Burma Campaign UK and Christian Solidarity Worldwide, which has been mentioned this morning, in keeping the terrible situation in Burma and elsewhere in the public eye.

Bob Spink: Will my hon. Friend please add Jubilee Campaign to his list?

Mr. Duncan: I am very happy to add Jubilee Campaign, which does much good work, to my list. That was a grave omission on my part, for which I apologise.

As the hon. Member for Stroud said in his opening comments, it is in North Korea that we see some of the worst persecution of Christian groups. The system there is brutal and oppressive and violence is routinely used to enforce the Government line. As he pointed out, Kim Il Sung established a cult of personality. He attempted to deify himself, so adherence to any religion, but in particular to Christianity, is viewed as an overt challenge to the regime. Arrest and execution or imprisonment await Christians when discovered. Christian Solidarity Worldwide, whose work I wholeheartedly commend to the House, has done a lot of work and research in North Korea.

The tales of camps are chillingly resonant of what happened in Europe in the late 1930s. Christians are incarcerated, routinely beaten or worked to death. Recantation of their Christian faith or death appear to be the only forms of release from the ordeal. I hope that today's debate will bring attention to bear on this oft-forgotten situation. I shall not dwell upon North Korea any longer, as the hon. Member for Stroud focused on it in detail and told us, and a wider audience, what is going on there.

The communal violence recently witnessed in India and Pakistan has been horrific. There has been appalling violence not only in Gujarat, but by Muslims against Christians in Pakistan, and by Hindus against Christians in India, but we should not forget that the worst violence has been between Hindus and Muslims. The crux of the issue is not simply violence against Christians, but interfaith violence of any sort. We welcome the assurances offered by President Musharraf of Pakistan last year: he said that Christians would receive state protection for themselves and their property. However, attacks such as that by extremists on the Christian community in Quetta remain a threat, and we hope that the President's offers are backed up with firm action.

In Tibet, the same basic principles apply. We believe that the people of Tibet have the right to live their lives in peace and to enjoy the freedom to practise their religion free from unwarranted persecution. We must be clear that violence against any group on the basis of their religion is unacceptable, as are blatant abuses of human rights.

We are not advocating a missionary approach: it is not our role to encourage those who attempt to convert people, or break laws on such matters in the countries in which they live. However, where violence is used or

[Mr. Duncan]

tolerated against people practising their beliefs peacefully, we will and must take a stand against it. We welcome the moves in countries such as Indonesia to clamp down on such violence and to promote better interfaith relations, and we hope that that course will be pursued with renewed vigour. We must make it clear to countries and regimes that are not prepared to clamp down on the oppression of or violence against Christians or any religious group on the basis of their faith that that is wholly unacceptable.

I have touched on a number of examples, and we could all produce many more. I will conclude however with a quote from Steven McFarland, Executive Director of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point referred. On 11 October last year, he said:

> "When the world changed on September 11, the background against which we struggle for religious freedom changed with it. In a war on terrorism, many democratic governments may be tempted to forego the pursuit of human rights and religious freedom . . . Demoting human rights, especially religious freedom, from our foreign policy priorities would be a serious mistake, because religious freedom, tolerance, interfaith understanding, the rule of law, and due process aren't luxuries—they are absolutely necessary to combat terror and the conditions that incubate terrorism".

I wholeheartedly endorse that view.

12.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): We have had an excellent debate with some thoughtful, passionate and detailed speeches. I am conscious of the issue of religious persecution because the church in my Rotherham constituency that I attend for midnight mass is called the Forty Martyrs. Anybody who has been brought up as a Catholic is well aware of the assaults that one faith can bring to bear on another.

I welcomed the comment by the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) about Amnesty International. Religious freedom is one with and indivisible from other human freedoms. Therein lies the importance of today's debate, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) in a powerful and convincing speech. I shall try to address all hon. Members' points, but if I do not cover everything, hon. Members are free to write to me and I shall go into further detail.

The 1948 universal declaration on human rights is our starting point. Article 18 is unambiguous:

> "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observation."

That is at the heart of Government policy. However, article 18 is qualified by an appeal to all religions not to demand that their particular perspective dominates public policy to the exclusion of others. That relates to the positions taken by different religions on issues such as gay rights, women being allowed to control their own bodies, and even the demand that religious perspectives are put into governmental or international state policy. In that sense, my fundamental belief as a man of belief is that international relations must be secular. Religious freedom, like the freedom to say what one wants, to travel where one wants and to assemble and organise as one wants, is a common and fundamental human freedom.

The Government unreservedly condemn the persecution of individuals because of their faith, wherever they are and whatever religion they practise. Our EU partners, the United States and the UK urge states to pursue laws and practices that foster tolerance and mutual respect and to protect religious minorities against discrimination, intimidation and attacks. Wherever possible, we aim to work with officials, religious leaders and non-governmental organisations both internationally and locally to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. For example, we co-sponsored a resolution at this year's meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva to work towards eliminating all forms of religious intolerance. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary travelled to Geneva to deliver the UK statement to the commission, which is the primary world forum for standard setting and discussion on human rights. He is the first Foreign Secretary to take the human rights work at the UN Commission so seriously that he went himself rather than dispatch one of his junior minion Ministers.

We work closely not only with fellow Governments, the EU and the UN, but with NGOs. The UK is home to some of the world's most renowned human rights NGOs such as Anti-Slavery International, Amnesty International, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, and Oxfam, and we have seen great movements such as the "drop the debt" campaign and the trade justice movement, which recently lobbied Parliament. Under the Labour Government, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office seeks to open its doors, share information and draw upon the expertise and commitment of NGOs in the policy-making process.

The FCO has a religious freedom panel that represents nearly all faiths. I had the honour of opening its last discussion, to which representatives of UK-based NGOs including Christian Solidarity Worldwide and representatives of different religions came to share information, discuss strategies and promote international religious freedom.

We support practical projects to promote human rights and religious freedom around the world. This year, for example, the FCO funded a project in west bank universities to incorporate human rights into religious education. We support the work of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe through its Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which offers technical assistance on legislation to help guarantee freedom of religion. The OSCE's advisory panel of experts on freedom of religion helped to develop a package for Armenian schools on religious tolerance, to prepare a draft law on the status of religious associations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and to expand a website to identify and gather examples of legislative best practice on freedom of religion.

Those are small, step-by-step practical bricks in constructing the edifice of human rights around the world, and they will be discussed in the next issue of the human rights report, which I have in draft form on my desk at the moment. For me, the US State Department's human rights report has long been a green bible—I refer to its covers, not its content—but I do not think that it makes sense for Britain to duplicate page by page what the United States, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch currently do so well.

Our ambassadors, I as a Minister, and other Ministers take up key cases. In particular, we have raised with the Chinese authorities the question of allowing their people the right to freedom of religious belief. We have raised individual cases, such as that of Su Zhimin, an unofficial Catholic bishop, Li Dexian, a Protestant house church leader, and Pastor Gong Shengliang, leader of the South China Church. This week in Beijing, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised issues of religious freedom with the Chinese Foreign Minister. We have a similar perspective on the Philippines. We welcome the action taken by the Indonesian Government against Laskar Jihad, in particular, the arrest of its leader, Jafar Umar Talib.

On North Korea, which is of particular interest to me as the Minister responsible, I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud, who spoke very eloquently about it, that that country will feature more prominently in this year's human rights report. The reason is that we now have an embassy in Pyongyang and can report directly from the country. Those who want to impose sanctions, or tie aid to particular conditions, must reflect that only through engagement can British Government officials, NGOs, British Council officials and others start to build networks to support human rights issues, in particular, religious freedom.

I can assure hon. Members that in all my meetings with North Korean officials and in written communications with the North Korean Government, it is made clear that we expect human rights issues to be addressed, as well as wider problems of terrorism, missile proliferation and the deployment of long-range ballistic missiles. Such matters are an essential part of our new dialogue with the North Korean Government. We will continue to ask the North Korean authorities to allow human rights monitors open access to different parts of the country so that they can seek out information on the camps to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud referred.

The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire referred to the use of the blasphemy law in Pakistan. We must examine that issue a little closer to home, because I do not see how any modern country can keep blasphemy legislation on its statute books. I completely agree with his point that crimes against women take place under the guise of asserting religious supremacy.

Mr. Alan Duncan: Is it now Government policy to wish to remove the blasphemy laws in Britain?

Mr. MacShane: Lord Avebury has a Committee working on that matter. We need to look at it, because it is very hard to condemn one country for using or keeping on its statute book laws that allow the persecution or prosecution of any one religion, when we have not looked at the beams and motes in our own eye—as the hon. Gentleman could read in the Bible. There is no Government policy position on that matter as yet, but if it is our intention to be consistent, we should remember that consistency, like charity, begins at home.

My hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) mentioned the need for more reporting back to Parliament. I agree with him. I think that I heard him describe Falun Gong as a religion, but my understanding is that Falun Gong explicitly says that it is not a religion. There is a very difficult question of interpretation for Governments to consider when getting into the field of Scientologists, Moonies and some of the odd cults in the United States.

I strongly agree with the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) about the need to use the period between now and the 2008 Olympic games to raise these issues with China. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) said that we should not be holier than thou. As a Liberal Democrat, she is an expert on that. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) talked about Iran and referred to Christians, but we should also remember the persecution of Jews and the Ba'hai faith in that country. He referred to Burma—or Myanmar, because Burma is part of Myanmar in the same way that Holland is part of the Netherlands—and we will take that matter up as well—

Mr. James Cran (in the Chair): Order.

Further Education Colleges

12.30 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): The Minister will be aware that I take a close interest in the fortunes of further education colleges in and around Eastleigh, my constituency. I am sure that his assiduous advisers will have briefed him that I have been a governor of Eastleigh college for about eight years. I have seen the college go through the trials and tribulations of incorporation, and pass through difficult times to achieve a much improved performance.

The Minister will know that the Further Education Funding Council 1997 inspection found that three aspects of provision were less than satisfactory, but by 1999 all had been brought up to a satisfactory standard. In May 2002, the provider performance review by the Learning and Skills Council rated the college as good. In that regard, we are almost looking forward to the imminent Ofsted inspection.

However, I want to use the debate to highlight issues throughout the sector, rather than in the particular college with which I am involved. Too often, the FE college sector has been overlooked—it has been treated as the poor relation in education—but more under-19s attend FE colleges than the combined total at sixth-form colleges and universities. FECs have traditionally been the training and education resource of the community, for the community. Traditionally, as many as 60 per cent. of students at an FE college are from the local area and remain settled in that community, becoming skilled craftsmen and technicians, who are essential to driving the local economy.

FECs often provide a second chance for mature students to gain skills that keep them off benefits and take them into work. FECs also provide opportunities for students from poorer backgrounds to gain the skills that will take them out of poverty and into well-paid jobs. More than a quarter of FE college students come from the 15 per cent. of local authority wards that are the most deprived. FECs provide opportunities for workers to update their skills and to gain new skills in our increasingly technology-driven commerce and industry.

Such colleges are the vital conduit through which the expression "learning is for life" can move from mere soundbite to approaching reality, so why is the sector in such disarray and all too often adrift and despondent? Why is it that, only last week, the chairman of the General Teaching Council, Lord Puttnam, wrote in *The Guardian* that further education

"is in a potentially catastrophic state. The present situation in FE is completely unsustainable"?

I put to the Minister some issues that he might dwell on in his response: staff pay and conditions, the inadequacy and uncertainty of core and standards funding, the impact of curriculum changes, lack of direction between local and national learning and skills councils, and student funding. First, pay and conditions. To quote Lord Puttnam, FE salaries are an "embarrassing joke". The facts are plain: some 80 per cent. of FECs were unable to fund at least one of the pay awards granted since 1993. The average salary of full-time FE lecturers is some £2,600 less than it would be had the national recommendations been implemented since 1993.

Since then, FE lecturers' pay has fallen by 7 per cent. compared with that of teachers, and by 20 per cent. compared with the equivalent private sector post. Teachers' starting salaries are some £1,600 higher than those of FE college lecturers. During that same period, more than 22,000 lecturers have been made redundant and today some 44 per cent. of lecturers are on temporary contracts. The college working year has increased by two weeks, and the working week by 20 per cent. No wonder staff turnover in FE colleges has risen to almost 20 per cent. per annum, and no wonder 60 per cent. of lecturers are over 45, compared with some 45 per cent. of secondary school teachers.

There is an urgent and desperate need for new initiatives to reverse the negative impact of insecurity and fragmentation that is putting the structure of further education at risk. Without new incentives to attract new recruits to replace an ageing staff, we shall face a growing deficit of skilled and committed FE lecturers in the very near future.

Turning to the inadequacy and uncertainty of FE funding, the Minister will be familiar with the Government's figures: FE funding increased by some 10 per cent. between 1996-67 and 2001-02, with further increases of some 2 per cent. per year planned to 2003-04. However, those figures are the total core funding and standards funding. Those are the funds that FE colleges must bid for at some expense, which is a bitter pill if the bid is unsuccessful. Core funding per student—the bread and butter for FE colleges—has fallen since 1997, and the add-on element, which is standards funding, will soon make up 12 per cent. of all FE college funding. However, as we all know, what the Government giveth, the Government taketh away.

I give just two examples for the Minister to contemplate. During this financial year, Amersham and Wycombe college in Buckinghamshire was awarded about £209,000 in standards fund allocation, but next year the LSC will award it just £32,000. During this financial year, Tower Hamlets college will receive some £500,000 in standards fund allocation, but next year that will fall to about £220,000.

That uncertainty and changes in funding will result in more staff redundancies, more short-term contracts and more uncertainty for colleges. No wonder there were some 6,000 unfilled staff vacancies in FE colleges last year. Added to the dilemma is the uncertainty and delay in core funding approval. The financial year for FE colleges starts on 1 August. Colleges are incorporated bodies and bound by law to operate responsible financial planning and budgeting procedures, which must be approved by their governors.

As late as the end of June 2002, the 2002-03 core funding allocation for Eastleigh FE college had not been confirmed and, today, it is still unclear precisely what standards fund allocation it can expect to receive. There has been dialogue between the college and the local LSC since March on the provisional allocation that the college can expect to receive next year. It needs to know that to prepare its budget. To be fair, it was never guaranteed that the figures would be finalised before June, but we understand that the provisional allocations that have been discussed and agreed for Eastleigh may not be met in full. Any significant deviation in allocation will invalidate the budgeting process and could even leave the college open to a charge of mismanagement. It cannot be right to expect FE colleges to fulfil their corporate responsibilities when financial planning data, which are essential to the process, are not available only five weeks before the start of their financial year.

Turning to curriculum changes, FE colleges have made a great success of the curriculum 2000 initiative and I am sure the Minister agrees that college staff have worked hard to deliver the model's broader curriculum. However, there are wide concerns that any backtracking from the model could be greatly detrimental to the 16 to 18-year-old students. Colleges are concerned that the new initiative might be abandoned or diluted, which will only further demoralise the hard-pressed staff who worked to make it a success.

There is a separate curriculum issue. Paragraph 23 on page 12 of the Government's discussion document "Success for All" is on meeting the skills need. It sets out the importance of recognising employers' needs, and I agree. Employers are stakeholders in the process, along with the taxpayer and the student, but the bodies charged with setting the national qualifications curriculum have been inflexible too often. They have failed to recognise changes in technology and skills, and changes in the marketplace involving employers' demands for new and different skills. That can be only to the detriment of student and employer alike. I would be grateful if the Minister were more specific, as "Success for All" refers to

> "reforming the qualification system . . . exploring opportunities for opening up unit achievement, the feasibility of a credit based approach and the funding implications".

I do not see where the Government are going, and I would like that clarified.

Next, the lack of a single direction for both local and national LSCs. Most FE colleges are developing positive and constructive relationships with their local councils and there is high regard between them, but it remains unclear how much authority is exercised locally. Funding decisions in particular seem to be taken nationally, sometimes overturning previous local agreements. The one-size-fits-all approach in further education is clearly not working and the Association of Colleges for Further and Higher Education would surely agree that we need more local decisions on local funding issues.

There is general concern that the advent of LSCs has increased the scrutiny burden without increasing effectiveness, or adding any value to the student. Many are concerned at the lack of representation of people with FE knowledge on some local LSCs. The satisfaction rating of local LSCs is highest among colleges that feel that local learning and skills council staff understand the nature of further education.

A recent Association of Colleges for Further and Higher Education survey found that two thirds of the colleges feel that there are clear tensions between local and national LSCs. As many as 90 per cent. feel that their LSCs have not reduced the burden of bureaucracy, and less than 3 per cent. think that they offer good value for money.

My final point is on student funding. There has been good news from the Chancellor, as education maintenance allowances are to be rolled out nationally. I welcome that, but why wait until 2004 and why set them at the reduced figure of £30 a week rather than the more attractive £40? We need to put in place initiatives to make young people stay in education now, rather than abandon a further two years' potential intakes while we wait for the scheme to be rolled out. We certainly must end the postcode lottery of allowances at the edges of the pilot areas, as is the case in the Southampton borders of my constituency.

Other funding issues for FE students are not addressed by the EMAs, and we must tackle them if we are to end FE's status as poor relation to HE. Funding for the over-19s in the system is discretionary—it is not guaranteed for the duration of the course, and two years is the maximum. When will that change? Real-terms expenditure on FE student support has hardly increased in more than a decade. In real terms, adult FE student support has almost halved during the past decade, and is little more than £82 million a year. No wonder the Library confirms that nearly a quarter of FE students are considering dropping out because of financial pressures and that three quarters of those who suffer financial hardships are single parents—the very group that we want to have more skills so that they are more employable and leave the benefits system.

If we compare the plight of FE students with the position of HE students, we see how unfair the situation is. However invidious comparisons may be, the £1.8 billion available in HE student loans, together with access funds of £91 million last year alone, show just how big the disparity is, although the HE student population is only slightly larger in full-time equivalent terms than that in FE. To underline the extent of the yawning funding gap, I might add that average funding per student taking three A-levels is £3,530 a year in a sixth-form school, but only £2,520 a year in an FE college—a difference of almost 40 per cent.

The increased education funding announced in the comprehensive spending review is welcome, but, depressingly, it serves only to reinforce the disparity between further education and education in general. Education spending is set to increase by 6 per cent., but FE is allocated a mere 1 per cent.—the same old sad and sorry story. I look forward to the Minister's response.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on securing a debate on this important issue. To a tremendous extent, we make common cause on the direction that further education should take.

I should confirm that the local community regards Eastleigh college as an excellent institution that does incredibly well, and I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who serves as a governor. It is important for Members of Parliament to experience the real world from time to time, and close contact with our schools and colleges is an important way of doing that.

The Government are clear about the need to reassert the status and value of further education, which must be central to the lifelong learning opportunities that we seek to create. For many, further education is the bridge to higher education; for others, it is the bridge to skilled employment. For many adult learners, it is also a way back into learning, and it plays an important role in delivering access to basic skill opportunities. It is

[Mr. Ivan Lewis]

important, too, for work force development, and if we want our economy to be successful, competitive and productive, it is important that we ensure that colleges support employers and provide them with appropriately skilled and trained staff.

It is also important to put further education at the heart of the society that we seek to create—one that is fair and socially just as well as economically successful and prosperous. Further education has an impressive track record on encouraging and supporting access to learning among those who have been denied such opportunities. It gives them the chance to fulfil their potential, which may have been denied them because school was not a success or because they lived in communities with relatively low educational aspirations. Further education therefore plays an incredibly important role in the social justice agenda. It plays an equally important role in creating the strong and successful economy that we need by ensuring that employers have access to proper training that upskills their work forces.

Perhaps the only issue on which I differ from the hon. Gentleman is the Government's record on FE funding. It does not surprise me when Liberal Democrats ask for yet more money without referring to the taxation requirement or to the fact that all Governments have finite resources and must make difficult decisions about priorities. As politicians, we should not mislead any sector or the general public by suggesting that there is an infinite amount of money and that the Government do not need to make hard choices about their priorities.

Our investment record is quite good. By next year, total FE funding will have increased by 26 per cent. in real terms since 1997 and funding for full-time equivalent students will have increased by 16 per cent. The teaching pay initiative is providing £110 million this year to reward high-quality teaching, which is £45 million more than last year. I believe that Eastleigh college will receive a 25 per cent. increase on last year's TPI allocation. During the four years before the general election—1993 to 1997—the previous Government cut FE unit funding by 12 per cent. in real terms, so we started from a very low base.

We have the opportunity to bring together an exciting and dynamic reform agenda with, for the first time, sustainable long-term investment. The sector is crying out for some sense of security about its status, value and worth in the world of education, as well as a strong sense of stability, viability and a long-term vision for institutions and area planning. The 1 per cent. real-terms core funding increase from the spending review settlement is good news for the FE sector. Along with the TPI, it will have implications for pay. It is too early to say what the outcome will be, but we will be in a much better position in the autumn to be clear about terms and conditions and plans for pay for people in the FE sector over the next three or four years.

The hon. Gentleman made an important point about the difficulties experienced by people in institutions who are expected to make decisions year by year when they are not sure what budget they will have at any time. That is one reason for us making it clear, as part of the spending review announcement, that we intend to move towards three-year budgetary planning cycles. That will provide clarity for the local LSCs and for each college on what the three-year programme entails.

In referring to investment, it is worth dwelling on the role of education maintenance allowances. I understand that the hon. Gentleman wants them to start earlier and to be more generous. I would expect a Liberal Democrat to say that, but we must manage finite resources. The education maintenance allowance is universally popular, other than among Conservative Members, who, interestingly, have no FE representative present. For the first time, we will have a universal mechanism to support young people who stay in education post-16.

A major challenge facing the education system is that far too many young people drop out. Some drop out at 16 simply because they have a negative experience in the education system, but, traditionally, many have dropped out because of lack of financial support to enable them to continue. Therefore, the introduction of education maintenance allowances is an important step forward. Evidence from the pilots shows that it leads directly to improved participation. Equally important is the fact that the allowances are linked to individual student performance and attendance. There is no automatic payment. Students must be studying and co-operating to receive an allowance, so it is a good incentive for young people to stay in education. It is important, however, that they not only stay in education, but attain as a consequence of participating beyond 16 and progress to either a modern apprenticeship or higher education.

Alongside the new commitment to investment, within the past two or three weeks we have published the document "Success for All", which sets out our vision for the future of further education and the reform that must accompany the investment. We are consulting widely on the document. The consultation will conclude at the end of September, when we will be clear about our investment and reform agendas for FE in the medium and long terms. Having consulted people in the sector and others, we shall make clear statements in the autumn.

There are several elements to FE reform. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that, although the social inclusion role of FE colleges is vital, we should focus on achievement and attainment as well. It is okay to say that it is good to get into education people who have been denied such opportunities, but it is equally important that we support them and enable them to succeed, achieve and attain when we hook them back in. There are real issues on achievement and attainment rates as opposed to participation rates.

Part of the reform and investment deal is that improvement targets will be negotiated between local LSCs and FE colleges. That should result in not only a three-year clarity on funding, but clear expectations on the quality and level of provision and the improvements expected.

Mr. Chidgey: As part of that programme, will the Minister recognise the difficulties that colleges have in recruiting and retaining well-qualified and able lecturers, who are obviously essential to the process, given the salary disparity between lecturers and schoolteachers?

Mr. Lewis: We recognise that. I referred to the extra money that will be granted through the comprehensive spending review. Later this year, we shall announce what that means for investment in FE, including the implications for pay and conditions. We accept that recruitment and retention is a real issue, and there is a commitment to levelling the investment in FE and schools. However, there is no commitment to a time scale, so we must see what we can realistically achieve with the settlement we have been given.

We intend to create a situation involving minimum performance, such as applies to schools and LEAs, and we shall have floor targets for FE colleges. We must develop excellence in the approach to teaching and learning in further education, which we may not have focused on as clearly as we have in schools in recent years. As well as pay and conditions, we must be clear about our commitment to training and development for FE staff and ensure that the infrastructure is there to support that.

We must also ensure that what happens in FE colleges responds to the needs of local employers and the local labour market. The criticism is sometimes made that a disparity exists between what is happening in the classroom and the rapidly changing economic profile of an area or the skills shortages identified by business and employers. There must be a much closer synergy between the world of work and the world of education, and FE colleges are vital in that regard. There is a direct relationship.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of qualifications. The Government have asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the LSC to work together to draw up plans to move towards a unitised qualification framework and to set out advice on a credits-based framework. We accept the need for change, but we believe that change must be managed carefully over time so that it does not simply reverse reforms that have been introduced only recently.

We also accept the need for well-designed vocational qualifications. Although vocational experiences must be as stretching for a student as other learning experiences and although vocational qualifications must have a similarly high status as other qualifications, the learning experience for vocational qualifications must not be the same as for the academic route. Otherwise, the object is defeated. We must ensure that the design, content and assessment of qualifications are right for the student.

We have introduced centres of vocational excellence in many colleges. That programme will accelerate, which feeds into the view that many more colleges should develop a specialist role in their communities. That again must be closely tied to the needs of the local economy and the labour market. However, there must also be far more institutional collaboration area by area. There has been a culture of competition in education over the years, but we are asking providers to come together and take a far more collaborative approach so that the learner has access to the full range of opportunities, recognising that individual institutions are not in a position to provide everything.

The relationship with the LSC is very important, and we are committed to a significant reduction in bureaucracy. The Sweeney taskforce is due to report soon. The LSC is committed to a 25 per cent. reduction in bureaucracy and we shall deliver on that in the months ahead. I accept that there needs to be an emphasis on the skills mix in local LSCs.

Working Time Directive

1 pm

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): I begin by expressing my delight at securing this important debate, which touches every aspect of people's lives. The Labour Government should be congratulated on implementing the working time directive. Many of us will remember the previous, Conservative Government fighting tooth and nail against it, denying British workers the same rights and protection as those afforded to our colleagues throughout the rest of Europe.

However, having said that, I must add that a recent report by the TUC showed that there are still more people in Britain working for more than 48 hours a week than there were in 1992. Those figures show that 4 million people, representing 16 per cent. of the total UK work force, work for more than the 48-hour maximum. There can be little doubt that working excessive hours can lead to ill health, stress and strains on family relationships.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Confederation of British Industry still maintains that workers should have the right to exercise discretion in relation to their working hours. Although that so-called opt-out sounds fine, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that employees are being pressurised into signing the opt-out clause or risk the possibility of losing their jobs. The Minister will no doubt be aware that the UK is the only European country that has implemented an opt-out clause, and other member states restrict the hours of work even further.

Another area of concern to me is the ambiguity surrounding regulation 16 of the Working Time Regulations 1998, which deals with the employee's right to paid holidays. Again, there is anecdotal evidence of bad practice by unscrupulous employers, who simply tell employees that part of their hourly rate should be used as holiday pay.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): May I make some observations? The working time directive should not prevent flexible working arrangements from being drawn up in various industries. The industry that comes to mind is that of mining, which has used flexible working for many years. There are few pits left now and it is common practice, because of the sheer distance that the coal has to be moved, for the men to work longer hours but fewer days over the week. Therefore, flexible working arrangements—

Mr. James Cran (in the Chair): Order. This is a short debate and interventions should be very short and crisp.

Jim Sheridan: My hon. Friend makes a good point. In principle, flexible hours should be just that. However, my point is that there are occasions when employees are pressurised into working excessive hours. I am sure that that is the experience of my hon. Friend in his distinguished career in the mining industry.

Anne Picking (East Lothian): On flexible hours, is my hon. Friend aware of the problem in the health service, where nurses work excessive hours. The trusts and private nursing homes get round the problem by ensuring that the nurses do their stint as full-time employees of the trusts and the boards and then do flexi-bank working on top of that. Those nurses can sometimes end up working an enormous number of shifts, creating unsafe situations.

Jim Sheridan: My hon. Friend makes an important point. She has had a distinguished career in the health service. While agency workers in the health service are welcome, there is a problem in terms of how many hours they work, who monitors that, and who is accountable for it.

I return to regulation 16, and the matter of unscrupulous employers and holiday pay. I referred to the experience of my constituent, Mr. Jim Hart, of Erskine and the type of sharp practice that undermines the spirit and intent of the directive. I would ask the Minister to consider strengthening regulation 16. I am certain that there is much more anecdotal evidence about people who have been denied appropriate holiday pay entitlement. It is unfortunate that there are still employers who do not make provision for people's holiday pay.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend on having secured this excellent debate. Is he aware of a recent court ruling to the effect that a worker with long-term sickness who, because an unscrupulous employer will not pay him off, is still on the payroll but not receiving pay, is entitled to statutory holiday of—I believe—20 days a year? That has to be paid, even though he is not receiving a wage.

Jim Sheridan: I was unaware of that ruling, but I am sure that my hon. Friend is correct. The Minister may also be aware of recent reports of the Spanish Government's having taken legal action over the implementation of the working time directive, with specific regard to the inclusion of owner-drivers.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is ridiculous to differentiate between owner-drivers and employee drivers? Surely a driver is a driver, regardless of his or her status, which is entirely irrelevant to the driving. What should be paramount is the safety of the public and of the drivers.

Jim Sheridan: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. My understanding is that owner-drivers are exempt until 2009. It is nonsensical for drivers, whether they are self-employed, owner-drivers or employed to be exempt from the regulations. If someone is driving a 20-tonne or 40-tonne lorry and it is involved in a serious accident on a motorway owing to stress or to people falling asleep at the wheel, the last question that we should be concerned about is whether he or she is an owner-driver, self-employed or employed. To leave that kind of risk until 2009 endangers a large number of people.

What concerns me and those who have supported me are reports that some member states, including this country, are sympathetic to the position of the Spanish Government. It would be helpful if the Minister could clarify the matter.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Obviously, the working time directive is vital to the protection of our workers. Does my hon. Friend believe that the application of the directive should be examined closely and, where breaches are taking place, the legislation should be strengthened in order to provide further protection for those who are being mistreated?

Jim Sheridan: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Legislation is fine, but it is making employers accountable for their actions that is important. If necessary, I would be in favour of stiffer penalties for those employers who knowingly disregard or misrepresent the regulations.

Mr. Connarty: I wonder whether there might be something more fundamental in the Government's approach to the working time directive. For example, road hauliers, whether they are owners or work for a firm, are concerned that the cabotage rules now being used in countries outwith the EU allow drivers from non-EU countries to drive much longer hours than the EU directives would allow, which lets let them pick up loads in the UK and thus undercut firms in this country. The Government have given too much weight to the economic impact instead of health and safety. Although they have allowed owner-drivers to compete, in a sense they are inviting people in the UK to break the rules so that they can compete with drivers from non-EU countries.

Jim Sheridan: My hon. Friend raises an important point. At the end of the day, if there is a major road accident, the last question that those concerned will ask is what nationality the driver is and what regulations he is working under. Again, I congratulate the Government on bringing in the working time directive, but it is irrelevant if we are going to allow foreign drivers who are subject to no legislation a free rein on our roads. We should be looking at legislation that covers the country not only the driver.

I began the debate by listing the genuine benefits of the working time directive for British workers. However, some workers are still exempt, and I hope that the Government will consider expediting legislation to include them.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that offshore oil workers are presently exempt, at the Government's insistence, and that they are not due to be included until 2003? I feel that they should be brought in more quickly, along with drivers and the other groups of workers that he has mentioned.

Jim Sheridan: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. I do not differentiate between workers; this should apply equally to the lorry driver, the oil rig worker and the agency nurse. I have never been on an oil rig, but I am told that they are extremely dangerous places to work. Accidents are caused by stress or lack of sleep—or lack of regulation—and that impacts on us all. If people's lives are being put in danger, something should be done. The Government should ensure that something is done by legislating sooner rather than later.

David Hamilton: Following on from that, trade union recognition is a key element in how best to protect the interests of the workers. If we had trade union recognition, it would go a long way to dealing with many of the anomalies on oil rigs—and it would also apply to the protection of holiday and sick pay and so on.

Jim Sheridan: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I remind the House that the trade union movement was primarily active in making the legislation, and it had a pivotal role in promoting it. When there is trade union recognition, the working time directive is implemented, monitored and taken into account. The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) may recall the tremendous resistance of the oil industry to recognising trade unions. The fact that the number of accidents in the oil industry has decreased, particularly in the North sea, is a direct result of trade union recognition. The recognition of health and safety matters in the oil industry was brought about by the introduction of the working time directive.

As I said earlier, there are genuine benefits from the working time directive for Britain's workers. However, we must never forget that should the unthinkable happen and a Conservative Government are returned—unfortunately, no Conservative Members are present at the moment—there is no doubt that they would take us back to the dark days of deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s, when Britain's workers had no protection. There is no doubt that they would be supported by that most pessimistic of organisations, the CBI, which has fought tooth and nail against any regulations for workers, whether the minimum wage, the working time directive, trade union recognition or whatever. It is happy to let market forces determine conditions. We should welcome the working time directive. It needs improvement, and I hope that the Government will make the improvements for which we have asked.

1.15 pm

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan) on securing the debate. Working time, along with pay, is central to employment relationships. It is a crucial issue, and this is a timely opportunity to debate it.

How working time is organised and utilised is key to maximising how productive workers are and determining the time that they have available to follow their own aspirations outside the workplace. The Government have always been committed to the working time directive. It is right that all workers should expect certain minimum standards in their terms and conditions of employment. Similarly, business should be able to market its products effectively without fear of being undercut by unethical competitors.

Let me briefly review the history of the issue. Working time measures are nothing new in UK law. Statutory limits on working time were first established by the Factories Acts of the 19th century, which restricted the daily and weekly working hours of women and young workers in industrial employment. The limits—12, and later 10, hours a day for a six-day week for women, and six and a half hours for children under 13—seem high now, but they were fiercely opposed at the time by those who felt that the light work undertaken in, say, cotton mills could easily be done for 15 or 16 hours a day.

[Alan Johnson]

Before the end of the 19th century, proposals for general legislation to establish an eight-hour basic working day were rejected in favour of regulating working time through collective bargaining, supplemented by partial statutory regulation for particular sectors. In the 1920s and 1930s, further legislation prevented the employment of children under school leaving age, set a basic nine-hour day and 48-hour week for women and young workers and established minimum holiday rights. The legal framework was consolidated in the Factories Act 1961.

In 1918 the wages councils, which were introduced by Churchill in 1909 for sectors in which collective bargaining had not become well established, were given powers to regulate working hours. The Holidays with Pay Act 1938 gave wages councils the power to make provision for annual paid leave of up to one week. In 1945 they were empowered to regulate all aspects of wages, hours and holidays. It is important to remember that there has always been a need to regulate working hours, particularly for people who are vulnerable in the workplace.

As we seem to have a trade union meeting taking place here—I think that most of us here have been through the same mill—may I take my colleagues back to the time when they wore flares and tank tops? They will remember that in the 1970s the British trade union movement opposed the establishment of minimum standards, apart from what the wages councils did, and the protections in the Factories Acts. We did not take the route that other European Union countries did, because the mantra of the 1970s was free collective bargaining, no interference by the state and civil rights at work coming with the union card. I was no different from anyone else.

After that, in the 1980s and most of the 1990s, there was absolutely no chance of any intervention on working time issues by the then Government. When the Labour party was last in government we had not introduced the full protection that existed in other European Union countries, and in the 1980s and 1990s even the minimal protection that I have just described was removed completely. By the time we came into office in 1997, there was no working time protection whatever in this country.

The working time directive as we know it was proposed by the European Commission in July 1990. The previous Government opposed it, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire said, on the basis that it was not justifiable on health and safety grounds. They got confused over whether the directive was really about the social chapter, but in fact it was always about health and safety. I am thankful to say that the European Court's view was that that opposition was unfounded. That Government lost their case hands down in Strasbourg, and the directive was finally adopted by the European Union on 23 November 1993. In this country, British workers had to wait until an incoming Labour Government implemented the directive through the Working Time Regulations 1998.

Workers now have a right to protection from being forced to work more than 48 hours a week on average. They also have a right to protections for night work, a minimum entitlement to four weeks' paid annual leave, and entitlements to daily, weekly and in-work rest. There are additional protections for adolescent workers. At the beginning of the 21st century, workers also achieved the right to a day off a week. Amazingly, 8,000 workers took advantage of that, because they had previously been working a seven-day week by compulsion.

We as a Government believe that those rights and entitlements are wholly appropriate and were long overdue. The regulations were amended in 1999, but the amendments represented a small refinement and did not weaken any of the original protections for workers. An additional amendment last year made the entitlement to paid annual leave available to all workers from their first day of service.

It is important that workers should not feel dissuaded from asserting the rights and entitlements that the regulations offer them. I noted the comments that my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire made about his constituent, Mr. Hart. There is every indication that the enforcement measures that we have in place have been successful in achieving that goal. The particular scam practised on that constituent was clearly in breach of the regulations. Of course we have to give people the confidence to know what those regulations are, especially when they are not represented by a trade union.

There is every indication that enforcement is being successfully achieved. Last year we ran a big national television advertising campaign to tell people that they had an entitlement to four weeks' paid holiday, and to promote the use of that. That put the message across effectively, and we followed it up with some user-friendly guidance, produced in consultation with representatives from both sides of industry. That generated a very positive response.

The Working Time Regulations 1998 will continue to evolve during the coming years to incorporate both our domestic requirements and European obligations. A point about the offshore oil industry was made in an intervention, and I can tell hon. Members that this country argued for that industry to be included. I personally argued that case in Europe. Workers in that industry will, as I think the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) said in his intervention, be covered from 1 August 2003. That is in line with the requirement in the directive that we successfully secured to extend protections.

Mr. Weir: I thank the Minister for his reassurance, but my understanding is that offshore oil workers will still be exempted from the provisions on daily rest, respite, weekly rest and the night work limit, provided that compensatory rest is given. Is that altogether wise? They could still be under pressure offshore to work longer than may be safe.

Alan Johnson: I do not think so. There were problems in the fishing industry and with transport workers, which I will come on to in a second. There were various problems with specific sectors. Hon. Members will understand that trawlermen out on a fishing expedition can hardly exercise such rights. The same arguments were made for the oil industry, but we fought very hard to get a consensus that the European Union could sign up to. By 2003 the regulations must cover sectors such as offshore and road transport industries, which are currently excluded.

More immediately, this year we will introduce stricter working time and night work controls for adolescents. I support the view that the long-hours culture must be tackled. Some research was published earlier this week from Japan showing that men—for some reason it concentrated on men—who worked for more than 60 hours a week were twice as likely to have a heart attack as men who worked more than 40 hours a week. Perhaps we should take that lesson into account in this place next time we talk to the Whips. We must change the inherent overtime culture, which has not developed because employers have been bad—although in some instances they undoubtedly have—but because overtime has simply permeated certain industries. I speak as an ex-postman who grew up in a culture of overtime. We had a low basic wage, and every time the unions tried to cut hours and overtime, members would argue against it. I think that many hon. Members here have been through the same mill.

We cannot pretend that addressing the issue through a regulation, or stricture, that states that a person cannot work more than 48 hours will solve every problem. Research that we have recently commissioned clearly shows that in large industry sectors workers want to work long hours; they tell us so. We must change that, and stop using "part-time worker" as a term of abuse—someone is seen reading the newspaper and will be asked, "What are you, a part-timer?"

Such a culture is more of a problem in this country than in other European countries because of the way in which things have been tackled since the war. That problem must be addressed. We are especially aware that women will never receive the practical benefits of equal opportunities legislation if they are obliged to work hours that do not fit with their domestic circumstances. We seek to change that culture. The European Commission is due to review the voluntary working time opt-out by November 2003. Any proposed changes to the directive as a result of the review will require a specific proposal from the Commission.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire talked about ambiguity in the regulations on the entitlement to paid annual leave, which I have addressed. There is no legal guarantee of certainty in the UK's interpretation of a directive, and I think that the scam that he referred to is outside the regulations. To best serve the interests of workers and employers, we must ensure that there is no ambiguity in the regulations.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire referred to the Spanish Government's legal action relating to the separate road transport sector directive, which is required to be implemented in the UK by 2005. The directive temporarily excludes the self-employed, and is subject to review before 2007. Depending on the outcome of the review, the scope of the directive may be extended to include the self-employed by 2009. It is difficult to comment on the issue without details of the action being taken by the Spanish Government. However, unlike Spain, we voted in favour of the directive covering the self-employed. We are not surprised that Spain might be mounting a legal challenge in connection with the approach that it adopted during debates in Europe.

The working time regulations do not, of course, extend to the genuinely self-employed, but they do apply to workers rather than employees, and therefore to the vast majority of the work force. A review of the distinction between an employee and a worker was launched last week.

We want to tackle the long-hours culture in this country. Curiously, the biggest problem now involves not the kind of workers who have been referred to in today's debate, but middle-ranking managers. Trade unions have certainly done their job in reducing contracted hours, but there are still problems to address. I welcome the debate. Its importance is indicated by the fact that hon. Members from so many constituencies are present, such as my hon. Friends the Members for West Renfrewshire, for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), for Midlothian (David Hamilton), for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan), for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall), and for East Lothian (Anne Picking), and the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir). There is obviously a concern about the issue, and it is one that we want to address, but perhaps we vary slightly about how we should do that.

Green Belt (Cambridge)

1.29 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I am delighted to have this short opportunity to raise an issue of huge importance to my constituents, which is causing them great worry. I am delighted to be joined by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), who shares with me the periphery of Cambridge city, and therefore the green belt that surrounds it. If there is an opportunity for him to catch your eye, Mr. Cran, I am more than content for that to be the case—although we are both interested to hear what the Minister has to say.

What is the green belt? The phrase is often used, and it is clear from many previous debates that hon. Members from all parties have confused the green belt with green fields. Green fields are an essential part of the green belt, but not all green fields are in the green belt. I am specifically talking about the green belt, which is a designated area. In this case, we are considering the one around Cambridge, which was one of the first designated green belts.

I shall quote from planning policy guidance note 2—and before the Minister chides me, I acknowledge that I know that that dates back to the previous Government. It says:

> "The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness."

It then lists five purposes of including land in the green belt:

> "to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
>
> to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
>
> to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
>
> to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns"—

obviously that applies particularly to Cambridge—

> "and
>
> to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land."

I would add another factor that is widely recognised. The green belt also protects city centres from becoming derelict as the sprawl spreads forever outwards.

If a green belt is to achieve all that, its integrity has to be largely sacrosanct. We hear a great deal from the Government about increasing the size of the green belt, but in this instance—if I can be forgiven for making this remark—size does not matter. It is not the size of the green belt that matters but its location. If the inside of a green belt is constantly nibbled away at to allow more housing, but the outside is spread, one can brag about increasing the size of the green belt by so many per cent. or thousands of acres or whatever it may be. However, that protects nothing. The sprawl and the absorption of towns and villages into the city are not stopped, and none of the objectives laid out in PPG2 is achieved. I would contend that any concept of development on green belt land has to be the extreme last resort. Otherwise we might as well pack up, go home and forget the whole idea of green belts.

If we consider the regional planning guidance for east Anglia as it applies to Cambridgeshire, which was published by the Government 18 months ago, we see that they decided that some 4,000 houses per annum should be built in the county during the period of the structure plan to 2016. That is a rate roughly twice that put forward by the county council and other local authorities to the regional planning guidance review. Nevertheless, the Government made their decision. Of that 4,000, 2,800 per annum were to be built in the Cambridge sub-region.

The guidance under policy 2, "Meeting development needs", lists the

> "effective use of existing buildings and infrastructure . . . sites within built up areas . . . development on previously developed sites . . . and development on previously undeveloped sites."

Policy 4 goes on to identify the location of housing in the cities, in other towns, in towns with good transport and

> "exceptionally, and on a small scale, in villages",

but all that is qualified by the phrase:

> "Apart from in the Cambridge sub-region".

In other words, all the grand ideas have to be put to one side for the Cambridge sub-region.

The RPG continues:

> "Planning policies in the past have sought to restrain development with the objective of protecting Cambridge's historic character and to disperse both housing and employment development. While research and technology based firms have been resistant to locating far from Cambridge, housing development close to Cambridge has been constrained."

It then lists several effects of such policies and states:

> "The approach adopted should take account of the strong likelihood of continued employment and population growth after 2016."

I shall return to that point in a moment.

Paragraph 5.14 states:

> "A sequential approach to the identification of sites is proposed starting with Cambridge's built up area"—

this is the critical point—

> "and followed by urban extensions subject to a Green Belt review, a new settlement and development in market towns, larger villages and existing new settlements."

In publishing the RPG, the Government cast aside all the policies that apply everywhere else in the country, where building on the green belt is the last resort—policies followed by successive Governments—and changed building on the green belt from the last resort to the second priority—second only to building in Cambridge's built-up area. That is a matter of huge concern to local people.

Policy 24 refers to the need for a green belt review and says that it

> "should be carried out and any proposals for changes to its boundaries included in development plans."

As a result of the RPG, the county council set out on its own consultation as to how to meet the housing obligations imposed on it by the Government. It concluded that the housing distribution for Cambridge city would be 6,500 houses in the built-up part and 6,000 on the edge, subject to review of the green belt boundary. That is a very large number of houses.

For those who are not aware of the fact, I should explain that the area of South Cambridgeshire district council—as opposed to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire, which is different—totally surrounds Cambridge city. That area is to receive 20,000 new houses, as opposed to 12,500 in the city. Of that 20,000, 6,000 will be in a new settlement, 5,500 will be in market towns and rural centres, 4,100 elsewhere in the sub-region, and 2,400—another indicative figure—will be within the built-up area of Cambridge. Over the years, some of what is actually in the district of South Cambridgeshire has come to be considered part of Cambridge city.

The county says that a

> "Green Belt will be maintained around Cambridge"—

everyone would say, "Thank goodness for that"—and that

> "Local plans will identify the boundaries of land to be released from the Green Belt to serve the long-term development needs of Cambridge".

That is the nub of the issue. It is a concern of local people and is exacerbated by policy P9/3c, which refers to the location and phasing of development land to be released from the green belt:

> "The following locations should be considered for the early commencement of development:
>
> North of Newmarket Road
>
> North of Cherry Hinton
>
> Cambridge Airport (subject to availability",

and two areas in my hon. Friend's constituency: near Addenbrooke's hospital, and Clay farm and Trumpington.

The policy goes on to state:

> "Other locations should be reserved for development when required as follows . . .
>
> Between Madingley Road and Huntingdon Road",

which is in my hon. Friend's constituency,

> "Between Huntingdon Road and Histon Road",

which we share. It also says:

> "Land east of Cambridge Airport is to be safeguarded for development after 2016".

That is the area that is of most concern to me.

The document goes on to refer to preparing a master plan for the eastern sector as a whole,

> "including land to the north of Newmarket Road, the north of Cherry Hinton, Cambridge Airport and land to its east."

The land to the east of Cambridge airport is agricultural. For the purposes of today's debate we can ignore its value in terms of the current industrial viability of agriculture. There are two villages, Teversham and Fulbourn, and further north the village of Fen Ditton, all of which are separated from Cambridge city by a very short distance. A single field is the green barrier between Teversham and what most people think of as Cambridge.

The eastern side of Cambridge is under a huge threat from the Liberal-controlled city council, which has clearly set out its stall to invade south-east Cambridgeshire with thousands of houses. It has produced a study of housing capacity that suggests 2,500 homes on the North Works, which is not highly controversial; 6,500 homes on the airport, which is certainly controversial; 2,000 homes in Teversham; 2,500 homes in north Fulbourn; and 750 homes in Fulbourn. Those are swingeing increases to relatively small villages.

More interestingly, because Cambridge airport is a highly commercial, viable business operation, it will be impossible for it to move, although its owners have said that they are prepared to move, for most of the planned period. A development of 6,500 homes on the airport cannot begin until the last two or three years of the structure plan period. In other words, to meet the targets that are being put forward, building in places such as Teversham, Fulbourn and Cherry Hinton will have to start very quickly. In a debate about a year ago, the now Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, who was the Minister's predecessor in his present job, said:

> "Allowing the potential for reviews of greenbelt boundaries does not in any way diminish our commitment to the principle and actuality of the current scale of greenbelt land."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 4 April 2001; Vol. 366, c. 82WH.]

I strongly disagree, because once one starts making significant changes to greenbelt boundaries one has seriously impinged on their principal purpose.

The threats to my constituency are clear. They come both from the Liberal-controlled city council, which is determined to build all over land to the east of Cambridge city, and from the policies applied solely to Cambridge and Cambridgeshire by the present Government. Local Labour party members have now decided to oppose the eastward expansion of Cambridge city, but they have only the Government's regional planning guidance to blame.

I want to conclude by trying to be constructive. The numbers proposed for building on the North Works, which is part of the Marshall's airport infrastructure, are largely non-controversial. There is an element of green belt, but in general, that is not controversial. There is land on the northern fringe of Cambridge in my constituency that has already been removed from the green belt. I accept that, having been removed, it has to be built on. There is also a large swathe of land, some of which is in Cambridge city and some in South Cambridgeshire, on the southern side of the A14 Cambridge bypass, such as the largely redundant railway sidings at Chesterton, the sewage works and what was known as the machinery sale ground. Those are vast areas capable of taking many thousands of houses.

There are problems with land assembly when different owners are involved, but that should not be allowed to prevent its development from being given priority. There is outstanding land, but we have inexplicably been told that because land was allocated in the previous plan, it cannot be reallocated in the current plan, despite the fact that it has not been built on. That is absurd. We have been through the previous plan and have managed to survive, one way or another, without houses on the land allocated in that plan. We are planning not for the past, but for the future. I hope that the Government will allow any land that has been scheduled for development but has not yet been developed to be counted as part of the land that can fulfil future need for housing—those 2,800 extra houses a year to which I referred earlier.

I suspect that few people want the airport to be developed, but I believe that most would reluctantly accept that one day that will probably happen. It is one of the least worse options for development. However, that could happen only at the very end of the current structure plan period, so would make little or no

[Mr. James Paice]

contribution to satisfying housing need at that time. It would also require a review of the green belt, so I do not stand four-square against any review of the green belt.

However, that is where I part company with the draft structure plan. There should be no review of the green belt east of the airfield. I want to say loudly and clearly on behalf of my constituents that a line in the sand must be drawn on Airport way—the road that runs alongside Cambridge airport. If we can protect Fulbourn and Teversham—only a field protects them—that line in the sand must be drawn and adhered to. That part of the draft structure plan must be rejected. The only reason for that proposal in the plan is the Government's decision to make building on the green belt the second priority to building within the city, in contrast with its policies for the remainder of the country.

Today is not the time to address wider issues concerning the location of the new settlement, nor my belief that many smaller villages that have been excluded from the plan could have been allowed some growth—10 per cent., for example—over the period of the plan. That would have been absorbable and might have allowed some village facilities such as pubs or post offices to keep going. However, not a brick should be laid on the green belt until every piece of brownfield land in Cambridge has not only been allocated but has had houses built on it. It is no use having land effectively frozen out of the system because a developer or owner will not build on it, and then forcing people to accept houses on green fields.

Finally, I want to say a few words about the overall pressures on Cambridge. It is a huge privilege for me, and for my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire, to represent an area as dynamic as the Cambridge sub-region. It is at the heart of so much of Britain's present and future enterprise, particularly biotechnology—but that brings infrastructure and development problems. Cambridge is a magnet, and there is a danger that it could destroy its own attraction. Many parts of the country would welcome a fraction of the development being attracted to Cambridge and the enterprises that spawn it. Successive Governments have tried financial measures to attract investment elsewhere, but that has been largely unsuccessful.

I shall finish with a suggestion. The principal magnet is Cambridge university, so the Government could encourage the university to develop satellite activities elsewhere in the United Kingdom and shift the magnet, or—to mix my metaphors—create an outer ring of satellite magnets. We know that the Minister for Science has close contacts with Cambridge university and I urge him and the Government to work with the university to try to find new ways of attracting some development away from Cambridge. I fear that if we do not do so, this debate will be repeated until Cambridgeshire is concreted over. None of us wants that.

1.49 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) on the timeliness of the debate, and on how he expressed his views. I would not depart from a word of what he said. I share completely the view that, by setting out a sequence in RPG6, the Government initiated a search for sites to develop in the green belt that went far beyond the purposes of the green belt. In Cambridge, green belts were primarily intended to preserve the special character of the city and its setting, and to prevent coalescence of settlements.

My hon. Friend and I could talk at length on this subject. He set out the position on Fulbourn and Teversham, and I could do the same in relation to Stapleford, the Shelfords and other villages. However, I want to ensure that the Minister refers not only to the RPG, but specifically to its policy 24 on the greenbelt review. I want him to make it clear that the purposes of the green belt include the special character of Cambridge city, and that the urban extensions and the amount of building proposed in the structure plan that followed the RPG—anything up to 16,000 homes in the green belt—is utterly inconsistent with the maintenance of the special character of Cambridge city.

On that basis, there is everything to be said for the Minister taking the opportunity to set out the Government's commitment to the purposes of the green belt, and especially to policy 24 in the RPG, before the structure plan inquiry in the autumn.

1.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I congratulate the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) on securing the debate, and I also congratulate the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). The green belt is an essential issue and planning tool, for all the reasons given by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire, especially in areas as successful as Cambridge. The matter is clearly of concern to both of them.

I am slightly troubled as to why the hon. Gentleman did not afford himself the opportunity to comment on the structure plan at the draft stage. That means that he cannot attend the examination in public of the issues on the draft. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire will attend in relation to new settlements, but I exhort the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire to put a note in before 30 July so that he, too, can have a word about green belts.

Mr. Lansley: The Minister will know that I made comments on the green belt, and that they were exactly the same as those made by my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire. Therefore I wanted to be invited to the green belt discussion, and wrote to the county council asking to be invited.

Mr. McNulty: I was not aware that the hon. Gentleman had done that, so my exhortation was unnecessary. I knew that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire was to attend in relation to new settlements, but clearly the examination in public is the next step in the process.

I take on board much of what both hon. Gentlemen said. The panel that considered the RPG for the plan in 1994 was concerned about the effect of the green belt on sustainable development patterns, and recommended that a review of the green belt should be initiated as a matter of urgency. From the outset, the essence of PPG2 has remained the same. I had all the relevant points nicely set out in my speech, but I shall not bother with them, given that the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire cited them all. The structure plan and the RPG need to refer back to PPG2. The green belt is vital, not least in this case.

I half accept what the hon. Gentleman said about size not being everything. The green belt has increased since 1997 by about 30,000 hectares. In many cases, that has served to consolidate what is already there. We start from PPG2. It is not for me, a humble graduate of the university of Liverpool, to tell the university of Cambridge what to do in terms of satellites, magnets or anything else, but I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) will pass on the hon. Gentleman's exhortations for the university to branch out further than the city itself.

The tension in a growing urban area, the maintenance of the urban fringe, sustainability, taking on growth and the consolidation of green belt are all part of the review process. Such reviews as are carried out deal in the main with that tension. I do not agree that any review is 100 per cent. bound to be detrimental to the green belt. A review may lead to some adjustment to its boundaries and even some additions—that possibility is not precluded during the process of the examination in public—and will consolidate the green belt around Cambridge for the immediate future and beyond.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire is right about the sustainable pattern of development. RPG6 sets out a sequential approach to meet Cambridge's development plan, in which the first preference is for development in the built-up area of Cambridge and the second preference for development on the periphery, subject to a review of the green belt. I would not understand that sequential hierarchy so negatively; the urban fringe and the interface between the urban fringe and the green belt and the built-up area are naturally the areas for development.

We need a review so that any infringement beyond the fringe is as little detrimental as possible to the green belt around Cambridge. That is a necessary exercise, and does not question the notion of a green belt for Cambridge. It requires that the review of the green belt should start from a vision of the city and the qualities that need safeguarding and consider how far green belt purposes are being fulfilled. When land meets the purposes of the green belt, including the proposals for use of land consistent with PPG2, it should remain in that context. The review will consider the suitability of sites for development when they could be released without significant detriment to green belt purposes. That is a crucial factor. The aim is not to encroach on to the green belt simply because of Cambridge's glorious success; any encroachment will occur in the least detrimental way, or without significant detriment.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire will not expect me to cover in detail the locations mentioned in P9/3c, or whatever the specific reference was. That is the purpose of the examination in public.

Mr. Paice: I know that the Minister is short of time, but I want to pick him up on the business of the examination in public. He chided me for not having objected to the draft structure plan. Does that mean that he is saying that remarks made in the House are less significant than those made during the examination in public? Most members of the public would be horrified to think that contributions made by their representatives in Parliament were less significant than something that takes place in a shire hall. I hope that what I have said will be taken into consideration by the inquiry.

Mr. McNulty: I do not doubt that it will. If I chided the hon. Gentleman, I did so gently—no more than that. The EIP is the process through which the issues raised on the draft structure plan are to be discussed in detail. I am sure that those involved in the EIP will see the record of this debate, but it is disingenuous to suggest that anything that an hon. Member says in this Chamber is, all of a sudden, way above any public policy position already established. That thought was at the core of what the hon. Gentleman said.

I am sure that he and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire will influence the course of debate at the EIP in whatever way they can, without necessarily being present at it. Given what they have said in today's debate, I do not doubt that they are both serious in their commitment to the green belt and to the development enhancement of south Cambridgeshire and the city of Cambridge.

By definition, a review of the green belt is controversial. However, if it is done in the context of a plans-led review, if an umbilical cord connects it to PPG2 and if it takes into account the statements with which the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire began his speech, with which I entirely agreed, I believe that the outcome of the EIP will be beneficial to Cambridgeshire overall. I cannot prejudge that process, of course, but we hope that it will amount to a proper detailed review of the area. I endorse everything that both hon. Gentlemen said about the green belt around Cambridgeshire, except for the bits about specific sites, which I could not comment on even if I wanted to.

I shall write to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire about what happens when land already designated has not been built on, because I was not clear about that point on myself, and it is an important issue. If any other issues arise when I read the hon. Gentleman's speech in *Hansard*, I shall happily get back to him on them. The issue is important, and I congratulate both hon. Gentlemen on raising it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 18 July 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Poverty

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Angela Smith.*]

2.30pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): We suggested a debate on poverty because of its obvious contemporary significance. For at least 100 years, Parliament and poverty have been intertwined. Perhaps that is inevitable given the rise of the mass franchise and the unstoppable march of British democracy in the past century. Earlier, Disraeli argued to his Tory party the need for one nation. When introducing his Budget of 1909, the Liberal, Lloyd-George, declared it to be

> "a War Budget. It is for raising money to wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness". —[*Official Report,* 29 April 1909; Vol. IV, c. 548.]

His Liberal Government laid the foundations for the early welfare state in the 20th century. From my party's point of view, the creation of the Labour party is in many respects a passionate cry against poverty.

For 100 years, the debate about poverty has been informed by research. In his book, "Life and Labour of the People in London", Charles Booth detailed the extent of poverty in our capital, drawing on evidence from the period 1887 to 1892. He was followed by that great Quaker, Seebohm Rowntree, whose book, "Poverty: a Study of Town Life", I found on my own library shelves yesterday evening. Rowntree's study documented the extent of poverty in the city of York in 1899. Today, the Rowntree Foundation and the other Rowntree trusts make a major contribution to our understanding of poverty.

In their different pioneering studies, both Booth and Rowntree reached similar, if not remarkable, conclusions. In London, Booth found that 30.7 per cent. of people were in poverty, while in York, Rowntree found that some 27.8 per cent. were. Rowntree's York study is also instructive in detailing the nature of poverty at that time. Comparing it with the situation today helps us to understand contemporary poverty—its nature, characteristics and extent, and the demographic, social, familial, economic and employment trends that have shaped and shaken poverty, as well as the challenge that it presents to Parliament and the Government of the day.

When one looks at the famous Rowntree study, one is struck by the fact that poverty in those days had such predominant causes and associations. Rowntree reckoned that almost 52 per cent. of poverty was in households in which there was regular work but wages were low. Large family size was a factor in 22 per cent. of households, and the other major factor in the cause of poverty was the death of the chief wage earner, which accounted for almost 16 per cent.

When one examines the trends since then, one can identify some of the things that have helped to tackle poverty. Reduced early mortality and widowhood or widowerhood, mean that those factors are a less significant cause of poverty today. Smaller family sizes have enabled many people to come out of poverty. On the other hand, we have seen a great ageing of our population. Lloyd-George introduced old-age pensions in 1908 because of the unique historical and demographic fact that working men were outliving their working lives and needed an income, which is why Parliament first discussed the need for an old-age pension almost 100 years ago. The issue of pensioner poverty still confronts us in Parliament.

We have also seen fluctuations in unemployment levels. Unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s shaped the consciousness, consciences and social politics of the nation. The depression had a great impact after the first world war on contemporary politicians such as Attlee, whose Government were influenced by the analysis of Beveridge and Keynes. Harold Macmillan hated the poverty and unemployment that he saw between the wars, which shaped an era of one nation Tory politics. Those politicians would have agreed with Beveridge in his 1942 report that of the five giant evils that needed to be overcome in the post-war world—want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness—idleness was the largest, the fiercest and the most important to attack. Beveridge also said that if we could not get that right all our other aims, such as improved educational attainment, were out of reach, which was a message that contemporary politicians understood. We still have to address unemployment, which rose for economic and political reasons in the 1980s.

We have also seen a growing awareness of both physical and mental disability and their capacity to be a force for insecurity and poverty. It is no surprise that recent Parliaments and Governments have had to confront disability through our social security systems.

A final factor is the nature and the force of family change. This country and the rest of Europe have reflected patterns in North America through the great rise of divorce as a mass phenomenon. There has also been a rise in what demographers accurately refer to as the single never-married mother. Both those things, and particularly the latter, are new forces for poverty. Many of our children grow up for much of their childhood, or sometimes all their childhood, living with just one parent, typically their mother.

One interesting issue that we may want to discuss this afternoon concerns the way in which—this is why I started my speech in that way—most poverty in 1899 obviously concerned economic insecurity. The causes of financial poverty today are not only economic but relate to demographics, family structure and family fracture.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The Minister is absolutely right to discuss past reformers who looked into some of those questions, because historical context is important. Does he agree that some of the early work by Booth and Rowntree was made more useful by the fact that they tried to define poverty? The relationship between relative and absolute poverty has changed over the period that the hon. Gentleman has just described, giving rise to genuine

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

difficulties. Will he discuss what the Government can do to capture a consensual definition of poverty, which would make the debate easier?

Malcolm Wicks: In our annual report on children and poverty we tried to capture the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. Finances are crucial, but poverty is not simply about that. The hon. Gentleman, who is Chairman of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions and is closely associated with one of the Rowntree trusts, is right to say that Rowntree was in the business of talking about a minimum standard for "mere physical efficiency". Today's debate is more complex and difficult and I am interested in it. I would welcome any comments from the hon. Gentleman, should he catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Returning to family fracture, one of the difficulties today for politicians, Governments and Parliaments is that some of the consequences of adult behaviour, and of the difficulty that some men and women have in maintaining their married or cohabiting relationships, impact seriously on children. That is difficult territory for the state, but the state cannot ignore or dodge it. The controversies surrounding the Child Support Agency illustrate the difficulties in, and the importance of, getting the right outcome.

As I have implied, there is no one definition today of who the poor are, or of why they are poor. Poverty is multi-dimensional and means different things to different people. We do not have robust information on all the relevant factors, but some groups are clearly at particular risk. Women predominate among the poor, which is what some people call the feminisation of poverty. I suspect that to some extent it was ever thus, but it is certainly true now. Women make up the vast majority of lone parents. They are more likely to be among the poorest of the elderly. They enter old age with fewer income and capital resources and they outlive men. Much elderly poverty concerns women.

People in some—I emphasise some—minority ethnic groups are particularly likely to be at risk of poverty. More than six in 10 working-age adults from Pakistani or Bangladeshi background are on low incomes. People with disabilities are of course liable to poverty. Working-age adults are almost twice as likely to be in the bottom quintile of income distribution if the household contains one or more disabled adults. Although I have mentioned the difference between now and then, between York in 1899 and today, with the smaller family sizes that we now have it remains the case that those from large families, with three or more children, are more likely to be in poverty. Those families are twice as likely to have no one in work and more likely to have a low in-work income. They may have a poorer financial incentive to work because it is difficult to pay for child care. We need to recognise that. Many of those factors overlap. For example, families from certain ethnic groups tend to be larger than average.

There is a strong association between a person's earnings in adulthood and their family's income when they were a child. Children growing up poor are more likely to be economically inactive as young adults, especially if they were poor in pre-school years or adolescence.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): On youth unemployment, the Minister recently promised that he would confirm to me whether youth unemployment stands at 4,500, as the Prime Minister recently stated to the House, or at about 240,000, as the Minister's Department maintains. The Minister wrote to me recently to say that he would let me know the answer soon. Does he have any news for me?

Malcolm Wicks: I remember that exchange, and I will write to the hon. Gentleman. I think that we are talking about the difference between a snapshot picture of youth unemployment and long-term youth unemployment, but I will let him have that information.

Today, I am trying to approach the matter slightly less confrontationally. There are times when we could have a ding-dong, and I am happy to have one later if that entertains the hon. Gentleman, but it is important to approach some of the issues in a more thoughtful way, because they have confronted Governments and Parliaments for many years.

The children whom I was mentioning have worse school attendance records, are less likely to remain in school after the age of 16 and are up to 10 per cent. more likely to have no qualifications. There is an obvious relationship between being in work and not being on a low income. Only one in seven working-age adults lives in a household in which no one works, but they account for almost half of those on low incomes.

I shall refer to some hard statistical definitions. In 2000-01, some 12.9 million people lived in households with less than 60 per cent. of contemporary median income after housing costs. Of those, some 3.9 million—30 per cent.—were children, of whom 44 per cent. were in lone-parent families. Some 51 per cent. were in working age groups and 18 per cent. were pensioners.

I have already referred to the importance of disability, which affects the three groups that I have mentioned. We know that 36 per cent. of the 1.5 million children living in a household containing one or more disabled children have household incomes of less than 60 per cent. of the median. Some 31 per cent. of children live in households with less than 60 per cent. of contemporary median earnings.

We also know something about persistent low incomes. One can approach definitions of poverty in different ways. Snapshots are always interesting and I do not dismiss them, but it is significant and worrying if children and adults are in persistent poverty. Indeed, 16 per cent. of children lived in low-income households in three out of four years between 1996 and 1999. We need to ask questions about that.

Great regional disparity exists and, within regions, spatial distributions will be of interest to hon. Members. In the south-east, 21 per cent. of children are in poverty, in the sense that they are in a low-income household. In the north-east, it is 36 per cent. I am struck by the fact that in London, 41 per cent. of children are in poverty. That is worrying for all of us, but particularly for those of us who are Londoners or who represent London constituencies.

I have spent some time presenting that analysis, and have roughly but accurately drawn historical comparisons. I hope that hon. Members have found that of some interest and use. Although it is not often said in the House, understanding how our society, economy, family life and demographics are changing aids us greatly in discussing, and even arguing about, what needs to be done.

What about strategy? Employment is crucial. That was understood by Beveridge, Keynes and other great political figures of the post-war era, earlier by Lloyd-George, and later by Macmillan, Clement Attlee, Aneurin Bevan and the rest. One of the interesting things that we are now trying to do, having been through the turbulence of the 1980s and early 1990s, is to reconnect employment with our welfare state and social security. Most of us would not need much convincing that, wherever possible, the best social security of all is a job. "Work for those who can" is our slogan and our approach. It is about getting the macro-economic framework right; we heard about that earlier this week from the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

We must see whether there are particular micro policies—labour market policies and social policies—that can help those who find it more difficult to seek work on their own. Most of us would agree that there has been much success. Some 1.5 million more men and women are in work than five years ago. Our employment rate—the percentage of men and women of working age in jobs—is very high, at almost 75 per cent. The figure for March to May 2002 is 74.7 per cent.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I am interested in what the Minister is saying, but is he aware that the trend, at least in Scotland, seems to be reversing? The latest figures published this week show that in the three months to May unemployment had risen by 8,000, and that it jumped by 28,000 in the past year. That is the single largest annual rise since such figures were first produced.

Malcolm Wicks: I am certainly aware that the figures released earlier this week were disappointing. Nationally, some of the trends are beginning to move in the wrong direction, although the changes are very small. More significantly—this is the hon. Gentleman's point—I am aware that there are important disparities throughout our United Kingdom. That is one of the reasons why the UK Government have a major role to play, but the Scottish Executive, regional development agencies and local authorities are also very important if we are to understand the causes of that phenomenon and seek to remedy it. That is why, for example, I met Glasgow MPs some months ago to talk about some of the initiatives in that city that would make work possible for people. We need to understand causation if we are to get that process right, so I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

I hope that people will recognise that although the regional and spatial characteristics are important, we are moving in the right direction overall. We have attained record employment rates. The contribution from the new deal policies for young people, for those aged 25 plus and for lone parents shows that the micro labour market policies are very important. If one considers Europe as a whole, we have a far higher employment rate in the UK than in France, Germany or Italy. That is one European league table that we are close to the top of, and we can take some satisfaction from that.

However, if making work possible is the crucial first step, making work pay is also of significance. We all know constituents who are on benefit, would like to get a job, have difficulties with child care and wonder whether it is financially worth their while to work. We need to assure those people that it is, and we now can. The national minimum wage benefits some 1.5 million people, and the tax credit policies that have been among the most innovative of tax-benefit social policies during the last five years mean that more and more people—soon not just families with children but those who are single or childless couples—will benefit from a tax credit that will improve their net income. Making work pay is vital.

A third strand is to make work skilled. We understand that what some have referred to as the knowledge economy depends on the skills of people. That is not just the skills and qualifications of children leaving school, but the skills of the adult population. We should recognise that we all need to re-skill from time to time in order to re-educate ourselves for new jobs, or our current ones. The skills strategy is vital to that process. In my constituency, Croydon—and this will hardly be unique—many companies and public services are crying out for skilled workers. They have a problem with vacancies that is common to the public sector. However, almost around the corner from those organisations, some are currently unemployed because they do not have the right skills. Some may not have the basic literacy and numeracy skills to undertake that work. We need to address the skills gap as part of our war on poverty.

Making work family-friendly is also vital. Men and women were not simply born to work; we are not just economic animals. We have relationships, children and caring responsibilities for elderly relatives. Achieving that work-life balance is vital. The announcement this week of a new interdepartmental unit to ensure a more joined-up policy for children under five is very important.

I hope that we have not neglected the other part of our approach, which is security for those who cannot work. We have seen some real progress in benefit rates for income support for children. We are now spending substantial amounts of money on disability benefits for those who are not at present able to work and who, because of their disability, are on benefit and need a decent benefit level.

A fourth strand is support for children. One feature of this Administration—it is certainly one of which I am proud—is the record rate of increases in child benefit. Since 1997, there has been a 25 per cent. increase in benefit for the first child, and total expenditure has increased by more than £1 billion in real terms. If we view those trends together with the children's tax credit and Child Support Agency reforms that will ensure that the so-called absent father—the non-custodial parent—pays maintenance for his child, we see that we have a real family policy in place.

It is vital that we do our best not only to tackle child poverty today, but to prevent it in the future. In our constituencies, parents sometimes come to see us with

[Malcolm Wicks]

their children, who may be in trouble and who may be excluded from school; often, they are preciously young. We must ask ourselves what would make the difference for such children, albeit they live in the most adverse, and sometimes the most chaotic, family circumstances.

The success of our literacy hour and our numeracy strategy in schools is encouraging. The sure start strategy to provide better health services for some of our poorest children is also encouraging. The strategy to reduce the rates of teenage pregnancy, which are appallingly high in what is meant to be a modern and educated society, is another vital strand.

I should add that this weekend's announcement on the roll-out of education maintenance allowances is vital. Gone should be the days when children left school at 16 and went straight into jobs to which no training was attached. We need to enable more of our boys and girls to pursue education at 16, although they need not necessarily take the academic path. They should, however, be able to take the training or vocational route. The education maintenance allowance announcement is as important to our strategy to combat poverty as some of the obvious social security issues before us.

The evidence shows that we are making real progress, and nearly all the indicators that we monitor annually in "Opportunity for All" are moving in the right direction. The latest edition of "Households Below Average Incomes"—for 2000-01—contains more recent figures for low incomes. It shows that significant income growth has been shared evenly by all income groups and that poorer individuals have shared in rising living standards. There have been large falls in the numbers of people below the absolute low-income thresholds, which suggests that incomes for those at the lowest end of the income distribution have increased significantly in real terms since 1996-97. We are continuing to reverse the trend of rising relative income poverty for children, despite the moving target of strong growth in incomes generally. The results show that about 500,000 fewer children are now below the 60 per cent. contemporary median incomes threshold, so we are having some success in our attack on child poverty.

I have focused mainly on families with children, but we should acknowledge that 1.1 million fewer pensioners are now below the 1996-97 real 60 per cent. median income threshold. There are also encouraging signs that we are reversing the trend in the number of pensioners on relatively low incomes.

I am also proud of the fact that, in spring 2001, 300,000 fewer children were living in households where no one worked than in spring 1997. We all understand that children who grow up in families where no one is in work get the wrong message and learn the wrong role . We have real progress to report, but I want to reflect on the changing nature of poverty and the challenges that it presents us in Parliament and in government.

2.59 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): It is a great pleasure to be able to take part in the debate. I very much welcome the general tone adopted by the Minister and his broader, discursive deliberations on poverty. I shall try to continue in that spirit. I applaud the Government's explicit commitment to tackling poverty, specifically child poverty. In my preliminary comments, however, I should like to fire a few warning shots across the Minister's bows in relation to the current situation.

Before the Prime Minister was elected in 1997, he said that he wanted to reduce the bill for social failure—something that we would all applaud—but it is interesting to note that, during the past seven years, the increase on welfare expenditure has been £34 billion, whereas the increases in expenditure on health and education have been £28 billion and £22 billion respectively, which seems to show a move in the opposite direction from that for which the Prime Minister hoped before he was elected.

We have never received a convincing explanation from the Government of why the avowed intention of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor to reduce means-testing, especially for older people, has not come to fruition. One third of all benefits are now means-tested, but in the case of pensioners the figure is approaching 60 per cent. There is worrying evidence that the take-up, especially by pensioners, of means-tested benefits is low, and in the case of pensioners, much lower than when money was given to them directly through a higher basic state pension, which could be targeted according to age. There has been common cause on that issue between the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the Liberal Democrats and the official Opposition in previous debates.

The Minister referred to "Households Below Average Incomes". The survey concluded that there was no statistically significant change in the proportion of households below various income thresholds compared with the situation in 1994. Two indicators in particular seem to be moving in the wrong direction, although I do not place blame for that at the Government's door because the trends are related to greater changes in society as a whole.

The Minister mentioned the number of children in workless households. There was a small increase in that figure between spring and autumn 2001. Some 15.7 per cent. of children live in workless households. In the year to autumn 2001, workless lone-parent households increased to 45 per cent. of the entire lone-parent household population. It is important to put on record those few caveats, but I do not intend to make a nit-picking, party political speech.

I now want to talk about three broad areas where it is essential to get things right if we are to be successful in tackling poverty. I completely agree with, and welcome, what the Minister said about work being the key to reducing poverty. A job is the best social policy to help any person lift themselves out of poverty. The Government have made a major effort to ensure that work pays. However, there are some differences between the Government's approach and that of the authorities in America. Much of the administration for tax credits falls on the employer in this country, but the administration for the earned income tax credit in America, for instance, falls on the Internal Revenue Service, the equivalent of the Inland Revenue. Some anecdotal and possibly stronger evidence suggests that smaller employers—those that do not have large personnel and human resources departments—have difficulty administering some of the tax credits, so I urge the Government to consider the matter.

On the various new deal schemes, the creation of Jobcentre Plus, and programmes to get people into jobs, it would be wrong for me to pre-empt anything that the Select Committee on Work and Pensions will say in its forthcoming report on employment strategy. I would not dare to do so with its Chairman sitting just to my left. However, I will say that, as the Minister may be aware, the Committee travelled recently to Europe and America to consider various means whereby other countries try to get people into jobs, especially those whom it is the hardest to help into work.

Our country can learn lessons from a much closer relationship between those in the voluntary, private, independent and not-for-profit sectors and employment staff alongside whom they work to help people back into jobs. On my visit to America, I was struck by how unthreatened and pleased the staff of the federal and state agencies were to work with people from local community colleges, the Seattle jobs initiative, the Oregon "Steps to Success" programme and the Transitional Work Corporation in Philadelphia. There was no fear or resentment on the part of the Social Security Administration staff in Philadelphia, Seattle or Portland in Oregon towards such organisations.

Much more intensive work is required on a flexible basis with the hardest to help, designing them individual programmes and especially considering matters such as soft skills, the basic life skills that so many of us born in more fortunate circumstances take for granted. Dress, appearance, getting on with people, working in a team, accepting instructions and getting out of bed at the same time every morning are often the issues that provide the largest barriers to putting people into work.

I also want to consider area-based regeneration. I want to flag up my grave concern about the number of initiatives that the Government have put in place. That is not a party political criticism, as the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and some Ministers have drawn attention to the subject in reports on the work of the social exclusion unit and elsewhere.

Let us consider six of the most deprived boroughs in the country. From Manchester to Hartlepool, an inordinate number of different schemes operate to assist local groups to raise their communities out of poverty. Manchester has 22 schemes, Tower Hamlets and Liverpool have 21 each, Newham has 20, Hackney has 19 and Hartlepool has 18. I ask the Minister to put himself in the position of a playgroup leader who wants better facilities, or of a community group leader who wants closed circuit television in a local park to protect playgrounds from vandalism. He could have up to 22 different schemes to refer to, which is too many. There is a strong argument for much more single-pot funding to make it easier for such groups to improve the environment that so many people who live in poverty have to put up with.

I also think that there is an issue about which parts of the country are able to access the schemes. For example, in South-West Bedfordshire we do not have access to neighbourhood renewal fund money or sure start money. In my constituency there are pockets of extreme poverty in three towns. Why should the people living in poverty in such small pockets in areas that are generally better off not be eligible? I urge the Minister to drill down to the micro level—ward, sub-ward or as low as possible—to examine the funding of schemes. If we are serious about tackling poverty, we need to tackle it wherever it occurs. Of course, some areas have multiple problems and need a special approach. However, the current methods of operating are far too focused on a few areas, and discriminate against others.

The third area that I want to discuss, which the Minister also touched on, is that of family life, relationships and children. We know from the "Households Below Average Incomes" report, published on 11 April, that lone-parent families are particularly at risk of having low incomes. Our statistics for teenage pregnancy, the proportion of dependent children living in lone-parent households, divorce and separation are the worst in Europe.

The Minister mentioned mortality. I have to tell him that our level of infant mortality is the second worst in Europe; only Greece has worse figures. Unless we are really serious about trying to stick together family life, we shall never be successful in tackling poverty. We should make common cause on it across the House. We sometimes view that as an excessively ideological approach, but it is not; it makes common sense to look at the problem on a cross-party basis to see what we can do about it.

In 1999, the National Family and Parenting Institute commissioned MORI to do a survey of people who were having problems in their relationship. That showed that nearly seven out of 10 people agreed that relationship support could make a difference if families had problems, but just under half of those surveyed said that they would not know where to go to get advice and help for family problems. That is significant, and a big area that we should focus on if we are to bolster the stability of family life.

Interestingly, the report also looked at Germany, where a major study was done into Church-based marriage preparation for couples. The result there was encouraging. When couples were taught communication skills and such skills as self-disclosure, positive responses to their partners and accepting responsibility for conflict, they were more likely to stay together. There are things that we can learn. I am particularly upset that the funding for national marriage week was cut so severely by the Government earlier this year. That is going the wrong way—the National Family and Parenting Institute's survey flagged up that we need a greater concentration on such issues.

However, I commend the Government for sure start. That is an excellent scheme. There are also small charities, such as Homestart, doing excellent work in the area. There is a particularly good group in Leighton Buzzard in my constituency. We should spread that more widely, as it can really make a difference.

Mr. Goodman: Would my hon. Friend commend to the Minister the statistic raised by the writer Jill Kirby, in her pamphlet "Broken Hearts", which points out that within five years of the birth of a child, 52 per cent. of cohabitees have split up compared with just 8 per cent. of married couples in the same situation? Does that not emphasise the importance of marriage for the happiness and prospects of children?

Mr. Selous: My hon. Friend is right to point that out. The most telling evidence is arrived at by comparing married couples with cohabiting and other couples from the same income background and the same district or location. Even then, there is a difference.

[Mr. Selous]

There is an argument that people who marry generally come from better-off backgrounds and their relationships are therefore more likely to survive. However, I would argue that there is much evidence that, taking like-for-like relationships in the same income bracket and the same area, marriage is indeed a social good. We should not be ashamed to say that or feel that we shall be seen as condemning anyone who is not married.

I often use what I call the folic acid example. If one goes into one's local health centre, one will often see a poster on the wall, saying, "If you are trying to conceive, folic acid is good for you." All the evidence says that it is, and none of us feels upset or offended by such a poster—it is up to us to decide whether to take folic acid. I would say exactly the same thing about marriage. We should not be ashamed merely to show the benefits, statistically or otherwise.

Yesterday afternoon my hon. Friend and I attended a meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on poverty, which the Minister addressed fairly recently. We had a fascinating time. A group of children from Tower Hamlets showed us some harrowing photographs of the environment in which they live. The vandalism and desecration of play equipment shown in photograph after photograph was soul-destroying. We should all focus our minds on how to turn around the individuals behind that desecration.

One of the girls in the group particularly caught my attention. I asked her, "Why do you think some people do this, and others don't?" She told us that her mother makes sure that she is always back early and in bed on time and that she is not out on the streets late. Her mother knows where she is and makes sure that she understands what her view will be if her behaviour errs on the side of ill-discipline. Her mother makes sure that she does her homework every day when she gets home from school.

I contend that that girl's life chances are infinitely better than those of many of her peers. She is lucky enough to have a mother who instils discipline in the home, making sure that she is not vandalising the local play equipment, and encourages her to do her homework. If we can teach more of the families in this country, whether through sure start or Homestart or any other means, to maintain such discipline and spirit in the home, we shall be setting many of our children on a much better road to the future.

3.18 pm

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): May I begin by thanking the Minister for the historical perspective that he provided at the beginning of his speech? That was very important, because it set the scene for the issues that we are tackling today. The contribution of Joseph Rowntree looms large and the work that he started informs many social reformers today. In fact, he still makes a material contribution through the trust that he established.

I represent [illegible] constituency in south Wales, and the experience of the 1920s and 1930s still looms very large for me. I am aware, as are many of my contemporaries, of the great hardships that the 1920s and 1930s created for the people of the south Wales valleys. The times of mass unemployment and depression, the general strike and the soup kitchens are all part of the consciousness of the people there today. Indeed, the experiences of those years materially helped to create the politics of the post-war period for much of Wales. It was because of the experience of the '20s and '30s that Aneurin Bevan, the architect of the national health service, began to formulate his views.

Jim Griffiths, another miners' leader, was greatly influenced by what he personally experienced during the harsh years of the inter-war period. Ness Edwards, one of my predecessors as Member of Parliament for Caerphilly, was another miners' leader who saw at first hand and personally experienced poverty for many years. That helped to shape his politics and those of the whole region, and it meant that when the second world war was over, those leaders, who came organically from their society, meant to make certain that their experience was never repeated for their children and grandchildren.

That is why the agenda of the 1945 Labour Government was so vital in recreating the whole social agenda for the country. The welfare state was established and, linked to that, there was a commitment to create full employment. For many people at that time, rightly, the creation of full employment was regarded as a welfare strategy. It was recognised that the surest way to ensure that the great mass of working people did not experience poverty was to make sure that everyone who wanted a job could find one.

The consensus established in 1945-51 more or less continued through the 1950s and into the 1960s. Today, however, we still have poverty, although it is clear that the poverty that people all too often experience now is different from that of the past. One reason is that society is different: it has become increasingly complex, and there are no longer straightforward solutions to create a society free from poverty.

The Labour Government have adopted the right policies by targeting groups in society who disproportionately experience poverty; for example, the elderly, and especially elderly women, as the Minister said. The fact that ethnic minorities suffer poverty also exercises the mind of the Government, and there is a new focus on child poverty. The evidence shows that the Government's policies are having a big impact. The Government's central thesis is that the best way to ensure that our society is free from poverty is to create and maintain full employment. We must ensure, too, that all our policies are imbued with the idea that it is better for everyone to be encouraged to come off benefit and go into work.

I turn now to economic inactivity as it affects areas like my constituency. In my area, as in many others, unemployment is low, and in some cases, historically low. However, there are high rates of economic inactivity, especially in the south Wales valleys. The further one travels up the valleys, the higher one finds the level of economic inactivity among the population. In many valleys communities—in a swathe of wards across the heads of the valleys—one in four people of working age experiences economic inactivity. There are many reasons why people are economically inactive rather than unemployed. A key reason is ill health, which is prevalent in these working-class communities.

There is a high instance of cardiac-related illnesses, arthritic complaints and severe mental health problems in those wards.

The great despair and impoverishment to be found in poor communities is not only experienced collectively; individuals who experience such poverty and deprivation have a traumatic lifestyle. In cold economic terms, it is worth pointing out that the high number of economically inactive people contributes to the low gross domestic product of many regions in the United Kingdom, not least south Wales. The valleys and west Wales have objective 1 status, which is useful in attracting extra Government and European money, but it is not something to be proud of. It is given in recognition of the fact that the GDP of two thirds of Wales is less than 75 per cent. of the European Union average. One of the main reasons for that is the high level of economic inactivity.

We must consider that question in a broad macro sense but also at a micro level. Since its advent, the National Assembly has given a great deal of attention to the matter, and is increasingly focusing on issues that remain to be tackled. The national economic development strategy "A winning Wales" sets a target for increasing the number of people in work in Wales and for creating a more equal society with more opportunity.

Wales has a number of other initiatives. The communities first initiative is targeting some of the poorest communities in Wales, not only to provide extra resources but to bring together local authorities, the voluntary sector and a range of other agencies to tackle collectively the deep-seated problems of those communities. In addition to the work of the National Assembly, work by the Government is having an impact in many areas and they are becoming increasingly proactive.

The Department for Work and Pensions is taking a monumental step forward by bringing the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service together in Jobcentre Plus. The completed pilot schemes have shown that it is the way forward, and I am glad that the Department has committed itself to extending it to the whole country. Employment zones have successfully been used to target high levels of unemployment and areas of high economic inactivity; they work more informally and flexibly through action teams, and relate to people more effectively than has been the case in the past.

What south Wales really needs, however, is greater co-ordination between what should be joined-up services. We have a National Assembly and the non-devolved services of central Government, but we really need a mechanism in which they can all work together in a complementary and coherent way. That is important for developing community regeneration and linking it to job creation.

It is important also to recognise that, although there are common features and common problems, every community is different. We need a tailored approach to tackle the specific problems of some of the hardest pressed communities. Above all, we need to recognise that issues such as poor health can have a huge impact on people's wealth—or lack of it—and their employability. In crude terms, it is not enough for communities that are experiencing high levels of economic activity simply to be given the opportunity of jobs or training; we must ensure that people can avail themselves of those opportunities. We must have programmes designed to improve the health of many people in our poorest communities, so that they are able and willing, enthusiastically, to avail themselves of the opportunities for training and jobs. If we take a holistic approach to the problem of poverty and job creation, we will go a long way towards creating a fairer society for everyone.

3.30 pm

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): The first intervention in the debate by the Chairman of the Work and Pensions Committee, under whom my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and I are so happy to serve, was about the measurement of poverty. It is sometimes assumed, although I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was not making such an assumption, that poverty can simply be measured by the income that people receive and that, if they have both low income and low capital, they are poor. It is important, however, to distinguish between temporary poverty and permanent poverty, and it is about the latter that I shall speak this afternoon.

For example, let us consider a student who is temporarily poor. He or she may be making a trade-off, trading in low income now for what will hopefully be higher income later. But what about the elderly widow in my constituency who visits my surgery? She wants to claim the minimum income guarantee or the pension credit, but is confused by the complexity of the forms that she must fill in. What about the young Asian kid from a broken family whose housing is poor and who attends a school that is less good than others, who faces the danger of drifting into crime and drug use, and then of finding it hard to hold down permanent work later? What about the black lone mum, who is looking for a stable relationship and a second income to support her children? Unlike the student, such people are in danger of permanent poverty and it is about them that I wish to speak.

Sometimes, society is depicted in debates such as this as a machine. It is suggested that if politicians push the right buttons and pull the right levers, the machine will work and poverty will be abolished. However, society is not a machine; it is more like an organism, and politicians are not engineers. We know from the history of the previous century that when politicians try to act as social engineers, societies go horrendously wrong. It is important to remember that the biggest engine of wealth creation in history is the market economy. This year, the Government look to spend about £418 billion. The total gross domestic product of Britain this year is estimated to be about £1,051 billion. It dwarfs the scale of the Government's spending, and it is the main engine of wealth creation.

I am sure that Conservative Members agree with other hon. Members here today that it is important to remember that a rising tide does not raise all boats. The boats of the widow, the young Asian kid and the black lone mum who are in danger of permanent poverty may not rise because they lack what has sometimes been called social capital—the inherited wealth, connections, skills, self-confidence and mobility that some others

[Mr. Paul Goodman]

have. Often those who lack social capital also lacked the childhood love and security that some of us who had it are prone to take for granted. Those who lack social capital do not lack talent and ability; it is simply that that talent has never been unlocked. I want briefly to discuss how it may be unlocked.

It is important to distinguish between those who can work and those who cannot, which brings me to pensioner poverty. The Minister made a thoughtful speech, and I acknowledge that there are some good things about the pension credit that the Government have introduced. However, along with Age Concern, Help the Aged and the National Pensioners Convention, I and my colleagues envisage a problem that can be described in one word—take-up.

According to the Government's own figures, between 300,000 and 750,000 pensioners who are entitled to the MIG have not taken it up. A senior civil servant in the Minister's Department, Alexis Cleveland, recently said in public evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee that as many as 1 million pensioners may not have received the MIG—about a third of those who are entitled to it. I am trying to be fair to the Government, but I have not, as yet, seen evidence that the take-up of pension credit will be any higher.

Take-up is alarmingly low because many elderly pensioners are baffled by the forms and the complexity involved in trying to claim the MIG. The Select Committee, which is of course dominated by the Minister's party, said:

> "We were concerned about the Department for Work and Pensions' inability to produce reasonable estimates for such an important figure as the take-up of a key Government benefit."

Among those who do not take up the MIG and who may be unlikely to take up the pension credit, elderly women are particularly predominant because, as the Minister said, women stand to gain rather less from the pension credit than many men, as their contribution record is more likely to have been broken over the life cycle. That is why my hon. Friends the Members for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) and for Havant (Mr. Willetts) made common cause, as my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire said, with the Liberal Democrats and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and formed an all-party consensus for additional resources to be targeted on the most elderly pensioners, many of whom are women and who face considerable poverty. Perhaps, when the Minister responds to the debate, he will tell us the targets for the take-up of pension credit or, if he cannot, when he might be able to do so. I hope that he will think aloud about whether he will try to guarantee a target of—this is only a suggestion—90 per cent. over five years.

I turn now to those who can work and my theme of social capital. The Select Committee's inquiries into Jobcentre Plus and the Government's employment strategy, to which my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire referred, are obviously not yet complete, but like him I have been struck by a theme throughout both. One of the biggest barriers to work is the lack of "soft skills". That is a relatively new phrase, but the Minister will know that it means the things to which my hon. Friend was referring earlier: turning up on time, being properly dressed for work, reliability, politeness and, perhaps, mastering a drug or alcohol problem. Most commentators and academics would agree that those social capital skills are built up partly at school but more largely at home, and a consensus has emerged that kids are best placed to build up social capital if there are two role models at home. If a boy's father lives at home and works in the economy, he is likely to pick up the work ethic and work habits.

We know from evidence that parents are more likely to stay together if they are married, as I pointed out in the midst of my hon. Friend's speech. Politicians should be very cautious when talking about the private life and personal conditions of those whom they are elected to represent and govern, but the mass of evidence is incontestable. It suggests that kids whose parents stay together and marry are more likely to achieve better outcomes, and it is in that spirit that I welcomed the Prime Minister's words in the Government's 1998 consultation document, "Supporting Families", in which he wrote that

> "marriage is still the surest foundation for raising children."

The Minister will agree that the test of the sentiment is not words but deeds. Obviously a pro-marriage Government would increase child benefit, which gives women choice about how they want to provide child care. They would not discriminate against one-earner couples but instead consider introducing transferable allowances to enable them to have greater choice about work. They would keep a marriage allowance too.

I pay tribute to one Government success by saying that I agree with the Minister's comments on child benefit, on which the Government's record is good. However, they have not introduced transferable allowances, and the tax credits that the Minister mentioned tend to discriminate heavily against one-earner couples. The Government have also scrapped the marriage allowance, and I am slightly concerned about press reports, which may or may not be inaccurate, that there is a danger that child benefit will not be paid to all parents as it is now. Will the Minister restate the Prime Minister's 1998 commitment to marriage and guarantee that child benefit will continue to be paid on the same basis as at present?

I want to mention other ways of building up social capital and improving soft skills. As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire said, the Select Committee has just returned from a trip to the United States of America, where it examined projects that build up soft skills and social capital. We visited three Democrat-run cities—Philadelphia, Portland and Seattle—and I was very impressed by the way in which the private and voluntary sectors worked with city, state and federal Government to harness the skills and talents of people whose potential is not being realised. My hon. Friend referred to that in his speech.

I will name only two projects, as other hon. Members want to speak. We saw the work of the Reinvestment Fund in Philadelphia, which is a community development financial institution that builds wealth and opportunity for people on low incomes by lending about $130 million to projects with social goals and returns. We also saw the Seattle jobs initiative, which builds up soft skills and social capital by producing tailor-made programmes to help individuals out of poverty and social exclusion.

It is not for my hon. Friends or me to anticipate the Select Committee report, but I want a similar approach here. Jobcentre Plus does some good work—there is an excellent project in my constituency—but a weakness may be that it tends to focus on getting people into work rather than keeping people in work. If more power and responsibility were devolved to managers and those who work in Jobcentre Plus, they could work more closely with the voluntary sector to provide the sort of tailor-made packages of support that we saw in the United States. That model of devolution and localisation is a model for any Government for reducing poverty and social exclusion, because it is Britain's Churches, credit unions, charities and voluntary organisations that have the commitment and ability to build up social capital and create the social entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

I pay tribute to the Government for reducing poverty to a degree, although, like hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire, I think that the Minister's figures were slightly glossier than the reality. The present method is likely to be the most effective way of tackling poverty in the long term. I am concerned, as some members of the Government may be, by the Government's Treasury-led fixation with measurement, centralisation and control which has led to the bewildering variety of funding streams to which my hon. Friend referred.

The Minister made a graceful reference to Disraeli's speech on one-nation politics, but real one-nation politics would seek to devolve and localise, not centralise. Hughenden manor, where Disraeli lived, is in my constituency, and it is an awesome thought that Opposition Members have his example from which to learn. The approach of localisation and decentralisation is best placed to reduce poverty, build up social capital, free Britain's communities and unlock the talents and abilities of the poor and socially excluded, whose ability is all too often untapped.

3.47 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): In his wide-ranging speech on the history of poverty, the Minister made the point, as have other hon. Members, that poverty is relative. That is true: it has always been relative, but it is none the less debilitating for that. The sad fact is that as we enter the 21st century, the inequality gap is widening, despite the actions of Government. From 1990 to 1996, income inequality decreased, but from 1996 to last year, it rebounded; the gap between rich and poor has grown again.

The Government have made their pledge to lift children out of poverty a cornerstone of their policy—a laudable aim, which I am sure all hon. Members support. However, the fiasco of the claim that 1.2 million children had been lifted out of poverty when the true figure was 500,000—a reasonably good figure—damaged the Government's credibility. That still leaves almost 4 million children in poverty. In many ways, it is a matter of priorities: if the Government had used the £2.4 billion tax cuts of April 2000 to tackle child poverty, a further 600,000 children could have been lifted out of poverty.

I do not want to be too critical of the Government, but they announce a laudable long-term policy of lifting children out of poverty, then come up with bizarre ideas such as withdrawing child benefit from parents whose children commit crimes or do not attend school. That policy was roundly condemned by the Child Poverty Action Group, whose director Martin Barnes noted:

> "Parents do have a responsibility for their children, but forcing low income families deeper into poverty is not going to make the already difficult job of parenting any easier. Parents on low incomes will have their hands tied behind their backs if they are forced deeper into poverty and debt".

Joined-up government is an issue in this respect. Laudable long-term goals sometimes seem to be submerged in short-term headlining—that is the difficulty with the policy. It is worth noting that the proportion of children in poverty in Scotland has remained static at about 30 per cent. for nearly 10 years. That is a heavy indictment of Governments both Conservative and Labour.

Some Opposition Members took up the Minister's reference to the difference between permanent and temporary poverty. He said that 16 per cent. of children live in permanent poverty. That is the real problem of poverty—the day-after-day, week-after-week, month-after-month grind. The longer children or families live in poverty, the harder it is for them to get out of it, as the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) hinted. Early action is needed to take children and families out of poverty before it becomes endemic. In some areas of our countries, there is second-generation, even third-generation, poverty because of high unemployment over the past 20 or 30 years.

Unemployment is obviously one of the key reasons for poverty. As I mentioned in an intervention, although the Government talk about putting more people back into work, according to International Labour Organisation figures unemployment in Scotland rose by some 8,000 during the three months to May. That means that unemployment in Scotland has jumped by some 28,000 in the past year—the single largest annual rise since the figures were first produced. The Scotland Office has stopped issuing press releases on unemployment figures.

We also have to ask what the true level of unemployment is. I refer the Minister to a speech made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) in a somewhat more rumbustious debate on this subject in the Scottish Grand Committee. He said:

> "I listened to the youth unemployment figures given by the Secretary of State. My area, like others, has displayed a tremendous decrease in youth unemployment, but I do not believe that that represents a movement of young people into employment. The figures register those unemployed and claiming benefit. There is a vast, unregistered, under-group of youngsters who have turned to a variety of illicit means of bringing in cash, or who have dropped out of the economy altogether, are not picked up by the official statistics and are ignored by the existing system."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 10 July 2002; c. 14.]

That is an opinion not from me but from a Labour Member representing a Glasgow constituency. It is worth noting that four of the 10 poorest parliamentary constituencies in the UK are in Glasgow. There is a problem identifying the full extent of unemployment and the poverty that it brings.

In the context of pensions, Conservative Members commented on the complexity of the minimum income guarantee and of the pension credit system. It is worth

[Mr. Michael Weir]

noting that Age Concern has said that, according to the Government's own figures, 750,000 pensioners do not claim means-tested benefits to which they are entitled. Help the Aged surmises:

> "The introduction of the pension credit will further add to the complexity and scope of the means-test, bringing over 50 per cent. of pensioner households into the claims process".

That is the difficulty of introducing means-testing, which is something that the Government originally said they would not do. There has been a massive increase in means-testing and, as has been pointed out, it presents particular difficulties for pensioners.

The complexity of the forms is not the only problem. We must all have had pensioners coming into our surgeries and, having looked at their income and told them that they cannot claim the minimum income guarantee, heard the reply, "Oh no, son, I have never claimed income support in my life and I am not going to start now." There is a real problem with the pride of our elderly people: they do not want to claim such things as income support, the minimum income guarantee or pension credit. The only way to deal with that serious problem is to make sure that the standard state pension is set at a reasonable level.

Research carried out recently by the insurer Prudential shows that 3 million pensioners throughout the UK are not claiming the full range of benefits to which they are entitled. It is interesting to look at the main reasons they gave for not claiming their full entitlement, and the fact that 43 per cent. of them said that they did not realise that they were eligible for certain benefits. The Government have to take up that issue to ensure that people get the benefits to which they are entitled. My constituents often come to me with the problem that although they have approached the Department for Work and Pensions, they are not advised about benefits that they could get but are not claiming. The Government have to consider whether more information can be given at local offices.

Of the pensioners surveyed, 23 per cent. did not know that a benefit to which they were entitled existed, and a further 18 per cent. were put off by red tape—the complexity of the forms has been mentioned. From a Scottish point of view, it was reported that 18 per cent. of Scottish pensioners were likely to shun means-tested benefits, compared with a UK average of 10 per cent. Increased means-testing therefore has a disproportionate effect on Scottish pensioners.

It is not only pensioners who have difficulties. The Minister and other Members have referred to the disabled. I should declare an interest because, although I do not claim benefits, people on disability living allowance come into my surgery and tell me that they have great difficulty with getting their incapacity benefit renewed. They are put through a procedure involving umpteen medical reports and then they are refused. They come and see me in a great deal of distress.

Many of those people have been on disability benefits for a number of years, but find themselves being put through a distressing procedure. Most of them should get the benefit. A vast number of people are refused disability living allowance on their first attempt to claim it but are successful when they appeal; there must be something wrong with a system that allows that to happen. That must be looked at to make sure that disabled people get the benefits to which they are entitled, because poverty among disabled people is real.

The associated group of those who care for disabled people continually come in to see me because they are having great difficulty with the benefits system. They comprise one group in our society that seems to have been well and truly left behind. In effect, they are being penalised for giving up their time and lives to look after others. I shall give an example. A constituent of mine, a lady in her 50s, had worked all her life but gave up her job to look after her elderly mother. She claimed income support: as a single person, she was at that time entitled to a rate of £53.05, to which was added the carer premium of £24.40, making a grand total of £77.45—hardly a fortune. She also claimed invalid care allowance of £41.75, but it was catch-22 because that sum was deducted from her income support, bringing her benefit back down to £77.45. In effect, she received no benefit from the invalid care allowance.

It gets worse: if a cared-for person does not live in the same home as their carer and the carer claims invalid care allowance, it is deducted from the benefit payable to the person being cared for. That is one form of double jeopardy that the Government do not seem keen to abolish. The effect is that both carers and the persons for whom they care are almost propelled into poverty because they cannot have sufficient funds and do not have the opportunity, as others may have, to go out to work.

In a recent Westminster Hall debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), announced that new regulations would be introduced to allow carers to claim carers allowance after reaching retirement age. That was broadly welcomed by all sides. However, after being contacted by a carers' organisation in my constituency, I tabled a parliamentary question to ask for clarification of whether that would be paid on top of pensions. The answer is well worth repeating:

> "Retirement pension (RP) and invalid care allowance (ICA) are income maintenance benefits. The former provides income replacement for those who have reached pensionable age, while the latter provides a measure of financial support for those who have given up the opportunity of full-time paid employment in order to care for a severely disabled person. It is a basic principle of the social security system that only one such benefit can be paid at any time because to pay both of them in full at the same time would amount to duplicate provision for the same need."—[*Official Report*, 1 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 96W.]

The effect of that is that people will not receive the allowance in addition to their retirement pension. People who reach retirement age will lose their invalid care allowance unless they are on a very low income, in which case they will receive the carer premium of £24.80 a week.

People who selflessly give up the opportunity of full-time work are plunged into poverty, regardless of the fact that they are saving the state a vast sum of money, as has been recently pointed out. I pursued that question with the Department, and asked how many people in my constituency and in Scotland as a whole were in that position. I was told that 300 people in Angus, and 20,600 people in Scotland as a whole, were in receipt of both income support and invalid care allowance. That is a vast number of people to be suffering in that way.

It is worth mentioning that poverty is not solely a problem of cities. We often think of poverty as being found in inner cities, but there is a real problem of rural poverty. A report by the Scottish Affairs Committee in 2000 pointed out that one in four people living in rural areas live in poverty. That is a real problem—and often a hidden one—which has been exacerbated by the recent problems in agriculture following BSE and foot and mouth. The Government have to ensure that their message gets across in rural areas. I think that they are failing to do that in many ways.

The Scottish Affairs Committee made various recommendations about benefits in general. It recommended that the Government continue to increase the minimum income guarantee, especially for the over-80s. I know that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have also pressed for such a policy, but it has not been introduced. The Committee also recommended that the Government look carefully at how they might further promulgate advice to pensioners and maximise take-up of benefits. A simple first step would be to ensure that a full benefits check is offered to all people of retirement age, and that they are then encouraged to take up what is offered. During the passage of the State Pension Credit Act 2002, a proposal to that effect was put forward, but it was opposed by the Government.

The Committee also recommended that the Government introduce take-up targets for the responsible Department, then the Department of Social Security. That connects with the point that I made earlier: the Department for Work and Pensions should ensure that elderly and disabled people are told about the benefits to which they might be entitled so that people who do not understand the system do not end up enmeshed in the bureaucracy when they try to claim them. Poverty in this country is relative, but it is real, and in a rich country that is a terrible indictment of all Governments.

4.3 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate, which I acknowledge takes place in Government time. I appreciate the sensitive way in which the Minister introduced the debate. The historical context he gave was valuable, and the debate has been better for the way in which he cast his opening remarks.

Although I know that he cannot do everything, I am a little disappointed that the Minister did not get a chance to explain to hon. Members what the consequences of the comprehensive spending review might be for the Department. It looked to me as though it would be business as usual for the next three years. That may be so, which is not to say that with sensible savings—there are always ways of making sensible savings in a Department—that extra resources could be found.

Over the next three-year period, will there be any new directions, investments or significant plans over and above those with which we were made familiar before the Chancellor made his statement last Tuesday? Are we to assume that the plan is for steady state finance and that we will need to find money in existing departmental estimates to make changes at the margins? I have no complaints about that approach, and I do not think that the interesting speeches of other hon. Members challenged the fundamentals of the strategy, but there are significant details of implementation to address and extra resources will be required to make progress.

The Minister was absolutely up front about using the household below average income figures that were published earlier this year. They were instructive and historical, dealing with the four years between 1996 and 2000-01. The Government are at liberty to say that changes since 2000-01 have not yet been reflected in statistics, and I accept that things might look better when the plans that have been introduced since the end of that period are assessed. My complaint is that our policy-making ability is diminished by the fact even when the statistics are correct—sometimes the Office for National Statistics manages to get them spectacularly wrong, or the Department interprets them wrongly—they are too late to be of any value in formulating a policy response.

I recognise that the absolute poverty situation has improved, but the relative poverty situation has been little better than static. That is important to put on record. However, even though the relative situation may have been static between 1996 and 2000, people's expectations have substantially changed. I can offer the Minister only anecdotal evidence: last week, in the high street of Hawick, I spoke to a number of people who were fed up with some captains of industry and angry about corporate profligacy, share options, and so on—even the Director-General of the BBC is receiving £100,000 bonuses.

People see such things on television, set against a background of local authority pay offers such as the ones that have been seen recently. It is not surprising that in this day and age workers become vexed about the fact that they are slipping further and further behind in the income stakes. The Minister speaks of the old days with relish, and I shall not challenge him on the details because I know that he has studied them, but in Seebohm Rowntree's days, all the people in the villages around York in which he was working were in the same boat; they all supported one another.

This country is not quite as bad as America in terms of income disparities. The Select Committee's study tour of America was instructive in many ways, and I am grateful to the hon. Members for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) for referring to that interesting experience in their speeches. The disparities of income found in the United Kingdom lead people to believe that they are being treated more unfairly now than in the past. That is a factor to take into account when assessing people's perception of poverty and whether it is real to them.

It is perceptions with which we must deal in political life. There are some big statistics: 9.7 million people or 12. 9 million people—the figures before and after housing costs are taken into account—live in household poverty, and 3.9 million children and 2.3 million pensioners live in households below the poverty line. Those statistics trip easily off the tongue, but we must remind ourselves that such households are under huge pressure to resolve resource conflicts in their weekly budget. They are forced to choose between basic household items and food, and between proper transport to get to work and social activities that put

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

them in a position similar to that of their neighbours. We often forget to add access to services to the list. In all such poverty debates we must remember that although progress is being made and policy may be heading in the right direction, there is still an inordinate and unacceptable number of people in households suffering such deprivation.

Such poverty leads to stress, and the Minister was right to mention family backgrounds and situations. The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire made the argument one of his unique selling points, and good for him, because it is true. Stress resulting directly from an inability to meet household budgets leads to family breakdown, and that is immensely costly to the state. The more we can do to prevent that happening, the better off we will all be.

The other thing that the statistics do not cover adequately is the current level of indebtedness. The one thing that is certainly different from Seebohm Rowntree's days in York is the fact that today people have access to credit. My young son has only just graduated—hooray for that, says the Kirkwood household—from Glasgow university, but he has already been approached by literally dozens of financial institutions, saying, "Welcome to the new life of the graduate. You will have a secure professional career over the next 40 or 50 years. Can we offer you £5,000 credit?" My son is able to cope with that because he has a rather stern father who sits on his shoulder and gives him sound advice about such things. It is much harder for people on income support not to take advantage—if that is the right word—of debt from all sorts of sources, including loan sharks.

There are real problems with the social fund. We have discussed that, and I know that the Minister's heart is in the right place, but we have not made much progress in making the social fund a more reasonable and effective vehicle for tiding people over life crises. That would be possible with just a bit of extra money but, as I said earlier, I do not think that there is much extra money in the departmental pot.

We are living in a great European age, and I was struck by some recent Eurostat figures. One Eurostat publication, "The social situation in the European Union 2002", contains the claim that the proportion of people at risk of poverty in the UK is only slightly lower than in Greece. That rather surprised me, even though the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire indirectly referred to that. The risk of poverty in the United Kingdom is very high.

The second Eurostat publication of note that crossed my desk recently was "European social statistics: Income, poverty and social exclusion 2002". It declares that the United Kingdom has the highest proportion of children in households with income below 60 per cent. of the median for 13 European countries. The Minister might say, with some credibility, that there are changes in the pipeline that will address the issue, so that our relative position in Europe will improve—but those changes had better be made, because the fourth biggest economy in the world should not have to face such statistics, even though some of them may be an overhang from 18 years of Conservative Government. We cannot be complacent about any of the figures. We need to work harder and get policies in place that urgently address the problems.

Earlier this week during the Prime Minister's appearance before the Liaison Committee, there was an exchange about child poverty. I was slightly taken aback in 1999 by the Prime Minister's claim, in his Beveridge lecture at Toynbee hall, that he would abolish child poverty by 2020. There were two staging points in that process. He set out policies that would reduce child poverty by a quarter by 2004-05—that is, within the next three-year spending review period. Can the Minister tell us whether the Government are on target for that? The Institute for Fiscal Studies considered that claim carefully and concluded that unless there were significant increases in benefits or more people were put into work, the chances of reaching the target as currently defined were remote. However, if the target is not to be met—targets sometimes are not met—I am doubly worried. The Government's consultation on defining poverty finished a few days ago, and I am concerned that there is to be an attempt to change the criteria by which poverty is measured before 2004, so that, come 2004, the Prime Minister can say, "In 1999 I got it right."

The consultation is important because it deals with vital concepts and concerns about definition that I put to the Minister in an intervention. Definition is now essential. The Work and Pensions Committee, in its previous guise as the Social Security Committee, did some serious work in that regard in the course of earlier inquiries. It concluded that minimum income standards—which are used by our sister European nations as a matter of course—are necessary in order to establish definitions with which all can agree. I do not care whether targets or benefits, if they are measured against minimum income standards, are not met every year.

It is time that we drew up a set of material conditions that provide a modest but adequate family life in the United Kingdom and measured benefit levels against them. That would be a very strict discipline and I hope that that will be the sort of suggestion that comes out of the consultation that has just concluded. If the Government are thinking of trying to work a flanker, as my granny used to say, and move the goalposts on how poverty is measured between now and 2004 merely so that the Prime Minister can say that he has met his target, that would be entirely unacceptable and would give rise to the sort of cynicism and disconnection among the population that cause us such concern.

The Minister talked about a strategy for putting people into work. I agree with that in principle. There have been some welcome developments, and the statistics on those who are nearest to the employment market have been relatively impressive. However, it is not safe to rely on the assumption that work means that people are not in poverty. When working tax credit comes on stream next year it will help, although there are some significant questions about take-up. I am still not satisfied—I do not think that the Government are putting enough effort into it. However, if the Government are saying that anybody who is in work is not poor, they are wrong.

The New Policy Institute has found that half the adults and children who fall below low-income thresholds are in working households—in families that are in the happy situation in which at least one member is in full-time or part-time work. It is not safe to depend on a policy of work to tackle poverty. Although it can be argued that the breadth of poverty has declined, the depth of poverty—how far people are below the low-income threshold—is increasing. If I had longer, I could trade statistics with the Minister to persuade him of that. There are aspects of tackling poverty that go beyond the important measure, which I endorse, of getting people off benefits and into work.

I shall say only one more thing, because I do not want to delay hon. Members for too long. Pensioner poverty is a crucial issue. I am very disappointed that the pension credit take-up target is not more ambitious. We heard further words on that from the Chancellor in his statement on the comprehensive spending review. I believe that before the Chancellor's statement, the target was 67 per cent. by 2004; now the target for pension credit take-up includes another 200,000 pensioners, increasing the target by 6 per cent. to 73 per cent. by 2006. That is not an ambitious target. The extra resources for pensioner households are welcome, but the Government need to work much harder. The comprehensive spending review statement was disappointing in that respect.

The Government must concentrate on the number of people on incapacity benefit who want to work, but they must approach the matter sensitively. If they attack the issue inappropriately, people will feel that they are being forced into work when their ill-health makes it impossible for them. That will require additional resources because those cohorts of the work force are currently the furthest away from the active labour market.

Members of the Work and Pensions Committee have visited countries such as the Netherlands, where people take a far more sophisticated approach to working with such groups. Private sector and voluntary groups of specialists get alongside those folk who are in what they describe as the hardest-to-help phase. They have had signal success, not only in getting people ready for work, but in following them through and supporting them during their first three to six months in the labour market. That policy works. The additional support costs money, but the departmental budget will need extra resources if it is to deal with the problem of incapacity benefit. There is a problem in the Netherlands, as there is here, but I hope that the problem will remain on the ministerial desk.

Additional help for child care was announced in the comprehensive spending review earlier this week. That is welcome because child care is an essential item that we must take seriously. I took that message from our study tour to America, but the Select Committee will consider that issue in due course.

Regional job gaps in areas such as Glasgow are another serious issue. The Chancellor goes about giving everyone the impression that there is work to be had all over the country. That is true in the majority of areas, but it is not true in downtown Glasgow, downtown Liverpool and downtown London. That is why the unemployment figures are difficult to explain regionally. The Government's strategy does not take account of those gaps—they seem to think that a one-size-fits-all strategy of welfare to work will deal with the problem. Some employment zone projects have been positive; they are being extended, and I hope that they will be further extended. However, job gaps remain which people—even if they have training and the soft skills to which the hon. Member for Wycombe rightly referred—cannot bridge because there is simply no work to be had.

Finally, I concur with the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) that rural poverty must not be forgotten. Much valuable innovative work is going on in inner cities; I have seen it for myself and it works, but I see no sign of anything special being done for people who live 15 or 20 miles or further away from employment opportunities. Unless the Government maintain a rural-urban balance in their policies, we will fail people in rural areas. The strategy is right, but the funding for the next three years may be inadequate for the important task of fine-tuning the implementation of policies. I hope that the Minister will deal with those points when he makes his winding-up speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. The Minister must have at least 10 minutes to respond to the debate. There are two Front-Bench spokesmen in the Chamber, so if they wish to use all the time available, they may consider it appropriate to use no more than half the time each.

4.24 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I should just like to confirm that the debate finishes at half-past 5, so we have sufficient time to make our points. This has been a valuable debate. We have heard some well-reasoned contributions, not least from my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, whose expertise on the subject far exceeds my own and who managed to say almost everything that I want to say. That shows admirable consistency.

I congratulate the Minister on allowing such a full debate, as it is extremely important that the House debates the issue regularly. In our political activity, we often do not give it sufficient attention. In my own small way, I helped matters in the previous Parliament by securing a debate on rural poverty. That might have been the only time that we had the opportunity during that Parliament to consider some of the issues in the round.

I commend the Minister on how he approached the debate. He applied his usual rationality, and I hope he will accept that if I disagree with him, I do so in the belief that we have the same intentions on poverty reduction. We seek to find the best mechanisms to achieve results. He brought optimism to the debate, as well as satisfaction with what the Government have done. Not all of that was misplaced by any means, as there has been some success.

I am concerned by the possibility that we may not be doing as well as we hope, however, and I want to dwell on that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said, 30 million people fall into the present definition of poverty. I do not want to get into a debate about how we define poverty in relative or absolute terms; to some extent, that is a sterile debate other than to give us points of reference, so that we know whether we are improving the situation or whether it is regressing.

[Mr. David Heath]

My hon. Friend made an important point when he drew attention to the analysis by the New Policy Institute of what is happening. It rightly refers to the Government's success in reducing the total number of people who fall within the definition of poverty. However, on closer examination it reveals that the main component of that reduction is people who find work. That is no mean achievement. Let us celebrate the fact that people are finding work and going into employment, and let us hope that that is largely a result of Government policies functioning well.

We disagree with the Government on aspects of compulsion and benefit sanction, but we do not disagree with their view that tailored programmes to deal directly with people who find it difficult to move into work are the right way to reduce unemployment. My concern is that there is inevitably some fragility.

We have drawn attention many times to the sharp decline of this country's manufacturing base in recent years, and the increasing reliance on service industries. We have also pointed out more recent changes that mean that even new industries such as information technology and financial services are shedding labour. There is a danger that we may go into a world recession that will affect this country, even if not because of our internal policies. If so, unemployment would rise markedly, and we would not be able to maintain even the improvements made to date.

The greater worry brought to light by the work of the New Policy Institute is the evidence that many of those in work are still in poverty. Low income in work has not changed as a factor in terms of the number of people who fall within the definition of poverty. As my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said, half the adults and children below the threshold—I shall leave pensioners aside for the moment—live in working households. That is a matter of concern, because it suggests that the Government's policies have not yet reached the people at whom they are targeted—those who are in work but still on low incomes. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that that is particularly true of households in which only one person works and of people who are engaged in part-time work.

Why is work no guarantee that a household will be taken out of poverty? If we look behind the figures, it is clear that part of the reason is the reduced take-up of the working families tax credit, which, at 62 per cent., is not adequate. Housing costs are another component, as is the sheer insecurity of many people in low-paid and, very often, temporary employment.

My hon. Friend said that we had seen a narrowing of the poverty base but not a reduction in the depth of poverty. We should be clear about the fact that marginal changes that simply move people from just below poverty level to just above it work well in statistical terms, but they probably do not matter that much to the household and do not change its lifestyle.

It is noticeable that the headline figures are remarkably consistent, with the exception of those for the south-east and eastern regions. Broadly speaking, there has been a reduction, although not, perversely, in the west midlands. A big gap is opening up in the south-east and eastern regions, and it is a concern that the proportion of people in poverty in London will soon be twice as big as that in the area that surrounds it. That aside, the figures for the different regions, including Scotland and Wales, fall within a 5 per cent. range. That shows that we have a national problem, not a regional one, although there is a regional dimension.

The Government have rightly made child poverty a prime target. It is an hereditary condition, and those who experience it in childhood will often lack opportunities for educational achievement and will face difficulties in finding employment. As a result, a new generation of children will live in poverty. If we tackle child poverty, we shall make a substantial contribution.

We know that the Government are keen on making progress, although they sometimes overstate things. Immediately before the election, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that 1.2 million children had been lifted out of poverty, but the official figures later showed that 500,000 had been—a marked disparity. That was immediately followed by the Department's consultation on changing the definition of poverty, although I make no causal connection.

My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire also drew attention to the targets and to whether there is any degree of fudge. I hope that there is not and that we are as crisp now in our objectives as we always were. Objective 1 of the public service agreements still commits us to ensuring the best start for all children and to ending child poverty in 20 years—hooray to that. The 2000 target read:

> "Make substantial progress towards eradicating child poverty by reducing the number of children in poverty by at least a quarter by 2004."

However, the 2002 target takes a subtly different position, and reads:

> "Reduce the number of children in low income households by at least a quarter by 2004, as a contribution towards the broader target of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020."

I hope that they are consistent targets, but there is at least a worrying suspicion that we may not achieve one of them, that that will become part of the context in which we move towards the other and that there will be scope for slippage. I also observe that 1.5 million children who are in poverty are in working households, a point that I made earlier. Unless we can target the assistance given to working households more effectively, so that those who work are genuinely better off and taken out of poverty—I know that the Minister is committed to that objective—we shall not have achieved our aims.

The second major concern is pensioner poverty. Again, we have differences with the Government about what approach should be taken. We believe that the basic state pension makes an important contribution to reducing pensioner poverty. It has the benefit that it reaches the great majority of pensioners, unlike more targeted measures that, although targeted, often miss those whom we seek to support. I hope that the Government are slightly more ambitious for their own programmes.

Another concern is that the 2002 spending review predicts that more than 1 million pensioner households will miss out on the pension credit. The Government have produced a target to pay pension credit to only three-quarters of those entitled to it—and that is three years after it was introduced. It seems that even the Government do not believe that they can reach the needy pensioners who are the supposed target of the measure. If so, that suggests either that the measure is wrong or that something radical needs to be done to encourage uptake.

I commend something that the Minister has not yet mentioned publicly, and I shall ask him to do so today. Last week, I visited the Care Direct pilot scheme in Taunton, which is being trialled in the south-west. It is co-located with NHS Direct, which is a sensible arrangement, and it has the full support of an active social services department. Most important, seconded officials from the Department for Work and Pensions are working proactively within Care Direct. As a result, people can ring up and, whatever the subject, they are directed to all the benefits to which they may be entitled; they do not have to apply for the benefits and then be told that they do not qualify.

That approach is to be commended, and I hope that the scheme will be rolled out to other parts of the country. I hope that doing so will not reduce the effectiveness shown by the pilot schemes. The scheme has had almost no publicity, but it has a high take-up and it is genuinely doing something to the benefit of pensioner families in my area.

Lastly I turn to rural poverty, a subject mentioned by the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir). It was also the subject of my debate in the last Parliament. I make one plea: we should remember that it is much easier to see urban poverty. The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) mentioned Tower Hamlets. When in London, I live there—only a stone's throw from Brick lane—and I am aware of what happens there. Indeed, it is impossible not to be aware of it. I am also aware of the relative affluence of those who live in the mean streets of Tower Hamlets and of the City next door, with its untold wealth.

That difficult juxtaposition must be difficult to bear—but let us not forget that many poor people in rural areas are virtually invisible because of a perception that the countryside is an affluent place—a misconception, but nevertheless a conception. Those who are less well off not only have the difficulties of living in a society where they may not be the norm but they have no access to the services necessary to support them. Unfortunately, they have no prospect of access to those services because the Government understandably target those areas with the highest concentration of need.

I shall give an example of that trend, although it does not fall under the Minister's Department. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport targets sports facilities for the most deprived wards. Such help does not apply in my area at all, although people there are poor, live 16 miles from the nearest facility, have no means of getting there, no public transport and no prospect of any access to it. Help is given to areas that already have good facilities on their doorstep. Because they are defined as deprived areas, they receive help while my area receives none. I cannot argue with the most deprived areas being at the head of the queue, but I can argue with the fact that those who are less well off in smaller pockets of the population, such as market towns and villages, are forgotten about altogether. That is wrong, and the Government need to address it.

The hon. Member for Angus referred explicitly and helpfully to carers and the disabled. I shall not repeat his words. My belief is that a test of not only this Government but all Governments is how they deal with chronic poverty, which did not go away in the Victorian period and was not a matter that the 1906 Government could afford to forget about. It is a matter for today and for this Parliament and Government. Not only are there economic costs of not addressing issues as effectively as possible, but there are huge personal costs in terms of despair, stress and break-up of relationships. That is what we should be addressing and that is what makes this debate so important.

4.41 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate from the Conservative Benches. It has been a good debate with interesting contributions from all quarters, including the speech that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). I shall follow some of the pathways already laid out by other hon. Members.

I enjoyed the Minister's opening remarks in which he set the historical scene and the bipartisan way in which he recognised the achievements of other great historical figures from different political traditions. I shall join in in the same spirit. Just as the Minister paid tribute to some prominent Conservatives, I pay tribute to the previous generations of Labour and Liberal politicians who played their part in tackling poverty. He referred to Lloyd-George, who in his early years in Government harnessed his undoubted energies and talents in the war against poverty, later using the same talents to wage war against the central powers during the first world war. Then, unfortunately, he waged war against some of his Liberal colleagues. However, we shall draw a veil over that and refer to the work that he did in his early period.

Mr. Kirkwood: Withdraw!

Mr. Clappison: I am happy to withdraw that remark, Mr. Deputy Speaker was a great man and one of our great historical figures, but I should not continue for too long on that theme.

I agree with the important points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), both of whom referred to the work done by voluntary groups and others besides the state in tackling poverty. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire was right to draw attention to the way in which a closer relationship between the state and voluntary groups can help those most in need. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe made the same point and made some important distinctions between the different types of poverty.

I join with my hon. Friends in paying tribute to all those in the voluntary sector, in charities and in various other groups who work to tackle the problems of poverty. I have seen that work being done in different parts of the country. Just this week, for example, I visited Brighton and met community-based groups of the sort to which my hon. Friends referred. Those groups worked together, sharing premises, to help many

[Mr. Clappison]

vulnerable people on the south coast. I met individuals who help the homeless, young people with serious—in many cases, disabling—health conditions, recovering alcoholics and those who are HIV positive. I pay tribute to the work done by all those individuals. Those whom they help also deserve our respect and support.

I shall follow other hon. Members today and take a broad approach to poverty. I do not want to become bogged down in statistics and definitions. I shall raise one or two specific points with the Minister, but I shall not become involved in arguments about the differences between relative and absolute poverty.

I recognise the fact that in Britain today people of different ages who live in urban and rural areas find life a struggle. We must think of how we can help them. Conservative Members are certainly aware of such problems. The Conservative party has a long and fine tradition of one-nation conservatism. The Minister was right to say that that dates back to the time of Disraeli, whose novels drew attention to the differences between the two nations.

At the memorial service for Lord Hailsham, I was reminded of the experiences of the 1930s, to which the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) and others referred. People in south Wales and other parts of the country suffered particularly badly during that depression and their experiences shaped the values of a generation of Conservatives among whom the late Lord Hailsham was one of the most distinguished. While the problems of the 1930s were different from today's in scale, nature and background, today's are serious in their own way. It is with that in mind that we take seriously our duty to hold the Government to account for their policies, and there are several issues to which I want the Minister to respond when he winds up the debate.

Other hon. Members have rightly said that tax credits are one of the Government's policy instruments. We have heard a little about them already. There has been no shortage of such policy developments. Between October 1999 and April 2003, the Government will have introduced five new tax credits for families. Four have already been abolished and two new ones introduced. There has been a great deal of activity in tax credits, but if we are to be fully informed about them and their effectiveness, we need to know the take-up figures.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said that there was 62 per cent. take-up for working families tax credit, but the Minister must put on record the precise figure. From time to time, Ministers have made assertions about take-up, but thus far in written answers they have not given the precise figure, even though working families tax credit is now in the process of being abolished. We still have not been given the full picture. It is necessary to have such a figure, and I should be grateful if the Minister gave an account today of the take-up. What proportion of working families tax credit has been taken up in terms of case load and expenditure? Will the hon. Gentleman say how many people are entitled to working families tax credit, but are not in receipt of it?

My hon. Friends referred to another of the Government's chosen policy instruments—the multiplicity of area-based initiatives. There has been no shortage of such developments. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire mentioned the inordinate number of schemes found in some areas. I believe that there are now at least 30 area-based schemes. As he said, often several run side by side at the same time. In Manchester, there are 22 schemes; in Liverpool and Newham, 21. That is an awful lot of schemes for people and communities to get used to.

In 2000 the performance and innovation unit concluded that:

> "the clear evidence from those on the ground and from the PIU's own analysis is that there are too many Government initiatives, causing confusion, not enough co-ordination; and too much time spent on negotiating the system, rather than delivering".

It was no doubt in response to such problems that the Government set up the regional co-ordination unit. It would be useful if the Minister were to discuss the co-ordination of those schemes through that unit, and told us whether the problems that the PIU unit identified in 2000 still exist and what progress the unit has made. We heard today about another unit being set up to co-ordinate Government activities. We should like to hear what has been achieved by the regional co-ordination unit that has already been set up.

We, too, are worried about pensioner poverty. I shall ask the Minister about child poverty, but it is worth remembering that poverty is a problem for other groups, in particular pensioners. I mention pensioners because it is not always as easy for pensioners to move out of poverty as it is for members of some other groups, as hon. Members on both sides said. Many pensioners, especially older ones, live in poverty, and we are worried about them in our approach to the matter.

We are also conscious of the fact that many people who are soon to be pensioners are apprehensive about their future living standards in the light of the crisis in funding pensions. Against that background, I ask the Minister to say a little more about pensioner poverty and to deal with the points that made, including the arguments about benefit take-up by pensioners, which is important. We heard today that 1 million pensioners might not be receiving the minimum income guarantee, which is the successor to income support. Is the proportion of entitled pensioners who take up the minimum income guarantee rising or falling? It would be useful if the Minister were to give an account of the size of that proportion.

Pensioners must grapple with ever-increasing complexity in the system. An increasing proportion face many serious problems, and an increasing number face means-testing in future. The Minister may be aware of recent exchanges about the proposals for the Pension Service and home visits. Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber referred to the way in which pensioners have to grapple with a complex system. We have been led to believe that the Pension Service will help pensioners, but there have been differences of opinion on how it will operate. It would be useful if the Minister were to give a definitive statement about how home visits will operate, and in particular whether any pensioner who wants a home visit will be entitled to one.

Delivery of services to pensioners and other benefit recipients is a specific and pressing subject. Will the Minister say a few words about the universal bank, which is intended to provide a service for many poorer people and to which many sub-post offices are looking as a source of relief? This is our last opportunity to raise the issue with Ministers for several months, and time is pressing on. The universal bank is scheduled to open in April 2003 to coincide with the introduction of automated credit transfer, and it is important from all points of view that that is co-ordinated. For some time, Ministers have been telling us that progress is being made, but we would like the Minister to reassure us today about the latest position on the universal bank.

We share the concern about child poverty and the questions about what has been achieved. No doubt the Minister heard the points that were made and wants to respond to them. We share the objective of tackling child poverty and the consciousness of the problem of rural poverty, concern about which was expressed from certain quarters. The remoteness of rural services can affect people living in rural areas, and they can face quite different problems of poverty. We regard those problems as being every bit as serious as poverty in urban areas and other settings.

I hope that the Minister will not mind me pressing him on these points, but they are important to people who are less well off. It is important to get at the facts about poverty. We recognise the challenge that poverty presents to all political parties. Issues of significant public interest are at stake, not least the substantial sums of public money involved in his Department's budget and the Treasury spending on tax credits. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire rightly referred to the scale of that spending compared with that of other Departments, especially the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills. We want to hold the Government to account on those significant issues, but share the concern and consciousness of poverty and the expressed wish to tackle poverty effectively in Britain today.

4.56 pm

Malcolm Wicks: I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, albeit late in the day. I note that, this week, you have chaired debates in which I have spoken, not least that on the Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill that was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). It is a pleasure to see you again in the Chair, although you may not be so pleased to see me.

It is customary on these occasions to say that this has been a useful and interesting debate. It is true that we have heard several distinguished and interesting contributions, and I thank colleagues for the way in which they have addressed the issues. I indicated to the Chair that I might require 10 minutes to reply. That is still my intention, but it could be quite a long 10 minutes, as I want to do my best to reply to the detailed points raised. As is usual on these occasions, not least with regard to the more statistical and technical issues, it might be more sensible if I write to colleagues.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) made a thoughtful and helpful contribution, and I will pick up on one or two of his more detailed points. I think that he was saying that social security expenditure has increased despite the Government's intentions. That is true, especially when one brings the tax credit system into the equation, as one must. Our objective was always to reduce what we call the costs of economic failure. The evidence shows that we have reduced those costs in the social security system. The figures that I have to hand show that expenditure on unemployment benefits—to use the old-fashioned language—has declined since 1996-97 by £9 billion. I am sure that we would all welcome that. We proclaim the fact that, perfectly properly, we are spending more money on child benefit and pensions, and none of us would consider that a great economic burden. We must consider whether the components of social security spending are moving in the right direction. I contend that the evidence base shows that they are.

I was intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's account of what was clearly a useful Select Committee study tour to the United States of America. I look forward to reading the report. It seems to have been an interesting visit, and I am rather envious because I used to be a member of the Committee. I accept the point about the need to work closely with people who are excluded or alienated from the labour market. One of our greatest challenges is to work out how to help a range of differently excluded groups. For example, we must help the man—they are often men—in his mid-50s who has not worked for five or more years and who feels that he will never get a job again. We must work with him to combat the age discrimination that affects him. Another serious example is that of a hard drug addict, but we now have resources in the Department to tackle that extremely difficult problem.

However we work with such groups, the face-to-face contact with a personal adviser is crucial. I remember visiting a mobile unit that was part of our action team for jobs on an estate in Glasgow, and I was told about an 18 or 19-year-old man who had not been in work since leaving school at 16. His adult life had had the worst possible start, but people worked with him and counselled him, and he was offered an interview at a warehouse. He did not have a jacket, tie, shirt and the rest to wear to the interview. However, because of the flexible funding available under the action team for jobs and an arrangement with a local clothing store, he was kitted out, got the job and is now working well. That is an example of the intensive care that some people of all ages need.

When we proclaim the achievement of having almost 75 per cent. of people of working age in work, we must ask who make up the other 25 per cent. and how can we work to help them. It is true almost by definition that working with that group will always be more difficult because of the exclusion that some people experience. *[Interruption.]* Word reaches me that a vote in the House is imminent.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire also spoke about pockets of deprivation in affluent areas. I understand his point, and the area approach has been discussed. In the late 1970s when I was very young, I worked in the Home Office deprivation unit on generating area approaches. The Conservative Government pursued the policy as well, so it has been a feature of all Governments. However, I understand that there can be a great deal of poverty in seemingly affluent areas, sometimes spatially concentrated and other times more dispersed. The sure start scheme is conducting research on how to direct help to children in rural areas and to what the hon. Gentleman described as small pockets of deprivation.

[Malcolm Wicks]

There was good news in this week's announcement that the education maintenance allowances, about which I knew something when I was a Minister in what was the Department for Education and Employment, are now to go nationwide. We piloted them extensively in poor areas in a third of the country, and they will mean that a 16-year-old in Bedfordshire, Croydon or wherever who stays on in education or training, or who needs to be persuaded to do so, will benefit from that education maintenance allowance. There are some steps in the right direction, at least.

I turn to the contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David), who had to leave the debate earlier because of other business but has now returned. He drew on his experience of Wales and of its history—the economic disadvantage that has so shaped the thinking of the people of Wales and their political representatives. He mentioned the important generation that included Jim Griffiths, who, as I recall, was largely responsible for the national insurance system after the war, following on from the Beveridge report. My hon. Friend understandably emphasised the importance of full employment.

As I think I implied earlier, when reflecting on what I have heard about the United States visit, in some respects, our difficulties today are greater and more complex, although that might seem a foolish thing to say. We are no longer talking about an economy in which literally millions of men—they were mainly men—worked in the great industries such as steel, the shipyards and coal mining. We are now talking about an era in which more and more jobs are in small and medium-sized enterprises. We need to understand the individual. The task of Jobcentre Plus therefore becomes more complex in some respects, although I am not saying that today's circumstances compare economically with the difficulties faced before the war. I would not say anything as naive as that.

My hon. Friend mentioned high rates of economic inactivity, and that issue has been a feature of our debate. We need to recognise that, although the figures for unemployment are moving in the right direction, it should not hide the fact that, many people, not least those in their 50s, are economically inactive. They are not in work and are often on incapacity benefit. I seem to recall that about one in three men aged 50 to 65 across our country are economically inactive. We need to ask serious questions about that.

5.7 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

5.22 pm

On resuming—

Malcolm Wicks: Before we went to vote in the Chamber, I was making the point to my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly that the issues raised by economic inactivity rates are very important and quite challenging. We recognise that many people have physical incapacities or disabilities, such as the muscular or skeletal problems found in those who worked in heavy industry, and we also recognise that, in the last decade or so, the number of conditions associated with mental stress seems to have grown.

There is absolutely no question but that those with serious disabilities have an absolute right to be on benefit—there should be no doubt about that—but the fact is that the numbers drawing incapacity benefit are now three times higher than they were in 1980. Therefore, some serious questions must be asked. One of the future strands of thinking has to be how we better join up—I am afraid I use that phrase again—different aspects of government to offer a rehabilitation service for people with such disabilities. Economic inactivity among the over-50s—and some younger people—is now one of the great challenges facing the Government. I welcome the way in which my hon. Friend introduced that important subject.

The hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) put emphasis on those in permanent poverty. He picked up on a point that I raised concerning the statistics. Clearly, students are relatively poor, as I seem to recall from my experience. Nevertheless, if children spend too much of their childhood in poor families, they get off to the poorest, in all senses of the word, start in life.

I was interested in what the hon. Gentleman said about a lack of social capital. We have something to learn from some of our ethnic communities. We often talk about ethnicity and ethnic minorities in a global, generalised way, which I find unhelpful, not least in my constituency of Croydon, North where different ethnic communities make up perhaps one third of the electorate. I am always struck, not only when I meet families and talk to them about education but when I see the data, by how well our children of Indian origin—they are mostly Gujarati in my constituency—are doing in schools. They outperform the indigenous white population. When I visit homes and see children doing homework in cramped conditions, I realise that the ethic is about improvement. A huge value is placed on education. Parents accept that their role is as important as that of the teacher and the school, and many other communities should reflect on, and draw upon, that example.

Pension credit has been a feature of one or two contributions. We understand the problem of entitlements not being taken up by older people. We are doing our best to simplifythe claim process for the minimum income guarantee—indeed, we have simplified it—and will seek to ensure that pension credit claims are as simple as possible, which is important.

We should acknowledge that means-tested benefits, whether they are new forms such as pension credit or more traditional forms, always have advantages and disadvantages, and I have been interested in that debate for some time. The great advantage of means-testing is that one can concentrate resources on the poorest, but a disadvantage is that one needs to work hard to explain and communicate the details of such benefits. Whether it was national assistance, supplementary benefit, income support or pension credit, all Governments since the war should have worked harder to get the message across, and we need to acknowledge that.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Minister is right that we need to be honest. The new Pension Service is using new technology, making contact by telephone and is well placed to persuade people to take the extra step and claim their entitlement. That is why the increase in the targets over the next three-year period is very disappointing.

Malcolm Wicks: The new Pension Service, which is a new aspect of business in our Department, will enable staff to talk to people on a one-to-one basis about their entitlement. Staff will use the opportunity of telephone contact to answer not only the immediate query, which might be about a pension, but to talk to people about other entitlements. There will be home visits where appropriate and we need local outlets, but the service provides us with one way in which we can start to tackle an issue that remains a problem.

Mr. Clappison: The Minister has just said that there will be room for home visits where appropriate, and I want to press him on that. If a pensioner wishes to receive a home visit, will they receive one?

Malcolm Wicks: Yes, that is the intention. If someone wishes to receive a home visit they should receive one, and we are developing our ideas about that. The Pension Service is very new, but that must be the approach. I imagine that the hon. Gentleman probably makes home visits when they are appropriate in his constituency. I certainly do in my constituency. People often want to show one something in their home or they may be too infirm to visit a constituency office. Any decent service has to provide an entitlement to home visits.

Andrew Selous: I must admit to becoming increasingly confused on the specific point about whether pensioners will be entitled to a home service if they want it. The chief executive of the Pension Service, Alexis Cleveland, clearly told the Select Committee that the Pension Service will decide who gets a home visit. Normally, it will be a telephone-based service and home visits will be granted at the say-so of the Pension Service and not at the choice of the pensioner.

Malcolm Wicks: If the hon. Gentleman finds it helpful for me to write to him in greater detail, I shall. The purpose of the new Pension Service is to offer a better, customer-focused, more individual service to our elders. We know from experience that many prefer to have interaction over the telephone, and that often works well. We are thinking hard about how to localise the service. Many people—not a huge proportion, but thousands of cases—would welcome home visits, and the service has to provide that. I shall write to him with more information on that point. I am more a Minister for work than for pensions, but I shall try to clarify the issue.

I understand the complexities that pensioners face. It might help if I briefly say something about a recent decision on housing benefit. By and large, people on housing benefit have to reapply for it every year. They have to fill in a new form and produce the necessary documentation. As the Minister responsible for housing benefit, I have recently examined the issue and decided, not least because I was influenced by the logic of pension credit, that we will end that rule. Yes, if people win the lottery, they will have to report a change of circumstance. We must secure the system, but the idea of an 85-year-old having to reapply every year for housing benefit when circumstances have not changed is nonsense. I know from constituency cases that reapplying can cause real distress, so we have decided to abolish the need for that, and the decision will take effect in the near future. I hope that I have outlined our approach to the matter.

The hon. Member for Wycombe raised marriage as a sub-theme of our discussion. He understandably made the point that politicians must tread carefully on such issues. I agree. However, I do not think that treading carefully on issues such as family policy necessarily means walking backwards fast. I accept the prejudice, based on substantive and quantitative evidence from the 1958 longitudinal study, that children brought up in stable families do better over a whole range of indicators than others. There is no doubt about that in my judgment. Usually, such results are associated with marriage, but I want to be deliberately careful when mentioning that. As a demographic or sociological point, whether the results are related to the marriage per se or to the stability and seriousness of couples who decide to get married rather than have other arrangements, that is something that we could debate. Nevertheless, we must not be too complacent about marriage because, as has been acknowledged, this country has exceedingly high divorce rates. Many children suffer as a consequence of the divorce of their parents. We are certainly in difficult territory.

The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) was a little more pessimistic than some—he should cheer up. I am not complacent when I consider the issue of poverty. I have been trying to do something about it for much of my career, but some of the indicators should make him happier than he seems to be. He was trying to have fun with the estimate of the number of children now out of poverty, but there are different ways of looking at that.

The fact that a million or so children might be financially better off because their parents have cash in their pockets is important. However, the real improvement—I mean real in the technical sense—is that 500,000 children have been taken out of poverty since the election. That is an achievement from which we should take some satisfaction, as we gather up the strength and confidence to go further down that path.

Mr. Weir *rose—*

Malcolm Wicks: The hon. Gentleman has cheered up and wants to intervene.

Mr. Weir: The Minister said that I was having fun. I was not. The point is that the Government tried to spin the issue in a certain way, but that backfired on them. No one disputes that 500,000 children have been taken out of poverty. That is a good thing, but the Government then claimed that the figure was 1.2 million; and then, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) pointed out, they attempted to redefine poverty.

Malcolm Wicks: I am committed, as an egalitarian, to concepts of relative poverty, but I recognise that my constituents are not so fascinated by it and are more interested in whether they have enough money in their pockets to buy things for their children. Both perspectives are important.

The hon. Gentleman was slightly unfair about our position for pensioners. Whatever his misgivings, the Government have spent a great deal more money on pensioners—an extra £6 billion a year in real terms—as a result of the policies that we have introduced since 1997. Although many people debate the earnings link—I always listen; it is an interesting debate—we are now spending three times more than an earnings link since 1998 would have given pensioners. We must put these things into perspective.

I realise that there is still too much unemployment throughout the nation and in Scotland. There is also a spatial dimension to that. I have mentioned my discussions with Glasgow Members about some interesting projects there that guarantee work in intermediate labour markets, and I am committed to helping such projects. However, the employment rate in Scotland is 73.5 per cent., which is slightly less than the Great Britain total. Unemployment rates on both measures are rather higher in Scotland than in England, but the employment rate has risen by more than 3 per cent. since 1997. The unemployment rate on both counts has fallen, so we are moving in the right direction.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)—I think of him as my hon. Friend; he was Chairman of the Select Committee when I was a member—asked about the spending review. We know that spending in recent times has been directed towards priorities in health, education, transport and so on. My Department already accounts for 29 per cent. of total public spending, although that figure may include tax credits. However, that is a huge percentage of the total budget. We have been engaged in redirecting that budget as unemployment reduces, directing instead towards priorities for children, pensioners and those with disabilities.

We have not been forgotten by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We have made sure of the money that is needed to roll out Jobcentre Plus, and we have also secured £200 million over three years to help local authorities achieve national performance standards in housing benefit. I felt vulnerable when asking housing authorities to improve their act on housing benefit because I could not offer them the financial support that they needed. We now have the money, and there will be a 50 per cent. increase in funding for anti-fraud work for all local authorities who take up the verification framework. I know that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire is interested in that. As a quid pro quo we offered—the offer has been accepted—to introduce the first anti-fraud housing benefit target of a 25 per cent. reduction by 2006. We are investing in local authorities, but the tackling of fraud has to be a priority for them.

The hon. Gentleman raised important points about the public's perception of the greed of company directors. My only comment on that would be that we are all engaged, in our different ways, in trying to make sense of the balance between rights and responsibilities in society and in trying to promote an ethical framework for what we do in our private lives and in terms of public spending. The debate about housing benefit sanctions, which the House is holding tomorrow, is an aspect of that. Those who are already powerful and rich must not be seen to be undermining that framework. Our position is that, if responsibility is good enough for the poor and the powerless, it is certainly good enough for the rich and the powerful. It undermines what we are about if all our citizens do not accept that.

I was asked about the child poverty target, for which my Department has joint responsibility with the Treasury. The target is to reduce by a quarter the number of children in relative low income below 60 per cent. of median by 2004, against a 1998-99 baseline. It will be monitored using household below average incomes data. The results show that we are around a third of the way there, after a third of the time. That represents good progress.

On rural areas, we should be very sensitive. All of us, not least those of us who are Londoners, tend to think about poverty in terms of urban conglomerations, inner-city poverty and housing estates. As we recognised in the earlier discussion on Bedfordshire, there is rural poverty and the Government understand that. There are success stories, however. I am told, for example, that the jobcentre in Argyll and Bute has a high success rate with the new deal. We are thinking hard about the new technology available, such as the job points in jobcentre offices. We should consider how we could put those job points into rural areas and other locations, using premises in the voluntary and private sectors if necessary, and some in the public sector, such as post offices. Technology can help, although I am not implying that it is the whole answer.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) reminded us of the world economy and was thoughtful about its impact on jobs. I reiterate the importance of skills in relation to that. The more that we can skill-up our work force—starting with the young but going right through to those who are jobless in their fifties—the stronger our position will be should the world economy take a more difficult path. The Learning and Skills Council in England, the equivalent body in Wales, initiatives in Scotland and the Connexions service for young people will all help with that.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) paid tribute to voluntary groups, acknowledging their important role. Although the state must properly take the lead in producing a more socially secure society through employment and social security and tax benefits, the voluntary sector or other agencies of the welfare state in local government and the health service can do very important work with families in great difficulties.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire mentioned Homestart. I have seen its work in my constituency and it plays a remarkably good role with fragile families that need help with skills and on other fronts.

Some interest was expressed in the take-up figures for the working families tax credit. We should all acknowledge that there are now nearly 450,000 more awards under that system than there were under the family credit. Whatever the take-up problems, there has been a great deal of success. I am advised—this is an

Inland Revenue matter and we are in close touch—that it is not possible clearly to identify how many families could be entitled to tax credit.

On the universal bank, I am not in a position to add to the statements that have already been made. We have done our best to keep the House informed of progress. We are committed to the bank as we move towards automatic credit transfer, which is necessary to help us in the battle against fraud and to enable more people to have bank or post office accounts and to become part of the financial mainstream. Nevertheless, we shall safeguard the desire of many of our pensioners to continue to be able to go to the post office—

It being fifteen minutes to Six o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 23 July 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Criminal Records Bureau

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The Police Act 1997, which established the Criminal Records Bureau, came into force some two months before the 1997 general election. The decision to create a centralised criminal records bureau was well received. The National Association of Clubs for Young People wrote to me at the end of last week to say that it fully supports the principle of the CRB.

Hon. Members have signed several early-day motions, including early-day motion 1335, which 75 hon. Members signed. Before the motion begins its complaint, it states:

> "That this House welcomes the establishment of the Criminal Records Bureau."

Early-day motion 1273, which some 63 hon. Members signed, also states that.

The Protection of Children Act 1999, a private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) with Government support, provided a list of all individuals who are unsuitable to work with children. It also provided for the CRB to administer checks against that list with an obligation on organisations to carry out checks on new recruits and volunteers. The CRB thus became the central access point for all organisations for information on convicted or suspected child abusers.

The CRB issues three levels of criminal record certificates of disclosure. The first is the standard disclosure, which is primarily for posts that involve working with children or vulnerable adults, but includes one or two legal professions and the accountancy profession. It provides details of all convictions on the national police computer, including spent convictions, cautions, reprimands, and names held on lists kept by the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills.

The second level of disclosure—the enhanced disclosure—is for those who will have a greater degree of contact with children, such as teachers, scout masters and guide leaders. It, too, provides the information under the standard disclosure, but adds a check of local police records.

Finally, the basic disclosure is available for all types of employment, including voluntary positions. It lists unspent convictions under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, and is applied for, and issued to, the individual concerned. It is up to the individual to choose whether to show it to their employer. It is a passport for employment in some professions, such as the care home industry. However, the procedure for seeking a standard or enhanced disclosure is different from that for the basic disclosure. An organisation is required to register for a standard or enhanced disclosure, which costs some £300 plus £12 to register any counter-signatories. Each further disclosure will cost £12, although that fee is waived for volunteers. Requests for standard and enhanced disclosures must be counter-signed by a registered counter-signatory. As expected, organisations have used the umbrella organisations of which they are members and to which they are affiliated to secure registrations on their behalf. A school seeking a disclosure will use the local education authority to seek that on its behalf as the registered body. That sounds fine in theory, but I have one or two observations about the costs and performance of the CRB.

On the cost, early-day motion 1326, which began life on 16 May, states that

> "this House notes the Government's pledge made last year to meet the costs of police checks on those volunteers wishing to work with young and vulnerable people through the voluntary sector . . . but expresses grave concern at the fact that the cost of carrying out the criminal record checks will be passed on to the volunteers by the new Umbrella Registered Bodies, leaving organisations such as the Scouts . . . facing huge costs, or the individual volunteer facing costs".

Similarly, early-day motion 1273, which began life on 9 May, notes

> "with regret the Government's failure to prevent the costs . . . being passed on to potential new volunteers by umbrella registered bodies; and urges the Government to reverse its decision and make resources available for umbrella registered bodies for this purpose, in order to encourage rather than deter legitimate volunteers".

Early-day motion 1335, which began life on 16 May, urges the Government

> "to look again at this matter to ensure volunteering is encouraged, not penalised."

That extraordinary situation has arisen despite the assurances given by Ministers.

In February 2001, the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment said:

> "We estimate that the voluntary sector will need to make at least 1.5m checks per year. That is why Jack Straw and I have worked together to ensure that organisations like the Scouts, playgroups and Sunday schools will not have to bear the cost of ensuring volunteers have undergone the essential criminal record background checks."

At that time, a Minister of State at the Home Office said:

> "We have announced our intention that standard and enhanced disclosures . . . will be issued free of charge to volunteers."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 695W.]

In one respect, they are issued free of charge to volunteers, but the volunteers nevertheless have to pay for them. The announcement by Ministers of an intention is not sufficient to deliver the reality on the ground, so what has gone wrong?

The Government pledged that no volunteers or voluntary organisations would be penalised financially. They pledged that volunteer checks would be free and, as I said, in one sense they are. However, volunteers cannot apply directly to the CRB; they must go through a registered body. Voluntary sector bodies will seek recompense only for their own costs as registered bodies, but commercial companies are free to charge what they like for the service. As a result, volunteers pay anything from £10 to £25 to have a check done. As I

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

said, the CRB makes no charge with respect to volunteers, but with regard to registered bodies, the service is not free.

The National Association of Clubs for Young People, which estimates that it will process 8,000 applications a year, anticipates costs of £60,000 a year. It has sent me the costing, and I have looked through it. The headline figure of £60,000 to process 8,000 registrations might strike people as expensive, but having looked through the costing—I am happy to send it to the Minister—I can say that the costs seem perfectly reasonable. I am referring to the costs of the clerk to do the work, the rental of the office space, IT support and so on, which mount up.

A body such as that association cannot be expected to bear that cost; it must pass it on to the volunteers. We should bear in mind the fact that the association represents about 400,000 club members, 75 per cent. of whom are drawn from the three lowest socio-economic groups. We are not talking about the Hurlingham club—it is more a case of the Boys' Brigade. Many of those club members come from our most vulnerable communities. The Government will have to deliver their pledge of a free service because the reality is that organisations will have to bear enormous costs or volunteering will be penalised by the payment.

The CRB has been criticised for running about six months behind schedule. How will it handle the volume of anticipated inquiries? What is the backlog of teacher applications? Applicant checks are to be slimmed down, with a check against only the so-called list 99 before a teacher is employed and full vetting being completed after he or she has started teaching. Will the Minister confirm that that is the case and, if it is, the implications of that, and when a normal service will be resumed or initiated?

My attention was drawn to the problem of delivery by the chief executive of New Forest district council, Mr. Dave Yates, who wrote to me about taxi drivers in his area. He said:

> "since the establishment of the CRB, all operators and drivers have encountered numerous problems, not least an unconscionable delay in response. This has led, in some cases, to the District Council being unable to issue drivers' licences and this means that certain individuals have had to suspend their livelihoods pending satisfactory resolution."

In other words, those individuals have not been able to work. I have had a helpful correspondence with the chief executive of the CRB; he has outlined to me in detail his action plan to deal with problem professions, including taxi drivers, about whom I am particularly concerned. He even helpfully gave me a telephone number that taxi drivers experiencing a problem could ring to expedite their applications. I thank him for that. However, what confidence can the Minister have that those are merely teething problems and how can we be assured that they are, without knowing in detail what they are? What is the cause of the problems?

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Like my hon. Friend, I have pursued the issue as a consequence of letters from a district council—in my case, Cambridgeshire county council. The council was naturally concerned about its failure to get timely checks on people who sought work with children and vulnerable adults. I felt particularly strongly about that when, as a member of the Standing Committee on the Protection of Children Bill, in 1999, I moved amendments that were expressly designed to provide that the CRB would have to obtain criminal record checks and enhanced disclosure within a calendar month. That is consistent with the target times that are being set, but it is clear from my correspondence with the CRB that within weeks of its establishment, and after three years of preparing to be established, it is not meeting even the targets set by Ministers at the outset and is having to take all sorts of remedial measures—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is too long for an intervention.

Mr. Swayne: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is right. It is a matter of debate who showed the greater prescience when he moved his amendments: he in spotting the problem, or Ministers in rejecting the amendments knowing that they would not be able to deliver on the demands made in them.

Mr. Lansley: I shall try not to strain your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker.

To be fair to Ministers, they said at the time that they would set targets. The point is that they are not meeting those targets because they did not put satisfactory measures in place when establishing the Criminal Records Bureau.

Mr. Swayne: My hon. Friend is right. In a parliamentary answer to me on 27 June, the Minister said:

> "the Criminal Records Bureau will be in a position, as soon as possible, to meet the high standards of service that it has set itself."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 2002; Vol. 387, c. 1070W.]

Will the Minister give us some grounds for sharing the confidence that he shows in that parliamentary answer? Will he tell us that the problems will be resolved and how that will be done?

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I was reluctant to intervene because I have been listening with great interest. Does my hon. Friend have any idea of the reasons for the problems and the failure to meet the targets? Is it because of a lack of resources or people in the CRB?

Mr. Swayne: I understand that additional staff were taken on after the initial problems were experienced, which suggests that the organisation was under-resourced when it began. However, I shall look to the Minister to explain the reasons, because I can only speculate and rely on my correspondence with the CRB, which sought to hide nothing but concentrated on how it was addressing the particular problem with taxi drivers to which I drew attention. I was grateful for that, but the CRB did not go into great detail on the wider problems.

Mr. Lansley: I promise my hon. Friend that I shall not interrupt him again. He said that nothing was being hidden by the CRB. I am sure that that is true, but in correspondence with me, the chief executive made it clear that it had a service standard of meeting 90 per cent. of enhanced disclosure applications within three weeks and 90 per cent. of standard disclosures within one week. However, he did not provide me with information about the bureau's performance compared with those standards.

Mr. Swayne: I agree entirely. If I had been more efficient and diligent, I would have tabled written questions to elicit that information, but I am sure that the Minister will tell us today.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Does my hon. Friend accept that one problem is that the CRB does not seem to know when it has received applications? Dorset county council has sent in applications that the CRB has consistently denied receiving.

Mr. Swayne: I have experience of that too. I know of taxi drivers in my constituency whose applications were never received, which is frustrating for the individuals concerned. However, that problem is not exclusive to the CRB. Constituents have told me that they have been unable to establish whether their passports, which they sent by registered post, arrived at or were processed by the UK Passport Service. Many constituents complain that they have not received a reply to their letters to me although I was never aware of having received them, so it is sometimes difficult to apportion blame.

Finally, I shall give the Minister what might be described as a hospital pass. It is a question that I am sure that he will be unable to answer, but I would be happy if he passed it on to the appropriate Minister who can answer it. I have received many representations from an organisation called Hampshire Care. One of its complaints has been the number of staff waiting to have their own disclosures processed. The key question for that organisation is the proper lifespan of a criminal records disclosure, by which I mean the lifespan that the registered person should apply to the validity of the document.

There is a great deal of labour mobility in the care home industry—people move from one care home or employer to another—and using their basic disclosure they are able to show the certificate that they acquired from another employer. The key question for the care homes organisations concerns the point at which they should seek a new disclosure. Those organisations asked that question of officials at the Department of Health on 14 February, and again on 11 March, 30 April and 30 May, but have not yet had an answer. I do not expect an answer today, but I am sure that the Minister will be able to supply me with one at some point.

Mr. Chope: Will my hon. Friend ask the Minister how the accuracy of the information that comes from the CRB will be ensured? I have a constituent who is a distinguished former RAF officer, who has found that he has—allegedly—a criminal record going back to 1990. Obviously that is not the case, but he is being required by the CRB to disprove that conviction.

Mr. Swayne: I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure us that we have not turned the principle of English justice on its head by requiring people to prove their innocence, and that the CRB will take a more pragmatic approach in such cases.

9.51 am

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) on securing the debate. I have attempted to table an Adjournment debate on this subject for some weeks. My hon. Friend has spoken elegantly and effectively, and has drawn attention to the problems of which we have become aware over recent months.

I initially tabled early-day motion 1335 with support from two Labour Members, one Liberal Democrat and one nationalist, which now has more than 70 signatures of support. It was based on concerns expressed to me by the National Association of Clubs for Young People. I pay tribute to that association for highlighting those concerns, and for demonstrating so graphically their effect on people and similar organisations. None of us disagree in principle with the fact that there should be checks of this type, and we must be certain that those who are working with children and vulnerable people do not have backgrounds or records that would make them unsuitable for that work.

None of us seeks to suggest that those checks are inappropriate. We are concerned about the practical implications, and how the CRB is working. The Home Secretary, when he was Education Secretary, estimated that the voluntary sector would need to make at least 1.5 million checks per year, and said that the Government wanted to ensure that organisations such as scout groups, playgroups and Sunday schools would not have to bear the cost of ensuring that volunteers had undergone the essential criminal record background checks. That statement was endorsed by the current chairman of the Labour party, when he was Minister of State at the Home Office. He said:

> "We have announced our intention that standard and enhanced disclosures, which include those working in sensitive positions with the vulnerable, will be issued free of charge to volunteers."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 696W.]

Organisations such as the National Association of Clubs for Young People want the Government to honour that commitment. A discrepancy has arisen because of the costs of the checks that have to be carried out by registered bodies, which include the voluntary organisations, and profit-making organisations that can charge significantly higher sums of money. The National Association of Clubs for Young People has given us a detailed breakdown of its grounds for believing that the cost will be about £80,000 in a full year for that organisation alone to check the record of its volunteers. It reckons that it needs about 8,000 new volunteers annually. That is not an extravagant figure; it works out at only three new volunteers per club throughout the country. Those people are not in a position to afford the charges; not only do the overwhelming majority of people who are supported by the clubs come from the three lowest socio-economic groups, but so do the volunteers, therefore they will not be able to afford significant charges.

The voluntary organisations say that there are direct consequences of the proposal: a reduction in volunteers would mean that the programme would be reduced

[Mr. Charles Hendry]

almost immediately and the smallest clubs, often serving deprived rural areas and, typically, maintained by the efforts of two or three volunteers, could be forced to close. We are talking not just about the costs but about a real possibility that the voluntary organisations that provide the services so effectively will have to close down, with the loss of those services.

Mr. Chope: Does my hon. Friend accept that there is a further problem? The Government are profiting from the process because value added tax is payable on the charges imposed by the club.

Mr. Hendry: I am glad that my hon. Friend made that point. I was going to come to it later in my speech, but I shall deal with it now. If the Home Secretary is right in his estimate that 1.5 million record checks a year will be required and that the average cost of each one could be about £10, the cost in total will be £15 million or more. That means that the Government stand to make £2 million, £2.5 million or £3 million a year from something that they said would be free. That is immoral. My hon. Friend tried to make changes to the Finance Bill to take that into account, but they were not acceptable because of the nature of that measure. It is completely wrong that when the principle is that the checks are free of charge the Government should profit from them through VAT. I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's comments on the matter.

I have contacted a range of other organisations that will be significantly affected. The Central Council of Physical Recreation, for example, which covers some 110,000 voluntary sport clubs, has a network of 1.5 million volunteers, and new volunteers coming on-stream will involve 30,000 checks a year, which is a phenomenal number. The CCPR reckons that the minimum cost will be £150,000 to £200,000 a year, money that could be spent on improving sports facilities, bringing in more volunteers or helping to run things more effectively, but instead it will be spent on paying charges simply to allow people to volunteer in the first place. The CCPR has decided that because of the costs involved it will not apply to become a registered body for processing applications. That means that those who want to volunteer to work with sports clubs and clubs for young people will often be driven to those who do such work on a profitable basis. One does not criticise that, but their costs will be higher than that of clubs run by a voluntary organisation.

The Scout Association says that it expects that 70,000 applications will have to be checked every year. It is already spending £25,000 on extra staffing to handle the applications and, as the year moves forward, it is possible that the cost will double to £50,000. The association believes, understandably, that that will put people off applying to become volunteers with the scouting movement.

The Church of England will be affected. Representations were made to me at the weekend by someone who was concerned by a notice from the diocese in Derby. There was concern about the cost even of a lay preacher, for example, who would have to undergo checks. The cost to the Church will be significant if it is to meet the legal requirements.

None of the organisations are in a position to bear the costs. The Prince's Trust thinks that the cost to them could be as much as £100,000 a year. These are phenomenal figures for organisations that do so much good work, often with the most vulnerable and insecure people in society, so I hope that the Minister can reassure us on the matter.

The Girl Guides tells me that it faces extra costs in handling the applications, and in training. It speaks of

> "huge cost implications involved in training our local managers who are all volunteers which is key to the system working. They are from very diverse backgrounds and will not always have the skills required to ensure that forms are completed correctly. There are also training implications associated with developing a robust appeals system to allow for appeals when a volunteer application is refused due to an adverse disclosure."

Will the Minister explain how best we can help organisations such as the Girl Guides to cope with associated costs?

As my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West said, there are two ways forward: either the costs have to be borne by the voluntary organisations themselves, reducing the scope of their work, or the costs have to be passed on to volunteers, which will discourage them. According to the Girl Guides, that is already happening. It says:

> "Guidance notes on completing forms are too detailed and are off putting to applicants."

The number of applications of people who want to work with Girl Guiding UK is diminishing because of the complicated procedure.

Some organisations say that the change will not be retrospective and claim that they will be all right because they deal only with a few volunteers. However, I understand—I hope that the Minister will confirm this—that it will be retrospective in its application to all those currently working with young or vulnerable people. The costs will be infinitely greater than many organisations currently recognise. I hope that today's debate will draw attention to such problems.

My hon. Friend also referred to delays, which are becoming extraordinarily serious. Girl Guiding UK states:

> "Replies to individual applications submitted in April/May still have not been received from the CRB",

though

> "applications submitted since June are being turned round in approximately 3 weeks."

The CRB claims that it can more closely meet the target that it set itself: does that apply only to current applications, or to historic applications as well? Will processing current applications more quickly create worse problems for applications submitted some months ago? Barnardos tells us:

> "As at the end of June only 26 per cent. of disclosure applications had been returned by the CRB, which is impacting on our ability to start new workers and volunteers into posts working with children."

It continues:

> "Summer play schemes are likely to have to be cancelled or disrupted because of the backlog."

Twenty-six per cent. is more than a quarter of the applications. It is clear that organisations such as Barnardos are feeling desperate at the prospect of such a substantial backlog.

Representations have also been made about the different forms that need to be completed. The Central Council of Physical Recreation says that it would prefer the system in Scotland, where a central registered body handles all the applications for voluntary organisations free of charge. The Scout Association has expressed frustration that it has to complete different forms in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, adding further to the bureaucratic problems. A range of issues is not being dealt with adequately.

My final point concerns the costs of the CRB. Whether the CRB is under-resourced has already been discussed. A vast increase in anticipated costs has occurred. Three weeks ago, I tabled a question to the Minister, requesting a reply by a named date. I should have received a reply three or four days later, but I have not yet—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. May I draw the attention of hon. Members to the fact that the only Member standing should be the one who holds the Floor.

Mr. Hendry: The question I asked the Minister concerned the initial anticipated costs of the CRB in comparison with current estimates. Capita, which has the contract to operate the CRB, issued a press release in July 2000 stating that the value of the contract was estimated to be around £400 million over 10 years. However, I understand that the Home Office said last month that current forecasts suggest that operating and overhead costs are estimated to be £940 million during the first 10 years of the project. That is a doubling of the estimate in two years and, by any calculation, it is a massive miscalculation. I hope that the Minister can give a clearer explanation than the information that we already have.

Those who work with young and vulnerable people are asking only that the Government should honour their clear pledge. The organisations involved took that pledge at face value and were grateful that they would not be charged by the CRB for carrying out checks. However, they did not realise how enormous the cost of preparing the forms for processing would be. The Minister will understand those concerns and I hope that he can address them this morning.

10.6 am

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne). He expressed his concerns eloquently and touched on serious issues.

The hon. Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) spoke about the costs falling on volunteers, so I shall not spend time on that, but I endorse his comments because the strong concerns about the matter are important.

Of course, checks must be made and we must have an assurance that they are adequate, but there are many questions and issues about the current situation and we all hope that the Minister will address them today. I want to touch on three areas: the failure to attain targets for disclosures, the accuracy of information and the future marketing of services.

On the targets for disclosures, I want to touch on an issue that is close to my heart. I wanted to ask the Prime Minister about it on Wednesday because it is vital. Many checks have not been carried out on volunteers who want to participate in and help to run holiday play schemes and other activities. We are all concerned about antisocial behaviour and know that diversionary programmes are necessary, but many have been held up. Have the Government put in place a fast-track system of checks so that play schemes and so on can go ahead? They are vital and one of our greatest concerns in society at the moment.

On delays, I have received, as has the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), copies of representations from Dorset county council. The leader of the council, in a letter dated 26 June, states:

> "Initial difficulties were experienced during March ... Since then over two hundred applications ... have been sent to the CRB. To date not one completed disclosure check has been received back. A similar situation exists with our Social Services Directorate. More than one hundred and seventy applications have been sent and so far only four completed checks have been received."

As the hon. Gentleman said, it is not clear that there was knowledge that those had been sent back by the bureau, which adds to the confusion.

The leader of Dorset county council is particularly concerned about performance standards and said that the National Care Standards Commission has instructed that potential employees must not be allowed to start work in children's homes prior to clearance being received—we all agree with that—and that the situation prompts the question whether, because of the poor service, the bureau will indemnify the county council for possible consequences of an unsuitable interviewee being put in post and harm arising therefrom. A number of bodies want reassurance because they are being asked to take risks or not to provide vital services. That is the choice before them. The service costs a lot, or perhaps I should say the lack of service.

Mr. Chope: The county council also says that the system that it used to operate when it obtained information from the local police was much more efficient than the new system. The new system is not only more expensive, but much less efficient.

Mrs. Brooke: Certainly, that point is being made strongly in representations to us. It shows what a long way the new service must travel before it can offer what the public deserve.

On accuracy, the data inputting has been outsourced to India and I have been informed of estimates that the data entered are only about 80 per cent. accurate. That means that some people are being wrongly identified as having a criminal record. If that is true, it is horrendous. I should like the Minister to clarify the matter, but the claim has been made to me that such people are having to prove their innocence. That seems bizarre in our system.

We have heard about the problems of escalating costs and we are aware that as the scheme is a partnership with Capita, profit must come into the equation at the end of the day. Although we all want organisations to be cost effective, I am concerned about how finance might be raised in the future. The CRB's business plans show that when it gets round to basic disclosures, which I think will be some time in the future, it has plans to

[Mrs. Brooke]

market the usefulness of basic disclosure checks on a wider group of individuals. To cover its costs, the CRB needs to look into about 6 to 9 million basic disclosures and whether it will remain financially viable if it does not hit that target is questionable. However, if it is marketing those checks, is it possible that many organisations will be inappropriately probing people's backgrounds?

A balance is needed. Of course we want security and safety checks, but the plan smacks of Big Brother if its drivers are financial rather than caring. That is what concerns me about profitability. The scheme must be cost-efficient, but should not seek profit at the expense of people's lives. That is particularly the case because we know that we need to rehabilitate offenders and bring down re-offending rates. Disclosures are appropriate in some circumstances, but we must get the balance right if we are to get people back on the right track. I should be very grateful if the Minister would address some of my concerns.

10.12 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I begin, Mr. Cook, by warmly congratulating—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I would be remiss were I not to remind hon. Members that when the House took the decision to have this parallel Chamber, it also decided that the four senior members of the Chairmen's Panel were to be referred to as Deputy Speakers when occupying this Chair.

Mr. Chope: I apologise profusely for having addressed you incorrectly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) on having introduced the debate so ably. It is significant that we have had contributions from the Opposition parties but none from Labour Back Benchers. Perhaps they are embarrassed by the failure and performance of their own Government.

Mr. Swayne: They signed the early-day motions.

Mr. Chope: As my hon. Friend says, that is despite the fact that they signed the early-day motions.

I shall not repeat many of the points that have already been so ably made, but let is be said that, on this matter, the Government have broken their promises to an important part of our community—the volunteers who make the world go round for so many young and elderly people in our localities. An intolerable burden is now being placed on those volunteers, a burden not just of cost but of inefficiency.

I want to concentrate my remarks on the case to which I alluded briefly in an earlier intervention, that of a very distinguished retired Air Force officer who lives in my constituency and is the victim of inaccurate data. The Criminal Records Bureau now requires him to prove his innocence. I hope that the Minister will take that issue seriously because it has severe implications for the issue of identity cards that use microchips, and what can happen when someone is falsely accused of having a criminal record.

My constituent writes:

> "As a contribution to charity, I have taken up acting as a volunteer driver . . . As the work involves dealing with disabled and vulnerable people, I was required to provide full information as to my identity. These details were passed to the Criminal Records Bureau . . . for checking . . . To my surprise, on 19 June this year, I received from CRB an Enhanced Disclosure . . . showing that I was, in fact, someone else with a conviction dated 8 November, 1990."

He has not passed the name of the person on to me for reasons of confidentiality, but he continues:

> "At the time of this man's conviction, I was resident in Switzerland. The only indication of a connection between the man and myself was that we were born in the same place."

He telephoned the CRB

> "who seemed a little surprised that I was making a complaint, and I also wrote to them expressing my dissatisfaction, suggesting that they recheck their data. They responded by sending me a pro-forma letter registering my complaint and asking me to send them three passport size photographs of myself, and to complete a Fingerprint Consent Form giving me a deadline date of 10th July."

There were obviously a very large number of allegations of false identity, hence a pro-forma letter.

Why should my constituent be required to complete a fingerprint consent form? Why should he be put in the position of a suspect or a convict when he is the victim of mistaken identity, and perhaps bad data and record keeping? His letter continues:

> "They would then arrange for my fingerprints to be taken by the local Police and they would be checked against the Police Central Fingerprint Database. Not unnaturally, I wrote to CRB and refused to do this, as I do not believe the onus is on me to prove that I am not someone they allege, but for them, if they wish, to prove I am not who I say I am."

He is not prepared to go to the time and expense of correcting CRB data.

My constituent says that he presumes—I am not so sure until we hear from the Minister that his presumption is correct—that the CRB has a responsibility to ensure that its data is correct, otherwise it is not worth having. He says that he has received another reply from the CRB. It seems that the CRB is quite good at dealing with correspondence, but it does not have the time to process the applications made. The CRB claimed to have rechecked its data, which showed that the convicted man had used my constituent's name, and date and place of birth as "an alias for conviction". My constituent says that he did not understand exactly what that means. He has a relatively unusual surname, so he finds it hard to believe that someone picked on that surname for part of a false identity. He will write to the CRB again to explain that he will not send photographs or have fingerprints taken, as it is for them to establish who is who for their records.

He draws to my attention and asks me to raise the issue that

> "The CRB must take responsibility for the accuracy of their data. If they find inaccuracies or inconsistencies in their data, it is their responsibility to check and correct their data, not ask innocent citizens to do their work for them."

He asks:

> "Whatever happened to the Data Protection Act when the criminal record of the man I am alleged to be has been passed to myself and others in the CRB Enhanced Disclosure? There seems to be no attempt to exercise confidentiality."

He goes on to ask what will happen if we get identity cards—or entitlement cards in Labour newspeak—that could have in a microchip containing all the person's data including their criminal record. If that happened, he asks:

> "How much confidence could one have in the quality of the data if simple cases of wrong identification like mine occur?"

I hope that the Minister will express his concern and tell us what the Government will do to ensure that similar injustices do not occur.

Perhaps because of my constituent's background in the armed services he does not say that he wants compensation. He is not suing for defamation—I am sure that he is entitled to do that, because he has been defamed by the CRB—but he seeks a system that is reliable and that can be used to ensure that information on people who have criminal records is available to those who need it but that those who do not have criminal records can remain free and at liberty.

10.20 am

Bob Russell (Colchester): The Criminal Records Bureau is turning out to be this Government's Child Support Agency. It seemed like a good idea at the time, it had all-party support and everyone believed that it would be the answer to what was perceived to be a major problem, namely, preventing those with a relevant criminal record from working in paid employment or as a volunteer with children, young people or vulnerable adults.

However, the reality is not what was expected or what was promised. I accept that the CRB is still a new organisation, but the stark position is that it has failed to meet any of its targets since it was set up, according to an answer to a question that I put at last week's meeting of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. Teething problems are one thing, but the failings cannot all be explained away with such a lame excuse.

Of particular worry is the prospect that the applications of some new teachers will not be processed in time for them to take up work in schools this September. Last Friday *The Times* reported:

> "Some new teachers may be unable to start work next term after a backlog at the Criminal Records Bureau, which does criminal checks on people working with children. The bureau has been unable to cope with the number of applications concerning teachers."

That report contradicts a written answer to a question that I put on the subject to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. I was told that contingency arrangements had been made and that

> "CRB staff are trawling the backlog of applications, and checking new applications, to identify those in respect of teachers and other key staff for schools."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 237W.]

Will the Minister clarify the precise position? The CRB, an executive agency of the Home Office, is based in Liverpool. Will the Minister tell us how many people are employed by the CRB and by its private sector partner, Capita? Do Ministers accept any responsibility for what is happening? Should we blame the CRB or Capita, which, according to a media report, has been subjected to an investigation into its activities? Apparently, Capita has been accused of improper accounting, and there are rumours that the Home Office plans legal action against it for consistently failing to meet its performance targets under a £400 million contract with the CRB. Would the Minister care to confirm, clarify or deny those serious points?

The situation at the CRB is dire. Many applications are now being processed in India because Capita and the CRB cannot cope with the huge backlog. In the light of such revelations, how confident can we be about the CRB, which is a sister organisation of the UK Passport Service? An example from my constituency illustrates the shambolic state of affairs. An application by a lollipop lady has languished with the CRB for six weeks. Every day throughout that time, hundreds of pupils who attend the Friars Grove infant and junior schools in Colchester have had to cross a busy road without the assistance of a warden. The schools break up today for the summer holidays. I hope that the CRB will have got its act together by the time pupils return in September.

I submit that the safety of every youngster has been put more at risk by the CRB prolonging the absence of a lollipop lady than the realistically non-existent threat posed to a single one of them by the highly unlikely possibility that the lady in question might have a dodgy past and would molest a child. I am told that the schools were prepared to engage her but were advised that, legally, they would be in breach of the legislation if it were subsequently found that she had a criminal record. They were not prepared to put themselves at risk in the eyes of the law, however remote the possibility.

The upshot is that the CRB—an organisation whose whole existence is supposedly for the purpose of protecting young people—has put children's lives and safety at risk because it has not processed a lollipop lady's application in the six weeks since Essex county council submitted it for clearance. She has lost six weeks' wages. People are not queuing up to become school crossing wardens—there are many vacancies.

That is not an isolated incident. Last night, my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) recounted to me a case in his constituency where someone had a job offer withdrawn because the CRB had taken too long to process the application. Youth organisations are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers, and lengthy delays by the CRB in processing applications for clearance are making the position even worse because potential volunteers can lose interest and find other things to do.

The CRB's annual report was published last Thursday and contains lots of ticks where performance tasks have been achieved. It boasts:

> "As a new organisation we have an opportunity to deliver a first-class customer service. We are fully committed to Service First principles and shall apply for Charter Mark recognition once we are fully operational."

Experience thus far is not encouraging.

The CRB admits that it exceeded its budget last year by more than 10 per cent., but failed to deliver what had been expected and promised. How much of the overspending went to Capita? The annual report observes that the

> "CRB was established as a public-private sector partnership (PPP). After a rigorous tender process we selected Capita as our private sector partner. Capita is responsible for developing the IT infrastructure; recruiting staff to operate the call centre; and making the initial identity check on applicants."

[Bob Russell]

Last year the Home Affairs Committee, which predicted troubled times ahead, said:

> "Effort should be concentrated on ensuring that the Criminal Records Bureau will operate effectively when it starts, rather than opening earlier and performing inadequately."

The Committee's reservations seem to have been realised. The Home Office's annual report shows that the CRB missed its target to commence the issue of standard and enhanced disclosure certificates by November 2001, and instead began processing such applications only in March 2002. The CRB did not become fully operational until 11 March 2002. During questions to Lord Falconer on 1 July he confirmed that the precise number of enhanced disclosures currently being made within three weeks was not known, but that it was dramatically below the target.

I have asked many questions about the CRB from before it was set up to the present. In my research for today's debate the earliest question that I could find was from January 1999, and my most recent questions led to five written answers that I received last night. I may have asked more parliamentary questions about the CRB of the Home Office, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport—in respect of sport—than any other Member, which may not come as a surprise to the Minister.

On 17 January 2001, I challenged the Prime Minister directly about the Government's intention to impose a tax on new volunteers by requiring them to pay a £10 fee to be checked out by the CRB. I followed that up with an Adjournment debate, and the Home Affairs Committee commenced an inquiry, which had only just started when there was a welcome U-turn by the Government, who agreed to scrap any fee, as the nation's voluntary youth organisations and I had requested. I suspect that the pending general election had something to do with that change of attitude.

The Government have said that clearance checks by the CRB will be free to volunteers, but the reality is that the establishment of the CRB collectively costs the nation's voluntary youth organisations several million pounds every year to service applications from new volunteers. My attempts, and those of others, to get the Government to reimburse organisations for their operating costs have proved unsuccessful. The loss of such money is to the detriment of our youth organisations, which consequently have fewer resources to invest in our young people.

In a written answer of 22 July 2002 the Minister said:

> "We have received representations from voluntary organisations requesting additional funding to meet start-up costs and ongoing overhead costs of processing applications. We have considered the representations very carefully but we have not been persuaded that it would be appropriate for additional funding to be made available for these purposes."—*[Official Report*, 22 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 96W.]

It is difficult to reconcile that refusal to help our voluntary youth organisations, sports clubs and other groups with the Government's claim that they want to encourage volunteering and promote the excellent work that the nation's youth organisations undertake.

In conclusion, I should like the Minister to consider how much it costs to lock up one youngster in a young offenders institution, and how many millions of pounds are spent each year dealing with the consequences of vandalism, antisocial behaviour and criminal activities. What about the cost to the national health service caused by the deteriorating collective health of the country's young people? That deterioration has been caused, in part, by the inadequate physical education that they receive in school and the lack of sports facilities outside school. If, rather than penalising volunteers, more was invested in organised youth activities, the public would receive better value for money. The Prime Minister says that he wants an extra 1 million volunteers to be recruited. The performance of the CRB is not helping to achieve that.

10.29 am

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) on securing the debate. I listened with great care to what he said, and also to the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) and for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). It is customary for the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman to come armed with statistics to back up the points made by the Member who proposed the debate. I have, however, rarely heard a more comprehensive and clear-cut litany of statistical evidence in a Westminster Hall debate. That evidence clearly shows that the CRB is not functioning. I will not repeat those facts to the Minister because I want him to have sufficient time to make the detailed reply that I am eager to hear.

The Minister should consider two issues of principle. There was universal approval across the House for the principle behind the introduction of the CRB and the vetting procedure. As the Minister knows, however, it was clear from the outset that there was considerable concern about the extent to which costs would be borne by voluntary organisations. The Government constantly reiterated that measures would be taken to ensure that that did not happen, but that has proved to be nonsense. The matter demonstrates, I fear, the law of unintended consequences. Departments consider a problem and identify what seems to them to be a solution—in this case, it was decided that volunteers would not have to pay to get the information—but, in fact, huge administrative burdens are created. I appreciate that the Government will say that those burdens will have to be shared to an extent, but there is a public policy issue.

I want to pick up on points made by the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) and my hon. Friends, which demonstrated the extent to which the vast bureaucratic system will have the unintended consequence of penalising and preventing volunteering. That will be to the detriment of society, even though the measures were intended to have an advantageous effect by preventing unsuitable people from gaining employment.

The other issue is performance. Performance is lamentable. The Minister will have to accept that. The CRB's own report shows that it has enormous problems. The evidence that shows that CRB's information is occasionally inaccurate—I have seen that in my constituency—is particularly worrying. I want the Minister to tell us more about the system by which the CRB operates. We have the impression that a structure has been set up. One asks a question of the structure and it comes up with an answer. It may not deliver it as quickly as it should, but it comes up with the correct answer. My hunch—perhaps it is more than a hunch, I think that one can detect this—is that the system is far more ramshackle than the existence of the CRB as an institutional agency suggests.

The recent publication relating to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, "Breaking the Circle", introduces a new topic that I will not touch on—although I remind the Minister that this valuable document contains interesting material. Paragraph 1.19, entitled "Approaches to disclosure", is about the background to the changes to the 1974 Act, which are intended to increase public protection while minimising the burden on those who should have their convictions treated as spent, thus changing the categories under which the CRB operates. It states:

> "An additional factor to consider has been the recent introduction of central arrangements for the disclosure of previous convictions through the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). The demand for checks for vetting job applicants has placed a heavy demand on local police forces. The CRB is shifting that burden to a one-stop shop service for access to criminal and other information, principally for recruitment and certain licensing purposes".

It then describes the three different levels of disclosure.

I was struck by that passage. Hon. Members may care to note its tone. First, it is clear from what is said that the CRB has not completed the shifting of that burden to a one-stop-shop service. Secondly, it highlights that in the initial stages of disclosure, the local police forces on which demand fell in practice were overwhelmed. I shall be interested to hear from the Minister what stage we are actually at. Does the CRB yet have all its data, or is it, in fact, having to shop around in a multiplicity of records? Since my time as a barrister, I have always taken the view that the criminal records system has been rather less centralised than some people may imagine. What are the procedural and logistical difficulties that the CRB must overcome to assure itself that it has all the information it needs?

My questions are genuine; they are not loaded and I do not know the answers to them. However, I have a feeling that matters are far less simple than the existence of the CRB may have led people to expect, a fact that struck me as I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch describe the case of his constituent. Sources of information seem by no means clear cut and could be open first to mistakes and secondly to a lack of confidence that the CRB is able to gain access to the information that it needs to supply the right reply. If I were working for the CRB, I would be rather anxious about giving somebody a cleared vetting when I know from the multiplicity of sources that the bureau taps into that it does not have the confidence to do that. I wonder if that goes some way to explaining the problems. What are the Government and the CRB doing about that?

As I said, I want to give the Minister every opportunity to reply. The Government have our absolute support in wanting to make the CRB work. However, the comment that it has the same feel about it as the Child Support Agency is correct in my view. We must get the system up and running and ensure that it is cost-effective, that the burden does not fall disproportionately on voluntary organisations and that answers come through accurately and quickly.

10.38 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) for raising this important issue. I am only too aware of the difficulties and problems about which he and other hon. Members have spoken in today's debate.

I shall begin by saying something simply and clearly: the Criminal Records Bureau is not currently providing a satisfactory service. I want to apologise to hon. Members for that fact. The CRB and its staff are aware that a satisfactory service is not being provided and they are working hard to put things right as we begin to deliver this important new service, which is, after all, aimed at improving the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

Before I try to respond to as many as possible of the questions that have been asked by hon. Members, it may be helpful if I set out the background. I acknowledge the point made by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and other speakers that there was and is widespread support for the creation of the CRB under part V of the Police Act 1997. As we heard, the CRB issues three levels of criminal record certificates, or disclosures. Anyone will be able to apply for the lowest level of certificate—the basic disclosure—when it becomes available early next year. However, access to the higher levels—the standard and the enhanced disclosure—is restricted to those applying for positions that are exceptions to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. That is intended to ensure that spent criminal record information is revealed only where necessary because of the sensitivity of the post for which an individual is applying.

The Police Act further restricts access to the highest level—the enhanced disclosure. Part V of the Act was amended primarily by the Protection of Children Act 1999 and the Care Standards Act 2000, which set up a single arrangement through which standard and enhanced disclosures reveal whether the applicant is included on lists of those who are unsuitable to work with children, which are held by the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills.

It was always recognised that the programme for establishing the CRB was highly complex and challenging. As we heard, the CRB replaced the previous arrangements involving separate checks with each local police force and against departmental lists. It should be remembered that the time the police took to carry out those checks under the previous arrangements varied enormously. Some checks were carried out quickly within two weeks; others took as long as three months, depending on the police force and the time of year. The creation of the CRB has thrown into sharp relief a single standard of performance compared with the previous performance of all the different police forces.

Switching from the previous arrangements involved 43 police forces, and the integration of a major central computer system and other Departments' databases. It was a massive undertaking but allows the CRB to offer a single route of access to local police force intelligence, information held by the police national computer, and lists held by the Department of Health and the

[Hilary Benn]

Department for Education and Skills. Drawing those sensitive databases together means that, for the first time, standards can be used for assessing the suitability of personnel who might be recruited into positions of trust.

The legislation under which the CRB operates requires registered bodies to countersign applications for higher-level disclosures, thereby confirming that the applicant's identity has been checked and that the higher level of disclosure is appropriate to the post or work involved. I will return to the point made by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) in a moment. These bodies may be employers or, in the case of volunteers, one of the large number of registered "umbrella" bodies. Following a major exercise, a total of 6,096 bodies have registered to date, of which 917 are umbrella bodies—an important point that relates to the issues raised by the hon. Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) and others about the impact on the voluntary sector. Of those 917 umbrella bodies, 442 are—in the jargon—open umbrella bodies that are prepared to take applications from outside their sector.

The CRB became operational on 11 March this year. Since then, more than 276,000 disclosure applications have been received and more than 119,000 disclosures have been issued. The number of disclosures currently being issued is already greater than that achieved by the old police checking system. The police carried out about 1 million checks a year; the CRB's current workload suggests that the annual rate for the first year will be about 1.5 million checks. However, as hon. Members forcefully pointed out, performance to date has not matched the service standards to which the bureau aims to work. There have been delays in processing disclosure applications, which I regret. The CRB is typically taking six weeks to process correctly completed disclosure applications. I emphasise the words "correctly completed", because one of the principal reasons for the delay is the introduction, following consultation with customers, of a paper-based application route—filling in a form—alongside the telephone route, which was originally envisaged as the principal application route. That is an experience with which hon. Members will be familiar in many other areas: if one wants to renew insurance, for example, one rings a number, gives the details and is then sent a piece of paper to sign.

A question was asked about the cause of the current difficulties. The bureau had anticipated a much higher level of telephone applications; about half the disclosures are issued within three weeks by that method, compared with the paper application route, which achieves that target for about 10 per cent. of disclosures. The contrast between the two routes is obvious. Paper applications contain very high rates of error and omission. Many forms—as many as almost half of those sent to the CRB—have had to be sent back because information was missing from them. Changes were made to accommodate paper applications; processing times are affected by incomplete applications. In addition, measures taken to overcome the early operating difficulties have led to delays in processing applications.

I am sure that hon. Members appreciate the great importance of ensuring that the CRB has the right information to make a check, because if a check is not done correctly—this relates to the point made by the hon. Member for Christchurch, to which I shall come in a moment, about the identity of his constituent—we would have a different debate, in which I would be criticised because the system had failed. The purpose of the process is to ensure the protection of children. We therefore need to ensure the proper collection of information and completion of applications. If that is done over the phone, an operator gets all the necessary information so that a form can be sent for the applicant to check and pass to his or her employer or registered umbrella body for counter-checking. That is the best way of ensuring that errors and omissions do not occur.

Mr. Hendry: Does the Minister agree that there is a third option, which is for applications to be processed electronically? Many voluntary organisations would welcome that because it gets round the problems of postal applications—although they recognise that there are difficulties with electronic signatures. Could more applications be done electronically, to speed up the process?

Hilary Benn: I do not know the answer to that but I shall inquire and write to the hon. Gentleman. We set up the CRB with the expectation that the vast majority of applications would be dealt with by telephone, which is a way of providing a service with which citizens are increasingly familiar and which, as I have tried to explain, has distinct advantages over the paper-based route in terms of making the system work more efficiently.

Many points have been made and I shall try to respond to them as extensively as possible in the time available. The hon. Member for New Forest, West asked about the life span of a criminal disclosure. That is a pertinent question but it is not an issue for the CRB. It has been suggested that checks should be made every three years, but ultimately it is the responsibility of the employer or the voluntary body to decide what is appropriate. If someone moves from one employment to another and says to the new employers, "Here's the check I received 12 or 15 months ago", the onus is on those employers—who are, after all, taking on the person—to decide whether the check is sufficiently up to date to satisfy them that the individual is safe to work with those for whom he or she will have responsibility or whether to request a further check.

Bob Russell: I am grateful to the Minister for that explanation. What advice would he give a voluntary organisation such as the Scout movement, which has tens of thousands of uniformed and non-uniformed volunteers?

Hilary Benn: The same advice would apply, because in the end the voluntary organisation faces the same responsibility. What other reassurance can one give? It is the employer or voluntary organisation that is responsible for taking on the person, whether in a paid or voluntary capacity, and it must decide the appropriate action to take. We all recognise that the CRB must be quicker in responding and issuing the disclosures, but the responsibility cannot be taken away from the organisation that takes on the person.

Mr. Grieve: I am sure that the Minister will see the difficulty that that poses in practice. It is one thing to vet a stranger who comes along and says that they want to work in an organisation, but a slightly unusual thing to tell someone who is a permanent part of the organisation that they will have to reassure the organisation every three years that they have not secured a criminal conviction somewhere else. This is when I start seeing elements of unreality creeping into the system.

Hilary Benn: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but in working for the protection of children and vulnerable adults, we are balancing risks. We must balance how organisations run against what would fall down on our heads from a great height if someone got a criminal conviction somewhere else and did not tell their employer or the voluntary body with which they were working. That is what we are dealing with, and we are imposing the requirement because as a society we want systems in place to minimise the chance that people are put at risk. There is a cost to that and a balance to be found.

The hon. Member for Wealden spoke about the complicated procedure. While informing myself, I looked at the application form. It requires a certain amount of information, but that is necessary to enable cross-checks to be made. If the CRB does not have those full data, it will find it much more difficult to issue a disclosure confidently. I was asked whether the system is retrospective. There is no obligation, and it is up to voluntary organisations to assess the potential. On the cost, the contract with Capita was valued at £400 million over 10 years. That is an element of the overall cost of the CRB, which, including the agency, non-Capita costs and the police, is estimated at £930 million over 10 years.

The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) asked about summer play schemes. Fast-track arrangements are in place, but if she is concerned about particular schemes, I would be grateful if she could draw them to my attention. The summer splash schemes organised by the Youth Justice Board have been fast-tracked, and I am aware of the point, made by the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), about the importance of other activities in ensuring that young people do not engage in criminal activity.

The hon. Member for Christchurch cited an important case, and I understand his concern. I am advised that fewer than 10 of the 119,000 disclosures have been disputed. If he gave me further details about the case, I would be happy to investigate and write to him. Indeed, I was interested in his description of the unfortunate circumstances in which his constituent finds himself—and it appeared that someone else had used his constituent's identity. We should pause for a moment to reflect on that. In those circumstances, the onus is on the CRB to satisfy itself about who it is dealing with.

I understand why someone who has not got a criminal record would ask why they should have to prove that they have not done something, and hon. Members asked about the process. Someone has a name and a date of birth, but people with a common name may share the same name and date of birth. If the CRB checks its various sources of data and finds that someone with that name and date of birth has a criminal record, it must ask itself whether it is dealing with John Smith of this date who has or John Smith of this date who has not. Those are the difficulties that arise, because people use aliases, with all the things that can be found on the police national computer and local police intelligence records.

The CRB has the duty to check. I appreciate the difficulty raised by the hon. Member for Christchurch, and I understand his constituent's concern. However, one could see the problem in a different light if, in another case, a person had committed an offence but had used an alias and applied under that name. That is why the CRB must be satisfied about who it is dealing with. However, if the hon. Gentleman gives me the details, I shall be happy to look into the case.

The hon. Member for Colchester asked about the number of staff: 700 staff are employed by Capita and there are 400 core staff. On the matter of voluntary organisations, the Government responded to the anxiety originally expressed about imposing a cost on the individual volunteer. I understand that it is possible for volunteers to apply by telephone and—I am thinking through the process—if they do so and give all the information required, the CRB will send them a form which they will have to sign and present to the umbrella body, saying, "Here is the evidence that shows I am who I am. Can you sign it?" The umbrella body will check their identity and countersign it. That might be a way to address the cost of the process.

In the time available, I want briefly to move on to the steps that the bureau is taking to deal with the problems that have been identified. First, incomplete forms are now removed from the mainstream processes to try to increase the efficiency of processing correctly completed applications and the exceptions. Incomplete or incorrectly completed application forms are now being returned to the registered body for correction.

Secondly, there is a programme of training and communication for registered bodies to try to reduce the main sources of errors and incomplete forms. If they can get the applications right first time, the CRB will have a better chance to deal with them than if they have to send them back. Additional staff have been taken on, including in the call centre, where last week 88 per cent. of calls were answered within the 20-second response time set down in the service standard, compared with under 30 per cent. at the end of May. That is progress, and we should acknowledge it.

Additional data entry capacity has been taken on by Capita using Hayes plc India, and new data entry systems involving fast keying and scanning optical character recognition systems are being utilised. The disclosure application forms have been reviewed and redesigned to try to deal with people's experiences as they fill them in. All of these steps form the CRB's improvement plan and if the agreed time scales are kept to, it will progressively achieve a reduction in the backlog of unprocessed work in the coming weeks, and achieve service standards by the end of the summer.

Mr. Grieve: Will the Minister answer my query about the CRB's ability to access information?

Hilary Benn: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not responding to his question. If he is content, I shall write to him about it as he raised a very important point about the systems and the processes. We need to look at that if they are creating difficulties.

[Hilary Benn]

The hon. Member for New Forest, West mentioned taxi drivers at the beginning of the debate. Special arrangements have been made for them, as I think the hon. Gentleman acknowledged in his response. I hope that they are working, in particular to deal with issues involving loss or distress. The hon. Member for Colchester mentioned teachers. The bureau has introduced contingency arrangements to enable teachers to be offered placements on the basis of a check of the Department for Education and Skills list 99, in advance of the full disclosure. That meets the legal requirement, so it will not result in the difficulty that the hon. Gentleman feared. For care home staff, the CRB is talking to the Department of Health about fast-track procedures.

It was perhaps inevitable that a project of such a size would encounter problems. Hindsight is perfect; the CRB is not yet. The problems, however, have made the staff at the bureau even more determined to offer a higher standard of service in future. They want to get things right.

I conclude where I began: there cannot be short cuts in trying to get things right. This is not just a mindless administrative process—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Export Credit Guarantees

11 am

Mr. Harold Best (Leeds, North-West): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish to address how the Government manage import and export credit guarantees, with particular reference to the arms industry and its trade with the rest of the world.

For the past 12 years, there has been a consistent loss in relation to the underwriting of the arms industry's export trade by the Export Credits Guarantee Department. My observation is based on my reading of an answer from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) in June this year. The answer contains a table of results, for want of a better term, from 1990 to 2001 that makes the losses clear.

As I understand the matter, the ECGD is required to operate with a reasonable expectation of breaking even. Premium levels are set to cover costs and risks, and the reserve margin is added to the premium rate to provide the necessary confidence for a break-even in trade that it carries out. The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting, in his previous job, emphasised that point, saying

"we expect ECGD to do a good deal more than break even."

He continued:

> "Export credits are not aid but...loans that we expect to be paid in full and on time."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall,* 2 February 2000; Vol. 343, c. 202-3WH.]

The ECGD operates under the Export and Investment Guarantees Act 1991. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's financial objectives for the export credit agencies lay down a set of rules, and Ministers are expected to ensure that they are upheld—that is, there should be no operation on a loss-making basis. That is manifestly not happening in relation to the guarantees for the arms-related business.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I do not want to take up my hon. Friend's time, but I must intervene. I think that he will find that his information is out of date, and I hope to show that things have dramatically changed in the past five years.

Mr. Best: If that is the case, I will be delighted to hear it, as will most hon. Members. From the information I have, though, things might be getting worse, even when recoveries are taken into account. Maybe that is the Minister's point.

On a macro-economic level, joint research carried out by the Centre for Defence Economics at York university and by the Ministry of Defence concludes that the significance of its results for the wider debate on defence exports is twofold: first, the economic costs of reducing defence exports are relatively small and losses are largely one-off, and, secondly, the balance of argument on defence exports should depend mainly on non-economic considerations. Those two points are of great significance in this debate.

In addition to what seems like an ECGD subsidy, the arms trade benefits from a £10 billion investment by the Ministry of Defence every year, including research and development, and £20 million provided through the Defence Export Services Organisation.

I and others think that the ECGD's support for defence exports should be included in annual reports on strategic export controls. That was also the view of the Quadripartite Committee in 1998. The economic benefits of the arms trade are at best dubious and, on what is essentially a moral issue, the Exchequer should no longer provide a subsidy to it.

This short debate is timely, in that the Export Control Bill is going through the House of Lords, and it provides an opportunity that we should take. We could tighten the Bill to strengthen the Department of Trade and Industry's role in the licensing process, making suitable development one consequence that it must consider in deciding whether to grant a licence. The Chancellor should build on the Mauritius mandate, and export credit should no longer be supplied for arms to go to any developing country. The need for transparency and accountability has never been greater than it is in that area.

I have some questions for my hon. Friend the Minister. First, why has the National Audit Office not investigated the excessive and unwise expenditure by the ECGD? Secondly, what explanation can be offered for the losses in relation to defence-related business? Thirdly, why have such losses been allowed to continue for the past 12 years? I shall be particularly interested in his response to that in the light of his assertion that it is not true. Fourthly, will the Government accept the need for clear and transparent accounts, and disaggregate the figures for sector and country so as to make it clear which areas and sectors are making a profit and which a loss? Finally, will they extend the Mauritius mandate, insisting that ECGD cover should be available only to those 63 developing poor countries that support economic and social recovery and development?

Like most people, I feel passionately about whether the Government of the United Kingdom take a moral approach to the arms trade and how it is financed by Departments. I am sure that all the people of Britain, not just taxpayers, would like to feel comfortable in that their Government are not involved in any financial arrangements that might subsidise the activities of arms manufacturers and the use of arms in other parts of the world.

11.7 am

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe (Wellingborough): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak early in the debate. As you are aware, I have an engagement elsewhere in the House at noon and I apologise to all hon. Members for having to leave early. I shall read with great interest and care all the contributions that I miss.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) on having secured the debate. He has brought before the House a subject that raises issues of considerable political, moral and economic importance, especially in the troubled times in which we live. It is right that Parliament should have an opportunity to discuss them.

It might help if I make clear the political and moral standpoint from which I view those issues. I am a Christian socialist who, although not a pacifist, has pacifist leanings. I am not a member of the Society of Friends, but I periodically attend Quaker meetings and I have been encouraged to consider the issues surrounding the ECGD and the arms trade by the parliamentary officer to the Society of Friends, Mr. Michael Bartlett, whom I thank for the research that he has undertaken. I am pleased that I and others in this Hall might have assisted in that research through the parliamentary questions that we have asked.

One parliamentary question that I asked sought to discover the total premiums received by the ECGD in respect of the arms trade for each year in the decade 1990 to 2000, and how much was paid out in claims for the same period. The answer was given on 12 June 2000. In respect of the arms trade, it showed that, for every single year of that decade, considerably more was paid out by the ECGD than it received through arms deals.

In none of those 10 years did premiums exceed payments made. During that period, premiums in the sector amounted to £213 million while the sum paid out in claims was a staggering £667 million, which is more than three times the premium. We must think about those figures, because they mean that the ECGD lost £454 million—nearly half a billion pounds—on arms deals in the last decade of the last millennium. More recent answers to similar questions on different years appear to reveal the same pattern of losses.

Ministers have often said that the ECGD does not operate to subsidise international trade, but to support and insure it. If the ECGD is an insurance policy, it is one that makes a staggering loss every year. When that happens on such a sustained and consistent basis and on such a scale, we must question the ministerial assertions. The figures are compelling, and they leave little room for any conclusion other than that the ECGD operates to subsidise the arms trade significantly. That raises issues of substantial political, moral and economic importance.

Politically, we must confront what appears to be the simple fact that a covert subsidy for the arms trade exists, which would be an overt breach of Government policy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West suggested, the ECGD is specifically required by the Government to operate with reasonable confidence that it will break even. It is not remotely breaking even on arms deals and it makes losses year on year. If the ECGD is confident that it is breaking even in the sector, its confidence seems badly misplaced.

If that is the case, we must ask significant questions. How can we require the ECGD to break even when we allow it to sustain losses on such a scale? How can we decry any subsidising role for the ECGD while simultaneously allowing it to fulfil exactly that role? Those are questions of profound political importance, and I trust that the Minister will address them.

The figures also raise a moral issue for us all. The arms sector, in which the ECGD operates, is no ordinary industrial or manufacturing sector, but one of the most sensitive sectors of all. That requires us to answer a simple question: do we believe that it is right for the weapons trade to be subsidised by our Government? I am not a Quaker or a pacifist. I believe, albeit reluctantly, that in our dangerous world it is necessary for nations to be armed and able to defend themselves. That means that I believe it legitimate to make and sell arms, but I question whether it is right for the Government to underwrite that trade to the extent that they manifestly do.

[Mr. Paul Stinchcombe]

Consider the countries and people to whom we have sold arms, and the extent to which they have benefited from such subsidies. Saddam Hussein has been the lucky beneficiary of £630 million of arms subsidies, not a penny of which has been recovered. In today's time of great peril, it seems that we could sell arms to Pakistan and India, backed by ECGD support. I hope that I am wrong, but I fear that I may not be. Subsidising arms deals to that theatre at this moment may not make the world safer.

The extent of the apparent subsidy seems to raise large economic issues. Apart from the domestic consequence of diverting such sums to the arms trade, the subsidy surely distorts the economies of the countries to which we sell the weapons, especially developing countries. That means that their scant resources are being diverted to arms deals. Many people—not only in the House, but in the country as a whole—already despair at the amount that developing countries spend on weapons. That money could be spent on schools, medicines or economic infrastructure, but our Government are apparently offering some of those nations subsidies to encourage them to continue buying arms that they may not need.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor appears already to understand that. Under the 1998 Mauritius mandate, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West referred, my right hon. Friend announced the end of support for arms export sales to the world's most highly indebted poor countries. That is warmly to be welcomed, but we must follow that lead and extend the policy globally. We shall then have an ethical policy of which we can all rightly be proud.

11.16 am

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I, too, begin by declaring my credentials: I am a Quaker—a member of the Religious Society of Friends. That does not necessarily bring with it total acceptance of the idea that we cannot have arms anywhere, and each of us constantly searches our conscience to work out where peacekeeping and justice are necessary. We do not simply say "No!" in every situation; we must think about what we do. Like other hon. Members in the Room, however, I have come to the conclusion that the ECGD should not be involved in the arms trade. Its involvement in such things does morals, ethics and the ethical dimension of our foreign policy no good. It also seems to cost us money, which we could invest in other countries positively rather than negatively.

ECGD export credit guarantees for defence-related sales have grown in recent years, which makes it a priority that we examine the department's activities. An answer that I received to a parliamentary question shows that £0.37 billion of guarantees were issued for exports of defence equipment in 1996–97. Under this Government, that figure has risen every year, and it reached £2.73 billion in 2000–01, which is the most recent year recorded.

I do not want to take a cheap swipe at the Government's ethical foreign policy. The intentions are there, but we need much stronger commitments, and if that means anything, it means examining the ECGD and arms exports. We know that the arms trade is subsidised using taxpayers' money. The ECGD succeeds in breaking even across all the exports that it supports, but that is not true of the defence sector. The net cash loss per annum for defence-related guarantees was £57 million per annum, but it has reached £80 million per annum during this Government's years in power. On top of that, it can be argued that the risks involved in export guarantees mean that the true cost of the ECGD's subsidy to the arms trade is as high as £227 million.

We must ask ourselves why arms exporters cannot go to the private market to cover risks, because if they can find cover there, they should. If private investors find the risks too high, they are surely also too high for the British taxpayer. The net cost to the ECGD confirms that.

Supporters of the subsidy to the arms trade advance various arguments in its favour, such as the fact that it provides employment, supports research and development and contributes to British technological excellence and the security of domestic sources of defence procurement. However, one could almost put those arguments in favour of the drugs trade. Last week, we heard of a big gang bust in south London and of the way of life of some of the people involved. One could say that getting rid of drugs gangs would cost jobs or car sales—that logic does not seem too different from that used by supporters of the subsidy.

Let us consider that logic. Ministry of Defence economists concluded in their analysis last December that the economic costs of reducing defence exports are relatively small and largely one-off, and they suggested that the transfer of resources from a capital-intensive industry such as arms production to a [illegible] labour-intensive industry might mean a [illegible] increase in employment.

Reference has already been made to the report "The Subsidy Trap", published by Oxford Research Group and Saferworld, which further undermines the claims about jobs in the arms sector. It estimates that each job in defence exports receives a subsidy of £4,200, although those figures can cut both ways and people can claim that they mean or do not mean certain things. However, whatever one says, Government subsidy is everywhere in arms exports. It could go somewhere else—to railways, renewable energies or forces for the sustainable environment. The engineers could be redeployed, and their skills would have a role elsewhere.

When considering technological excellence and security of supply, we still have to take a realistic approach based on the dangers and challenges that we face. Our involvement in recent conflicts has been as a member of international coalitions based on our membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union. Defence procurement takes place with our allies, as in the case of the Eurofighter. For those who believe that that is the way we should go, the development of such co-operation is much better for our security and it will do more to strengthen than to undermine it.

We must remember, on behalf of the Government, what our over-zealous and unethical pursuit of the arms trade has led to in the past, and this debate is part of that. Sales have been made to countries such as

Indonesia, which have used the arms for internal repression and external aggression. Efforts have been made, including this Session's Export Control Bill, to ensure that that does not happen in future—I know that the Minister will come to that—but there are loopholes in that Bill, which I know my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) will refer to.

Mark Thomas, of Channel 4, found that, within a week or two, he could become a middleman arms broker, facilitating the sale to Zimbabwe of gun parts originating in Britain. At the time, we were friendly with some countries or hostile regimes to which we sold arms. How do we know what arms Iraq has? Because we sold Iraq the arms and we have the receipt, so we know that Saddam Hussein has dangerous weapons.

Sometimes we do not even think before we sell, or we think the wrong thoughts. There are ethical considerations that cannot be ignored—this is a matter not just of subsidy, but of ethics. The Government have taken positive steps by stopping the use of guarantees for exports to some of the world's poorest and most indebted countries, and we all welcome that, but there is still concern about exports to India and to Indonesia, the instability of conflict areas such as Kashmir and the message that the continued sales sends to the countries involved. Jack Straw says that the deal was not intended to support the conflict, but we are sending mixed messages.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. In the Chamber, we refer to Members by either their Government post or their constituency, not by their Christian name and surname.

Sue Doughty: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should have said Foreign Secretary, and I take your point entirely.

People are not happy about the taxpayer's role in such conflicts. Our priority, and I hope that the Government will continue with this, is to assist in achieving peaceful resolutions rather than to support conflict. Although nations have the right to defend themselves, I am no cheerleader for the arms trade. It is part of international trade, but we should not help it through Government subsidy. We must negotiate and, if necessary, act unilaterally to make our arms trade an ethical exporter or to bring it as near as possible to a strict definition of an ethical exporter. Conducted ethically, the trade may even work towards greater global stability.

I must make a further point on the ECGD and corruption. Susan Hawley, for Cornerhouse, presented a paper on that subject at the "Beyond Best Practice" seminar in Parliament on 23 May. The paper identified the amount of bribery undertaken by British business and identified the ECGD as an organisation with a long history of backing projects involving corruption. Bribery by British businesses remains a significant problem, despite the OECD convention, and Gary Campkin of the CBI said recently:

> "The CBI and British business is totally against bribery, corruption and extortion. But these sort of issues are often about the way you do business."

A document entitled "Transparency International Bribe Payers Index" shows that, this year, Britain comes well behind other European countries in that respect. None the less, the top three corrupt industries are construction and public works, arms and defence, and oil and gas. There is a lot of corruption in those industries, and we need the ECGD to take a lead in eliminating it. The ECGD needs to review its policies, because export credit is still being given to corruption-prone businesses. It must play a greater role in sharpening the Government's anti-corruption measures and commit itself to greater transparency.

In concluding, one might ask what the ECGD is for. It results in a peculiar subsidy that is taken from the better side of our export trade and given to the arms business. That is totally unacceptable. However, at the 23 May seminar, we heard nothing about the ECGD promoting renewable energy, which is a force for peace and economic development in the world's poorest countries. If we are to retain the ECGD, we should ask that it support sustainable businesses that benefit British exports and do good rather than harm in the world overall.

11.27 am

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) on securing the debate and presenting it so well. I agree with him and the other hon. Members who have spoken in their criticisms of the ECGD.

I quote *New Statesman*, which produced a supplement for the arms industry entitled "The Defence Business". Louise Bowman wrote an article referring to the issues that we are discussing:

> "Export guarantees are a way of offering finance to the buyer on the cheap—at the expense of the vendor country's taxpayers"—

in other words, us. She continued:

> "At its simplest, the arms buyer borrows money from a bank to pay for the goods. The export credit agency (ECA) in the vendor country, whose industry is selling the arms, stands surety for the loan. Because the ECA is a government agency, the loan is backed by the Government and—this is the key—so qualifies for the lowest rates of interest."

Under such arrangements, and with guarantees from our Government and our taxpayers, we are subsidising foreign companies that want to buy arms. We often subsidise foreign Governments who want to buy arms. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) is right to say that we subsidised Saddam Hussein with about £630 million for armaments for which we have received not a penny back.

Nigel Griffiths: We did not do that.

Harry Cohen: No, the Labour Government did not do that, but the last Conservative Government did. However, that is the system under which the ECGD operates, which led to that situation. Some £4,100 million of military-related guarantees are still at risk.

Oxford Research Group, which has done a lot of excellent work, estimates that the net subsidy via the ECGD is £227 million per annum. The ECGD persistently makes losses, although Ministers have said that it is supposed to break even and have given clear instructions to that effect. It has made losses every year

[Harry Cohen]

for the past 12, and the figures are illuminating, as in no year has the premium earned come anywhere near the claims paid. For example, in 1991–92, £11 million of premium was earned and £79 million in claims paid—a sevenfold difference. The claims recovered made only a small dent in the deficit. That pattern is repeated year after year, with a fivefold or sixfold difference.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that, in a previous debate in this Chamber on the ECGD, a Minister denied that there was any cost to the taxpayer?

Harry Cohen: I hear that point and I know that that was the Government's position, but it is contradicted by figures in parliamentary answers. If the subsidy is not direct, it is a back-door subsidy of the size that I mentioned. Despite ministerial requirements that the ECGD should break even, there have been consistent losses, year after year. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West and I have sent a joint letter to the Comptroller and Auditor General, asking him to meet us to discuss the issue. The ECGD is clearly not operating in the way that it is required to operate.

The ECG is only part of the overall subsidy to the arms industry. The Campaign Against Arms Trade has just issued its document "Shelling Out", which details the amounts involved and shows that the overall subsidy is £763 million a year—that is, £30 for every person in this country every year, despite the fact that defence constitutes only [illegible] per cent. of our overall exports. We could build 10 hospitals or 100 schools with that subsidy.

I want to list several criticisms. The arms that we sell end up in the hands of people for whom they are not intended and there is no end-user requirement on arms exports. That creates all sorts of misery, war and conflict in other parts of the world.

One consequence is that refugees seek to escape those conflicts, which have been fuelled by our armaments and armaments subsidies. Those refugees then come to Britain and we are told every day by the press, such as the *Daily Express*, that asylum carries a cost, which it does. It is right to offer asylum, because we must treat people decently and not allow them to be tortured or killed, but of course that costs money. That is a hidden subsidy of the arms trade, which should be added to the bills already identified by the Campaign Against Arms Trade, Oxford Research Group and Saferworld.

The arms trade also does harm through wars worldwide. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough has tabled an early-day motion emphasising that no impact assessment has been carried out on the arms trade or the work of the ECGD. There is a licensing system, but that is not the same as an impact assessment covering human rights, the effect on the environment and the effect of wars and refugees. Such an assessment should be carried out before subsidies are given.

The Government and those who favour subsidies for the arms trade often make the excuse that many jobs are involved. "The Subsidy Trap", published in July 2001 by Oxford Research Group, estimates that annual Government subsidies for arms exports are about £420 million. That is less than the figure in "Shelling Out", but still £4,600 for every job in arms exports. In December 2001, a Ministry of Defence economist and independent academics teamed up to publish a report on the economic impact of halving defence exports, which concluded:

> "The economic costs of reducing defence exports are relatively small and largely one-off."

It went on to suggest that employment levels are likely to benefit from investments being transferred to more labour-intensive, but lower wage, economic activities. I believe that we could create more jobs and more income for the nation by putting such subsidies directly into productive jobs.

We must consider the issue of free trade and protectionism. We are told by the Americans and members of our Government who are in favour of globalisation that we need to end protectionism and subsidies, but subsidies go directly to the arms trade, which contradicts what they say. Those subsidies amount to a trade barrier. There is consensus in the OECD on the effect of such subsidies in other areas, which are restricted, but that does not apply in agriculture and defence, so all sorts of hidden subsidies occur as a result. They distort overall Government borrowing because we have to pick up the bills, especially in the case of default, and they penalise other productive sectors.

In the example of the ECGD, which breaks even overall, civil industry—productive industry—is paying the bill for subsidies to non-productive areas, such as defence, when the money should go to productive sectors of the economy. Why not let the market do the job anyway? There are plenty of other credit agencies. Why not let the arms industry live or die by the market, as other areas of the economy are being told to do?

I believe that the Government have proposed a 6 per cent. rate of return on capital, as the *New Statesman* article said. That is welcome to a degree, although the arms industry is already campaigning against it. Even if it is implemented, will it be required? If the ECGD is supposed to break even, it will not, so is it just another target that will not be met? For those reasons, all Government subsidies and credits to the arms industry should be ended completely. That is long overdue.

11.39 am

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I shall be brief. I, too, thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) for obtaining the debate. Hon. Members have expressed their opinion on war, so I shall express mine. I am not a pacifist, although I wish I had the strength of mind to be one. I am probably one of the world's natural warriors, but I am interested in conflict resolution and I seem to spend most of my working life concentrating on that. If this country were attacked, however, I would hope that we had the correct arms to defend ourselves.

For that reason, I realise that we cannot do without some sort of arms trade, but I do not believe that our taxes should be used to subsidise other regimes through it. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) that we can do nothing about the end use of arms, and there have been tragic consequences from end-use in our lifetime—Saddam Hussein has been mentioned, and I went to East Timor during the referendum and saw the suffering there. Perhaps we should concentrate on that. We carried on selling to Indonesia when we knew that wholesale slaughter was going on in East Timor.

What the Government do in my name is hugely important to me. The ECGD is clearly subsidising the arms industry, and we are still helping India and Pakistan to increase their arms, which fills me with horror. They were teetering on the brink of nuclear war just weeks ago, and that threat has not gone away.

A number of other Members have tabled early-day motions, such as that condemning the sale of F16 fighter aircraft to Israel. We cannot control end use. I shall give an example. Earlier today, the sovereign so-called democracy of Israel used an F16 to fire a missile into a residential area, supposedly to assassinate a Hamas leader. So far, 16 civilians have died, eight of them children. The incident is being called the slaughter of the innocents, which it certainly is.

That slaughter was carried out not by an organisation operating outside the state or an organisation from an aspiring state, but by the state, taking part in murder. The fact that eight civilians who died were children is coincidental. The attack was ordered by Ariel Sharon, who is already dripping in blood from Sabra and Shatila. I want an answer from the Government on why the rules for obtaining export licences were changed, allowing British components for the F16 fighter to be sold to Israel via America. Will the Minister explain the ethical dimension of allowing the Department to subsidise the arms trade and grant licences to countries such as Israel and, in the past, Iraq and Indonesia?

As other hon. Members have said, if we are to subsidise, we should do so for humanitarian reasons. A company in my constituency made a terrific product—drills for obtaining water in developing countries. I bet that it would love a subsidy. It did a useful job, as most of the developing world is without clean water supplies, and I would like my taxes and those of my constituents to go on something like that. I agree with the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty), who talked about sustainable energy and worthwhile projects, which we would all like to see.

I want to speak only briefly, so I end by pleading with the Government and the Minister to take note of the extremely sensible advice of the Quadripartite Committee, which is that they should stop subsidising the arms trade. If there is talk of ethical dimensions to policy, let us put our money where our mouth is and carry it out for once.

11.44 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) on choosing this important subject, and on the brevity and clarity with which he introduced it. He thereby gave other hon. Members the opportunity to develop arguments in a manner that is rather unusual in this Chamber, where the introductory speeches are often rather self-indulgent.

Most hon. Members who have spoken have declared where they come from, spiritually and ideologically. The hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) called himself a Christian socialist, and my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) described herself as approaching the subject as a Quaker. Like her, I had my spiritual upbringing in the Quaker meeting house in York, although I fear that I have regressed.

I approach the issue from the standpoint of an economic liberal. I do not quarrel with the basic proposition that there has to be an arms trade—countries have to defend themselves, so they have to acquire arms, which have to come from somewhere, and have to be bought and sold across frontiers. There is, therefore, a legitimate role for trade and for the UK, both as an importer and an exporter of arms.

However, the arms trade is different from trade in other products. It therefore has to be hedged with regulation to take account of the dangers of internal repression and of the sort of instance described by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), in which the arms export trade can fuel conflict. I take come comfort from the strong position taken by the IMF, which has been extremely critical of the role played by export credit guarantee agencies, not only the British one, in relation to the arms trade. It argues that normally, when an export credit guarantee operates for the supply of, say, machine tools or a power station, it is supplying a productive asset that generates income and wealth. It therefore contributes to development and that development helps the country to repay the debt that it has acquired. However, that does not apply in the case of the arms trade, because what is being sold is an unproductive asset. Weapons generate no income or wealth. One has, therefore, to be extraordinarily careful to ensure that the supply of weapons under export credit agreements does not undermine the development of the countries concerned. The IMF has taken a critical view of the role of export guarantee agencies. This is not just a moral issue, it is also an economic one.

I was fortunate enough to introduce a debate on the subject in February 2000, and I made many of the points that the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West has made today. I want not to go over that ground again, but to identify the areas in which Government policy has moved on, so that we can update the debate. I would point to two factors. First, the role of the ECGD has been reviewed—indeed, I think that it is now in the middle of a second review. There is clearly some discomfort in Government about it, and I believe that that arises from wondering why the ECGD is not turned over to the private sector. The Government have been happy to do that with National Air Traffic Services and other organisations, so if the ECGD is purely commercial and will be subject to commercial discipline, why is it not privatised? That would be a logical step for a body that was subject to full commercial discipline, but it has not happened; the ECGD has been retained as a public agency. Therefore, Members of this House have, very reasonably, asked why, if it is a public agency subject to public policy concerns, we should not have a look at what it is doing.

That has raised several secondary issues. The environmental agencies are rightly asking why a public body is providing credits that are, arguably, subsidised, to promote coal burning in power stations, which undermines the Government's Kyoto objectives. Questions are also asked, as they have been today, about why the organisation is apparently promoting

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

armaments exports. That is important, because of the proportion of the ECGD's portfolio represented by the armaments business. If that were only 5 or 10 per cent., as it was in the 1960s and 1970s, it would not be an issue; we would not be debating it. However, the arms trade is now central to the role of the ECGD. Some 40 to 50 per cent. of outstanding debt to the ECGD relates to armaments business. Last year, 50 per cent. of its new business was arms. That might have been a blip. However, in recent years, the armaments industry has been the dominant industry to be supported by ECGD arrangements. To summarise, there is a big debate about the ECGD and its role. If it is commercial, why is it not private? If it is public, why does it not support public policy objectives?

The second big change since I introduced the debate a couple of years ago is the evolution of Government policy towards arms exports. The Minister will know about the Export Control Bill, as he piloted it through the House. I trust that we will not hear any more about it tomorrow on the Floor of the House, but we are not quite sure about that. It has almost completed its passage through Parliament. In general, my colleagues and I welcome it, and we also welcome the fact that the Government took the initiative to introduce this legislation, which provides a framework of discipline for arms exports and licensing.

However, there has been much ambiguity in the Government's attitude towards arms exports, notably in respect of sustainability. The Government have ignored an all-party consensus on that issue, hence the Tanzanian deal—on which, as the Minister knows, I have strong views, and about which I have spoken in the main Chamber. There is also a lack of effective controls over deals involving third countries, which has led to the current arrangements in relation to Israel.

There has been a lack of transparency, because the Government have chosen to ignore the recommendations of the Quadripartite Committee. That is very important in the context of the narrow discussion on subsidies, because we do not know how much of the arms section of the ECGD portfolio is subsidised. The issue is wrapped in secrecy, and the Department's annual report hardly refers to the arms part of its business, even though it accounts for almost 50 per cent. of its activity. There is very little transparency and clarity and we have little idea of what is actually going on.

Dr. Tonge: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the amendments that we tried to push through to strengthen the prior scrutiny provisions in the Export Control Bill would have ensured much greater transparency and enabled the whole of government to see where the deals were being done? That might have brought the ECGD under the control of Parliament rather than one or two Ministers.

Dr. Cable: I agree, and that is the single most disappointing retreat that the Government have made in this policy area. It is relevant not only to licensing but to the way in which the deals are financed.

I shall make a final comment on Government policy, before turning to the narrow issue of subsidy. I am worried because the Government have been at least partially captured by the industry. About 10 days ago, BAE Systems made an outrageous statement demanding a monopoly in Government arms contracts. It was an outrageous demand and I am pleased that Defence Ministers robustly repudiated it. None the less, something has given BAE Systems the expectation that Government Ministers are there to do its bidding. That is a worrying and alarming indication of the way in which the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry have handled their relationships with the industry. The subsidy issue is an integral part of that.

When I raised the issue of subsidy in a debate more than two years ago, I was told, as the Minister has obviously said to Labour Members now, that our figures were out of date and that the Government would demonstrate to us in the course of time that they had tightened up on implicit subsidies through defaults on ECGD contracts, so there was no subsidy at all.

However, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) asked a penetrating question that demonstrated that the net loss from ECGD business is accelerating, not declining. While this Government have been in power there has been a net cash loss of £80 million a year, as opposed to £57 million a year before 1997. That is expressed in simple cash terms, but the cash losses understate the extent of the subsidy.

As hon. Members have already said, two major reputable academic studies have cast light on the problem. The first one to be published, to which we first had access a few years ago, was the York study conducted by Professor Hartley and his colleagues, which focused on the fact that the ECGD was required merely to break even, rather than to generate the 6 per cent. return required of organisations such as the Post Office and London Underground. The subsidy was calculated on that basis. The ECGD has subsequently said that it does not merely break even, but makes a 5 per cent. return on its capital. The problem is that we do not know the return on its arms business, because it does not say; it has not broken the figures down and it probably does not analyse them. That is the department's defence, but it is rather shaky.

A more sophisticated study, which was recently carried out at Oxford, nails down the fully subsidised nature of the department's arms activities. It examined the cost of export credit guarantees, which are, effectively, a form of political risk insurance provided by the ECGD to arms exporters. Those involved in the study went round the market asking what deals would have cost had they been financed in the international capital markets, particularly using the new derivatives available in those markets. They then applied the same weighting for risk that would apply in a purely commercial transaction. The result was a sophisticated, methodologically faultless study, which came up with a figure of £225 million a year for the subsidy to the arms exporters. Without it, they would have had to pay higher premiums in the market.

To conclude, I do not understand why the Government are so reluctant to apply market discipline to arms exporters. After all, it is now accepted that many aspects of PFI projects must be financed in the market and carry the full market cost. Why should our arms exporters be exempt from that discipline? Ministers have never satisfactorily answered that question, and the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West has performed a valuable service in continuing to focus their attention on it.

11.57 am

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I, too, start by congratulating the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best), who initiated the debate. It is important that we have the opportunity to air our feelings about these extremely important issues on behalf of our constituents, and I shall seek to do just that.

Hon. Members seem to have been declaring interests, so I had better declare mine. Earlier this year in the main Chamber, I said that it might be a good idea if we declared where we were coming from on issues with moral and ethical dimensions. I therefore have no difficulty in saying that I am a fully paid-up member of the Church of England and that I take my religion seriously.

All those who have spoken have considered only one side of the equation as regards exports, and particularly defence exports, and I shall seek to redress the balance somewhat. I look forward to the Minister's comments; indeed, I think that he might even have some news for us, because we are expecting an announcement quite soon.

I want to move the debate from utopia to the real world. It has always been my understanding that the ECGD's purpose was to share risk in the national interest, not to subsidise exports. That is a fundamental difference in view between the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West and myself.

The Conservative party has supported arms sales to foreign Governments where those sales conformed to the accepted consolidated criteria that have been put in place. Arms should be sold only where we are satisfied that they will be used for the legitimate purposes of security and defence. During the recent stand-off between India and Pakistan, my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said that we should temporarily suspend arms sales to the region. That is now inappropriate in the light of the de-escalation of tension between the two countries. There is therefore no doubt that we take a pragmatic approach, but it is based on a strong ethical foundation.

Harry Cohen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Key: I really do not have the time.

Harry Cohen *rose*—

Mr. Key: All right, but only because it is the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen).

Harry Cohen: Will the hon. Gentleman say whether the previous Conservative Government were satisfied that it was in the interests of security and defence to give Saddam Hussein an ECGD subsidy?

Mr. Key: I was not a Minister at the time, and cannot answer for the then Conservative Government, much as that will disappoint the hon. Gentleman.

Hon. Members who are not Ministers have no access to intelligence or defence reports or to the diplomatic analysis available to the Government. Only the Government have that information—and quite right, too. They have the legitimate right to make executive decisions on exports, and we scrutinise those decisions under our constitution through the Select Committee system. The Defence Committee, as the hon. Gentleman knows because he served on it with me, has access to secret information on a limited basis, which can help to inform us. For those reasons, however, my party and I reject the suggestion that there should be prior parliamentary scrutiny. In the end, the Executive have the right to govern, and only they have the information.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Key: No, I am going to make progress.

Under the United Nations charter, countries have the right to self-defence. I believe that it is morally bankrupt to say, "Let's trust the United Nations to sort out the world's problems and accept that nations will buy arms—but not from my country, because I am morally superior." That is not a sustainable argument.

The overriding reason for the existence of the United Kingdom defence industry is, always has been, and always will be the supply of equipment and services needed by the British armed forces to ensure that our country's national security interests are protected. Exports are increasingly vital for the continued maintenance of a viable defence industrial base in the United Kingdom, and the industry cannot be sustained by reliance on procurement by the Ministry of Defence alone. Due to the high technology input and the cost of a large proportion of the defence industry's output, it is essential to lengthen production runs and reduce unit costs. Therefore, it is vital to export.

The benefits of the United Kingdom defence exports to the Government in reducing defence equipment costs outweigh their cost by a significant margin. Rather than being subsidised, as we have heard consistently from hon. Members today, defence exports represent a significant net benefit to the United Kingdom economy. Sales averaged about £6 billion in 1998–99 and supported almost 100,000 of a total of 400,000 defence jobs. Many of those were high quality jobs in cutting-edge, high-technology industry.

It has been estimated that the ending of defence exports from the United Kingdom would involve a one-off adjustment cost of between £4 billion and £5 billion, which is equivalent to about 0.5 per cent. of one year's gross domestic product. In addition, there would be a continuous net cost to the taxpayer of between £90 million and £200 million a year.

The Government's policy of supporting the legitimate efforts of the United Kingdom industry to win export orders are primarily based on their contribution to our defence and international security interests. Defence exports help to support a strong United Kingdom defence industry and contribute to the security of our friends and allies.

Dr. Tonge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Key: I am sorry, but I am going to make progress; the debate so far has been very one-sided.

[Mr. Key]

The benefit of the defence exports is felt by not only British companies but by United Kingdom industry as a whole, because defence exports are a catalyst for national economic and technological development. Exports also help to defray the costs of the United Kingdom's research and development. The Ministry of Defence has estimated that defence exports through extended production runs reduced unit costs by £350 million to £400 million per year from the United Kingdom defence budget.

It is unsurprising that the United Kingdom's share of the world defence export market is rising, because the global defence market has been in steady decline since the mid-1980s. That market is still lucrative and valuable financially while also having important intrinsic strategic and political implications. The benefits for the companies involved and for the wider British economy are substantial. The market protects the United Kingdom's national interests through the maintenance of our indigenous manufacturing capability, and British political influence around the world. Companies often fund a considerable portion of the research and development activities that develop the equipment needed by the British armed forces from export-generated income. Exports help to keep the United Kingdom at the cutting edge of high technology development, giving our armed forces a technological advantage. The Export Credits Guarantee Department is probably the most reviewed agency of Government at the moment. I hope that the Government will, within the next 24 hours, stop dithering and tell us what they plan for the ECGD.

Defence should be judged by the same criteria as any other sector when ECGD cover is considered. Once it has fulfilled the conditions of the consolidated criteria, it is no different from any other industry. I hope that the ECGD, and defence exports, will be treated accordingly. I also hope that the ECGD process will not be used to second-guess issues such as sustainable development—subjects on which we have had substantial debate both in the House of Commons and in the other place.

If an export licence is issued by the Government, firm and open reasons should be given for any subsequent refusal of ECGD support. Examples are regularly quoted of cases in which Treasury intervention—or some other mysterious intervention—stops a particular export, even if it is a reorder by a NATO ally, but the company involved is never told. Sometimes hints are dropped, but that is as far as it goes. If we seek transparency, that is an area in which there should be more; companies should know why their applications are being rejected.

Some aspects of defence procurement might not be shared by the majority of other bidders for ECGD support. Project fulfilment often spans many years, the customers are usually Governments, not companies or consumers, and the risks are sometimes political as well as commercial. Banks will often refuse to provide cover in such circumstances, even when an export licence has been granted. The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead says that we should let companies live and die by the market, but that would not necessarily be in the national interest. If the banks will not—for a very good reason—take on a risk that the Government assess from their information to be in the national interest, the hon. Gentleman's argument falls down. Our main competitors enjoy strong and cheap support from their equivalent Government agencies for defence business. So long as that situation remains, we need comparable support from the UK Government to ensure that there is a sustainable approach to risk. This is all about risk management, not about subsidy.

What does the ECGD support? Is this just about arms? Of course it is not. The exports that it has supported have included textile machinery for Uzbekistan and power stations for China. Yes, there has been defence-related equipment, but civil aircraft take 21 per cent. of the budget, and among £800 million of overseas investments there is an office building in Morocco. The projects featured in the annual report include double-decker buses for Hong Kong, low-cost housing for Romania, road improvement schemes for the Pacific island of Vanuatu, a pharmaceutical plant in Croatia, social services vehicles for Barbados, navigational equipment for Trinidad and Tobago and investment in an aluminium smelter in Mozambique, generating 800 jobs.

I mention those because they are all part of the same equation; we cannot separate defence from everything else. It is straightforward. If, as a nation, we are to come back to the moral and ethical position, apart from ensuring that we have a healthy industrial base for the prosperity of our people, we need to reduce the need for arms around the world. That has been a prime mover in the whole of western strategic defence analysis.

We have learnt the lessons of the cold war, and we are now learning the lessons of terrorism and the consequences of asymmetric warfare. We see the horrors of mines around the world and the damage that they do to the economy. We are talking about areas of instability, such as the great arc of instability from the Caucasus through the middle east and along the Maghreb to the western or Atlantic end of north Africa. Instability generates a need for arms and leads to economic migration and further political and military instability.

In 1996, I served on the Select Committee on Defence. I cannot remember whether the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead was on the Committee then—I think that he was. We visited nearly all the countries on the northern shores of the Mediterranean and talked to them about reducing risk, economic inequalities and the need to migrate.

The root cause of all the instability is poverty. All the nations of the developed world need to start thinking differently. The hon. Gentleman has been thinking along those lines since 1996 at least, when the Committee produced the report outlining that need. If we talk about reducing the need for arms, we should also talk about reducing poverty and the lack of food, water and education, and health problems—especially women's health. They are the root causes.

Dr. Tonge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Key: In a moment. We are talking about the need to support some of the most vulnerable people in the world. We must all promote that new thinking. As a Conservative, I think that that is consistent with my political beliefs.

Dr. Tonge: I thank the hon. Gentleman. If he believes that poverty is the cause of all the instability he referred to, does he not feel a little ashamed that the Conservative Government reduced the proportion of GNP spent on overseas aid to 0.25 per cent, and that, as the Conservative spokesman on international development has explained, it is not his party's policy to raise the proportion to the 0.7 per cent. that the United Nations recommends?

Mr. Key: That is not an accurate representation of my party's policy. I certainly do not feel any shame. I feel disappointment, and did so many years ago, when I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the then Minister for Overseas Development, Chris Patten. We were constantly battling with the Treasury, just as people in Departments do now, to try to increase the proportion of the budget that went to our Department.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) said that the ECGD must take a lead in eliminating corruption. That is an extraordinary request to make of the ECGD. I do not think that such a role is in its constitution. Let us get back to reality.

It is important to recognise that the largest slice of ECGD support—53 per cent. was the latest figure that I could get hold of—goes to civil programmes. Those will be crucial if we are to start eliminating the poverty that leads to all the instability that leads to the arms trade.

I hope that we can get more of a note of realism in the debate. If all we can do is try to stop the arms trade, we will not get very far forward. I read with interest the letter from bishops and others in *The Times* yesterday about that issue. I thought that their hearts were wholly in the right place, but that they should get their feet on the ground and think of the broader equation that I have tried to outline.

I hope that we shall get some news about the ECGD, because there have been four ongoing reviews in the last year or so. I hope that the Minister will have some important messages for us.

12.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) on securing this important debate. I also congratulate all hon. Friends and hon. Members on their excellent contributions, and on giving their sincerely held views.

Before answering the five questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West put, I shall set out the value of the ECGD's work. In its recent annual report, the ECGD showed that the guarantees were aimed at ensuring that countries could benefit from the expertise of UK businesses, and that UK businesses are not disadvantaged when bidding for contracts abroad, whether civil or defence related.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment, Baroness Symons, presented the new and comprehensive ECGD annual report on 10 January. She stressed that it showed that exporters—with Government insurance and Government support—had been successful in winning orders worth billions of pounds.

More than 50 per cent. of the ECGD's support goes directly to civil contracts. I expect that civil contracts in 2001-02 will take up 70 per cent. of such support, and that the proportion taken up by defence contracts will fall to 30 per cent. Civil projects include, for example, the export of Airbus aircraft to Austria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, El Salvador, Finland, Hong Kong, Iceland, Korea, the Netherlands, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and the United States.

All hon. Members can see that the ECGD plays an important role in supporting the aerospace industry's export drive. It also helps business to export buses to Hong Kong; it aids the construction of a port in India; it provides a desalination plant in Oman to supply fresh water for thousands of homes; it builds bridges and a 500 MW gas-fired combined-cycle power station in the Philippines; and it supports a food-packaging plant in Turkey. All those examples are testimony to the value of export credit guarantees. The ECGD also welcomes applications for sustainable energy projects—as hon. Members know, that is a subject close to my heart.

More than 30 countries received goods backed by export credit guarantees last year, and details are given in the annual report. Those countries include South Africa, the United States, Australia, Lithuania, India, Italy, Sweden and Greece. In Romania, export credit guarantees helped a UK defence manufacturer to supply border surveillance vehicles. That is a part of the world that I know well, and the whole House knows that nearby territories were subject to the worst type of ethnic cleansing. The command and control systems for South Korea's navy were supplied by UK manufacturers helped by export credit guarantees. Of course, some items that were formerly supplied using export credit guarantees were the subject of great controversy. Those include the Hawks that the Conservatives sold to Indonesia in 1990.

In answer to one of the specific questions that hon. Members raised, I should make it clear that we reject any automatic linkage between export licences and ECGD support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) mentioned the Mauritius mandate and demanded that ECGD cover should not be granted to the poorest developing countries. I agree. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House on 4 December:

> "Export credit support for defence sales to 63 of the poorest developing countries is not generally available."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 145W.]

In fact, those countries have received precisely no ECGD cover for defence items in any of the past five years. We go further than the OECD statement of principles on official export credit support to heavily indebted poor countries, which lists only 41 countries, as my hon. Friends know.

Dr. Tonge: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Griffiths: I will not give way to the hon. Member, because she came in late and did not hear the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West. I want to answer the points raised by hon. Members who have been here throughout.

In the past five years, export credit guarantees have not been granted for defence contracts to any African country, expect Egypt and South Africa. Total Government aid to African countries—excluding, of course, the export credit guarantees to the two countries that I mentioned—totalled £450 million in 1997–98, £575 million in 1998–99, £634 million in 1999–2000 and £778 million last year.

The UK has one of the most responsible and transparent export licensing regimes in the world. In response to questions that have been raised, I should say that neither Pakistan nor Israel has benefited from UK defence companies using ECGs in the past five years—nor, since 1998, have Indonesia and India. When Thabo Mbeki's democratic Government sought to ensure that his country and all the citizens of South Africa had the necessary protection, they awarded a contract to BAE Systems and its partners to supply 52 aircraft. An application for ECG was accepted.

I shall now turn to the four questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West.

Dr. Cable: Before the Minister does that, I want to ask him about the transparency that he just described. Will he explain why he has just approved export licences for the sale of military equipment to the Channel Islands, including helicopter parts, machine guns and much else, given that the Channel Islands does not even have an army?

Nigel Griffiths: The issue is transparency. The hon. Gentleman knows about those export licences because the information is in the public domain, but I am happy to write to him about any specific questions that he wants to ask.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West asked why the National Audit Office is not examining the ECGD. As hon. Members will know, I served on the Public Accounts Committee, and I have the greatest admiration for the work of Sir John Bourn and his colleagues. They decide what they will investigate and they have clearly chosen to focus on expenditure that causes far more concern than that of the ECGD.

My hon. Friend's second point related to losses. The ECGD charges a premium to cover its costs and any expected losses, and as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House on 22 January 2002, it is her policy to eliminate subsidies from export credits. For several years, ECGD has made a net contribution to the Exchequer: £128 million in 1999 to 2000; £205 million in 2000–01; and I understand that a similar contribution is expected for 2000–02.

My hon. Friend's third question referred to the amount of ECGD support for defence manufacturers during the past 10 years, which he claimed amounted to a subsidy. Let me give the Chamber a fuller account of our stewardship since May 1997. For defence businesses supported from 17 May 1997, claims outstanding are zero. In fact, ECGD earned about £100 million in premium for defence business in the same period. The ECGD has actually made a net contribution. In summary, since May 1997, when the Labour Government were elected, no new business supported by ECGD for the defence sector has had claims sanctioned.

My hon. Friend's fourth question related to the need to provide figures country by country. The Secretary of State has done precisely that in her full answers to parliamentary questions. Let us be clear about how we ensure the defence of the UK. Our spending on equipment is almost £10 billion. We can—and do— buy some of that equipment abroad. We purchase other equipment from UK firms, which employ about 245,000 people in this country. Those companies also seek to export some of that equipment, or modifications of it, to other countries that want to defend their territory. That generates an income of about £5 billion a year.

Some would argue that such exports should be abolished, shrinking the defence industry to two thirds of its present size. That would not remove the need for the UK's armed forces to have equipment, but it would require the MOD to source more of it from abroad. Export credit support for defence exports is available from all the major exporting countries. Competition in the defence sector is fierce, and if UK manufacturing exporters are to remain competitive, they should have access to the same sort of support that is available to their overseas rivals.

Mrs. Mahon: Even if what is exported is used as it was in Israel this morning, against civilians? Eight children died.

Nigel Griffiths: I did refer to Israel earlier, when I assured hon. Members that my information was that Israel had not benefited from defence-related export credit guarantees for the past five years under this Government's stewardship.

I have been closely involved with the Export Control Bill, and it is important to realise and accept what the Quadripartite Committee said: we have one of the most transparent and effective export control regimes in the world. We are, however, seeking to strengthen it, because there is no complacency in our approach, and I shall describe some of the improvements that we have made.

First, we set out our ECGD business principles in 2000 to ensure that the ECGD promotes a responsible approach to business and takes account of the Government's policies on sustainable development, the environment, human rights, good governance and trade. Any support for the defence sector must now be consistent with those principles.

Secondly, we have increased transparency by ensuring that the ECGD publishes a list of guarantees in the annual report for the first time. Defence manufacturers are not exempt from the terms of confidentiality that apply to all other business sectors. Thirdly, the ECGD has strengthened its anti-corruption and due diligence procedures.

All nations have the right to self-defence; it is enshrined in article 51 of the United Nations charter. However, many countries do not have an indigenous defence industry and rely on purchasing equipment from elsewhere to safeguard their national security.

Harry Cohen: Does Iraq have the right to self-defence?

Nigel Griffiths: Every country has the right to self-defence, but I take it that my hon. Friend is not defending some of the terrible practices in Iraq. A few moments ago he openly condemned the purchases of past decades. Indeed, even those who contributed to licensing them have recognised that they were a mistake. I hope that that answers my hon. Friend's question. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. All interventions should be made from a standing position and through the Chair.

Nigel Griffiths: This has been an important debate. It has covered an issue that cuts across party differences, and many sincere contributions have been made. It is our job in government to ensure that there is no repetition of the arms-to-Iraq scandal and others. I welcome the interventions that have been made, and the keen interest shown by many Members of Parliament, particularly those who are present. For many years, they have highlighted any reprehensible practices, and they seek at all times to hold the Government accountable for export policy and the way in which export credit guarantees are given.

The debate has given those of us in government the chance to explain how our policy is working, and I urge every hon. Member to read this year's annual report. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West for securing the debate and enlightening us all.

Belarus

12.29 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): I am grateful for this opportunity to bring the situation in Belarus back to the attention of the House. This is the third time that I have raised the subject in such a debate, but I make no apology for that. The oppressed people of Belarus rely on us to give them the voice that they are denied in their own country. In July last year and July 2000, I outlined the condition of what was, and sadly remains, the most authoritarian of European countries. Since then, the position has got worse.

I should like first to welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien). It is my first opportunity to welcome him to his new position. In the three debates that I have been fortunate enough to secure, he is the third Minister to reply. I regard these opportunities as important moments for Ministers to familiarise themselves with, and educate themselves on, this question. I also welcome him back to the Government, as he was a loss to them. I am sure that he will do well.

It is important for us in the free Parliaments of the world to continue to remind the authorities in Minsk that we are watching them closely and that they shall one day be called to account. Last year, the Minister for Europe spoke well of the need for the torch of liberty to be lit for Belarus. Over the years, that torch has illuminated the hidden secrets of totalitarian dictators throughout the world, been used to search out and expose the wicked deeds of tyrants and helped bring half our continent closer to the clear light of responsible government. Mr. Lukashenko and his cronies in Minsk should be in no doubt that we will continue to hold the torch of freedom for Belarus.

In the past two years, we have seen first parliamentary and then presidential elections in Belarus. Both were severely flawed. The Minister will know that the British Government said that the parliamentary elections

> "failed to meet international standards for democratic elections"—[*Official Report*, 11 January 2001; Vol. 360, c. 603W.]

I am sure that the Government are equally critical of last year's presidential elections, in which the united opposition forces struggled against injustice and corruption. The elections were conducted in a country where there is no proper rule of law or division of powers, no legitimate Parliament and no free access to the media for the opposition forces. Electoral law in Belarus is far from fair and, inasmuch as it exists, is evaded rather than respected by the state authorities. Above all, the atmosphere of fear created by Mr. Lukashenko persists and, in recent months, has perhaps heightened. As in all totalitarian societies, fear is essential for keeping the system going. Belarus is a police state going to the bad. It remains the worst such country in Europe, and Mr. Lukashenko continues to hold the unenviable title of our continent's most tyrannical leader.

Before examining developments since the recent elections, it is important to remind the House of concerns that have existed for some time. We should not lose sight of the depth of the problems in Belarus. In recent years both the United Nations committee against

[Mr. Michael Trend]

torture and Amnesty International have commented fiercely on Lukashenko's curtailment of basic liberty and freedoms, and I will cite a few past cases that are still alive. The Belarussian authorities have still failed to initiate impartial and thorough investigations into the "disappearances" of the former Interior Minister Yury Zakharenko in May 1999, the former first secretary chairman of the dissolved Belarussian Parliament Viktor Gonchar and his companion Anatoly Krasovsky in September 1999, and the Russian television cameraman Dmitry Zavadsky in July 2000. Amnesty International's three prisoners of conscience in Belarus—Professor Yury Bandazhevsky, Andrey Klimov and Vladmir Koudinov—remain in prison. In each case, the real reason for their imprisonment was their opposition to Mr. Lukashenko. I could mention countless other examples, but suffice it to say that our memories will go on as long as it takes.

More recently, what has happened in Belarus since the recent elections? The simple answer is that there has been an increase in state control of Belarussian society and further concentration of power in the hands of Lukashenko. His Government have failed to produce any viable plan to reform the ailing Belarussian economy, which is heading full speed towards crisis, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has said that it will curtail its activities in Belarus because the country has failed to enact economic and political reforms. The EBRD announced last year that it would review its activities following the presidential elections. It now sees no evidence of a commitment to the principles of multi-party democracy, pluralism and market economics. It probably did not help that after the presidential elections Lukashenko also unseated several senior businessmen from their positions when it suited him to do so.

Lukashenko has also fallen out with his one former international ally, the Russian leader President Putin. Assaults on human rights and freedoms in Belarus are becoming even more blatant and the situation continues to deteriorate. I shall give examples of that. For some years, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe has played an important role in voicing the concerns of the free world in Minsk. After many months of worsening relations between the Belarus Government and the OSCE, the authorities have refused to extend the visa of the acting head of the OSCE's advisory and monitoring group in Belarus, Andrew Carpenter. No reason has been given for de facto expulsion of Mr. Carpenter, which means in effect that the sterling work that the OSCE has done in Belarus has come to an end. The expulsion was condemned at a recent OSCE parliamentary assembly meeting in Berlin and the Council of Europe has also registered its support for the OSCE position. It was right that the delegation from the Belarus Parliament—which was elected two years ago but which we do not recognise as legitimate—was not allowed to sit in the OSCE parliamentary assembly.

The case of two journalists of the independent regional newspaper, *Pahonya*, in Grodno who were convicted of libelling Mr Lukashenko during last year's presidential campaign has also caused much concern. The two men, Mikola Markevich and Pavel Mazheiko, were sentenced to serve up to two and a half and two years respectively in a detention camp. Amnesty International has said about the case:

> "The sentencing of these journalists yet again revealed Belarus' inability to brook dissent and allow its small independent journalist community to give voice to widely shared concerns about the fate of a series of high-profile 'disappearances' in the country".

What remains of press freedom in Belarus is in a precarious position. *Pahonya* has now been shut down. Other journalists have been arrested and other publications are under threat. Lukashenko's reign of terror extends across all the provinces of Belarus.

Another case should give us great cause for concern. Mr Anatoly Lebedko, leader of the United Civil party, is an old friend of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, of which I have the honour to be a governor. He has travelled widely in his campaign to put the case for the democrats of Belarus; indeed, hon. Members of all parties met him in the House only a few years ago. He too is in a position of potential personal danger. On 12 July he was summoned to the prosecutor's office and informed that a criminal case had been opened against him. The Belarus Ministry of Justice has begun a broad examination of activities of the United Civil party; the authorities demanded that they be given 5,000 documents within two days. Their intentions are clear: to get rid of the UCP and others who effectively block the Belarussian Government's attempts to achieve international legitimacy. Other political parties, independent trade unions and non-governmental organisations have also been targeted and subjected to harassment. Ordinary people as well as political leaders and journalists have been subject to criminal and administrative persecution for taking part in demonstrations: for instance, there were severe beatings of peaceful demonstrators who demanded social protection for workers and pensioners in April.

There is also a threat to freedom of religion in Belarus. The Belarus Assembly recently approved a draft bill to introduce compulsory registration of religious communities as well as other restrictions on religious freedoms in the country—which has great resonance for those of us who followed the assaults on religious freedom under the Soviet Union. In the past few weeks, we have once again heard the voice of the Keston Institute, which I am ashamed to say I have not thought about much in the past 10 years. It still exists, and has pointed out the threat that this law poses to Protestant churches and non-traditional religious movements in Belarus.

Lukashenko' s behaviour on the international scene continues to give as much concern as his tyranny at home. There have been many reports recently about the part that Belarus plays in international arms trading. Only last week, United States Congressman Christopher Smith, who was in Berlin for the OSCE parliamentary assembly, commented on his fears about the extent and nature of Lukashenko's arms dealing. In an interview with Radio Svoboda, Mr. Smith said:

> "The facts I saw, both confidential and not confidential ones, evidence that Minsk is a main source of arms delivery to dictatorships and terrorists, including Iraq, for which the potential targets are the USA and British military aircrafts, patrolling the air zone. It is a special question. There is an agreement at a high level that Lukashenko supports terrorists."

We should understand that that view is widely held in Washington. This country has a clear interest in not allowing Belarus to operate as a European arsenal of terrorism.

It is also clear that we should keep a close eye on the deteriorating relationship between Lukashenko and President Putin of Russia. Since 11 September last year, much has changed in the relationship between Russia and the west. A consequence of the improving relationship has been a falling out between the authorities in Moscow and Minsk. A few weeks ago, several parties of the Russian state Duma, including the Union of Right Forces and Yabloko, urged President Putin to press Belarus to investigate all its cases of disappearance. The leader of the Union of Right Forces, Boris Nemtsov, said that Putin is concerned about the number of people who have gone missing in Belarus. That is a great change. Last year, Putin was not prepared to use his influence for good in the Belarussian presidential elections. Now, he pours scorn on Lukashenko's wild plans for a union of equals between Belarus and Russia.

Surely those developments present the west with an opportunity. Belarus has hitherto relied heavily on moral and financial support from Russia. There is some evidence that the continual notice that we in the west give to individual cases in Belarus pays off, in that the authorities tread with greater care. How much more of an effect could President Putin have if he really decided to help sort out the disgrace that is the Government of his neighbour, Belarus?

We must also keep sight of the fact that Belarus will quite soon be the European Union's neighbour, given the EU's ever widening border. Drug traffickers and other serious criminals are allowed to operate in Belarus. The EU has a clear interest here, too.

Finally, I want to pay a personal tribute to the brave people who keep the torch of freedom alight in Belarus. The debate always returns to human rights. Those who work for human rights internationally, especially in oppressed countries, most deserve our support. International parliamentary bodies and groups such as Amnesty International continue to play an important and robust part in the fight against injustice. Our embassy staff in Belarus should also be commended, as should the OSCE mission. Charter'97 does much to bring news from Belarus to the attention of the outside world, as does Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. However, our greatest concern must always be for individuals. At this time, I am thinking chiefly of Mr. Lebedko.

If I have one delicate word of criticism for our own Government, it is that I still regret the closure of the British Council in Minsk. At the time of the closure, Members from both sides of the House were very critical of the Government for sending the wrong signal to the Government and democrats in Belarus. If the Minister can say anything today that might bring some hope that the Government will reconsider their decision, it would be very welcome.

The United States and European Governments, and many international bodies and observers, have rightly condemned Lukashenko's behaviour. I look to our Government today to raise their voice again in defence of the human rights of the people of Belarus. Liberty, the rule of law and the right to own property are at the heart of individual and collective freedom. These are denied to the people of Belarus at the moment. I urge the Government to take the opportunity to add their voice—the voice of a free and strong people—to the general condemnation of Lukashenko and to do all that they can in particular cases to advance the cause of liberty in Belarus.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I thank the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) for his warm words on my appointment: I am looking forward to carrying out my new responsibilities. I congratulate him on keeping issues about Belarus in the public eye. It is indeed a police state going to the bad, as the hon. Gentleman described it, and it needs to know that Members of Parliament in the UK will keep the torch of liberty burning for the people of Belarus.

It is almost exactly two years ago since the hon. Gentleman raised the issue of Belarus for a summer Adjournment debate. He raised it again last July, and now brings this important issue before the House once again. When we debated Belarus two years ago, the country was due to hold parliamentary elections. The then Minister of State noted that the flawed referendum of November 1996 had set the country on an anti-democratic path, from which it has not deviated. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) hoped that the parliamentary elections of 2000 would be used to take a step towards democracy. In last year's debate, he noted that those hopes were not fulfilled, but looked forward again to the presidential elections due last September. I regret that I am unable to bring news of any improvement in Belarus. Rather, the democracy and human rights position there has deteriorated.

Most opposition parties boycotted the parliamentary elections of October 2000. The conduct of those elections did not comply with international standards. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Union all declined to send official observers to the elections, and have not recognised the election as legitimate.

Presidential elections were held on 9 September last year, and the Belarussian electoral commission declared President Lukashenko the winner with 75 per cent. of the vote, but the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights reported that the election process had failed to meet OSCE standards. After two years and two flawed elections, President Lukashenko' s re-election regrettably appears only to have confirmed him in his anti-democratic path.

Most seriously, no progress has been made in investigating the disappearances of political opponents or the oppression of political opponents. I shall mention, as did the hon. Member for Windsor: the former Interior Minister, Yury Zakharenko, the Belarus Supreme Soviet Deputy, Viktor Gonchar, Anatoly Krasovsky and the journalist Dmitry Zavadsky. We are also worried about the prisoners of conscience to whom the hon. Member for Windsor referred: Professor Bandazhevsky, Andrey Klimov and Vladmir Koudinov. We in this country are concerned about them all. Some remain missing and no progress on these cases has been made, despite frequent expressions of concern from the international community.

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

Belarus's legislature, the National Assembly, is the product of the flawed and internationally unrecognised elections of 2000. It is now considering an illiberal law, requiring the registration of religious communities. The proposed Bill would outlaw religious groups active in Belarus for fewer than 20 years or with fewer than 20 Belarus citizens. One might have anticipated that Lukashenko was the sort of person who would have sought to ban the 12 apostles. The Bill clearly sets out Lukashenko's vision for Belarus—to turn back the clock to at least 1982.

On the economy, Lukashenko has reiterated his opposition to structural reform and earlier this year assumed powers to interfere in business activities. Attempts to reach agreement with the International Monetary Fund have consistently failed. The directors of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development reported in March that economic conditions in Belarus were such as to preclude fulfilment of the technical conditions for new lending.

The people of Belarus are being impoverished by their President. Further evidence of the path followed by Lukashenko is found in his relationship with the OSCE, which has deteriorated in the past two years. In 1997, the OSCE permanent council established an advisory and monitoring group, which was set up in Minsk in 1998. However, following the departure of the group's head official, the Belarussian authorities have refused to grant a visa for a replacement and have refused to extend the visas of other senior AMG personnel.

The hon. Member for Windsor noted the latest turn of events. The senior OSCE expatriate—Andrew Carpenter, a Briton—was told on 3 June that his visa was not to be extended and that he had until midnight to leave the country. Such behaviour by the Belarussian authorities is unacceptable and gratuitously damages relationships with other countries, such as ours.

What can we do about it? Our actions to deal with Belarus must necessarily be taken in concert with our EU and other partners. We are all exerting pressure for change but in the end the solution lies in Lukashenko's own hands; we cannot run Belarus for him. He has been in power since 1994, and he has four years of his current term left to run. The UK and other EU member states have made our position very clear. The measures taken by the EU in 1997 remain in place. They restrict ministerial contacts with Belarus, suspend aid except for humanitarian reasons or to support civil society, and suspend ratification of the EU-Belarus partnership and co-operation agreement.

EU member states will not support Belarus's membership of the Council of Europe. NATO's partnership for peace agreement, signed in 1995, remains undeveloped. Aid to Belarus by international financial institutions is restricted, going only to support small and medium-sized enterprises and the private sector, with a view to strengthening civil society. I should here point out that we have no quarrel with the people of Belarus, as the hon. Member for Windsor said. We wish to alleviate the problems they face because of the misguided policies of their leader. Giving money to Lukashenko is a waste and unless we can get help directly to the people of Belarus it is frankly better to keep the cheque book shut.

Belarus may not be changing, but the region around it is. Belarus's western neighbour, Poland, is now a member of NATO and should soon join the EU. Belarus's north-western neighbours, Latvia and Lithuania, are candidates to join both NATO and the EU. To the south, Ukraine has just declared its intention to join NATO, and is seeking to intensify its relations with the EU, which it has stated its desire to join one day.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently launched a wider Europe initiative which aims to encourage the EU to set out a policy for its relationship with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus after EU enlargement. Such a policy could be the basis for the fruitful development of relations between the EU and its three new eastern neighbours. We envisage enhanced agreement in a range of areas, conditional upon further reforms in the countries concerned. The Danish presidency is taking forward detailed work on these elements. On present form, Belarus looks likely to miss out on the opportunities that that would offer, but the clear option of a more beneficial relationship with the EU will soon be on the table. Belarus will need to decide how to respond.

To the east, Russia has established a new relationship with NATO. It also has a key role in the future of Belarus, not least because of Lukashenko's interest in a Russia-Belarus union. As the hon. Gentleman said, the plan seems to have been thrown into doubt following last month's meeting in St. Petersburg between Presidents Putin and Lukashenko. At the meeting, President Putin seemed lukewarm, to say the least, about the concept, and the prospect of uniting Belarus's unreformed economy with that of Russia, which is much further advanced, cannot be attractive.

We understand President Putin's wish to develop a close relationship with neighbouring states with which Russia has traditionally close ties. An undemocratic and economically dependent Belarus is a less interesting proposition, even if it is on Russia's doorstep and any union would be on its terms. The hon. Gentleman is right that we hope that the pressure for reform in Belarus will come from the east as much as the west, and we would welcome any decision by Russia to use its influence to encourage positive changes in Belarus.

The hon. Gentleman referred to reports about arms supplies and links to Iraq. We are concerned about the reports and are watching the situation carefully. President Lukashenko needs a clear warning that close relationships with Iraq would not just lead to him being frowned upon by the international community, but to it expressing its views even more strongly than that.

I repeat my congratulation to the hon. Member for Windsor on securing this debate. I also repeat the concern that the UK shares with the people of Belarus about the way in which their President is running the country into the ground. Lukashenko is leading his country backwards economically and politically, and that is unsustainable. We shall ensure that the pressure for reform, or the torch of liberty as the hon. Gentleman described it, continues at least to flicker in Belarus and is supported by parliamentarians in this country. The day will come when Belarus returns to the democratic path and the European mainstream.

Charter Holiday Industry

12.57 pm

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): I am delighted to have secured this important debate on a subject that directly affects the lives of many people in the United Kingdom.

According to the Home Office's website, more than 38 million holiday trips were undertaken from this country last year, and of those more than 20 million were what is known as package or inclusive holidays. This week, airports throughout the UK will move vast numbers of holiday-making families to their dream destinations. The people taking those trips—to the heat of the Spanish costas, the fun of Majorca, the nightlife of Ibiza, the magic of Florida or wherever their chosen holiday resort lies—deserve the best value their money can buy.

Those people have worked hard all year. Many pay the cost of their trip with loans and will repay them in the next 12 months in time for next year's holiday. However, millions of them do not realise that they have been ripped off by greedy holiday companies. The phrases ripped off, fleeced, done, overcharged or taken for a ride all mean the same thing: people have not received value for money. Unfortunately, no one seems able or willing to give them the protection they deserve.

I do not intend to discuss the holidays from hell that we see commonly on television: the four-star hotels with no sanitation; the family rooms above a 24-hour discotheque; the half-built self-catering unit; the room with a view of the local rubbish dump; the pool with no water; the cruise ship with no hot water; and the villas flooded with too much water. I intend to highlight the need for regulation of the holiday industry to ensure a better deal for those who put their trust and hard-earned cash in the hands of holiday operators.

For some time, I have been appalled by the practices of the holiday industry, as they extract as much money from their customers as possible. However, I became even more appalled, and angry, when I discovered that those same companies paid no heed to the guidelines laid down by the Civil Aviation Authority on the serious matter of safety during flights. I quote from the CAA's "Flight Operations Bulletin on Cabin Safety":

> "Emergency situations have shown that the separation of family groups, especially children, may lead to problems in emergency situations. Of particular concern is that during emergency evacuations group members separated from other members of the family, or party, might seek each other out during an evacuation process."

That is very understandable. What family or parent would not immediately ensure their child's safety in the event of an emergency evacuation from an aircraft? The guidelines continue:

> "Such actions could have an adverse effect on passenger flow rates towards emergency exits and might seriously affect the outcome of an evacuation."

That is exactly what would happen if families were not seated together on their holiday flights. Undoubtedly, parents would not escape quickly from an aircraft if they knew that the rest of their family were sitting some rows behind them. They quite naturally would make their way back along the aircraft, against the flow of the other passengers, to ensure their family's safety. That delay, caused by seat separation at the check-in desk, could mean the difference between life and death for many people on a stricken plane.

In the same bulletin, the CAA states clearly:

> "Operators are recommended to develop procedures for seat allocation that takes into account the following factors
>
> a) Children accompanied by adults, should ideally be seated in the same row as the adult. In wide-bodied aircraft children and accompanying adults should not be separated by more than one aisle.
>
> b) Where such criteria is not possible, children should be separated by no more than one seat row from accompanying adults.
>
> c) Seat allocation procedures for family groups, including adults, should reflect the above criteria."

Those are straightforward, unambiguous guidelines with no possible misinterpretation: for everyone's safety, families must sit together on aircraft. What do United Kingdom holiday companies do? That nice Mr. Thomson, not to mention Airtours, JMC and Global—in fact, nearly every charter company—charge us extra for the privilege of staying alive with our kids in an aircraft emergency.

During the past few weeks, my American intern, Jess Lorber, and I have contacted a number of well-known travel firms to find out whether they charge families for the privilege of sitting together on an aircraft. Almost 90 per cent. told us that, to guarantee a seat together, there would be an average charge of £10 per family member. However, they did not all charge £10: some gave discounted children's rates of £7 and £5. Kindness indeed. All the operators told us that that was an extra service, and the best way of ensuring that a family was seated together. One operator even told us, "Between you and me, we do it to remain competitive with other companies, as they all charge fees." Forget about safety, is not it comforting to know that some companies charge merely to remain competitive? That statement sums up the need for this debate and, more importantly, the need for stronger regulation of the holiday sector. Companies argue that they rip families off because their competitors do. That is an indictment of the holiday sector.

I have no hesitation in calling on holidaymakers to boycott companies that charge families for the privilege of sitting together on a flight to or from their holiday destination. There is no need for such charges, whether at the pre-booking or late-deal stages. Every company knows beforehand how many families will be travelling together and can pre-allocate adjoining seats, just as many scheduled flight operators do every single day of the week. I hope that the Minister will address that serious issue.

After the dreadful events of 11 September last year, every flight operator and airport rightly had to review their security procedures. The world had moved into a new era of asymmetrical threat from terrorist attack, and every innocent family became a potential target. I believe that every holiday company in the UK now charges a security surcharge of £7 per person. I presume that it is for the increased costs at airports and on flights, although one company representative stated:

> "These charges were government imposed after September 11."

Perhaps the Minister can tell us when the Government imposed such a charge. I suspect that he will be as puzzled as I am.

[Mr. Frank Roy]

Perhaps the £7 charge pays for more controlled airport parking, perimeter fencing, CCTV, luggage and body scanners and more employees at airports. However, is not it strange that a company such as easyJet charges only £1.60 for the same services? The explanation on the company's website for imposing the charge is that, because of the incidents of 11 September, the cost of running a secure airline had risen and, although easyJet had tried to avoid incurring extra charges for its customers, a charge of £1.60 had been imposed to appease insurance syndicates. It assures customers that it

"will not be making any additional profit from this charge."

What happens to the difference of £5.40 between easyJet's £1.60 charge and the £7 charged by travel companies? Why is it charged? I certainly do not know why; perhaps a tougher regulator would be able to tell us.

Can we argue that a family of four should have to pay almost £30 for extra security at the airport and on flights? I doubt that we can, but BAA plc may be able to. However, its senior management told other Members and me last week that

"they have passed on no extra security charges to flight operators since September 11."

By my calculations—according to the school that I went to—more than 20 million trips taken by holidaymakers at £7 per person bring in £140 million. For what? We know that the money is not going to BAA plc. It does not buy more controlled parking spaces, perimeter fencing, CCTV cameras, luggage and body scanners or more people. So where does it go? Are holiday companies ripping customers off as a result of 11 September? I sincerely hope not. Perhaps the Minister will give us his opinion about that.

Can the Minister explain the meaning of a holiday advertisement on Teletext a few days ago, which said:

"Family of 4, 14 days, HB, Majorca, 1,500, BF £10pp, TOD £10pp, DC/CCC 2.5 per cent."

In the interests of fairness, I shall repeat that more slowly:

"Family of 4, 14 days, HB, Majorca, 1,500, BF £10pp, TOD £10 pp, DC/CCC 2.5 per cent."

I am sure that you know what that means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but, with all due respect, I hazard a guess that the Minister would have been puzzled on reading it, as I was. It means that 14 days half board in Majorca for a family of four costs £1,500. Booking fees are £10 per person, which for a family of four is £40. Tickets on departure are £10 per person, which is £40 for a family of four. I shall refer later to DC/CCC. The new price is now £1,580.

There are more hidden rip-offs. The £7 per person security charge would cost a family of four £28. In late deals, transfer between the airport and the hotel costs £15 per person, which is another £60. Optional flight meals cost £10 per person, which is an extra £40. Even the 20 kg luggage allowance that used to be included now costs £15 per person, so that is an extra £60. All those hidden charges blow away the theory that we are still considering a package holiday. It is no longer a package holiday, but a fragmented rip-off. Our family of four, who were paying £1,500, now need to pay £1,768. What is the final rip-off? Every travel agent sets its employees targets to sell holiday insurance to unsuspecting customers. Even when free insurance incentives are offered, which are known in the trade as silver level, employees are ordered to sell gold-level insurance, which costs £10 per adult and £7.50 per child. That insurance is paid out against a holiday costing £1,500 per person. How many ordinary families in this country book a fortnight's holiday in Majorca at a cost of £1,500 each? Families are paying far in excess of what they need to pay. If a family of four are not offered free insurance, they pay the going travel agency rate of a staggering £31.99 per adult and £27.74 per child to cover the two-week holiday. Those inflated insurance charges add an extra £119.46 to the family's bill.

From the original price of £1,500, our family must now pay a new amount of £1,887.46. To borrow words from "Who wants to be a millionaire", "But we don't want to give you that. We want to give you DC/CCC at 2.5 per cent." That debit or credit card charge of 2.5 per cent. on £1,887.46 is £47.18. That brings the new grand rip-off charge for the £1,500 holiday seen on Teletext to £1,934.64. That is an astonishing hidden charge of nearly 30 per cent.—a rip-off in anyone's language.

I can highlight other rip-offs, such as cancellation fees. If a family buys out within 56 days, they pay £105 per person, so our family of four would lose £420. However, if the company cancels, it pays out only £20 per person, which would be a total of £80. There is an increase if the customer cancels 14 days before departure. They would lose 90 per cent. of their money, yet the company would pay only £40 per person if it did likewise. That means that if our family of four cancel, they lose £1,698.72, but in similar circumstances, the company is obliged to pay out only £160. I genuinely believe that consumers receive a raw deal from holiday companies. Their flagrant disregard for the Civil Aviation Authority's guidelines is scandalous. Their security fees must be justified, their hidden charging must be investigated and the rip-offs must stop.

While researching this matter, Jess Lorber asked me why British consumers do not complain more and insist on a higher level of service. He was right to ask that, and it is why I am complaining in this debate. I am looking for a far higher level of service and demanding tougher regulation of the holiday industry.

The examples that I have given reveal only the tip of an iceberg. We all know that there are many horror stories to be told about the charter holiday industry, so I call on the Government to launch an inquiry into the need for stricter regulation of that industry. I and 20 million others await with interest the Government's response.

1.15 pm

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, which is topical as we are now in the holiday season. He raised important issues and made typically shrewd observations on the travel industry and the need to protect holidaymakers.

I shall speak first about the holiday market in the United Kingdom, which is one of the largest and most diverse in Europe with about 20 million packages sold every year and a turnover of around £8 billion. The traditional holiday market is changing and, increasingly, the familiar package is just one of a number of holiday products from which consumers can choose. Before focusing on my hon. Friend's concerns, I want to outline the protection available to the travelling public in the United Kingdom.

There is already a considerable body of regulations governing holidays, especially package holidays. Package travel law recognises the great diversity of the market from the largest operators, which are household names, to the smaller, independent businesses and one-person operations. The key legislation is the package travel regulations, which implement the 1990 package travel directive. One of the main reasons for the introduction of those regulations was to enable dissatisfied holidaymakers to pursue their case with a single supplier. Previously, aggrieved holidaymakers had to pursue their case with hoteliers and transport providers in a foreign country. The important protection is that the regulations place on tour operators a wide range of obligations to their clients, and ensure that when things go wrong consumers have adequate means of obtaining redress. The regulations also require tour operators that become insolvent to be able to repatriate and refund holidaymakers.

Another important protection for consumers is provided by the Civil Aviation Authority's licensing regulations. The majority of package holidays sold in the United Kingdom involve air travel, and the package travel regulations require organisers to hold a licence issued under the Civil Aviation (Air Travel Organisers' Licensing) Regulations 1995. Those licences are administered by the CAA and provide financial protection arrangements for air packages.

Other consumer legislation also applies to the sector, including the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, misleading prices law, the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 and the Control of Misleading Advertisement Regulations 1988. They provide protection against misleading statements by tour operators about the holidays they provide, and apply to all holidays, not just packages.

The package holiday market is also self-regulated, primarily by the codes of practice operated by the Association of British Travel Agents. Those codes of practice have been tried and tested over a long period. ABTA operates an independent arbitration scheme to resolve disputes between holidaymakers and ABTA members, who sell more than 90 per cent. of packages in the United Kingdom.

The fact that there is a strong body of legislation does not mean that things do not go wrong. As my hon. Friend said, things can go awry even before a holiday has started, and he highlighted problems arising from lack of transparency when consumers are given misleading or confusing information.

The travel industry is dynamic and constantly changing in response to consumer demand and other less predictable events. Since 11 September, the tourism industry has been through a difficult time. Recovery has been slow since consumer confidence took a blow. Bookings for the next year are down on previous years, and the industry has been going through some restructuring; it has cut capacity in an effort to face new challenges. Some costs, such as aviation insurance and airport security, have become more unpredictable.

As I said earlier, other market developments include an increasing trend away from package holidays. Instead, consumers put together elements of holidays from sources other than traditional travel agents by, for example, looking for the best deals on the internet. The phenomenal rise of the no-frills airlines has been part of that trend, and it is set to rise further. However, the great majority of British family holidaymakers continue to look for conventional packages, and the variety of deals and prices on offer can be bewildering.

As my hon. Friend emphasised, changing trends can bring problems as well as increased choice for consumers. The regulatory bodies report significant numbers of consumer complaints about this sector, and we take that very seriously. The levels of protection for consumers vary according to the methods by which consumers book their holidays; the rules are extremely complex. There are concerns that consumers may not know their rights despite the efforts of the regulator, industry bodies and consumer groups, which is why my Department is taking steps to improve the information available to consumers.

Holidays that go wrong can be particularly distressing for consumers. My hon. Friend described several specific problems encountered by consumers when they try to book holidays. I shall briefly address each of those.

As regards security charges, I appreciate the concerns about the levying of yet more charges on holidaymakers. However, the industry is best placed to make a commercial judgment as to what extent extra security charges need to be passed on to the consumer. The Government have the same concerns as my hon. Friend. If additional security charges are levied, they should be fully justified and presented in a clear and transparent manner so that holidaymakers know what they are paying for at the outset and can make a choice of whether to use a particular operator or to go elsewhere.

We are liaising with trading standards officers on concerns about pricing practices in the holiday industry. The law is clear: prices that include security charges must be made transparent. We are ensuring that this sector operates in that manner.

Concerns have been raised that consumers are inadequately protected because they are increasingly buying holidays that are not packages and so fall outside the scope of the regulations. That issue was covered in a recent European Parliament report, which proposed a fairly wide-ranging review of the package travel directive. The origins of the report lie in earlier work carried out by the Commission on the implementation of the directive by all member states.

There is a trend among tour operators to add a number of supplementary charges to the price of a package, and my hon. Friend has given some examples of that. Others include charges for collecting tickets at

[Alan Johnson]

point of departure, and even for using the resort swimming pool. We believe that holiday operators should ensure that all charges are made clear to the consumer at the point of sale, so that people know what they are buying. My hon. Friend was worried about the practice of some operators of charging for pre-bookable seats. That is a matter of concern, particularly as the CAA recommends that in the interests of safety families should be seated together. I shall return to that point.

The recurring problem of misleading prices in brochures or shop windows is often highlighted in the media. Trading standards officers keep those practices under close scrutiny, and have initiated discussions with the industry about pricing. A particular problem is the way in which holiday prices are generally presented, with the use of discounts, fluid pricing and, last but not least, the increasing use of supplementary charges or optional extras, to which my hon. Friend has referred.

What are the Government doing about those criticisms? There are mechanisms in place for dealing with misleading statements. In addition to powers under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, trading standards officers are empowered to take action when they consider that a misleading price indication has been given. Any suspected breaches of pricing law fall within the scope of part III of the Consumer Protection Act 1987, and should be reported to the trading standards service so that it can investigate as appropriate. My Department is in close touch with the trading standards service on matters relating to that legislation, and trading standards takes a keen interest in such issues.

Seating arrangements on aircraft are such an important matter that the Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), who has responsibility for competition, consumers and markets, will be discussing it in more detail with the scheduled tour operators. That is in response to criticisms voiced by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw, not least at DTI questions recently.

My hon. Friend referred to the powers of the Director General of Fair Trading under the Control of Misleading Advertisement Regulations 1988. He does have such powers, but they are used only as a last resort. Advertising and sales promotion in the printed media in the United Kingdom are largely controlled by self-regulation. We would prefer businesses to use that means to ensure that their advertising material does not offend or mislead. The Advertising Standards Authority is responsible for ensuring compliance with the British code of advertising and sales promotion. It is to that organisation that concerns about misleading advertisements in the printed media should be directed.

That system of independent scrutiny, set up with the support of commercial businesses, shows why it is important to examine ways of tackling problems through self-regulation, such as improvements to codes of practice or information and advice, so as to arm consumers better when making decisions about holiday bookings. More regulation is sometimes the answer, but I hope that I have reassured my hon. Friend that the market is already well regulated and monitored. Given the circumstances that my hon. Friend described, I suggest that the travel industry should take primary responsibility for fulfilling its obligations to its customers, and should do so well and within the prescribed legal limits. If the industry fails to do that, it runs the risk of facing legal action.

Having said that, I recognise that the operation of legislation benefits from fresh consideration and review of its effectiveness. We are aware of the European Commission's interest in reviewing package travel and timeshare law. The Commission has said that further work is needed, for example, to clarify the definition of a package holiday. A recent European Parliament report recommended that the term "package" be redefined. We shall have to consider whether widening the scope of the directive would be appropriate and would address some of the concerns that my hon. Friend has raised.

We are ready to play a full part in ensuring that the travel market works properly, and we want to develop a dialogue with key players in the industry, with regulatory authorities and with key consumer bodies. The latest Commission initiative may provide the opportunity to resolve once and for all some of the issues surrounding the protection of consumers buying package holidays. By their very definition, the matters that we are discussing are wider international concerns, not just domestic issues. That initiative builds on work already done by the Commission and others. The market is changing, and traditional consumer attitudes to holidays, including the way in which they book them, are changing. The Government must ensure that consumers are protected in that constantly changing market, but consumers have a responsibility to be careful when buying one of the many types of holiday now on offer.

I congratulate my hon. Friend once again on raising an important matter. I hope that I have reassured him that there is work in progress to address the real concerns that he has raised this afternoon.

Hospital Services (Somerset)

1.29 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I am delighted to have secured this debate with only 24 hours to go until the recess. I want to be a little parochial; rather than discuss hospitals in Somerset, I should like to talk about the Minehead, Williton and Bridgwater hospitals in my constituency. I shall focus on the Minehead and Bridgwater hospitals, as the Williton hospital is quite new, and has had an exemplary record for many years. I want to consider the problems of a constituency that is more than 52 miles long, and covers some of the most sparsely populated areas of England. The problems of west Somerset are probably quite well known to many people. The area contains the biggest Butlins in Britain, where 9,000 people a week can enjoy the delights of the riviera of north Somerset. Last week, 280 people went down with a virus, and hon. Members can imagine the strain that was put on the local health service to deal with that problem. I could say that that happens only once in a while, but it tends to happen each year, when that number of people are in such close proximity to each other.

My constituency is a tourist area, including Exmoor, the Quantocks and the Levels. The last battle in Britain was fought in my constituency—some say that it still goes on. People come through it at an enormous cyclical rate to enjoy the delights of a very large area. The town of Bridgwater is the opposite extreme. It is an industrial town that makes cellophane, Sunny Delight, ammunition, plastics, extruded plastics and many other things. The hospitals cover a very sparse and dense area, but they have one thing in common: they cover a vast area.

I should like to pass on the apologies of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), from whose areas the hospitals draw people and who cannot be here owing to other duties. They have exactly the same problems with those two hospitals, and would say what I am saying. To put it crudely, we need two new hospitals: one in Minehead and one in Bridgwater. That is because the present hospitals were built by subscription, as most in this country were within living memory. The hospitals have a finite capacity. Minehead hospital is on three floors, with the operating theatre on the third floor. As hon. Members can well imagine, with today's health and safety concerns, doctors cannot operate on the third floor due to the constraints of fire regulations and other modern problems that were not taken account of quite so readily some years ago.

I want to cite some statistics to show why we need a new hospital: it is a case of the devil and the damned. West Somerset covers 218 square miles—London would fit into it easily. Bridgwater is a slightly smaller area, but it covers Mendip, Taunton Deane and a surrounding area that has the sea on only one side. The rest is almost the same size. There are on average 50 beds in Bridgwater hospital, slightly fewer in Minehead and about 30 in Williton. An enormous number of people need health care and they cannot always get it.

The local major hospital, Musgrove Park, is just outside the constituency of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). That hospital has its own problems because its general surgery unit needs about £40 million to bring it up to a standard that is acceptable today. It was built so that US Army jeeps could drive down the corridors during the last war. That is how wide the corridors are, although I am not sure jeeps would get down them nowadays. Musgrove Park is going down the private finance initiative route already, but I do not want to concern the Minister with that. However, we have infrastructure problems that we need to address. The hospital in Minehead is in the middle of the town, and it is physically impossible to expand it any further. The one in Bridgwater has exactly the same problem. It cannot be expanded because it is faced by a river, and a main road lies behind it.

We also have other problems. We have an enormous problem in housing nurses. There are not enough houses. The Minister may respond that that is the responsibility of another Department. It is incredibly expensive to live in Exmoor or the Levels. One would think that it would be comparatively cheap because it is a rural area, but in fact houses in Exmoor are more expensive by far than anywhere locally, because of the area and its outstanding beauty.

We also cannot recruit GPs. The whole of Somerset is short of GPs, but especially in my constituency. We cannot get them to come down and settle there. One would think that GPs would love to come to such a beautiful area and be part of a thriving rural community. It is a lovely place in which to bring up their families. However, they do not come and we are short of them. We are also short of dentists throughout the county, and we are trying to encourage them to come to the area. We have a problem getting them to settle in the area, although we had no problem in doing so until recently.

We have a problem with all levels of care. Until recently we were fighting tenaciously for equipment to keep our X-ray system in Minehead going. We managed to do so, but it cost £150,000, nearly half of which was raised by the League of Friends and others. We could not rely on our primary care trust to raise the money, although it is doing its best to provide money across the spectrum. The trust got the money and now has a digital X-ray machine, but thanks only to enormous support from the local community in the Minehead area.

Domiciliary care is another problem. We cannot get people to come down and settle because we have a problem with training our nurses. If a nurse settles in my area and needs to train to get up to the next level or grade, they have to go to Plymouth, Bristol or in some cases Truro. Truro is in Cornwall and is about 120 miles away. Plymouth is 80 miles away and Bristol is between 50 and 60 miles away. Those places are not easy to get to, so if a nurse intends to take time out and wants to get up to the next grade at a cost of £350, she has to do it in her own time. Getting cover in an area such as my constituency is almost impossible, so many nurses who want to get on and better themselves are not in a position to do so. We do not have enough people to take up all the slack in the system. I am sure that that is true throughout the United Kingdom, but I am describing the particular problems of a rural area.

Nurses' pay is another problem. I am delighted that the Government intend to build more houses in London for nurses, and are doing whatever else they can to encourage nurses, doctors and police, but that does not

[Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger]

help us in our area. Will the Minister consider some form of inducement for nurses to settle in rural areas, to encourage them and enable them to retrain? In Minehead especially we depend almost entirely on people who retire to the area or who are considering settling in the area because their husbands or wives have moved there.

I wonder whether, in the longer term, we should consider establishing a mechanism to encourage nurses and other specialists to settle in areas such as my constituency. They should not be offered a bribe—that would be cheap—but some form of incentive so that they could set up their family and themselves in an area where they know they can stay for a long time.

The health service is considering how to improve training in our area, and the university of Plymouth, with Somerset College of Arts and Technology in Taunton and Bridgwater college, is actively considering whether something can be done. However, as the Minister knows, the cost of doing anything like that is enormous, and it will be difficult for the university of Plymouth to improve matters without help from the Learning and Skills Council, the medical sector or the Department of Health. If that were forthcoming, a lot of people would be willing to come and settle in the area in the certainty that they would receive training and be able to stay on. That goes for GPs and for everybody else.

About a third of the beds in our three hospitals are blocked. We have a major problem in Somerset with care homes. We have lost many beds during the past few years, in an area with a large number of retired people, and the hospitals have had to take much of the strain. I had a meeting with all the health care providers in my constituency at Bridgwater hospital last Friday. They said that the situation was getting worse. I am not saying that there is an easy fix to the problem—there is not—but I hope that the Minister will try to deal with the problems caused by the fact that up to a third of the beds in those hospitals, which are almost always full, are taken up by people who need to be properly looked after either in the community or in care homes.

Somerset county council pays one of the lowest rates of income to nursing home operators in the United Kingdom. I see Somerset as the forgotten county. People go through it to get to Devon and Cornwall or elsewhere, and we seem to be forgotten. We have more old people than the areas that surround us. As a result of that, and the loss of homes, we cannot afford to keep those people, so homes are shutting down at an alarming rate. In Minehead, we have lost four homes in the past year. We cannot continue that level in any sustainable future. People have to go to Musgrove on the one ambulance that we have or stay in the hospital in Minehead, but the capacity there is such that acute patients have to go to Musgrove to be looked after.

People in hospitals tell us that they want to be in a care home but cannot get into one, which is a shame. That is not because they do not have the money. Some have the money, but beds are not available for them. A lady from one of the homes in my constituency told me a couple of weeks ago that she had a waiting list of five people for every bed. As the Minister knows, people usually get into nursing homes usually as a result of the death of a client, to put it crudely. We have a structural problem now that things have reached that level.

Another problem in Bridgwater—it applies to the whole of Somerset—is that the mental health department in the county wants to lay off between 45 and 50 people this year because of a funding crisis. I received an e-mail from a constituent, who stated:

> "The chief executive admitted at the meeting that services to our patients would suffer as a result of these cuts. This in turn will put extra pressure on the GP's and other primary care staff."

That sums up the problem. The area can ill afford to lose so many mental health professionals. I hope that the Minister will take that on board. It is not a criticism, but it may make him consider the future of a county that has encompassed mental health provision. We bring many people into Bridgwater from elsewhere and ably look after them. Is there any way in which we can bring that to the forefront of people's minds? Unfortunately, it tends to be disastrous when people's mental health is not as good as it should be. All the health care professionals involved suffer, as well as the person who is ill. I do not want blame to be apportioned; I merely want the problem to be sorted out. The Minister could address that.

I want to praise the Somerset Coast primary care trust, which has done a phenomenal job. Its work extends into the constituencies represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells, and it has tried to bring health care to the forefront of people's minds in the area. Donald Hinds and Alan Carpenter, the two people at the top, have worked incredibly hard with the general practitioners and all the health care professionals in my constituency and in the other two constituencies to ensure that the trust works. So far, so good, I can safely say. It is marvellous that the trust is creating a system in which GPs and nurses feel that they are part of the team and that people are talking to each other. Last Friday, I was delighted to see the executives of the trust and the health care professionals talking openly about the future.

In the past month, we have had two yellow alerts in Musgrove. There have been 12 medical outlays in July as well. We are a tourist area, and we cannot always cope with problems when we have an influx of tourists. The information about the yellow alerts came from a doctor, as I had wondered about them. Two in one month is not good. We cannot cope, and it does not help when people are in corridors on beds or when they cannot be admitted to hospital because there are no beds. The situation in Musgrove is extremely difficult.

We should consider new hospitals in such areas. They could be built with small accident and emergency departments, out-patient departments and so on. At the moment, in neither of my hospitals are such departments manned all the time. They do not have the capacity or the people, and that point must be considered. Resolving that problem would help the situation dramatically.

The only downside or fear that we have about the strategic health authority is that we have been thrown in with Dorset, and if people in my area need acute care they must go to Dorchester, Poole or Bournemouth. It is a long way to travel from my area to Dorset, through the constituency of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome. I wonder whether the decision is right; if it works, it will be marvellous, but if it does not it will be difficult for people in Somerset—certainly for those in my constituency. That is why we need those hospitals, because it takes the whole day to go down to Dorset.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) on securing this important debate. His passion for his constituency and for health issues in the area is evident. I know Somerset a little, having had occasion to visit Glastonbury in the past. One of the first media events in which I participated on becoming Member of Parliament was to visit Frome's Women's Institute for "Any Questions", so I know how friendly people are in that part of the country. The national health service is vital for people in his constituency and for everyone in the country. I am pleased to take on board much that has been said and to speak on the issue.

The hon. Gentleman referred to two community hospitals in his constituency, at Bridgwater and Minehead, which provide a valuable role and, at least to some extent, enjoy good local support. I join him in expressing my appreciation and thanks to those who work in them for the care and support that they provide to their patients. The hon. Gentleman raised the need for investment and to improve the environment of the two hospitals, which are managed by the Somerset Coast PCT.

I am pleased to be able to inform the hon. Gentleman that as part of the clean hospitals programme, the Government last year provided that PCT with £75,000 to improve cleanliness and decor at hospitals. Extensive refurbishment of community hospitals in Minehead, Williton, Bridgwater and Burnham has now been completed. It included the painting of hospital corridors and foyers, the provision of new signs to give patients clear directions around the hospitals, refurbished toilets and new tables and chairs.

The refurbishment is part of the Government's £60 million investment to improve the environment for patients across the country and comes with the requirement for NHS trusts to carry out monthly cleanliness inspections and quarterly building maintenance audits, to be monitored by strategic health authorities and NHS Estates.

The hon. Gentleman raised concerns about the changes to the two hospitals. One would expect a constituency MP to raise such concerns, and I take them on board. It is important to emphasise that the NHS has a new framework; we have been serious about shifting the balance of power from Richmond house to local PCTs in liaison with their strategic health authorities. The debate will be on record, but I encourage the hon. Member to take his views and those of his constituents to the local PCTs, which liaise with the strategic health authority to make those important local decisions.

The hon. Gentleman expressed concerns about mental health care. Those decisions may need to come back to Richmond house. Essentially, investment is shifting the balance of power. We are serious about that and committed to it in the NHS plan. That means that it is for local areas to make any decision.

I also hear what the hon. Gentleman says about the configuration of the strategic health authority. Again, that involves local decisions, and there are discussions about reconfiguration and other issues elsewhere in the country. That is an issue for the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in the health community in the Somerset and Dorset area.

The hon. Gentleman highlighted the problems faced by the local health community in recruiting suitably qualified staff. He will know that the main problem facing the health service is not necessarily the provision of extra money; indeed, people throughout the country will say that they see the resources coming through. The NHS is growing faster than any other health service in Europe and it has undergone the longest sustained period of growth that we have ever known. However, the hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned staffing constraints, including the number of trained and qualified staff across a range of specialties. Increasing the work force is therefore a top priority for him and, indeed, the Government. We have said that, by 2004, there will be 7,500 more consultants, 2,000 more GPs, 20,000 extra nurses, 6,500 extra therapists and 1,000 more medical school places, on top of the extra 1,100 already announced. That huge programme of growth is intended to deal with capacity issues that affect some of our larger counties, and particularly those whose population profiles include a large elderly community.

In 1996, there were 2,629 consultant anaesthetists. Five years later, there were 3,549—an extra 900. However, that is simply not enough, and we estimate that we will need another 2,500 consultant anaesthetists over the next nine or 10 years. We expect 1,850, so it looks as if there will be a shortfall. We therefore need a massive recruitment campaign to step up the numbers right across the board.

Trusts in Somerset have been active not only in recruiting the necessary additional staff but in retaining those who currently work in the area. The PCT has attended several career fairs around the country to showcase the facilities that are now available, and that is starting to have positive results. In addition, it offers a range of flexible working conditions, including flexible working patterns, team-based self-rostering, annual hours and flexitime. I understand that it is also looking to develop a child care strategy centre to provide staff with good, accessible and affordable child care. There will also be particular local needs and local ways of recruiting, which the PCT will be well placed to take on board, and I listened with interest to some of the hon. Gentleman's suggestions in that regard.

Several new developments are under way in Somerset. They are the result of the hard work and commitment of staff and of new moneys invested by the Government. They are helping the trust to attract new members of staff from across the country, and I want to mention some of the exciting new services in the Somerset area. A £17 million oncology centre is due to open in 2005. It will significantly improve services for the people of Taunton and Somerset, while reducing the need for patients to travel to Bristol for treatment. The Dene Barton House medical step-down unit has been developed at a cost of £700,000. That vital unit provides on-going care for patients once they have left the acute wards of Taunton and Somerset hospital, but before they are ready to go home, and it enables the trust to

[Mr. David Lammy]

reduce the length of time that people stay in hospital unnecessarily following treatment. It also helps to free beds in the district general hospital that are taken by patients who are waiting for nursing home places and who would be better placed outside the hospital environment.

A new cardiac catheter lab and angioplasty service have been developed at a cost of £420,000. The new service will increase the range of services available to the people of Taunton and Somerset, while reducing the need for patients to travel to Bristol. Those significant new investments will lead to an improved service for patients and show the commitment of the local NHS to providing specialist services closer to home, so that patients need not travel long distances for treatment.

I take on board many of the suggestions that have been made. I hope that the investment, alongside the ideas and good practice that have arisen as a result of the PCT's work with the hon. Gentleman and others, is the beginning of a health journey for people in the Somerset area. We are starting to see the benefits of investment and reform, both nationally and locally. Waiting time figures have improved significantly. The trust met its 2001 NHS plan targets of no patients waiting in excess of 15 months for in-patient treatment, or 26 weeks for out-patient treatment, by March 2002. It also achieved a maximum in-patient wait of 14 months and reduced the number waiting in excess of 13 weeks for an out-patient appointment to 971.

The trust will achieve the NHS plan target of a maximum 21-week out-patient wait by March 2003 and will move towards a 13-week maximum during 2003–04. Waiting list figures should continue to improve following the redevelopment of existing theatres and ward areas, the establishment of additional beds and the development of a diagnostic and treatment centre.

The hon. Gentleman raised concerns about delayed discharges, and linked the problem to the geography and population profile of his constituency, which includes a large elderly population because people retire there. A few weeks ago, I was in Devon, where there are similar issues because of the nature of the county. He is right that there are too many delayed discharges, not only in Somerset but across the country. However, we are investing record amounts of money in social services. The Chancellor's Budget commitment to double annual increases in social services funding for the next three years will give social services departments the money that they need to build care capacity in the future.

We have already taken action to maintain capacity in the care home sector, to ensure that older people get the choice of a care home place when they need it. An extra £300 million has been allocated to local authorities to build capacity locally. From this, Somerset county council received £2.25 million. Our monitoring shows that at least half of that money has gone to support care homes with fee increases of between 3 and 10 per cent. since last September. The rest is enabling older people to stay in their own homes or to avoid having to go into hospital in the first place.

The number of delayed discharges is also falling as a result of the investment, which has ensured that people get the care that they need in the right place. In March 2001 there were 5,938 beds blocked but there were only 4,691 in March 2002.

We have already taken action to ensure that the care standards do not lead to the closure of good quality care homes. We will continue to monitor the situation and will take further action if necessary. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the on going discussions between the local council and independent care home providers to address local concerns.

In conclusion, I would like to praise the staff working in the Somerset Coast PCT. I am pleased to support the hon. Gentleman's view that their dedication and commitment is highly commendable.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 24 July 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Packaging Waste

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Dan Norris.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): It is my pleasure to open this debate on the effects of the packaging waste regulations on the packaging industry. Such a debate is long overdue. I do not regard it as a political, them-and-us debate. I am sure that colleagues and members of the Opposition will want to raise issues that involve the packaging industry in their constituencies. The industry covers aluminium, glass, paper and board, plastic, steel and wood and it has been subject to European Union proposals and regulations since January 1998. Further proposals and targets have now been introduced, which, if implemented, could have serious effects on the industry and the economy of many regions and communities.

The various interests of the packaging industry are represented in the Chamber this morning. Nearly every constituency has some connection with waste packaging. My constituency contains companies that are involved in the plastics industry, the aluminium industry, the paper industry and the wood industry, and many others connected with packaging. Next to Coca Cola and Cadbury Schweppes is a large aluminium supply industry and, between them, they employ 900 people, so I have a significant constituency interest in the proposals.

The Commission is revising the targets for recovery and recycling, which are between 60 and 85 per cent. It originally suggested a target date of 2006, but there is a strong argument for it to be 2008. The all-party parliamentary group for the aluminium industry is concerned about the differentials that are being proposed and wants the overall recovery target set at about 20 to 25 per cent. and the target date as 2008, because that would give us more opportunity to meet those targets.

If the proposed increase in the targets goes ahead, it will be at considerable expense to the industry. The glass industry estimates that it could cost it about £200 million. It is disappointed that the United Kingdom target of 50 per cent. recovery for 2001 was not achieved. However, we must bear in mind the fact that the packaging directives were produced for two purposes. First, they will prevent member states from introducing measures that act as a barrier to trade and remove existing barriers to trade. Little action has been taken to remove existing barriers and new ones have been introduced. Secondly, the directives will reduce the impact of packaging on the environment and establish packaging recovery and recycling systems to enable member states to reach set targets. More than 48 per cent. of used packaging is now recovered in the United Kingdom. The 2001 target was 50 per cent., so we missed it by 2 per cent. The United Kingdom and France are the only member states that have properly implemented the part of the directive that encourages good design of packaging. The industry believes that the Commission should pay more attention to the trade barrier problem and, in the longer term, consider replacing the directive with non-legislative measures that would give more importance to issues that are not covered by the directive, such as wastage, transport and designing a complete packaging system for overall resource efficiency.

The current directive obliges the European Commission to produce proposals for new recovery and recycling rates. However, the industry has constantly argued that the right level of recycling cannot be decided in Brussels or even here in London because it depends on local factors, such as the proximity of reprocessing facilities, and that is more a regional than a national matter. In view of the fact that we are moving towards regional government, perhaps that issue could be covered by those who propose regulations.

Packaging recovery notes are a currency for recovery and recycling processes. The system is weak. Companies are failing to register their obligations and companies that do register are legitimately finding ways to minimise their obligations. We lack resources to police the system. There are three regulators—one covering England and Wales, one covering Scotland and one covering Northern Ireland—and therefore no set pattern for policing the system. Data are not consistent, transparent or timely. Targets are set late and last for only one year. Therefore, PRNs must be addressed seriously.

The price of paper PRNs is returning to the approximate price in 1998—£30 to £35 per tonne—although prices had fallen to less than £8 per tonne during previous years. In order to encourage more collection and to provide adequate recycling funds, PRN prices should be more closely matched to the true cost of collection and recovery. The PRN system failed to achieve a recovery target of 50 per cent. in 2001, and it will not achieve any new targets without improvements to the system. We should examine the system seriously.

The Advisory Committee on Packaging is criticised as being unrepresentative by the paper and plastics industries and by the industries that use other materials. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs must address the new proposals. The committee is not considered to be representative of all stakeholders. Companies, which pay millions of pounds each year in levies, are under-represented because of the number of recovery scheme members and regulators that are proposed for the body. Reprocessors lack an adequate presence on the committee. Each material is different, and the number of representatives of material industries should not be reduced. Will the Minister review the representation on the committee? The organisations that are involved with the industry should occupy the majority of the places.

There are suggestions for improving the system that applies to the industry in general, such as the creation of a commercially competent regulatory office. It is suggested that the industry should have one regulator, which could be called Offpack or Offwaste—whichever term is most suitable. The regulation process would be addressed better by one regulator. The regulator would

[Mr. Bill O'Brien]

take over responsibility for data management and for the preparation and timely dissemination of statistics. It would monitor and consolidate the business plans of compliance schemes to ensure adequate investment to achieve future recovery and recycling targets. It would audit the application of funds derived from the sale of recovery notes to set clear, consistent and accurate standards of data recovery and reporting to ensure that the regulations are applied consistently in the devolved parliaments and regions of the United Kingdom. We should therefore give serious consideration to changing the current system to an overall regulator.

I am aware that there are others who wish to contribute today so I shall not take my full 20 minutes. That should allow people to express their views on the industries that they represent.

At 41 per cent., packaging waste has one of the highest recycling rates in the total waste stream. Does the Minister intend to make changes to the UK packaging regulations to make them less complex and bureaucratic, and to ensure that there is better enforcement and monitoring? Will he consult the industry on the common position proposed by the European Parliament prior to the meeting of the Council of Ministers in October?

The Secretary of State told the House that she and her Ministers supported the compromise of the outgoing Spanish presidency, which included some differential material targets that were even higher than those proposed by the European Commission. The UK industry has made its feelings known about the recent consultation exercise and Members of Parliament support the industry on the basis of observations that have been presented to the Department. Does the Minister intend to maintain that position at the meeting of the Council of Ministers in October? The matters I have mentioned are important to the industry and it would be helpful if the Minister could address some of my concerns.

Recent media reports have indicated that for the domestic waste stream to be improved there will need to be an extra charge on domestic households. Reference has been made to a possible cost of £1 or £5 a bag for extra waste that may be collected, which would create problems for local authorities.

We must address the question of helping local authorities to meet their recycling and composting targets. Without the support of local authorities, the regulation targets on reducing, collecting and recycling packaging would be more difficult to meet. I urge the Minister to focus on improving the performance of the regulations in order to achieve recovery and recycling targets in the future.

9.43 am

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on securing an important debate. He referred to many of the industries in his constituency. My constituency is the largest area in the UK in which paper and board are manufactured. The industry produces some 1.4 million tonnes every year and employs some 1,000 people. I have declared an interest in the industry in the register.

The debate is important, both for industry and the environment. The packaging waste regulations, packaging waste recovery notes and packaging export recovery notes are not something that my constituents write to me about a great deal, but they complain about the amount of packaging that surrounds things that they buy in supermarkets and other retail outlets and they ask me what the Government are doing about that.

The packaging waste regulations are an important and significant development in the reduction of waste and the recovery of fibre that will allow us to recycle more waste. Industry must play its part. The benefit of the PRN system is that it is relatively cheap. While the PRN system has not achieved the 50 per cent. recovery target that was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, there has been a step change since its introduction. There is no need to scrap the system and start again, but we should review it regularly, monitor its effectiveness, find improvements and modify it.

The paper industry has complained that, as my hon. Friend, the Environment Agency is not properly or adequately policing the system. It is said that some companies simply ignore their obligations while others are unaware of them. How far does that extend to UK companies? How many are involved? What is the mass of the recovered fibre involved? Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister will enlighten us.

It is important to establish fact and dispel myth in the debate. The question is how to improve registration of companies with regulations. One proposal is that all companies should opt in and be given a certificate to opt out, rather than having to opt in, as happens at the moment under what might be described as a voluntary system. My right hon. Friend the Minister might balk at the consequential red tape that would be imposed on British industries, but the matter is worth consideration in trying to find ways in which to increase the number of companies that register. Does he have a view?

We must be more rigorous. The recycling rates to which my right hon. Friend the Minister referred have been described as pathetic. He has put in place tough targets, and PRNs need to be applied more rigorously. Elsewhere in Europe, recycling rates are much higher and systems are more rigorous.

It is vital that more people register if we are to generate the much-needed reprocessing infrastructures to which my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton referred. It is a vital and fundamental part of the scheme to generate that infrastructure to encourage investment and increase recycling targets.

We should not think that nothing is happening in the country. Industry is playing its part. In my constituency, SCA recently invested £17 million in a recovered fibre plant as a result of the PRN system, and it has specially designed vehicles to collect waste from all 410 branches of Sainsbury's. Once again, the paper industry is leading the way and demonstrating its sustainable credentials. It is increasing capacity, while the number of paper and board mills has reduced in recent years: 81 now operate. In the face of the strength of the pound, which has severely affected the paper industry, and gas prices, which have doubled, and despite other regulations, the industry is making great strides.

Is my right hon. Friend the Minister satisfied that the Environment Agency is policing companies that have a turnover of £2 million and produce more than 50 tonnes of packaging, which requires them to register? Might the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department of Trade and Industry work in partnership? Have any discussions been held on how to ensure that companies comply and are aware of their obligations?

We should not regard the new requirements as a threat. There is great opportunity for developing and improving infrastructure. Investment in the green economy is vital if we are to meet the targets and protect our environment. Rigour is required, and tough decisions must be taken now—we cannot wait forever and a day before we take them.

We must also address the situation in a sustainable way. We do not want any unnecessary impact on our industries that would result in them going out of business. My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton referred to the development of more infrastructure. The Government recently provided a grant to Shotton paper mill in Wales, for an expansion of newsprint. I was involved in the discussion about that. The grant went to the wrong company; it should have gone to Aylesford Newsprint. I make no apology for my parochial perspective on that.

As my hon. Friend said, it is vital that all stakeholders are involved in reviewing the current arrangements. Reprocessors must play a greater role on the advisory committee. I am keen to hear what my right hon. Friend the Minister has to say about that. If he is looking for names, I am sure that the Paper Federation of Great Britain would be more than happy to provide them.

I turn to the packaging export recovery notes. There is concern in the paper industry that the amount of waste that is being exported is rising considerably—by 59,000 tonnes in 2000 to just over 179,000 tonnes in 2001, and reports suggest that that figure will rise higher. Waste merchants are able to receive PERNs; the total amount over the past year or so is £80 million. We want that to be invested in reprocessing infrastructure. Does DEFRA have a breakdown of where that investment is going? That issue is causing debate among waste merchants and in the paper industry.

The PERN has made it more favourable for waste merchants to export material; it costs £60 to hire a container to China, which is very cheap. Paper mills are in a perverse situation; because so much waste is being exported, they are having to import it as they are unable to get sufficient supply from the domestic stream. This is a market system, but we have to make it work; we must look at whether the market is allowing us to operate in a sustainable way. My right hon. Friend the Minister should also look at when the targets are announced. It is difficult for companies to plan, if they do not know well in advance what next year's target will be.

The waste merchants will argue that, as a direct result of PRNs, the major UK mills have enjoyed very low prices in recent years. We live in a free market, and the basic laws of supply and demand apply. If someone is willing to pay so much for waste, it will go to them—it will go to the highest bidder. We must ensure that we get the very best out of the current system. The packaging waste regulations are important. They have made a step change, but much more needs to be done to bring people together so that we get the very best out of what we have, and produce improvements—rather than cause too much damage—to all areas of industry.

9.54 am

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on securing the debate and bringing forth a broad discussion on the important and often overlooked matter of waste.

The packaging industry has suffered from clumsy, burdensome and extremely ineffective regulation, but waste, particularly the waste produced by that industry, is a political issue that goes beyond the interests of just one industrial sector. It affects us all, and my constituents cannot understand why more is not done to control effectively the amount of waste that we produce as an industrial nation. Why do we not do more, and why is the action that we do take not more effective? Why can other European countries get a grip on the amount of waste that they produce—I am thinking particularly of what happens in Germany—yet we seem to be stuck like rabbits in the headlights of oncoming cars?

The Government are usually very much in touch with public opinion. Indeed, they pride themselves on their ability to read the public mind, yet in this respect they are greatly out of step with the public mood. Over-regulation has, in some areas, led to the demise of simple, local solutions for recycling. I am referring not to the regulations that we have heard about, but to fire regulations, for example.

In the past, the usual way to carry away goods from a supermarket was to pick up a brown cardboard box that had been brought out of the storeroom and kept at the checkout. People would load in their produce and carry it away, but now, invariably because of planning or fire regulations, that regime no longer exists. A much larger mountain of waste is created, and the practical, simple and local solutions are actually leading to a greater amount of waste and greater problems in disposing of it. In Bexhill and Battle, people are particularly impatient with the failure to get to grips with the excess waste that is produced because we face the prospect of one or two incinerators in the constituency. People cannot understand why more is not done.

We were told that this would be the greenest Government ever but, sadly, Britain still ranks near the bottom of the international recycling league of developed nations. That is partly because, although many local authorities such as Wealden, which covers part of my constituency, do a terrific job of getting to grips with recycling, there is a lack of political will at the centre to get a grip on the much larger picture, which incorporates packaging and minimisation. It is no good local authorities increasing recycling by themselves, if people are not looking at the bigger picture to control on waste problems and we continue to allow the amount of waste that we produce to rise, as it has under this Government.

We must consider much more critically not only how we can improve recycling, but how we can bear down on the whole waste hierarchy. We must cut through the

[Gregory Barker]

plethora of EU and domestic regulations, and create an effective framework to cut down on wasteful packaging and tackle waste at its source. Simple regulation that works with the industry invariably works best. We need better and more effective regulation that does not burden companies, but encourages them to minimise waste responsibly.

Unfortunately, as I have said, most of the goods that we now buy involve much more packaging than was traditionally the case. Indeed, packaging is now estimated to form up to half the volume of municipal waste in western Europe. As we have heard from other hon. Members, the packaging and packaging waste directive that was adopted in 1994 had to be implemented by June 1996. The targets for recovery and recycling of packaging and packaging waste by June 2001 were to recover at least 50 per cent. by weight of packaging, and to recycle at least 25 per cent. by weight of the totality of packaging materials contained in the waste, with a minimum of 15 per cent. by weight for each packaging material.

Any business handling more than 50 tonnes of packaging with a financial turnover of more than £2 million is affected by the regulations if it performs one or more of the following activities: manufacturing raw materials for packaging; converting materials into packaging; filling packaging; selling packaging to the final user; or importing packaging or packaging materials into the UK.

At the outset, businesses such as packaging manufacturers and retailers were obliged to recover 52 per cent. of packaging waste by 2001, and recycle at least 16 per cent. of each material category. Targets for 2001 under packaging regulations were 56 per cent. for recovery and 18 per cent. for material-specific recycling and packaging waste. Businesses will have to meet targets of 59 per cent. for recovery and 19 per cent. for material-specific recycling of packaging waste under the packaging waste recovery and recycling targets set for 2002. When those targets were set, the Minister claimed that the UK had done well so far. There had been 36 per cent. of recycling and 42 per cent. of recovery of packaging waste by the end of 2000, and improvement in recovery of 12 per cent. since 1998. As I said, however, the UK still lags behind the rest of Europe in recycling and recovery rates.

In April 2001, a Friends of the Earth study found that the packaging directive had not led to any significant increase in the recycling of packaging. It stated:

> "Friends of the Earth believes there should be no recovery target at all, that the targets for recycling should be much higher and that there should also be a target for minimum levels of re-use of packaging, which is further up the waste hierarchy."

In April 2002, the Minister admitted that compliance schemes were not working at optimum levels when he chastised the second largest scheme in the UK for not meeting targets. In 2001, the PERN system revenue to accredited exporters for paper packaging waste was £3.3 million, compared with PRN revenue to accredited reprocessors for paper packaging waste of £32 million. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) highlighted, the large-scale export of plastics to China by some waste collection companies has allowed the system to be distorted, which means that even the UK's existing plastics recycling capacity is not being used.

Once packaging waste generators have rid themselves of their PRN obligations through waste retrieval firms, they can absolve themselves of further responsibility. Furthermore, the current system places no obligation on firms to search for more environmentally friendly and easily degradable forms of packaging. The motives behind the recovery system are clearly honourable, but the problems highlighted today must be addressed. It is essential to create a climate of opinion that presents achieving a better, more sustainable environment as a great opportunity rather than a chore. That will mean more carrots for the companies, local authorities and people who do the right thing, and fewer sticks that all too often miss their targets.

We need to measure and quantify the effectiveness of the system, not just introduce more and more regulations. We must also align people's best interests with their self-interest, and make it easier for companies to do the right thing for their local communities, which ultimately must shoulder the consequences of excess packaging and the failure to curb the growth of waste. We need better, more effective and less clumsy regulation. The target dates that the EU has set are drawing closer. The public are demanding action, and the Government will ignore them at their peril.

10.4 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Mr. Cook, I will ask my right hon. Friend the Minister two questions, and comment briefly on the second. First, given that the major part of the growth in the UK packaging and recycling industry will need to come from household waste, what steps are being taken to ensure that household collection will be expanded sufficiently to meet future higher targets?

Secondly, what is the economic and environmental justification for the proposed different material-specific recycling targets of 60 per cent. for glass, 55 per cent. for paper, 50 per cent. for metals and 20 per cent. for plastics? I would like to know whether that is a fair division between materials, and whether it will achieve the desired result of the 55 per cent. minimum targets over the whole base.

On 8 May, some of us in the all-party aluminium industry group heard Nick Kendal say that the European Union packaging waste directive is about to be revised, and that he was worried that Orwellian tones were "abroad" within the Commission's current proposal. He said:

> "Astonishing though it may sound, it's proposed that some packaging materials are to become more equal than others! You may be less surprised to hear that down at Animal Farm the material least easy to recycle or re-use is proposed for the "more equal status". It could be a case of straight bananas riding again!
>
> Quite simply, concerning recyclable or re-usable products, the Commission is proposing that while the more favourable material types—Metals, Paper and Board and Glass should be allocated recycling targets of 50 per cent. to 60 per cent., the least favourable material, Plastic, should only be set at 20 per cent . . . We don't want to see such nonsense enacted, and we don't think that you do either. For the sake of the environment, we would like to see you help to ensure that logic is maintained. That's the message, pure and simple."

I would like a comment on that issue, and on one other matter. The Dutch Member of the European Parliament, Dorette Corbey, who was responsible for steering the directive revision through Committee, opposes material-specific targets for which the Commission has not demonstrated any advantages. The United Kingdom Government apparently share that opposition. I would like to know what has happened to her amendment setting an equal minimum 25 per cent. for all materials, while raising the overall recycling target into the 55 per cent. to 65 per cent. range. What is the Government's attitude to that proposal?

10.7 am

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Mr. Cook, I rise to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I would be remiss in my duties were I not to remind the hon. Members that, in its decision to assume these proceedings in Westminster Hall, the House also took the decision that the four senior Members of the Chairmen's Panel should be referred to, when occupying this seat, as "Deputy Speaker". If I were to allow this misdemeanour to continue, trivial though it may be, the expressions of amusement on some faces in the Chamber might turn to dismay. I would not want that to happen.

Mr. Illsley: I apologise for my error, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was following the Father of the House and compounding his error. I seem to be starting my remarks between a rock and a hard place.

I will make a few comments regarding the glass industry, but would first like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on securing the debate. As he pointed out, all hon. Members have an interest in packaging waste, and therefore should have an interest in the packaging waste regulations. The issue affects all of us.

My constituency has a major glass manufacturing operation, known as Rexam Glass. Glass manufacturing is important to the constituency; indeed, the glass bottles that are on the table this morning were made in that factory. As regards packaging waste, glass is in a unique position.

Mr. Dalyell: I cannot let go the fact that the water comes from near my constituency, and the water is equally as important as the glass.

Mr. Illsley: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. I am reminded of when we used to have different mineral waters—Highland Spring, Ashbourne, Malvern and Cwmbran—because of the intense jealousies between the various nationalities within the House. We now have House of Commons water, which fills the bottles made in my constituency.

To recap, glass is in a unique position in terms of packaging waste. The glass container industry reprocessed some 600,000 tonnes of post-consumer glass waste in 2001. It is a basic raw material in glass manufacture, sought by the glass industry on that basis. It is an easy material to recycle into another product. The collection is something else, but it is what we call a primary closed loop recycling system. Such recycling in 2001 saved the quarrying of 700,000 tonnes of raw material—the energy equivalent of 77 million kW hours and reduced carbon dioxide emissions by the equivalent of 132,000 tonnes, avoiding almost 600,000 tonnes of landfill. That type of recycling—the primary closed loop system—is unique to the glass industry: if replicated, it would exemplify best practice. The UK glass container industry currently recycles approximately 33 per cent. of the container waste stream. It has been involved in such activity for the past 25 years. Recycled glass is a primary material in the construction of new glass.

As we have heard this morning, the revision of the packaging and packaging waste directive under discussion in Brussels could result in a 60 to 70 per cent. target—a significant increase—being imposed on the glass industry by 2006. That scale of increase in targets within such a time scale has been achieved in mainland Europe only through significant Government intervention and by placing great onus on local authorities and the consumer to achieve compliance. The container glass industry estimates the cost of achieving the new target at £200 million. For an industry that has witnessed a halving of profitability over the past five years, that is a huge cost burden, which the industry is unlikely to be able to manage.

The glass industry already possesses the capacity to reprocess and recycle 50 per cent. of the UK's glass container waste. Facility improvements and capital investment in two new reprocessing plants can go ahead only if the glass industry can be assured of increased supplies of good quality raw material. In other words, we can recycle more glass only if the facilities are there to process and use it. If new manufacturing plants come on stream, we will be able to increase the amount of recycled products. That complicates the target: industry can recycle only certain amounts because they are used in the manufacture of new glass products.

For the closed loop recycling system to work, the glass industry requires the Government to encourage the increased collection of colour separated waste. British Glass, the glass manufacturers' trade organisation, urges the promotion of this form of collection, whether from bottle bank sites or from kerbside collections. The colour separation argument is important. If glass is not colour separated, recycled glass can produce only green glass. Clear glass or amber glass can be produced only from recycled amber or clear glass. If two or three are mixed together, the resultant product is simply green. It leads to mountains of green glass cullet, which the industry simply cannot use.

About 50,000 bottle banks currently exist in the UK, which is equivalent to one per 2,700 head of population, which compares to a European average of one to 1,000. I am pleased that the first-ever bottle bank was placed in my constituency in 1970, hence the 25-year recycling history. Kerbside collection of glass is available to only 10 per cent. of United Kingdom households and most of the studies show that access to kerbside collection immediately doubles recycling of post-consumer glass waste. Further investment within the UK in kerbside recycling systems is desperately needed.

The term bottle bank is a misnomer, but the industry is stuck with it. It should be renamed glass bank, which would encourage people to recycle other glass

[Mr. Illsley]

containers such as jam jars and so on. People seem to think that they are restricted to recycling only bottles in bottle banks.

In 2002, the glass industry will spend about £425,000 on education and the promotion of glass recycling, but that is not nearly enough to persuade target audiences to recycle more by using kerbside and other schemes.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, by and large, consumers want to play a full part in recycling if given the opportunity to do so? Responsibility for providing the opportunity comes down to the efforts being made, or not made, by local councils.

Mr. Illsley: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. More effort by government and local authorities is needed to provide systems to enable us to meet the targets that will be imposed from 2006. Those huge increases in recycling targets will be met only if the systems for recycling are in place. By the same token, local authorities will need extra resources from the Government to be able to make the schemes work.

I want to mention some of the problems facing the glass industry in relation to recycling. Surprisingly, one of those problems is the newly introduced aggregates tax. Although the glass industry obtained relief from paying the tax, it is now beginning to suffer significantly as a result of the aggregates industry seeking supplies of glass container waste for use as an aggregate in road building. That means that aggregates companies avoid paying the tax, but also benefit from receiving packaging recovery notes income. The net effect is that the glass industry will receive less PRN revenue for investment in the collection infrastructure, promotion and education and might even be forced to have to purchase PRNs to cover its own obligation, which will be a further drain on its resources. It will also result in a significant under-utilisation of reprocessing and recycling facilities.

The glass industry is extremely concerned at that turn of events, which will also increase the industry's energy costs and pollution levels, and could in turn lead to it being penalised under the climate change levy and the integrated pollution prevention and control legislation.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: As my hon. Friend referred to the climate change levy, I want to refer to a letter sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 8 May by the plastics industry—I accept that it is not the Minister's responsibility but it should be on the record. It suggests that very few plastics companies are able to obtain voluntary agreement to secure the climate change levy rebate and only one fifth of the levy is offset by the reduction last April in the employers' national insurance contributions. The effect of the reduction in the national insurance contribution is negative in this respect. Will my hon. Friend take that on board and associate the plastics industry with the glass industry?

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I was about to come to that very subject. As I have said many times in the House, the climate change levy has had a disproportionate effect on the glass industry because, although in some circumstances it qualifies for the 80 per cent. rebate, the tax imposed on the industry is still substantial. In 2002 it is estimated that the net cost to container manufacturers will be £1.8 million. Everyone agrees that we should support Kyoto targets on reducing our emissions and producing a cleaner environment, but that should not be achieved at the expense of certain industries in our country. The burden should be spread throughout the country, and not placed only on the manufacturing industry.

Gregory Barker: Does the hon. Gentleman favour a carbon tax as a fairer way of working?

Mr. Illsley: No, I do not favour a carbon tax, but I would prefer a fairer system than the climate change levy, which unfairly affects manufacturing industry. It has caused huge costs to manufacturers in the glass industry, and some container glass manufacturers have based future energy reduction programmes, required by the CCL, on increased levels of recycled glass used in manufacture. If recycled glass sources reduce or even dry up, sections of the industry could find themselves liable to the CCL at 100 per cent. Its impact would be extreme and could put them out of business.

On the integrated pollution prevention and control regulations, the glass industry is committed to reducing polluting emissions, including carbon dioxide. The increased use of recycled glass as a raw material helps to achieve that, because less energy is used in re-melting cullet or recycled glass. If the industry experiences a shortage in supplies of good quality colour separated recycled glass, it could be forced to install electrostatic precipitators, which will cost the industry about £30 million and increase energy consumption by about 3 per cent. per annum. Again, an extra financial burden will be imposed on the industry if we cannot secure that supply of glass.

Another solution would be for glass manufacturers to consider importing recycled glass from abroad simply to meet the IPPC and CCL targets. The industry believes that that would be a retrograde step when a potentially good UK source of recycled glass exists, which will either be disposed of as landfill in the domestic waste stream or used as road aggregate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton spoke about the revision to the packaging waste directive, and I wholeheartedly endorse his comments. As most hon. Members have suggested, the glass industry does not support the idea of differentiated material specific targets, as they are likely to lead to competitive imbalances in the packaging sector. For example, the current proposal to give plastics a target of 20 per cent. compared with a 60 per cent. target for glass would give the plastics industry a huge advantage over the glass industry. We saw the advent of the PET glass containers some years ago, when drinks manufacturers put their product into plastic rather than glass containers even though plastic is more difficult to recycle. Once recycled, certain forms of plastic cannot be used as a food container, whereas anything made of glass has the advantage of being reusable.

The plastics industry could achieve that 20 per cent. target through recovery from industrial waste only, which would give the packet fillers and retailers who specify packaging types a much lower supply chain obligation. The glass industry maintains that if it is going to meet 60 per cent. targets for 2006, we must examine the domestic waste stream to recover that level of material. That brings me back to the systems that we need to have in place—the kerbside recovery schemes and so on—to get the material from the domestic, rather than the industrial, stream.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: I think that the issue that my hon. Friend is driving at is the importance of long-term planning. We need activities and investment to drive up the collection and recovery capacity for household waste. Although there are highly complex systems in place, my hon. Friend is right to suggest that there must be long-term planning from local government, central government and private operators. If we get that long-term planning, we cannot fail.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We must consider not only long-term planning but the impositions that we have placed on various industries. In terms of the climate change levy, those impositions were well intentioned; however, we may find that they affect our attempts to recycle and recover materials. For example, energy costs and national insurance contributions have increased for the manufacturing industry. Other burdens, such as the climate change levy, have been put upon it, too. Unless there is real joined-up thinking about our environmental, recycling and recovery targets, we are giving industry advantages with one hand but taking them away with the other by imposing measures such as the climate change levy and IPPC regulations.

I echo the conclusions of my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, who drew attention to the fact that companies are failing to register obligations, or are finding ways to minimise them. Of course, we must consider issues such as giving some companies a minimal obligation—such as plastics at 20 per cent.—resources for policing the system, bringing in kerbside collection schemes if necessary, and getting packaging waste out of the domestic waste stream. Companies in my constituency make the point that, across the European Union, there is no consistent data with which to compare and contrast the countries that are meeting their recycling targets and those that are not. We need to reconsider that.

I look forward to hearing the Government's response, particularly to the questions posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, who deserves our congratulations on initiating this timely debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We usually start the winding-up speeches 30 minutes before the conclusion of the debate, and apportion time equally between the three main speakers. I hope to allow the Minister a couple of extra minutes this time, because there are lots of questions to answer.

10.28 am

Sue Doughty (Guildford): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall do my best to keep within a sensible amount of time.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), not only on securing the debate but on explaining so clearly the problems faced by the packaging industry. We are not without sympathy for those problems. Packaging and the interim processes that we go through to get goods are absolutely essential. We must recognise that. It is easy for environmentalists to say "Packaging—no, no, no.", but the issue is really one of appropriate levels of packaging and recycling, and making sure that we are using materials as wisely as possible. The packaging industry needs encouragement to do so and to fulfil its obligations.

However, many problems are a result of giving responsibility for such matters to the producer. The Government are more or less throwing the issue over the wall to the producer without saying how targets are to be achieved. There are problems with moving targets. What is the target for 2001? Is there a target for 2006, or for 2008? We also need to consider interim targets, because if the packaging industry it to achieve what is being asked of it, it needs to know what the steps are along the way and how it is going to get there. We must also make sure that there are incentives for those involved with the recycling and materials recovery business to see that it has a long-term future and is worth investing in. Without support, that will not happen.

We have packaging waste regulations, but I have read that there are some in the packaging industry who feel that they are an anonymous European Commission directive, brought down from on high to upset everybody. Of course, that is not the case. One of the biggest problems facing this planet, along with over-population, is the mountain of waste, which is growing enormously year on year. We must not only arrest its growth but reverse its increase.

We have many problems with targets. How are they to be achieved? The former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions announced on 21 November 2000 targets of 56 per cent. recovery and 18 per cent. material-specific recycling for businesses, obligated by the UK regulations. It took until May 2002 to get the figures for 2001 performance from the Government, despite endless parliamentary questions to try to drag that information from them. Can the Minister tell me why it took so long to make those figures available? How can we know how we are performing, if we do not have the information? Even if the news is bad, we need information so that we can put in place the necessary measures to improve performance. Typically, we failed to achieve those targets. If we failed to meet those modest targets, can the Minister tell us how on earth we are to meet the much more challenging 2006 targets? What will be done to help the packaging industry achieve those?

Wastepack, one of the compliance schemes, has failed to obtain recovery certificates to match even half its obligations. What changes will the Minister make to ensure that such compliance scheme failures do not occur in future and that the Government are alerted sooner to potential problems? Underscoring that is the need for interim monitoring and reporting.

Businesses need to know the targets in order to plan ahead. They have to tool up and identify what materials are needed, and to negotiate with their purchasers any changes in the materials used. It is not straightforward to say, "Today we're using tetrapaks, tomorrow glass or

[Sue Doughty]

card products." Such changes cannot be made overnight. The industry needs information. Why do the Government expect obligated parties to meet their obligations, when they do not know until three months into the year what the targets are on which they are being measured? That has been a problem, and does not provide a level playing field.

We saw DEFRA's initial proposals for 2002 targets in September 2001. They were 61 per cent. recovery and 20 per cent. material recycling. One can only assume that the figures were lowered because by that time, we already knew that we were not going to meet those targets. We need a formal consultation process between DEFRA and business to improve the system so that the 2006 targets can be met. Everything that I hear from businesses says that they want to comply, but they need the Government to tell them what they want and to give them an idea of how they can achieve it without crippling their industry. Such information is essential.

We have not discussed plastic recycling very much. Understandably, we have had an interesting debate on the use of glass or plastic between Members who have those interests in their constituencies. There are many issues around plastic recycling, especially that of plastic bags. Ireland has introduced an innovative scheme of charging for those bags. Much more could be done.

I agree with the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) that the recovery of plastics in the form of incineration is unacceptable, in my constituency or in his. The idea that energy from waste is the solution to many of our problems is not acceptable to the public at present, and I do not see that view changing. We must be much more canny over how to deliver recovered materials into alternate situations

Making a breakthrough on waste recycling is potentially a huge task. My background has been in working with local government asking people what they are doing to recover end-user packaging, to recycle it and reduce it. Those with whom I work spend their time saying that they do not want all this packaging, but people do not always recognise that some packaging is essential to preserve the quality of the goods in the way that people expect them to be delivered.

There are problems, and we need waste partnerships to achieve targets if we are to increase domestic waste recycling performances. At present, 11 million households are covered by local authority controlled kerbside programmes that collect domestic waste, but only 100,000 tonnes of packaging is collected. Some 300 local authorities have kerbside programmes of some sort, but they cover limited materials and not all households. Over a third collect only newspapers and pamphlets, which do not even qualify as packaging waste.

We need to ensure that between 1.2 and 2.7 megatonnes of additional packaging recovery takes place. We need a substantial increase in packaging recovery. We need to achieve an additional 500,000 tonnes of packaging recovery from household waste. To realise that figure would require the full participation of counties and 15 to 20 district authorities, but we want to make that happen nationally. We need far more material recycling facilities close to the point of use and collection, so that we do not prolong the problem of shipping materials somewhere else. We need investment of about £10 million of capital to start recovering such materials.

I went to see one of the plastics recovering companies in the midlands. It uses a variety of plastics, and has the process pretty well sorted. It was a very low-tech operation: about half a dozen people working in a barn, and producing plastics that form perfectly good drainage pipes and shields for underground cables, where it does not matter if the plastic is contaminated. Therefore, very little work has to be done to make those materials suitable for reuse. That company told me that it wants to take United Kingdom plastic, but because the Belgian market works much more effectively, it is cheaper to bring in that plastic. Despite that, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle has been explaining how plastic is being shipped out to China. There is something wrong about the business of moving waste across countries and oceans to do something with it.

When I go to my local bottle bank, I cannot get anything into the plastics part of the bank because it is always full. I asked my local authority why, and it told me that it already has to spend money to take plastics to the midlands, and it has to be careful with the limited amount of money it has for that resource. We need to ensure that plastics are recovered properly, in greater proximity to the point of collection and with more of a following wind.

I could ask the Minister many more questions, but he already has many on his desk and I recognise that Mr. Deputy Speaker wants to make space for those questions to be answered. Without Government support for the packaging industry in the ways I have outlined, we will continue to experience problems of incineration and landfill, which the public and the business do not want to see. I hope that I do not see it in the future.

10.38 am

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on securing the debate, and on raising, as did the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), some very practical questions from the industry. I would also like to thank the hon. Member for Normanton for being so generous with his time, which has allowed every other Member who wanted to speak to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) raised one of the most important questions and made the most obvious point, which is that the best way to reduce waste is not to produce it in the first place. That point keeps being made, but it is not often answered. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) posed in rather brief order what we might call the West Lothian question of domestic waste. I look forward to the Minister's answers to that conundrum and to why it is that there is so little kerbside collection and domestic waste segregation.

The Government's handling of the European packaging waste directive provides an example of their "leap before you look" environmental policy. It is easy and inviting to prove one's European credentials by signing up to regulations and directives but then to muddle through on the home implementation front, alienating domestic interest groups, failing to secure one's purpose and running up bills to the taxpayer.

The key question is one of outcomes. How successfully have the regulations achieved their objectives? Can the Government fulfil their statutory obligations and attain the recovery and recycling targets, thus enabling the directive, which the Conservative party supports, to fulfil its purpose? How is the incentive to recycle to be created at the local level without over-regulation that simply increases bureaucracy and cost?

The directive is designed to prevent member states introducing measures that would act as a barrier to trade, to reduce the environmental impact of packaging and to establish economically efficient packaging recovery and recycling systems to enable member states to reach set targets. The challenge is to finance the expansion of the recycling industry and to make producers responsible for packaging waste, while not disrupting normal business activity.

In 1998, the UK achieved the lowest recovery and recycling rates of any member state: 33 per cent. and 28 per cent. respectively, compared with 89 per cent. for recovery in Denmark and 65 per cent. for recycling in Germany and Austria. From 1998 to 2001, the UK improved. It achieved recovery and recycling rates of 48 per cent. and 42 per cent., yet in 2001, as has already been stated, it missed the directive recovery rate of 50 per cent. and the Government's target of 52 per cent.

The regulations specify targets for the recovery and recycling of packaging waste as well as the essential requirements to be met by packaging placed on the market. They place on certain businesses three main obligations: to register with the Environment Agency and provide data; to take reasonable steps to recover and recycle packaging waste; and to certify that the necessary recovery and recycling has been carried out. The packaging recovery note system was established in 1997 to force manufacturers to take financial responsibility for the packaging waste that they produce. Since 1998, some £250 million for PRNs and packaging export recovery notes has been channelled to reprocessors through registration fees.

However, if the purpose is to increase the amount of packaging that is reused or recycled, there is little evidence to show that money has been invested to achieve it. There are three main problems with the system. First, no differentiation is made between different types of packaging waste. For instance, hemp-based packaging, which is easily biodegradable, is treated in the same way as polymer-based packaging. Manufacturers and retailers are thus given no incentive to investigate less environmentally damaging forms of packaging.

Secondly, packaging waste generators are not directly involved with the recycling process. Once they have paid a waste retrieval firm to absolve them of their PRN obligations, they can effectively wash their hands of the waste that they have generated. That encourages a cynical approach to recovery and recycling: businesses simply look for the cheapest way of absolving themselves of their PRN obligations.

Thirdly, the PRN system is often undermined by the existence of the packaging export recovery note system, which has been mentioned by other hon. Members. Under that scheme, it is often cheaper for a waste recovery firm to send collected waste materials abroad for recycling. The consequence of that—we have already talked about China—is that even the existing plastics recycling capacity in the United Kingdom is not fully utilised, so there is little incentive to build on it.

No doubt the Minister will talk about the increase in recycling. That is fair enough, but we must recognise that that increase has been in the easiest areas: the commercial and industrial sectors. That is because of a lack of investment in segregated household collection systems. Local authority recycling targets are based on weight, which means that newspapers and composting materials are prioritised above the lighter part of the waste—packaging. We have to meet higher packaging waste recycling targets over the next four years. To do so, we must extract additional packaging waste from the household waste stream and develop recycling markets. That will be achieved only if there is investment in household collection, sorting and reprocessing schemes.

Only 44 per cent. of households in English regions are served by segregated kerbside collection. According to the Packaging Federation, up to 80 per cent. of households in the United Kingdom would need such a scheme by the end of 2006 if the current European Union proposals were adopted. The suggested target levels for 2006 to 2008 will require between 1.2 million and 2.7 million tonnes of additional packaging recovery in the United Kingdom. That is a massive increase and the cost will be considerable. Even an extra 50,000 tonnes of packaging from household waste would require an investment of around £10 million. So even with the lowest figure of 1.2 million extra tonnes, we are talking about £240 million.

If the system does not produce the results that we want—and I have shown that it does not—we need to think about what should be done. Has the Minister considered a reward system for waste management? It would work on the basis of a matrix of the increasing non-biodegradability of waste materials—from paper to plastic—against the increasing adverse environmental impacts of different waste management options, from reuse and recycling to incineration and landfill. An increasing financial reward for the best waste management of the most non-biodegradable or environmentally damaging material would be offset by an increasing financial penalty for the worst waste management solutions. That would be a real incentive to recover and recycle, while rendering redundant the ineffective and costly PRN system, which fails to fulfil the purpose of the packaging waste regulations. It would also render the landfill tax redundant.

In order to achieve the objectives of the directive, the Government rely on the support of local authorities, private waste contractors and reprocessors, compliance scheme operators and the packaging industry. By upsetting each of those interest groups equally, the Minister may believe that he has achieved a balanced solution. If so, he is wrong. He has achieved a system that neither works well nor satisfies anyone. It is incumbent on the Government to ensure that we have a system that does what we want it to do, rather than a system that fails in so many ways.

10.49 am

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on securing what has been an

[Alun Michael]

excellent and well-informed debate. I shall do my best to further inform the debate, but the Chamber will be aware that the subject comes under the portfolio of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, and my detailed knowledge falls far short of his.

Many short but complex questions have been asked in today's debate and they require lengthy answers. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is the world's expert at encapsulating in the shortest question a challenge on a very complex issue. If I may, I shall seek to supplement my responses by writing to hon. Members where necessary. I want to focus on the serious issues raised by a number of Members, but I must start by chiding the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed).

Mr. Sayeed: I thank the Minister for giving way. When he says that he will write to Members with specific answers, will he put those replies in the Library?

Alun Michael: Yes, I am happy to do so. May I now proceed to chide the hon. Gentleman? I want to make it clear to him that far from seeking to upset groups, the Government seek to work with all groups with a sense of urgency. That may put many people under pressure.

In his response, the hon. Gentleman should have said to the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow why recycling and related issues are at a low in the United Kingdom. The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire was a member of a Government who turned the muddled implementation of European directives into an art form. For 18 years, they did too little to tackle waste, which is why there is now a need for urgency and for pressure on the industry and local government to assist us in doing what is needed.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle rightly acknowledged that this is the greenest Government that we have ever had. He was right to say that people want more to be done about waste, which is why it was so frustrating during the 1980s and 1990s for those of us who were concerned about the environment to see a Conservative Government doing so little about it. I saw work being done on waste and recycling in places such as Canada and Germany, and it was frustrating to return to this country to see so little being done, except for that done by voluntary organisations, such as the excellent organisation, Track 2000, in my constituency. I remember that that gained its first grant to begin its work in the early 1980s, very much on the basis of voluntary activity.

It is also worth pointing out that local authorities during that period were frustrated. The greater current level of engagement of local authorities with such issues is the result of having a Government who believe in partnership with regional and local government and the range of industries involved, and who are trying to draw all organisations together to get on with the job. The failure to do that over 18 years is why we face such a challenge and must improve the situation with a sense of urgency; it why we must set clear targets, and why we have a lower starting point than many other European countries—that was mentioned by several hon. Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton raised a number of important issues. I want to reflect his serious and measured approach to opening the debate. He referred to the wide range of materials used in the packaging industry. He rightly outlined the relevance of the industry to constituency members, and therefore to people in all parts of the country. Although the impact of regulations on the industry is considerable, we must remember that what lies behind them is concern over the impact of waste from packaging on our economies, on the environment and on all of us as citizens. He rightly suggests that the Commission should consider issues such as transport and resource efficiency, to which several hon. Members have referred. They must be addressed in future as we consider how regulations and practice develop.

There are regional variations, but addressing regional issues, which are important, must not stand in the way of achieving consistency, fairness and national targets. Companies that seek to minimise their obligations may well reflect human nature and the nature of business. These are complex issues, but delay in making progress, or failure to make any, are not acceptable options.

I turn to the number of regulations and the nature of the regulatory body. I hope that we have succeeded in getting clear regulations. They have been in place since 1997 and are enforced by the Environment Agency in England and Wales and by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in Scotland. Over time, those organisations have achieved a reputation for performing their key tasks—and, increasingly, for engaging industry in proper debate about undertakings.

I turn to the matter of the EC directive. When work is done on future directives, and on the implementation of them, the views of industry will be taken into account, particularly during the course of negotiations in Brussels. Full consultation will occur during those negotiations, and before regulations come into effect; that is one of the assurances that has been sought.

Reference was made to the need for strong industry representation on the Advisory Committee on Packaging. I am unsure whether a majority is always the best way to achieve that, but we need a good balance and the expertise of the industry. We are reviewing the membership of that committee. We hope to be able to announce the new membership shortly, and we will take into account the points that have been made in the debate.

The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire and others talked about the timing of targets. That is a challenge. One of the difficulties is that, although consultation was issued last year on targets to be set for 2002, data from compliance schemes have been received since then. One has to know where one is, in order to know the position from which one seeks to move forward. Final targets could not be set until the data were finalised, but consultation has allowed business to plan for the new targets.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) raised several issues. She is another hon. Member who is good at asking questions. She talked about avoiding excessive movement, and the need for the market to develop. It is clear that there is a great deal of movement that it might be possible to avoid in the longer term due to an accelerated period of development of the market.

I was unsure of what to think about her suggestions with regard to interim monitoring and interim reporting. It is necessary to keep a finger on the way that things are developing, but it is possible to increase the amount of monitoring and the bureaucracy to such an extent that they get in the way of decisions that the industry should take.

The hon. Lady could have given a little more credit for what has been done. The UK narrowly failed to meet the recovery target of at least 50 per cent., but it met the recycling target and the material specific recycling target for all materials including plastic. The UK achieved just short of 48 per cent. recovery, with a shortfall against the target of just 195,000 tonnes. Therefore, the UK system has allowed us to move from a 30 per cent. recovery level in 1998 to a 48 per cent. level in 2001, and from about a 27 per cent. recycling level in 1998 to a 42 per cent. level. That is a considerable achievement, especially as it took only four years, and I pay tribute to the excellent performance of the majority of UK businesses. We will look with interest at the performance of Liberal Democrat local authorities, and the contribution that they made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow talked about the increase in the recycling of waste, and the importance of recycling domestic waste. Household collection is being expanded, and the local authority role in that is critical. We are working closely with the Local Government Association to promote it. He referred to material specific and differential targets; however, it would be sensible for me to write to hon. Members who have asked questions about matters of such complexity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) rightly said that it is important to separate fact from myth, and to think of the developments as an opportunity, not a threat. They are certainly a challenge, but they are also an opportunity for us to get it right. It is worrying that some companies may not be aware of their obligations; we will do all that we can to make sure that companies are made aware of them. My hon. Friend is right to anticipate our wish to minimise red tape as well as emphasising the need to apply requirements more rigorously. I am sure that he will accept that that is a difficult balance to achieve.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is time to move on to the next debate.

PPG3

11 am

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): First, I apologise for choosing what is probably the dullest debate title this Session. PPG3—Planning policy guidance note 3—is something that I did not know a great deal about two years ago, and my constituents certainly did not know much about it either. If I were to say that people were now discussing PPG3 in the pubs and bars of Winchester, hon. Members might not believe me, but it is becoming an issue of extraordinary concern in the area. The document with the strange title "PPG3" is having quite an impact on the postbags of many Members of Parliament who represent constituencies similar to Winchester, and people visit our surgeries to talk about it. In essence, PPG3 is a Government policy designed to maximise the development of brownfield land.

My second apology is to the Minister; I am sure that he is fed up with Members of Parliament from the south-east making representations about housing developments in that area. I do not want to take a NIMBY approach to the subject, but will point out some of my concerns about the approach that is being taken, and the impact that PPG3 is having on the development and character my constituency and the rest of Hampshire.

I am not arguing that Hampshire should put up a "full" sign or a big barrier saying "No more developments in this area." I accept that there is a need for some form of housing, particularly low-cost housing. The subject is topical in view of last week's announcement by the Deputy Prime Minister. However, it is important that we have a debate about the type and amount of housing and, more specifically, its location and the Government targets being put in place.

In simple terms, the problem is that the Government have set some tough targets for the south-east, and those targets have been broken down into percentage targets for developments on both greenfield and brownfield sites in the area. The county council are to set up a structure plan, and local authorities will be faced with the day-to-day task of implementing decisions as planning applications come through to them.

The traditional argument, which I have used on many occasions, is that if we have to accept those central Government targets, we should at least try to avoid using green fields. They should be the very last option, and I certainly support the assumption that we should maximise use of brownfield sites to avoid building on them. In general, the public have understood that message; indeed, they have begun to use the phrase "brownfield site" at meetings. They recognise that development on brownfield sites is the price that we pay for not building on green fields.

I applied for this debate because the drive away from greenfield land towards brownfield land is having a serious impact. We need to recognise that the pendulum has swung the other way. We should urgently consider the impact that the pendulum swing towards brownfield sites is having on planning in the area. I am asking not for a shift back to development on greenfield sites, but for a review of the implication of developing brownfield sites, and in particular, the impact that PPG3 is having

[Mr. Mark Oaten]

on local authorities. I shall discuss several issues, including sensitive brownfield sites, the need for more affordable housing, demands on infrastructure, the pressure put on individuals by developers, and the pressure on planning departments.

I shall start with sensitive brownfield sites. At the moment, all brownfield sites are alike in the eyes of the Government. Any previously developed area—even a factory site or an area covered in tyres—is in the same brownfield site category as, for example, a site very close to Winchester cathedral. We need to think again about how to categorise what is meant by a brownfield site. It is too simplistic to say that a site is either greenfield or brownfield, and if it is brownfield it can be developed to avoid building on greenfield areas. Many urban sites have as much value as marshland or other countryside areas, and are just as sensitive. However, at present there is no easy way to identify that third type of site.

At present, a development is being planned on the site of Minstrels, an old coffee shop in sight of Winchester cathedral. That is regarded as a brownfield site, just as an old factory site would be, which means that developers and the local authority have as much responsibility to pack as many flats or houses on to that site as they would on an old factory site. However, that is not really a brownfield site. Surely a third category is needed for such areas. Perhaps we could have greenfield sites, brownfield sites and "historic-field" sites, or semi-brownfield sites. I am sure that the Government can come up with terminology that would set aside a different category for those areas. It is important that they do that, because in certain parts of the country, brownfield sites are sensitive. A conservation area and cathedral city such as Winchester has less capacity to manage brownfield developments than more modern cities, or areas where there is more need for urban regeneration.

I wrote to the previous Minister about whether the Government were planning to review PPG3, and asked specifically whether they would consider its impact on the character of historic cities. The answer was that the research on PPG3 involved the influence of capacity studies on housing development, but that it would not report specifically on its impact on the character of historic cities. Will the present Minister reconsider that, because there is a need to examine what is happening to those cities? If the review shows that PPG3 is having a detrimental impact on historic sites, will the Government consider introducing a third category not of brownfield or greenfield, but of historic or conservation sites?

My second worry builds on my previous point. If we accept that some areas are more capable of coping with regeneration and PPG3 than others, there must be a way in which county areas can manage the flow better. PPG3 says that there is a preference for building on urban sites and that regional planning bodies are supposed to work together to achieve that. I have seen little evidence of such co-operation. There should be some ability to trade sites between various city and local authority areas. That could be achieved by making better use of the Government's database of brownfield sites, which represents a good step towards a trade-off between sites that can and cannot take extra housing.

Local authorities contribute towards the database by undertaking urban capacity studies. That is an excellent idea, but at present we are not making maximum use of those studies. I believe that local authorities should submit their studies to the Secretary of State and that a county structure plan should not be agreed, signed or set in place unless all the urban capacity studies have been completed. In areas such as Hampshire, it is nonsense to submit the hard work done by half the authorities in identifying brownfield sites to the county, and for the county then to make decisions without seeing the rest of the local authorities' work.

We need to have a system that allows for certain areas that are in need of urban regeneration to undertake urban capacity studies and maximise the use of brownfield sites in their areas, thus relieving the pressure on the more ancient city centres. If that sounds as if I am a NIMBY saying, "You can build it all in the old port areas in Hampshire, not in the ancient city centres," I apologise. But there is merit in having a system that allows that to happen. Local people would benefit from it.

My third worry is about the market overheating as a result of the emphasis now placed on PPG3. There is, as the Deputy Prime Minister has acknowledged, a backlog in meeting housing demand, but there is a danger, certainly in my constituency, that the floodgates are being opened. The market is overheating. Developers know that they can knock on doors and say to people, "Instead of building one house in your back garden, PPG3 means that we have to build three or four."

I am not one of those who would normally argue for interfering with the market. I accept that we live in a market economy and that the south-east and the housing market are both buoyant. However, the targets for brownfield developments set in PPG3 will probably be achieved quickly, possibly in the next two years, because developers and builders recognise that local authorities have to maximise their use of brownfield sites. Some of us would have preferred that target to be achieved over a phased 10-year period.

It seems right that the planning authority should be able to say to developers, "Yes, under PPG3 you could have built four or five houses on this site, but in the last six months we have built so many new properties—we have built about 1,000 in the past few years—that we are going to say no at the moment, because we want to phase this in over a 10-year period, rather than it all hitting the market so early on." I would welcome a response from the Minister on whether local authorities could take that approach. They could accept an application in planning terms, but turn it down in the short term to try to calm the market and restrain excessive demand, and seek to phase developments in. It is important that the situation should be calmed down.

The impact on my constituency is enormous; applications are coming through for every little bit of land. The overheating in these early years will not allow the infrastructure to catch up. We know that new schools, hospitals, drains, roads and so on take time to be established. Such developments can be planned over a 10-year period, but they cannot be put in place quickly enough to cope with the present demand. Brownfield sites should be near to sustainable areas, but developers are identifying sites where the infrastructure is not in place.

I recently attended a meeting of the Compton Down residents association, which has produced its own study of whether the area is sustainable and what it can cope with. The sustainability appraisal shows that there is no primary school, secondary school or general practitioner, no post office or shop, no bank, petrol station, pub, library, church, community hall or recycling point—I could continue. There is none of the infrastructure that we would normally require to accompany developments. Perhaps such infrastructure developments could be made during the next 10 years, but they cannot be achieved at the moment.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Will my hon. Friend comment on the crazy situation whereby Government grants are being used to demolish housing in some parts of the country where infrastructure already exists—for example, in Hull and Newcastle—while in the south we are building where there is no infrastructure, and we are trying to find ways to fund new infrastructure?

Mr. Oaten: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point that illustrates the need to take a more global approach to the matter, rather than making individual local authorities meet targets. Some areas will be able to support urban regeneration and add to their infrastructure, rather than having to create infrastructure where it does not exist.

In Whiteley, in my constituency, new homes were built and within three or four years the primary school was full. Two extra classrooms were added and there is talk of adding a temporary classroom. Clearly, the infrastructure that should accompany new homes is not in place. We need to phase in and control PPG3 and allow local authorities to say that they will not accept all its requirements straight away. I accept that that would mean interfering with the market. I am not comfortable with that, but there is a desperate need for us to take that step now.

Flooding is another infrastructure issue. The drive towards PPG3 and finding and identifying sites will have some interesting impacts on the pressure to build on flood plains. My office was in contact with the Environment Agency manager for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, who said that although the agency promotes sustainable development it believes that there could be greater pressure to build residential developments on flood plains. He said:

> "An increase in housing capacity on site will also limit such initiatives as Sustainable Urban Drainage".

He believes that there could be a conflict between PPG25, which deals with flood risk, and the drive towards developing land under PPG3. He continued:

> "We should all be thinking strategically and encouraging some brown-field sites to revert to nature, or for habitat improvement",

rather than making the assumption that we should necessarily build on them. I hope that the Minister will recognise that building on more brownfield sites involves dangers and anxieties about building on sites that, as we know only too well from our experiences 18 months ago, have a habit of flooding.

I support affordable housing. My constituency like everyother constituency, has an enormous shortage of police, nurses and key workers, and I welcomed aspects of the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement last week. However, the consultation paper on reforming planning obligations suggests that the Government plan to change the way in which local authorities can extract money from developers for affordable housing. At the moment, under section 106 agreements, local authorities can set a tariff for developers and use the money to build affordable homes. The local authority in Winchester relies on that to secure revenue and provide new homes.

I understand that the suggestion is that in the new system there would be a threshold below which developers would pay nothing. If the local authority could no longer impose a levy on developments of fewer than four properties, that would have a serious impact on areas such as Winchester. Many infill sites involve four or five properties, and we rely on being able to set a tariff to pay for affordable housing. Do the Government intend to introduce a threshold to exclude smaller developments from the contribution that local authorities can take under section 106 agreements?

I now come to the frustrating subject of empty properties. We are focusing on the need to knock down existing properties on brownfield sites and redevelop, but brownfield sites contain an enormous number of vacant properties. In April 2001, 753,000 dwellings were vacant. About 86,000 were in the south-east, and about 17 per cent. were publicly owned. I am no mathematician, but my researcher tells me that that means that there are about 14,800 empty homes in the south-east, which would go a long way towards enabling Winchester and other local authorities in Hampshire to meet their brownfield targets. We need to make much more use of what already exists. Does the Minister believe that the urban capacity studies that local authorities use might be linked with studies and audits of empty properties? Recapturing some of those properties should be regarded as a way of achieving some of the targets.

People need to be encouraged to tackle difficult brownfield sites. In my experience in Winchester, developers find it easy to knock on the door and persuade someone to sell off a bit of garden, or, on discovering that a shop or office has become vacant, to move in and make an application. However, they seem reluctant to tackle a brownfield site that is tough, perhaps because methane has been found there or because it is large and a lot of work and cost would be involved.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the subject of the difficult sites, which he is exploring extremely well, will he return to the subject of existing residential sites where developers move in, pay the sort of money that people cannot refuse and develop to a very high density? In my constituency of Solihull, 10 residential units gave way to a development of 79 residential units. Would the hon. Gentleman care to say a word about intensity?

Mr. Oaten: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I touched on that point earlier in my contribution; the impact of PPG3 reflects exactly the point that he has

[Mr. Oaten]

made, because it causes 10 properties to be turned into 79 properties. I am asking the Minister to review the impact of PPG3 because such things happen day in, day out throughout the country. One day we will wake up and discover that we have a different urban culture. There is good motivation for that because none of us wants to build on greenfield sites, but we must recognise that the balance is shifting in the other direction.

Encouraging better use of difficult and complex brownfield sites would relieve pressure from the street corner developments. I understand that the partnership investment programme—PIP—was a popular and effective way of using public money to support regeneration related to private sector developments, but the European Commission outlawed it in 2001. Subsequent schemes to try to encourage the private-public use of old brownfield sites have not been successful. Will the Minister comment on that—he may wish to do so in writing—and tell us whether the Government have any plans to think again and lobby the European Commission to relax the state aids regulation? PIP was an effective way of using the sites, but as it no longer exists, some developers are reluctant to use difficult brownfield sites.

I shall examine the impact on individuals. I mentioned earlier the pressure on individuals when there is a knock on their door or a letter from a developer. That manifests itself in nasty ways. Apart from the fact that some people, such as 70 and 80-year-olds who live on their own, feel vulnerable and under pressure from developers to sell their land, a pattern is emerging whereby developers put in a planning application on a property, although they do not own it. At present there is nothing in law to stop that happening.

That means that the Minister could go back to his constituency tonight and discover that a planning application, in which he had had no say or involvement, had been made to turn his home into four flats. Local residents would be somewhat confused and immediately assume that he had put the application in. Such a situation has arisen in my constituency and it is causing enormous disquiet. The people who own the houses swear blind to their neighbours that they did not submit the application, but nobody believes them because it is assumed that they are trying to sell off their houses to make a quick buck. In fact, a developer has put the application in.

Can the Minister examine that problem? I appreciate that there are legal difficulties, because in some circumstances it is right and proper for planning applications to be submitted by a person who does not own the relevant land. However, the regulations could be tightened so that any notification issued would make it clear to the community that it was not the owner but a third party who did not own the land who had made the application, without the owner's permission. That is a small but growing problem as developers try every technique in the book.

The second impact on individuals is related to enforcement. A development in Crowder terrace in my constituency is a real example of the effect of PPG3 on individuals. Notification was poor. Indeed, a couple who lived right next to the property simply did not know that the development was going to happen. In another case, the developers went ahead without permission on a tight and particularly complex site. It is proving very difficult for planning authorities to tackle that, which is part of the general pressure being put on such authorities as PPG3 kicks in.

I have the utmost respect for planning officers. I visited the Winchester city planning department three or four months ago, and Steve Bee, the director, and his colleagues do an enormous amount of good work in the face of incredible demand. Applications to the authority have increased by 33 per cent. in the last three or four years, and are flooding in.

Mr. Taylor: Has the hon. Gentleman experienced in his constituency, as I have in mine, serial applications and appeals one after another, which have almost put the planning department under siege?

Mr. Oaten: It sounds as if the hon. Gentleman and I have similar experiences in our constituencies, because that is exactly what has been happening in Winchester.

The Government target that applications should be considered within eight weeks and the system that allows for an appeal create false deadlines. Taking more time to consider planning applications should not, in my view, mean a performance indicator failure. In fact, I would rather my authority was allowed 16 weeks to consider some applications, so that it could negotiate with developers and have more discussions, which would result in better quality decisions. Because the performance indicator requires that things be done within a fixed period, the authority feels not exactly that it must rush, but that it has to work under enormous pressure when dealing with applications.

We must take the heat off planners. To put it bluntly, it is probably much easier for a planning department to grant permission for 4,000 homes on one big greenfield site than to cope all at once with 200 or 300 smaller detailed brownfield applications to achieve the same number of homes. We support the shift towards brownfield sites, but we must recognise the pressure that that puts on planning authorities.

I ask the Minister to think carefully about expanding the review of PPG3. We all support the Government's objective of reducing the number of developments on greenfield sites, but I am also arguing, in a non-NIMBY way, that the pendulum is swinging in the other direction, and the net consequence of PPG3 and the drive to use brownfield sites causes as many problems as if the developments had been on greenfield sites in the first place.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I think it advisable to remind hon. Members that in such a debate, it is common practice to allocate the last 30 minutes to the three winding-up speeches from the Front Benches. That time is usually apportioned equally between the two main Opposition spokespersons and the Minister. However, the Chairmen's Panel is reconsidering that practice, because we do not think that it is entirely fair. A Minister may require more time to answer questions—or, conversely, he may be happy to have a limited amount of time, in which he cannot answer questions.

As the Annunciator screens show, we have considerably more time than that today, but the Chairmen's Panel still feels strongly that the time left should be allocated equally only if necessary. In other words, the spokespersons from the main Opposition parties should not overrun one third of the time available. They do not have to take all of that time, but they must take no longer. Bearing those considerations in mind, and having explained that on the record, I am happy to call the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders).

11.29 am

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): You will be pleased to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have no intention of trying to fill the time available. Instead, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on securing the debate, and on choosing a title that ensured minimum attendance in the Chamber, so that he had the maximum time to put his point across. I am sure that if he had chosen the title "Housing in the South-east", or "Brownfield Development", the Chamber would have been packed.

The current planning system in England has two main parts: a framework of plans, and development control. A third element is the role of the Secretary of State in determining planning policy, which is where the planning policy guidance notes come in. The Secretary of State has three key roles. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister sets out the planning policies that drive the whole planning system, and they are principally contained in 25 planning policy guidance notes, or PPGs, and a series of minerals planning guidance notes, or MPGs.

The planning system is often seen as not working, unresponsive, and sometimes slow and difficult to understand. Over the past 50 years, however, it has protected some of the country's most important green spaces. It has regulated development and, especially has recently given communities some opportunities to participate in shaping the future of their area. It is certainly better than a free-for-all, and has provided an essential framework for managing our built environment.

However, as the Government clearly recognise in their planning Green Paper, there is a need for a thorough rethink, and the pressures on our planning system are driving that forward. Let there be no misunderstanding: one of those pressures is the fact that there is a housing crisis. Record numbers of people are inadequately housed in accommodation inappropriate to their needs. We know that there are links between poor and inadequate housing, and such things as low educational attainment and greater demands on social care and health services. There is a direct link between temporary accommodation and contact with the criminal justice system. Many of the social problems that rear their heads time and again in council chambers and in the House are linked to poor housing conditions.

The Liberal Democrats take a bottom-up approach. We believe that people in their communities know what is required, or should have mechanisms for determining what is required, so they should have the powers to meet those local demands and needs. Our policy is that each local authority should be tasked with undertaking a housing needs survey in its area to find out not only the number but the type of homes that are needed. We would then get away from the current system whereby developers build the properties that they wish to see in a locality and then, if they are in a property hotspot, advertise in national newspapers. Under that system, local needs go unmet.

The waiting lists for affordable housing in large parts of the south and south-east, and in several property hotspots in the north, are lengthening. There is a national problem. The right housing—housing appropriate to people's needs—is not being supplied. House prices are rocketing, as there are too few properties available for sale and interest rates are low. Low interest rates are a good thing, but when they make it easier for people to purchase there is too much money chasing too few properties. It is a classic problem of supply not meeting demand.

We also want local authorities to adopt a strict hierarchical approach after assessing housing needs in their area. The first thing that they should do is use empty homes. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester said that there were 753,000 empty homes, and if we total up the number of people on council waiting lists and add those who are temporarily housed or homeless, the result is a similar figure of 750,000 people, taking into account the fact that each home represents a family. The locations of the empty homes do not necessarily square with the demand or the lack of supply, but the priority should still be to bring them back into use. We would give local authorities a statutory right to take over a property that had remained empty for more than 12 months without good reason, bring it back into use and supply a home for someone.

The second part of our hierarchical approach is to assess whether other empty buildings could be converted to use as homes. Homes above existing properties could be considered. To give credit where it is due, I must say that the Government's homes above shops scheme has proved popular, but much more could be done. We should consider infill and easing the planning system for change of use so that properties designated for business use could, when there was no more demand for that business, be changed to some form of housing use. Then we should consider brownfield and greenfield land, as a last resort.

The price of land is another key element. One reason why land values are high in this country is that although other countries tax land, we do not. If we taxed the undeveloped value of land, we would surely maximise its use. For a start, that would discourage the horrible practice of land banking, whereby developers purchase land speculatively and, believing that the price will rise in the future, hang on to it to make more money later rather than develop it to meet today's demand.

The community sometimes makes an investment in infrastructure that raises the value of the land around it. For example, when a new road is built, the land either side of it suddenly gets considered for development and its price rises.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): It sounds as if the hon. Gentleman is proposing a tax on the

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

undeveloped value of land similar to the development land tax introduced by the Labour Government in the 1970s. That was an utter disaster, because development land was not brought forward for development. Has the hon. Gentleman thought through his proposal? How would it help make more land available for development and how much would it raise?

Mr. Sanders: I am talking about not a development land tax, but land value taxation. It was attempted in the 1920s but sadly, it was blocked for one simple reason: we did not then have a comprehensive land register, which would have been necessary for the policy to be successful. Such a tax would raise significant sums and could replace the uniform business rate altogether. We could do away with the uniform business rate and simply tax the site value of businesses and land. That might also help to iron out regional differences such as the overheating of particular regions. Developers would be encouraged to develop land with a lower land value tax, moving development away from the hotspots to other areas that we wish to be regenerated. Such a tax would also end windfall gains to which people contribute nothing. People lucky enough to live near the Jubilee line saw their properties rocket in price, but made no contribution to its costs. Such windfall gains are unjust, and the Government should consider mechanisms to put that situation right.

There are fairer mechanisms than section 106 agreements, which are mainly dependent on the negotiating skills of a particular local government officer with a particular developer. There can be two identical schemes in different districts, but one will get much more out of its section 106 agreement than the other. That system, too, must be reformed.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman's proposal for taxation sounds very much like the punitive levels of taxation that the old Labour party introduced in the 1960s and 1970s. Will he confirm that the Liberal party has finally given up on any pretence of being a modern middle-of-the-road party and is now a far-left party?

Mr. Sanders *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I find it difficult to allow myself to be persuaded that such inquiries have a direct impact on PPG3. I advise the hon. Gentleman to carry on with his speech.

Mr. Sanders: I shall take your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am proposing land value taxation as one way of ensuring that we get the housing that we need. It would not be an additional tax, but replace existing ones, so in fact Liberals could be attacked from the left for being far too right wing in wanting to reduce the taxes that people have to pay, rather than increasing them or maintaining the status quo, as the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) clearly wants.

The idea of such a tax has always been defeated by the lack of a comprehensive land register, and that is directly linked to PPG3. Local authorities cannot prepare their structure plans and decide how to designate each plot of land unless they know who owns that land. According to the recently published book "Who Owns Britain", the owners of more than 60 per cent. of the land in this country are not known. It is staggering that we know the owners of only about 40 per cent. of the land.

We can find out who owns land only when the title changes and the land is registered. Although we may have a rough idea of who owns land that has not changed title for hundreds of years, we do not know for sure. It is often then released in small pockets, at the owner's whim and according to the market, to maximise its price. The first step in trying to bring land into use would be a comprehensive land register, so will the Minister say whether the Government have considered the link between knowing who owns land and Government land use policies, which are the responsibility of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister?

In conclusion, we need local housing studies, a strict hierarchy at a local level, a comprehensive land register and land value taxation. That radical agenda, which would reduce tax and abolish the uniform business rate, provides the answer to the problems that we are facing in our communities.

11.43 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): This has been an interesting debate, but I expect that the proximity of the recess has ensured that the attendance is not as great as it would otherwise have been. Nevertheless, it is important.

To start, we should examine the PPG, because it is wide ranging. It says:

> "the focus for additional housing should be existing towns and cities".

It also recommends that we should

> "provide wider housing opportunity and choice and a better mix in the size, type and location of housing than is currently available, and seek to create mixed communities . . . give priority to re-using previously-developed land within urban areas . . . create more sustainable patterns of development . . . make more efficient use of land"

and, above all,

> "promote good design in new housing developments".

That is a pretty wide agenda, and we have had a pretty wide debate this morning.

We believe in the need for good quality, affordable housing. We thoroughly approve of the aim of using previously developed land—that is a better term than brownfield land—instead of concreting over the English countryside. We agree with the objectives of PPG3. After all, they were drafted under our stewardship. The shocking fact, which is not widely understood, is that last year only 162,000 houses were built, which is the lowest number since 1924, excluding the war years. Even more staggering is the fact that growth in the number of households in that period was 220,000, so for the first time ever the number of households has exceeded the number of houses being built. Furthermore, 7.6 per cent. of the nation's housing stock was classified as unfit in 1996, widening the gap between the number of homes available and those in need of housing. Little wonder, therefore, that the number of homeless has risen by

12,000 since the Government were elected in 1997and the number of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has soared by 150 per cent. since the election. Imaginative policies are needed to start solving some of those fundamental problems.

Hon. Members have rightly talked about the need to build on brownfield, or previously developed, land. The Government will have great difficulty meeting that 60 per cent. target once the number of houses to be built starts to increase, and my goodness it needs to do so. I suggest that the Government should require all local authorities to draw up a register of all previously developed land in their area. They should co-operate with the owners to discover the nature of the contamination of that land, and plans should be drawn up showing how that land could be brought back into use and what use would be feasible for it. Some brownfield land is so contaminated that it can never be developed; other brownfield land could be developed only as a car park, for example, and the less contaminated land could perhaps be used for residential dwellings. The Government need to take a more proactive stance in that respect.

It is a sad indictment that one of the world's biggest economies cannot house itself. We need more building, but we do not want to concrete over our green fields and the green belt. The Deputy Prime Minister's statement last week presaged a lot of extra building on green fields and the green belt, but quite how building 100,000 extra houses in the rural parts of the south-east of England equates with protection of the green belt is particularly difficult to understand. The Deputy Prime Minister made great play of the fact that he is the Minister who will protect the green belt, but with his centralised regional planning targets, which will be imposed on local authorities in the south, it is hard to see how he will achieve that.

The focus for additional housing should be on existing towns and cities. The housing density target of 30 houses to the hectare, which the Deputy Prime Minister announced last week, may often be sensible in inner cities, but in a rural area such as my constituency in the Cotswolds it is quite inappropriate. What we really want the Government's target to achieve is the discretion to decide whether it should be applied, according to the conditions that prevail in a particular local authority. In the inner cities, that may be achieved by building sensibly designed tower blocks to get the density up to 50 or even 70 dwellings per hectare, but it would be inappropriate in a rural area. Flexibility is needed in that respect.

Particularly worrying is the fact that homelessness is not only rising—by 12,000 as I said earlier—but rising among the young. The figure is 11 per cent. since the election. The number of people who have to be housed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation is especially reprehensible.

We need to ensure that we build more sustainable communities. That means mixed, well designed and well planned communities with a mixture of sustainable housing that is near the workplace. That requires imaginative policies as well as sensible planning, design and transport links. Too often, houses are built in rural areas where the transport links are not sustainable.

We need to ensure that there are adequate transport links in areas where new, larger estates are built. In building such larger estates, particularly in the inner cities—I have recently embarked on a programme of visits to some of the larger ones—we need to ensure that the developers and the city corporations can aggregate enough parcels of land to obtain a development of sufficient size for its infrastructure, mix of houses, work and facilities to be sustainable.

We must tackle this serious housing problem with a vision for the 21st century. The Government are beginning to tackle it, which is welcome, but we are looking for action, because after five years the difficulties have got substantially worse and the Government's announcements have not yet sorted them out. There is a real problem with urban regeneration. Our cities will generate the renaissance, but there are too many schemes. Urban regeneration is far too fragmented and there is no focus on bringing the parcels of land together.

I suggest to the Minister that the Government should clarify the respective roles of English Partnerships, regional development agencies, urban regeneration companies and sub-regional bodies. To a certain extent, the review of English Partnerships has helped, but it would help the regeneration process if English Partnerships were to assume national responsibility for brownfield land. That would help to bring forward some brownfield sites, which would make more land available. The problem with the housing market is that there is not enough land. If one constrains the supply of land, the price of houses is bound to go up. I have suggested to the Minister how he can identify where that brownfield land is, so we look to the Government for some form of pump-priming to get that brownfield land back in action.

We lost European gap funding due to bad negotiating by the Government and the derelict land grant has been abolished, so unless they suggest a mechanism to pump-prime those brownfield sites not enough will be put back in action and the Government will not meet their targets. If the brownfield sites are not built on, I predict that an unacceptably large amount of green belt and greenfield land will be built on. That is wrong for our country's future. Once greenfield sites have been built on, that can never be reversed. We look for a vision from the Government, and I await the Minister's response with interest.

11.53 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on securing this important debate, and I join the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) in chastising him for being so obtuse in choosing its title—the Chamber is not full to bursting. If the debate had been entitled "Housing in the south-east", numbers might have been greater. We finish later today, but, even so, I do not accept the point that attendance is low because the recess is near. Colleagues, of all parties, are busy doing other things. When they see a debate title that looks like something out of the cast list of "Dr. Who and the Daleks", we should not wonder why they do not come along in droves.

[Mr. Tony McNulty]

I think I believe the contention of the hon. Member for Winchester that people are slowly starting to talk about PPG3 in the pubs and clubs of Winchester. I suspect that that is the case, however unlikely it might seem. I congratulate him on placing his remarks very firmly in a thoughtful context that shows, first, that he has read PPG3 and, secondly, that the debate is not just about nimbyism—the attitude that if there are needs to be satisfied, fine, but that should be done anywhere but Winchester.

I shall try to touch on most of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I am sure that he will forgive me if I miss anything, and I shall write to him if I do. With the best will in the world, I have no intention of speaking for 35 minutes. I shall speak for as long as I need to and that is it.

The hon. Gentleman rightly assumed that greenfield developments remain the last option. Things will get more difficult, but we are a long way ahead of the game in terms of achieving our target of 60 per cent. plus of new developments on brownfield sites. It will be difficult and troublesome to sustain that, but it is the starting point of the process. If I can be parochial for a moment, in London the figure is well over 90 per cent., which will be equally difficult to sustain. All our towns, cities and urban fringe areas have an organic dynamic that means that people may be talking about tomorrow's brownfield sites in the boardrooms of Winchester, Hampshire and elsewhere, if not in the pubs and clubs, although they are currently not brownfield at all.

Mr. Sanders: Something said by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) struck me: once a greenfield site has been built on, that can never be reversed. That is not strictly true. Is there not a case for returning some existing built-on land to nature in exchange for the use of a greenfield site? That would be a quid pro quo—turning developed land such as a former industrial site into a public park and using a bit of greenfield land in return. The overall amount of greenfield land would not go down.

Mr. McNulty: In my two months in this role, I have not gone through every nook and cranny and every single planning application countrywide, but I served on a planning committee for 11 years, and I know that such things can happen and have happened any number of times. In my borough, we switched a piece of green belt over to join another piece on the far side of a railway line so that we could put a supermarket on the near side. That consolidated the green belt on one side, and a supermarket was developed on the other on a site that had been greenfield. It also happened to be, although this does not matter, the site of my primary school, but that was bulldozed long since. Such swapping round happens frequently in development. How often brownfield land goes all the way back to being virgin green belt, metropolitan open space or greenfield varies, but it can happen.

Although the contribution of the hon. Member for Winchester was thoughtful on the whole, an idea lacking in our deliberations is taking PPG3 in the round. It is not simply about brownfield land and hierarchical gradations. I shall return to his comments on historic towns. Much of PPG3 is about "Creating Sustainable Residential Environments". That section makes up almost half the document, followed by the sections on housing and on land. We need to see it completely in the round.

The hon. Gentleman also asked for a review, but in governmental terms if a document has 2000 on it, that means that the ink is barely dry, which would be the case for Governments of any persuasion. There will not be a review yet, but there may be further research. I shall return to that point.

The important aspect of PPG3 to bear in mind is paragraph 31, which gives the details underlining many difficulties that the hon. Gentleman queried:

> "In deciding which sites to allocate for housing in local plans and UDPs"—

unitary development plans—

> "local planning authorities should assess their potential and suitability for development against each of the following criteria".

Let us stop there. Ultimately, PPG3 deals with suitable brownfield sites. Again, there is no automatic switch so that people can get on with doing what they like with a previously built-on brownfield site. I shall deal with the criteria in a moment, but the site must be suitable and, more generally, within the context of other planning. I do not know anything about the example that has been given and I do not want to say anything about it, because I may have to deal with it in some form or other. However, if it is a previously developed site, and if it is slap bang in the middle of a conservation area and almost in the shadow of Winchester cathedral, all the elements of the wider planning policy framework prevail, not just this one. *[Interruption.]* I shall try to leave the microphone alone in future.

Mr. Oaten: It is absolutely right that all those aspects kick in, but the difficulty is that targets must be achieved. The authority cannot say no to all applications. The problem with an area such as Winchester is that nearly all the sites are sensitive. The inclination is to use those things that the Minister talks about to say no, but the authority is virtually forced to say yes to achieve the target. That is why different criteria are needed for places such as Winchester.

Mr. McNulty: I am not entirely sure that new or different criteria are needed. Developers must understand that PPG3 is not above the rest of the planning framework, but part and parcel of it. The matter to which the hon. Gentleman alludes reinforces the point that the Deputy Prime Minister made last week about giving far more resonance to reasonable planning guidance and getting counties, boroughs and districts to appreciate their housing difficulties, whether caused by overheating or low demand, in a national and a regional context. That means that Hampshire must talk to Surrey. I am sorry, but they must talk, although I know that they do not like to do that. We must try to get East Sussex and West Sussex working together—we could start a real revolution.

In recent months, I have been involved in a few things in the north-west, where low demand is the reverse of the problem in London and the south-east. It is a salami-style situation—not quite block by block, but there is low demand, overheating, low demand, overheating. Resolving problems in east Manchester might be wrong for, and cause further underheating in, Salford, Rochdale and Oldham. The same consideration should be paramount in addressing the overheating in London and the south-east. I take the point.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: There is a danger of being too simplistic about brownfield land. It is important that the Minister considers his powers in legislation to establish a national register of brownfield land, identify the contamination on it and develop a plan as to how it might be used. Land is so precious in the south that we must consider very carefully every single piece of previously developed land.

Mr. McNulty: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I return to that point.

The criteria are the availability of previously developed sites and empty or under-used buildings, their suitability for housing use and the location and accessibility of potential development sites to jobs, shops and services. I take the point about pressure on existing infrastructure and the scope for new, which is the next criterion. Additional criteria are the capacity of existing and potential infrastructure, including public transport, water, sewerage and other utilities; social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals; the ability to build communities where major brownfield sites are being developed; and the physical and environmental constraints on the development of the land, which I shall deal with later.

Regional and local authorities should utilise brownfield sites in the context of the wider planning framework. That is important if conservation areas are included. I fully appreciate, even in a London context, that development on previously developed land in Harrow will be slightly different from such development in Hackney. I am sure that that is the case for Winchester versus Southampton as well, but I am not sure that the third category is needed, although we may consider it.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Winchester about sensitive brownfield sites, the starting point and the key to much in PPG3 is the suitability of previously developed sites for further development. There is no carte blanche for developers to get on with developing any site that has been previously developed, and it may be important to explore that with them. I take the point, because it is known to me in a London context.

I am not sure that I agree with the points about floodgates opening, markets overheating and PPG driving over-development and overly high density. The idea of a causal link—that it is all PPG3's fault—is a tad simplistic. There are enormously complex events going on in London and the south-east, as well as the fascinating corollary in parts of the north-west, that we need to deal with. However, that is not all happening because of PPG3, which, as the hon. Gentleman said, started under the previous Government. That is a tad unfair, and we need to consider matters in a wider context.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McNulty: In a moment.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On the flooding point.

Mr. McNulty: I have not touched on flooding, with respect. I mentioned floodgates and the market overheating.

On the question of slowing the market down to allow infrastructure to catch up, there is scope in the body of the PPG for phasing developments, especially larger ones. That would not only slow things down, but, to address the other point made by the hon. Member for Winchester, allow infrastructure to keep pace with development. PPG3 allows the phasing of housing to control the pattern and speed of urban growth to ensure that new infrastructure is co-ordinated with new housing developments. Developers are becoming more and more aware of that.

On some sites and developments that I have seen recently, the better developers have put more thought into the environmental, structural and social consequences of what they are doing. They are building houses, which involves not only the piecemeal infrastructure for those who live for a while on a temporary building site—the market is so hot that half of the properties go before the process is finished—but keeping an eye on the impact that the last pieces of infrastructure and the last buildings have on the surrounding infrastructure and communities. That sensitivity is developing more and more.

I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said, but I thought that he was going to make one point that I really would agree with. Whether it is empty houses, brownfield sites, previously developed sites or sites in general, if one looks in any locality, many such sites belong to the public sector. Some notion of getting to grips with what the public sector does with them more generally is important.

People are keen to consider some notion—perhaps defined by the Office of Government Commerce and the Treasury—of best value and the contribution of those public sector sites to the common weal in terms of housing and development in a particular area. We have scarcity, but a lot of sites have public sector, or ex-public sector, imprimatur on them. The market is completely overheated when there could be a little control in terms of how to phase our land for the public good. That is worth looking at. If the hon. Gentleman did not say that, I have said it anyway.

I take the point on vacant homes, which is emphasised in paragraph 2 of the PPG. We are trying to tap potential. Our good practice guide on capacity studies says that we should consider vacant lots because they are a significant source of capacity. However, as the hon. Gentleman said, I would not want to go down the road suggested by the hon. Member for Torbay and say that there are 720,000 empty houses in the public sector and about 720,000 people in bed-and-breakfast and

[Mr. McNulty]

temporary accommodation—voilà, problem solved. Would that it were that simple. Put one figure against the other and the mismatch is phenomenal.

It is inappropriate to say that we have failed, and that it is all misery, doom and gloom as regards state aid and gap funding. The housing gap funding schemes are focused on brownfield sites, and there is a new scheme in place that broadly deals with whole notion of state aid. Such matters develop all the time, and the funding allows grants of up to 60 per cent. for more difficult areas.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) made a point that is relevant to the debate and not part of a broader rant: we must somehow reach a capacity at which the public sector assists private developers to tackle the most difficult brownfield sites. The fact that reclaiming such sites for our communities is difficult should not lead us simply to conclude that they are far too poisonous and contaminated and that they should be left. That will lead to difficulties, not least because of the capacity of some urban towns.

There are other fiscal measures about which I shall write to hon. Members, as I do not have the details to hand. They include a 150 per cent. tax credit for the clean-up of contaminated land and a range of VAT initiatives. I ask hon. Members not to push me on VAT, because I shall simply tell them that the Treasury deals with it. If I find out more about gap funding, state aid or the broader issue of really difficult contaminated land sites, I shall certainly get back to hon. Members.

Given that the hon. Member for Winchester is so interested in planning—anyone who reads PPG3 must be—it is shameful that he did not listen in fine detail to what the Deputy Prime Minister said last week. I do not mean to knock the hon. Gentleman, but had he listened he would know that his question on thresholds and the tariff-based approach no longer prevails. Significantly, we have decided after much consultation to revise policy guidance on planning aid section 106, but that we shall not pursue legislative routes for the tariff measures replacing that section.

We shall revise circular No. 197 on section 106, but we think, given the consultation that has taken place, that we can make the existing planning obligation system under section 106 work far better. We shall try that route before using primary legislation. The Deputy Prime Minister said the same in his statement last week. The fact that PPG3 dates from March 2000 means, in governmental terms, that the ink is just dry and it will not be reviewed instantly. We said in the Green Paper and in our response to consultation that we shall consider in the round the nature, scope and format of planning policy guidance.

Mr. Oaten: In a parliamentary answer on 1 March, the then Under-Secretary of State for the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), said:

> "We have research underway to consider the implementation of PPG3 and this will report the progress made by local authorities".—[*Official Report*, 1 March 2002; Vol. 380, c. 1592W.]

Will the Minister acknowledge that he is talking about the same thing now?

Mr. McNulty: With respect, I am not, but my next paragraph refers to it.

As we said in the planning Green Paper, when we find a legislative slot, we shall consider in the broadest sense the form, context and role of planning policy guidance. We want to have a headline statement with the detail following it, rather than something too complicated. On a rainy night in Winchester, read PPG23 on mining and aggregates—it is wonderful reading. There is no need for a rewrite on that basis, but we are researching the implementation and bedding down of PPG3, and we shall evaluate its overall impact and consequences. That may, but only may, prompt us to reconsider parts of PPG3, but that is for the future.

In a broad sense, some of what we are trying to do in the Green Paper, outwith PPG3 or the general PPG process, may address points made by the hon. Members for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) and for Winchester on serial applications and subsequently serial appeals, which are part of the wider planning process, not just guidance. The hon. Member for Winchester is entirely right to say that, at this moment, someone could be putting in a plan to bulldoze my nice little semi in Kenton in Harrow to put up a block of flats. Such a person would not even have to notify me, as it is up to the local planning authority to do that.

I am not sure whether trying to take action on that would represent using a big stick to sort out a little problem, but we will consider the matter. I was on a planning committee for 11 years and I know that people are deeply perplexed when they suddenly discover that half their garden or their garage is part of next door's application for flats. I am not sure how people deal with that. I have not a clue where Crowder terrace is, let alone what the enforcement issues were, but we are considering enforcement under the Green Paper. Much of PPG3 involves creating sustainable residential environments.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McNulty: I am just coming to the relevant point. There are proper sequential hierarchies to go through in relation to the elements that I have described—flooding, flood plains and so on.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I want to give the Minister another constructive suggestion. Sustainability will increase the pressure on flood plains. Is he aware that Ordnance Survey is doing interesting work producing height maps, which will make it much easier to identify those areas where the one-in-100-years event is likely to take place? Will he contact Ordnance Survey to find out whether that work can be speeded up so that local authorities have a better idea of where flood plains are likely to extend? That is particularly important in this era of climate change, when we are getting wetter winters than we used to.

Mr. McNulty: I am not only aware of that work, but I have the great delight of being the Minister in charge of Ordnance Survey. When I pop down to Southampton, I may well raise that issue, among others. Ordnance Survey does exceptionally good work across the field. Happily for the hon. Gentleman and for the synergy of answering his question, I am also the Minister responsible for dealing with coastal and inland flooding. Those are matters of concern, and the freak events—I hope that they are freak events—in much of the south-east and some of the south-west in recent years need addressing. What Ordnance Survey is doing in that regard is very important. I shall pursue the matter.

PPG25, another darling little document, introduced the risk-based sequential test that gives priority to developing in lower-risk flood areas. We should bear it in mind that, as has been said, we are well behind. This is not a partisan point, but in the 1970s and 1980s—Labour was in government for part of that time—some buildings were put where they ought not to be. That had serious environmental consequences, which we want to address. We certainly do not want a repeat of that, and we will use the information that the hon. Member for Cotswold suggested.

I recommend anyone who is interested in the important, deep and detailed technicalities of mapping for any sort of public policy work to look at what Ordnance Survey does. I know that the hon. Gentleman has done so. Ordnance Survey is well ahead of the game in developing and utilising digital mapping and other technologies. That is the end of the advertisement.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester, not only on how he spoke, but on a very thoughtful speech. If I have left anything out, I will get back to him. That is the nice bit over. I do not have much to say in response to PPG3 specifically, and I know that you would chide me if I strayed off that subject to respond to the other contributions, Mr. Amess.

I spent a great day and a half in the constituency of the hon. Member for Torbay, who called me a friend of Torbay, which is kind of him. I hope that he remains a friend when I have finished speaking. He will forgive me if I deliberately confine my remarks to the thrust of the speech of the hon. Member for Winchester, rather than to the delights of what seems to be a tortured package of housing reform and local government finance. The finance issue probably has its roots in the 1850s, and the housing reform issue certainly has its roots in the 1960s. I am not here to debate the arcane nature of, or the flaws in, the policy package that was alluded to. Perhaps I should pop along to the Liberal Democrat conference.

We should not be simplistic about such matters. The hon. Member for Torbay asked—in an early intervention, before he got to his rather weak party political broadcast—why we demolish properties in low demand areas where infrastructures are in place and then build where there are fewer or no infrastructures. That goes back to my point about the wholly simplistic approach of "X amount of empty houses, X amount of people in bed and breakfast, merge the two, problem solved."

Some northern towns and urban centres must ask themselves serious questions and they have to grasp the nettle, which is, "Actually, X town, which has had 80,000 people for the past 100 years, probably cannot sustain more than 40,000 or 50,000, given its communities and infrastructure." Such questions are painful, but it is not enough to give the impression that, in the next 10 years, the 20,000 people who may want to live in the Winchester or Southampton areas can fill a particular place in Lancashire or Yorkshire, thereby solving the problem. Really complex and desperately painful choices about low and high demand will be faced in the north and the south.

I shall tell my constituents that Liberal Democrat policy is to tax those who [illegible] in Queensbury, Canons Park and Stanmore—the three tail-end Jubilee line stations—not because their houses have moved, but because what is happening 30 miles away at the other end of the Jubilee line, through to north Greenwich, is a windfall for them. I find that absolutely astonishing and I shall pursue such matters wearing a political hat, not my governmental hat.

Mr. Sanders: Will the Minister consider the position in which someone who lives next to an infrastructure improvement receives a windfall through the value of his property, for which he is not taxed, even though the rest of the community has put taxpayers' money into that improvement? The mechanism that can resolve that problem should be investigated.

Mr. McNulty: I shall not go down that route as it is not germane to PPG3, save to say that developments or windfalls gained by the people of north Southwark and north Greenwich due to the Jubilee line extension 25 miles from my constituency should not penalise my constituents in Stanmore, Canons Park and Queensbury. However, perhaps we can pursue such matters over a cup of tea another time.

Given that the hon. Member for Cotswold described these matters as a serious problem, it might be useful if he took them seriously. Perhaps his new boss will sort things out, but all we heard from him was a party political rant without substance. It offered no hope at all and was more to do with internal Conservative family difficulties than anything else. It offered nothing to the people in need of PPG3. That is a shame in the light of how the hon. Member for Winchester started the debate. I do not say that the Government have all the answers on overheating in the south and in Winchester and on the problems of low demand in the north, but I know from last week's statement that we are seriously trying to tackle such problems realistically, in the north and in the south, and that PPG3 is part of that process.

Last week, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said that we need to take a new stand on how we build homes and communities. The Chancellor put his hand in his pocket and gave us the resources to assist with that process. PPG3 is a cornerstone in the programme that links planning, housing, transport, education and regeneration, and it is about people, places and protecting the environment. I take seriously the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Winchester. I urge hon. Members to read in detail not only what the Deputy Prime Minister said last week, but the daughter documents that flow from it—not least those on housing and planning—and any subsequent statements issued in summer and during our new Session.

We are deadly serious about the issues covered in the briefing from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, especially housing, regeneration and planning. As one

[Mr. McNulty]

who spent 11 years on a planning committee, I am grateful that, finally, people are starting to regard planning and guidance as serious political tools to deal with the problems in our towns and cities, north and south. I look forward to future debates on PPG3, but let us give them a title broader than what sounds like a relative of K9 from "Dr. Who".

12.24 pm

Sitting suspended.

Social Exclusion

12.30 pm

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Last week, in this Chamber, there was an excellent Government debate on poverty. The Government set out clearly and without complacency the progress that they have made over the past few years in their concerted fight against poverty. We heard how pensioner poverty was being successfully addressed, about the advances in the struggle against child poverty, what was being done with regard to ethnic minorities, and how job creation was a central part of the Government's policy to tackle social exclusion.

Important contributions were made; several hon. Members cited their experiences in their constituencies. The thrust of the comments reinforced, supported and extended what the Government are doing. However, one issue that was not touched upon is the relationship between poverty, participation and power, and that is what I will focus on today.

At the end of 2000, a 63-page report entitled "Listen hear; the right to be heard" was published. It was the result of the work of 12 commissioners, who put their heads together, debated, argued and took evidence from around the country. They addressed the causes of social exclusion and poverty, and they examined what had been done to address them in the past; but they also mapped out some things that might be considered in the future.

The commissioners were drawn from various aspects of public life, and, more importantly, several of them had had direct experience of poverty. It was my privilege to be one of those public life commissioners, and I found the work enlightening and rewarding. I like to think that it has had some influence on what I am now doing as a Member of Parliament.

The inspiration and support for the project came from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the membership organisations of the UK Coalition against Poverty. The report is hard hitting; it does not mince its words. It is clear about what it sees, and it is forceful in its recommendations. When I and the other commissioners were thinking about how to prepare the report, we took as our starting point the principle that genuine participation is a basic human right. We all held the view that poverty is compounded by powerlessness and exclusion, and we strongly believed that if we were going to get policies that address poverty and social exclusion, the people who actually experience those things should be properly consulted.

Many people who experience poverty do not vote or participate in consultation processes: many such people are cynical about politicians and decision-making processes, and they deliberately absent themselves from engaging in democratic structures that could, in theory, make an improvement to their lives. One question that the commission asked is: why is that the case? It examined the many complex issues that contribute to the situation. It found that frequently people who experience poverty are not respected. They are often looked down upon and are patronised by others in society, particularly decision makers. Those who have power all too often dismiss people who are experiencing poverty. We have all heard the names—scroungers, hangers-on, lazy and so forth. That has a profound and negative effect on those in poverty—those at the sharp end. That is shown clearly in a quote included in the report. It was made by a speaker at a conference in Glasgow organised by Voices for Change:

> "People with little or no power are made to believe there is no point in raising their voice, as it will make no difference. That they will not be listened to by those who have power and control."

It came across clearly in our work that participation is often far from genuine. There is a great deal of tokenism. People often go through the motions of encouraging participation without taking the time to think about what it means and what it could lead to. From the same document, I cite one of the grass-roots commissioners:

> "People ask: how is this meeting going to change my life?—and if they can't see how, they won't go. Whatever is done, you need to ensure the change affects their lives."

Another graphic statement was made by a commissioner in a conference in south-west England organised by Voices for Change:

> "Where are the decision makers? We invited so many councillors and council officials and they are not here. The leader of the council and the MP made their speeches and then scarpered. Once councillor said he had to go to another meeting in the council house. They were discussing 'citizenship and democracy'! They should have been discussing it with us, here."

That, again, illustrates clearly what people think about the tokenism that is sometimes shown on the notion of participation, empowerment, engagement and so on. It is all very well to use buzzwords and in-phrases, but unless they mean something in practice, people quickly become cynical.

As the previous quote suggests, tokenism is not confined to one tier of government or one kind of organisation. In the Benefits Agency, for example, the commission found that people were frequently treated with condescension and lack of understanding about the problems that they face. Someone told the commission:

> "I had two children and no maintenance from my ex-husband. I had no family to support me and was totally financially dependent on social security. When my giro didn't arrive I started to panic as we had no electricity left, no gas or coal for heating and very little food. I went to the local DSS office and was told my giro was in the post. When it didn't arrive the next day I went back—and this was repeated every day for a fortnight. I became increasingly desperate and angry and on one occasion clearly heard one of the staff say, 'Here comes that bloody woman again.' By the third week and two days before Christmas, I had to borrow money for food and gas stamps . . . I told a friend and he took me down to the main DSS office, where I went in all guns blazing demanding to see the manager and refusing to leave until I had my giro. Ten minutes later I had my giro—it had been on someone's desk all the time!"

People in poverty face such experiences day in, day out. For others in society, such a situation—where the solution is apparently easy and straightforward—would not arise. However, for many people, for whom we need to ensure full participation in our democracy, such problems are monumental.

Privatised utilities can also show a lack of sympathy and sometimes pursue policies that penalise the poor. In local government, there is frequently evidence of top-downism. The jargon of empowerment is often used to justify decisions that have already been taken in order to pursue certain policies.

It is not always non-Labour authorities that pursue such insensitivity and top-downism. In many traditional Labour areas, such as the south Wales valleys, there is much of the "I know best" approach to the local community. Although a councillor might be elected on only a very low turnout, the councillor—usually an elderly man who is, of course, white—considers that he always knows best what people want on whatever issue because he has the support of the electorate. Sadly, that is not the case.

The problem sometimes continues even after a change in the political control of local authorities. I cite the example of Rhondda Cynon Taff in south Wales. The Labour party lost control of that authority to Plaid Cymru. However, exactly the same policies, attitudes and prejudices exist in the authority as when it was under Labour control. That applies not only to elected councillors, but to professional staff in local authorities. That raises the question of how local officers are trained and what contact they have with the communities that they are supposed to serve.

The commission also found that poverty is not always geographically confined. Many people, such as the elderly, disabled people, young people, women and asylum seekers, do not feel part of traditionally defined communities. Nevertheless, they experience exclusion and poverty in different ways. Also, the loudest voices in communities are not always the most representative. Often those who suffer in silence should be those who are most keenly listened to. However, the situation is not all bad—positive examples can be given, and I shall talk about some of those in a moment.

The commission also discovered that people face personal and practical barriers to empowerment. There is a lack of basic skills in many areas. There is a notion that people could speak up for themselves if they had the willpower to do so—but that is unfair, because they are a product of their circumstances. Women experience the problem that a lack of child care frequently prevents their participation. There is a lack of so-called tools of the trade because people in poverty seldom have faxes, computers and in some cases, even telephones. They have a lack of money, which impairs real participation.

Some aspects of our social security regulations dampen enthusiasm for volunteering. The commission examined positive examples from countries such as Australia and the Netherlands in which volunteering and community work is recognised as legitimate engagement with the community for which remuneration can be received from the state.

I do not intend to sound negative. Real problems prevent the popular participation that many of us want, but we can cite positive examples of good practice. Several members of the commission visited Caia park estate in Wrexham and we saw an excellent community project based on recycling. Another project provided fruit, vegetables and other healthy food for people who did not have a large income. Members of the commission visited the Pembroke street estate management board in Plymouth and we were extremely heartened to see the tremendous enthusiasm there. We noted that a modest residents' group had developed so that residents were in a genuine partnership with the local authority to help to run their estate.

[Mr. Wayne David]

We learned that, in Hull, the Preston road residents committee was deeply involved in putting together a "new deal for communities" scheme, supported with finance from central government. In Wales, we learned how the communities first project was beginning to breathe new life into communities that have experienced deprivation for generations. One of the most positive meetings that we had was with Edwina Hart, the Assembly Member and Welsh Government member with responsibility for finance. She explained to us how the communities first project would transform some of the communities in Wales. That is now happening. I shall give an example from my constituency. A small estate called Graig y Rhacca was renowned for its high level of unemployment and its deprivation, but the community is now coming together. Through partnership, the initiative is beginning to create a new kind of ethos and optimism.

Another thing that the commission found to be true is that central government are making significant strides on that agenda. Much has been done with regard to consultation with children and young people. The neighbourhood renewal unit has set up a community forum and provides advisors on community regeneration schemes and brings together people who have experienced poverty in their communities. Several commission meetings have been held with people who have been active with voluntary organisations and with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Treasury civil servants, the Secretary of State for Wales, and Home Office civil servants.

The all-party poverty group is very active. The Cabinet Office has prepared a so-called tool kit to advise on best practice and how to bring about inclusive consultation. The social exclusion unit continues to examine the issue, and is making powerful recommendations on best practice in myriad subject areas. There is, however, room for improvement. The Department for Work and Pensions received some criticism from the European Commission on the action plan that it put forward last year, but lessons are being learned.

Poverty and social exclusion are the crucial social issues of our time, but so too is ensuring that people who experience them are involved in our decision-making processes. The report points the way forward in many respects. I know full well that the Government have given it active consideration. I hope that they continue to do so, and I hope that they give real consideration to its central recommendation, which is that a series of task forces be established, both for devolved Administrations and central government, to consider how the agenda could be purposefully pursued.

12.47 pm

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I shall be brief, because I know that the Minister needs time to reply. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) on securing the debate, because the issues of poverty and exclusion are very important. I am glad that he has highlighted the issue of getting people to participate.

In particular, it is important that children and young people participate in decision making that will affect their lives and help to lift them out of poverty. In Wales, there are some outstanding examples of how children and young people have participated in a culture that I believe is beginning to grow throughout the United Kingdom. I should like to mention the information centre in Swansea, which the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs visited yesterday. Young people decided what they wanted from it and where it should be. They designed the place and appointed the staff. The result is an information centre that is completely geared to young people's needs. Similar examples are to be found throughout Wales.

The other example that I should like to use is that of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. That is a unique appointment, in which young people were involved. Those are examples of how we can tackle poverty and exclusion by involving people from the beginning of their lives in the decision-making. I add that to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly.

12.49 pm

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): Thank you, Mr. Amess. I am delighted to reply to this extremely important debate under your chairmanship.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) on securing the debate. It may be the last day on which the House meets before the summer recess, but my hon. Friend could not have picked a more important subject for us to consider. He is an expert in this area; he was a commissioner of the "Listen hear" report by the UK Coalition against Poverty, about which he spoke so eloquently. The report is an extremely useful contribution to the debate on poverty and social exclusion and to our consultation.

The social exclusion unit was set up in 1997 to provide joined-up solutions to the problems of social exclusion. We all agree that we cannot place social exclusion in any one category. We must confront problems of income, employment, health, disability, education and skills, housing and access. I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words about the unit. The key to its success is listening to people. We cannot understand the problems faced by people sleeping rough on our streets, or the problems that looked-after children and children in care have with educational attainment, unless we talk to them. We cannot produce a report on ex-offenders unless we talk to prison governors, prison officers and prisoners. All that is central to the way in which the unit works. Moira Wallace, the first director of the unit, gave evidence to the commission and is quoted in the "Listen Hear" report.

The National Assembly for Wales has launched communities first—a long-term programme to tackle poverty and social disadvantage locally, which I welcome. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly rightly talked about wards in his constituency that are extremely deprived. However, there are also growing examples in his constituency of good community projects. He referred to a successful sure start health outreach team that has new shop-front premises. It has become clear that projects such as sure start have huge name recognition. Sure start has become successful because people have a sense of ownership and are consulted about what they want. Local parents have a say, which is important.

On the subject of participation, the "Listen hear" report makes a point about the need for serious commitment to reaching out to diverse or hard-to-reach groups. It also makes the point that that should be part of a continuing dialogue, not a one-off exercise. We should not just dip in and then leave, but should keep the dialogue going, which we are committed to doing. The unit understands that there is a need to do more than consult the same people—the usual suspects—time and again. I am not sure if my hon. Friend used that phrase, but he was being too kind.

In 1998, we formed the 18 policy action groups to develop policy for the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal. That led to important initiatives such as the neighbourhood renewal unit, to which my hon. Friend referred. Of the 596 recommendations that emerged from the policy action team reports, 86 per cent. were adopted as Government policy, which is significant.

My hon. Friend was right to talk about the Cabinet Office strategy unit's public involvement framework to help policy makers at all levels to involve the public more in decision making and thus improve policy design. As he and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) said, that is in a sense a new innovation for Government. If consultation is to be purposeful and meaningful, it is quite difficult to carry out and we have to work quite hard at it, but we have some good examples.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North that involving children and young people is essential, but that is difficult to do, which is why the children and young people's unit launched "Learning to Listen". That document sets out the core principles that will apply across Government for the involvement of young people in policy making. It commits Departments to developing plans to provide more opportunities for children and young people to get involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of Government policies and services.

In 1998, we launched an initiative on better government for older people, building a unique partnership with similar objectives. From September, all secondary schools will teach citizenship as part of the national curriculum, another important recommendation in the "Listen hear" report.

One major recommendation in the report is the one outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly, which is that the Government and the devolved Administrations should set up a taskforce of people with direct experience of poverty to draw up recommendations. That would ensure that such people could participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. I understand why the recommendation was made, but I am not convinced that such a standing committee would be the best solution at UK level, partly because we are talking about a wide range of issues that affect practically every Department. That might make a single consultative structure a little unwieldy, but there are ways in which a more tailored approach could benefit us. I am certainly committed to working with my hon. Friends and other hon. Members to see how we can take the matter forward.

As part of the European Union's support for tackling poverty and social exclusion, we shall shortly begin work on our 2003 national action plan for social inclusion. Participation at all levels will be essential to ensure that the plan reflects the full range of effective action that is needed to tackle the problem throughout the UK, so we shall consult widely. We also want to use that opportunity as a focus for a national campaign against social exclusion, a campaign that we want to be as participative as possible. It is important that we go out and talk about the issue, and that we are responsive. A flexible, tailored approach will produce the best results for all concerned.

I agree with my hon. Friend that although a lot has been done, there is a lot to do. We can improve our practices, and I will always be interested in seeing how we can do that. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is also engaged in issues of participation. Hon. Members will remember that he met the all-party parliamentary group on poverty earlier this year, when these issues were discussed in detail.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly has raised a vital subject. We need to take forward the important issues and find new and creative ways to work on innovation. I am committed to doing so and thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate.

Manchester Airport

1 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Thank you, Mr Amess. It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship.

This is "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" for me, although not with the august Minister of State. I usually deal with his colleague the Aviation Minister, and it is good to know that as Transport Secretaries and their shadows come and go, debates on Manchester airport remain a regular fixture of the parliamentary year—for me at least.

On our last day before the summer recess, I am grateful for this timely opportunity to debate plans by Manchester airport to change the use of its departure routes over Cheshire. It is timely because the threat to the peace, lifestyle and health of many thousands of my constituents is imminent and because yesterday the Government announced a major consultation on their proposals to manage growth in air traffic while minimising the effects on local people and the environment.

I acknowledge the huge debt that I owe to the many local people in my constituency who have helped me on this issue. My comments would be reiterated by other hon. Members who represent airport constituencies, because we are always struck by the enormous support that we receive from volunteers. I want particularly to mention Jeff Gazzard, Alan Wilson, Tony Greaves, Chris Corner, Barry Wienholdt, Anthony Dobell, Bert Grange and all those involved in action groups like the Knutsford and Mobberley joint action group, the Manchester airport environment network, and the parish and town councils of Knutsford, Mobberley, Marthall, Ollerton and Peover. They are the unsung heroes of this campaign.

Those people are all volunteers with limited time and even more limited resources, but each has put a huge effort into mastering the detail of aviation policy, section 106 agreements and flight routes so that Manchester airport is challenged and properly held to account. We are up against the might of the airport, with its full-time professional lawyers and public relations people, but we are more than holding their own. At times it feels like a David and Goliath fight, but we should remember how that story ended.

Without the vigilance of that local army of volunteers, we may never have known that Manchester airport was proposing to change the use of its departure routes in the first place. The airport was adamant that the opening the second runway last year marked the end of a period of change, not the beginning of a new one. However, alert residents in Lower Peover and Ollerton first noticed last autumn that each day, around lunchtime when most people were not home, one or two passenger jets were flying over their villages. That seemed strange, as the map printed by Manchester airport and circulated to thousands of local residents made it clear that the only propeller planes and light jets were allowed to fly over their villages. Indeed, according to the Civil Aviation Authority, even such light jets are only allowed in exceptional circumstances, although exceptional seems to have become routine.

To distinguish that restricted departure route—the so-called LISTO route—from the main routes used by larger commercial jets, it was shaded green instead of blue on the map sent by the airport to residents. The distinctive colouring is so clear that even the Aviation Minister, in his letter to me on 1 July, said that the LISTO route is

> "also referred to as the 'Green Corridor'".

It is so described because it coloured green on the map to distinguish it from other departure routes. The restriction of the LISTO route, or green corridor, to only the smallest of aircraft was a crucial part of the airport's argument during the planning process and public inquiry into the second runway. It enabled the airport to admit that some areas would lose out as a result of the new runway and departure route, but point to other areas, such as those covered by the LISTO route, that had previously experienced heavy traffic but would be much better off.

The new routes, including the heavy restrictions on the LISTO route, were spelled out in black and white in the section 106 planning agreement signed by the airport, Manchester city council and Cheshire county council in 1994. On the basis of that agreement, people bought homes and settled down in places covered by the green corridor, including east Knutsford, Peover and Ollerton. They thought, and their house purchase searches told them, that they would not suffer from the misery of aircraft noise.

The first sign that Manchester airport was about to betray these people came last autumn, when a few alert residents noticed that the occasional large passenger jet was using the green corridor. Ken Sayle, chairman of Ollerton and Marthall parish council, wrote to the airport to ask why. He received an answer of which George Orwell would have been proud. The airport's community relations manager revealed that clandestine trials had been conducted using a range of aircraft on the LISTO route. She explained that there were

> "some air traffic control advantages (and capacity ones) that would flow from some re-balancing of traffic on the southbound routes".

She ended by stating:

> "our general advice to those residing close to the airport is that they are likely to see and hear aircraft at some time".

That is a truly extraordinary statement, given that the point of aviation policy is to assign preferred noise routes to limit the impact. Saying that people living close to an airport are likely to see aircraft from time to time is not the same as changing departure routes.

I went to see John Spooner, the managing director of the airport, to find out exactly what the airport was up to. I established at that meeting last December that the airport had indeed conducted a major trial on the LISTO route—without telling anyone, including the Department for Transport, and in breach of both the section 106 agreement and Civil Aviation Authority guidelines on the use of that route. I also discovered that it was now considering completely changing the use of LISTO routes to include large commercial jets. Although the airport was concerned about noise on other routes—one of its excuses—the real reason for the change was, according to the managing director, "a capacity one". In other words, it wanted to dispatch more aircraft, more quickly, early in the morning. That was seven months ago. At no point since then has the airport made any attempt to inform local people about what it was planning, ask for their opinions, or engage in any meaningful consultation whatever.

Only thanks to the local newspaper, the *Knutsford Guardian*, the work of the Knutsford and Mobberley joint action group, and a newsletter that I printed and distributed from my own office allowances, have the residents of Knutsford and affected villages woken up to the airport's betrayal of its agreement with local people and to the huge threat that now looms over them. They have now begun to fight back. Action groups have been set up and thousands of protest letters sent. I received more than 200 and forwarded them to the airport.

These are not the pro forma letters or postcards that MPs are used to receiving, but individual letters, which people have taken the time and trouble to write. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Lenderyou wrote:

> "The impact on this densely populated area will be very negative, inflicting disturbance and noise pollution".

Mr. and Mrs. Simmons wrote:

> "There is an alternative route over more open countryside (which is used at present) and it seems completely irresponsible of the Airport to contemplate a route which will detrimentally affect so many households and fly over two junior schools".

Mrs. Needham wrote:

> "I help out at a school in Knutsford with children having learning difficulties and concentration problems. The noise of planes constantly overhead will not help."

Mr. Cotton wrote:

> "This proposed change to the use of these assured routes will have a detrimental effect on my family's quality of life. It also goes without saying that the value of my property is also likely to be negatively affected by changes".

Mr. Corner wrote:

> "Many people moved to this side of town because they found life intolerable under the landing path. They now find themselves with the prospect of being out of the frying pan into the fire".

That snapshot of letters gives an idea of how angry and betrayed local people feel, and how determined we are to stop the airport changing the use of this route. We have had some success. The Aviation Minister told me in a recent letter that he was

> "aware of the concern of local residents regarding the LISTO routes".

That is a huge victory: we have penetrated the ivory towers of Whitehall. We have also affected the airport's thinking. The managing director told me back in April that he hoped to make a decision to proceed by the end of that month. That was three months ago, and there is still no formal application to the Government. I was told by someone who recently had a meeting with the managing director that the reason for the delay was that I, the local Member of Parliament, had "put my oar in." The airport will be disappointed to know that I intend to keep on rowing on the issue.

Ultimately, however, the fate of my constituents will be determined by the Department for Transport. That is why I asked for this debate today. I know from our ongoing correspondence with the Minister's colleague that no formal application has been made by the airport to change its routes, and I am sure the Minister will say that again today. However, I also know that the Department has held a number of informal discussions about the proposal. Therefore, this is the perfect time to ask the Minister five questions. If he is unable, for obvious reasons, to respond in detail to the questions today, perhaps he will undertake to write to me about the matters that I raise.

First, will the Minister give me an assurance that any change to the departure routes at Manchester airport will be subject to the specific approval of the Secretary of State? I ask that because in the Aviation Minister's first letter to me on the issue on 16 May this year, he said that if the airport wishes to change the use of its departure routes, it must first make a formal application to the Directorate of Airspace Policy. If that directorate believes that

> "such changes have a significant detrimental effect on the environment"

then, according to the directions under the Transport Act 2000, they must

> "refrain from promulgating such changes without first securing the approval of the Secretary of State".

The Aviation Minister has already acknowledged that his Department knows about the huge concern of local people about the proposed route change. The Department must also acknowledge that sending large passenger jets down a flight route that does not carry them at the moment must, by definition, have a

> "significant detrimental effect on the environment".

Will the Minr today confirm that any change will require the approval of the Secretary of State?

My second question again refers to what the Aviation Minister said to me in his letter of 16 May. He said:

> "it has been the view of successive Governments since the 1960s that the balance of social and environmental advantage lies in concentrating departing aircraft along the least possible number of departure routes".

Therefore, like previous Governments, will this Government—it is their practice to date—reject the argument from the airport that one way of reducing the impact of aircraft noise is by fanning out departing aircraft along several routes? The airport is using that spurious argument to try to divide local opinion. It has told residents of Mere, a village which is badly affected by the current departure route, that opening up the LISTO route would make life more bearable for them.

I know what a misery aircraft noise causes in Mere, but as the airport's main consideration is to put more planes into the sky more quickly, I honestly believe that a change of route will not significantly reduce the number of aircraft flying over them and will certainly not stop the noisiest planes of all, such as the PIA jumbos, from flying over Mere.

Will the Minister stick to existing Government practice and reject the argument that it is best to spread the misery when it comes to departure routes?

Thirdly, the Aviation Minister said in his letter of 16 May that as it is Government policy to concentrate departing traffic along

> "a relatively small number of tracks . . . it makes sense to arrange these tracks to over-fly sparsely populated areas where possible and thus reduce the sum of total disturbance".

[Mr. George Osborne]

Therefore, before any decision is taken on Manchester airport's proposal, will the Minister undertake to conduct a survey of how many people live in the area under the LISTO route to establish how sparsely populated it is? Current departure routes quite rightly go to great lengths to go around Knutsford, because that is densely populated. If departing aircraft went to the same lengths to stick to those routes it would be even better. However, the parameters of the LISTO route cut straight across the eastern half of Knutsford, where thousands of people live, and then proceed over several large villages. How can letting large jets fly down that route be consistent with a policy of arranging routes so that they

"over-fly sparsely populated areas where possible?"

Fourthly, the Aviation Minister acknowledges that details of departure routes were included in agreement on the second runway

"as part of the assessment of the likely effects of the proposed new runway".

However, he says that it would not be appropriate to comment on that agreement, as it was between the airport, Manchester city council and Cheshire county council. I accept that the Government were not party to that agreement. Is the Minister therefore saying that the Department takes no notice whatever of the section 106 agreement, and the promises made by the airport? It seems unfair and a little strange that the Government do not take into account the basis upon which Manchester airport was given permission to construct a second runway, and the solemn promises that they made to local people at the time, when deciding whether to allow the airport to break those promises. Indeed, the course of the LISTO route described in the section 106 agreement is very different from current LISTO route, which is much further west and now overflies Knutsford—something that did not feature in the original maps. The Government may not be party to the agreement, but surely they must take it into consideration.

Fifthly, and finally, the Government yesterday announced a major consultation on the future of air capacity in the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State said that the key issues included not only how we should respond to the continued growth in demand for air travel, but how we should deal with the environmental impact of expansion and its effects on people living close to airports.

The consultation document covering the north of England raises some very big questions for Manchester airport and the people living around it. It forecasts that the number of passengers using Manchester each year may rise from 18 million in 2000 to 60 million by the year 2030, or even higher in some scenarios, and raises the issue of a fourth terminal in Manchester by 2015.

I welcome the spirit in which the consultation has been launched. I want Manchester airport to be a success and a magnet for jobs in the region, but for that to happen it must respect the rights of people who live around it and treat them like adults. As I understand it, the consultation will run for four months and the Government will then publish a White Paper upon which decisions may be taken and legislation based. Does the Minister agree that it would wholly wrong to take a decision on the changed use of departure routes at Manchester airport before consultation has taken place and before a White Paper has been produced? As I hope that I have demonstrated today, Manchester airport's proposal to change the use of its departure routes has huge implications for local people, the local environment and airport capacity. It will bring the misery of aircraft noise to thousands of homes that to date have mercifully been spared. It will be a betrayal of the promises made by the airport to local people when the second runway was agreed, and it will run counter to current Government policy of concentrating the impact of departing aircraft along a small number of routes flying over sparsely populated areas.

The decision cannot be taken out of the big picture and looked at in isolation; it requires joined-up thinking. Will the Minister give me an assurance that he will give careful consideration to the issues that I have raised to today, that he will wait until the Government produces the White Paper before taking any decision on the change of use of routes at Manchester, and that he or the Secretary of State will decide the future of those routes? The quality of life of the people whom I represent will depend upon it.

1.17 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) for raising the important subject of the use of departure routes at Manchester airport. He posed a considerable number of questions, and I hope that I will be able to answer some of them. If there are matters that I cannot cover in the time available, I shall write to him. As he said, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport debated the subject of noise from aircraft using Manchester with the hon. Gentleman last July—it is obviously an annual event—and described the prosperity that the airport brings to Manchester and to the whole of the north-west region.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the might of Manchester airport, and certainly it is a significant factor in the north-west. Manchester is the biggest regional airport in the United Kingdom, with an extensive programme of scheduled and charter flights to a number of short-haul, medium-haul and long-haul destinations. It also has the largest belly-hold freight operation—the hold of passenger aircraft—outside the south-east of England. In 2000, Manchester airport handled 18.4 million passengers, some of whom may have been the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and 117 thousand tonnes of freight. The airport infrastructure comprises two main runways and three terminals with a capacity of around 30 million passengers per annum.

The airport is a major employer in the region, a factor that should not be under-estimated. In 2000, it directly supported an estimated 17,800 jobs and a similar number of indirect and induced jobs in the area. It operates training and apprenticeship schemes with local communities. The hon. Gentleman's constituency benefits from a significant share of those jobs, for example at the Emirates European call centre, Barclays IT centre and BNFL.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary recognised, as do I, that noise in local communities is an undesirable but inevitable consequence of the airport. He described a number of measures that the airport has taken to limit the adverse impact of noise on local communities. They include night restrictions, ground noise restrictions, noise insulation, departure noise limits and departure routes. The last of those measures, which arouses much interest in Manchester, is our subject today.

I want to stress that the policy of successive Governments has been that aircraft noise is a local issue, best resolved locally. Only Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports are designated for the purposes of section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. The Government are responsible for setting noise mitigation measures for those airports. Elsewhere, including at Manchester, that is a matter for local resolution. Manchester airport has been designated under section 35 of the 1982 Act, so is required to provide adequate consultation facilities for users of the aerodrome, local authorities and local representative organisations on issues of concern arising from airport operations. I have encouraged members of the local community, through their representatives on the consultative committee, to take the opportunity to express their views. From what the hon. Gentleman has said today, they are availing themselves of that.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the second runway at Manchester was the subject of a public inquiry in1994–95 that carefully considered air noise. The inspector recognised adverse impacts on Knutsford. A package of mitigation measures was crucial to the granting of planning permission to build the second runway. Those measures are the subject of an enforceable agreement with Cheshire county council and Manchester city council under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The hon. Gentleman referred to a letter received from my hon. Friend the Aviation Minister in May. It is appropriate to clarify what I understand that letter said. When my hon. Friend said that he could not comment on the agreement, that was not meant to imply that he was not taking it into account, but that he could not comment on a legal interpretation of the agreement, which was a matter for the relevant local parties.

A map illustrating the existing and proposed departure routes was included for information in the evidence on the airport company given to the planning inquiry. The planning permission given for the second runway was not contingent on the precise location of the routes or their usage. The airport included in its section 106 agreement with Cheshire county council a provision committing it to further consultation over any proposed changes to the PNR—preferred noise route—segment of its departure routes, and to undertaking that through the airport consultative committee and the environmental health officers' consultative committee.

The new runway at Manchester airport was opened in February 2001. It is staggered relative to the old runway, and lies approximately 1.8 km—1.2 miles—closer to Knutsford than the old one. International Civil Aviation Organisation rules for the use of staggered parallel runways state that landing aircraft should utilise the first available runway. When both runways are in use, aircraft taking off should use the other runway. That means that during the day, when the wind is from the south or west, aircraft will take off toward Knutsford from the new runway, with a consequent increase in noise in that area. I fully accept that.

The introduction of the second runway necessitated the design of new departure routes. All routes must be properly designed in accordance with internationally agreed design requirements. Aircraft are not permitted to commence turns until they have reached a minimum height. Due to the displacement of the second runway, it is impossible exactly to reproduce for the new runway routes from the old one. There has been no change to departure routes over Greater Manchester as a consequence of the second runway. There are now four routes for departures to the south-west. Those to the north and west are largely as before, with a slight adjustment due to the spacing and stagger of the runways.

I fully accept that there has been a noticeable shift for southbound traffic. At the time that the second runway scheme was conceived, it was thought that the old CONGA southbound route passing to the east of Knutsford was incapable of taking all types of traffic without significant overflying of Knutsford. Therefore, it was proposed for propeller aircraft only. The result is that the majority of southbound traffic passes to the north of Knutsford before turning south between Knutsford and Northwich. The CONGA routes were renamed LISTO in August 2001 and have also been referred to as the green routes.

The directorate of airspace policy at the Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for airspace design and for promulgating changes to existing airspace arrangements. The DAP is required to act in accordance with directions given to the CAA by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under section 66(1) of the Transport Act 2000. The directions require the DAP,

"where such changes might have a significantly detrimental effect on the environment,"

to

"advise the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions"—

the directions were issued in 2000—

"of the likely impact and of plans to keep the impact to a minimum",

and to

"refrain from promulgating such changes without first securing the approval of the Secretary of State."

The guidance goes on to stress the importance of consultation, through which the views of those who may be affected by any change can be considered and a solution can be developed.

The original proposals for the use of the CONGA, or LISTO, routes were drawn up in about 1993 on the assumption that there would continue to be a fairly large contingent of propeller-driven aircraft used on many of the short-haul services from the airport. More recently, since planning permission was granted, small regional jet aircraft have largely replaced the propeller fleet operating from Manchester to UK and European destinations. That is part of a wider phenomenon in the aviation industry.

[Mr. John Spellar]

Airport officials evaluated the performance and noise characteristics of those small jet aircraft compared with their predecessors, the propeller driven aircraft, as the growing popularity of regional jets was causing problems with air traffic control. Their work was reported to the technical advisory group of the Manchester Airport Consultative Committee, which agreed that the CONGA 1R and 1Y routes could be used for light jets in addition to the propeller driven aircraft previously proposed. That view was subsequently endorsed by the main committee, which acknowledged that, in noise terms, it had advantages over the original proposals. It was also endorsed by the Environmental Health Officers Group. As it represented a change to the original proposal in respect of the preferred noise route segment of the route, the proposed modification was referred by the DAP to the then Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in June 2000. The Department was satisfied that appropriate consultation had taken place.

I understand that airport officials have carefully monitored the pattern of community noise disturbance since the opening of the airport's second runway in February 2001. There has been a significant increase in community complaints from the area north of Knutsford as a result of increased air traffic, as the hon. Gentleman indicated.

Mr. Osborne: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Time is our enemy, and he may wish to write to me on some of the specific issues that I raised. However, would he deal with one point before our time is up? Does he agree that it would be wrong to make a decision on the use of routes while a major consultation is taking place on air traffic in the north of England?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman described a pressing issue in his area. I am not sure whether he wants to delay consideration of that situation while there is, as he rightly says, a public consultation on the much broader issue of air traffic in the north of England and the long-term future of Manchester airport. However, following his comments, I shall give those views consideration.

As I said, it is also the case that areas to the east of Knutsford have benefited from significantly reduced air traffic. In recognition of the concern expressed by the communities to the north of Knutsford, consideration has been given as to how that could be mitigated. One potential solution suggested is to widen the range of aircraft able to operate on LISTO as a way of sharing the noise burden.

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. We now come to the final subject for debate.

Pensioners (Allowances)

1.30 pm

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Thank you, Mr. Amess. I am delighted to have secured a debate on an issue that affects not just my constituents but those of every hon. Member.

People of pensionable age make up 18 per cent. of the UK's population. My constituency of Glasgow Anniesland has one of the highest concentrations in Europe— 31.5 per cent. of the electorate are in that bracket. It is very important for me to ensure that an issue that affects such a large number of my constituents is recognised and addressed by the Government. There is no doubt that the policy initiatives introduced by the Government have made a huge impact on improving the lives of our pensioners. We have spent a great deal of money on pensioners—an extra £6 billion a year in real terms—as a result of the policies that we have introduced since 1997. In fact, we are now spending three times more than an earnings link since 1998 would have given pensioners.

Between 1979 and 1997 the gap between the richest and the poorest pensioners widened beyond belief. The top fifth saw their incomes rise by 80 per cent. above inflation, but the incomes of the poorest fifth rose by only 34 per cent.—less than half as much. I am very pleased that the Government have focused on pensioner poverty as an immediate priority. Indeed, measures such as free eye tests, the winter fuel allowance and free television licences for the over 75s have applied to all pensioners regardless of income. However, measures such as the increases in the basic pension and the introduction of the minimum income guarantee have ensured that it is the poorest pensioners who have benefited most.

This year's Budget pledged that whatever the rate of inflation, the basic state pension will increase by at least £100 a year every year, and this year it is rising by even more than that: £156 a year for single pensioners and nearly £250 for couples. In fact, the average pensioner will be £7.75 a week better off as a direct result of the tax and benefit changes announced in this year's Budget. All in all, with the minimum income guarantee, the new pension credit and the new pensioner tax allowances, the average pensioner household is now £1,150 better off even after inflation than in 1997.

From next year, 5 million pensioners will gain from the new pension credit—on average by £8 a week or £400 a year more per household. For the poorest single pensioner, extra help will guarantee a minimum income of £98.15 a week this year and at least £100 next year. By absorbing the minimum income guarantee, it will underpin the incomes of people aged 60 and over so that they need not live on less than £100 a week, or £154 a week for pensioner couples.

There will also be a higher guaranteed income for those who are severely disabled, and for carers. I take a big interest in that subject, and I more than welcome that move. The pension credit will also reward pensioners for saving. We no longer want a security system that penalises pensioners with modest occupational pensions or savings. We no longer want millions of pensioners living on low or moderate incomes, who struggled to put money aside for their retirement, only to find they were little or no better off than people who had saved nothing. The credit will benefit half of all pensioner households, topping up the state pension with a cash reward, and ensure that pensioners with small occupational pensions or modest savings will no longer face losing a pound in their benefit for every pound of pension or other savings they have built up. Crucially, it will abolish the intrusive weekly means test. From age 65, most awards will instead be set for five years, and pensioners will have to report only significant changes in their circumstances.

The pension credit will be delivered through the new Pension Service as part of our plans to make it far easier for pensioners to claim all their entitlements. At the point of retirement, we will be able to work out how much pension credit pensioners are entitled to, at the same time as working out their basic state pension. We will then normally need to reassess their award only every five years, unless they tell us that their income has fallen.

Since April, the Benefits Agency ceased to exist and all work relating to pensions—for pensioners today and in future—became the responsibility of the Pension Service. There will be one point of contact for pensioners where pension entitlement and arranging payment can be worked out. Pensioners will need to give information only once and will not be left to find their way through the system. I welcome the measures, but I think that we could do more.

Life expectancy at birth has increased dramatically during the past hundred years. In 1910, for example, a man could expect to live until the age of 48, which means I would now have been dead for two years. Born today, he could expect to live until at least 75. Likewise, a woman born in 1910 had a life expectancy of 52 years, whereas today she can expect to live until at least 80. By 2020, there will be 50 per cent. more pensioners than there were in 1990 and a smaller work force to support them.

As the population ages, we find it more difficult to support and protect our elderly. Recent figures show that fewer pensioners were in poverty last year than for the previous decade. Some 21 per cent. of pensioner couples now have incomes after housing costs of less than 60 per cent. of the median income, which is down from 27 per cent. 10 years ago and equates to well over 1 million fewer pensioners than in 1997. Those are encouraging signs that we are reversing the trend in the number of pensioners on relatively low incomes, and clearly show that we are moving in the right direction. Although I take heart from those figures, I do not believe that it is acceptable for anyone who has contributed all their working life to find themselves in poverty in retirement.

I congratulate the Government on the work that has been done so far, but I should like to make one or two suggestions about what we need to do now. I mentioned earlier that I welcomed the introduction of free television licences for those over 75, but I should like us to go a step further by lowering the qualifying age to 65. The most recent estimates put the cost of doing that at £714 million. It is a lot of money, but when one considers that annual spending on education and skills increased by £12.8 billion in the comprehensive spending review, it is not much. It is absolutely right that we invest in our children, but we must also look after our pensioners. When a person reaches 65, television is no longer a mere luxury, but a necessity.

I wholeheartedly supported the introduction of the winter fuel allowance, and the increases since then have been welcome. However, it is time to go further. Although there has been a drop in excess winter deaths, more people die in the UK than in any other European countries as a direct result of the cold. Winter is often a precarious time for older people. Research shows that the poorest pensioners tend to live in housing with the most inefficient heating and insulation: those who can least afford a high heating bill must pay most to keep their homes really warm. When a household needs to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income on energy, it is considered to be fuel poor.

The energy efficiency of the home is another key indicator. The energy efficiency rating of a home is measured by the standard assessment procedure or SAP, which has a scale from 1 for highly inefficient to 100 for highly efficient. The most recent figures showed that lone pensioners living in the private sector had an average SAP rating of 11, which compares with the national average of 35. New buildings are required to have an SAP of 70. We can see why those pensioners have to pay most for their heating.

Some 77 per cent. of single pensioners and 43 per cent. of couples are still fuel poor. It is estimated that fuel poor households still spend between £700 and £800 a year less than they should to achieve adequate warmth. I would suggest that, as a further step to eradicating fuel poverty, we look at increasing the winter fuel allowance to £250. I completely accept that the existing £200 payment was not even an option under the Tories, but we need to find ways of further eradicating fuel poverty. The cost to the Exchequer could perhaps be offset by the £1 billion that fuel poverty costs the NHS every year.

I welcome the home energy efficiency scheme, HEES-plus, which is aimed at people over 60 who receive an income-related benefit—the minimum income guarantee, council tax benefit or housing benefit. Government figures show that from 1990 to 2000, between 39,000 and 77,000 people did not claim the income support to which they were entitled. That does not entirely convince me that those who should claim HEES-plus will do so. If it is not claimed, it will not go far enough toward combating fuel poverty.

That brings me to my next point. One third of all benefits are now means-tested, but for pensioners the figure is almost 60 per cent. There is some evidence to show that the take-up of means-tested benefits by pensioners is low and, furthermore, that it is lower than when money was given directly to them through the higher basic state pension, which is targeted according to age. The key question, one that I hope the Minister will address, is how we continue to target our poorest pensioners. That requires a degree of means-tested benefits while ensuring that take-up is at a desirable level.

[John Robertson]

I wish that we could do away with means-testing, but unless someone can come up with a better way of assessing those who have least, I fear that it will be around for as long as we have poverty.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Robertson: Can the hon. Lady please wait? We must give the Minister time to answer, and I still have a little of my speech to go.

According to the Government's figures, between 300,000 and 750,000 pensioners who are entitled to MIG have not taken it up. Take-up is low because many elderly pensioners are baffled by the forms and the complexity involved in trying to claim. I appreciate that we have shortened the MIG claim form from 40 to 10 pages, but at that age, even 10 pages is too long. I hope that the aims to do even better under the pension credit scheme will come to fruition.

Means-testing presents pensioners with particular difficulties. The complexity of the forms is not the only problem. Research shows that 3 million pensioners throughout the UK are not claiming the full range of benefits to which they are entitled. According to research carried out by Prudential, 43 per cent. of pensioners surveyed said that they did not realise that they were eligible for certain benefits, 23 per cent. did not even know that a benefit to which they were entitled existed and 18 per cent. were put off by red tape.

The research showed that 18 per cent. of Scottish pensioners were likely to reject means-tested benefits, compared with a UK average of 10 per cent. Increased means-testing, therefore, is disproportionate in its effect on Scottish pensioners. A factor that I have not yet mentioned is that pensioners are often put off means-tested benefits because they are proud never to have claimed any form of income support during their working lives and do not want to start in their retirement. We need something better.

We could look at the language used in naming additional benefits. Words such as "benefit", "support" and "allowance" all conjure up an image of some form of income support or charity, as elderly people sometimes think of it. We must look at more positive words such as "entitlement". The name "pension credit" is a step in the right direction, but even that could be improved. We should examine how we can promote the range of benefits and advice available to pensioners, to maximise take-up. I certainly hope that the new Pension Service will be more effective in that way.

I shall consider the new proposals that deal with the ways in which pensions will be paid from now on. There are plans to scrap the traditional pension book and replace it with a bank card, and to pay pensions into bank accounts. Although I understand the reasoning behind those proposals, I have concerns. Many elderly people do not have bank accounts, for various reasons. They may not understand them or they may be uncertain about new technology. Above all, there is no substitute at that age for meeting and dealing with a real person. Pensioners like to have cash to hand, but I fear that having to withdraw it from a hole in the wall will not reassure them that their money is safe.

I again congratulate the Government on all the work that they have done to help pensioners. They have introduced policies that would never have been introduced under previous Governments. Above all, we are on the right track to eradicating pensioner poverty and improving pensioners' lives. However, I reiterate that I would like further steps to be taken. I am talking about free television licences for the over-65s, an increase in the winter fuel allowance, less means-testing, more assistance for pensioners in finding their way around the system, and real people to deal with pensioners face to face, rather than new technology.

I have raised a number of issues and made suggestions about the way forward. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister's reply.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): First and foremost, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on securing the debate. He is fast showing himself to be a stalwart defender of, and advocate for, his pensioner constituents. I, along with other Ministers who have something to do with pensions, have noticed that, as I am sure that his pensioner constituents will have, too.

My hon. Friend has raised important issues. I thank him in particular for the way in which he has set out his comments, because he has taken the trouble to explain what the Government have already done. That is important, because it would have been easy for him just to come along and say, "This is what we want." I thank him for his even-handedness.

The Government's strategy is to ensure that all pensioners enjoy a decent and secure income in retirement and share in the nation's rising prosperity. As my hon. Friend was kind enough to say, we have already achieved a great deal, given where we started. We inherited a pension system that was failing to provide enough support to current pensioners and to provide security in retirement for future pensioners. In addition, the gap between better-off and poorer pensioners was growing. Indeed, my hon. Friend has given the figures.

As soon as we took over from the previous Tory Government, we started to right past wrongs. Our first priority was to address the immediate problem of pensioner poverty among retired people, which is why we introduced the minimum income guarantee in April 1999. Anyone who has had anything to do with social security will realise what a long and difficult task it is to introduce a new benefit or to change an existing one. However, we were determined to increase quickly the incomes of the poorest pensioners, who did not have access to a good second pension and who had not had the opportunities during their working lives, or their lives caring for others and bringing up children, to accrue such a pension.

That is why we built on the income support system that already existed, but we were left with a number of problems, which my hon. Friend has mentioned and to which I shall return. The key issue was to get money to poorer pensioners as fast as possible, and the MIG did that. We have uprated it in line with earnings every year since its introduction, and we will continue to do so for the lifetime of this Parliament.

We went further by introducing winter fuel payments in winter 1997. These benefit pensioners generally as well as the poorest pensioners. When we introduced the payments, the rate was £20 for each eligible household and £50 for those on income support. Many of us forget that that was the starting level. It was increased to £100 in 1999, and from winter 2000 the payments have been £200 for each eligible household. That is considerably more than they would have been if the increases had been in line with inflation.

More than 11 million older people in more than 8 million households receive a significant contribution to their winter fuel bills through the winter fuel payment. In my hon. Friend's constituency, as he probably knows, almost 14,000 people received payments last year. He will know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has already announced that sufficient money has been set aside to continue paying winter fuel payments at £200 for the rest of this Parliament. My hon. Friend asked for a further increase, but I hope that he acknowledges how much we have already done and how welcome and popular the winter fuel allowance is among our pensioner constituents. I have found that when knocking on doors in south Liverpool.

My hon. Friend referred to fuel poverty and the home energy efficiency scheme plus, but did not say how much that scheme could help. In 2001–02, we expect some £81 million to have been spent on home energy efficiency scheme plus grants, which tackle fuel poverty on a house-by-house basis—possibly the most effective way imaginable. We expect 600,000 homes to have received help by 2004, and my hon. Friend should recall that we have increased the scheme's maximum grant from £315 to £2,500. Significantly more work can be done to tackle fuel poverty, and the grant is usually enough to pay for gas-fired central heating.

John Robertson: Does my hon. Friend accept that take-up is never sufficient to alleviate the poverty? The £200 winter fuel allowance worked, so if we gave £250, it would go a long way to alleviating the problem of people not taking up their allowances.

Maria Eagle: As expected, my hon. Friend is sticking tenaciously to his argument. I shall come to his point about take-up in a moment, but I want to get on record the fact that the increase in home energy efficiency scheme plus is significant. It will help 600,000 households by 2004 on a house-by-house basis, dealing with cold problems in particular dwellings. That is a very targeted way of spending the money.

I should like to remind my hon. Friend that in real terms between 1997 and 2001, domestic gas prices in the UK fell by 12.6 per cent. while domestic electricity prices fell by 16.8 per cent. Therefore, he will have to acknowledge that the winter fuel payment is becoming better and better value each year, even though it is staying at £200. I hope that I have convinced him.

John Robertson: Can my hon. Friend guarantee that the prices will continue to fall?

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend thinks that I have far more power that I do. We hope that the falls will continue, but unfortunately I am not in charge of the entire economy or domestic fuel pricing. We can only hope.

My hon. Friend acknowledged that the free television licences have been a tremendously popular initiative, and we spend more than £356 million a year on providing free television licences to households with at least one person aged 75 or over. My hon. Friend may know that about 6,200 pensioners over 75 are eligible for free television licences in his constituency, and I am sure that they tell him how pleased they are to have them. I know that my hon. Friend would like the scheme extended to all pensioners, but the current regime strikes the right balance between safeguarding the principle that the BBC should be funded by viewers through the universal licence fee and our duty to help our oldest pensioners, who for reasons of ill-health, restricted mobility and social isolation are more likely to be reliant on television as their window to the world.

I cannot agree that people turn into couch potatoes when they hit the age of 65. That is a somewhat pessimistic view of human nature, and one statistic will illustrate my point. At age 75 plus, only 2 per cent. of pensioners still receive income from earnings, but one-fifth of those aged 65 or more are still working in one form or another and are not as socially isolated as some of our more elderly, frail pensioners. I hope that my hon. Friend will acknowledge my response, although I cannot expect him to have been won over completely by my arguments. No doubt he will come back to me and to the Department.

Compared with 1997, single pensioners in receipt of the minimum income guarantee, the winter fuel payment and free TV licences are now at least £18 a week better off. Pensioner couples have gained by more than £27 a week in real terms. My hon. Friend referred to the take up of means-tested benefits and, in particular, the minimum income guarantee. Our recent take-up campaign for the minimum income guarantee resulted in more than 138,500 successful additional claims. Those pensioners received, on average, an extra £20 a week. That campaign can be seen only as a success. He explained some of the reasons why we have a problem with take-up of the MIG, and they include the stigma and resulting reluctance felt by many pensioners to claim what they consider to be perhaps a handout or an income-related benefit. We want to tackle that.

It is certainly true that the figures for the pensioners entitled to the minimum income guarantee, but who have not claimed it yet, pre-date the national take-up campaign in May 2000. We are therefore undertaking further research to obtain a more precise estimate of the number of pensioners who are entitled to, but not receiving, the minimum income guarantee. More than 1 million pensioners responded to the take-up campaign and many of them were not eligible for MIG, usually because they had too much capital. The changed capital limit—the abolition of some of the requirements for MIG in pension credit—will tackle that problem and many more of those pensioners will be entitled to help under pension credit than under the minimum income guarantee. We can get in touch with them; we know who they are and where they are, unless they have moved. However, many pensioners remain in the same home.

We have made it easier for older people to claim their entitlement through a new shortened MIG claim form. We have reduced it from 40 pages to 10, which is certainly an achievement. We have stopped asking pensioners whether they are pregnant, which must be a

[Maria Eagle]

step forward. The reason why such questions were on the form was that it was based on income support. We had to administer MIG through the income support system to ensure that payment was made quickly. The change to pension credit will be a major breakthrough. It will make real changes to the way in which we ask pensioners for information, the type of information we ask for and the type of process that they must go through to receive it. It will make a big difference in respect of take-up.

Pensioners who contact the retirement pension telecentre line are asked a series of questions to identify those callers who are not already receiving the minimum income guarantee, but who may be entitled to it. We are taking a more proactive approach to identifying entitlement and trying to ensure that payments are made to those who are entitled to them. That will make a difference, too. We have started a data matching exercise that will enable us to invite a claim to MIG from those whom we think may be entitled, following the award of another benefit or life event, for example a bereavement or marriage. We will know whether people are entitled to it and encourage them to claim.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the Minister give way?

Maria Eagle: I appreciate that the hon. Lady has attended the debate, but perhaps she may apply for one herself at a later stage. I still have some points to make in answer to my hon. Friend.

The pension credit is a tremendously important stage in our strategy to address the unfairness in the social security system that leaves people with modest savings no better off than some people who have no savings. From 2003, we shall reward people with most savings through the introduction of the pension credit. The way in which we shall undertake that will deal with the take-up issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland. The main group of people who will benefit will be women over 70. Under the current rules, the occupational pension that they may have saved towards is taken into account pound for pound against any entitlement that they may have. Under pension credit, there will be a reward for that saving of up to £13.80 a week for a single person. My hon. Friend made the point that, on average, pensioners who are entitled will be £400 a year better off.

For most pensioners, the pension credit will be fixed for five years and people will not need to make reports each week on whether their income has changed. That will also remove the stigma and ensure that entitlement is clear and take-up is fully implemented. We hope that more pensioners will claim pension credit as a result of such changes. My hon. Friend asked about automatic credit transfer. I reassure him that that will not stop pensioners being paid in cash over post office counters. The measure will save administrative costs and, because order books are open to fraud, we want to ensure that there is less fraud. I hope that I have given him some assurance on the points that he has raised and I congratulate him again on the debate.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 389

SESSION 2001–2002

15th July—24th July 2002

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- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
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REFERENCES

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
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A3
- 1248w

A12
- 1247w

A30
- Repairs and maintenance (22.07.02) 788–91

A46
- 1246w

A140
- 966–7w

A303
- (22.07.02) 740–3

A404(M)
- 143w, 736w

Abandoned vehicles
- 345w

Abbott, Ms Diane
- *Questions*
  - Iraq, Armed conflict 979–80

Abortion
- 1385w
- Drugs 1434–7w

Absent voting
- 574w, 700w

Acceptable behaviour contracts
- South Yorkshire 557w

Access to Justice Act 1999
- *Questions*
  - 412–3w

Access to work programme
- 1566w

Accident and emergency departments
- Solihull Hospital 209–10w, 660w
- Standards 659–60w

Accidents
- Chinook helicopters 1107w
- Civil servants 335w
- Helicopters 282
- Nuclear power 783w
- Railways 326w, 462w, 744–5w
- Roads 739w, 741–3w, 965–7w, 1245w, 1251–3w
- Shipping 8w
- Transport 1242w

Accountancy
- 1338–9w
- British Nuclear Fuels 1336–7w
- Regulation 1328w
- Small businesses 1332–3w
- Standards 337w
- Strategic Rail Authority 745–6w

Acquittals
- 503–4w

Acrylamide
- Food 1431–2w

Acute beds
- 124w, 219w, 1416w
- Kent 1102w

Adams, Mrs Irene
- *Debates etc.*
  - Airports (23.07.02) 861

Additives
- Animal feed 29w, 703w, 919w

Addresses to the Crown
- Foot and mouth disease (22.07.02) 649

Administration of justice
- 528–9w, 1068w
- Annual reports 403w
- Standards 1459–60w, 1532w

Admissibility of evidence
- Telephone tapping 1517w

Advertising
- Advocate General for Scotland 380w
- Arts Council of England 496w
- Business links 778w
- Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 474–6w
- Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 459w
- Dept for Work and Pensions 1578–9w
- Inland Revenue 253w
- National Savings Agency 1197w
- Office for National Statistics 1197w
- Scotland Office 382w

Advisory Committee on Business Appointments
- see Business Appointments Advisory Committee

Advisory services
- Business 777w
- Pensions 1543–5w
- Prisoners 1469–70w
- Young people 204w

Advocacy
- Crown Prosecution Service 619w

Advocate General for Scotland
- Advertising 380w
- Buildings 380–1w, 770w
- Consultation papers 381w
- Females 985w
- Holiday leave 380w
- Manpower 1233w
- Members 1232–3w
- New deal schemes 985w
- Official hospitality 381–2w
- Orders and regulations 380w
- Overtime 770w
- Pay 380w, 985w
- Public expenditure 379w, 382w, 770w
- Recruitment 1233w
- Standards 503w
- Training 379w
- Visits abroad 1233w

Aerials
- Planning permission 27w, 344w, (22.07.02) 756–9, 1003w

Afghanistan
- Armed conflict 21w, 1110w
- Army 492w
- Asylum 590–1w, 899–900w
- International assistance 258w, 1126–7w
- Overseas aid 176–7w, 714–5w, 1127–8w
- Peace keeping operations 21–2w, 276–7w, 494w, 753w, 1117w
- Politics and government 966–8
- Unmanned air vehicles 758w

Africa
- AIDS 717–8w, 965–6
- Arms trade 281–2
- HIV infection 1131–2w
- International assistance 833–4
- Meat 387–8w, 481–2w, 920w
- Peace keeping operations 763w, 1311w
- Water 1125w

African Development Fund (Additional Subscriptions) Order 2002
- *Debates etc.*
  - (15.07.02) 127

African Union
- 718w

After school clubs
- Inspections 1341–2w

Age Discrimination (No 2) Bill 2001/02
- *Debates etc.*
  - 2R order read (19.07.02) 634

Aggregates levy
- Scotland 1228w

Agricultural products
- Developing countries 1126w
- Imports 486w

Agriculture
- see also Farmers and Farms
- Education 648w
- Non-domestic rates 315–6w
- Pay 935w
- Research 918–9w
- Scotland 308–9w
- Subsidies 134w, 300w, 312w, 488w, 621w, 1139w, 1143–4w
- Sustainable development 75w, 300w
- Trade 177w, 775w
- Trade competitiveness 313–5w
- USA 177w, 775w
- Zimbabwe 586w

AIDS
- Africa 717–8w, 965–6
- Asylum 97w
- Botswana 963–5
- Developing countries 719w
- Drug resistance 1389w
- Research 1389–90w
- Ukraine 1388–9w

***Ainsworth, Bob**, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office*
- *Debates etc.*
  - Police, Merseyside (16.07.02) 266–8
  - Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 478–86, 494, 498–501, 507–13, 515–6, 523–5
  - Proceeds of Crime Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1050–5, 1058–9
- *Questions*
  - Airguns, Ownership 219w
  - Buildings, Home Office 397w
  - Cannabis, Crime 669–70w
  - Cannabis, Lambeth 222w
  - Crime, Alcoholic drinks 222–3w
  - Crime, Wandsworth 98w
  - Crime prevention, Young people 401–2w
  - Crimes of violence, Retail trade 682–3w
  - Driving under influence 1063w, 1448–54w
  - Drug treatment and testing orders 104w
  - Drugs, Children 88w
  - Drugs, Crime 87w, 104–5w, 396–7w, 666–70w, 1461–2w
  - Drugs, Misuse 87–8w, 559w, 1068–9w
  - Drugs, Nottinghamshire 1462–3w
  - Drugs, Portsmouth 836w
  - EC action, Home Office 632w
  - European Police Office, Powers 223–4w
  - Firearms 1069–70w
  - Firearms, Convictions 1056–8w
  - Internet, Security 394–5w
  - Members' interests, Home Office 394w
  - Prisoners, Repatriation 1044–5w
  - Proceeds of crime 223w
  - Recovered Assets Fund 1069w
  - Regulatory impact assessments, Home Office 396w
  - Road traffic offences 687–8w
  - Road traffic offences, Fixed penalties 843w
  - Road traffic offences, Private roads 688w
  - "Road Traffic Penalties Consultation Paper" 1448w
  - Speed limits 675–8w
  - Statistics, Home Office 397–8w
  - Warehouse parties, Southern region 401w
  - Xenotransplantation 228–9w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter
  Questions
  General practitioners 803–4w

Air conditioning
  1154w
  10 Downing Street 803w
  11 Downing Street 803w
  Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1002w
  Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre 1002w

Air force
  Engineers 23–4w

Air pollution
  London Underground 478–9w

Air routes
  Gatwick Airport 1241w
  Heathrow Airport 961w
  Singapore 17–8w
  South East region 733w
  USA 17w, 146w

Air traffic control
  Manpower 572w

Aircraft carriers
  Deployment 284–5w
  Portsmouth 902–3w

Airguns
  Ownership 219w

Airlines
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 177w

Airports
  Construction 733w, 824w
  Landing rights 1235w
  Ministerial statements (23.07.02) 847–68
  Scotland 983w
  South East region 1236w

Albania
  Environment protection 588–9w

Alcohol Services Bill 2001/02
  Debates etc.
  2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Alcoholic drinks
  Crime 222–3w
  Misuse 641w
  Young people 284–5, 408w, 558–9w, 1455–8w

Alconbury airfield
  Planning permission 245w

***Alexander, Mr Douglas**, Minister of State, Cabinet Office*
  Questions
  Buildings, Cabinet Office 405w
  Central Office of Information, Annual reports 1164w
  Centre for Management and Policy Studies, Annual reports 725–6w
  Civil servants, Accidents 335w
  Civil servants, Pay 405w
  Civil servants, Pensions 728–30w
  Civil service, Annual reports 272w
  Civil service agencies 726w
  Computer software, Government departments 725w
  Computers, Cabinet Office 84w
  Deregulation Task Force 956w
  Electronic government 726–7w
  Emergencies, Planning 727w
  European Scrutiny Committee, Explanatory notes 1165–6w
  Government Car and Despatch Agency, Annual reports 971–2w
  Mandelkern Group 361w

***Alexander, Mr Douglas**—continued*
  Non-departmental public bodies, Public appointments 1164w
  Orders and regulations, Cabinet Office 404w
  Public participation, Cabinet Office 1164–5w
  Recycling, Cabinet Office 641w
  Regulation, Audit 641–2w
  Regulation, EC action 360–1w
  Regulation, Voluntary organisations 1165w
  Regulatory Accountability Panel 345w
  Regulatory impact assessments 972w
  Strategy Unit 641w

Allen, Mr Graham
  Questions
  Crime and disorder partnerships 89w, 680w
  Offender assessment system 1496w
  Parliamentary scrutiny 323w
  Police, Standards 1495w
  Prison Service, Disciplinary proceedings 1516w
  Prison Service, Disclosure of information 1515w
  Standing committees 325w
  Strokes, Medical treatments 1424w
  Written questions, Administrative delays 1431w

Allotments
  46w

Almondbank
  Defence Aviation Repair Agency 163w

Alzheimer's disease
  Prescription drugs 1399–400w

Ambulance services
  Crimes of violence 608w
  Standards 1410–1w

Amendments and new clauses
  Rulings and statements (16.07.02) 177, (18.07.02) 480

Amess, Mr David
  Debates etc.
  Care homes (22.07.02) 783–8
  Endangered Species (Offences) Bill, 1R (22.07.02) 705
  Questions
  Asthma, Medical treatments 1423–4w

Ammunition
  Procurement 20w

Anaesthetics
  Medical equipment 1420–1w, 1423–4w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
  Questions
  Zimbabwe, Sanctions 831–3

Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
  Questions
  Health services, Wales 269–70
  Religious broadcasting, Licensing 1157w

Angola
  Asylum 719–20w
  Famine 447–8w, 585–6w
  Overseas aid 448w
  Peace negotiations 1310–1w

Animal breeding
  Tax allowances 255w

Animal experiments
  Organophosphates 313w
  Schools 54w

Animal feed
  30w, 702–3w, 1149–50w
  Additives 29w, 703w, 919w
  Poultry 297w

Animal products
  EC external trade 300w

Animal Sanctuaries (Licensing) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
  Debates etc.
  2R order read (19.07.02) 637

Animal welfare
  Expenditure 619–20w
  Livestock 921w
  Poultry 311w, 486w, 915w, 1154w

Anna Climbie Death Inquiry
  see Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry

Anniversaries
  Queen Elizabeth II 391–2w

Annuities
  466w

Antiaircraft missiles
  Procurement 157w, 162w

Antiques
  Auctions 692–3w

Antisemitism
  221–2w
  Middle East 181w, 765w

Antisocial behaviour orders
  663–4w, 831w
  Hampshire 558w
  South Tyneside 830–2w
  South Yorkshire 557–8w
  West Sussex 1466–7w

Appeals Service
  Scotland 1557–8w

Apprentices
  Finance 990w

Apprenticeships
  see Modern apprenticeships

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
  Debates etc.
  Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 698
  Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 328
  Defence review (18.07.02) 468
  Questions
  Smoking 426–8w

Archaeology
  656–7, 1160–2w

Area Child Protection Committees Bill 2001/02
  Debates etc.
  2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Areas of outstanding natural beauty
  Wales 319w

Armed conflict
  19–20
  Afghanistan 21w, 1110w
  Burundi 587w
  Central African Republic 1307w
  Civilians 749–50w
  Democratic Republic of Congo 1–2w, 585w
  Iraq 280–1, 975, 979–82
  Liberia 260–1w, 886w, 900w, 1306w
  Sudan 837–9
  Uganda 588w, 899w

Armed forces
  Bridgwater 760w
  Cadets 760w
  Cellular phones 276w
  Colombia 756w
  Cyprus 385–6w
  Deployment 762w, 901w
  Discharges 3–5, 22w

Armed forces—continued
Ethnic groups 14–5
Health services 749–50w
Housing 5–6, 24w, 159–60w, 750–3w, 905–6w, 1107–9w
Nepal 886w
Pensions 1113w
Personnel management 277–8w
Psychiatry 754w
Racial discrimination 14
Recruitment 13–4, 1107w
Religion 20–1w
Sierra Leone 1308w
Slovakia 275–6w
Training 275–6w
Wales 3–4
Warminster 159w, 752w
Wiltshire 160w

Armoured fighting vehicles
913w

Arms trade
436w, 491w, (22.07.02) 751–3, 1325w
Africa 281–2
Developing countries 1138w
Export controls 77–8w, 384w, 435–6w, 611w, 780w, 1317–8w, 1330w
India 1324–5w
Iran 383w
Israel 839–42
Namibia 1327w
Offset arrangements 489–90w
Pakistan 1324–5w

Army
Afghanistan 492w
Deployment 19w
Discharges 15
Edinburgh 1115w
Internet 755w
Manpower 6, 19w
Young people 277w

Army Personnel Centre
Standards 1118–9w

Art works
British Council 888w

Arthritis
Surgery 214w

Artillery
Radar 492–3w

Arts
North East region 692w

Arts and Humanities Research Board
992–3w

Arts Council of England
Advertising 496w
Expenditure 495–6w
Planning 496w

Asbestos
Water supply 476w

Asda
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 310w

Asia
Christianity (17.07.02) 89–112wh

Asperger's syndrome
Employment schemes 113–4w

Asthma
Medical treatments 1423–4w

Asylum
91–2w, 225w, 246–8w, 1323w
Administrative delays 1042w
Afghanistan 590–1w, 899–900w
AIDS 97w
Angola 719–20w

Asylum—continued
Appeals 92–3w, 1290–1w
Applications 90w, 393w, 552–3w, 860–1w, 1318w, 1447–8w
Bicester 220w
Children 90w, 550–2w
China 884w
Detainees 1043w
Education 773w, 1045w
Employment 1041–2w
Greater London 90–1w, 549–50w
HIV infection 1041w
Housing 551–2w, 1063w
Identity cards 548w
Iraq 228w, 400–1w
Maternity payments 1043w
Throckmorton airfield 1373w
Welfare milk 541–2w
Zimbabwe 226w, 398–9w, 551w, 586w

Atherton, Ms Candy
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 864
Questions
Botswana, Ethnic groups 176w
Botswana, Nature conservation 763w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 136w
Neurology, Manpower 1412–3w
Transport, Rural areas 1264w
Travel, Concessions 1264w

Atkins, Charlotte
Questions
Brixton Prison, Standards 1447w
Dental health 189w

Atkinson, Mr David
Questions
Angola, Famine 585–6w
NATO, Russia 18

Atkinson, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 681
Questions
Members, Correspondence 477w, 631–2w
Sub-Saharan Africa, Overseas aid 1125w

Attendance allowance
1582w
Scotland 112w

Auctions
Antiques 692–3w

Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group
170w, 1326–7w, 1337w
Ministerial statements (24.07.02) 1003–17

Aujeszky's disease
484w

Auld Review
see Criminal Courts Review

Australia
Overseas residence 1031w

Automated credit transfer
Pensions 1551w
Social security benefits 597–601w, 805–7w, 809–11w, 1029w, 1031–2w, 1550–2w, 1579w

Automatic train protection
1243w

Aviation
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 384–5w
Military bases 1114–5w, 1234–5w
Scotland 970w
Thailand 763–4w
USA 1236w

Babies
Food 418w

Baby care units
129w

Bacon, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (18.07.02) 410
Questions
Educational institutions, Computer software 651–2w

Badgers
see Bovine tuberculosis

Bahrain
835–6

Baird, Vera
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 302–3
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 500, 516–9
Questions
Burundi, Armed conflict 587w
Burundi, Debts 586–7w
Central Africa, International assistance 591w
Child Support Agency, Standards 819w
Combined heat and power, Saltburn 441w
Contact orders 525w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Armed conflict 585w
Democratic Republic of Congo, International assistance 584–5w
Jobcentre Plus, Welfare tax credits 271w
Judges, Training 606–8w
Maintenance, Children 1026w, 1547–9w
Telephone tapping, Admissibility of evidence 1517w
Trials, Rape 798–9w, 1280–8w

Baker, Norman
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 710, 715–8, 728
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), Rem stages (24.07.02) 1065, 1067–71
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 500, 508–9, 519–21
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1053–4, 1057–8
Written questions, Points of order (24.07.02) 1049
Questions
Animal feed, Additives 919w
China, Sanctions 385–6w
Criminal Records Bureau, Standards 1483–4w
Environmentally sensitive areas 622w
European Parliament elections 699w
Government Communications Headquarters 389w
Meat, Hygiene 429w
Metropolitan Police, Sick leave 1049–50w
Official gifts 1177–8w
Panchen Lama 386w
Police, Standards 856–7w, 1496–7w
Police Standards Unit 106w
Poultry, Animal feed 297w
Privy Council 712–3w
Royal family, Finance 1178w
Sanctions 385w
10 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 804w

Baldry, Tony
Debates etc.
Respite Care (Children) Bill, 1R (17.07.02) 307–10
Questions
Afghanistan, Politics and government 968
Africa, Peace keeping operations 763w, 1311w
Arms trade, Export controls 384w
Developing countries, Common agricultural policy 261w
Developing countries, Education 290–1w
Developing countries, Trade 261w, 763w
Sierra Leone, Peace negotiations 1310–1w
South Africa, HIV infection 291w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 258w

Balkans
Peace keeping operations 2w, 9–10

Ballistic missile defence
Type 45 destroyers 158–9w
USA 26w, 881w

Baltic states
Regional planning and development 589–90w

Bank for Reconstruction and Development of Europe
see European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Bank notes
470w

Bank services
68–9w
Financial Services Consumer Panel 270w
Post offices 438–9w, 523w, 597w, 815w, 945w, 953w

Bankruptcy
355–6w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 683
Questions
Heath, Edward, Public statues 1167w

Barclays Group Reorganisation Bill (HL) 2000/01
Debates etc.
3R order read (16.07.02) 137, (24.07.02) 963

Barker, Gregory
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 452
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 891, 904
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 252–4wh, 258wh
Questions
Arms trade, India 1324–5w
Army, Internet 755w
British Nuclear Fuels, Pay 783–4w
Cancer, Burnham on Sea 1422w
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 786w
Climate change levy, Nuclear power 957w
Commonwealth Development Corporation 449–51w, 574–84w, 722w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Debts 450w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Directors 450w, 581–2w, 584w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Pay 575–6w, 580–1w, 583w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Publicity 583w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Redundancy 576w

Barker, Gregory*—continued*
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Sub-Saharan Africa 449w, 576–7w
Developing countries, Microfinance 293w
Electricity, Distribution 1329w
Electricity generation, Markets 1330w
Electricity generation, Prices 944w
Energy 943–4w
Energy, Competition 346w, 943w
Energy, Hacking 346w
Flood control 302–3w, 623–5w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 700–2w
Gibraltar, Spain 281w, 391–2w, 473–4w
Hacking, Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Hacking, Home Office 843w
Hawk aircraft, India 436w
Hedges and ditches 303–4w
Indonesia, Forests 591w
Iran, Nuclear fuels 389–90w
ITV Association 410w
Japan, Radioactive materials 389w
Kenya, Microfinance 293w
Lapwings, Conservation 302w
Magnox reactors 784w
Members, Correspondence 131w
Military bases, Cyprus 279w, 282w
Nuclear power 1330w
Nuclear power, Accidents 783w
Nuclear power, Publicity 345w
Nuclear power stations, Construction 346w
Nuclear power stations, Security 346w
Nuclear reactors 783–4w
Officer Training Corps 281–2w
Papua New Guinea, Forests 591w
Playgrounds, Wood 652–3w
Public libraries 1157–8w
Public relations, Ministry of Defence 285w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 391–2w
Radar, Wind power 761w
Radioactive wastes 784–5w
Radioactive wastes, Railways 785–6w
Radioactive wastes, Transport 345–6w, 784w, 786w
Renewable energy 787–8w
Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst 279–82w, 756w
Royal School of Artillery 278–9w, 755–6w
Sellafield, Radioactive wastes 782–3w
Small Enterprise Development Agency, Finance 292w
Southern Africa, Overseas aid 1124w
Terrorism, Energy supply 842–3w
Uganda, Microfinance 292–3w
Uranium, Mining 347w, 782w
USA, Ballistic missile defence 881w
Wind power, Planning permission 787w
Wood, Health hazards 425w
Work permits 107–8w, 395–6w
Work permits, Information technology 107w, 831w
Written questions, Dept for International Development 292w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Moorside Mining, Standing Order No 24 applications (15.07.02) 45
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 997–8
Regeneration, Clay Cross (22.07.02) 753–6
Questions
Business questions 425
Pensions, Self-employed 114–5w
Social security benefits, Widowed people 1559–60w
State retirement pensions 115–6w

Barnsley
Primary care trusts 1386w
Theatre 691w

Baron, Mr John
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 228
Questions
Army, Manpower 19w
Crime prevention, Wales 320w
EC aid 880w
Housing, South East region 980

Barrett, John
Questions
Central African Republic, Armed conflict 1307w
Central African Republic, Education 716–7w
Central African Republic, HIV infection 717w
Central African Republic, Politics and government 717w
Climate change 31–2w
Dental services, Fees and charges 662w
Developing countries, Drugs 336w, 593–4w, 1186w
Developing countries, HIV infection 592–3w, 895w
Development aid 73w
Energy supply 347–8w
Excise duties, Fuels 462w
Further education, Buildings 989w
Lesotho, Famine 717w
Mali, Elections 1306w
Mozambique, Food 42–3w, 587w
North Africa, Water 588w
Overseas aid 41–2w, 1185–6w
Post offices, Bank services 438–9w
Post offices, Closures 944w
Post offices, Social security benefits 438w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 717w
Sierra Leone, Peace negotiations 886w, 1308w
Somalia, International assistance 41w
Somalia, Livestock 41w, 1136w
Southern Africa, Famine 587w
Sub-Saharan Africa, Water 291–2w
Syrian Arab Republic, Overseas aid 43w
Welfare tax credits 1179–80w
Zimbabwe, Asylum 586w

Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 296
Questions
Oxygen, Medical equipment 1383w

Basle Concordat
Scotland 76w

Baton rounds
1459w

Battle, Mr John
Questions
Funeral payments 604–5w
Trade, Agriculture 775w

Bayley, Hugh
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 472
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 489
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 905, 912, 949
Stillman, Ian, Petitions (23.07.02) 953–4
Questions
Directors, Dept for International Development 1129w
Hospitals, Hygiene 203w
Housing 1216w
Housing, York 980–1
Sanctions, Zimbabwe 821w

BBC
694w
Digital broadcasting 1159w

BBC External Services
844–5, 1320–1w
Pay 390w

***Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret**, Secretary of State for Environment Food and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Ministerial statements (22.07.02) 669–88
Questions
Animal feed 30w, 702–3w, 1149–50w
Animal feed, Additives 29w, 703w
Asda, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 310w
Bovine tuberculosis 703w
EC Agriculture Council 309–10w
Livestock, Transport 922w
Livestock, Waste disposal 135w
Meat products, Contamination 204w
Pigmeat, Import controls 29–30w
Public expenditure, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 627–31w
"Royal Society Scientific Review of Infectious Diseases in Livestock" 140–1w
Rural Payments Agency, Standards 914–5w
Scrapie 30w
Sellafield, Radioactive wastes 133–4w, 931w
Sheep, Disease control 31w
Sheep meat 29w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1149w

Beef
Exports 1151–2w
France 309w, 934–5w, 1228w

Bees
Diseases 489w

Begg, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Endometriosis, Petitions (17.07.02) 388
Questions
Identity cards, Transsexualism 555–6w
Oil, Exploration 443–6w
Pensions 402–3
Trading Schemes Act 1996 439w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 542
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 171–2
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amends (16.07.02) 179
Members, Points of order (24.07.02) 1018
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 249
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 257wh
Questions
Business questions 433
Community development, Northern Ireland 1202w
Foreign workers 440w
Foreign workers, Minimum wage 440w
Prisoners, Northern Ireland 1202w
Public sector, Pensions 255w
Smuggling, Northern Ireland 507–8w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 684–5
Questions
Absent voting 700w

Beith, Rt Hon A J—continued
Annual reports, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 408–9w
Annual reports, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 709w
Annual reports, Dept for International Development 594w
Annual reports, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587w
Annual reports, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Annual reports, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 890w
Annual reports, Home Office 1078–9w
Annual reports, Lord Chancellor's Dept 797w
Annual reports, Northern Ireland Office 505w
Annual reports, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 999–1000w
Annual reports, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1376w
Annual reports, Scotland Office 769w
Annual reports, Treasury 1190w
Elections, Wales 699–700w
Electoral Commission 1123w
Electoral register 665–6
Electoral systems 996w
Electronic voting 664–6
European Parliament elections 699w
Hospices, Finance 200w
Local government services, Standards 974–5
Members, Correspondence 297w, 878w
Political parties, Finance 662–4, 996–7w
Standards, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 975
Voting rights, Young people 700w

Belarus
(23.07.02) 224–30wh

Belfast
Closed circuit television 506–7w

***Bell, Mr Stuart**, Second Church Estates Commissioner*
Questions
Bishops 663–4
Bishops, Housing 293w
Cathedrals, Repairs and maintenance 667–8
Churches, Planning permission 723–4w
Clergy, Conditions of employment 723w, 1164w
Clergy, Pensions 666
Clergy, Recruitment 662
Electronic commerce, Private sector 781w
Electronic commerce, Public private partnerships 960–1w
Hunting 723w
Taxation, Self-assessment 472–3w

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 700–1
Housing (18.07.02) 454
Lockerbie, Bombings (23.07.02) 958–9
Questions
Cancer, Research 144–5
Smallpox, Vaccination 1086–7w, 1390–1w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 1124w
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 829–30

***Benn, Hilary**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Home Office*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 196–201wh
Questions
Administration of justice 1068w

Benn, Hilary—continued
Administration of justice, Standards 1459–60w, 1532w
Bigamy, Convictions 1503w
Brixton Prison, Standards 1447w
Care homes, Vetting 835w
Children, Protection 229–31w
Consultation papers, Home Office 837–40w
Corporate manslaughter 1505w
Correctional Services Board 1446–7w
Crime prevention, Annual reports 861–2w
Criminal Courts Review 1078w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, Administrative delays 1503–4w
Criminal injuries compensation scheme 1532w
Criminal proceedings 1530–1w
Criminal Records Bureau 1483w
Criminal Records Bureau, Administrative delays 1056w, 1453w, 1483w, 1518w
Criminal Records Bureau, Annual reports 554w
Criminal Records Bureau, Capita 827–8w
Criminal Records Bureau, Complaints 1483w
Criminal Records Bureau, Standards 1483–4w
Dangerous mental patients 1067–8w
Double jeopardy 1461–2w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, Education 849w, 1077w
Genetics, Identification of criminals 1517w
Home detention curfews 1453–4w, 1460–1w
Homicide, Habitual offenders 843w
Human trafficking 834w
Juries, Corruption 830w
Life imprisonment 832w, 1519–20w
Life imprisonment, Sexual offences 832w
Maladministration, Home Office 1486w
Mentally disturbed offenders 1527w, 1529w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Prisoners' release 1521w
National Association of Prison Visitors 1528w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Finance 1521–2w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Greater London 1460w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Information technology 845–6w, 1517–8w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Pay 1460w
Offences against children 1533–4w
Offences against children, Sports 1163w
Offender assessment system 1496w
Parole 836–7w
Police cautions 832w
Police custody 1444–5w
Police custody, Standards 1445w
Pornography, Internet 1532–3w
Pre-sentence reports 853w
Pre-sentence reports, Greater London 844w
Prison governors, Ethnic groups 835w
Prison governors, Females 834w
Prison Service, Annual reports 564w
Prison Service, Disciplinary proceedings 1516w
Prison Service, Disclosure of information 1515w
Prison Service, Environment protection 564w
Prison Service, Sick leave 1070–6w
Prison Service, Standards 1075–7w
Prison visitors 1528–9w
Prisoners 1506–8w
Prisoners, Ethnic groups 1508–16w

***Benn, Hilary**—continued*
Prisoners, Females 832–3w
Prisoners, Literacy 856w
Prisoners, Pay 1075w
Prisoners, Rehabilitation 854–5w
Prisoners, Repatriation 1504–5w
Prisoners, Self-mutilation 855w
Prisoners, Suicide 828–9w, 1463–4w, 1519w, 1537–8w
Prisoners' release 1535–8w
Prisons 837w
Prisons, Closures 1443–4w
Prisons, Disciplinary proceedings 1536w
Prisons, Drugs 828w
Prisons, Education 1498–502w
Prisons, Health services 1534w
Prisons, Inspections 1501–2w
Prisons, Mental health services 1097w, 1529w, 1534–5w
Prisons, Per capita costs 1534w
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, Standards 845w
Probation and aftercare 837w, 846–7w, 1520–1w
Probation and aftercare, Greater London 844–5w, 1077w, 1532w
Probation and aftercare, Suicide 1519–20w
Prostitution 1058–60w
Public participation, Home Office 841–2w
Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 403w
Segregation of prisoners 1075w
Sentencing 85w
Sexual offences 1454–6w
Smith, Helen 1531w
Strang, Eden 1531w
Telephone services, Home Office 848w
Telephone tapping, Admissibility of evidence 1517w
Vetting, Overseas residence 1483w
Vetting, Sports 847w
Wandsworth Prison 854w
Witnesses 93–4w
Young offender institutions, Drugs 1445–6w
Young offender institutions, Human rights 1443w
Young offenders 833w, 1462w
Young offenders, Children in care 1463–5w
Young offenders, Habitual offenders 1531w

Bennett, Andrew
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 447
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 723
Select committees (22.07.02) 731
Questions
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 304w
Fines, Greater Manchester 1300–2w
Inheritance tax 1194w
Tameside College 1367w

Bercow, Mr John
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 895–6, 906–8, 935, 945–9
Questions
Administration of justice 1068w
Administration of justice, Standards 1532w
Advertising, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Advertising, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 475–6w
Advertising, Dept for Work and Pensions 1578–9w
Advertising, Scotland Office 382w
Asylum, Appeals 92–3w
Asylum, Bicester 220w

***Bercow, Mr John**—continued*
Buildings, Advocate General for Scotland 380–1w, 770w
Buildings, Cabinet Office 405w
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 262w, 605–6w
Buildings, Dept of Health 206–7w
Buildings, Dept of Trade and Industry 790–1w
Buildings, Home Office 397w, 546w
Buildings, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Buildings, Scotland Office 383w, 768w
Buildings, Solicitor-General 289–90w
Burglary 1485–6w
Civil servants, Dept for Education and Skills 187w
Civil servants, Scotland Office 382w
Community development, Grants 226w
Community development, Standards 402w
Consultants, Dept for International Development 893–4w
Consultation papers, Advocate General for Scotland 381w
Consultation papers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 496–8w
Consultation papers, Dept for Education and Skills 60–4w
Consultation papers, Dept for International Development 40–1w
Consultation papers, Dept for Work and Pensions 1026–8w
Consultation papers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w
Consultation papers, President of the Council 5w
Consultation papers, Scotland Office 383w
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 131w
Correspondence, Scotland Office 1225w
Crime prevention, Young people 401–2w
Criminal injuries compensation scheme 1532w
Criminal investigation 1487w
Dangerous mental patients 1067–8w
Drug treatment and testing orders 104w
Drugs, Crime 104–5w
EC action, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 301–2w, 304–5w, 702w, 957w
EC action, Dept of Health 1084w, 1439–40w
EC action, Home Office 564–5w, 1044w
EC law, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1150–2w
EC law, Dept of Health 205–6w, 658–9w
EC law, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 323w
EC law, Scotland Office 382w
EC law, Solicitor-General 288w
Females, Advocate General for Scotland 985w
Females, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 134w
Females, Dept for Work and Pensions 521w
Females, Lord Chancellor's Dept 411w
Females, Ministry of Defence 283–4w
Females, Northern Ireland Office 509w
Females, Scotland Office 983w
Food Standards Agency, Scotland 1226w
Holiday leave, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Holiday leave, Scotland Office 382w
Holiday leave, Solicitor-General 288–9w
Knowledge for Development Challenge Fund 44w
Manpower, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Manpower, Scotland Office 1228w

***Bercow, Mr John**—continued*
Manpower, Solicitor-General 616w
Members, Advocate General for Scotland 1232–3w
Mentoring Fund 103w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scotland Office 500w
National income 404
New deal schemes, Advocate General for Scotland 985w
New deal schemes, Scotland Office 980w
Non-departmental public bodies, Scotland Office 501w, 767w
Occupational pensions 1541w
Offices, Scotland Office 980w
Official hospitality, Advocate General for Scotland 381–2w
Official hospitality, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Official hospitality, Home Office 545w
Official hospitality, Solicitor-General 614w
Operating costs, Scotland Office 1225w
Orders and regulations, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Orders and regulations, Cabinet Office 404w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Education and Skills 1364–5w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Work and Pensions 515–6w
Orders and regulations, Home Office 565w
Orders and regulations, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Orders and regulations, Scotland Office 382–3w
Orders and regulations, Solicitor-General 289w
Overseas aid 715–6w
Overtime, Advocate General for Scotland 770w
Overtime, Scotland Office 767w
Pay, Advocate General for Scotland 380w, 985w
Pay, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Pay, Scotland Office 382–3w, 980w
Pay, Solicitor-General 615–6w
Pay, Treasury 64–5w
Pre-sentence reports 853w
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, Standards 845w
Private finance initiative, Scotland Office 501w
Probation and aftercare 846–7w
Public expenditure, Advocate General for Scotland 379w, 382w, 770w
Public expenditure, Cabinet Office 340w
Public expenditure, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Public expenditure, Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Public expenditure, Dept for International Development 290w
Public expenditure, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 8w
Public expenditure, Dept for Work and Pensions 261–2w, 1586w
Public expenditure, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Public expenditure, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2w
Public expenditure, Home Office 546w
Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 749w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland Office 508w
Public expenditure, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374w
Public expenditure, President of the Council 5–6w

***Bercow, Mr John**—continued*
Public expenditure, Scotland Office 382–3w, 767w
Public expenditure, Solicitor-General 612–3w, 617w
Public private partnerships, Home Office 543–4w
Public relations, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 916w
Public relations, Home Office 1065w
Relocation services, Scotland Office 500w
Robbery 101–3w
Serious Fraud Office, Information technology 612w
Standards, Advocate General for Scotland 503w
Standards, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 323w
Standards, Scotland Office 501–2w
Standards, Solicitor-General 289w
Training, Advocate General for Scotland 379w
Training, Home Office 546w, 1057–8w
Training, Scotland Office 382w
Training, Solicitor-General 615–6w, 913–4w
Visits abroad, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Visits abroad, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Visits abroad, Dept for Education and Skills 773–4w
Visits abroad, Dept for International Development 43–4w
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 238w, 1271w
Visits abroad, Dept for Work and Pensions 1040w
Visits abroad, Dept of Health 1429w
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 762–3w
Visits abroad, Home Office 545–6w
Visits abroad, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526w
Visits abroad, Ministry of Defence 749w
Visits abroad, Northern Ireland Office 506w
Visits abroad, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1376–7w
Visits abroad, President of the Council 414w
Visits abroad, Scotland Office 983w
Visits abroad, Solicitor-General 615w
Visits abroad, Treasury 1180w
Voluntary organisations, Grants 226–7w
Written questions, Home Office 106w

Beresford, Sir Paul
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 859

Berry, Mr Roger
Questions
Communications Bill (Draft) 495w
Employment, Disabled 1576–7w
Hearing aids 215–6w
Telecommunications, Disability aids 405–7w

Best, Mr Harold
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 202–3wh
Questions
Cystic fibrosis, Prescriptions 200–1w
Cystic fibrosis, Screening 200w

Best value
1017w

Beta-interferon
Derbyshire 203w

***Beta-interferon**—continued*
Sutton 423w

Bicester
Asylum 220w

Bigamy
Convictions 1503w

Billing
Government departments 442–3w
Pharmacy 210w, 1420w

Birmingham
Elderly (22.07.02) 780–3

Bishops
663–4
Housing 293w

Blackman, Mrs Liz
Questions
Asylum, Appeals 1290–1w

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Questions
Africa, Arms trade 281–2
Agriculture, Sustainable development 75w
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 284–5
Asylum, Throckmorton airfield 1373w
Business Appointments Advisory Committee, Annual reports 567w
Care homes, Standards 982
Channel tunnel, Freight 323–4w
Civil servants, Codes of practice 803w
Civil servants, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1373w
Coastal areas 324w
Crime 278–80
Crime, Hertfordshire 282
Firearms, Manchester 285–6
Galileo project 803w
General practitioners 803–4w
Gibraltar, Spain 286
Government, Annual reports 803w
Health and Safety Commission 1369w
Helicopters, Accidents 282
Heroin, Misuse 972
Honours 1371w
Hospices, Children 981
Hospital beds 284
Housing, South East region 980
Housing, York 980–1
Industrial diseases, Compensation 280
Information Commissioner, Public appointments 1374w
Information officers, Prime Minister 805w
Iraq, Armed conflict 280–1, 975, 979–82
Local government services, Standards 974–5
Members, Correspondence 805w, 890w
Meyer, Catherine 803w
Ministerial policy advisors, Pay 1370–2w
Ministerial policy advisors, Prime Minister 890w, 1371w
Ministerial policy advisors, Visits abroad 1370w
Ministers, Visits abroad 1370w, 1372–3w
MMR vaccine, Greater London 285
New deal for communities 277–8
NHS, Finance 282–3
Northern Ireland government 283–4
Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, UK delegations 1374w
Overseas students 1373w
Paper, Prime Minister 802w
Parliamentary scrutiny 323w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, Public appointments 1374w
Pensions, Taxation 283
Pupil exclusions 978–9

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**—continued*
Recycling, Prime Minister 75w
Renewable energy 324w, 890–2w
Republic of Ireland, Prime Minister 1369w
Robbery 281
Scotland, Prime Minister 1372w
Shadow cabinet 971–2
Shipman, Harold 974
South East Asia, Disease control 281
Standards, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 975
Sure start programme 182w
10 Downing Street, Air conditioning 803w
10 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 804w, 1368–9w
Terrorism 972–4
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 975–7
12 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 1368w
Urban regeneration companies, Gloucester 281
Wildlife, Meat 1367–8w
Wimbledon Football Club 977–8
World Summit on Sustainable Development 804w

***Blears, Ms Hazel**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Health*
Questions
Abortion 1385w
Acrylamide, Food 1431–2w
Acute beds, Kent 1102w
AIDS, Drug resistance 1389w
AIDS, Research 1389–90w
Blood 657w
Bovine tuberculosis 124w
Breast cancer 1386–8w
Breast feeding 414–5w
Cancer 415–6w
Cancer, Burnham on Sea 1422w
Cancer, Health services 1422w
Cancer, Medical treatments 1100w
Cancer, Research 144–7, 1422w
Cancer, Surgery 422w
Cervical cancer, Screening 419–21w
CJD, Sheep meat 428–9w
Colon cancer, Medical treatments 212w
Community health services 191w
Complementary medicine 1431w
Contraceptives 864–6w
Dietary supplements, EC action 413–4w
Drugs, Misuse 404w
EC action, Dept of Health 1084w, 1340w, 1432–4w, 1439–40w, 1595w
Encephalitis 1432w
Endometriosis 423–4w
Fluoride, Drinking water 417–8w, 1390w
Fluoride, Food 418w
Fluoride, Toothpaste 417w
Food, Labelling 1384–5w
Food, Safety 430–1w, 1100w
Food Standards Agency 429w
German measles, Vaccination 423w, 1391–2w
Haemophilia, Drugs 421w
Health centres, Property transfer 218w
Health education, Disabled 423w
Health services, Cooperatives 655w
Health services, Kent 218–9w
Herbal medicine, EC law 150–2
HIV infection 212w
Hormone treatments, Children 422w
Hospices, Finance 200w
Hospices, Lancashire 200w
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, Annual reports 207–8w
In vitro fertilisation, Registration of births deaths and marriages 1430w
Influenza, Vaccination 428w, 1083w, 1391w

***Blears, Ms Hazel**—continued*
Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, Disclosure of information 1391w
Lactose, Drugs 413w
Maternity services, Surrey 1097w
Meat, Hygiene 429w
Meat Hygiene Service, Annual reports 1082w
Meat products, Contamination 417w, 429w, 1154–5w
Medical equipment 122w
Medical treatments, Overseas visitors 424w, 1394w
Medicines Commission, Annual reports 1082w
Medicines Control Agency, Annual reports 1083w
Members, Correspondence 1390w, 1409w
National Institute for Biological Standards and Control 1529–30w
NHS Direct, Southampton 421w
NHS Leadership Centre, Manpower 1101w
Nurses, HIV infection 536–7w
Nurses, Schools 1392w
Obesity, Sports 432–4w
Pain, Medical treatments 423w
Poultry, Import controls 1155–6w
Poultry meat, Safety 429–31w
Primary health care, West Sussex 1394–5w
Queen Alexandra Hospital, Private finance initiative 217w
Radioactive fallout, Chernobyl 316w
Redwood Hospital 1412w
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 431–2w
RU486 1434–7w
Salt, Nutrition 1385w
Sheep meat 878w
Skin cancer 208–9w
Smoking 426–8w
Soft drinks, Caffeine 1440w
Soft drinks, Taurine 1440w
Surrey and Sussex Health Authority, Waiting lists 1416–7w
Teenage pregnancy 416–7w, 1386–8w
Vaccination 218w
Vaccination, USA 1391w
Welfare milk, Asylum 541–2w
Wood, Health hazards 425w
Written questions, Administrative delays 217w

Blizzard, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 621–2
Questions
Developing countries, Multinational companies 1134–5w
Developing countries, Overseas companies 720w
Disabled, Access 1008w
General practitioners, Recruitment 201w
Internet, President of the Council 453w
Overseas aid, Water supply 1134w
Radio, Commercial broadcasting 654
Roads, Tolls 736–7w
Vehicle Inspectorate 964w

Blood
657w

Bluestone, Karl
683w

***Blunkett, Rt Hon David**, Secretary of State for the Home Dept*
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings, Ministerial statements (17.07.02) 287–304

***Blunkett, Rt Hon David**—continued*
Questions
Administration of justice, Annual reports 403w
Civil Contingencies Committee 108w
Consultation papers, Home Office 839–40w
Departmental expenditure limits, Home Office 1078w
Embassies, Israel 553w
Emergencies, Planning 1070w
EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council 1059–60w
Hacking, Home Office 843w
Industrial tribunals, Home Office 679w
Information officers, Home Office 850w
International Sikh Youth Federation 554w
Members, Correspondence 108w, 220–1w
Ministerial policy advisors, Home Office 1476w, 1492w
Public expenditure, Home Office 1078w
Republic of Ireland, Home Office 1055w
Ringfenced funding, Home Office 1055–6w
Telecommunications, Data protection 1465w
Terrorism 553–4w
Terrorism, Chemical and biological warfare 553w
Terrorism, Energy supply 842–3w

Blunt, Mr Crispin
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 703–4
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 178–80, 183, 189, 191–2, 195, 197, 203, 206–7, 209–12
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 234, 237, 256–8
Questions
Central Railway 746w
M25, Repairs and maintenance 328w
Surrey and Sussex Health Authority, Waiting lists 1416–7w

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

***Boateng, Rt Hon Paul**, Chief Secretary to the Treasury*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 890–8, 904
Questions
Airports, Construction 824w
Annual reports, Treasury 1190w
Child tax credit 1189–90w
Council tax 468w
Crown Estate Commissioners, Scotland 469w
Devolution, Liability 251w
Foreign investment in UK 412–3, 1176w
Government art collection 1180w
Government departments, Cost effectiveness 824w
Government departments, Publications 958–9w
Government departments, Standards 468w, 1193w
Health services, Finance 255–6w
Housing, Finance 463w
Inheritance tax 463w
National Audit Office, Standards 1187w
National income 1188w
Network Rail, Finance 820w, 1183w
NHS, Finance 464w
Pensions, Exservicemen 1200–1w
Private finance initiative 1176w
Productivity 463w
Public expenditure 465w, 468w, 1189w
Public expenditure, Devolution 69w, 958w

***Boateng, Rt Hon Paul**—continued*
Public expenditure, Scotland 1177w, 1187w
Public expenditure, Scotland Office 1187w
Public finance 250w, 466w, 1190w
Public sector, Pay 727–8w
Public sector, Sick leave 820w
Public Sector Classification Committee 250w
Regional planning and development, Finance 63w
Scotland, Treasury 1171–3w
Standards, Treasury 1193w
Tax burden 1191w
Transport, Finance 1168–9w, 1176–7w

Body armour
London Ambulance Service 1410w

Bomb disposal
Land mines 162w

Bombings
Lockerbie 765–6w, 843–4, (23.07.02) 956–62

Borders region
Social security benefits 1552w

Borrow, Mr David
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 302
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 4

Boswell, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 561–2, 568, 584–9, 596
Questions
Further education 1352w
Hearing aids 1091–2w, 1398w
Manufacturing industries, Trade competitiveness 418
Pensions, Overseas residence 1541–3w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Manpower 473w

Botswana
AIDS 963–5
Ethnic groups 176w
Nature conservation 763w

Bottomley, Peter
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 702
Questions
Metropolitan Police, Complaints 1476–7w
Parole 836–7w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Debates etc.
Local government finance (22.07.02) 735–7
Questions
A3 1248w
Education, Surrey 1352w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 1413–5w
Local government finance 998w
Metropolitan Police, Criminal records 1050w
Right to buy scheme 1019w
Teachers, Surrey 1343–4w
Tourism 1158–9w
Town and Country Finance Issues Group 1002–3w
Unmanned air vehicles 970w
West Surrey Health Authority, Per capita costs 1398w

Bovine tuberculosis
124w, 703w
Compensation 932–3w

Bovine tuberculosis—continued
Disease control 131–3w, 136w, 931–3w, 1147w, 1378w

BOWMAN combat radio system
753w

Bradford
Civil disorder 1473–4w

Bradley, Rt Hon Keith
Questions
Children, Diseases 124w, 1422–3w

Bradley, Peter
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 453
Questions
Generic prescribing 1383w
Honours 1371w

***Bradshaw, Mr Ben**, Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Council and Leader of the House*
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 539, 543–5
Recess motions (22.07.02) 809–20

Brady, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 863–4
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 47, 65, 74–9, 88, 94–7, 100, 105–8, 110, 119–22, (24.07.02) 1026, 1033
Written questions, Points of order (23.07.02) 886, (24.07.02) 1018
Questions
Government departments, Standards 468w
Schools, Management 1341w
Specialist schools 363w

Brake, Tom
Questions
Air traffic control, Manpower 572w
Airports, Construction 733w, 824w
London Underground, Finance 1238w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 143w, 747w, 1237–8w
National Air Traffic Services, Insurance 571–2w
Network Rail 1245w
Police custody, Death 677–8w
Roads, Tolls 573w
Robbery, Greater London 1474w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre, Industrial health and safety 458–9w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 539–40
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 299
Defence review (18.07.02) 474
Questions
Medical treatments, EC countries 871w
Pensions 465w
Robbery 281

"Breaking the Circle"
403w

Breast cancer
1386–8w

Breast feeding
414–5w

Breed, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 678–9
Questions
Agriculture, Research 918–9w
Albania, Environment protection 588–9w
Aujeszky's disease 484w

Breed, Mr Colin—continued
Baltic states, Regional planning and development 589–90w
Bus services, Rural areas 15–6w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 916–7w
Doctors, Foreign workers 202–3w
Game, Farms 823–4w
Homelessness, Rural areas 46w
Know-How Fund, Environment protection 720w
Livestock, Markets 919–20w
Pet travel scheme 484w
Pigs, Diseases 305–6w
Police stations 562w
Romania, Regional planning and development 590w
Romania, Sustainable development 589w
Secondment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 32–4w
Tipping of waste 28–9w
VAT, Gun sports 821w

Brennan, Kevin
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 77
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 1000–1
Questions
Armed forces, Racial discrimination 14
Business questions 435–6
Cyprus, EC enlargement 883–4w
Developing countries, EC external trade 1125–6w
Elections, Wales 700w
Music 693w
Strategy Unit 641w
Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Standards 620–1w

Bridges
Greater London 8w
Railways 1244w
Repairs and maintenance 7–8w, 739w, 966w

Bridgwater
Armed forces 760w

British Airways
Security 970–1w

British Council
1320–1w
Art works 888w

British Forces Post Office
Standards 1119–20w

British nationality
636w
Children 552w

British Nuclear Fuels
see also Sellafield
Accountancy 1336–7w
Contracts 782w
Finance 782w, 1337w
Pay 783–4w

British overseas territories
175–6w, 391–2w, 765w, 1314w, 1318–9w
Financial services 1315–6w
National income 175–6w

British Petroleum
Colombia (22.07.02) 770–1

Brixton Prison
Standards 1447w

Broadband
Huntingdon 439w
Schools 1366w
Scotland 76w

Broadcasting Act 1990 (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 635

Bromley
Police 1468w

Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Debates etc.
Police Reform Bill (HL), Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1063
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 187–9wh
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders 663w, 831w
Council tax 468w
Crime and disorder partnerships 1477w
Microcredit Summit 899w
Nurseries 1342w
Police, Radio 1495–6w
Theft, Cellular phones 825–6w

***Brown, Rt Hon Gordon**, Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Ministerial statements (15.07.02) 21–44
Questions
Business 405–9
Economic and monetary union 470–1w
National income 403–5
Official gifts 1177–8w
Overseas aid 414–5
Public expenditure, Standards 824w
Royal family, Finance 1178w, 1182w
Standards, Dept of Health 409–11

***Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas**, Minister for Work, Department for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Work and Pensions 1578–9w
Employer Direct 1035w
Employment, Disabled 1575–6w
Employment zones 523–4w, 1593w
Incapacity benefit 515w, 1564–7w
Incapacity benefit, Child benefit 1567w
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 1566w, 1569w
Incapacity benefit, North West region 1567w
Incapacity benefit, Pensioners 1567–8w
Income support, Lone parents 1549–50w
Information technology, Dept for Work and Pensions 512–4w
Internet, Dept for Work and Pensions 1594w
Jobcentre Plus 1581w
Jobcentre Plus, Gosport 813w
Jobcentre Plus, Training 1035w
Jobcentre Plus, Welfare tax credits 271w
Jobcentres, Manpower 1580–1w
Jobcentres, New Forest 812w
Jobcentres, Rural areas 1580w
Lorry drivers, Training 265–6w
Massey Ferguson, Coventry 1595–6w
New deal schemes 597–8w
New deal schemes, Scotland 511–2w
Newspaper press, Dept for Work and Pensions 110w
ONE programme, Nottinghamshire 1593–4w
Post offices, Bank services 523w
Press, Dept for Work and Pensions 1037w
Public expenditure, Dept for Work and Pensions 261–2w
Regional planning and development, Dept for Work and Pensions 1578w

Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas—continued
Scotland, Dept for Work and Pensions 1583w
Serials, Dept for Work and Pensions 605w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1575w
Social security benefits, Disqualification 815–8w, 1024w
Social security benefits, Portsmouth 521–2w
Social security benefits, Publicity 116w
Standards, Dept for Work and Pensions 521w
Telephone services, Dept for Work and Pensions 518w
Training, Textiles 1594–5w
Unemployment, Young people 522–3w

Brown, Mr Russell
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 682
Lockerbie, Bombings (23.07.02) 957–8
Questions
Maintenance, Children 517w
Ukraine, Foreign relations 836–7

Browne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 182–8, 193–8, 201–9, 211–5

Browning, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
A30, Repairs and maintenance (22.07.02) 788–91
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 879
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 742, 807, 814, 819
Questions
Bus services 147w
Driving under influence 827w
Sexual offences 1455w

Bruce, Malcolm
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Flood control (16.07.02) 23wh, 36–9wh
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 459w
Driving instruction, Young people 307w
Flood control 621–2w
Green Ministers Committee 307–8w
Hearing aids 217w
London Underground, Air pollution 478–9w
Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations 2001 298w
Small School Support Fund 369–71w
Speeches, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 917w
Water abstraction 487–8w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 804w

Bryant, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Members' constituency work, Points of order (23.07.02) 885
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 3–4
Bishops 663–4
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Annual reports 139w
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Standards 139–40w
Community development, Wales 317w
Crime, Wales 274
NHS Direct 142–3

BSE
417w

Buck, Ms Karen
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 171
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 622–3
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 11–2wh, 15wh
Questions
Child benefit 262–3w
Children, Housing 1215w
Income support, Lone parents 1549–50w
Social rented housing 1210–1w

Buckingham
Financial services 1199–200w

Buckinghamshire
Local government finance (22.07.02) 761–5
Special constables 672w

Bucklow of Carlisle Committee
see Business Appointments Advisory Committee

Budget April 2002
Publications 253w

Building alterations
Capital allowances 242w
VAT 242w

Burden, Richard
Questions
Israel, Arms trade 841
Motor sports 652–3
Riot control weapons, Northern Ireland 507w

Burglary
1485–6w

Burgon, Colin
Questions
Medical Devices Agency, Annual reports 537–8w

Burnett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 298
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 375–6
Questions
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group 1326–7w
Exchange rates 413

Burnham, Andy
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 903
Questions
NHS, Finance 282–3
NHS Direct 143–4

Burnham on Sea
Cancer 1422w

Burnley
Housing (22.07.02) 737–40

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Aerials, Planning permission (22.07.02) 756–9
Housing (18.07.02) 459
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 777, 781
Questions
Business questions 430–1
Child Support Agency 600w
Herbal medicine, EC law 152
Information officers, Scotland Office 1226w
Medical treatments, Overseas visitors 1394w

Burns, Mr Simon—continued
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 129–30w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scotland Office 766w
Official hospitality, Scotland Office 1225–6w
Pet travel scheme, USA 935w
Visits abroad, Scotland Office 766–7w

Burnside, David
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 540–1
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 315
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 688
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 185
Ministerial statement intervention (24.07.02) 985
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 225–6, 232, (22.07.02) 791–3
Questions
Fireworks, Northern Ireland 506w
Terrorism 10

Burstow, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Child Abuse Deaths Bill, 1R (17.07.02) 306
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 876–7
Questions
Acute beds 124w
Asylum, Children 90w
Attendance allowance, Scotland 112w
Beta-interferon, Sutton 423w
Care homes, Closures 1401–2w
Care homes, Fees and charges 654w, 1400–1w
Care homes, Standards 124–5w, 1401w
Care homes, VAT 822–3w
Carers, Medical records 1401w
Carers, Social security benefits 111–2w
Children in care 123w, 1424–7w
Driving offences 566w
Foster care 662w, 1402–4w
Health services, USA 208w
Herbal medicine, Licensing 1430–1w
Home energy efficiency scheme 622–3w
Homelessness, Children in care 1003w
Hospital beds 867–8w, 1094–8w, 1418–9w
Hospitals, Admissions 206w
Hospitals, Infectious diseases 1398–9w
Influenza, Vaccination 428w
Local government finance 1203–4w
Local government finance, Greater London 1204w
Manpower, Ministry of Defence 282–3w
Members, Correspondence 1394w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Prisoners' release 1521w
Multiple sclerosis, Medical treatments 1424w
Neighbourhood nuisance, Sheltered housing 687w
Neurology 868w
NHS, Recruitment 874–5w
NHS trusts, Management 534–5w
Nurses, Foreign workers 419w
Personal care services 128w
Social services, Expenditure 1089w
Social services, Standard spending assessments 48w
Strang, Eden 1531w

Burt, Alistair
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 94–8wh
Questions
Asylum 91–2w

Burt, Alistair—continued
China, Family planning 1135–6w

Burundi
Armed conflict 587w
Debts 586–7w

Bus services
147–8w, 460–1w, 1257–9w
Greater London 9–10w, 1257–9w
Rural areas 15–6w, 743–4w
Somerset 1243w
Standards 743–4w, 1258w

Buses
Pollution control 1259–60w

Business
405–9
Advisory services 777w
Data protection 1326w
Questionnaires 1190–1w

Business Appointments Advisory Committee
Annual reports 567w

Business improvement districts
235–6w

Business links
778w
Advertising 778w

Business motions
(15.07.02) 126, 127, (16.07.02) 176, (18.07.02) 534–6, 539–45, (24.07.02) 1081–4

Business plans
National Audit Office 979–80w

Business statements
421–37

Butterfill, Mr John
Questions
Public expenditure 468w

Bypasses
Silverstone 1249–51w

C17 aircraft
759–60w

Cabinet Office
Buildings 405w
Computers 84w
Departmental responsibilities 1000w, 1002w
Orders and regulations 404w
Press 1014w
Public expenditure 340w
Public participation 1164–5w
Recycling 641w
Statistics 236w

Cable, Mr Vincent
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1009
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 880
Export Control Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1048
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 211–5wh, 221wh
Questions
Armed forces, Housing 5–6
Business, Advisory services 777w
Business links, Advertising 778w
Cervical cancer, Death rate 1197–8w
Computers, President of the Council 1168w
Consignia, Termination of employment 348w
Contracts, Scotland Office 501w
Developing countries, Poverty 969

Cable, Mr Vincent—continued
Disability aids 1092w
Driving, Cellular phones 1234w
Electronic government 726–7w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 1339w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, Education 849w, 1077w
Flood control 704–5w
General practitioners, Standards 1411–2w
Home detention curfews 1460–1w
House of Commons, Recycling 711w
Housing 1211w
Housing benefit, Greater London 1222–4w
Immigration 228w
Information officers, Dept for Education and Skills 988w
Information officers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1139w
Information officers, Dept for International Development 721w
Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961–2w
Information officers, Home Office 850w
Information officers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 799–800w
Information officers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 725w
Information officers, President of the Council 712w
Information officers, Prime Minister 805w
Information officers, Scotland Office 769w
Information officers, Treasury 822w
Investors in people, Small businesses 993–4w
Members, Correspondence 105w
Motor vehicles, Registration 11w
Pensions 403
Poland, EC enlargement 843
Police Standards Unit 1443w
Post offices, Bank services 815w
Post offices, Information services 172w
Postal services 171w
Postal services, Theft 774w
Press, Cabinet Office 1014w
Press, Dept for Work and Pensions 1037w
Prisoners, Rehabilitation 854–5w
Prisoners, Self-mutilation 855w
Probation and aftercare, Greater London 844–5w, 1077w, 1532w
Publicity, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 698w
Publicity, Dept for Education and Skills 771–3w
Publicity, Dept for International Development 721–2w
Publicity, Dept for Work and Pensions 1584–6w
Publicity, Dept of Health 1403w
Publicity, Dept of Trade and Industry 945w
Publicity, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 887w
Publicity, Home Office 1067w
Publicity, Lord Chancellor's Dept 800w
Publicity, Ministry of Defence 761w
Publicity, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Publicity, Scotland Office 769w
Publicity, Treasury 821w
Regulatory impact assessments, Dept for Work and Pensions 524–5w
Regulatory impact assessments, Dept of Trade and Industry 437w
Regulatory impact assessments, Home Office 396w
Regulatory impact assessments, Scotland Office 274w
Royal Military School of Music 761–2w
Small Business Service 1338w

Cable, Mr Vincent—continued
Small Business Service, Finance 1337w
Small businesses, Loan guarantee scheme 778w
Small businesses, Regulation 437–8w
Social Care Inspection Commission, Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission 1409w
Social security benefits 1036w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 805–7w, 809w, 1031–2w, 1579w
Stationery, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Wandsworth Prison 854w

***Caborn, Rt Hon Richard**, Minister of State for Sport, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Debates etc.
Museums and galleries, North East region (15.07.02) 132–6
Questions
English Sports Council, Finance 976–7w
English Sports Council, Manpower 979w
English Sports Council, Pay 975w, 979w
Horserace Totalisator Board 53w
Motor sports 652–3
National Lottery 165w, 973w
Playgrounds 530–1w
Sports, Children 53w
Sports, Chorley 699w
Sports, Clubs 660–1
Sports, Drugs 696w
Sports, Finance 164w, 975–6w, 978w
Sports, Health 975w
Sports, Schools 691w
Sports, Taunton 51w
Sports, Vetting 52–3w, 164w
Sports, Voluntary work 498w
Sports, Young people 658–9, 692w, 974–5w
Swimming pools, Leominster 691–2w
Tennis 695w
Wembley Stadium 498w

Cadets
Armed forces 760w

Caffeine
Soft drinks 1440w

Cairns, David
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 470
Questions
State retirement pensions 294w

Calton, Mrs Patsy
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 180–1, 207
Questions
Cancer 415w
Electoral Commission 1123w
Encephalitis 1432w
Local government finance 125w
National Institute for Biological Standards and Control 1529–30w
Northern Ireland government 509w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 1239w
Schools, Information technology 378w
Social services, Elderly 1098–9w

Cambridge
Greenbelt (17.07.02) 129–36wh

Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Finance 1477–8w

Cameras
Speed limits 687w

Cameron, Mr David
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 43–4, (23.07.02) 895
Social services, Oxfordshire (22.07.02) 795–9
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 764
Questions
National Lottery 651–2
Tourism, Oxfordshire 693w

Cameroon
Ethnic groups 1124w

Campbell, Mr Alan
Questions
Forensic Science Service, Annual reports 231–2w
Jobcentre Plus, Disabled 812w
Maintenance, Children 516w

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 878
Housing (18.07.02) 454
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 38
Questions
Asylum, Administrative delays 1042w
Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Finance 1477–8w
Higher education 184w
Police cautions 832w
Railways, Fares 568w

Campbell, Mr Gregory
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 181–2, 192–3, 201

Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 696–7
Ministerial statement intervention (18.07.02) 467
Questions
Arms trade, Export controls 77–8w, 435–6w
Arms trade, Israel 840–1
Ivory Coast, Elections 390w

Campsfield House Detention Centre
1448w

Canada
Pet travel scheme 935w

Cancer
415–6w
Burnham on Sea 1422w
Death rate 1178–9w
Health services 1422w
Medical treatments 1100w
Research 144–7, 1100w, 1422w
Surgery 422w

Cannabis
Clinical trials 1431w
Crime 669–70w
Driving under influence 403–4w
Lambeth 222w

Canvey Island
Floods 933–4w

Capita
Criminal Records Bureau 827–8w

Capital allowances
Building alterations 242w

Capital punishment
Iran 1312w

Carbaryl
936w

Carbon dioxide
Pollution control 39w, 786w

Care homes
198w, (22.07.02) 783–8, 1089–90w, 1402w
Closures 1401–2w
Fees and charges 202w, 654w, 1400–1w
Finance 872–3w
Qualifications 1402w
Scotland 198w
South West region 197w
Standard spending assessments 197–8w
Standards 124–5w, 199w, 982, 1401w
Surrey 121w
Training 1089w
VAT 822–3w
Vetting 835w, 873–4w
Wales 316w

Care Standards Act 2000
Questions
982

Carers
541w
Greater London 219w
Medical records 1401w
Social security benefits 111–2w

Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000
Questions
541w

Caribbean Development Bank (Further Payments) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(15.07.02) 127

Carlisle United Football Club
Petitions (23.07.02) 954

Carmarthenshire
Roads 965–6w

Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 489–90, 492, 499
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 100–1wh, 105wh
Questions
Property, Scotland Office 502w

Cars
967w, 1016w

Casale, Roger
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 304
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 600–1
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 896, 901, 948–9
Questions
Business questions 434–5
Defence, EC countries 23w
Exchange rates 413
Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Standards 296–7w
Wimbledon Football Club 977–8
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 830

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1012
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 49–57, 60, 63–5, 67, (24.07.02) 1023, 1025–32, 1034–5

Castle Point
Education (22.07.02) 821–8

Castle Point—continued
Planning 1218w

Cathedrals
Repairs and maintenance 667–8

Caton, Mr Martin
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 27w
Community care grants 1577w
Fire prevention, Wales 320w
Further education, Pay 642w, 770–1w
NHS, Private finance initiative 1085–6w
Pensions 520–1w
Pensions, Taxation 602w
Social Fund 1579–80w, 1582–3w

Cawsey, Mr Ian
Questions
Annual reports, Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency 1202w
Life Sentence Review Commissioners, Annual reports 1202–3w
NHS Estate Management and Health Building Agency, Annual reports 217w
Police, Northern Ireland 1202w

Cayman Islands
Human rights 889w, 1314w

Cellular phone masts
see Aerials

Cellular phones
Armed forces 276w
Crime prevention 1485w
Driving 1234w
Theft 555w, 825–6w, 1479–80w, 1484–5w

Census
Public Record Office 800–2w, 1080w

Central Africa
International assistance 591w

Central African Republic
Armed conflict 1307w
Education 716–7w
HIV infection 717w
Politics and government 717w

Central Office of Information
Annual reports 1164w

Central Railway
746w

Central Science Laboratory
Annual reports 915w
Standards 489w

Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
Annual reports 139w
Standards 139–40w

Centre for Management and Policy Studies
Annual reports 725–6w

Cervical cancer
Death rate 1197–8w
Screening 419–21w

Challen, Mr Colin
Questions
Community Champions Fund, Morley 647w
Convention on the Future of Europe 845
Developing countries, Education 258–60w
Drugs, Crime 668–70w
Educational maintenance allowance, Morley 57w
Employment, Yorkshire and Humberside 67–8w, 637w
Housing benefit, Yorkshire and Humberside 1014–5w
Licensing laws 362w
Mature students, Morley 647w

Challen, Mr Colin—continued
Meat products, Contamination 1154–5w
Post offices, Disabled 349w
Students, Morley 57w
Taxpayers, Yorkshire and Humberside 256–8w
Teachers, Foreign workers 368w
Vocational education, Morley 648w
Working families tax credit, Leeds 252–3w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel tunnel
Freight 323–4w, 329w, 968w
Illegal immigrants 393w

Channel tunnel railway line
Scotland 982w

Chapman, Mr Ben
Questions
Asylum, Applications 1318w
Clergy, Conditions of employment 723w, 1164w
Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive 968w, 1277–8w
Postal services, Wirral 774w
Poverty 44w, 73–5w
Poverty, Children 254w
Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 403w
Unemployment, Wales 321w

Chapman, Sir Sydney
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 558–61, 593
Questions
Archaeology 657
Clergy, Pensions 666
MMR vaccine, Greater London 285

Charities
VAT 463w

Chaytor, Mr David
Questions
Excise duties, Fuels 467–8w
General certificate of secondary education, Standards 772w
Grammar schools 189w
Radioactive wastes, Russia 776–7w
Schools, Transport 1341w
Secondary education, Pupils 644w
Specialist schools 644w
Specialist schools, Admissions 363w

Chechnya
Human rights 881w

Cheltenham
Schools 988w

Chemical and biological warfare
Emergencies 748w
Terrorism 553w

Chernobyl
Radioactive fallout 316w

Cheshire Constabulary
Sick leave 1538–9w

Chewing gum
Litter 311–2w

Chidgey, Mr David
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 861
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (17.07.02) 113–6wh, 118wh
Questions
British overseas territories 175–6w, 1314w
Cayman Islands, Human rights 889w, 1314w

Child Abuse Deaths Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (17.07.02) 306

Child benefit
262–3w
Foreign students 263w
Incapacity benefit 1567w
Internet 295w

Child Benefit Centre
Telephone services 266w

Child minding
Manpower 994w

Child Support Agency
(16.07.02) 52–8wh, 600w
Computers 818–9w, 1545–7w
Standards 819w, 1546w

Child Support (Maintenance and Special Cases) Regulations 1992
Questions
267w

Child tax credit
1189–90w

Child Tax Credit Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

Childbirth
119w, 208w

Children
Abuse 122–3w, 1487w
Asylum 90w, 550–2w
British nationality 552w
Day care 60w, 127–8w, 183–4w, (17.07.02) 389–96, 987–8w, 1083w
Departmental coordination 1342w
Developing countries 1137–8w
Diseases 124w, 1422–3w
Drugs 88w
Hormone treatments 422w
Hospices 981
Housing 1215w
Kidnapping 411–2w
Maintenance 116w, 267w, 516–7w, 599–600w, 819–20w, 1026w, 1547–9w, 1560–1w
Mental health services 123w, 125–6w, 1098w
Poverty 254w, 462–3w, 1033w
Prostitution 1059w
Protection 229–31w
Sports 53w, 214w

Children Act 1989
Questions
658w, 1215w

Children in care
123w, 1424–7w
General certificate of secondary education 123w
Homelessness 1003w
Isle of Sheppey 123w
Social security benefits 813–4w
South West region 1100w
Young offenders 1463–5w

Children's tax credit
Mitcham 462w

Chile
Warships 760w

China
Asylum 884w
Family planning 1135–6w
Human rights 839
Overseas trade 610–1w
Sanctions 385–6w

Chinook helicopters
Accidents 1107w
Ministerial statements (22.07.02) 689–704

Chiropody
Recruitment 425w

Chope, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Arms trade (22.07.02) 751–3
Richmond Park, Petitions (15.07.02) 128
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 183wh, 185wh, 188–91wh
Questions
Administration of justice, Standards 1459–60w
Arms trade, Export controls 1330w
Children in care, South West region 1100w
Dogs 308w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 636w
Exports, Licensing 358–9w, 436–7w
Flags 82w
Government departments, Standards 1193w
Health centres, Property transfer 218w
Housing benefit, Dorset 268w
Industry, Profits 172w
London Underground, Industrial disputes 148w
London Underground, Standards 747w
Members, Correspondence 564w
Network Rail 144–5w
Network Rail, Finance 145w, 820w, 1245w
Network Rail, Public appointments 145w
Oil, Northern Ireland 1193w
Pensioners, Dorset 268–9w
Public finance 250w
Public Sector Classification Committee 250w
Public transport, Standards 963w
Railways, Standards 1256w
Road traffic, Urban areas 573w
Road traffic control, Standards 1255–6w
Roads, Accidents 1251–3w
Roads, Tolls 1255w
Standards, Treasury 1193w
State retirement pensions, Dorset 268w
Transport, Finance 735–6w, 1168–9w
Transport, Planning 1272w, 1276w
Transport, Standards 736w
Trials 1303w
Vaccination 218w

Chorley
Neighbourhood wardens 1485w
Sports 699w

Christchurch
Health centres 218w

Christianity
Asia (17.07.02) 89–112wh
Pakistan 386w

Chronic fatigue syndrome
210–1w
Complementary medicine 538w

Churches
Planning permission 723–4w

Circulars
NHS 212–3w

City academies
643–4w

Civil Contingencies Committee
108w

Civil disorder
Bradford 1473–4w

Civil proceedings
1279–80w

Civil servants
Accidents 335w
Codes of practice 803w
Dept for Education and Skills 187w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 178w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1373w
Pay 405w
Pensions 728–30w
Scotland Office 382w

Civil service
Annual reports 272w

Civil service agencies
726w

Civilians
Armed conflict 749–50w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Questions
Accountancy 1338–9w
Bahrain 835–6
Emergency services, Sick leave 1053w
Employment Tribunal System Taskforce 1338w
Financial Services Compensation Scheme 468–9w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 280
Industrial diseases, Home Office 547w
Regional development agencies, Annual reports 1338w
Retirement, Home Office 394w

Clappison, Mr James
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 606
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 616, 624
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 166–9wh, 173wh
Questions
Employment zones 523–4w
Hertfordshire Constabulary, Manpower 1491w
Incapacity benefit 515w, 1564–6w
Pensions, Taxation 295–6w
Post offices, Bank services 523w, 597w
Prescription drugs, Imports 1403–4w
Social security benefits, Abuse 595–6w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 597–8w, 1029w, 1550w
Working families tax credit 251–2w
Working families tax credit, Abuse 252w

Clark, Mrs Helen
Questions
Diesel engines, EC action 945–6w
Flood control, EC law 625–6w
Livestock, Animal welfare 921w
Mental health services, Ethnic groups 197w
Pollution, EC action 946–7w
Taxis, Peterborough 459–60w

***Clark, Dr Lynda**, Advocate General for Scotland*
Questions
Advertising, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Buildings, Advocate General for Scotland 380–1w, 770w
Consultation papers, Advocate General for Scotland 381w
Females, Advocate General for Scotland 985w
Holiday leave, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Manpower, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Members, Advocate General for Scotland 1232–3w

***Clark, Dr Lynda**—continued*
New deal schemes, Advocate General for Scotland 985w
Official hospitality, Advocate General for Scotland 381–2w
Orders and regulations, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Overtime, Advocate General for Scotland 770w
Pay, Advocate General for Scotland 380w, 985w
Public expenditure, Advocate General for Scotland 379w, 382w, 770w
Recruitment, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Standards, Advocate General for Scotland 503w
Training, Advocate General for Scotland 379w
Visits abroad, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w

Clark, Paul
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 457
Questions
Councillors, Misconduct 999w

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 36

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 559–62, 564, 572–3, 596–7
Questions
Developing countries, Poverty 969–70
Overseas aid 415

Clarke, Mr Tony
Questions
Crime prevention, Northamptonshire 1469w
NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, Annual reports 875w
Regional planning and development 533–4w

Clay Cross
Regeneration (22.07.02) 753–6

Clergy
Conditions of employment 723w, 1164w
Pensions 666
Recruitment 662

Cleveland Constabulary
Inquiries 99–100w

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Orders and regulations, Points of order (18.07.02) 476–7, (22.07.02) 705
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 40
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Derelict land, Planning permission (24.07.02) 276–80wh, 283–4wh, 286wh
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 2wh, 4wh, 9wh, 17–9wh
Questions
Care homes, Standards 982
Fire Service College, Disciplinary proceedings 18w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 321w
Listed buildings, Internet 407–8w
Meat products, Contamination 417w
Orders and regulations, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 997w
Sheep premiums 481w
Suckler cow premiums 481w

Climate change
31–2w

Climate change levy
Nuclear power 957w

Clinical trials
Cannabis 1431w
Contraceptives 1383–4w

Closed circuit television
Belfast 506–7w

Clubs
Sports 660–1

Clwyd, Ann
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 176–7w
Afghanistan, Politics and government 967–8
Arms trade, Export controls 384w, 1317–8w
Arms trade, Iran 383w
Arms trade, Israel 839–40
Dental services, Wales 275–6
International Criminal Court 1105w

Coaker Mr Vernon
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 345w
Civil service, Annual reports 272w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 409w
Dementia 191–2w
Mentally incapacitated, Protection 563w
Noise, Pollution control 793–4w
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Annual reports 957w
Poverty 469w
Sports, Young people 658

Coal
Selby 165–8w

Coal Authority
Annual reports 950w

Coalfields Regeneration Trust
Finance 344w

Coastal areas
324w

"Code of Practice on Access to Government Information Monitoring Report 2001"
1288w

Cohen, Harry
Debates etc.
British Petroleum, Colombia (22.07.02) 770–1
Defence review (18.07.02) 469
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 43
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 208–10wh, 215wh, 223wh
Questions
Armed forces, Colombia 756w
Arms trade 1325w
Dance 495w
Data protection, Home Office 1495w
National childcare strategy, Greater London 54–6w
Schools, Governing bodies 378–9w
Sheikh, Ahmed Omar Saeed 764w
Social security benefits, Abuse 1036–8w

Coinage
68w

Colchester
Housing benefit 1015w
Military bases 905–6w, 1114w

Coleman, Mr Iain
Questions
Asylum 246–8w

***Coleman, Mr Iain**—continued*
  Civil servants, Pay 405w
  Council tax 45–6w, 244–5w
  Council tax benefits 602w, 1037–8w
  Free school meals 372–4w
  Local government finance 239–40w
  Mental patients 660–1w
  NHS, Pay 542w
  Pupils, Languages 375–8w
  Teachers, Vacancies 57–60w

Collins, Mr Tim
  Debates etc.
  Airports (23.07.02) 850–3
  Questions
  Contracts, Dept of Health 1429w
  Livestock, Cumbria 477–8w
  Ministerial policy advisors, Home Office 1476w
  Photography, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w
  12 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 1368w

Colman, Mr Tony
  Questions
  India, Females 260w
  Liberia, Armed conflict 260–1w
  Productivity 780w
  Tennis 695w

Colombia
  Armed forces 756w
  British Petroleum (22.07.02) 770–1

Colon cancer
  Medical treatments 212w

Combined heat and power
  Greater Manchester 441w
  Saltburn 441w

Commercial broadcasting
  Radio 654–6

Commission for Health Care Audit and Inspection
  see Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission

Commission for Health Improvement
  210w
  Pay 1427–8w

Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection
  see Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission

Commission for Social Care Inspection
  see Social Care Inspection Commission

Common agricultural policy
  Developing countries 261w, 1129w
  Reform 916–8w
  Scotland 917w

Common fisheries policy
  705w, 919w

Common land
  915w

Commonwealth
  Education 713–4w

Commonwealth Bill 2001/02
  Debates etc.
  Rep* and 3R (19.07.02) 603–9

Commonwealth Development Corporation
  449–51w, 574–84w, 722w
  Debts 450w
  Directors 450w, 581–2w, 584w
  Pay 575–6w, 580–1w, 583w
  Publicity 583w
  Redundancy 576w
  Sub-Saharan Africa 449w, 576–7w

Commonwealth Games
  Manchester 164w, 409w, (22.07.02) 743–5

Communications Bill (Draft)
  Questions
  407w, 495w, 654

Community care grants
  1577–8w

Community Champions Fund
  Morley 647w

Community councils
  1233–4w

Community development
  341–3w, 1471–2w
  Dept for International Development 898w
  Dept for Work and Pensions 1587–8w
  Grants 226w
  Northern Ireland 1202w
  Northern Ireland Office 1202w
  Standards 402w
  Wales 317w

Community Development Venture Fund
  1201w

Community health councils
  1410w

Community health services
  191w

Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Service
  see National Probation Service for England and Wales

Commuters
  Railways 569w

Companies
  Disclosure of information 788–9w
  Ilford 256w

Companies Act 1985
  Questions
  350–1w

Company law
  168–9w

Competition
  Energy 346w, 943w
  Water supply 916w

Complaints Audit Committee
  Annual reports 1043–4w
  Public appointments 1448w

Complementary medicine
  (17.07.02) 67–88wh, 1431w
  Chronic fatigue syndrome 538w

Comptroller and Auditor General
  see National Audit Office

Compulsory purchase
  533w

Computer software
  Educational institutions 651–2w
  Government departments 725w
  Inland Revenue 1183w

Computers
  Cabinet Office [illegible]w
  Child Support Agency 818–9w, 1545–7w
  Dept for Culture Media and Sport 499w
  Dept for Education and Skills 651w
  Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 37w
  Dept for International Development 893w
  Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13w
  Dept for Work and Pensions 294w
  Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w
  Legal Services Commission 1299–300w

***Computers**—continued*
  Lord Chancellor's Dept 607w
  Members 711w
  Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 244w
  Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1378w
  President of the Council 413–4w, 1168w
  Scotland Office 768w
  Social Security Contributions Agency 295w
  Treasury 66w

Computers within reach programme
  1367w

Conditions of employment
  Clergy 723w, 1164w
  EC law 446–7w
  General practitioners 1393w
  Higher education (24.07.02) 1072–80
  Police 1046w

Conduct
  Judges 82w

Congo (Kinshasa)
  see Democratic Republic of Congo

Connarty, Mr Michael
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 122–3wh
  Questions
  Broadband, Scotland 76w
  Herbal medicine, EC law 151–2
  Liquefied petroleum gas, Scotland 502w
  Orphan drugs 1440w

Conservation
  Energy 27–8w, 249–50w, 479w, 485w
  Lapwings 302w

Consignia
  Termination of employment 348w

Constituencies
  Scotland 76–7w

Consultants
  Dept for International Development 893–4w
  Hospitals 137–9, 418–9w
  Nurses 537w

Consultation papers
  Advocate General for Scotland 381w
  Dept for Culture Media and Sport 410w, 496–8w, 697w, 971–4w, 1156–8w
  Dept for Education and Skills 60–4w, 985–6w
  Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 937–42w
  Dept for International Development 40–1w, 591–2w
  Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13–4w, 1266–7w
  Dept for Work and Pensions 602–4w, 814w, 1026–8w, 1596w
  Dept of Health 1429w
  Dept of Trade and Industry 791–2w, 950–1w
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 885–6w
  Home Office 837–40w
  Lord Chancellor's Dept 526–8w, 796–8w
  Ministry of Defence 903w, 1106–7w
  Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w
  President of the Council 5w
  Scotland Office 383w, 769w
  Treasury 1181–2w

Consumer Credit Act 1974
  Questions
  169–70w

Consumers
Scotland 169–70w

Contact orders
82–3w, 525w
Voluntary organisations 525–6w

Contamination
Land 1147–8w
Meat products 204w, 417w, 429w, 1154–5w

Contraceptives
864–6w
Clinical trials 1383–4w

Contracting Out (Functions of Local Authorities: Income-Related Benefits) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(16.07.02) 259–60

Contracts
British Nuclear Fuels 782w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961w
Dept of Health 1429w
Highways Agency 1248–50w
Local government 1020w
Scotland Office 499–501w

Contributions Agency
see Social Security Contributions Agency

Control of Fireworks (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 638

Convention on the Future of Europe
3w, 845

Convictions
1056w
Bigamy 1503w
Domestic violence 849–50w
Firearms 1056–8w

Cook, Frank
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 298
Questions
South East Asia, Disease control 281

***Cook, Rt Hon Robin**, President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons*
Debates etc.
Select committees (22.07.02) 729–32
Questions
Business statements 421–37
Computers, President of the Council 413–4w, 1168w
Consultation papers, President of the Council 5w
Electronic government, Democracy 182–3w
Information officers, President of the Council 712w
Internet, President of the Council 453w
Members, Pensions 83–4w, 712w
Ministerial policy advisors, President of the Council 1168w
Privy Council 712–3w
Public expenditure, President of the Council 5–6w
Visits abroad, President of the Council 414w

***Cooper, Ms Yvette**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Chancellor's Dept*
Questions
Absent voting 574w
"Code of Practice on Access to Government Information Monitoring Report 2001" 1288w

***Cooper, Ms Yvette**—continued*
Computers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 607w
Data protection, Business 1326w
Data protection, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1303w
Elections, Expenditure 1080w
European Parliament elections, Gibraltar 1291w
European Parliamentary Elections Bill (HL) 2001/02 607–8w
Fines, Debit cards 607w
Fines, Defaulters 82w, 608w
Fines, Greater Manchester 1300–2w
Freedom of information, Codes of practice 797–8w, 1292–4w
Freedom of Information Act 2000, Government departments 272w
Judges, Conduct 82w
Judges, Housing 1303–5w
Judges, Training 606–8w
Limitation of actions 272w
Magistrates, Resignations 796w
Magistrates' courts, Closures 1305w
Magistrates' courts, Information technology 1288–90w
Magistrates' courts, Thames Valley 1081–2w, 1293w
Magistrates' courts committees 1293w
Members' interests, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278w
Referendums, Departmental responsibilities 1305w
Standards, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1293–9w
Trials 1303w
Trials, Administrative delays 81w
Trials, Rape 798–9w, 1280–8w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1299w

Cooperatives
Health services 212w, 655w

Coordinating Group on Audit and Accounting
see Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group

Copaxone
199w

Copyright
169w

Copyright Etc and Trade Marks (Offences and Enforcement) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Corbyn, Jeremy
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 456
Questions
Pesticides Safety Directorate, Annual reports 709w
Police, Housing 841–2w
Western Sahara 609w
Western Sahara, Peace negotiations 609w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 685–6
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 999
Questions
Business questions 429–30
Israel, Arms trade 840

Corporate hospitality
Treasury 1199w

Corporate manslaughter
1505w
Network Rail 327w

Corporate Responsibility Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 634

Correctional Services Board
1446–7w

Corruption
Juries 830w

Cotter, Brian
Questions
Business links 778w
Crime prevention, Retail trade 836w, 1465–6w
Pharmacy, Billing 210w, 1420w
Regulation, Audit 641–2w
Regulatory Accountability Panel 345w
Small businesses 172w
Special educational needs, Finance 1354w

Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership
1338w

Council housing
1205–10w
Double glazing 1220w

Council tax
45–6w, 244–5w, 468w
Greater London 1216–8w
North West region 1216–8w

Council tax benefits
602w, 1037–8w
Dorset 268w

Councillors
Disabled 271–2w
Misconduct 999w

Countryside
Access 137w

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
Questions
136–7w, 304w, 1153w, 1194w

Countryside stewardship scheme
707w

County Durham Health Authority
Per capita costs 1398w

Court Service
Wales 319w

Courts
Closures 1443–4w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Questions
Information technology, Dept for Work and Pensions 512–4w
Pensions, Public sector 416
Taxation 251w
Welfare milk, Asylum 541–2w

Coventry
Housing 1018w
Massey Ferguson 1595–6w
Police 1475–6w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Asylum 91w
Asylum, Greater London 90–1w
Crime, Wandsworth 98w
Criminal investigation 832w
Cyprus 178w, 180w
Cyprus, Armed forces 385–6w
Cyprus, EC enlargement 179–80w
Cyprus, Foreign relations 178–80w
Cyprus, Peace keeping operations 180w
Deportation 223w
Entry clearances 684w
Hannay of Chiswick, Lord 179w
Human trafficking 548w, 684–5w, 833–4w

Cox, Mr Tom—continued
Human trafficking, Greater London 685w
Illegal immigrants, Romania 399–400w
Life imprisonment 832w
Life imprisonment, Sexual offences 832w
Metropolitan Police 1479w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 1488w
Police, Wandsworth 1480w
Prison governors, Ethnic groups 835w
Prison governors, Females 834w
Prisoners, Females 832–3w
Prisoners, Suicide 1537–8w
Proceeds of crime 223w
Prostitution 1058–60w
Prostitution, Children 1059w
Segregation of prisoners 1075w
Sexual offences 1455–6w
Turkey, Human rights 387w
Young offenders 833w

Cran, Mr James
Questions
Members, Correspondence 221w

Cranston, Ross
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 718–21, 724
Questions
Archaeology 1160–2w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, Administrative delays 1503–4w
"Disabled Person's Parking Badge Scheme Consultation Paper" 1245–6w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, EC enlargement 1132w
Historical Manuscripts Royal Commission 409w
Kidnapping, Children 411–2w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Finance 1521–2w
Overseas aid 464–5w

Crausby, Mr David
Debates etc.
Redundancy Payments Bill, 1R (23.07.02) 887–9
Questions
Conditions of employment, EC law 446–7w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 1550w

Creative partnerships initiative
698w

Credit cards
Fraud 679–80w

Credit unions
418–20

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease
Sheep meat 428–9w

Crime
86–8w, 95–7w, 278–80, 557w, 680–2w, 1441–3w
Alcoholic drinks 222–3w
Cannabis 669–70w
Drugs 87w, 104–5w, 396–7w, 666–70w, 1461–2w
Elderly 681–2w
Greater London 1472–3w
Hertfordshire 282
Somerset 1457–9w
Wales 273–5
Wandsworth 98w

Crime and disorder partnerships
89w, 680w, 1477w

Crime prevention
826–7w, 851–2w, 1461w
Annual reports 861–2w

Crime prevention—continued
Cellular phones 1485w
Finance 794–5w, 858w
Northamptonshire 1469w
Retail trade 795–6w, 836w, 862–4w, 1465–6w
Standards 852–4w
Wales 320w
Young people 401–2w, 694w

Crimes of violence
Ambulance services 608w
Hospitals 536w
Retail trade 682–3w
Wales 321w

Criminal Courts Review
1078w

Criminal Evidence (Prohibition of Sale) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (16.07.02) 173
2R order read (19.07.02) 639

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
Administrative delays 1503–4w

Criminal injuries compensation scheme
1532w

Criminal investigation
832w, 1487w, 1491–2w

Criminal Justice and Courts Services Act 2000
Questions
1533–4w

"Criminal Justice White Paper"
1305w

Criminal proceedings
1530–1w
Ministerial statements (17.07.02) 287–304

Criminal records
Metropolitan Police 1050w

Criminal Records Bureau
(23.07.02) 179–201wh, 1481–3w
Administrative delays 1056w, 1453w, 1483w, 1518w
Annual reports 554w
Capita 827–8w
Complaints 1481w, 1483w
Standards 1481–4w

Crops
Genetically modified organisms 33–4w, 700–2w

Crossrail line
1241w

Crown Estate Commissioners
Scotland 274w, 469w

Crown Prosecution Service
Advocacy 619w
Annual reports 287w
Complaints 617–8w
Manpower 618–20w
Offices 525w

Cruise missiles
155w

Cryer, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 300-1
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 880

Cryer, John
Questions
Pensions 401–2
Postal workers, Vetting 349w
Sports, Young people 659

Cumbria
Livestock 477–8w

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Questions
Armed conflict, Civilians 749–50w
Buildings, Urban areas 1211w
Bus services 147–8w
Cancer 416w
Colon cancer, Medical treatments 212w
Council housing, Double glazing 1220w
EC Economic and Social Committee 1314–6w
HIV infection 212w
Housing, Coventry 1018w
Housing, Empty property 1017w
Housing, Low incomes 1017–8w
Magistrates' courts committees 1293w
Massey Ferguson, Coventry 1595–6w
Police, Coventry 1475–6w
Police, Recruitment 857–8w
Public footpaths, Safety 137w
Public transport 148w, 1261–2w
Rights of way, Access 136–7w
Roads, Construction 148w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 328w
Roads, Tolls 149w
Schools, Playing fields 989–90w
Wind power 787w

Cunningham, Tony
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 684
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 907–8
Questions
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 1582w
Members, Correspondence 338w, 1390w
Motor sports 652

Curriculum
Environment protection 480w
Languages 1351w

Curry, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 682
Housing (18.07.02) 456

Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire
Questions
Acquittals 503–4w
Apprentices, Finance 990w
Crown Prosecution Service, Complaints 617–8w
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 618–20w
Drugs, Misuse 1504w
Industry 111w
Juries, Corruption 830w
National training organisations, Finance 648–52w
Offences against children, Northumbria 859w
Regulatory impact assessments 972w
Witnesses 93–4w

Customs and Excise
Scotland 470w, 1171–2w
Southern region 70w

Cycling
Road signs and markings 965w
Safety 965w
Standards 1277w

Cyprus
178w, 180w
Armed forces 385–6w
EC enlargement 179–80w, 883–4w
Foreign relations 178–80w
Military bases 279w, 282w

***Cyprus**—continued*
Peace keeping operations 180w

Cystic fibrosis
Prescriptions 200–1w
Screening 200w

Czech Republic
1w
Immigration officers 685–6w

Dairy farming
314w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1012
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 699
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 167
Lockerbie, Bombings (23.07.02) 956–7, 962
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 37
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 254–5wh
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 258w, 1126w
Archaeology 657
Immigration controls, France 229w
Indonesia, Forests 448–9w
Iraq, Armed conflict 981–2
Lockerbie, Bombings 843–4

Dance
495w

Dangerous mental patients
1067–8w

***Darling, Rt Hon Alistair**, Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc.
Airports, Ministerial statements (23.07.02) 847–68
Questions
Network Rail, Finance 568–9w
Railways, Accidents 462w
Railways, Fares 568w

Data protection
Business 1326w
Home Office 1495w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1303w
Medical records 688w, 864w
Telecommunications 1465w

Data Protection Act 1998
Questions
1303w, 1326w, 1495w

Data Protection (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Databases
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 565–6w
Land use 1010–2w

Davey, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 604, 608
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 611–21, 630
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 563, 572–3, 578, 580–2, 587–8, 590, 599–600
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 895–6, 911–9

***Davey, Mr Edward**—continued*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 7wh, 9wh, 15–7wh

Davey, Mrs Valerie
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 109
Trade, Petitions (16.07.02) 260–1
Questions
Coal, Selby 165–8w
Employment schemes, Asperger's syndrome 113–4w
International Criminal Court, USA 846
Mining, Pensions 171–2w

David, Mr Wayne
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Disadvantaged, Public participation (24.07.02) 290–3wh
Poverty (18.07.02) 147–50wh
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Reform 917w
Export Credits Guarantee Dept, Trading funds 779–80w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 317w
Manufacturing industries, Trade competitiveness 417–8
Winter fuel payments, European economic area 599w

Davidson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 317, 329–30
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 481, 490–2, 513, 521–2
Questions
Armed forces, Recruitment 1107w
Employment, Disabled 1575–6w
Football, World Cup 554w
Social security benefits 1028–9w
Social security benefits, Voluntary work 1554–5w
Unemployment, Young people 522–3w
USA, Agriculture 177w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 920–2
Questions
National income 404

Davies, Geraint
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 626–7
Patients Without Legal Capacity (Safeguards) Bill, 2R order read (19.07.02) 636
Questions
Business 406–7
Computer software, Government departments 725w
Fire services, Radio 245w, 343w
Iran, Drugs 4–5w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 206
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 216–25, 231–4, (24.07.02) 986–9

Dawson, Mr Hilton
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 883
Questions
Sudan, Armed conflict 838–9

Day care
Children 60w, 127–8w, 183–4w, (17.07.02) 389–96, 987–8w, 1083w
Devon 183–4w

Dean Hill
Defence Munitions 25w, 285–7w

Death
Drugs 404w
Multiple occupation 238w
Outdoor education 1269–70w
Police custody 677–8w, 1054w, 1103w
Princess Royal Barracks 7–9

Death rate
Cancer 1178–9w
Cervical cancer 1197–8w

Debit cards
Fines 607w

Debt Management Office
see UK Debt Management Office

Debts
Burundi 586–7w
Commonwealth Development Corporation 450w
Developing countries 464–5w, 971

Deductions
Social security benefits 1589–92w

Defaulters
Fines 82w, 608w

Defence
EC countries 23w
Expenditure 1–3
Finance 755w, 1111–2w
USA 1113w

Defence Aviation Repair Agency
Almondbank 163w
Standards 911–2w

Defence equipment
155w, 907w, 1112–3w
Procurement 153–5w, 158w, 161–2w, (17.07.02) 311–86, 490w, 904–6w

Defence Estates
Property transfer 18w

Defence Fire Service
15–7

Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency
Standards 1117–8w

Defence Housing Executive
Standards 159w, 908–9w

Defence Medical Services
753w

Defence Munitions
Dean Hill 25w, 285–7w
Gosport 286w
Operating costs 285w

Defence Procurement Agency
160–1w

Defence review
Ministerial statements (18.07.02) 460–75

Defence Storage and Distribution Agency
Standards 1120w

Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation
QinetiQ 1122–3w

Defence Transport and Movements Agency
Standards 1119w

Deferred divisions
Rulings and statements (18.07.02) 537–8, (19.07.02) 556, (24.07.02) 1044

Dementia
191–2w

Democracy
Electronic government 182–3w

Democratic Republic of Congo
Armed conflict 1–2w, 585w
International assistance 584–5w
Rwanda 883w

Demonstrations
Parliament Square 554w

***Denham, Rt Hon John**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 706–11, 725–8
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), Rem stages (24.07.02) 1066–70
Police Reform Bill (HL), Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1060, 1063–4
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 558–9w, 1455–8w
Antisocial behaviour orders 663–4w, 831w
Antisocial behaviour orders, Hampshire 558w
Antisocial behaviour orders, South Tyneside 830–2w
Antisocial behaviour orders, South Yorkshire 557–8w
Antisocial behaviour orders, West Sussex 1466–7w
Baton rounds 1459w
Bluestone, Karl 683w
Burglary 1485–[illegible]w
Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Finance 1477–8w
Cheshire Constabulary, Sick leave 1538–9w
Children, Abuse 1487w
Children, Departmental coordination 1342w
Civil disorder, Bradford 1473–4w
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries 99–100w
Community development 1471–2w
Convictions 1056w
Credit cards, Fraud 679–80w
Crime 86–8w, 95–7w, 557w, 680–2w, 1441–3w
Crime, Elderly 681–2w
Crime, Greater London 1472–3w
Crime, Somerset 1457–9w
Crime and disorder partnerships 89w, 680w, 1477w
Crime prevention 826–7w, 851–2w, 1461w
Crime prevention, Cellular phones 1485w
Crime prevention, Finance 794–5w, 858w
Crime prevention, Northamptonshire 1469w
Crime prevention, Retail trade 795–6w, 836w, 862–4w, 1465–6w
Crime prevention, Standards 852–4w
Crimes of violence, Retail trade 683w
Criminal investigation 832w, 1487w, 1491–2w
Criminal Records Bureau 1481–3w
Criminal Records Bureau, Complaints 1481w
Criminal Records Bureau, Standards 1481–2w
Data protection, Home Office 1495w
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Manpower 563w
Dizaei, Ali 1478w
Domestic violence, Convictions 849–50w
Driving offences 566w
Driving offences, Speed limits 105w, 827w
Driving under influence 827w

***Denham, Rt Hon John**—continued*
EC action, Home Office 564–5w
Emergencies, Chemical and biological warfare 748w
Emergency services, Radio 1470w
Emergency services, Sick leave 1053w
Ethnic groups 1503w
Firearms 94w
Football, World Cup 554w
Forensic science 109w
Forensic Science Service 1077w
Forensic Science Service, Annual reports 231–2w
Hampshire Police Authority 560w
Heathrow Airport, Theft 859w
Hertfordshire Constabulary, Manpower 1491w
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Public appointments 1487–8w
Immobilisation of vehicles, Regulation 1473w
Leicestershire Police 96w
Leicestershire Police Authority, Public appointments 560w
Luton, Home Office 1492–4w
Members, Correspondence 1065w, 1468w
Mentally incapacitated, Protection 563w
Metropolitan Police 671w, 824–5w, 1478–9w
Metropolitan Police, Complaints 1476–7w
Metropolitan Police, Criminal records 1050w
Metropolitan Police, Disciplinary proceedings 856w, 1054w
Metropolitan Police, Housing 671–2w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 1488w
Metropolitan Police, Sick leave 1049–50w
Metropolitan Police, Training 848–9w
Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence 1340w
Neighbourhood nuisance, Sheltered housing 687w
Neighbourhood wardens, Chorley 1485w
Offences against children, Northumbria 859w
Parliament Square, Demonstrations 554w
Perjury 678–9w
Police 95w, 670–1w, 1045–6w, 1480–1w
Police, Bromley 1468w
Police, Compensation 1466–8w
Police, Conditions of employment 1046w
Police, Coventry 1475–6w
Police, Diabetes 1061–2w
Police, Dismissal 95–6w
Police, Domestic violence 850w
Police, Emergency calls 100–2w
Police, Firearms 1047–50w
Police, Football 1475w
Police, Freemasonry 1502–3w
Police, Greater London 830w
Police, Havering 1474w
Police, Housing 841–2w
Police, Manpower 563w, 837w, 1486–92w
Police, North West region 850–1w
Police, Pay 836w, 849w, 859–60w
Police, Pensions 94–6w
Police, Portsmouth 561–3w
Police, Private finance initiative 560–2w
Police, Radio 98–9w, 1495–6w
Police, Recruitment 103–4w, 857–8w
Police, Reform 1478w
Police, Retirement 1046–7w
Police, Sick leave 1480w
Police, Standards 856–7w, 1495–7w, 1522–8w
Police, Training 559–60w
Police, Wandsworth 1480w
Police, Weapons 1522w
Police custody, Death 677–8w, 1054w

***Denham, Rt Hon John**—continued*
Police Reform Bill and Implementation Unit 561w
Police Standards Unit 105–6w, 1443w
Police stations 562w, 672–6w, 829–30w
Police stations, Greater London 1475w
Politics and government, Young people 188–9w, 1166w, 1363–4w
Prostitution, Children 1059w
Racial harassment 853–4w
Racial violence 665w
Rape 835w
Robbery 101–3w, 1487w
Robbery, Greater London 1474w
Security guards, Licensing 688w
Special constables, Buckinghamshire 672w
Special constables, Manpower 855–6w
Special constables, Recruitment 221w, 672w, 1054–5w
Speed limits, Cameras 687w
Surrey Police, Finance 1470–1w
Sussex Police, Early retirement 835w
Sussex Police, Finance 1459w
Theft, Cellular phones 555w, 825–6w, 1479–80w, 1484–5w
Tobacco, Young people 1456w
Vetting, Foreign workers 1482w
Vetting, Voluntary work 555w
West Mercia Constabulary, Finance 675w
West Midlands Police, Recruitment 1050–3w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1505w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 684w
Young offenders 664–6w
Young offenders, Lancashire 558w
Young people, Advisory services 204w

Dental health
189w

Dental services
189–90w
Fees and charges 662w
Gloucestershire 141–2, 1396w
Morecambe 190w
Pensioners 1438w
Wales 275–7

Departmental coordination
Children 1342w

Departmental expenditure limits
Home Office 1078w

Departmental responsibilities
Cabinet Office 1000w, 1002w
Dept for Transport 455–6w, 962w, 1261w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1081w
Referendums 1305w

Depleted uranium
see Uranium

Deployment
Aircraft carriers 284–5w
Armed forces 762w, 901w
Army 19w

Deportation
223w
Injuries 400w

Deprivation indicators
1215w

Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Annual reports 408–9w
Computers 499w
Consultation papers 410w, 496–8w, 697w, 971–4w, 1156–8w
EC action 359w, 498–9w, 633–4w
Internet 1158w
Public expenditure 407w
Public participation 974w
Publicity 698w

Dept for Culture Media and Sport—continued
Scotland 1159–60w
Visits abroad 407w
Wood 407w

Dept for Education and Skills
Civil servants 187w
Computers 651w
Consultation papers 60–4w, 985–6w
EC action 773w, 1361–3w
Energy 53w
Information officers 988w
Internet 1365–6w
Orders and regulations 1364–5w
Public expenditure 651w
Publicity 771–3w
Republic of Ireland 1363w
Standards 651w
Statistics 1365w
Telephone services 1364w
Visits abroad 773–4w

Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Advertising 474–6w
Annual reports 709w
Asda 310w
Computers 37w
Consultation papers 937–42w
Correspondence 131w, 477w, 1141–2w
EC action 35w, 69–70w, 79–80w, 301–2w, 304–5w, 486–7w, 702w, 922–9w, 952w, 957w
EC law 1150–2w
Females 134w
Information officers 1139w
Public expenditure 627–31w
Public participation 1144–6w
Public relations 916w
Secondment 32–4w
Speeches 917w
Sponsorship 921w
Standards 975

Dept for International Development
Annual reports 594w
Community development 898w
Computers 893w
Consultants 893–4w
Consultation papers 40–1w, 591–2w
Directors 1129w
Information officers 721w
Internet 900w
Manpower 1133w
Ministerial policy advisors 900w, 1132w
Public expenditure 290w
Public participation 1135w
Publicity 721–2w
Scotland 1138w
Temporary employment 1132–3w
Visits abroad 43–4w
Written questions 292w

Dept for Transport
Departmental responsibilities 455–6w, 962w, 1261w
Ministers 142–3w
Pay 962w
Press releases 733w, 1270w

Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Advertising 459w
Annual reports 999–1000w
Buildings 333w
Computers 13w
Consultation papers 13–4w, 1266–7w
Contracts 961w
EC action 6–7w, 80–1w, 332w, 358w, 435w, 632w, 731–2w, 1272–5w, 1323–4w
Empty property 453w

Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions—continued
Equal opportunities 236w
Gender impact assessment 236w
Housing 732w
Information officers 961–2w
Internet 1265w
Manpower 1262–3w
Ministerial policy advisors 1263w
Public expenditure 8w
Public participation 1265–6w
Republic of Ireland 1262w
Scotland 1262w
Speeches 962w
Temporary employment 1264w
Visits abroad 238w, 1271w
Written questions 456w

Dept for Work and Pensions
Advertising 1578–9w
Annual reports 1035w, 1587w
Buildings 262w, 605–6w, 1582w
Community development 1587–8w
Computers 294w
Consultation papers 602–4w, 814w, 1026–8w, 1596w
EC action 232–4w, 249w, 269–70w, 603–4w, 1583–4w
Energy 1023–4w
Equal pay 112w
Females 521w
Green Ministers Committee 811–2w
Information technology 512–4w
Internet 1594w
Manpower 1588–90w
Ministerial policy advisors 1596w
Newspaper press 110w
Orders and regulations 515–6w
Press 1037w
Public bodies 294w
Public expenditure 261–2w, 1586w
Public participation 1542w
Publicity 1584–6w
Recycling 1023w
Regional planning and development 1578w
Regulatory impact assessments 524–5w
Republic of Ireland 1581–2w
Scotland 1583w
Serials 605w
Standards 521w
Statistics 1024w
Telephone services 518w
Temporary employment 1587w
Visits abroad 1040w
Written questions 113–4w

Dept of Health
Buildings 206–7w
Consultation papers 1429w
Contracts 1429w
Correspondence 1378–9w, 1428w
EC action 379w, 432w, 1084w, 1339–40w, 1432–4w, 1439–40w, 1595w
EC law 205–6w, 658–9w
Empty property 663w
Energy 663w
Location 867w
Oral questions 1431w
Public participation 1094w
Publicity 1403w
Standards 409–11
Visits abroad 1429w

Dept of Trade and Industry
Annual reports 789w
Buildings 790–1w
Computers 781w
Consultation papers 791–2w, 950–1w
EC action 951–2w, 960w
Energy 77–8w
Hacking 781w
Isle of Wight 1325w

Dept of Trade and Industry—continued
Official hospitality 790w
Pay 789w
Public expenditure 789w
Public participation 172–4w
Publicity 945w
Regional planning and development 792w
Regulation 170w
Regulatory impact assessments 437w
Scotland 350w
Secondment 790w
Stationery 790w
Telephone services 791w, 954–6w

Derbyshire
Beta-interferon 203w
Primary care trusts 1382–4w

Deregulation Task Force
956w

Derelict land
1019w
Planning permission (24.07.02) 268–89wh

Dermatology
Manpower 122w

Detainees
Asylum 1043w

Developing countries
see also Heavily indebted poor countries initiative
Agricultural products 1126w
AIDS 719w
Arms trade 1138w
Children 1137–8w
Common agricultural policy 261w, 1129w
Debts 464–5w, 971
Disease control 719w
Drugs 336w, 593–4w, 1186w
EC external trade 884w, 1125–6w
Education 258–60w, 290–1w, 895–6w, 1129–30w
HIV infection 592–3w, 895w
Human rights 720w
Microfinance 293w
Multinational companies 1134–5w
Overseas companies 720w, 970–1
Poverty 260w, 968–70
Renewable energy 1130–1w
Trade 261w, 763w
Trade agreements 947w

Development aid
73w

Devolution
Liability 251w
Public expenditure 69w, 958w
Wales 320w

Devon
Day care 183–4w

Devon and Cornwall Constabulary
Manpower 563w

Dhanda, Mr Parmjit
Questions
Sure start programme 182w
Urban regeneration companies, Gloucester 281, 1016w

Diabetes
191w
Police 1061–2w
Screening 191w

Diagnostic treatment centres
1086w

Diesel engines
EC action 945–6w

Dietary supplements
EC action 413–4w, 1440–1w

Digital broadcasting
362w, 691w
BBC 1159w

Diplomatic service
384w, 889–90w, 1319w

Dir64/432/EC
131–2w

Dir86/635/EEC
337w

Dir99/31/EC
28–9w

Dir2000/35/EC
210w

Dir2000/53/EC
1332w

Dir2001/29/EC
169w

Dir2002/15/EC
710w

Director of Public Prosecutions
see Crown Prosecution Service

Directors
Commonwealth Development Corporation 450w, 581–2w, 584w
Dept for International Development 1129w

Directors Remuneration Report Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(15.07.02) 127

Disability aids
201w, 1092w
Social security benefits 1558w
Telecommunications 405–7w

Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Questions
263–4w, 1038–9w

Disability living allowance
1573–4w
Scotland 814–5w

Disabled
1038–9w
Access 1007–8w, 1574w
Councillors 271–2w
Employment 1575–7w
Health education 423w
Jobcentre Plus 812w
Post offices 349w
Social security benefits 1569–73w, 1575w
Village halls 263–4w
Young people 121–2w

"Disabled Person's Parking Badge Scheme Consultation Paper"
1245–6w

Disadvantaged
Pre-school education 188w
Public participation (24.07.02) 290–6wh
Transport 1214–5w

Disciplinary proceedings
Doctors 1091w
Fire Service College 18w
Health professions 1091w
Metropolitan Police 856w, 1054w
Prison Service 1516w
Prisons 1536w

Discipline
Schools 1343w

Discrimination
Employment 1032–3w

Disease control
Bovine tuberculosis 131–3w, 136w, 931–3w, 1147w, 1378w

Disease control—continued
Developing countries 719w
Foot and mouth disease 306w, 1153w
Sheep 31w
South East Asia 281

Diseases
Bees 489w
Children 124w, 1422–3w
Fish 35–6w
Pigs 305–6w

Dismissal
Police 95–6w

Dismore, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 603–5
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 610–4, 630
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 564–84, 587, 590, 595–6, 599
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 633, 635–6
Questions
Civil service agencies 726w
Criminal Records Bureau, Administrative delays 1453w
Foster care, Ethnic groups 119w
Middle East, Antisemitism 181w, 765w
NHS Pensions Agency, Standards 1083w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 181w
Social services, Finance 1409w
Social services, Standards 119w

Disqualification
Social security benefits 815–8w, 1024–6w

Distribution
Electricity 1329w

District councils
Standards 249w

Divorce (Religious Marriages) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Dizaei, Ali
1478w

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1015
Questions
Alconbury airfield, Planning permission 245w
Broadband, Huntingdon 439w
Housing, Construction 1018–9w
Local government, Standards 440w
NHS, Finance 464w
Parish councils, Codes of practice 1009w
Parish councils, Resignations 1009w

Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Questions
Criminal Records Bureau, Capita 827–8w
Licensing laws 498w

Doctors
Disciplinary proceedings 1091w
Foreign workers 202–3w, 1394w
Recruitment 202w, 1100–1w
Reserve forces 422w, 1111w

Doctors' list of patients
201w, 1392w

Dodds, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 184–5, 194

Dodds, Mr Nigel—continued
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 226, 238–9, (24.07.02) 995–6

Dogs
308w

Domestic Combined Heat and Power (Reduction in VAT) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (24.07.02) 1020

Domestic violence
Convictions 849–50w
Immigration rules 229w
Police 850w

Donaldson, Mr Jeffrey M
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 233, 242–5, (24.07.02) 998
Questions
Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption 1404w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H
Questions
Billing, Government departments 442–3w

Donors
Kidneys 657w
Organs 658w

Doran, Mr Frank
Questions
India, Terrorism 879w
Social security benefits, Applications 600w

Dorset
Council tax benefits 268w
Housing benefit 268w
Pensioners 268–9w
State retirement pensions 268w

Double glazing
Council housing 1220w

Double jeopardy
1461–2w

Double taxation
Lithuania 959w
South Africa 959w
USA 822w

Doughty, Sue
Debates etc.
Local Sustainability Bill, 1R (23.07.02) 886
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 205–8wh
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 259–62wh
Questions
Green Ministers Committee, Dept for Work and Pensions 811–2w
Green Ministers Committee, Home Office 547w
House of Commons, Recycling 50–1w, 324–5w
Local government, Private finance initiative 941–2w
Paper, Prime Minister 802w
Recycling, Cabinet Office 641w
Recycling, Dept for Work and Pensions 1023w
Recycling, Prime Minister 75w
Suicide, Females 152–4
Tipping of waste 28–9w, 315w
Tipping of waste, Planning permission 941w

Dowd, Jim
Questions
Road traffic 143w

***Dowd, Jim**—continued*
Road traffic, Greater London 1247–8w

Dredging
Wales 37–8w

Drew, Mr David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 89–94wh
Questions
Central Science Laboratory, Annual reports 915w
Common land 915w
Dental services, Gloucestershire 1396w
European Parliamentary Elections Bill (HL) 2001/02 607–8w
Euthanasia 1302w
Flood control 626–7w
Further education, Finance 645–6w
Health services, Cooperatives 212w, 655w
"Making Decisions Consultation Paper" 1082w
Mentally incapacitated 529w
Police, Pay 836w, 849w
Poultry, Animal welfare 915w
Rural Payments Agency, Standards 914–5w
Sudan, Armed conflict 837–8
Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Annual reports 916w
Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Annual reports 915–6w
Village halls 308w
Water supply, Competition 916w

Drinking water
Fluoride 417–8w, 1390w

Driver information systems
1253–4w

Driving
Cellular phones 1234w
Licensing 965w

Driving instruction
Young people 307w

Driving offences
566w
Petitions (16.07.02) 261
Speed limits 105w, 827w
Surrey 827w

Driving under influence
742–3w, 827w, 967w, 1063w, 1448–54w
Cannabis 403–4w

Drown, Ms Julia
Debates etc.
Imitation guns (22.07.02) 765–7
Rape (Consent) Bill, 1R (16.07.02) 174–6
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 772
Questions
Business questions 427–8
Firearms 94w
Firearms, Convictions 1056–8w
Local government, Pay 1194w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 208w
Trade agreements, Developing countries 947w

Drug resistance
AIDS 1389w

Drug seizures
87w
Scotland 1179w

Drug treatment and testing orders
104w

Drugs
Abortion 1434–7w
Children 88w

***Drugs**—continued*
Crime 87w, 104–5w, 396–7w, 666–70w, 1461–2w
Death 404w
Developing countries 336w, 593–4w, 1186w
Haemophilia 421w
Iran 4–5w
Lactose 413w
Merseyside 1504w
Misuse 87–8w, 202w, 404w, 559w, 1068–9w, 1504w
Multiple sclerosis 199w
Northern Ireland 508w
Nottinghamshire 1462–3w
Portsmouth 836w
Prisons 828w
Smuggling (22.07.02) 803–6
Sports 696w
Worcester 202w
Young offender institutions 1445–6w

Duchess of Kent Military Hospital
754w

Duke of York's Royal Military School
Standards 1117w

Duncan, Mr Alan
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 106–9wh, 112wh
Questions
Liberia, Armed conflict 1306w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces 1308w
Sierra Leone, Elections 1309w
Sierra Leone, Peace keeping operations 1309–10w
Sierra Leone, Peace negotiations 1308–10w
Sudan, Armed conflict 838
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 1307w

Duncan, Mr Peter
Questions
Care homes, Fees and charges 202w
Care homes, Scotland 198w
Energy, Conservation 27–8w
Medicine, Scotland 127w
Post offices, Scotland 774w
Smuggling 1173w
Social security benefits, Disability aids 1558w
State retirement pensions 1539w
Visits abroad, Scotland Office 1225w
Wind power 788w

Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (15.07.02) 33
Questions
Crime 278–80
Pensions, Taxation 283
Pupil exclusions 978–9
Terrorism 972–4

Dungavel Detention Centre
232w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 859
Questions
Police, Manpower 837w
Shipping, Accidents 8w

Durham County
Education 1352w
Mental health services 127w

Dyslexia
Hyperactivity 990w

***Eagle, Maria**, Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions*
Debates etc.
Children, Day care (17.07.02) 393–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Child Support Agency (16.07.02) 55–8wh
Pensioners, Income support (24.07.02) 310–4wh
Questions
Access to work programme 1566w
Attendance allowance 1582w
Attendance allowance, Scotland 112w
Carers, Social security benefits 111–2w
Community development, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587–8w
Disability living allowance 1573–4w
Disability living allowance, Scotland 814–5w
Disabled 1038–9w
Disabled, Access 1574w
Disabled, Village halls 263–4w
Employment, Disabled 1576–7w
Employment schemes, Aspergers syndrome 113–4w
Energy, Dept for Work and Pensions 1023–4w
Green Ministers Committee, Dept for Work and Pensions 811–2w
Incapacity benefit 1568–9w
Industry 111w
Jobcentre Plus, Disabled 812w
Maternity payments, Sure start programme 1559w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Work and Pensions 1596w
New deal schemes 111w
Recycling, Dept for Work and Pensions 1023w
Social security benefits, Appeals 114w, 1033–4w, 1557–8w
Social security benefits, Applications 600w
Social security benefits, Children in care 813–4w
Social security benefits, Disability aids 1558w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1569–72w
Social security benefits, Personal injury 1578w
Vaccination, Compensation 1593w
Written questions, Dept for Work and Pensions 113–4w

Early retirement
NHS 542w, 1380w
Sussex Police 835w

East Timor
1313w
Homicide 1319–20w

Eastern Europe
Iron and steel 1130w
Overseas aid 1128w
Regional planning and development 590w

Eastern region
Hospital beds 1094–8w
Regional planning and development 343w

EC action
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 359w, 498–9w, 633–4w
Dept for Education and Skills 773w, 1361–3w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 35w, 69–70w, 79–80w, 301–2w, 304–5w, 486–7w, 702w, 922–9w, 952w, 957w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 6–7w, 80–1w, 332w, 358w, 435w, 632w, 731–2w, 1272–5w, 1323–4w

EC action—continued
Dept for Work and Pensions 232–4w, 249w, 269–70w, 603–4w, 1583–4w
Dept of Health 379w, 432w, 1084w, 1339–40w, 1432–4w, 1439–40w, 1595w
Dept of Trade and Industry 951–2w, 960w
Diesel engines 945–6w
Dietary supplements 413–4w, 1440–1w
Electronic equipment (18.07.02) 537
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 359–60w
Genetically modified organisms 37w
Home Office 564–5w, 632w, 1044w, 1063–5w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278–9w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 633w
Pollution 946–7w
Public transport 454–5w
Regulation 360–1w
Temporary employment (15.07.02) 127
Transport 1272w
Treasury 339w, 471–2w, 636–7w, 747–8w, 1173–6w
Wood 710–1w
Zimbabwe 174w

EC Agriculture Council
309–10w

EC aid
880w

EC budget
(17.07.02) 310

EC countries
Defence 23w
Ferries 1233w
Medical treatments 201w, 538w, 871–2w
Rapid reaction forces 26w

EC defence policy
611w

EC Economic and Social Committee
1314–6w

EC enlargement
181w, 880w, 882w
Cyprus 179–80w, 883–4w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 1132w
Poland 842–3
Turkey 3w

EC environmental policy
355w
Procurement 354–5w

EC external trade
Animal products 300w
Developing countries 884w, 1125–6w

EC Finance Council
338–9w

EC grants and loans
Gibraltar 764–5w
Higher education 187w
Wales 318–21w

EC Health Council
1087–8w

EC institutions
386–7w
Manpower 1315w

EC law
Conditions of employment 446–7w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1150–2w
Dept of Health 205–6w, 658–9w
Flood control 625–6w
Herbal medicine 150–2
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 323w
Scotland Office 382w

EC law—continued
Solicitor-General 288w
Working hours (17.07.02) 121–8wh, 710w

EC presidency
Greece 881w

Ecclesbourne School
(22.07.02) 745–8

Economic and monetary union
470–1w, 1198–9w
NHS 1198w
Wales 1378w

Economic policy
(17.07.02) 397–400

Economic situation
1199w
South West region 467w

Edinburgh
Army 1115w

Education
Agriculture 648w
Asylum 773w, 1045w
Castle Point (22.07.02) 821–8
Central African Republic 716–7w
Commonwealth 713–4w
Developing countries 258–60w, 290–1w, 895–6w, 1129–30w
Durham County 1352w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre 849w, 1077w
Finance 1366w
Medicine 657w
Ministerial statements (16.07.02) 155–73
Pilot schemes 1347–50w
Prisons 1498–502w
Stafford (22.07.02) 759–61
Standard spending assessments 1215w
Surrey 1352w

Education Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Programme motion* and Lords amendts (15.07.02) 46–126
Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1021–43
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080
Questions
1341w

Education of children at home
North West region 1346w

Educational institutions
Computer software 651–2w

Educational maintenance allowance
Morley 57w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Questions
Administration of justice, Annual reports 403w
Antisemitism 221–2w
Jobcentre Plus, Wales 321–2w
Overseas aid 464w
Territorial Army 20w

Efford, Clive
Questions
Asylum, Children 550–2w
Asylum, Greater London 549–50w
Carers, Greater London 219w
Community development 341–3w
Education, Asylum 773w
Foster care, Greater London 1221–2w
Health services, Greater London 873w
Hospital beds, Greater London 640w, 660w, 1221w
National Care Standards Commission, Finance 213–4w
Post offices, Urban areas 998w
Race relations 1060–1w

Efford, Clive—continued
Social services, Greater London 249w, 531–4w, 654–6w
Social workers, Greater London 655w
Teachers, Ethnic groups 364w
Teachers, Manpower 364w
Teachers, Retirement 364w
Tourists, Expenditure 497w

Eggs
920–1w

Elderly
Birmingham (22.07.02) 780–3
Crime 681–2w
Health services 128–9w
Ministerial statements (23.07.02) 869–84
Residential and nursing care see Institutional care
Social services 1098–9w
Staffordshire 190–1w

Elections
Expenditure 1080w
Ivory Coast 390w
Local government 83w, 244w
Macedonia 611w
Mali 1306w
Sierra Leone 1309w
Wales 699–700w, 724w
Zimbabwe 174w

Electoral Commission
1123w

Electoral register
665–6

Electoral systems
996w
Scotland 77w

Electricity
Distribution 1329w

Electricity generation
Markets 1330w
Prices 944w

Electronic commerce
Private sector 781w
Public private partnerships 960–1w

Electronic equipment
EC action (18.07.02) 537
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 235w
Waste disposal 482–3w, 1332w

Electronic government
726–7w
Democracy 182–3w

Electronic voting
664–6, 1016w
Finance 1016w

11 Downing Street
Air conditioning 803w
Repairs and maintenance 804w

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Questions
Electronic voting 665
Gibraltar, Spain 612w
Israel, Arms trade 840
Regional arts boards 692w
Regional development agencies, Finance 1213–4w
Sussex Police, Early retirement 835w

Embassies
1318w
Israel 553w
USA 145w

Emergencies
Chemical and biological warfare 748w
Planning 727w, 1070w

Emergency calls
Police 100–2w

Emergency services
Radio 1470w
Sick leave 1053w

Employee share ownership schemes
1183w

Employer Direct
1035w

Employers' liability
Insurance 250–1w

Employment
Asylum 1041–2w
Disabled 1575–7w
Discrimination 1032–3w
Females 793w
Glasgow 1575–6w
Mentally ill 123–4w, 126w, 196w
Yorkshire and Humberside 67–8w, 637w

Employment agencies
949w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 608–9w

Employment Relations Act 1999
Questions
440–1w, 777w, 1164w

Employment schemes
Asperger's syndrome 113–4w

Employment Tribunal System Taskforce
1338w

Employment tribunals
954w

Employment zones
523–4w, 1593w

Empty property
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 453w
Dept of Health 663w
Housing 1003–6w, 1017w

Encephalitis
1432w

Endangered Species (Illegal Trade) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Endangered Species (Offences) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (22.07.02) 705

Endometriosis
423–4w
Petitions (17.07.02) 388

Energy
(16.07.02) 59–66wh, 711w, 943–4w
Competition 346w, 943w
Conservation 27–8w, 249–50w, 479w, 485w
Dept for Education and Skills 53w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1023–4w
Dept of Health 663w
Dept of Trade and Industry 77–8w
Hacking 346w
Home Office 544w
NHS 211–2w

Energy supply
347–8w, 1335–6w
Terrorism 842–3w

Engineers
Air force 23–4w

Engines
Future large aircraft 492–3w

English Partnerships
1211–3w

English Sports Council
Finance 976–7w
Manpower 979w
Pay 975w, 979w

Ennis, Jeff
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders, South Yorkshire 557–8w
Arms trade, Export controls 611w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 350w
Mining, Pensions 775w
NHS Direct 144
Primary care trusts, Barnsley 1386w

Enterprise investment scheme
1184w

Entertainments
Public houses 649–50

Entry clearances
684w, 887w
Genetics 1446w
India 1532w
Indian subcontinent (22.07.02) 748–51, 1311–2w
Macedonia 402w
Zimbabwe 4w

Environment
Ministerial policy advisors 312w

Environment Agency
622w
Public appointments 1144w

Environment protection
Albania 588–9w
Curriculum 480w
Design 1333w
Export credit guarantees 779w
International cooperation 39–40w
Know-How Fund 720w
Prison Service 564w
QinetiQ 912–3w

Environmental Audit (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 638

Environmental Protection Act 1990
Questions
308w

Environmentally sensitive areas
622w

Epilepsy
1406–9w

Equal opportunities
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Home Office 555w
Scotland Office 768w

Equal pay
792–3w
Dept for Work and Pensions 112w
Home Office 546–7w

Equitable Life Independent Inquiry
636w, 1339w

Etherington, Bill
Questions
Fluoride, Drinking water 1390w

Ethiopia
Overseas aid 1126w

Ethnic groups
1503w
Armed forces 14–5
Botswana 176w
Cameroon 1124w

Ethnic groups—continued
Foster care 119w
Mental health services 197w
Prison governors 835w
Prison Service 1508–16w
Prisoners 1508–16w
Teachers 364w

EU Better Regulation Consultative Group
see Mandelkern Group

EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council
1059–60w

Euro
Overseas trade 1198w
Tourism 695w

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC enlargement 1132w

European Communities
see also EC and EU headings

European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 397–400

"European Community Finances White Paper"
822w

European economic area
Winter fuel payments 599w

European Energy and Transport Forum
731–2w, 1338w

European fighter aircraft
21w, 156–7w, 492w, 760w

European Parliament elections
699w
Gibraltar 1291w

European Parliamentary Elections Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R* and 3R* (15.07.02) 126
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080
Questions
607–8w

European Police Office
Powers 223–4w

European Scrutiny Committee
Explanatory notes 1165–6w

European technology acquisition programme
904w

Euthanasia
1301–3w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Questions
Crime, Wales 275
Drugs, Crime 666–7w
Health services, Wales 270
Hospital beds, Lancashire 204–5w
Police, North West region 850–1w
Police, Sick leave 1480w
Postal workers, Vacancies 350w
Public appointments, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1377w
Public Guardianship Office, Complaints 412w
Publications, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375–6w
Regional airports, Wales 272
Theft, Cellular phones 1484–5w
Working hours, Parents 171w
Young offenders, Lancashire 558w

Ewing, Annabelle
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 491, 496–8, 511, 520
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Pensioners, Income support (24.07.02) 309wh, 313wh
Questions
Agriculture, Scotland 308–9w
Airports, Scotland 983w
Army, Young people 277w
Aviation, Scotland 970w
Beef, France 309w, 1228w
Civil servants, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1373w
Common fisheries policy 919w
Crown Estate Commissioners, Scotland 274w, 469w
Customs and Excise, Scotland 470w, 1171–2w
Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Almondbank 163w
Disability living allowance, Scotland 814–5w
Drug seizures, Scotland 1179w
Dungavel Detention Centre 232w
Fisheries, Quotas 621w
Foreign workers 1062–3w
Hewlett-Packard, Redundancy 983w
Incapacity benefit, Child benefit 1567w
Liquefied petroleum gas, Scotland 1230–2w
Lockerbie, Bombings 765–6w
Maladministration, Home Office 1486w
Manpower, Dept for International Development 1133w
Manpower, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262–3w
Manpower, Dept for Work and Pensions 1588–90w
Manpower, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1322–4w
Manpower, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1377w
Manpower, Scotland Office 1229–30w
Manpower, Treasury 1172w
Older people consultative forums, Public appointments 1022w
Pension credit 1540w
Scotland, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1159–60w
Scotland, Dept for International Development 1138w
Scotland, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Scotland, Dept for Work and Pensions 1583w
Scotland, Dept of Trade and Industry 350w
Scotland, Prime Minister 1372w
Scotland, Scotland Office 1230w
Scotland, Treasury 1171–3w
Social Fund 270w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1569–72w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1554w
Unemployment, Scotland 983–4w
VAT, Fuels 1171w

Exchange rates
65w, 413–4, 1182–3w

Excise duties
Fuels 462w, 467–8w, 740–1w
Motor vehicles 10–1w, 334w

Exhaust emissions
479w

Explanatory notes
European Scrutiny Committee 1165–6w

Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002
Questions
506w

Export Control Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1045–9
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Export controls
Arms trade 77–8w, 384w, 435–6w, 611w, 780w, 1317–8w, 1330w
India 435w
Pakistan 435w

Export credit guarantees
(23.07.02) 202–23wh
Environment protection 779w

Ex[illegible]ort Credits Guarantee Dept
Tr[illegible]g funds 779–80w

Expor[illegible]
Beef 115[illegible]
India 358–9w
Licensing 358–[illegible]6–7w
Sheep 921–2w

Exservicemen
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 160w, 909–12w
Pensions 1200–1w
Sleeping rough 753–4w

Eyesight
Police 103–4w

Fabricant, Michael
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (18.07.02) 422
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 707, 709, 711, 713, 715,721–3
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 891
Questions
Bishops 664
Cathedrals, Repairs and maintenance 667–8
Churches, Planning permission 723–4w
House of Commons, Internet 325–6w
House of Commons, Publications 1167w
Marines 17
Members, Computers 711w
Poland, EC enlargement 843
Sheep meat, Wales 277
Sports, Young people 658–9
VAT, Charities 463w

Fallon, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 922–6

Family planning
China 1135–6w

Family practitioner services
Petitions (15.07.02) 128

Famine
Angola 447–8w, 585–6w
Lesotho 717w
Southern Africa 587w

Fares
Railways 568w, 1242w

Farmers
see also Agriculture
Income 1147w

Farms
see also Agriculture
Game 823–4w

Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre
Education 849w, 1077w

Females
Advocate General for Scotland 985w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 134w
Dept for Work and Pensions 521w
Employment 793w
India 260w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 411w
Ministry of Defence 283–4w
Northern Ireland Office 509w
Prison governors 834w
Prisoners 832–3w
Scotland Office 983w
Suicide 152–4

Ferries
EC countries 1233w

Field, Rt Hon Frank
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 701
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 613, 618–23, 628–9
Questions
Criminal Records Bureau, Administrative delays 1518w
Fraud, Home Office 403w
Housing benefit, Abuse 266w
Income support 1024–5w
Social security benefits, Abuse 595w, 1555–6w
Social security benefits, Deductions 1589–92w
Social security benefits, Disqualification 815–8w, 1024w

Field, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 509
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 4–5wh, 13–5wh
Questions
Foreign trade 175w
Mental Health Bill (Draft) 191w
Secondment, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w

Finance Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Financial services
British overseas territories 1315–6w
Buckingham 1199–200w
Complaints 65w
Misrepresentation 335–6w
VAT 824w

Financial Services Act 1986
Questions
35[illegible]-1w

Financial Services Authority
1177w

Financial Services Compensation Scheme
468–9w

Financial Services Consumer Panel
Bank services 270w

Fines
Debit cards 607w
Defaulters 82w, 608w
Greater Manchester 1300–2w

Fire extinguishers
235w

Fire prevention
1211w
Wales 320w

Fire Service College
Disciplinary proceedings 18w

Fire services
Government assistance 1015–6w
Offshore industry 638w
Pay 1002w
Radio 245w, 343w

Firearms
94w, 1069–70w
Convictions 1056–8w
Manchester 285–6
Police 1047–50w

Firearms (Amendment) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (15.07.02) 46
2R order read (19.07.02) 639

Firearms (Replica Weapons) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 635

Fires
150–2w

Fireworks
Northern Ireland 506w

Firing ranges
Imber 24–5w, 162w
Shoeburyness 20w

Fish
Diseases 35–6w

Fisher, Mr Mark
Questions
Religious broadcasting, Licensing 1157w

Fisheries
132w, 967–8w
Compensation 1327w
Quotas 621w
Spain 621w

Fitzsimons, Lorna
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 294

Fixed penalties
Illegal immigrants 552w
Immigration controls 220w
Road traffic offences 843w

Fixed-Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(16.07.02) 259–60

Fixed-Term Parliaments Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Flags
82w
Proscribed organisations 505w

Fleet Air Arm
22–3w

Flight, Mr Howard
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 891
Questions
Business 408
Homicide, Habitual offenders 843w
Surgery, Private sector 202w

Flint, Caroline
Debates etc.
Children, Day care (17.07.02) 389–93
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 40–1

Flood control
(16.07.02) 22–44wh, 302–3w, 310–1w, 621–7w, 703–5w, 934w

Flood control—continued
EC law 625–6w

Floods
Canvey Island 933–4w

Flook, Mr Adrian
Questions
Bus services, Somerset 1243w
Learndirect centres, Taunton 1351–2w
Limitation of actions 272w
Railways, Taunton 1243w
Roads, Construction 1247w
Somerset College for Arts and Technology, Finance 1351w
Sports, Taunton 51w
Television, Licensing 1160w

Fluoride
Drinking water 417–8w, 1390w
Food 418w
Toothpaste 417w

Flynn, Paul
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Mortgages (16.07.02) 50–1wh
Questions
Agriculture, Subsidies 1139w
Business questions 432–3
Defence, Expenditure 1–2
Disability living allowance 1574w
Foot and mouth disease, Public footpaths 1139–40w
Incapacity benefit 1568–9w
Incapacity benefit, Pensioners 1567–8w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1571–3w
State retirement pensions 1539–40w

Follett, Barbara
Questions
Bank notes 470w
Double taxation, South Africa 959w
Double taxation, USA 822w
Economic and monetary union 470–1w
Energy, Conservation 249–50w
"European Community Finances White Paper" 822w
Financial Services Authority 1177w
Government departments, Publications 958–9w
Inland Revenue, Expenditure 253–4w
Office for National Statistics, Annual reports 821w
Public expenditure, Devolution 69w
Statistics Commission, Annual reports 336w
"Tax Benefit Reference Manual, 2002/03" 960w
Terrorism, Finance 959w
UK Debt Management Office, Annual reports 958w
VAT, Imports 336–7w

Food
Acrylamide 1431–2w
Babies 418w
Fluoride 418w
Genetically modified organisms 36–7w
Hospitals 200w
Imports 298w
Labelling 1384–5w
Mozambique 42–3w, 587w
Procurement 447w
Safety 430–1w, 1100w

Food Labelling Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Order for resuming adjourned 2R read (19.07.02) 635

Food Poverty (Eradication) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 631

Food Safety (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Food Standards Agency
429w
Scotland 1226w

Foot and mouth disease
301w
Addresses to the Crown (22.07.02) 649
Compensation 306w
Disease control 306w, 1153w
Ministerial statements (22.07.02) 669–88
Public footpaths 1139–40w
Tourism 693w
Wales 317w

Football
Police 1475w
World Cup 554w

Football Spectators Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 631

Forced labour
Import controls 776w

Forced marriage
658w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Airlines 177w
Annual reports 890w
Aviation 384–5w
Civil servants 178w
Computers 884w
Consultation papers 885–6w
EC action 359–60w
Employment agencies 608–9w
Government information services 5w
Internet 1319w
Manpower 1322–4w
Ministerial policy advisors 1321–2w
Photography 884w
Public expenditure 2w
Public participation 1321w
Publicity 887w
Republic of Ireland 1320w
Standards 2w
Temporary employment 1322w
Visits abroad 762–3w

Foreign investment in UK
412–3, 1176w
Wales 316–7w

Foreign relations
Cyprus 178–80w
Hong Kong 888w
Iran 845–6
Ukraine 836–7

Foreign students
Child benefit 263w

Foreign trade
175w

Foreign workers
440w, 1062–3w
Doctors 202–3w, 1394w
Minimum wage 440w
NHS 1101w
Nurses 419w
Teachers 368–9w, 645w
Vetting 1482w

Forensic science
109w

Forensic Science Agency of Northern Ireland
see Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency

Forensic Science Service
1077w
Annual reports 231–2w

Forestry Commission
Finance 627–31w

Forests
Indonesia 448–9w, 591w
Papua New Guinea 591w
Petitions (24.07.02) 1071

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 539–44
Business questions intervention (18.07.02) 429
Deferred divisions, Points of order (18.07.02) 536–7, (19.07.02) 555–6, (24.07.02) 1043–4
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 211
Members, Points of order (18.07.02) 533
Ministerial statement intervention (15.07.02) 41
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 632, 640
Recess motions (22.07.02) 806–9
Select committees (22.07.02) 730
Questions
Business statements 421–5
Members, Pensions 83–4w
Members' interests, Home Office 394w
Members' interests, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278w
Members' interests, Scotland Office 982w
Public appointments, Treasury 337–8w

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Debates etc.
Museums and galleries, North East region (15.07.02) 131–2

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 855–6
Housing (18.07.02) 445–6
Questions
A140 966–7w
Automatic train protection 1243w
Building alterations, Capital allowances 242w
Building alterations, VAT 242w
Buildings, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 333w
Cars 967w, 1016w
Channel tunnel, Freight 329w
Civil Contingencies Committee 108w
Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Finance 344w
Community Development Venture Fund 1201w
Consultation papers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 972w
Consultation papers, Dept for Education and Skills 985w
Consultation papers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 938–42w
Consultation papers, Dept for International Development 40w
Consultation papers, Dept for Work and Pensions 602–4w
Consultation papers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 885w
Consultation papers, Home Office 839–40w
Consultation papers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 796–8w
Consultation papers, Ministry of Defence 1106w
Consultation papers, Scotland Office 769w
Consultation papers, Treasury 1181–2w

Foster, Mr Don—continued
Crossrail line 1241w
Dental services 189–90w
Departmental responsibilities, Cabinet Office 1000w, 1002w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept for Transport 455–6w, 962w, 1261w
Elections, Expenditure 1080w
Electronic voting 1016w
Electronic voting, Finance 1016w
Emergencies, Chemical and biological warfare 748w
Empty property, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 453w
Empty property, Dept of Health 663w
Exhaust emissions 479w
Fire prevention 1211w
Fire services, Government assistance 1015–6w
Health and Safety Commission 326w
Highways Agency 333w
Highways Agency, Contracts 1248–50w
Housing 638w
Housing, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 732w
Housing, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Local Government Bill (Draft) 236w
Local transport plans 326–7w, 329–31w
Ministers, Dept for Transport 142–3w
Ministers, Redundancy pay 1218w, 1270w
Multiple occupation, Death 238w
New Opportunities Fund, Recreation spaces 243w
Office of the Rail Regulator 568w
Pay, Dept for Transport 962w
Planning, Urban areas 639w
Pollution control, Tax allowances 242w
Pre-school education, Disadvantaged 188w
Press releases, Dept for Transport 733w, 1270w
Press releases, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Private companies, Government assistance 69w
Public transport, EC action 454–5w
Railway stations, Safety 571w
Railways, Accidents 326w, 744–5w
Railways, Finance 327w
Railways, Franchises 744w
Railways, Freight 969w
Railways, Standards 1241w
Railways, Vandalism 745w, 1240w
Recreation spaces, Standards 242–3w
Regional planning and development, Dept for Work and Pensions 1578w
Regional planning and development, Dept of Trade and Industry 792w
Regional planning and development, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1204–6w
Road traffic, Forecasts 331–2w
Road traffic control 454w
Roads, Construction 456–9w, 573–4w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 329w, 332–3w, 454w, 738–9w
Roads, Safety 11–2w, 454w
Speeches, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 962w
Speed limits 328w, 1248w
Strategic Rail Authority 567–8w
Thailand, Aviation 763–4w
Transport, Accidents 1242w
Transport, Disadvantaged 1214–5w
Transport, Planning 573w, 1277w
Transport, Telephone services 327–8w
Transport, Urban areas 1271–2w
Transport Direct 733–5w
Transport for London, Finance 17w

Foster, Mr Don—continued
Transport Works Authorisation Branch 45–8w
Transport Works Authorisation Branch, Manpower 47w
Travel, Research 734w
Voting methods 1016w
Working hours, EC law 710w
Written questions, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 456w

Foster, Mr Michael Jabez, (Hastings and Rye)
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 455
Questions
"Code of Practice on Access to Government Information Monitoring Report 2001" 1288w
Pension credit, Hastings 1032w
Regulation, Voluntary organisations 1165w

Foster, Mr Michael John, (Worcester)
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Flood control (16.07.02) 30–2wh
Questions
Drugs, Misuse 202w
Poverty, Children 462–3w
"Royal Society Scientific Review of Infectious Diseases in Livestock" 140–1w

Foster care
117–8w, 662w, 1402–4w
Ethnic groups 119w
Greater London 1221–2w
Recruitment 541w, 1402w

Foulkes, Rt Hon George
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 685
Questions
Defence Fire Service 16–7

Fox, Dr Liam
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 872–4
Questions
Cancer 415w
General practitioners, Recruitment 1393w
Heart diseases, Surgery 1380–2w
Influenza, Vaccination 1083w
NHS, Public appointments 865–7w
Primary care trusts 148–50

"Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate"
1148–9w

France
Beef 309w, 934–5w, 1228w
Immigration controls 219–20w, 229w
Sheep meat 936–7w

Franchises
Railways 744w

Francis, Dr Hywel
Questions
Iron and steel, Wales 318w

Francois, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 319–20, 338, 349, 355–8, 364, 367–8, 385
Education, Castle Point (22.07.02) 826
Housing (18.07.02) 455
London Underground, Points of order (17.07.02) 306
Planning permission (22.07.02) 793–5
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 906
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 757, 798

***Francois, Mr Mark**—continued*
Questions
Emergencies, Planning 727w
Foot and mouth disease, Wales 317w
Gibraltar, EC grants and loans 764–5w
Gibraltar, Spain 883w
Pensions 401

Fraud
Credit cards 679–80w
Home Office 403w
Insurance 555w

Free school meals
372–4w

Freedom of information
Codes of practice 797–8w, 1292–4w

Freedom of Information Act 2000
Questions
797–8w, 1167w
Government departments 272w

Freemasonry
Police 1502–3w

Freight
Channel tunnel 323–4w, 329w, 968w
Railways 570w, 968–9w
Roads 570w

Fuels
Excise duties 462w, 467–8w, 740–1w
Motor vehicles 1246–7w
Public transport 1177w
VAT 1171w

Funeral payments
604–5w

Further education
(17.07.02) 113–20wh, 1352w
Buildings 989w
Finance 645–6w, 771w, 986–9w
Pay 642w, 770–1w

Future large aircraft
Engines 492–3w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 861–2
Questions
BBC External Services, Pay 390w
Chiropody, Recruitment 425w
Road works, Utilities 333–4w

Galileo project
803w, 1107w, 1268–70w

Game
Farms 823–4w

Gapes, Mike
Questions
Arts and Humanities Research Board 992–3w
Bahrain 836
NATO, Russia 18–9

Gardiner, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 565–7, 569–72, 584, 591
Questions
Africa, Meat 387–8w
Asylum, Employment 1041–2w
Business 408–9
Environment protection, International cooperation 39–40w
Wembley Stadium 1159w
Wildlife, Meat 484–5w, 705–6w, 920w, 1140w, 1367–8w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 706w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 293
Questions
Members, Correspondence 1379w

Gas and Electricity Markets Authority
786w
Pay 354w

Gas supply
see Natural gas

Gatwick Airport
1234w
Air routes 1241w
Landing rights 1234–5w

Gender impact assessment
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Home Office 556w
Scotland Office 768w

General certificate of secondary education
Children in care 123w
Standards 772w

General Lighthouse Fund
1275–6w

General practitioners
803–4w
Conditions of employment 1393w
Finance 424w
Recruitment 201w, 1393w
Standards 1411–2w
Waiting lists 418–9w
West Sussex 1394–5w

General Service Medal
Suez 907–8w, 1104w

Generic prescribing
1383w

Genetically modified organisms
702w, 774–5w
Crops 33–4w, 700–2w
EC action 37w
Food 36–7w

Genetics
Entry clearances 1446w
Identification of criminals 1517w

George, Rt Hon Bruce
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 332, 340–6
Questions
Skin cancer 208–9w

German measles
Vaccination 423w, 1391–2w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 591–6
Questions
Employment, Disabled 1576w
Entry clearances, Genetics 1446w

Gibb, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 41
Questions
Acrylamide, Food 1431–2w
Asylum, Identity cards 548w
British Nuclear Fuels, Accountancy 1336–7w
British Nuclear Fuels, Finance 1337w
Driving, Licensing 965w
Fines, Defaulters 82w, 608w
Identity cards, Fees and charges 1194–5w
Immigration controls 98w

***Gibb, Mr Nick**—continued*
National insurance 1194w
Network Rail, Finance 1183w
Primary education, Standards 367–8w
Programme for international student assessment 66–7w
Public finance 466w

Gibraltar
EC grants and loans 764–5w
European Parliament elections 1291w
Spain 1w, 281w, 286, 391–2w, 473–4w, 611–2w, 765w, 882–3w
Statistics 765w

Gibson, Dr Ian
Questions
Cervical cancer, Screening 419–21w
Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, Disclosure of information 1391w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 659w
Vaccination, USA 1391w

Gidley, Sandra
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 74wh, 76–81wh
Questions
Defence Munitions, Dean Hill 285–7w
Defence Munitions, Gosport 286w
Defence Munitions, Operating costs 285w
Equal opportunities, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Equal opportunities, Home Office 555w
Equal opportunities, Scotland Office 768w
Gender impact assessment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Gender impact assessment, Home Office 556w
Gender impact assessment, Scotland Office 768w
Mental health services, Hospital beds 141
NHS Direct, Recruitment 421w
NHS Direct, Southampton 421w
Statistics, Cabinet Office 236w
Statistics, Home Office 556–7w
Statistics, Scotland Office 768w
Temporary employment, Dept for International Development 1132–3w
Temporary employment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1264w
Temporary employment, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587w
Temporary employment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1322w
Temporary employment, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374–5w
Temporary employment, Scotland Office 1229w
Temporary employment, Treasury 1187w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 603
Local government finance, Buckinghamshire (22.07.02) 761–5
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 556, 579, 634, 637–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 70wh
Questions
Business questions 434
Community health councils 1410w
Dermatology, Manpower 122w
Financial services, Buckingham 1199–200w
Hospices, Children 981
Magistrates' courts, Thames Valley 1081–2w

***Gillan, Mrs Cheryl**—continued*
Special constables, Buckinghamshire 672w
Winter fuel payments 1034w

Gilroy, Linda
Debates etc.
Sentencing, Petitions (23.07.02) 954
Questions
Community health services 191w
Railways, Plymouth 569w

Glasgow
Employment 1575-6w

Global Environment Facility
39-40w

Gloucester
Urban regeneration companies 281, 1016w

Gloucestershire
Dental services 141-2, 1396w
Housing 639w

Glucuronolactone
Soft drinks 1440w

Goggins, Paul
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 860
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 937-41

Golden Jubilee 2002
see Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries

Goodman, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Islam (19.07.02) 642, 647
Ministerial statement intervention (15.07.02) 34
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 140wh, 146wh, 150-3wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 21w
Community development, Dept for International Development 898w
Community development, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587-8w
Community development, Northern Ireland Office 1202w
Members, Correspondence 1588w

Gosport
Defence Munitions 286w
Jobcentre Plus 813w

Governing bodies
Schools 378-9w

Government
Annual reports 803w

Government art collection
1180w

Government Car and Despatch Agency
Annual reports 971-2w

Government Communications Headquarters
389w

Government departments
Billing 442-3w
Computer software 725w
Cost effectiveness 824w
Freedom of Information Act 2000 272w
Publications 958-9w
Standards 468w, 1193w

Government information services
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 5w

Grammar schools
189w, 1349w

Gray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 313, 322-3, 365, 377-81
Ministers, Points of order (17.07.02) 305-6
Questions
Aircraft carriers, Deployment 284-5w
Armed forces, Deployment 901w
Army, Manpower 6
C17 aircraft 759-60w
Chinook helicopters, Accidents 1107w
Defence, Finance 755w
Future large aircraft, Engines 492-3w
Harrier aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 754-5w
HMS Albion 492w
HMS Fearless 275w, 493w
HMS Nottingham 758-9w
HMS Southampton 759w
Joint strike fighter aircraft 495w
Military aircraft 758w
Mine control measures vessels 762w
Special constables, Recruitment 221w, 672w, 1054-5w
Submarines 759w
Type 45 destroyers, Ballistic missile defence 158-9w
Warships, Chile 760w

Grayling, Chris
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 60-4, 67, 74, 81-5
Questions
Air routes, South East region 733w
Armed forces, Recruitment 13
British Airways, Security 970-1w
Budget April 2002, Publications 253w
Care homes, South West region 197w
Foot and mouth disease, Wales 317w
Network Rail 144w
Network Rail, Finance 12w, 17w, 1244-5w
Pensions 521w
Railtrack, Finance 144w
Rights of way, Access 708w
Special educational needs 188w
Strategic Rail Authority, Finance 12w
Surrey Police, Finance 1470-1w
Transport, EC action 1272w
Transport, Schools 13-5w, 647w

Great Western Trains
1242w

Great Yarmouth
Helicopters 282

Greater London
Asylum 90-1w, 549-50w
Bridges 8w
Bus services 9-10w, 1257-9w
Carers 219w
Council tax 1216-8w
Crime 1472-3w
Foster care 1221-2w
Health services 873w
Hospital beds 640w, 660w, 1221w
Housing benefit 1222-4w
Human trafficking 685w
Local government finance 1204w
MMR vaccine 285
Multiple occupation 343w
National childcare strategy 54-6w
National Probation Service for England and Wales 1460w
Planning (16.07.02) 1-21wh
Police 830w
Police stations 1475w
Pre-sentence reports 844w
Probation and aftercare 844-5w, 1077w, 1532w

***Greater London**—continued*
Prostitution 1059w
Public transport 1260-1w
Road traffic 1247-8w, 1255-6w
Road traffic control 1255w
Roads 8w, 145-6w
Robbery 1474w
Social services 249w, 531-4w, 654-6w
Social workers 655w
Traffic lights 742w
Transport 1271-2w

Greater Manchester
Combined heat and power 441w
Fines 1300-2w

Greece
EC presidency 881w

Green, Mr Damian
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 159-61
Housing (18.07.02) 448

Green, Matthew
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 617, 620
Questions
Shadow cabinet 971-2

Green Ministers Committee
307-8w
Dept for Work and Pensions 811-2w
Home Office 547w

Greenbelt
Cambridge (17.07.02) 129-36wh

Greenway, Mr John
Questions
English Sports Council, Finance 976-7w
English Sports Council, Manpower 979w
English Sports Council, Pay 975w, 979w
Pensions, Exservicemen 1200-1w
Sports, Finance 975-6w, 978w

Grenades
906w

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 707-8, 712-3, 715, 719-20, 723-5
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), Rem stages (24.07.02) 1065-6, 1068, 1070
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 483-4, 486-91, 494, 500, 505, 512, 517, 524, 528-30
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1052-3, 1055-9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 194-5wh, 198-200wh
Questions
Convictions 1056w
Crime, Greater London 1472-3w
Drugs, Crime 1461w
Ethnic groups 1503w
Home detention curfews 1453-4w
Land, Ownership 1219-20w
Magistrates' courts, Thames Valley 1293w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 1488w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Greater London 1460w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Pay 1460w
Theft, Cellular phones 555w

Griffiths, Jane
Questions
Cameroon, Ethnic groups 1124w
Network Rail, Finance 568-9w

Griffiths, Jane*—continued*
Railways, Accidents 462w

Griffiths, Nigel*, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Export Control Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1045–6, 1048–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 202wh, 208wh, 219–23wh
Questions
Arms trade 436w, 1325w
Arms trade, Export controls 77–8w, 435–6w, 780w, 1330w
Arms trade, India 1324–5w
Arms trade, Namibia 1327w
Billing, Government departments 442–3w
Business, Advisory services 777w
Business links, Advertising 778w
Community Development Venture Fund 1201w
Export controls, India 435w
Exports, Licensing 358–9w, 436–7w
Fisheries, Compensation 1327w
Hawk aircraft, India 436w
New businesses 1331w
New businesses, Rural areas 1330–1w
Public sector, Regulation 170w
Regulatory impact assessments, Dept of Trade and Industry 437w
Small Business Service 1338w
Small Business Service, Finance 1337w
Small businesses 172w, 1333–6w
Small businesses, Loan guarantee scheme 778w
Small businesses, Regulation 351–2w, 437–8w
Uranium 942–3w
Venture capital 779w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Questions
Africa, International assistance 833
Children, Departmental coordination 1342w
Children, Developing countries 1137–8w
Human rights 1320w
Iran, Capital punishment 1312w
Iran, Human rights 1313w
Overseas aid 414–5
Sierra Leone, Health services 1137w
Sierra Leone, Politics and government 1136–7w
Sports, Young people 692w
Teachers, Wales 320w
Young offender institutions, Drugs 1445–6w

Ground water
1145–7w

Group of Eight
Kananaskis Summit 896–7w

Guisborough
Market town initiative 315w

Gulf War
see Iraq–Kuwait conflict

Gulf War syndrome
Compensation 490–1w, 878w

Guillotine motions
see Timetabling of bills

Gummer, Rt Hon John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Flood control (16.07.02) 22–9wh, 40wh
Questions
District councils, Standards 249w
Embassies, USA 145w
Fines, Debit cards 607w

Gummer, Rt Hon John*—continued*
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Databases 565–6w
Local government finance 240–1w, 998w
Meat, Smuggling 481–2w
Regional planning and development, Eastern region 343w
Roads, Greater London 145–6w
Salt, Nutrition 1385w
Sexual offences 1454–5w
10 Downing Street, Access 1251w
Transport, Planning 145w
Western Sahara, Sovereignty 180–1w
Wildlife, Meat 1140–1w

Gun sports
VAT 821w

Gurkhas
23w

Habitual offenders
Homicide 843w
Young offenders 1531w

Hacking
Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Energy 346w
Home Office 843w

Haemophilia
Drugs 421w

Hague, Rt Hon William
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 680
Questions
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1141–2w

Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption
1404w

Hain, Rt Hon Peter*, Minister for Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Convention on the Future of Europe 3w, 845
Cyprus 178w, 180w
Cyprus, Armed forces 385–6w
Cyprus, EC enlargement 179–80w, 883–4w
Cyprus, Foreign relations 178–80w
Cyprus, Peace keeping operations 180w
Czech Republic 1w
Developing countries, EC external trade 884w
EC action, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 359w
EC aid 880w
EC Economic and Social Committee 1314–6w
EC enlargement 181w, 880w, 882w
EC institutions 386–7w
EC institutions, Manpower 1315w
Gibraltar, EC grants and loans 764–5w
Gibraltar, Spain 1w, 391–2w, 473–4w, 611–2w, 765w, 882–3w
Gibraltar, Statistics 765w
Greece, EC presidency 881w
Hannay of Chiswick, Lord 179w
Poland, EC enlargement 842–3
Poland, Iron and steel 390–1w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 391–2w
Republic of Ireland, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1320w
Treaty on European Union 1w
Turkey, EC enlargement 3w
Turkey, Human rights 387w
Turkey, Politics and government 764w
USA, Agriculture 177w

Hain, Rt Hon Peter*—continued*
Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Annual reports 888–9w
Zimbabwe, EC action 174w

Hall, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 40
Questions
EC enlargement 882w

Hall, Patrick
Questions
Regional assemblies 1217w

Hamilton, David
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 999
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 121wh, 123–4wh
Questions
Employment, Discrimination 1032–3w
Internet, Security 394–5w

Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Questions
BBC External Services 844–5

Hammond, Mr Philip
Questions
Business 405–6
Care homes, Surrey 121w
Commission for Health Improvement 210w
VAT, Public sector 1168w

Hampshire
Antisocial behaviour orders 558w

Hampshire Police Authority
560w

Hancock, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 313, 315, 320, 327, 337
Defence review (18.07.02) 472
Questions
Aircraft carriers, Portsmouth 902–3w
Antisocial behaviour orders, Hampshire 558w
Armed forces, Housing 159–60w, 751–3w, 1107–9w
Armed forces, Training 275–6w
Armoured fighting vehicles 913w
Artillery, Radar 492–3w
Assets, Ministry of Defence 163w, 1109w
Baton rounds 1459w
BOWMAN combat radio system 753w
Breast cancer 1386–8w
Children, Abuse 1487w
Cruise missiles 155w
Defence equipment 155w
Defence equipment, Procurement 161–2w
Defence Housing Executive, Standards 159w
Drugs, Portsmouth 836w
European Energy and Transport Forum 1338w
Haemophilia, Drugs 421w
HMS Nottingham, Repairs and maintenance 276w
Judges, Conduct 82w
Lone parents, Income support 813w
Medicine, Education 657w
Mercenaries 748w
Metropolitan Police 671w
Metropolitan Police, Housing 671–2w
Metropolitan Police, Training 848–9w
Military bases, Portsmouth 756–7w
New deal schemes 597–8w
Nurses, Recruitment 543w
Police, Portsmouth 561–3w

Hancock, Mr Mike—continued
Princess Royal Barracks, Death 8
Prisoners, Pay 1075w
Prisoners, Suicide 1519w
Probation and aftercare 1520–1w
Probation and aftercare, Suicide 1519–20w
Queen Alexandra Hospital, Private finance initiative 425w, 1090–1w
RAF Brize Norton, Housing 163–4w
Schools 367w
Social security benefits, Portsmouth 521–2w
Social workers, South East region 1092w
Social workers, Southern region 1400w
Special constables, Manpower 855–6w
Weapons 25–6w
Written questions, Administrative delays 217w, 1505w

Hannay of Chiswick, Lord
179w

Harman, Rt Hon Harriet,* *Solicitor-General
Questions
Acquittals 503–4w
Annual reports, Solicitor-General 615w
Buildings, Solicitor-General 289–90w
Crimes of violence, Ambulance services 608w
Crown Prosecution Service, Advocacy 619w
Crown Prosecution Service, Annual reports 287w
Crown Prosecution Service, Complaints 617–8w
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 618–20w
EC law, Solicitor-General 288w
Holiday leave, Solicitor-General 288–9w
Manpower, Solicitor-General 616w
Official hospitality, Solicitor-General 614w
Orders and regulations, Solicitor-General 289w
Pay, Solicitor-General 615–6w
Police custody, Death 1103w
Public expenditure, Solicitor-General 612–3w, 617w
Repairs and maintenance, Solicitor-General 287w
Sentencing, Appeals 287–8w
Serious Fraud Office, Annual reports 615w
Serious Fraud Office, Information technology 612w
Sick leave, Solicitor-General 288w
Standards, Solicitor-General 289w, 613–4w
Training, Solicitor-General 615–6w, 913–4w
Visits abroad, Solicitor-General 615w

Harold Shipman Tribunal of Inquiry
658w

Harrier aircraft
Repairs and maintenance 754–5w

Harris, Dr Evan
Questions
Acute beds 1416w
Ambulance services, Standards 1411w
Anaesthetics, Medical equipment 1420–1w
Dental services, Gloucestershire 142
Epilepsy 1406–9w
Health professions, Disciplinary proceedings 1091w
Members, Correspondence 1409w
Mentally ill, Hospital beds 1419–20w
Mentally ill, Prisoners 126w
NHS, Standards 203–4w
Primary care trusts, International cooperation 419w
Prisoners, Suicide 828w

Harris, Dr Evan—continued
Prisons, Mental health services 1097w
Psychiatry, Manpower 868–71w
Redwood Hospital 1412w
Surgery, Waiting lists 418w

Harris, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 618–9, 629
Members, Points of order (17.07.02) 305
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 255–6
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 562, 572, 583
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 487–9, 493–6, 515
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 899, 905–6, 913, 925, 941, 946
Questions
Asylum, Applications 1447–8w
Community councils 1233–4w
Productivity 463w
"Road Traffic Penalties Consultation Paper" 1448w

Harvey, Nick
Questions
Arts Council of England, Advertising 496w
Arts Council of England, Expenditure 495–6w
Arts Council of England, Planning 496w
BBC, Digital broadcasting 1159w
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Manpower 563w
General Lighthouse Fund 1275–6w
Light dues 18w, 634–6w
Lighthouses 1275–6w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 1220–1w
National Lottery 165w
Police, Training 559–60w
Radio, Commercial broadcasting 654–5
Soft drinks, Caffeine 1440w
Soft drinks, Taurine 1440w

Hastings
Pension credit 1032w

Havard, Mr Dai
Questions
Developing countries, Overseas companies 970–1

Havering
Police 1474w

Hawk aircraft
India 436w
Indonesia 3–4w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 482–3, 495, 506, 510–1, 513–6, 518–9, 529
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1058
Questions
Cannabis, Lambeth 222w
Princess Royal Barracks, Death 7–8

Hayes, Mr John
Questions
Czech Republic 1w
European Police Office, Powers 223–4w
Terrorism, Chemical and biological warfare 553w
Treaty on European Union 1w

Hayes Committee
see Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority

Hazardous substances
Waste disposal 312w, 483w

Headteachers
Qualifications 1345–6w
Training 1345w

Heald, Mr Oliver
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 69wh, 73wh, 79wh, 82–4wh, 86wh
Questions
Ambulance services, Standards 1410–1w
Blood 657w
Children, Abuse 122–3w
Health services, Elderly 128–9w
Hospitals, Nurseries 536–7w
Medical equipment 122w
Mental Health Bill (Draft) 661w
Mental health services 126–7w, 196w, 538–9w
Mental health services, Children 123w, 125–6w, 1098w
Mental health services, Expenditure 1098w
Mental health services, Finance 540w
Mental health services, Manpower 539w
Mental health services, Private finance initiative 877w
Mental health services, Vacancies 1097w
Mental health services, Waiting lists 1420w
Mental health services, Worcestershire 127w
Mentally ill, Employment 123–4w, 126w, 196w
NHS, Circulars 212–3w
NHS, Early retirement 542w, 1380w
NHS, Procurement 214–5w
Obesity, Sports 432–4w
Prescriptions, Information technology 213w
Prisoners, Suicide 828–9w
Sick leave, Solicitor-General 288w
Special hospitals 124w
Special hospitals, Hospital beds 1418w

Healey, John, *Economic Secretary, Treasury*
Questions
Climate change levy, Nuclear power 957w
Companies, Ilford 256w
Customs and Excise, Scotland 470w, 1171–2w
Customs and Excise, Southern region 70w
Debts, Developing countries 464–5w
Development aid 73w
Drug seizures, Scotland 1179w
Drugs, Developing countries 336w
EC action, Treasury 471–2w, 747–8w, 1173–5w
Economic situation, South West region 467w
Energy, Conservation 249–50w
Excise duties, Fuels 462w, 467–8w
Manufacturing industries, Trade competitiveness 417–8
Oil, Northern Ireland 1193w
Overseas aid 464–5w, 1185–6w
Overseas aid, Sports 473w
Poverty 73–5w, 469w
Public transport, Fuels 1177w
Recruitment, Treasury 1197w
Smuggling 1173w
VAT, Care homes 822–3w
VAT, Charities 463w
VAT, Financial services 824w
VAT, Fuels 1171w
VAT, Gun sports 821w

***Healey, John**—continued*
VAT, Imports 336–7w
VAT, Marks and Spencer 1191–2w
VAT, Museums and galleries 335w
VAT, Public sector 1168w
Written questions, Administrative delays 543w

Health
Sports 975w

Health (Air Travellers) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Order for resuming adjourned 2R read (19.07.02) 633

Health (Air Travellers) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 637

Health and Safety Commission
326w, 1369w

Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission
Social Care Inspection Commission 1409w

Health centres
Christchurch 218w
Property transfer 218w

Health education
Disabled 423w
Overseas aid 1128–9w

Health hazards
Wood 425w

Health professions
Disciplinary proceedings 1091w

Health Reform (Education and Public Involvement) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 634

Health Service Commissioner
Public appointments 1374w

Health services
Armed forces 749–50w
Cancer 1422w
Cooperatives 212w, 655w
Elderly 128–9w
Finance 255–6w
Greater London 873w
Kent 218–9w
Morecambe 656w
Overseas aid 1124–5w
Prisons 1534w
Sierra Leone 1137w
USA 208w
Wales 269–70

Hearing aids
215–7w, 1091–2w, 1398w
Taxation 1173w

Heart diseases
Surgery 1380–2w

Heath, Mr David
Debates etc.
A303 (22.07.02) 740–3
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 603, 605–6
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 561–7, 572, 597
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 774
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 162–6wh
Questions
Armed forces, Housing 24w
Jobcentre Plus 1581w
Public houses, Music 654

***Heath, Mr David**—continued*
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 830–1

Heath, Edward
Public statues 1167w

Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Deferred divisions, Points of order (18.07.02) 538

Heathrow Airport
146w, 1234w
Air routes 961w
Landing rights 1234–5w
Theft 859w

Heavily indebted poor countries initiative
715w, 1131w

Hedges and ditches
141–2w, 303–4w

Helicopters
Accidents 282
Great Yarmouth 282

Hendrick, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 721–2
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 900
Questions
Armed conflict 19–20
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group 1337w
Coal Authority, Annual reports 950w
Emergencies, Planning 1070w
Employment agencies 949w
Government Car and Despatch Agency, Annual reports 971–2w
Kashmir 177w
Manufacturing industries 947–9w
National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux 942w
Police, Firearms 1047–50w
Post offices, Information services 947w
Radio, Licensing 949–50w
Uranium 942–3w

Hendry, Mr Charles
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 184–7wh, 198wh
Questions
Criminal Records Bureau 1483w
Prisons, Drugs 828w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 1124w

Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders, South Tyneside 830–2w
Foster care 117–8w
Higher education, Admissions 53–4w
Maintenance, Children 599–600w, 1026w

***Heppell, Mr John**, Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 953
Recess motions (22.07.02) 820

Herbal medicine
EC law 150–2
Licensing 1430–1w

Hercules aircraft
1110w

Hermon, Lady
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 294
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 177–8, 180, 184, 186, 189–91, 197, 199–200, 210–1, 213–4

***Hermon, Lady**—continued*
Questions
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 975–6

Heroin
Misuse 972

Hertfordshire
Crime 282
Multiple occupation 343w

Hertfordshire Constabulary
Manpower 1491w

Hesford, Stephen
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 514–5
Questions
Crime 557w
Health services, Finance 255–6w

***Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia**, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group, Ministerial statements (24.07.02) 1003–17
Questions
Annual reports, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Buildings, Dept of Trade and Industry 790–1w
Business links 778w
Coal, Selby 165–8w
Companies, Disclosure of information 788–9w
Computers, Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Conditions of employment, EC law 446–7w
Consultation papers, Dept of Trade and Industry 791–2w, 950–1w
EC action, Dept of Trade and Industry 952w
Employment, Females 793w
Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry 77–8w
Equal pay 792–3w
Export credit guarantees, Environment protection 779w
Export Credits Guarantee Dept, Trading funds 779–80w
Genetically modified organisms 774–5w
Hacking, Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Import controls, Forced labour 776w
"Investing in Innovation" 943w
Iron and steel, USA 776w
Manufacturing industries 947–9w
Official hospitality, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Pay, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Productivity 780w
Public expenditure, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Public participation, Dept of Trade and Industry 172–4w
Publicity, Dept of Trade and Industry 945w
Regional development agencies, Expenditure 791w
Scotland, Dept of Trade and Industry 350w
Secondment, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Stationery, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Telephone services, Dept of Trade and Industry 791w, 954–6w
Trade, Agriculture 775w
Trade agreements, Developing countries 947w
Wood, EC action 710–1w

Hewlett-Packard
Redundancy 983w

Higher education
- 184w
- Admissions 53–4w
- Conditions of employment (24.07.02) 1072–80
- EC grants and loans 187w
- Finance 771w, 986–9w
- Marketing 643w
- Special educational needs 452w
- Student numbers 184–7w

Highways Agency
- 333w
- Contracts 1248–50w

Hill farming
- 313–4w, 918w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
- *Debates etc.*
  - Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 875
- *Questions*
  - Members, Correspondence 1588w

Historic buildings
- Finance 695–6w

Historical Manuscripts Royal Commission
- 409w

History of Parliament Trust
- Finance 49–50w

"History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1690–1715"
- 49–50w

HIV infection
- 212w
- Africa 1131–2w
- Asylum 1041w
- Central African Republic 717w
- Developing countries 592–3w, 895w
- Nurses 537w
- Overseas aid 894–6w
- South Africa 291w

HM Customs and Excise
- see Customs and Excise

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
- Public appointments 1487–8w

HM Prison Service
- see Prison Service

HMS Albion
- 492w, 905w

HMS Bridport
- 26w

HMS Fearless
- 275w, 493w, 760–1w

HMS Nottingham
- 276w, 758–9w
- Repairs and maintenance 26w, 276w

HMS Southampton
- 759w

Hoban, Mr Mark
- *Debates etc.*
  - Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 78–9
- *Questions*
  - NHS, Finance 201w
  - NHS, Recruitment 1393–4w
  - NHS Bank 1404–6w
  - Private Pension Legislation Review 1543w
  - Surgery 426w

***Hodge, Margaret**, Minister of State for Universities, Dept for Education and Skills*
- *Debates etc.*
  - Higher education, Conditions of employment (24.07.02) 1076–80

***Hodge, Margaret**—continued*
- *Questions*
  - Arts and Humanities Research Board 992–3w
  - Children, Day care 60w, 127–8w, 183–4w
  - Community Champions Fund, Morley 647w
  - EC action, Dept for Education and Skills 773w, 1361–3w
  - Education, Agriculture 648w
  - Educational maintenance allowance, Morley 57w
  - Further education, Buildings 989w
  - Further education, Finance 645–6w, 771w, 986–7w
  - Further education, Pay 642w, 770–1w
  - Higher education 184w
  - Higher education, Admissions 53–4w
  - Higher education, EC grants and loans 187w
  - Higher education, Marketing 643w
  - Higher education, Student numbers 184–7w
  - Mature students, Morley 647w
  - Medicine, Students 772w
  - National childcare strategy 128w
  - National childcare strategy, Greater London 54–6w
  - Pre-school education, Disadvantaged 188w
  - Socrates programme 56w
  - Student Loans Company 642w
  - Students, Morley 57w

Hoey, Miss Kate
- *Debates etc.*
  - Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 998–9
- *Questions*
  - City academies 643–4w
  - Firearms 1069–70w
  - South Bank Centre, Expenditure 696–7w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
- *Debates etc.*
  - Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 703
  - Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 294–5
  - Defence review (18.07.02) 473
  - Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 683–4
  - Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 478, 485–6, 488–9, 492–4, 498–9, 508, 510, 514, 518, 522–3
- *Questions*
  - Zimbabwe, Sanctions 831

Holiday leave
- Advocate General for Scotland 380w
- Scotland Office 382w
- Solicitor-General 288–9w

Holiday play schemes
- Sports 693–4w

Holmes, Paul
- *Questions*
  - Disability aids 201w
  - Social security benefits, Appeals 114w
  - Training and enterprise councils, Finance 1354–5w, 1357–62w
  - Training and enterprise councils, Manpower 1355–7w

Home detention curfews
- 1453–4w, 1460–1w

Home Energy Conservation (No 2) Bill 2001/02
- *Debates etc.*
  - 2R order read (19.07.02) 638

Home energy efficiency scheme
- 622–3w

Home Office
- Annual reports 1078–9w
- Buildings 397w, 546w
- Consultation papers 837–40w
- Correspondence 396w
- Data protection 1495w
- Departmental expenditure limits 1078w
- EC action 564–5w, 632w, 1044w, 1063–5w
- Energy 544w
- Equal opportunities 555w
- Equal pay 546–7w
- Fraud 403w
- Gender impact assessment 556w
- Green Ministers Committee 547w
- Hacking 843w
- Industrial diseases 547w
- Industrial tribunals 679w
- Information officers 850w
- Luton 1492–4w
- Maladministration 1486w
- Members' interests 394w
- Ministerial policy advisors 1476w, 1492w
- Official hospitality 545w
- Orders and regulations 565w
- Public expenditure 546w, 1078w
- Public participation 841–2w
- Public private partnerships 543–4w
- Public relations 543w, 1065w
- Publicity 1067w
- Regulatory impact assessments 396w
- Repairs and maintenance 1065–7w
- Republic of Ireland 1055w
- Retirement 394w
- Ringfenced funding 1055–6w
- Statistics 397–8w, 556–7w
- Telephone services 848w
- Training 546w, 1057–8w
- Visits abroad 545–6w
- Written questions 106w, 686w

Home zones
- 1267w

Homelessness
- 239w, 341–2w
- Children in care 1003w
- Finance 997–8w
- Rural areas 46w

Homicide
- East Timor 1319–20w
- Habitual offenders 843w

Hong Kong
- Foreign relations 888w

Honours
- 1371w

Hood, Mr Jimmy
- *Debates etc.*
  - Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 698
- *Questions*
  - EC Agriculture Council 309–10w
  - EC Finance Council 338–9w
  - EC Health Council 1087–8w

***Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey**, Secretary of State for Defence*
- *Debates etc.*
  - Chinook helicopters, Ministerial statements (22.07.02) 689–704
  - Defence review, Ministerial statements (18.07.02) 460–75
- *Questions*
  - Afghanistan, Armed conflict 21w
  - Afghanistan, Army 492w
  - Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 21–2w, 494w
  - Ballistic missile defence, USA 26w
  - Defence, EC countries 23w
  - Defence, Expenditure 1–3

***Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey**—continued*
Defence, USA 1113w
Defence equipment 907w
Gibraltar, Spain 281w
International Criminal Court 1105w
Marines 17–8
NATO, Russia 18–9
Nuclear weapons 1106w
Rapid reaction forces, EC countries 26w
Territorial Army 20w
Terrorism 9–12
Weapons 25–6w

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin
Questions
Public houses, Entertainments 650

Horam, Mr John
Questions
Mental health services, Physiotherapy 875–7w
Police, Bromley 1468w

Hormone treatments
Children 422w

Horse racing
165w

Horserace Totalisator Board
53w

Horticulture
Pay 936w

Hospices
Children 981
Finance 200w, (22.07.02) 777–80
Lancashire 200w

Hospital beds
284, 867–8w, 1092w, 1094–8w, 1418–9w
Eastern region 1094–8w
Greater London 640w, 660w, 1221w
Lancashire 204–5w
Mental health services 139–41
Mentally ill 1419–20w
Special hospitals 1418w

Hospital wards
535–6w

Hospitals
Admissions 206w
Consultants 137–9, 418–9w
Crimes of violence 536w
Food 200w
Hygiene 203w, 1415w
Industrial health and safety 1418w
Infectious diseases 1398–400w
Nurseries 536–7w
Public appointments 127w
Rural areas 535w
Sexual offences 536w
Somerset (23.07.02) 239–46wh
Standards 1417–8w
Waiting lists 321w, 1379–80w, 1413–5w
Wales 321w

House of Commons
Internet 325–6w
Manpower 1167w
Publications 1167w
Recycling 50–1w, 324–5w, 711w
Waste disposal 189w

House of Commons Journal
49w

Housing
238w, 638w, 1007w, 1211w, 1216w
Armed forces 5–6, 24w, 159–60w, 750–3w, 905–6w, 1107–9w
Asylum 551–2w, 1063w
Bishops 293w
Burnley (22.07.02) 737–40
Children 1215w

***Housing**—continued*
Construction 1018–9w
Coventry 1018w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 732w
Empty property 1003–6w, 1017w
Finance 463w
Gloucestershire 639w
Huntingdon 1018–9w
Judges 1303–5w
Kingston upon Hull (22.07.02) 733–5
Low incomes 1017–8w
Metropolitan Police 671–2w
Ministerial statements (18.07.02) 438–59
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Planning permission 1008–9w
Police 841–2w
Prices 466w
RAF Brize Norton 163–4w
RAF Halton 163–4w
Royal Centre for Defence Medicine 163w
South East region 465w, 980
York 980–1

Housing benefit
510–1w, 595w, 809w, 1022w, 1561–3w
Abuse 266w
Administrative delays 595w
Colchester 1015w
Dorset 268w
Greater London 1222–4w
North West region 1563–4w
Scotland 594w
Yorkshire and Humberside 1014–5w

Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 610–30

Housing Planning Local Government and the Regions Select Committee
see Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee

Housing (Wales) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 631

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 30–3, (23.07.02) 890, 898–905, 910
Questions
Employee share ownership schemes 1183w
Pensions 402
Standards, Dept of Health 411
VAT, Marks and Spencer 1191–2w

Howarth, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Export Control Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1047–8
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 926–31
Questions
National Lottery 650–1
VAT, Museums and galleries 335w

Howarth, Mr George
Questions
Wood 248–9w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 321–2, 329–40, 344, 359, 383–4
Questions
Galileo project 803w, 1107w, 1268–70w
Princess Royal Barracks, Death 8–9
SA80 rifle 757–8w

***Howells, Dr Kim**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 408w
Annual reports, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 408–9w
Archaeology 656–7, 1160–2w
Arts Council of England, Advertising 496w
Arts Council of England, Expenditure 495–6w
Arts Council of England, Planning 496w
BBC, Digital broadcasting 1159w
Communications Bill (Draft) 495w
Computers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 499w
Consultation papers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 410w, 496–8w, 697w, 971–4w, 1156–8w
Dance 495w
Digital broadcasting 362w
EC action, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 359w, 498–9w, 633–4w
Foot and mouth disease, Tourism 693w
Historic buildings, Finance 695–6w
Historical Manuscripts Royal Commission 409w
Internet, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1158w
ITV Association 410w
Licensing laws 362w, 498w
Listed buildings, Internet 407–8w
Museums and galleries, Science 1160w
Museums and galleries, West Midlands 657–8
National Foundation for Youth Music 1158w
New Opportunities Fund, Recreation spaces 243w
Office of Communications 406–7w
"Pride of Place" 697w
Public expenditure, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Public houses, Entertainments 649–50
Public houses, Music 653–4
Public libraries 1157–8w
Public participation, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 974w
Publicity, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 698w
Radio, Commercial broadcasting 654–6
Religious broadcasting, Licensing 410w, 697–8w, 1157w
S4C 698w
Scotland, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1159–60w
South Bank Centre, Expenditure 696–7w
Telecommunications, Disability aids 405–7w
Television, Licensing 661, 1160w
Theatre 497w
Theatre, Barnsley 691w
Tourism 1158–9w
Tourism, Euro 695w
Tourism, Oxfordshire 693w
Tourists, Expenditure 497w
Visits abroad, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Wood, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Debates etc.
Pensioners, Petitions (23.07.02) 954–5
Questions
Aviation, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 384–5w
Cancer, Research 146

***Hoyle, Mr Lindsay*—continued**
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 306w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Airlines 177w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Civil servants 178w
Gibraltar, Spain 1w, 392w
Hospices, Lancashire 200w
Hospitals, Public appointments 127w
Iron and steel, USA 776w
Neighbourhood wardens, Chorley 1485w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 1413w
Sports, Chorley 699w
World Health Organisation, Taiwan 117w

HSBC Investment Banking Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
3R order read (16.07.02) 137, (23.07.02) 829

***Hughes, Beverley**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Questions
Annual reports, Home Office 1078–9w
Antisemitism 221–2w
Asylum 91–2w, 225w, 246–8w
Asylum, Administrative delays 1042w
Asylum, AIDS 97w
Asylum, Appeals 92–3w
Asylum, Applications 90w, 393w, 552–3w, 860–1w, 1447–8w
Asylum, Bicester 220w
Asylum, Children 90w, 550–2w
Asylum, Detainees 1043w
Asylum, Education 1045w
Asylum, Employment 1041–2w
Asylum, Greater London 90–1w, 549–50w
Asylum, HIV infection 1041w
Asylum, Housing 551–2w, 1063w
Asylum, Identity cards 548w
Asylum, Iraq 228w, 400–1w
Asylum, Maternity payments 1043w
Asylum, Zimbabwe 226w, 398–9w, 551w
British nationality, Children 552w
Buildings, Home Office 546w
Campsfield House Detention Centre 1448w
Community development, Grants 226w
Community development, Standards 402w
Complaints Audit Committee, Annual reports 1043–4w
Complaints Audit Committee, Public appointments 1448w
Deportation 223w
Deportation, Injuries 400w
Dungavel Detention Centre 232w
EC action, Home Office 1044w, 1063–5w
Energy, Home Office 544w
Entry clearances 684w
Entry clearances, Genetics 1446w
Entry clearances, India 1532w
Entry clearances, Macedonia 402w
Equal opportunities, Home Office 555w
Equal pay, Home Office 546–7w
Foreign workers 1062–3w
Fraud, Home Office 403w
Gender impact assessment, Home Office 556w
Green Ministers Committee, Home Office 547w
Human trafficking 548w, 684–5w, 833–4w
Human trafficking, Greater London 685w
Identity cards, Costs 544–5w
Identity cards, Transsexualism 555–6w
Illegal immigrants 88–9w
Illegal immigrants, Channel tunnel 393w
Illegal immigrants, Lorries 552w
Illegal immigrants, Romania 399–400w
Immigration 224–5w, 228w, 547–8w

***Hughes, Beverley*—continued**
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 229w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Databases 565–6w
Immigration controls 98w
Immigration controls, Fixed penalties 220w
Immigration controls, France 219–20w, 229w
Immigration officers, Czech Republic 685–6w
Immigration rules, Domestic violence 229w
Industrial diseases, Home Office 547w
Islam, Ministers of religion 686–7w
Members, Correspondence 105w, 220–1w, 564w, 1069w, 1465w
Mentoring Fund 103w
National Asylum Support Service, Standards 1043w
Official hospitality, Home Office 545w
Orders and regulations, Home Office 565w
Passports 689–90w
Public expenditure, Home Office 546w
Public private partnerships, Home Office 543–4w
Public relations, Home Office 543w, 1065w
Publicity, Home Office 1067w
Race relations 1060–1w
Repairs and maintenance, Home Office 1065–7w
Retirement, Home Office 394w
Statistics, Home Office 556–7w
Training, Home Office 546w, 1057–8w
United Kingdom Passport Agency, Annual reports 553w
Vetting, Voluntary work 97w
Visits abroad, Home Office 545–6w
Voluntary organisations, Grants 226–7w
Work permits 96w, 107–8w, 395–6w
Work permits, Information technology 107w, 831w
Written questions, Home Office 106w, 686w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 89w, 392–3w, 1461w

Hughes, Mr Kevin Michael
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 865
Questions
Hospitals, Consultants 138–9

Hughes, Simon
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 291–2
Police Reform Bill (HL), Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1061–4
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 635
Questions
Armed forces, Ethnic groups 14–5
Asylum, Zimbabwe 398–9w, 551w
Clergy, Recruitment 662
Crime 86–8w
Crime prevention, Finance 858w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Information technology 1517–8w
Police custody 1444–5w
Police custody, Standards 1445w
Police stations 672–6w
Prisons, Closures 1443–4w
Prisons, Per capita costs 1534w
Religious broadcasting, Licensing 410w
Thameslink railway line 971w
Young offenders, Children in care 1463–5w
Zimbabwe, Entry clearances 4w

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority
Annual reports 207–8w

Human rights
1320w
Cayman Islands 889w, 1314w
Chechnya 881w
China 839
Developing countries 720w
Iran 1313w
Nepal 610w
Pakistan 386w
Rwanda 3w
Turkey 387w
Young offender institutions 1443w

Human Rights Act 1972
Questions
889w

Human Rights Act 1998
Questions
1314w

Human trafficking
548w, 684–5w, 833–4w
Greater London 685w

Humble, Mrs Joan
Questions
Mental health services, Hospital beds 140

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 217, 232, (24.07.02) 997
Questions
Alzheimer's disease, Prescription drugs 1399–400w
Child benefit, Foreign students 263w
Innogy 1325–6w
Maintenance, Children 267w
Mandelkern Group 361w
Police, Northern Ireland 508–9w, 1203w
Public sector, Regulation 170w
Regulation, EC action 360–1w
Small businesses, Regulation 351–2w
Takeovers 350–1w

Hunting
483w, 723w, 1150w

Huntingdon
Broadband 439w
Housing 1018–9w

Hurst, Mr Alan
Questions
Housing, Construction 1019w

***Hutton, Rt Hon John**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 84–8wh
Questions
Acute beds 219w, 1416w
Beta-interferon, Sutton 423w
Care homes, Fees and charges 1400–1w
Chiropody, Recruitment 425w
Contracts, Dept of Health 1429w
Copaxone 199w
Dental services, Gloucestershire 141–2
Dermatology, Manpower 122w
Diabetes 191w
Diagnostic treatment centres 1086w
Doctors, Foreign workers 202–3w, 1394w
Doctors, Recruitment 202w, 1100–1w
Doctors, Reserve forces 422w
Doctors' list of patients 201w, 1392w
EC action, Dept of Health 379w, 432w
EC Health Council 1087–8w
Epilepsy 1406w

Hutton, Rt Hon John—continued
General practitioners, Conditions of employment 1393w
General practitioners, Finance 424w
General practitioners, Recruitment 201w, 1393w
General practitioners, Standards 1411–2w
General practitioners, Waiting lists 418–9w
Health professions, Disciplinary proceedings 1091w
Health services, Greater London 873w
Heart diseases, Surgery 1380–2w
Hospital wards 535–6w
Hospitals, Crimes of violence 536w
Hospitals, Nurseries 536–7w
Hospitals, Rural areas 535w
Hospitals, Sexual offences 536w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 1379–80w, 1413–5w
Junior doctors, Working hours 1102w
Medical treatments, EC countries 201w, 538w, 871–2w
Medical treatments, Radiation exposure 1434w
Medicine, Education 657w
Members, Correspondence 878w
Mental health services, Manpower 539w
Mental health services, Physiotherapy 875–6w
Mental health services, Private finance initiative 877w
Mental health services, Vacancies 1097–8w
Neurology, Manpower 1412–3w
NHS, Early retirement 542w, 1380w
NHS, Finance 201w, 424–5w
NHS, Foreign workers 1101w
NHS, Manpower 1093w
NHS, Nurseries 540w
NHS, Pay 542w
NHS, Pensions 1411w
NHS, Private finance initiative 872w, 1084–6w
NHS, Public appointments 865–7w
NHS, Recruitment 419w, 542w, 874–5w, 1393–4w
NHS, Standards 203–4w
NHS Direct, Recruitment 421w
NHS Estate Management and Health Building Agency, Annual reports 217w
NHS Pensions Agency, Annual reports 1083w
NHS Pensions Agency, Standards 1083w
NHS trusts, Management 534–5w
NHS trusts, Mergers 1087w
Nurses, Consultants 537w
Nurses, Foreign workers 419w
Nurses, HIV infection 537w
Nurses, Recruitment 542–3w
Nurses, Resignations 1092–3w
Primary care trusts 147–50
Primary care trusts, Derbyshire 1382–4w
Primary care trusts, International cooperation 419w
Psychiatry, Manpower 868–71w
Queen Alexandra Hospital, Private finance initiative 425w, 1090–1w
Smallpox, Vaccination 1086–7w, 1390–1w
Surgery 426w
Surgery, Private sector 202w
Surgery, Waiting lists 418w, 536w
Unni, Kolathuv 540w
West Surrey Health Authority, Per capita costs 1398w

Hydrofluorocarbons
Refrigeration 1438w

Hygiene
Hospitals 203w, 1415w
Meat 429w

Hyperactivity
Dyslexia 990w

Iddon, Dr Brian
Questions
Armed forces, Religion 20–1w
Consultation papers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 410w, 697w, 971–4w, 1156–8w
Consultation papers, Dept for Education and Skills 985–6w
Consultation papers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 937–8w
Consultation papers, Dept for International Development 591–2w
Consultation papers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1266–7w
Consultation papers, Dept for Work and Pensions 602–4w, 814w, 1027–8w, 1596w
Consultation papers, Dept of Health 1429w
Consultation papers, Dept of Trade and Industry 791–2w, 950–1w
Consultation papers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 885–6w
Consultation papers, Home Office 837–40w
Consultation papers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526–8w
Consultation papers, Ministry of Defence 903w, 1107w
Consultation papers, Treasury 1181w
Crime prevention, Annual reports 861–2w
Euthanasia 1301–3w
India, Overseas aid 1129w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Exservicemen 160w
Mentally incapacitated, Medical treatments 411w
Primary care trusts 148
Wilton Park, Standards 388–9w

Identification of criminals
Genetics 1517w

Identity cards
Asylum 548w
Costs 544–5w
Fees and charges 1194–5w
Transsexualism 555–6w

Ilford
Companies 256w

Illegal immigrants
88–9w
Channel tunnel 393w
Fixed penalties 552w
Lorries 552w
Romania 399–400w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 944–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 255–9wh
Questions
Primary care trusts 150
Theatre, Barnsley 691w

Imber
Firing ranges 24–5w, 162w

Imitation guns
(22.07.02) 765–7

Immigrants
Indian subcontinent 684w
Languages 684w

Immigration
224–5w, 228w, 547–8w

Immigration adjudicators
Manpower 411w

Immigration and Nationality Directorate
229w
Databases 565–6w

Immigration controls
98w
Fixed penalties 220w
France 219–20w, 229w

Immigration officers
Czech Republic 685–6w

Immigration rules
Domestic violence 229w

Immobilisation of vehicles
Regulation 1473w

Import controls
Forced labour 776w
Pigmeat 29–30w
Poultry 1155–6w

Imports
Agricultural products 486w
Food 298w
Meat 298–9w
Poultry meat 1152–3w
Prescription drugs 1403–4w
Sheep meat 136w
VAT 336–7w

Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government
1205w

In vitro fertilisation
Registration of births deaths and marriages 1430w

Incapacity benefit
515w, 1564–9w
Child benefit 1567w
Medical examinations 1566w, 1569w
North West region 1567w
Pensioners 1567–9w

Income support
1024–5w
Lone parents 511w, 813w, 1549–50w
Pensioners (24.07.02) 306–14wh

Income tax
1169–70w
Payments 251w

India
Arms trade 1324–5w
Entry clearances 1532w
Export controls 435w
Exports 358–9w
Females 260w
Hawk aircraft 436w
Overseas aid 1129w
Terrorism 879w

Indian subcontinent
Entry clearances (22.07.02) 748–51, 1311–2w
Immigrants 684w

Individual learning accounts
452–3w, 992w, 1351w

Indonesia
Forests 448–9w, 591w
Hawk aircraft 3–4w
Religion 609–10w

Industrial diseases
Compensation 280, 350w, 352w, 356w, 953–4w
Home Office 547w

Industrial disputes
1195w
London Underground 148w

Industrial health and safety
81w

Industrial health and safety—continued
Hospitals 1418w
Smoking 732w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 458–9w

Industrial relations
777w

Industrial tribunals
Home Office 679w
Scotland Office 1225w

Industry
111w
Profits 172w

Infectious diseases
Hospitals 1398–400w

Inflation
65w

Infliximab
207w

Influenza
Vaccination 428w, 1083w, 1391w

Information Commissioner
Public appointments 1374w

Information officers
Dept for Education and Skills 988w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1139w
Dept for International Development 721w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961–2w
Home Office 850w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 799–800w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 725w
President of the Council 712w
Prime Minister 805w
Scotland Office 769w, 1226w
Treasury 822w

Information services
Post offices 172w, 947w

Information technology
Dept for Work and Pensions 512–4w
Magistrates' courts 1288–90w
National Probation Service for England and Wales 845–6w, 1517–8w
Prescriptions 213w, 1420w
Schools 378w
Serious Fraud Office 612w
Work permits 107w, 831w

***Ingram, Rt Hon Adam**, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence*
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 311–30, 333–5, 350, 370–1, 380
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 276–7w, 753w
Afghanistan, Unmanned air vehicles 758w
Air force, Engineers 23–4w
Armed conflict 19–20
Armed forces, Cellular phones 276w
Armed forces, Ethnic groups 14–5
Armed forces, Personnel management 277–8w
Armed forces, Racial discrimination 14
Armed forces, Recruitment 13–4, 1107w
Armed forces, Religion 20–1w
Armed forces, Training 275–6w
Army, Deployment 19w
Army, Manpower 6, 19w
Army, Young people 277w
C17 aircraft 759–60w
Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Almondbank 163w

Ingram, Rt Hon Adam—continued
Defence Fire Service 15–7
Defence Munitions, Dean Hill 25w, 285–7w
Defence Munitions, Gosport 286w
Defence Munitions, Operating costs 285w
Firing ranges, Imber 24–5w, 162w
Fleet Air Arm 22–3w
Gurkhas 23w
HMS Bridport 26w
HMS Fearless 275w
HMS Nottingham 276w, 758–9w
HMS Nottingham, Repairs and maintenance 26w, 276w
HMS Southampton 759w
Military aircraft 758w
Military bases, Colchester 1114w
Military bases, Cyprus 279w, 282w
Military exercises, Salisbury Plain 901w
Mine control measures vessels 762w
Officer Training Corps 281–2w
Princess Royal Barracks, Death 7–9
Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 1110w
RAF St Athan 162w
Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst 279–82w, 756w
Royal School of Artillery 278–9w, 755–6w
Submarines 759w

Inheritance tax
463w, 1194w

Injuries
Deportation 400w
Public transport 6w

Inland Revenue
1184–5w
Administrative delays 1184w
Advertising 253w
Computer software 1183w
Expenditure 253–4w

Inland waterways
135w

Innogy
1325–6w

Insurance
Employers' liability 250–1w
Fraud 555w
National Air Traffic Services 571–2w
Quarrying 174w
Railways 1240w
Terrorism 960w

Intelligence services
4w

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
see World Bank

International cooperation
Environment protection 39–40w
Primary care trusts 419w

International Criminal Court
474w, 882w, 1105w
USA 846

International Development Association
899w

International Monetary Fund
1139w

International Sikh Youth Federation
554w

Internet
Army 755w
Child benefit 295w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1158w
Dept for Education and Skills 1365–6w
Dept for International Development 900w

Internet—continued
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1594w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1319w
House of Commons 325–6w
Listed buildings 407–8w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1279w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1219w
Pornography 1532–3w
President of the Council 453w
Security 394–5w
Transport 1267w
Treasury 1186w

"Investing in Innovation"
943w

Investors in people
Small businesses 993–4w

Iran
Arms trade 383w
Capital punishment 1312w
Drugs 4–5w
Foreign relations 845–6
Human rights 1313w
Nuclear fuels 389–90w

Iraq
(22.07.02) 801–3
Armed conflict 280–1, 975, 979–82
Asylum 228w, 400–1w
Kurds 388w
Sanctions 887w

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
Exservicemen 160w, 909–12w

Iron and steel
Eastern Europe 1130w
Poland 390–1w
USA 776w
Wales 318w

Irranca-Davies, Huw
Questions
Industrial diseases, Compensation 352w

Islam
(19.07.02) 641–8
Ministers of religion 686–7w

Isle of Sheppey
Children in care 123w

Isle of Wight
Dept of Trade and Industry 1325w

Israel
Arms trade 839–42
Embassies 553w

Israeli–Palestinian conflict
see Middle East

ITV Association
410w

Ivory Coast
Elections 390w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 543
Defence review (18.07.02) 474
Deferred divisions, Points of order (18.07.02) 538
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 686
Questions
Business questions 428
European fighter aircraft 156–7w
Police, Radio 98–9w

Jackson, Ms Glenda
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 880

Jackson, Ms Glenda—continued
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 10–3wh
Questions
Marines 17–8
Mental health services, Hospital beds 141

Jackson, Helen
Questions
Asylum, HIV infection 1041w
Asylum, Maternity payments 1043w

Jackson, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Higher education, Conditions of employment (24.07.02) 1072–6
Questions
Intelligence services 4w

***Jamieson, Mr David**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport*
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 588–90, 594–5, 601–2
Questions
A12 1247w
A46 1246w
A140 966–7w
A404(M) 143w, 736w
Advertising, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 459w
Air routes, Singapore 17–8w
Air routes, South East region 733w
Air routes, USA 17w, 146w
Air traffic control, Manpower 572w
Airports, Construction 733w
Airports, Landing rights 1235w
Airports, South East region 1236w
Automatic train protection 1243w
Aviation, Military bases 1234–5w
Aviation, Scotland 970w
Aviation, USA 1236w
British Airways, Security 970–1w
Buildings, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 333w
Bus services 147–8w, 460–1w, 1257–9w
Bus services, Greater London 9–10w, 1257–9w
Bus services, Rural areas 15–6w, 743–4w
Bus services, Somerset 1243w
Bus services, Standards 743–4w, 1258w
Buses, Pollution control 1259–60w
Bypasses, Silverstone 1249–51w
Cars 967w
Central Railway 746w
Channel tunnel, Freight 329w
Computers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13w
Consultation papers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13–4w, 1266–7w
Contracts, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961w
Crossrail line 1241w
Cycling, Safety 965w
Cycling, Standards 1277w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept for Transport 455–6w, 962w, 1261w
"Disabled Person's Parking Badge Scheme Consultation Paper" 1245–6w
Driver information systems 1253–4w
Driving, Cellular phones 1234w
Driving, Licensing 965w
Driving under influence 742–3w, 967w
Driving under influence, Cannabis 403–4w
EC action, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 6–7w, 80–1w, 332w, 358w, 435w, 632w, 731–2w, 1272–5w, 1323–4w

Jamieson, Mr David—continued
Empty property, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 453w
European Energy and Transport Forum 731–2w
Ferries, EC countries 1233w
Fire services, Offshore industry 638w
Fisheries 967–8w
Fuels, Excise duties 740–1w
Galileo project 1268–70w
Gatwick Airport 1234w
Gatwick Airport, Air routes 1241w
Gatwick Airport, Landing rights 1234w
General Lighthouse Fund 1275–6w
Great Western Trains 1242w
Health and Safety Commission 326w
Heathrow Airport 146w, 1234w
Heathrow Airport, Air routes 961w
Heathrow Airport, Landing rights 1234–5w
Highways Agency 333w
Highways Agency, Contracts 1248–50w
Home zones 1267w
Housing, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 732w
Industrial health and safety 81w
Industrial health and safety, Smoking 732w
Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961–2w
Internet, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265w
Light dues 18w, 634–6w
Lighthouses 1275–6w
Local transport plans 326–7w, 329–31w
London Bridge Station 458w
London Underground, Finance 1237–8w
London Underground, Industrial disputes 148w
London Underground, Overcrowding 747w, 1238w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 143w, 747w, 1237–8w
London Underground, Standards 747w
M4 454w
M25, Repairs and maintenance 328w
Manpower, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262–3w
Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive 968w, 1277–8w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1263w
Ministers, Dept for Transport 142–3w
Ministers, Redundancy pay 1270w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 10–1w, 334w
Motor vehicles, Fuels 1246–7w
Motor vehicles, Registration 11w
National Air Traffic Services 146w
National Air Traffic Services, Insurance 571–2w
Network Rail 144–5w, 746w, 1245w
Network Rail, Corporate manslaughter 327w
Network Rail, Finance 12w, 17w, 145w, 1244–5w
Network Rail, Public appointments 145w
Office of the Rail Regulator 568w
Oil, Pollution 12–3w
Outdoor education, Death 1269–70w
Park and ride schemes 142w
Pay, Dept for Transport 962w
Petrol alternatives 963–5w, 1246w
Plant power 137–8w
Press releases, Dept for Transport 733w, 1270w
Private roads 344w
Private roads, Local government services 344–5w

Jamieson, Mr David—continued
Public expenditure, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 8w
Public participation, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265–6w
Public transport 148w
Public transport, EC action 454–5w
Public transport, Greater London 1260–1w
Public transport, Standards 963w
Quarrying, Insurance 174w
Railtrack, Finance 142w, 144w, 1239w
Railway stations, Repairs and maintenance 143w
Railway stations, Safety 571w
Railway stations, Security 460w
Railways 461w
Railways, Accidents 326w, 744–5w
Railways, Bridges 1244w
Railways, Commuters 569w
Railways, Fares 1242w
Railways, Finance 327w, 570w
Railways, Franchises 744w
Railways, Freight 570w, 968w
Railways, Investment 969–70w
Railways, Overcrowding 1235–7w, 1256w
Railways, Passengers 460w, 570w, 572w, 1276–7w
Railways, Pennines 12w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 1239w, 1244w
Railways, Safety 334w
Railways, Speed limits 1244w
Railways, Standards 461w, 969w, 1241w, 1256w
Railways, Taunton 1243w
Railways, Twyford 744w
Railways, Vandalism 745w
Rapid transit systems 146w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Rescue services, Portland 11w
River Thames, Safety 334–5w
Road signs and markings, Cycling 965w
Road traffic 143w, 963w, 966w
Road traffic, Forecasts 331–2w
Road traffic, Greater London 1247–8w
Road traffic, Urban areas 573w, 1255w
Road traffic control 454w
Road traffic control, Greater London 1255w
Road traffic control, Lorries 1247w, 1253w
Road traffic control, Standards 1255–6w
Road works, Utilities 333–4w
Roads 740w
Roads, Accidents 739w, 741–2w, 965–6w, 1245w, 1251–3w
Roads, Construction 148w, 456–9w, 573–4w, 1247w
Roads, Greater London 8w
Roads, Leyton 12w
Roads, Noise 1254–5w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 7–8w, 328–9w, 332–3w, 454w, 737–41w, 966w, 1256w
Roads, Safety 11–2w, 454w
Roads, Tolls 149w, 573w, 736–7w, 1255w
Scotland, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Shipping, Accidents 8w
Shipping, Radioactive wastes 571w
Speeches, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 962w
Speed limits 328w, 1248w
Strategic Rail Authority 567–8w
Strategic Rail Authority, Accountancy 745–6w

Jamieson, Mr David—continued
Strategic Rail Authority, Finance 12w, 746w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 147w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre, Industrial health and safety 458–9w
Taxis, Licensing 1260w
Taxis, Peterborough 459–60w
Taxis, Standards 1260w
Temporary employment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1264w
Traffic lights, Greater London 742w
Train operating companies, Finance 969w
Transport, Accidents 1242w
Transport, Disadvantaged 1214–5w
Transport, Finance 734–6w
Transport, Internet 1267w
Transport, Planning 573w, 968w, 1272w, 1276–7w
Transport, Radioactive wastes 1262w
Transport, Rural areas 1264w
Transport, Schools 13–5w
Transport, South East region 1265w
Transport, Standards 736w
Transport, Telephone services 327–8w
Transport, Urban areas 1271–2w
Transport Direct 733–5w
Transport for London, Finance 17w
Travel, Concessions 1264w
Travel, Research 734w
Unmanned air vehicles 970w
Urban bus challenge 8–10w
Vehicle Inspectorate 964w
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1271w
West coast railway line 6w, 969w
Wood 248–9w
Working hours, EC law 710w
Written questions, Administrative delays 456w, 1263w
Written questions, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 456w

Japan
Radioactive materials 389w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 693–5
Defence review (18.07.02) 464–6
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 276–7w, 753w
Armed forces, Cellular phones 276w
Armed forces, Health services 749–50w
Ballistic missile defence, USA 26w
Defence equipment, Procurement 153–5w, 906w
EC defence policy 611w
Grenades 906w
HMS Bridport 26w
HMS Nottingham, Repairs and maintenance 26w
Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 1109–10w
Terrorism 11–2

Jenkins, Mr Brian
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 22w
British Council, Art works 888w
Crime 97w
Crown Prosecution Service, Annual reports 287w
Deprivation indicators 1215w
Education, Standard spending assessments 1215w
Hong Kong, Foreign relations 888w
NHS, Private finance initiative 1084–5w

Jenkins, Mr Brian—continued
Schools, Broadband 1366w
Schools, Finance 1353–4w
Wembley Stadium 498w
Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Annual reports 888–9w

Job creation
Manufacturing industries 633w

Jobcentre Plus
1581w
Disabled 812w
Gosport 813w
Manpower 1545w
Training 1035w
Wales 321–2w
Welfare tax credits 271w

Jobcentres
Manpower 1580–1w
New Forest 812w
Rural areas 1580w

Jobseeker's allowance
511w, 1024–5w

***Johnson, Alan**, Minister of State for Employment Relations and Regions, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy (16.07.02) 63–6wh
Package holidays, Standards (23.07.02) 234–8wh
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 124–8wh
Questions
Diesel engines, EC action 945–6w
Employment agencies 949w
Employment Relations Act 1999 440–1w
Employment Tribunal System Taskforce 1338w
Employment tribunals 954w
Foreign workers 440w
Foreign workers, Minimum wage 440w
Industrial relations 777w
Isle of Wight, Dept of Trade and Industry 1325w
Manufacturing industries 356–8w
Manufacturing industries, Job creation 633w
Occupational pensions 271w
Regional development agencies, Annual reports 1338w
Regional development agencies, Planning 952–3w
Regional planning and development, Dept of Trade and Industry 792w
Regulation, Dept of Trade and Industry 170w
Vacant land, Property development 353w
Working hours, Parents 171w

Johnson, Mr Boris
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 495, 501, 517, 525
Questions
Religious broadcasting, Licensing 697–8w

***Johnson, Miss Melanie**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Accountancy 1338–9w
Accountancy, Regulation 1328w
Accountancy, Standards 337w
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group 170w, 1326–7w, 1337w
Bankruptcy 355–6w
Company law 168–9w
Consumers, Scotland 169–70w
Copyright 169w

Johnson, Miss Melanie—continued
EC action, Dept of Trade and Industry 951–2w, 960w
Horse racing 165w
Industry, Profits 172w
Innogy 1325–6w
Local government, Standards 440w
Local press, Ownership 439w
National Association of Citizens' advice bureaux 942w
Small businesses, Accountancy 1332–3w
Takeovers 350–1w
Telephones, Concessions 530w
Trading Schemes Act 1996 439w
WorldCom 1327w

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation
Disclosure of information 1391w

Joint strike fighter aircraft
495w

Jones, Helen M
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 166
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 284–5
Annual reports, Solicitor-General 615w
Cheshire Constabulary, Sick leave 1538–9w
Serious Fraud Office, Annual reports 615w

Jones, Mr Jon Owen
Questions
Asylum, Iraq 228w, 400–1w
Illegal immigrants 88–9w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 880w
Police, Wales 273

Jones, Mr Kevan
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 316–7, 331, 333, 337, 374–6
Museums and galleries, North East region (15.07.02) 129–31
Questions
Arts, North East region 692w
Defence, EC countries 23w
Defence, Expenditure 3
Greece, EC presidency 881w

Jones, Dr Lynne
Questions
Computers within reach programme 1367w
Developing countries, Poverty 260w
Embassies, Israel 553w
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 1566w, 1569w
National Asylum Support Service, Standards 1043w
Occupational pensions 271w
Pensions 1542w
Roads, Accidents 1245w
Transsexualism 1079–80w, 1306w

Jones, Mr Martyn David
Questions
New deal schemes, Wales 322w

Jones, Mr Nigel
Questions
Schools, Cheltenham 988w

***Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa**, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Antiques, Auctions 692–3w
Arts, North East region 692w
BBC 694w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 409w
Creative partnerships initiative 698w
Crime prevention, Young people 694w
Digital broadcasting 691w

***Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa**—continued*
Members, Correspondence 699w
Music 693w
National Lottery 650–2, 973w
Playing fields 1162w
Regional arts boards 692w
Sports, Finance 1162–3w
Sports, Holiday play schemes 693–4w
Wembley Stadium 1159w

Joyce, Mr Eric
Questions
Debts, Developing countries 465w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Armed conflict 1–2w
Minimum wage, Scotland 1228w
Unemployment, Scotland 1232w

Judges
Conduct 82w
Housing 1303–5w
Training 606–8w

Junior doctors
Working hours 1102w

Juries
Corruption 830w

Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Programme motion* and Lords amendts (16.07.02) 176–215
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Kananaskis Summit
Group of Eight 896–7w

Kashmir
177w, 1311w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Questions
Members, Correspondence 108w, 220–1w, 294w, 639–40w, 805w, 890w, 1379w, 1587w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 835
Written questions, Administrative delays 543w

***Keeble, Ms Sally**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for International Development*
Questions
Angola, Famine 447–8w
Angola, Overseas aid 448w
Botswana, AIDS 963–5
Indonesia, Forests 448–9w
Small Enterprise Development Agency, Finance 292w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1123–4w
Written questions, Dept for International Development 292w

Keen, Alan
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 863
Questions
River Thames, Safety 334–5w

Keen, Ann
Questions
Theatre 497w

Keetch, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 314, 322
Defence review (18.07.02) 467
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 1110w
Afghanistan, Unmanned air vehicles 758w
Armed forces, Pensions 1113w
Defence, Expenditure 2–3

***Keetch, Mr Paul**—continued*
Defence equipment, Procurement 158w, 490w, 904–5w
European technology acquisition programme 904w
Hercules aircraft 1110w
Military aircraft 494w, 1103–4w
Police, Wales 273
SA80 rifle 1110–1w
Transplant surgery 216–8w
Unmanned air vehicles 157–8w, 494w

***Kelly, Ruth**, Financial Secretary, Treasury*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 949–53
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Mortgages (16.07.02) 47–51wh
Questions
Annuities 466w
Bank notes 470w
Bank services 68–9w
British nationality 636w
Business, Questionnaires 1190–1w
Cancer, Death rate 1178–9w
Cervical cancer, Death rate 1197–8w
Child tax credit 1190w
Coinage 68w
Computers, Treasury 66w
Consultation papers, Treasury 1181–2w
Corporate hospitality, Treasury 1199w
Credit unions 418–20
EC action, Treasury 339w, 636–7w, 1175–6w
Economic and monetary union 1198–9w
Economic and monetary union, NHS 1198w
Economic situation 1199w
Employment, Yorkshire and Humberside 67–8w, 637w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 636w, 1339w
Euro, Overseas trade 1198w
"European Community Finances White Paper" 822w
Exchange rates 65w, 1182–3w
Financial services, Buckingham 1199–200w
Financial services, Complaints 65w
Financial services, Misrepresentation 335–6w
Financial Services Authority 1177w
Financial Services Compensation Scheme 468–9w
Housing, Prices 466w
Housing, South East region 465w
Identity cards, Fees and charges 1194–5w
Industrial disputes 1195w
Inflation 65w
Information officers, Treasury 822w
Inheritance tax 1194w
Insurance, Employers' liability 250–1w
Insurance, Terrorism 960w
International Monetary Fund 1139w
Internet, Treasury 1186w
Local government, Pay 1194w
Manpower, Treasury 1172w
Maternity services 1438w
Members, Correspondence 338w
Ministerial policy advisors, Treasury 1195w
Mortgages, Complaints 360w
National income 1188w
National insurance 1194w
National Savings Agency, Advertising 1197w
Occupational pensions 469w
Office for National Statistics, Annual reports 821w

***Kelly, Ruth**—continued*
Office for National Statistics, Codes of practice 66w, 1170w
Pay, Treasury 64–5w, 1192w
Pensions 401–3, 465w
Pensions, Public sector 416
Pensions, Taxation 602w, 1200w
Private companies, Government assistance 69w
Private Pension Legislation Review 601w
Programme for international student assessment 66–7w
Public appointments, Treasury 337–8w, 1195–6w
Public finance 821w
Public participation, Treasury 1182w
Public Works Loan Board 1193–4w
Publicity, Treasury 821w
Republic of Ireland, Treasury 1188w
Sanctions, Zimbabwe 821w
Solicitors, Treasury 1199w
Statistics Commission, Annual reports 336w, 1170w
Stocks and shares 64w, 68w, 1199w
Tax credit 467w
Teenage pregnancy 70–4w, 1196–7w
Temporary employment, Treasury 1187w
Terrorism, Finance 959w
UK Debt Management Office, Annual reports 958w
UK membership of EC 469w
Unemployment, Scotland 1232w
Visits abroad, Treasury 1180w, 1188w
Welfare tax credits 254–5w

Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
Questions
Iraq, Armed conflict 280–1

***Kennedy, Jane**, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 258–9
Questions
Annual reports, Northern Ireland Office 505w
Closed circuit television, Belfast 506–7w
Community development, Northern Ireland Office 1202w
Crown Prosecution Service, Offices 525w
Drugs, Northern Ireland 508w
Females, Northern Ireland Office 509w
Fireworks, Northern Ireland 506w
Northern Ireland government 509w
Police, Northern Ireland 508–9w, 1202–3w
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Annual reports 957w
Prisoners, Northern Ireland 1202w
Proscribed organisations, Flags 505w
Proscribed organisations, Northern Ireland 505–6w, 1201w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland Office 508w
Riot control weapons, Northern Ireland 507w
Smuggling, Northern Ireland 507–8w
Telephone services, Northern Ireland Office 1201w
Visits abroad, Northern Ireland Office 506w

Kent
Acute beds 1102w
Health services 218–9w

Kenya
Microfinance 293w
Politics and government 764w

Key, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 703
Defence review (18.07.02) 473
Export Control Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1046–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 215–9wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Politics and government 967
Armed forces, Housing 6
Arms trade, Export controls 780w
Defence Munitions, Dean Hill 25w
Energy, Conservation 485w
Genetically modified organisms 702w, 774–5w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 33–4w
Members, Correspondence 661w
Mental health services, Hospital beds 140
Military exercises, Salisbury Plain 901w
RAF Chilmark 1105–6w
Sudan, International assistance 882w

Khabra, Mr Piara S
Questions
Meat Hygiene Service, Annual reports 1082w

Kidnapping
Children 411–2w

Kidney, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education, Stafford (22.07.02) 759–61
Questions
Administration of justice 528–9w
Countryside stewardship scheme 707w
Housing benefit 1563w
Inland waterways 135w
Law Society, Complaints 412–3w
Medicines Commission, Annual reports 1082w
Organic food 707w
Plastics, Waste disposal 707w
Sports, Holiday play schemes 693–4w

Kidney patients
Lancashire 1088w
Royal Preston Hospital 1088w

Kidneys
Donors 657w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter
Questions
Iraq, Armed conflict 975

King, Andy
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 866
Questions
Nadia, Naira 386w
Pakistan, Christianity 386w
Pakistan, Human rights 386w

King, Ms Oona
Questions
Indonesia, Religion 609–10w

Kingston upon Hull
Housing (22.07.02) 733–5

Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 300
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 165
Lockerbie, Bombings (23.07.02) 957
Questions
German measles, Vaccination 423w, 1391w

Kirklees
Social security benefits 1030w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 138–9wh, 157–62wh, 166wh, 172–3wh
Questions
Bank services 68–9w
Business questions 431
Community care grants 1578w
Financial Services Consumer Panel, Bank services 270w
Heath, Edward, Public statues 1167w
History of Parliament Trust, Finance 49–50w
House of Commons, Internet 325–6w
House of Commons, Manpower 1167w
House of Commons, Publications 1167w
House of Commons, Waste disposal 189w
House of Commons Journal 49w
Housing benefit 595w, 1022w
Low flying 284w
RAF Police, Low flying 283–4w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 809–11w, 1551w
Social security benefits, Borders region 1552w

Knight, Rt Hon Greg
Questions
Economic and monetary union 1198w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 1257w
Roads, Tolls 1256w

Knight, Jim
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 318, 328–9, 340, 356–7, 359, 367, 376–7
Questions
British Forces Post Office, Standards 1120w
Defence Fire Service 16
Defence Storage and Distribution Agency, Standards 1120w
Defence Transport and Movements Agency, Standards 1119w
Duke of York's Royal Military School, Standards 1117w
Magistrates' courts, Information technology 1288–90w
RAF Personnel Management Agency, Standards 1116w
RAF Training Group, Standards 1120–2w

Know-How Fund
Environment protection 720w

Knowledge for Development Challenge Fund
44w

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Questions
Community development 1471–2w
Electronic equipment, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 235w
Market town initiative, Guisborough 315w

Kurds
Iraq 388w

Labelling
Food 1384–5w

Lactose
Drugs 413w

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 301
Questions
Cancer, Medical treatments 1100w
China, Human rights 839

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Questions
Basle Concordat, Scotland 76w
Constituencies, Scotland 76–7w
Electoral systems, Scotland 77w
Meat, Smuggling 1232w
Neurofibromatosis 1387w

Lamb, Norman
Questions
Arms trade 436w
Arms trade, Export controls 780w
Disabled, Village halls 263–4w
Members, Correspondence 1091w
Train operating companies, Finance 969w

Lambeth
Cannabis 222w

Laming Inquiry
see Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry

Lammy, David, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Hospitals, Somerset (23.07.02) 243–6wh
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Standards 659–60w
Ambulance services, Standards 1410–1w
Anaesthetics, Medical equipment 1420–1w, 1423–4w
Beta-interferon, Derbyshire 203w
Buildings, Dept of Health 206–7w
Cannabis, Clinical trials 1431w
Chronic fatigue syndrome 210–1w
Commission for Health Improvement 210w
Commission for Health Improvement, Pay 1427–8w
Community health councils 1410w
Consultation papers, Dept of Health 1429w
Contraceptives, Clinical trials 1383–4w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 1378–9w, 1428w
Cystic fibrosis, Prescriptions 200–1w
Dental health 189w
Dental services 189–90w
Dental services, Fees and charges 662w
Dental services, Gloucestershire 1396w
Dental services, Pensioners 1438w
Diabetes, Screening 191w
Dietary supplements, EC action 1440–1w
Drugs, Misuse 202w
EC action, Dept of Health 1339–40w
EC law, Dept of Health 205–6w, 658–9w
Empty property, Dept of Health 663w
Energy, Dept of Health 663w
Generic prescribing 1383w
Health services, Cooperatives 212w
Health services, USA 208w
Herbal medicine, Licensing 1430–1w
Hospitals, Food 200w
Hospitals, Hygiene 203w, 1415w
Hospitals, Industrial health and safety 1418w
Hospitals, Infectious diseases 1399–400w
Hospitals, Public appointments 127w
Hospitals, Standards 1417–8w
Hydrofluorocarbons, Refrigeration 1438w
Infliximab 207w
Kidneys, Donors 657w
Location, Dept of Health 867w
London Ambulance Service, Body armour 1410w
Medical Devices Agency, Annual reports 537–8w
Medical records, Data protection 688w
Members, Correspondence 1379w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 129–30w

***Lammy, David**—continued*
Multiple sclerosis, Medical treatments 1424w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 208w, 1410w
NHS, Circulars 212–3w
NHS, Energy 211–2w
NHS, Finance 1428w
NHS, Information 1428w
NHS, Negligence 1396–8w
NHS, Procurement 214–5w
NHS, Standards 211w
NHS Direct 142–4
NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, Annual reports 875w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 1413w
Oral questions, Dept of Health 1431w
Organs, Donors 658w
Orphan drugs 1440w
Oxygen, Medical equipment 1383w
Pharmacy, Billing 210w, 1420w
Prescription drugs, Imports 1403–4w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 121w, 659w
Prescriptions, Information technology 213w, 1420w
Primary care trusts, Barnsley 1386w
Public participation, Dept of Health 1094w
Publicity, Dept of Health 1403w
Remploy, Primary care trusts 1429–30w
Sexual offences 864w
Solihull Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 209–10w, 660w
Transplant surgery 216–8w
Visits abroad, Dept of Health 1429w
World Health Organisation, Taiwan 117w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1431w

Lancashire
Hospices 200w
Hospital beds 204–5w
Kidney patients 1088w
Young offenders 558w

Land
Contamination 1147–8w
Ownership 1219–20w

Land mines
Bomb disposal 162w
Serbia 895w

Land use
Databases 1010–2w

Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002
Questions
28w

Landing rights
Airports 1235w
Gatwick Airport 1234–5w
Heathrow Airport 1234–5w

Languages
Curriculum 1351w
Immigrants 684w
Pupils 375–8w

Lansley, Mr Andrew
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 181–3wh
Flood control (16.07.02) 32–4wh
Greenbelt, Cambridge (17.07.02) 133–4wh

Lapwings
Conservation 302w

Law Commission
1081w

Law Society
Complaints 412–3w

Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Debates etc.
Textiles, Wales (18.07.02) 550
Questions
Court Service, Wales 319w
Double taxation, Lithuania 959w
Equal pay 792–3w
Insurance, Terrorism 960w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority 781–2w

Laws, Mr David
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1016
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 311, 321, 347–52, 382–3
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 914–5
Questions
Armed forces, Recruitment 13–4
Beef, Exports 1151–2w
Crime 680–2w
Crime, Somerset 1457–9w
Crime prevention, Standards 852–4w
Crown Prosecution Service, Advocacy 619w
Defence Procurement Agency 160–1w
Drugs, Children 88w
Drugs, Misuse 559w, 1068–9w
Energy, Conservation 479w
Fish, Diseases 35–6w
Food, Safety 1100w
Food Standards Agency 429w
Gulf War syndrome, Compensation 490–1w
Higher education, Student numbers 184–7w
HMS Nottingham 276w
Literacy, Primary education 369w
Members, Correspondence 1065w
Mental patients 538w
Navy, Procurement 161w
Parliament Square, Demonstrations 554w
Police, Emergency calls 100–2w
Police, Freemasonry 1502–3w
Police, Manpower 1488–92w
Police, Standards 1522–8w
Pre-school education 994w
Prisoners, Literacy 856w
Public sector, Sick leave 820w
Pupil exclusions 183w
Rapid reaction forces, EC countries 26w
Sleeping rough 243w
Standards, Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Standards, Dept for Work and Pensions 521w
Standards, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2w
Statistics, Dept for Education and Skills 1365w
Statistics, Dept for Work and Pensions 1024w
Statistics, Home Office 397–8w
10 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 1368–9w

Laxton, Mr Bob
Questions
New deal for communities 277–8

Lazarowicz, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1014
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 497, 518, 523
Questions
Child Benefit Centre, Telephone services 266w
Civil servants, Accidents 335w

***Lazarowicz, Mr Mark**—continued*
Debts, Developing countries 464w
Ferries, EC countries 1233w
Overseas students 1373w
Veterinary medicine, Research 1135w

Learndirect centres
Taunton 1351–2w

Lee on Solent
Rescue services 11w

Leeds
Road traffic 736–7w
Working families tax credit 252–3w

Legal Services Commission
Computers 1299–300w

Leicestershire Police
96w

Leicestershire Police Authority
Public appointments 560w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 702
Questions
Abortion 1385w
Medical records, Data protection 688w
National Audit Office, Business plans 979–80w
Sexual offences 864w, 1454w
Teenage pregnancy 1386w

Leominster
Swimming pools 691–2w

Lepper, Mr David
Questions
Chronic fatigue syndrome 210–1w
Corporate manslaughter 1505w
Freedom of Information Act 2000, Government departments 272w
Legal Services Commission, Computers 1299–300w
Social security benefits, Disqualification 1025–6w

***Leslie, Mr Christopher**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Questions
Air conditioning, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1002w
Best value 1017w
Computers, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 244w
Council tax 45–6w, 244–5w
Council tax, North West region 1216–8w
Departmental responsibilities, Cabinet Office 1000w, 1002w
Disabled, Access 1007–8w
Electronic equipment, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 235w
Electronic voting 1016w
Electronic voting, Finance 1016w
English Partnerships 1211–3w
Fire prevention 1211w
Fire Service College, Disciplinary proceedings 18w
Fire services, Government assistance 1015–6w
Fire services, Pay 1002w
Fire services, Radio 245w, 343w
Housing, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Housing, Planning permission 1009w
Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government 1205w
Internet, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1219w
Local government, Elections 83w

***Leslie, Mr Christopher**—continued*
Local government, Standards 241w
Local government finance 45w, 239–40w, 1203–4w
Local government finance, Greater London 1204w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1219w
Ministers, Redundancy pay 1218w
Orders and regulations, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 997w
Parish councils, Codes of practice 1009w
Parish councils, Resignations 1009w
Press, Cabinet Office 1014w
Press releases, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Public expenditure, Cabinet Office 340w
Regional planning and development, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1204–6w
Social services, Greater London 249w
Social services, Standard spending assessments 48w
Standard spending assessments 1000–1w
Voting methods 1016w

Lesotho
Famine 717w

Letwin, Rt Hon Oliver
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 289–90
Questions
Immobilisation of vehicles, Regulation 1473w
Police Reform Bill and Implementation Unit 561w
Police Standards Unit 105–6w
Prisoners, Repatriation 1504–5w
Robbery 1487w
Shellfish, Licensing 310w

***Lewis, Mr Ivan**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Education and Skills*
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 109, (24.07.02) 1027
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (17.07.02) 116–20wh
Questions
Apprentices, Finance 990w
Computers, Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Computers within reach programme 1367w
Dyslexia, Hyperactivity 990w
Educational institutions, Computer software 651–2w
Grammar schools 189w
Immigrants, Languages 684w
Individual learning accounts 452–3w, 992w, 1351w
Investors in people, Small businesses 993–4w
Learndirect centres, Taunton 1351–2w
Literacy, North West region 1346–7w
Modern apprenticeships 991–2w
National training organisations, Finance 648–52w
Playgrounds, Wood 652–3w
Pupil referral units, North West region 1346w
Schools, Broadband 1366w
Schools, Playing fields 989–90w
Schools, Transport 647w
Sixth form colleges, Finance 987w
Somerset College for Arts and Technology, Finance 1351w
Tameside College 1367w
Training, Textiles 1367w

***Lewis, Mr Ivan**—continued*
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 1354–5w, 1357–62w
Training and enterprise councils, Manpower 1355–7w
Vocational education, Morley 648w

Lewis, Dr Julian
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 704
Criminal Evidence (Prohibition of Sale) (No 2) Bill, 1R (16.07.02) 173
Defence review (18.07.02) 472–3
Prime Minister (Office Role and Functions) (No 2) Bill, 1R (16.07.02) 173
Private Members' bills, Points of order (18.07.02) 477, (19.07.02) 632, 634, 639
Questions
Africa, AIDS 965
Agriculture, Subsidies 300w
Agriculture, Sustainable development 300w
Crime, Wales 274
Devolution, Wales 320w
Fleet Air Arm 22–3w
Food, Hospitals 200w
Food, Imports 298w
Food, Labelling 1384–5w
Meat, Imports 298–9w
Milk 480w
Milk Marque 480w
Planning, Inquiries 243–4w
Political parties, Finance 663
Recruitment, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Recruitment, Scotland Office 1226w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 834–5
Terrorism 10

Leyton
Roads 12w

Liability
Devolution 251w

Liberia
Armed conflict 260–1w, 886w, 900w, 1306w
Overseas aid 715w

Libraries
see Public libraries

Licensing laws
362w, 498w

***Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Questions
Advertising, Scotland Office 382w
Aggregates levy, Scotland 1228w
Airports, Scotland 983w
Annual reports, Scotland Office 769w
Basle Concordat, Scotland 76w
Beef, France 1228w
Broadband, Scotland 76w
Buildings, Scotland Office 383w, 768w
Channel tunnel railway line, Scotland 982w
Civil servants, Scotland Office 382w
Computers, Scotland Office 768w
Constituencies, Scotland 76–7w
Consultation papers, Scotland Office 383w, 769w
Contracts, Scotland Office 499–501w
Correspondence, Scotland Office 980–1w, 1225w
Crown Estate Commissioners, Scotland 274w
EC law, Scotland Office 382w
Electoral systems, Scotland 77w
Equal opportunities, Scotland Office 768w
Females, Scotland Office 983w

***Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen**—continued*
Food Standards Agency, Scotland 1226w
Gender impact assessment, Scotland Office 768w
Grants, Scotland Office 767w
Hewlett-Packard, Redundancy 983w
Holiday leave, Scotland Office 382w
Industrial tribunals, Scotland Office 1225w
Information officers, Scotland Office 769w, 1226w
Liquefied petroleum gas, Scotland 502w, 1230–2w
Lockerbie, Bombings 765–6w
Manpower, Scotland Office 1228–30w
Meat, Smuggling 1232w
Members' interests, Scotland Office 982w
Minimum wage, Scotland 1228w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scotland Office 273w, 500w, 766w, 1229w
New deal schemes, Scotland Office 980w
Newspaper press, Scotland Office 1227w
Non-departmental public bodies, Scotland Office 501w, 767w
North Sea oil, Scotland 984w
Offices, Scotland Office 980w
Official hospitality, Scotland Office 1225–6w
Operating costs, Scotland Office 1225w
Orders and regulations, Scotland Office 382–3w
Overtime, Scotland Office 767w
Pay, Scotland Office 382–3w, 980w
Press releases, Scotland Office 981w
Private finance initiative, Scotland Office 501w
Property, Scotland Office 502w
Public expenditure, Scotland 984w
Public expenditure, Scotland Office 382–3w, 767w, 984w
Publicity, Scotland Office 769w
Recruitment, Scotland Office 1226w
Regional assistance 502w
Regulatory impact assessments, Scotland Office 274w
Relocation services, Scotland Office 500w
Republic of Ireland, Scotland Office 984w
Scotland, Scotland Office 1230w
Serials, Scotland Office 1226–7w
Standards, Scotland Office 76w, 501–2w
Statistics, Scotland Office 768w
Taxation, Offshore workers 1229w
Telephone services, Scotland Office 768w
Temporary employment, Scotland Office 1229w
Training, Scotland Office 382w
Unemployment, Scotland 983–4w
Visits abroad, Scotland Office 766–7w, 983w, 1225w
Wales, Scotland Office 982w
Written questions, Scotland Office 1228w

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 367–8, 371–4
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Hospitals, Somerset (23.07.02) 239–43wh
Questions
Agriculture, Subsidies 1143–4w
Ammunition, Procurement 20w
Annuities 466w
Armed forces, Cadets 760w
Cancer, Burnham on Sea 1422w
Cancer, Research 1422w
Education, Agriculture 648w
Environment protection, Curriculum 480w
Hospitals, Rural areas 535w
Jobcentres, Manpower 1580–1w
Local government, Elections 83w
Military exercises, Quantocks 905w
National Air Traffic Services 146w

***Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian**—continued*
NHS, Recruitment 419w
Pupil exclusions, Somerset 645w
Pupils, Personal records 375w
Railway stations, Repairs and maintenance 143w
Regional airports, Wales 270–1
Regional development agencies, Expenditure 791w
Sports, Schools 691w
Village halls, Construction 708–9w
Warehouse parties, Southern region 401w

Lidington, Mr David
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 673–6
Questions
Animal feed 30w, 702–3w, 1149–50w
Animal feed, Additives 29w, 703w
Asda, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 310w
Bovine tuberculosis 124w, 703w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Sheep meat 428–9w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 1378–9w
Hunting 1150w
Livestock, Transport 922w
Livestock, Waste disposal 135w
Meat products, Contamination 204w, 429w
Pigmeat, Import controls 29–30w
Poultry, Import controls 1155–6w
Public Record Office, Census 800–2w, 1080w
Scrapie 30w
Sheep, Disease control 31w
Sheep meat 29w, 878w

Life imprisonment
832w, 1519–20w
Sexual offences 832w

Life Sentence Review Commissioners
Annual reports 1202–3w

Light dues
18w, 634–6w

Lighthouses
1275–6w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 295–6
Questions
Asylum, Applications 552–3w
Multiple occupation, Greater London 343w
Social security benefits, Abuse 1556w
Stocks and shares 64w
Tax evasion, Personation 256w

Limitation of actions
272w

Linton, Martin
Questions
Political parties, Finance 662–4
Social security benefits, Mortgages 1584w

Liquefied petroleum gas
Scotland 502w, 1230–2w

Listed buildings
Internet 407–8w

Literacy
North West region 1346–7w
Primary education 369w
Prisoners 856w

Lithuania
Double taxation 959w

Litter
Chewing gum 311–2w

Litter and Fouling of Land By Dogs (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 638

Livestock
Animal welfare 921w
Cumbria 477–8w
Markets 919–20w
Somalia 41w, 1136w
Transport 134–5w, 922w, 1142–3w
Waste disposal 135w

Llandovery
Military exercises 906–7w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 172
Questions
Asylum, Administrative delays 1042w
Firearms, Manchester 285–6
Health and Safety Commission 1369w
Kenya, Politics and government 764w
Mental health services, Hospital beds 139–40
Middle East, Peace negotiations 879–80w
Railways, Safety 334w
Xenotransplantation 228–9w

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 167
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 883
Questions
Africa, Arms trade 281–2
Crime, Wales 275
EC grants and loans, Wales 318–9w
Israel, Arms trade 841–2
National Assembly for Wales, Planning 322–3w
Public expenditure, Home Office 1078w
Wales, Scotland Office 982w

Loan guarantee scheme
Small businesses 778w

Local authorities
Disclosure of information 999w

Local government
Contracts 1020w
Elections 83w, 244w
Pay 1194w
Private finance initiative 941–2w
Standards 241w, 440w

Local Government Act 2000
Questions
999w

Local Government Bill (Draft)
Questions
236w

Local government finance
44–5w, 125w, (15.07.02) 127, 239–41w, (16.07.02) 259–60, (22.07.02) 735–7, (23.07.02) 889, 998w, (24.07.02) 1020, 1203–4w
Buckinghamshire (22.07.02) 761–5
Greater London 1204w
Wokingham 1204w

Local government services
Private roads 344–5w
Standards 974–5

Local press
Ownership 439w

Local Sustainability Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (23.07.02) 886

Local transport plans
326–7w, 329–31w

Location
Dept of Health 867w

Lockerbie
Bombings 765–6w, 843–4, (23.07.02) 956–62

London
see Greater London

London Ambulance Service
Body armour 1410w

London Bridge Station
458w

London City Racecourse
640w

London Underground
Air pollution 478–9w
Finance 1237–8w
Industrial disputes 148w
Overcrowding 747w, 1238w
Public private partnerships 143w, 747w, 1237–8w
Standards 747w, 1238–40w

Lone parents
Income support 511w, 813w, 1549–50w
Portsmouth 813w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Annual reports 797w
Computers 607w
Consultation papers 526–8w, 796–8w
Data protection 1303w
Departmental responsibilities 1081w
EC action 1278–9w
Females 411w
Information officers 799–800w
Internet 1279w
Members' interests 1278w
Public participation 1291w
Publicity 800w
Republic of Ireland 1292w
Standards 1293–9w
Telephone services 82w
Visits abroad 526w

Lorries
Illegal immigrants 552w
Road traffic control 1247w, 1253w

Lorry drivers
Training 265–6w

Loughton, Tim
Questions
Anaesthetics, Medical equipment 1423–4w
Antisocial behaviour orders, West Sussex 1466–7w
Archaeology 656–7
Asbestos, Water supply 476w
Cancer, Death rate 1178–9w
Care homes, Vetting 835w
Carers 541w
Children, Day care 987–8w
Commission for Health Improvement, Pay 1427–8w
Contracts, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 1428w
Credit cards, Fraud 679–80w
Crimes of violence, Ambulance services 608w
Doctors, Foreign workers 1394w
Doctors, Recruitment 1100–1w
Economic and monetary union, NHS 1198w
Foster care, Recruitment 541w, 1402w
German measles, Vaccination 1392w
Hospitals, Crimes of violence 536w
Hospitals, Hygiene 1415w
Hospitals, Infectious diseases 1399–400w

***Loughton, Tim**—continued*
Immigration officers, Czech Republic 685–6w
London Ambulance Service, Body armour 1410w
Medical treatments, EC countries 538w
Medicine, Students 772w
Motor vehicles, Fuels 1246–7w
NHS, Foreign workers 1101w
NHS, Information 1428w
NHS, Negligence 529–30w, 1398w
NHS, Nurseries 540w
NHS, Recruitment 542w
NHS Direct 144
NHS Leadership Centre, Manpower 1101w
Nurses, Consultants 537w
Nurses, Resignations 1092–3w
Nurses, Schools 1392w
Petrol alternatives 951w, 963–5w
Police 1480–1w
Police, Compensation 1466–8w
Primary health care, West Sussex 1394–5w
Remploy, Primary care trusts 1429–30w
Social workers, Training 541w
Sussex Police, Finance 1459w
Travelling people, Trespass 639w
Ukraine, AIDS 1388–9w
Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry 541w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1431w

Love, Mr Andrew
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 1–7wh
Questions
Electoral register 665–6
Employment zones 1593w
Flood control 310–1w, 704w
International Development Association 899w
Local authorities, Disclosure of information 999w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 880w
New deal for communities 1021w
Pensions, Taxation 1200w
Railways, Bridges 1244w
Road traffic offences 687–8w
Rwanda, Human rights 3w
Schools, Finance 1364w
Secondary education, Pupils 1350w
Social Fund 1583w
Social security benefits, Abuse 1556–7w
Terrorism 553–4w
Turkey, EC enlargement 3w

Low flying
284w
RAF Police 283–4w

Low incomes
Housing 1017–8w

Lucas, Ian
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 493, 496, 520
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1056–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Mortgages (16.07.02) 45–7wh
Questions
Africa, Water 1125w
Allotments 46w
Campsfield House Detention Centre 1448w
Complaints Audit Committee, Public appointments 1448w
Correctional Services Board 1446–7w
Crime prevention, Cellular phones 1485w
History of Parliament Trust, Finance 49–50w
House of Commons Journal 49w

***Lucas, Ian**—continued*
Lactose, Drugs 413w
Schools, Finance 1353w
Smith, Helen 1531w
VAT, Financial services 824w

Luff, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 687
Questions
Asylum, Housing 551–2w, 1063w
Asylum, Throckmorton airfield 1373w
Defence Estates, Property transfer 18w
Developing countries, Agricultural products 1126w
Emergency services, Radio 1470w
Multiple sclerosis, Drugs 199w
West Mercia Constabulary, Finance 675w

Luke, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 1002
Questions
Child Support Agency, Computers 1546w
Foreign investment in UK 412
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1131w

Luton
Home Office 1492–4w

M4
454w

M25
Repairs and maintenance 328w

McCabe, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Members, Points of order (19.07.02) 557
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 561, 574, 583, 587
Questions
Compulsory purchase 533w
Iran, Foreign relations 845–6
Ministers, Visits abroad 1372–3w

McCafferty, Ms Chris
Questions
Botswana, AIDS 964
Export credit guarantees, Environment protection 779w
Shipman, Harold 974

***McCartney, Rt Hon Ian**, Minister for Pensions, Department for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Annual reports, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587w
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 262w
Computers, Dept for Work and Pensions 294w
Consultation papers, Dept for Work and Pensions 1596w
Employment, Discrimination 1032–3w
Equal pay, Dept for Work and Pensions 112w
Females, Dept for Work and Pensions 521w
Jobcentre Plus, Manpower 1545w
Manpower, Dept for Work and Pensions 1588–90w
Members, Correspondence 1588w
Occupational pensions 518w, 520w, 1541w
Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, Annual reports 510w
Older people consultative forums, Public appointments 1022w

***McCartney, Rt Hon Ian**—continued*
Orders and regulations, Dept for Work and Pensions 515–6w
Pension credit 510w, 1540w
Pension credit, Hastings 1032w
Pensioners 1588w
Pensioners, Dorset 268–9w
Pensioners, Incapacity benefit 1569w
Pensioners, Social security benefits 295w
Pensions 518–21w, 1035w, 1040w, 1542w, 1584w
Pensions, Advisory services 1543–5w
Pensions, Overseas residence 1031w, 1541–3w
Pensions, Self-employed 114–5w
Private Pension Legislation Review 1543w
Public bodies, Dept for Work and Pensions 294w
Public expenditure, Dept for Work and Pensions 1586w
Public participation, Dept for Work and Pensions 1542w
Publicity, Dept for Work and Pensions 1584–6w
Regulatory impact assessments, Dept for Work and Pensions 524–5w
Social security benefits 112–3w, 1036w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 1550w, 1579w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Computers 295w
State retirement pensions 114–6w, 294w, 518w, 1039w, 1539–42w
State retirement pensions, Dorset 268w
State second pension, Publicity 1545w
Statistics, Dept for Work and Pensions 1024w
Temporary employment, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587w
Transsexualism 1306w
Visits abroad, Dept for Work and Pensions 1040w
Winter fuel payments 1034w
Winter fuel payments, European economic area 599w

McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Questions
Public houses, Entertainments 649–50
Social Fund 510w
Working families tax credit, Mitcham 462w

McDonnell, John
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 856–7
Questions
Breast feeding 414–5w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Information technology 845–6w
Planning 45w

MacDougall, Mr John
Questions
Terrorism 9–10

Macedonia
886w
Elections 611w
Entry clearances 402w

McFall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 35–6, (23.07.02) 905–11
Questions
National income 404–5

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 178, 190–1

McGrady, Mr Eddie—continued
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 245–8, (24.07.02) 994–5
Questions
Northern Ireland government 283–4
Sellafield, Radioactive wastes 133–4w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 976–7

***McGuire, Mrs Anne**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scotland Office*
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 496–7, 504–7, 528–9
Questions
Medicine, Scotland 127w

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 1126–7w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty, Wales 319w
Channel tunnel, Freight 323–4w, 968w
EC enlargement 181w
EC institutions 386–7w
EC institutions, Manpower 1315w
Employment, Females 793w
European fighter aircraft 21w, 760w
European Scrutiny Committee, Explanatory notes 1165–6w
Foreign investment in UK 412, 1176w
Horse racing 165w
Horserace Totalisator Board 53w
Illegal immigrants, Channel tunnel 393w
Illegal immigrants, Lorries 552w
Immigration controls, Fixed penalties 220w
Members, Correspondence 1142w
Motor sports 653
NHS Direct 143
Office of Communications 406–7w
Planning 1008w
Railways, Freight 968w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 482–3w
Tax allowances, Animal breeding 255w
Tax credit 467w

McIsaac, Shona
Questions
Information Commissioner, Public appointments 1374w

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 297–8
Housing (18.07.02) 451–2
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 1000

McKechin, Ann
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Reform 918w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda 883w
Kashmir 1311w
National Lottery 973w
Overseas aid 1136w
Post offices, Bank services 945w
Post offices, Closures 944–5w
West coast railway line 969w

McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Questions
Pesticides Safety Directorate, Standards 138–9w

Mackinlay, Andrew
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (23.07.02) 851

Mackinlay, Andrew—continued
Oral question time intervention (15.07.02) 5
Questions
British overseas territories 765w, 1318–9w
British overseas territories, National income 175–6w
Gibraltar, European Parliament elections 1291w
Gibraltar, Statistics 765w
NATO, Russia 19
Railways, Insurance 1240w
Ukraine, Foreign relations 837
Unni, Kolathuv 540w

Maclean, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 632–3

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Ecclesbourne School (22.07.02) 745–8
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 173
Questions
Electronic voting 665
Medical treatments, EC countries 201w
Members, Correspondence 298w
Primary care trusts, Derbyshire 1382–4w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Driving offences, Petitions (16.07.02) 261
Housing, Kingston upon Hull (22.07.02) 733–5
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 193, 200–1, 203
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 236, 250–3, (24.07.02) 992
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service, Offices 525w
Diplomatic service 889–90w
Employment agencies, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 608–9w
Forensic science 109w
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Public appointments 1487–8w
Local government, Standards 241w
Metropolitan Police, Sick leave 1050w
Prisoners, Suicide 1463–4w
RU486 1434–7w
Young offenders 1462w

***McNulty, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Derelict land, Planning permission (24.07.02) 280–9wh
Greenbelt, Cambridge (17.07.02) 134–6wh
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 19–21wh
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 344w, 1003w
Alconbury airfield, Planning permission 245w
Allotments 46w
Building alterations, Capital allowances 242w
Building alterations, VAT 242w
Buildings, Urban areas 1211w
Cars 1016w
Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Finance 344w
Community development 341–3w
Council housing 1205–10w
Council housing, Double glazing 1220w
Deprivation indicators 1215w
Derelict land 1019w
Dredging, Wales 37–8w

McNulty, Mr Tony—continued
EC action, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 633w
Equal opportunities, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Flood control 934w
Gender impact assessment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Hedges and ditches 141–2w
Homelessness 239w, 341–2w
Homelessness, Children in care 1003w
Homelessness, Finance 997–8w
Homelessness, Rural areas 46w
Housing 238w, 638w, 1007w, 1211w, 1216w
Housing, Construction 1018–9w
Housing, Coventry 1018w
Housing, Empty property 1003–6w, 1017w
Housing, Gloucestershire 639w
Housing, Low incomes 1017–8w
Housing, Planning permission 1008–9w
Land, Ownership 1219–20w
Land use, Databases 1010–2w
Local government, Private finance initiative 941–2w
London City Racecourse 640w
Members, Correspondence 639–40w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 241w, 1220–1w
Multiple occupation, Death 238w
New deal for communities 1021w
New towns 1218w
Ordnance Survey 1012–4w
Ordnance Survey, Standards 245–6w
Planning 45w, 639w, 1008w
Planning, Castle Point 1218w
Planning, Inquiries 243–4w
Planning, Urban areas 639w
Planning permission, Administrative delays 1007–8w
Playing fields 1217w
Pollution control, Tax allowances 242w
Post offices, Urban areas 998w
Recreation spaces, Standards 242–3w
Regional development agencies, Finance 1213–4w
Regional planning and development 237–8w
Regional planning and development, Finance 1020–1w
Right to buy scheme 48w
Sleeping rough 243w
Social rented housing 1210–1w
Statistics, Cabinet Office 236w
Telecommunications Working Group 47–8w, 1009w
Thameslink railway line 971w
Tipping of waste 315w
Tipping of waste, Planning permission 941w
Transport Works Authorisation Branch 45–8w
Transport Works Authorisation Branch, Manpower 47w
Travelling people, Trespass 639w
Urban regeneration companies, Gloucester 1016w

***MacShane, Mr Denis**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 109–12wh
Questions
Africa, International assistance 833–4
Africa, Meat 387–8w
Africa, Peace keeping operations 763w, 1311w

MacShane, Mr Denis*—continued*
  Annual reports, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 890w
  Asylum, Applications 1318w
  Balkans, Peace keeping operations 2w
  BBC External Services 844–5, 1320–1w
  BBC External Services, Pay 390w
  Botswana, Ethnic groups 176w
  Botswana, Nature conservation 763w
  British Council, Art works 888w
  Central African Republic, Armed conflict 1307w
  China, Asylum 884w
  China, Human rights 839
  China, Overseas trade 610–1w
  China, Sanctions 385–6w
  Computers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w
  Consultation papers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 885–6w
  Democratic Republic of Congo, Armed conflict 1–2w
  Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda 883w
  Developing countries, Trade 763w
  EC action, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 359–60w
  Embassies 1318w
  Employment agencies, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 608–9w
  Foreign trade 175w
  Hong Kong, Foreign relations 888w
  Human rights 1320w
  International Criminal Court 474w, 882w
  International Criminal Court, USA 846
  Internet, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1319w
  Iran, Drugs 4–5w
  Iraq, Sanctions 887w
  Ivory Coast, Elections 390w
  Japan, Radioactive materials 389w
  Kenya, Politics and government 764w
  Liberia, Armed conflict 1306w
  Macedonia 886w
  Macedonia, Elections 611w
  Mali, Elections 1306w
  Manpower, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1322–4w
  Panchen Lama 386w
  Photography, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w
  Public expenditure, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2w
  Public participation, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321w
  Publicity, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 887w
  Rwanda, Human rights 3w
  Sanctions 385w
  Sierra Leone, Armed forces 1308w
  Sierra Leone, Elections 1309w
  Sierra Leone, Peace keeping operations 1309–10w
  Sierra Leone, Peace negotiations 886w, 1308–11w
  Standards, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2w
  Sudan, Armed conflict 837–9
  Sudan, International assistance 882w
  Sudan, UN Convention Against Torture 609w
  United Nations, Peace keeping operations 881w
  Wilton Park, Standards 388–9w
  Zimbabwe 882w, 1307w
  Zimbabwe, Elections 174w
  Zimbabwe, Sanctions 1307w

Mactaggart, Fiona
    Debates etc.
  Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 298–9

Mactaggart, Fiona*—continued*
    Questions
  Absent voting 700w
  Agriculture, Subsidies 134w
  Creative partnerships initiative 698w
  Rape 835w

McWalter, Mr Tony
    Questions
  Business questions 431–2

McWilliam, Mr John
    Debates etc.
  Select committees (22.07.02) 730
    Questions
  Research and development tax credit 1170–1w
  Standing committees 325w

Magistrates
  Resignations 796w

Magistrates' courts
  1378w
  Closures 1305w
  Information technology 1288–90w
  Thames Valley 1081–2w, 1293w

Magistrates' courts committees
  1293w

Magnox reactors
  784w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
    Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 210–1wh, 216wh, 222wh
    Questions
  Driving under influence 742–3w, 967w, 1063w, 1448–54w
  Iraq, Sanctions 887w
  Road traffic offences, Fixed penalties 843w
  Terrorism 10

Maintenance
  Children 116w, 267w, 516–7w, 599–600w, 819–20w, 1026w, 1547–9w, 1560–1w
  Overseas residence 267w

"Making Decisions Consultation Paper"
  1082w

Maladministration
  Home Office 1486w

Malawi
  Overseas aid 588w, 1138w

Mali
  Elections 1306w

Malins, Mr Humfrey
    Questions
  Asylum 92w
  Deportation, Injuries 400w
  Immigration adjudicators, Manpower 411w
  Members, Correspondence 131w, 1465w
  Yarl's Wood Detention Centre 89w, 392–3w, 684w
  Young offenders, Habitual offenders 1531w

Mallaber, Judy
    Questions
  Business questions 431
  Training, Textiles 1367w, 1594–5w

Manchester
  Commonwealth Games 164w, 409w, (22.07.02) 743–5
  Firearms 285–6

Manchester Airport
  (24.07.02) 297–305wh

Manchester City Council
  340w

Mandelkern Group
  361w

Mann, John
    Questions
  Drugs, Crime 1462w
  Drugs, Nottinghamshire 1462–3w
  Heroin, Misuse 972
  In vitro fertilisation, Registration of births deaths and marriages 1430w
  Prescriptions, Information technology 1420w
  Recovered Assets Fund 1069w
  Welbeck College 7

Manufacturing industries
  356–8w, 947–9w
  Job creation 633w
  Trade competitiveness 417–8
  Wales 318w

Maples, Mr John
    Questions
  Police, Pensions 94–6w

Marines
  17–8

Market town initiative
  Guisborough 315w

Marketing
  Higher education 643w
  Petrol 786w

Markets
  Electricity generation 1330w
  Livestock 919–20w

Marks and Spencer
  VAT 1191–2w

Marris, Rob
    Debates etc.
  Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 76–7, 80–2, 84, 107, 110
  Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 490, 511, 513
    Questions
  Electronic government, Democracy 182–3w

Marsden, Mr Gordon
    Questions
  Care homes, Standard spending assessments 197–8w
  Eastern Europe, Overseas aid 1128w
  Sentencing, Appeals 287–8w

Marsden, Mr Paul
    Questions
  Cancer, Surgery 422w
  Chronic fatigue syndrome, Complementary medicine 538w
  Crime, Elderly 681–2w
  Doctors' list of patients 1392w
  General practitioners, Waiting lists 418–9w
  Overseas aid, HIV infection 894–6w
  Pay, Treasury 1192w
  Prisoners, Advisory services 1469–70w
  Public bodies, Dept for Work and Pensions 294w
  Surgery, Waiting lists 536w

Marshall, Mr David
    Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 122wh
    Questions
  Aviation, USA 1236w
  Driving offences, Speed limits 105w

Marshall-Andrews, Mr Robert
    Debates etc.
  Airports (23.07.02) 857–8
  Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 293–4

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Carlisle United Football Club, Petitions (23.07.02) 954
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 679
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 1117w
Animal welfare, Expenditure 619–20w
Environment Agency 622w
Forensic Science Service 1077w
Prison Service, Standards 1075–7w
Rabies 135w
West coast railway line 6w

Massey Ferguson
Coventry 1595–6w

Maternity benefits
264–5w

Maternity payments
Asylum 1043w
Sure start programme 1559w

Maternity services
1438w
Standards 1097w
Surrey 1097w

Mates, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 478–9, 481

Mature students
Morley 647w

Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 857

May, Mrs Theresa
Debates etc.
London Underground, Points of order (17.07.02) 305
Questions
A404(M) 143w, 736w
Bus services 460–1w, 1257–9w
Bus services, Greater London 9–10w, 1257–9w
Bus services, Rural areas 743–4w
Bus services, Standards 743–4w, 1258w
Cycling, Standards 1277w
Driver information systems 1253–4w
Electoral systems 996w
Fires 150–2w
Fuels, Excise duties 740–1w
Heathrow Airport, Air routes 961w
Home zones 1267w
London Bridge Station 458w
London Underground, Finance 1237–8w
London Underground, Overcrowding 747w, 1238w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 747w
M4 454w
Members, Correspondence 1468w
Network Rail 746w
Network Rail, Corporate manslaughter 327w
Park and ride schemes 142w
Police stations 829–30w
Public transport, Greater London 1260–1w
Railtrack, Finance 142w
Railway stations, Security 460w
Railways 461w
Railways, Commuters 569w
Railways, Fares 1242w
Railways, Finance 570w
Railways, Freight 570w
Railways, Overcrowding 1235–7w, 1256w

***May, Mrs Theresa**—continued*
Railways, Passengers 460w, 570w, 572w, 1276–7w
Railways, Standards 461w, 969w
Railways, Twyford 744w
Rapid transit systems 146w
Regional planning and development 238w
Road traffic 963w, 966w
Road traffic, Urban areas 1255w
Road traffic control, Greater London 1255w
Road traffic control, Lorries 1247w, 1253w
Roads 740w
Roads, Accidents 739w, 741–2w, 1253w
Roads, Greater London 8w
Roads, Leyton 12w
Roads, Noise 1254–5w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 7–8w, 737–41w, 966w, 1256w
Strategic Rail Authority, Accountancy 745–6w
Strategic Rail Authority, Finance 746w
Teachers, Training 57w
Transport, Finance 734w
Transport, Internet 1267w
Transport, Planning 968w
Transport, South East region 1265w
Urban bus challenge 8–10w
Written questions, Administrative delays 456w

***Meacher, Rt Hon Michael**, Minister of State for the Environment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 345w
Asbestos, Water supply 476w
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 39w
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Annual reports 139w
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Standards 139–40w
Climate change 31–2w
Dogs 308w
EC action, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 35w, 69–70w, 79–80w, 702w
Energy, Conservation 27–8w, 479w, 485w
Environment, Ministerial policy advisors 312w
Environment Agency 622w
Environment protection, Curriculum 480w
Exhaust emissions 479w
"Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate" 1148–9w
Genetically modified organisms 702w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 33–4w, 700–2w
Genetically modified organisms, EC action 37w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 36–7w
Ground water 1145–7w
Hazardous substances, Waste disposal 312w, 483w
Home energy efficiency scheme 622–3w
Land, Contamination 1147–8w
Lapwings, Conservation 302w
Litter, Chewing gum 311–2w
London Underground, Air pollution 478–9w
Noise, Pollution control 793–4w
Plastics, Waste disposal 707w
Radioactive wastes, Pollution control 914w
Recycling 36w
Recycling, Standards 35–6w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 482–3w
Tipping of waste 28–9w, 481w

***Meacher, Rt Hon Michael**—continued*
Water abstraction 487–8w
Water supply, Competition 916w
Wildlife, Meat 484–5w, 705–6w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 706w

Meat
Africa 387–8w, 481–2w, 920w
Hygiene 429w
Imports 298–9w
Scotland 1232w
Smuggling 299w, 481–2w, 1232w
Wildlife 387–8w, 484–5w, 705–6w, 920w, 1140–1w, 1367–8w

Meat Hygiene Service
Annual reports 1082w

Meat products
Contamination 204w, 417w, 429w, 1154–5w

Medical Devices Agency
Annual reports 537–8w

Medical equipment
122w
Anaesthetics 1420–1w, 1423–4w
Oxygen 1383w

Medical examinations
Incapacity benefit 1566w, 1569w

Medical records
Carers 1401w
Data protection 688w, 864w

Medical treatments
Asthma 1423–4w
Cancer 1100w
Colon cancer 212w
EC countries 201w, 538w, 871–2w
Mentally incapacitated 411w
Multiple sclerosis 1424w
Overseas visitors 424w, 1394w
Pain 423w
Radiation exposure 1434w
Strokes 1424w

Medicine
Education 657w
Scotland 127w
Students 772w

Medicines Commission
Annual reports 1082w

Medicines Control Agency
Annual reports 1083w

Members
Advocate General for Scotland 1232–3w
Computers 711w
Correspondence 105w, 108w, 131–2w, 220–1w, 294w, 297–8w, 338w, 477w, 564w, 631–2w, 639–40w, 661w, 699w, 805w, 817–8w, 878w, 890w, 1065w, 1069w, 1091w, 1142w, 1379w, 1390w, 1394w, 1409w, 1465w, 1468w, 1587–8w
Pensions 83–4w, 712w
Rulings and statements (24.07.02) 1018

Members' constituency work
Rulings and statements (23.07.02) 885

Members' interests
Home Office 394w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278w
Scotland Office 982w

Meningitis
Vaccination 428w

Mental Health Act 1983
Questions
660–1w

Mental Health Bill (Draft)
Questions
191w, 197w, 322w, 661w

Mental health services
126–7w, 196w, 538–9w
Children 123w, 125–6w, 1098w
Durham County 127w
Ethnic groups 197w
Expenditure 1098w
Finance 540w
Hospital beds 139–41
Manpower 539w
Physiotherapy 875–7w
Primary care trusts 192–6w
Prisons 1097w, 1529w, 1534–5w
Private finance initiative 877w
Vacancies 1097–8w
Waiting lists 197w, 1420w
Wales 322w
Worcestershire 127w

Mental patients
538w, 660–1w

Mentally disturbed offenders
1527w, 1529w
Prisoners' release 1521w

Mentally ill
Employment 123–4w, 126w, 196w
Hospital beds 1419–20w
Prisoners 126w

Mentally incapacitated
529w
Medical treatments 411w
Protection 563w

Mentoring Fund
103w

Mercenaries
748w

Mercer, Patrick
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 474
Iraq (22.07.02) 801–3
Questions
Afghanistan, Army 492w
Antiaircraft missiles, Procurement 157w, 162w
European fighter aircraft 156w, 492w
Nimrod aircraft 491–2w
Skill force scheme 156w
Submarines, Nuclear reactors 490w

Merchant Shipping (Safety of Navigation) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(22.07.02) 820

Mergers
NHS trusts 1087w

Merron, Ms Gillian
Questions
Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Standards 911–2w
Defence Housing Executive, Standards 908–9w
General Service Medal, Suez 907–8w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Exservicemen 909–12w
Law Commission 1081w
QinetiQ 911–2w
Radioactive wastes, Pollution control 914w
Teenage pregnancy 1387–8w

Merseyside
Drugs 1504w
Police (16.07.02) 262–8

Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive
968w, 1277–8w

Metropolitan Police
671w, 824–5w, 1478–9w
Complaints 1476–7w
Criminal records 1050w
Disciplinary proceedings 856w, 1054w
Housing 671–2w
Manpower 1488w
Sick leave 1049–50w
Special constables 221w
Training 848–9w

Meyer, Catherine
803w, 887w

***Michael, Rt Hon Alun**, Minister of State, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 264–7wh
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 27w
Common land 915w
Computers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 37w
Countryside, Access 137w
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 304w, 1153w
Driving instruction, Young people 307w
Environment Agency, Public appointments 1144w
Foot and mouth disease, Public footpaths 1139–40w
Green Ministers Committee 307–8w
Hill farming 313–4w
Hunting 483w, 1150w
Market town initiative, Guisborough 315w
New Forest, National parks 707–8w
Public footpaths, Safety 137w
Rights of way, Access 136–7w, 708w
Rural areas, New businesses 929–30w
Rural development plans 39w
Village halls 308w
Village halls, Construction 708–9w
Water sports 934w

Microcredit Summit
899w

Microfinance
Developing countries 293w
Kenya 293w
Uganda 292–3w

Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust
Waiting lists 129–30w

Middle East
Antisemitism 181w, 765w
Peace negotiations 879–80w

***Milburn, Rt Hon Alan**, Secretary of State for Health*
Debates etc.
Elderly, Ministerial statements (23.07.02) 869–84
Questions
Harold Shipman Tribunal of Inquiry 658w
Hospitals, Consultants 137–9
Members, Correspondence 1379w
NHS Bank 1404–6w

***Miliband, Mr David**, Minister of State for Schools, Dept for Education and Skills*
Debates etc.
Education, Castle Point (22.07.02) 825–8
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 47–9, 59, 64–8, 72–4, 87–9, 92–4, 100–5, 112–4, 117–9, 122, (24.07.02) 1021–6, 1030, 1033–6
Questions
After school clubs, Inspections 1341–2w

***Miliband, Mr David**—continued*
City academies 643–4w
Education, Finance 1366w
Education, Pilot schemes 1347–50w
Education, Standard spending assessments 1215w
Education, Surrey 1352w
Free school meals 372–4w
Grammar schools 1349w
Headteachers, Qualifications 1345–6w
Headteachers, Training 1345w
Primary education, Literacy 369w
Primary education, Standards 367–8w
Pupil exclusions, Somerset 645w
Pupils, Languages 375–8w
Pupils, Personal records 374–5w
Schools 367w
Schools, Admissions 56w
Schools, Finance 1353–4w, 1364w
Schools, Governing bodies 378–9w
Schools, Information technology 378w
Schools, Management 1341w
Schools, North West region 1343–4w
Schools, Transport 363w, 1341w
Secondary education, Pupils 644w, 1350w
Small School Support Fund 369–71w
Special educational needs 1354w
Special educational needs, Finance 1354w
Specialist schools 363w, 644w
Specialist schools, Admissions 363w
Statistics, Dept for Education and Skills 1365w
Teachers, Ethnic groups 364w
Teachers, Foreign workers 368–9w, 645w
Teachers, Manpower 364w
Teachers, North West region 1345–6w
Teachers, Pensions 1344w
Teachers, Recruitment 372w
Teachers, Retirement 364w
Teachers, Surrey 1343–4w
Teachers, Training 57w, 364–7w, 1352–3w
Teachers, Vacancies 57–60w

Military aircraft
see also Low flying
494w, 758w, 1103–4w

Military bases
Aviation 1114–5w, 1234–5w
Colchester 905–6w, 1114w
Cyprus 279w, 282w
Portsmouth 756–7w
West Sussex 164w

Military exercises
Llandovery 906–7w
Quantocks 905w
Salisbury Plain 901w

Milk
480w

Milk Marque
480w

Millennium Exhibition
Property transfer 241w, 1220–1w

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 302
Questions
Ministerial policy advisors, Pay 1370–2w

Mine control measures vessels
762w

Minimum wage
Foreign workers 440w
Scotland 1228w

Mining
Pensions 171–2w, 441–2w, 775w
Uranium 347w, 782w

Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence
1340w

Ministerial policy advisors
  Dept for International Development 900w, 1132w
  Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1263w
  Dept for Work and Pensions 1596w
  Environment 312w
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321–2w
  Home Office 1476w, 1492w
  Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 340w, 1219w
  Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w
  Pay 1370–2w
  President of the Council 1168w
  Prime Minister 890w, 1371w
  Scotland Office 273w, 500w, 766w, 1229w
  Treasury 1195w
  Visits abroad 1370w

Ministerial statements
  Airports (23.07.02) 847–68
  Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1003–17
  Chinook helicopters (22.07.02) 689–704
  Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 287–304
  Defence review (18.07.02) 460–75
  Education (16.07.02) 155–73
  Elderly (23.07.02) 869–84
  Foot and mouth disease (22.07.02) 669–88
  Housing (18.07.02) 438–59
  Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 983–1002
  Public expenditure (15.07.02) 21–44

Ministers
  Dept for Transport 142–3w
  Redundancy pay 1218w, 1270w
  Visits abroad 1370w, 1372–3w

Ministers of religion
  Islam 686–7w

Ministry of Defence
  Assets 163w, 1109w
  Consultation papers 903w, 1106–7w
  Females 283–4w
  Manpower 282–3w
  Public expenditure 749w, 1109–10w
  Public relations 285w
  Publicity 761w
  Republic of Ireland 762w, 1113w
  Television 283w
  Visits abroad 749w
  Waste management 907w

Misconduct
  Councillors 999w

Misrepresentation
  Financial services 335–6w

Misuse
  Alcoholic drinks 641w
  Drugs 87–8w, 202w, 404w, 559w, 1068–9w, 1504w
  Heroin 972

Mitcham
  Children's tax credit 462w
  Working families tax credit 462w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
  Debates etc.
  Elderly, Birmingham (22.07.02) 780–3
  Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 881
  Questions
  Business questions 436–7
  Territorial Army 20w
  Zimbabwe 882w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
  Questions
  Accountancy, Regulation 1328w
  Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 241w
  WorldCom 1327w

Mittal, Lakshmi
  290w

Mixed oxide fuel
  157w

MMR vaccine
  Greater London 285

Mobile phone masts
  see Aerials

Mobile phones
  see Cellular phones

Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL) 2001/02
  Debates etc.
  2R (22.07.02) 706–28
  Rem stages (24.07.02) 1065–71
  Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Modern apprenticeships
  991–2w

Moffatt, Laura
  Questions
  Central Office of Information, Annual reports 1164w
  Police custody, Death 1103w
  Primary care trusts 147

Mole, Mr Chris
  Debates etc.
  Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 82–3, 96–7, 102
  Questions
  Digital broadcasting 691w

***Moonie, Dr Lewis**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Ministry of Defence*
  Debates etc.
  Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 334, 348, 363, 380–6
  Questions
  Afghanistan, Armed conflict 1110w
  Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 1117w
  Aircraft carriers, Deployment 284–5w
  Aircraft carriers, Portsmouth 902–3w
  Ammunition, Procurement 20w
  Antiaircraft missiles, Procurement 157w, 162w
  Armed conflict, Civilians 749–50w
  Armed forces, Cadets 760w
  Armed forces, Colombia 756w
  Armed forces, Deployment 762w, 901w
  Armed forces, Discharges 3–5, 22w
  Armed forces, Health services 749–50w
  Armed forces, Housing 5–6, 24w, 159–60w, 750–3w, 905–6w, 1107–9w
  Armed forces, Pensions 1113w
  Armed forces, Psychiatry 754w
  Armoured fighting vehicles 913w
  Arms trade 491w
  Arms trade, Offset arrangements 489–90w
  Army, Discharges 15
  Army, Edinburgh 1115w
  Army, Internet 755w
  Army Personnel Centre, Standards 1118–9w
  Artillery, Radar 492–3w
  Assets, Ministry of Defence 163w, 1109w
  BOWMAN combat radio system 753w
  British Forces Post Office, Standards 1119–20w
  Chinook helicopters, Accidents 1107w

Moonie, Dr Lewis—continued
  Consultation papers, Ministry of Defence 903w, 1106–7w
  Cruise missiles 155w
  Defence, Finance 755w, 1111–2w
  Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Standards 911–2w
  Defence equipment 155w, 1112–3w
  Defence equipment, Procurement 153–5w, 158w, 161–2w, 490w, 904–6w
  Defence Estates, Property transfer 18w
  Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency, Standards 1117–8w
  Defence Housing Executive, Standards 159w, 908–9w
  Defence Medical Services 753w
  Defence Procurement Agency 160–1w
  Defence Storage and Distribution Agency, Standards 1120w
  Defence Transport and Movements Agency, Standards 1119w
  Duchess of Kent Military Hospital 754w
  Duke of York's Royal Military School, Standards 1117w
  European fighter aircraft 21w, 156–7w, 492w, 760w
  European technology acquisition programme 904w
  Exservicemen, Sleeping rough 753–4w
  Females, Ministry of Defence 283–4w
  Firing ranges, Shoeburyness 20w
  Future large aircraft, Engines 492–3w
  Galileo project 1107w
  General Service Medal, Suez 907–8w, 1104w
  Grenades 906w
  Gulf War syndrome, Compensation 490–1w, 878w
  Harrier aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 754–5w
  Hercules aircraft 1110w
  HMS Albion 492w, 905w
  HMS Fearless 493w, 760–1w
  Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Exservicemen 160w, 909–12w
  Joint strike fighter aircraft 495w
  Land mines, Bomb disposal 162w
  Low flying 284w
  Manpower, Ministry of Defence 282–3w
  Mercenaries 748w
  Military aircraft 494w, 1103–4w
  Military bases, Aviation 1114–5w
  Military bases, Portsmouth 756–7w
  Military bases, West Sussex 164w
  Military exercises, Llandovery 906–7w
  Military exercises, Quantocks 905w
  Mixed oxide fuel 157w
  Navy, Procurement 161w
  Nimrod aircraft 491–2w
  Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 749w, 1109–10w
  Public relations, Ministry of Defence 285w
  Publicity, Ministry of Defence 761w
  QinetiQ 911–2w
  QinetiQ, Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation 1122–3w
  QinetiQ, Environment protection 912–3w
  Queen Alexandra Hospital, Private finance initiative 902w
  Queen Victoria School, Standards 1122w
  Radar, Wind power 761w
  RAF Brize Norton, Housing 163–4w
  RAF Chilmark 1105–6w
  RAF Personnel Management Agency, Standards 1116w
  RAF Police, Low flying 283–4w
  RAF Training Group, Standards 1120–2w
  Republic of Ireland, Ministry of Defence 762w, 1113w
  Reserve forces, Doctors 1111w

Moonie, Dr Lewis—continued
Royal Centre for Defence Medicine, Housing 163w
Royal Military School of Music 761–2w
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 901–2w
SA80 rifle 757–8w, 1110–1w
Skill force scheme 156w
Submarines, Nuclear reactors 490w
Television, Ministry of Defence 283w
Territorial Army 20w
Type 45 destroyers, Ballistic missile defence 158–9w
Unmanned air vehicles 157–8w, 494w
Visits abroad, Ministry of Defence 749w
War graves, Wrecks 1115w
War pensions 493w
Warship Support Agency, Standards 1115–6w
Warships, Chile 760w
Warships, Procurement 19w
Waste management, Ministry of Defence 907w
Welbeck College 7

Moore, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1015
Questions
Angola, Famine 447–8w
Angola, Overseas aid 448w
International Criminal Court 474w
United Nations, Peace keeping operations 881w

Moorside Mining
Standing Order No 24 applications (15.07.02) 45

Moran, Margaret
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 862
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 296–7
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 42
Questions
Bluestone, Karl 683w
Forced marriage 658w
Luton, Home Office 1492–4w
Police, Domestic violence 850w

Morecambe
Dental services 190w
Health services 656w
Speech therapy 656w

Morgan, Julie
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Disadvantaged, Public participation (24.07.02) 293–4wh
Questions
Asylum, Education 1045w
Business questions 429
Prisoners, Repatriation 1044–5w

Morley
Community Champions Fund 647w
Educational maintenance allowance 57w
Mature students 647w
Students 57w
Vocational education 648w

Morley, Mr Elliot, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Flood control (16.07.02) 26–9wh, 40–4wh
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 474–6w
Agricultural products, Imports 486w
Agriculture, Pay 935w
Agriculture, Research 918–9w
Agriculture, Scotland 308–9w

Morley, Mr Elliot—continued
Agriculture, Subsidies 134w, 300w, 312w, 488w, 621w, 1139w, 1143–4w
Agriculture, Sustainable development 300w
Agriculture, Trade competitiveness 313–5w
Animal feed, Additives 919w
Animal products, EC external trade 300w
Animal welfare, Expenditure 619–20w
Annual reports, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 709w
Aujeszky's disease 484w
Beef, Exports 1151–2w
Beef, France 309w, 934–5w
Bees, Diseases 489w
Bovine tuberculosis, Compensation 932–3w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 131–3w, 136w, 931–3w, 1147w
Carbaryl 936w
Central Science Laboratory, Annual reports 915w
Central Science Laboratory, Standards 489w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 916–8w
Common agricultural policy, Scotland 917w
Common fisheries policy 705w, 919w
Consultation papers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 937–42w
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 131w, 477w, 1141–2w
Countryside stewardship scheme 707w
Dairy farming 314w
EC action, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 301–2w, 304–5w, 486–7w, 922–9w, 952w, 957w
EC law, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1150–2w
Eggs 920–1w
Environmentally sensitive areas 622w
Farmers, Income 1147w
Females, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 134w
Fish, Diseases 35–6w
Fisheries 132w
Fisheries, Quotas 621w
Flood control 302–3w, 310–1w, 621–7w, 703–5w
Flood control, EC law 625–6w
Floods, Canvey Island 933–4w
Food, Imports 298w
Food, Procurement 447w
Foot and mouth disease 301w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 306w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 306w, 1153w
Hedges and ditches 303–4w
Horticulture, Pay 936w
Information officers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1139w
Inland waterways 135w
Livestock, Animal welfare 921w
Livestock, Cumbria 477–8w
Livestock, Markets 919–20w
Livestock, Transport 134–5w, 1142–3w
Meat, Imports 298–9w
Meat, Smuggling 299w, 481–2w
Members, Correspondence 131–2w, 297–8w, 477w, 631–2w, 1142w
Milk 480w
Milk Marque 480w
Organic food 707w
Organophosphates, Animal experiments 313w
Pesticides 709–10w

Morley, Mr Elliot—continued
Pesticides Safety Directorate, Annual reports 709w
Pesticides Safety Directorate, Standards 138–9w
Pet travel scheme 484w
Pet travel scheme, USA 935w
Pigs, Diseases 305–6w
Plant Health Inspectorate 301w
Plant power, Scotland 483–4w
Poultry, Animal feed 297w
Poultry, Animal welfare 311w, 486w, 915w, 1154w
Poultry meat, Imports 1152–3w
Public participation, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1144–6w
Public relations, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 916w
Rabies 135w
Scottish White Fish Producers Association 1153w
Secondment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 32–4w
Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations 2001 298w
Set-aside schemes 488–9w
Sheep, Exports 921–2w
Sheep meat, France 936–7w
Sheep meat, Imports 136w
Sheep premiums 481w
Shellfish, Licensing 310w
Slaughterhouses 930–1w
Speeches, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 917w
Sponsorship, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 921w
State Veterinary Service, Manpower 921w
Suckler cow premiums 481w
Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Annual reports 916w
Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Standards 620–1w
Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Annual reports 915–6w
Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Standards 296–7w
Wellcome Trust, Finance 930w
Wildlife, Meat 920w, 1140–1w

Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle, Secretary of State for Education and Skills
Debates etc.
Education, Ministerial statements (16.07.02) 155–73
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 59
Questions
Child minding, Manpower 994w
Children, Day care 987–8w, 1083w
Consultation papers, Dept for Education and Skills 60–4w, 985–6w
Higher education, Finance 988–9w
Internet, Dept for Education and Skills 1365–6w
Nurseries 1342w
Pre-school education 994w
Pre-school education, Fees and charges 993–4w
Pre-school education, Special educational needs 995–6w
Public expenditure, Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Schools, Cheltenham 988w

Mortgages
(16.07.02) 45–51wh
Complaints 360w
Social security benefits 1584w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Air routes, Singapore 17–8w
Air routes, USA 17w, 146w
Heathrow Airport 146w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 147w
Theft, Cellular phones 1479–80w

Motor sports
652–3

Motor vehicles
Excise duties 10–1w, 334w
Fuels 1246–7w
Registration 11w

Motor Vehicles (Prohibition on Use of Hand-Held Mobile Telephones) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 631

Mountford, Kali
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Reform 917w
Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, Annual reports 510w

Mozambique
Food 42–3w, 587w

Mudie, Mr George
Questions
Business 407

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 292
Questions
Hospitals, Consultants 137–8
House of Commons, Waste disposal 189w
Local press, Ownership 439w
NHS, Standards 211w
Police, Football 1475w
Racial harassment 853–4w

Multinational companies
Developing countries 1134–5w

Multiple occupation
Death 238w
Greater London 343w
Hertfordshire 343w

Multiple sclerosis
Drugs 199w
Medical treatments 1424w
Respite care 199w

Munn, Meg
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 882
Questions
Africa, International assistance 834
Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, UK delegations 1374w
Public expenditure, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 627–31w

***Murphy, Rt Hon Paul**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Questions
Annual reports, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1376w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty, Wales 319w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 1378w
Buildings, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Care homes, Wales 316w
Computers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1378w
Consultation papers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w

Murphy, Rt Hon Paul—continued
Court Service, Wales 319w
Crime prevention, Wales 320w
Crimes of violence, Wales 321w
Dental services, Wales 275–7
Devolution, Wales 320w
EC grants and loans, Wales 318–21w
EC law, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 323w
Economic and monetary union, Wales 1378w
Elections, Wales 724w
Fire prevention, Wales 320w
Foot and mouth disease, Wales 317w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 316–7w
Health services, Wales 269–70
Information officers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 725w
Iron and steel, Wales 318w
Jobcentre Plus, Wales 321–2w
Magistrates' courts 1378w
Manpower, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1377w
Manufacturing industries, Wales 318w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w
National Assembly for Wales, Planning 322–3w
Orders and regulations, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Public appointments, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1377w
Public expenditure, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374w
Publications, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375–6w
Publicity, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Publicity, Wales 1377w
Regional airports, Wales 270–2
Republic of Ireland, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1372w
Small businesses, Wales 319w
Standards, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 323w
Telephone services, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 322w
Temporary employment, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374–5w
Unemployment, Wales 321w
Visits abroad, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1376–7w

Murrison, Dr Andrew
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 5
Armed forces, Housing 159–60w, 750–2w
Business 405–6
Cancer, Research 146
Diplomatic service 384w, 1319w
Doctors, Reserve forces 422w, 1111w
General practitioners, Recruitment 1393w
Magistrates' courts, Closures 1305w
Medical treatments, EC countries 871–2w
Mentally disturbed offenders 1527w, 1529w
National Association of Prison Visitors 1528w
NHS, Energy 211–2w
Police custody, Death 1054w
Postal services 353w
"Pride of Place" 697w
Prison visitors 1528–9w
Prisons, Mental health services 1529w
Renewable energy 352w
Serbia, Land mines 895w
Trials, Administrative delays 81w

Museums and galleries
North East region (15.07.02) 129–36
Science 1160w

Museums and galleries—continued
VAT 335w
West Midlands 657–8

Museums Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Music
693w
Public houses 653–4

Nadia, Naira
386w

Namibia
Arms trade 1327w

National Air Traffic Services
146w
Insurance 571–2w

National Assembly for Wales
Planning 322–3w

National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux
942w

National Association of Prison Visitors
1528w

National Asylum Support Service
Standards 1043w

National Audit Office
Business plans 979–80w
Standards 1187w

National Care Standards Commission
Finance 213–4w

National childcare strategy
128w
Greater London 54–6w

National Foundation for Youth Music
1158w

National income
403–5, 1188w
British overseas territories 175–6w

National Institute for Biological Standards and Control
1529–30w

National Institute for Clinical Excellence
208w, 1410w

National insurance
1194w

National Insurance Contributions Unit
see Social Security Contributions Agency

National Land Information Service
151–3w

National Lottery
165w, 650–2, 973w

National Meat Hygiene Service
see Meat Hygiene Service

National parks
New Forest 707–8w

National Probation Service for England and Wales
Finance 1521–2w
Greater London 1460w
Information technology 845–6w, 1517–8w
Pay 1460w

National Savings Agency
Advertising 1197w

National Statistics
see Office for National Statistics

National training organisations
Finance 648–52w

- **NATO**
  - Russia 18–9
- **Natural gas**
  - 1328–9w
- **Nature conservation**
  - Botswana 763w
- **Navy**
  - Procurement 161w
- ***Naysmith, Dr Douglas***
  - *Questions*
    - Developing countries, EC external trade 884w
    - Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 1131w
    - Mental health services, Primary care trusts 192–6w
    - Mental health services, Waiting lists 197w
    - Museums and galleries, Science 1160w
    - Prescriptions, Fees and charges 121w
- **Negligence**
  - NHS 529–30w, 1396–8w
- **Neighbourhood nuisance**
  - Sheltered housing 687w
- **Neighbourhood Renewal Fund**
  - 277–8
- **Neighbourhood wardens**
  - Chorley 1485w
- **Nepal**
  - Armed forces 886w
  - Human rights 610w
- **Network Rail**
  - 144–5w, 746w, 1245w
  - Corporate manslaughter 327w
  - Finance 12w, 17w, 145w, 568–9w, 820w, 1183w, 1244–5w
  - Public appointments 145w
- **Neurofibromatosis**
  - 1387w
- **Neurology**
  - 868w
  - Manpower 1412–3w
- **New businesses**
  - 1331w
  - Rural areas 929–30w, 1330–1w
- **New deal for communities**
  - 277–8, 1021w
- **New deal schemes**
  - 111w, 597–8w
  - Advocate General for Scotland 985w
  - Scotland 511–2w
  - Scotland Office 980w
  - Wales 322w
- **New Forest**
  - Jobcentres 812w
  - National parks 707–8w
- **New Opportunities Fund**
  - Recreation spaces 243w
- **New Roads and Street Works Act 1991**
  - *Questions*
  - 333–4w
- **New Scotland Yard**
  - see Metropolitan Police
- **New towns**
  - 1218w
- **Newspaper press**
  - Dept for Work and Pensions 110w
  - Scotland Office 1227w
- **NHS**
  - Circulars 212–3w
  - Early retirement 542w, 1380w
- ***NHS—continued***
  - Economic and monetary union 1198w
  - Energy 211–2w
  - Finance 201w, 282–3, 424–5w, 464w, 1428w
  - Foreign workers 1101w
  - Information 1428w
  - Manpower 1093w
  - Negligence 529–30w, 1396–8w
  - Nurseries 540w
  - Pay 542w
  - Pensions 1411w
  - Private finance initiative 872w, 1084–6w
  - Procurement 214–5w
  - Public appointments 865–7w
  - Recruitment 419w, 542w, 874–5w, 1393–4w
  - Standards 203–4w, 211w
- **NHS Bank**
  - 1404–6w
- **NHS Direct**
  - 142–4
  - Recruitment 421w
  - Southampton 421w
- **NHS Estate Management and Health Building Agency**
  - Annual reports 217w
- **NHS Leadership Centre**
  - Manpower 1101w
- **NHS Pensions Agency**
  - Annual reports 1083w
  - Standards 1083w
- **NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency**
  - Annual reports 875w
- **NHS trusts**
  - Management 534–5w
  - Mergers 1087w
  - Public appointments 1413w
- **Nimrod aircraft**
  - 491–2w
- **Noise**
  - Pollution control 793–4w
  - Roads 1254–5w
- **Non-departmental public bodies**
  - Public appointments 1164w
  - Scotland Office 501w, 767w
- **Non-domestic rates**
  - Agriculture 315–6w
- ***Norman, Mr Archie***
  - *Questions*
    - Telecommunications Working Group 47–8w, 1009w
- **North Africa**
  - Water 588w
- **North East region**
  - Arts 692w
  - Museums and galleries (15.07.02) 129–36
- **North Sea oil**
  - Scotland 984w
- **North West region**
  - Council tax 1216–8w
  - Education of children at home 1346w
  - Housing benefit 1563–4w
  - Incapacity benefit 1567w
  - Literacy 1346–7w
  - Police 850–1w
  - Pupil referral units 1346w
  - Schools 1343–4w
  - Social security benefits 269w
  - Teachers 1345–6w
- **Northamptonshire**
  - Crime prevention 1469w
- **Northern Ireland**
  - Community development 1202w
  - Drugs 508w
  - Fireworks 506w
  - Oil 1193w
  - Police 508–9w, 1202–3w
  - Prisoners 1202w
  - Proscribed organisations 505–6w, 1201w
  - Riot control weapons 507w
  - Smuggling 507–8w
  - Terrorism 975–7
- **Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency**
  - Annual reports 1202w
- **Northern Ireland government**
  - 283–4, 509w, (22.07.02) 768–9, 791–3
  - Ministerial statements (24.07.02) 983–1002
  - Opposition days (16.07.02) 216–59
- **Northern Ireland Office**
  - Annual reports 505w
  - Community development 1202w
  - Females 509w
  - Public expenditure 508w
  - Telephone services 1201w
  - Visits abroad 506w
- **Northumbria**
  - Offences against children 859w
- **Nottinghamshire**
  - Drugs 1462–3w
  - ONE programme 1593–4w
- **Nuclear fuels**
  - Iran 389–90w
- **Nuclear power**
  - 943w, 1330w
  - Accidents 783w
  - Climate change levy 957w
  - Publicity 345w
- **Nuclear power stations**
  - Construction 346w
  - Security 346w, 785w, 862w
- **Nuclear reactors**
  - 783–4w
  - Submarines 490w
- **Nuclear weapons**
  - 1106w
- **Numeracy**
  - Primary education 369w
- **Nurseries**
  - 1342w
  - Hospitals 536–7w
  - NHS 540w
- **Nurses**
  - Consultants 537w
  - Foreign workers 419w
  - HIV infection 537w
  - Recruitment 542–3w
  - Resignations 1092–3w
  - Schools 1392w
- **Nutrition**
  - Salt 1385w
- ***Oaten, Mr Mark***
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall*
    - Derelict land, Planning permission (24.07.02) 268–74wh, 282wh, 285–6wh
  - *Questions*
    - Aerials, Planning permission 1003w
    - Chechnya, Human rights 881w
    - Child Support Agency, Computers 1546–7w
    - Disability aids 1092w
    - Hampshire Police Authority 560w
    - Junior doctors, Working hours 1102w

Oaten, Mr Mark—continued
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 1410w
NHS, Negligence 1396–8w
Right to buy scheme 48w

Obesity
Sports 432–4w

***O'Brien, Mr Mike**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 606–9
Lockerbie, Bombings (23.07.02) 959–62
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Belarus (23.07.02) 228–30wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 176–7w
Arms trade, Export controls 384w, 611w, 1317–8w
Asylum 1323w
Aviation, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 384–5w
Bahrain 835–6
British overseas territories 175–6w, 765w, 1314w, 1318–9w
British overseas territories, Financial services 1315–6w
British overseas territories, National income 175–6w
Cayman Islands, Human rights 889w, 1314w
Chechnya, Human rights 881w
Criminal investigation 1491–2w
Diplomatic service 384w, 889–90w, 1319w
East Timor 1313w
East Timor, Homicide 1319–20w
Entry clearances 887w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Airlines 177w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Civil servants 178w
Indian subcontinent, Entry clearances 1311–2w
Indonesia, Hawk aircraft 3–4w
Indonesia, Religion 609–10w
Iran, Arms trade 383w
Iran, Capital punishment 1312w
Iran, Foreign relations 845–6
Iran, Human rights 1313w
Iran, Nuclear fuels 389–90w
Iraq, Kurds 388w
Kashmir 177w, 1311w
Lockerbie, Bombings 843–4
Meyer, Catherine 887w
Middle East, Antisemitism 181w, 765w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 879–80w
Nadia, Naira 386w
Nepal, Armed forces 886w
Nepal, Human rights 610w
Pakistan, Christianity 386w
Pakistan, Human rights 386w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 181w
Sheikh, Ahmed Omar Saeed 764w
Temporary employment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1322w
Terrorism, Finance 387w
Thailand, Aviation 763–4w
Trinidad and Tobago, Politics and government 5w
Ukraine, Foreign relations 836–7
USA, Ballistic missile defence 881w
USA, Terrorism 1317w
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 762–3w
Weapons 1317w
Western Sahara 609w
Western Sahara, Peace negotiations 609w
Western Sahara, Sovereignty 180–1w
Zimbabwe, Entry clearances 4w

O'Brien, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 168
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 55, 58–60
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 640
Questions
Police, Wales 272–3
Standards, Dept of Health 409

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 38–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 247–9wh, 257wh, 259wh
Questions
Armed forces, Recruitment 13
Cancer, Research 145–6
Doctors' list of patients 201w
Gurkhas 23w
Maintenance, Children 819–20w
Television, Licensing 661

Occupational pensions
271w, 469w, 518w, 520w, 1541w

Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority
Annual reports 510w

Offences against children
1533–4w
Northumbria 859w
Sports 1163w

Offender assessment system
1496w

Office for Civil Nuclear Security
Annual reports 353w
Training 353w, 1337–8w

Office for National Statistics
Advertising 1197w
Annual reports 821w
Codes of practice 66w, 1170w

Office of Communications
406–7w

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Air conditioning 1002w
Annual reports 999–1000w
Civil servants 1373w
Computers 244w
EC action 633w
Electronic equipment 235w
Housing 640w
Internet 1219w
Manpower 237w
Ministerial policy advisors 340w, 1219w
Orders and regulations 997w
Press releases 640w
Regional planning and development 1204–6w

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee
(22.07.02) 732

Office of the Rail Regulator
567–8w

Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
Annual reports 1376w
Buildings 724w
Computers 1378w
Consultation papers 1375w
EC law 323w
Information officers 725w
Manpower 1377w
Ministerial policy advisors 1375w
Orders and regulations 724w
Public appointments 1377w

Office of the Secretary of State for Wales—continued
Public expenditure 1374w
Publications 1375–6w
Publicity 724w
Republic of Ireland 1372w
Standards 323w
Telephone services 322w
Temporary employment 1374–5w
Visits abroad 1376–7w

Officer Training Corps
281–2w

Offices
Crown Prosecution Service 525w
Scotland Office 980w

Official gifts
1177–8w

Official hospitality
Advocate General for Scotland 381–2w
Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Home Office 545w
Scotland Office 1225–6w
Solicitor-General 614w

Official residences
Finance 1182w

Offset arrangements
Arms trade 489–90w

Offshore industry
Fire services 638w

Offshore workers
Taxation 1185w, 1229w

Oil
Exploration 443–6w
Northern Ireland 1193w
Pollution 12–3w

Older people consultative forums
Public appointments 1022w

ONE programme
Nottinghamshire 1593–4w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1010
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 699–700

"Operation Lancet"
99–100w

Opik, Lembit
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 222, 234–40, (24.07.02) 992–3
Questions
Closed circuit television, Belfast 506–7w
Inland Revenue, Computer software 1183w
Proscribed organisations, Flags 505w
Proscribed organisations, Northern Ireland 505–6w, 1201w
Regional airports, Wales 271–2

Opposition days
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 216–59

Oral questions
Dept of Health 1431w

Ordnance Survey
1012–4w
Standards 245–6w

Organ, Diana
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 686

Organ Donation (Presumed Consent and Safeguards) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 637

Organic food
707w

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UK delegations 1374w

Organophosphates
Animal experiments 313w

Organs
Donors 658w

Orphan drugs
1440w

Osborne, Mr George
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1016
Business motions (18.07.02) 541
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 297
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 95, 97
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 42, (23.07.02) 893–4
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manchester Airport (24.07.02) 297–302wh, 305wh
Questions
Antiques, Auctions 692–3w
Government, Annual reports 803w
Referendums, Departmental responsibilities 1305w
Road signs and markings, Cycling 965w

Osborne, Sandra
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 864–5
Questions
Telecommunications, Data protection 1465w

Ottaway, Richard
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 7–10wh
Questions
Overseas aid, Health education 1128–9w
Pre-sentence reports, Greater London 844w
Traffic lights, Greater London 742w

Outdoor education
Death 1269–70w

Overcrowding
London Underground 747w, 1238w
Railways 1235–7w, 1256w

Overseas aid
41–2w, 414–5, 464–5w, 715–6w, 1136w, 1185–6w
Afghanistan 176–7w, 714–5w, 1127–8w
Angola 448w
Eastern Europe 1128w
Ethiopia 1126w
Health education 1128–9w
Health services 1124–5w
HIV infection 894–6w
India 1129w
Liberia 715w
Malawi 588w, 1138w
Sierra Leone 717w
Southern Africa 1124w
Sports 473w
Sub-Saharan Africa 1125w
Syrian Arab Republic 43w
Tanzania 44w
Water supply 1134w
Zimbabwe 897w, 1124w

Overseas companies
Developing countries 720w, 970–1

Overseas investment
Switzerland 958w

Overseas residence
Australia 1031w
Maintenance 267w
Pensions 1031w, 1541–3w
Taxation 1173w
Vetting 1483w

Overseas students
1373w

Overseas trade
China 610–1w
Euro 1198w

Overseas visitors
Medical treatments 424w, 1394w

Overtime
Advocate General for Scotland 770w
Scotland Office 767w

Owen, Albert
Questions
Business Appointments Advisory Committee, Annual reports 567w
"Investing in Innovation" 943w

Oxfordshire
Social services (22.07.02) 795–9
Tourism 693w

Oxygen
Medical equipment 1383w

Package holidays
Standards (23.07.02) 231–8wh

Packaging
Waste disposal (24.07.02) 247–67wh

Page, Mr Richard
Questions
Agricultural products, Imports 486w
Eggs 920–1w
Members, Correspondence 221w
Poultry, Animal welfare 311w, 486w

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 884
Housing (18.07.02) 449
Police Reform Bill (HL), Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1060–1, 1064
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Greenbelt, Cambridge (17.07.02) 129–33wh, 136wh
Questions
Metropolitan Police 824–5w, 1478–9w

Pain
Medical treatments 423w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 192
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 219–20, 253–5

Pakistan
Arms trade 1324–5w
Christianity 386w
Export controls 435w
Human rights 386w

Palmer, Dr Nick
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 247–8
Questions
Army, Deployment 19w
Tourism, Euro 695w

Panchen Lama
386w

Panel for Regulatory Accountability
see Regulatory Accountability Panel

Paper
Prime Minister 802w

Papua New Guinea
Forests 591w

Parents
Working hours 171w

Parish councils
Codes of practice 1009w
Resignations 1009w

Park and ride schemes
142w

Parliament Square
Demonstrations 554w

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
Public appointments 1374w

Parliamentary Pensions (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(16.07.02) 260

Parliamentary procedure
Rulings and statements (18.07.02) 477

Parliamentary scrutiny
323w

Parole
836–7w

Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(16.07.02) 259–60

Passengers
Railways 460w, 570w, 572w, 1276–7w

Passport Agency
see United Kingdom Passport Agency

Passports
689–90w

Paterson, Mr Owen
Questions
Police, Pay 859–60w

Patients Without Legal Capacity (Safeguards) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Peace keeping operations
Afghanistan 21–2w, 276–7w, 494w, 753w, 1117w
Africa 763w, 1311w
Balkans 2w, 9–10
Cyprus 180w
Sierra Leone 1309–10w
United Nations 881w

Peace negotiations
Angola 1310–1w
Middle East 879–80w
Sierra Leone 886w, 1308–11w
Western Sahara 609w

Pennines
Railways 12w

Penrose Inquiry
see Equitable Life Independent Inquiry

Pension credit
510w, 1540w
Hastings 1032w

Pension Service
Manpower 1545w

Pensioners
1588w
Dental services 1438w
Dorset 268–9w
Incapacity benefit 1567–9w
Income support (24.07.02) 306–14wh
Petitions (23.07.02) 954–5
Social security benefits 295w
Taunton 1160w
Wakefield 661

Pensions
401–3, 465w, 518–21w, 1035w, 1040w, 1542w, 1584w
Advisory services 1543–5w
Armed forces 1113w
Automated credit transfer 1551w
Civil servants 728–30w
Clergy 666
Exservicemen 1200–1w
Members 83–4w, 712w
Mining 171–2w, 441–2w, 775w
NHS 1411w
Overseas residence 1031w, 1541–3w
Police 94–6w
Public sector 255w, 416
Self-employed 114–5w
Taxation 283, 295–6w, 602w, 1200w
Teachers 1344w

Pensions Annuities (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Order for further consideration read (19.07.02) 631

Pensions Simplification Review
see Private Pension Legislation Review

Perham, Linda
Questions
Afghanistan, Politics and government 966–7
Companies, Disclosure of information 788–9w
Companies, Ilford 256w
Company law 168–9w
London City Racecourse 640w
Maintenance, Children 1026w
Nuclear weapons 1106w
Politics and government, Young people 188–9w

Perjury
678

Personal care services
[illegible]

Personal income
1186w

Personal injury
Social security benefits 1578w

Personal records
Pupils 374–5w

Personation
Tax evasion 256w

Personnel management
Armed forces 277–8w

Pesticides
709–10w

Pesticides Safety Directorate
Annual reports 709w
Standards 138–9w

Pet travel scheme
484w
Canada 935w
USA 935w

Peterborough
Taxis 459–60w

Petitions
Carlisle United Football Club (23.07.02) 954
Driving offences (16.07.02) 261
Endometriosis (17.07.02) 388
Family practitioner services (15.07.02) 128
Forests (24.07.02) 1071
Pensioners (23.07.02) 954–5
Richmond Park (15.07.02) 128
Road traffic (16.07.02) 260
Sentencing (23.07.02) 954
Stillman, Ian (23.07.02) 953–4
Totternhoe (19.07.02) 555
Trade (16.07.02) 260–1

Petrol
Marketing 786w

Petrol alternatives
951w, 963–5w, 1246w

Pharmacy
Billing 210w, 1420w

Photography
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w

Photovoltaics
952w

Physiotherapy
Mental health services 875–7w

Pickering Review
see Private Pension Legislation Review

Picking, Anne
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 121–2wh

Pickles, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 862
Housing (18.07.02) 442–4
Questions
Business improvement districts 235–6w
Fire extinguishers 235w
Housing benefit, Administrative delays 595w
Local government, Elections 244w
Manpower, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 237w
Members, Correspondence 1142w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 340w
Regional planning and development 237w

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 170
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Standards 659–60w
Asylum, Detainees 1043w
Hedges and ditches 141–2w
NHS, Finance 424–5w
Transsexualism 1079w
Yarl's Wood Detention Centre 1461w

Pigmeat
Import controls 29–30w

Pigs
Diseases 305–6w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 879
Housing, Burnley (22.07.02) 737–40
Housing, Points of order (18.07.02) 476
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 779
Questions
Africa, AIDS 965–6
Commonwealth, Education 713–4w
Kidney patients, Lancashire 1088w

Pike, Mr Peter L—continued
Kidneys, Donors 657w
Litter, Chewing gum 311–2w
Medicines Control Agency, Annual reports 1083w
Organs, Donors 658w
Royal Preston Hospital, Kidney patients 1088w
Social security benefits, North West region 269w
Sports, Voluntary work 498w

Pilot schemes
Education 1347–50w

Planning
45w, 639w, 1008w
Arts Council of England 496w
Castle Point 1218w
Emergencies 727w, 1070w
Greater London (16.07.02) 1–21wh
Inquiries 243–4w
National Assembly for Wales 322–3w
Regional development agencies 952–3w
Transport 145w, 573w, 968w, 1272w, 1276–7w
Urban areas 639w

Planning permission
(22.07.02) 793–5
Administrative delays 1007–8w
Aerials 27w, 344w, (22.07.02) 756–9, 1003w
Alconbury airfield 245w
Churches 723–4w
Derelict land (24.07.02) 268–89wh
Housing 1008–9w
Tipping of waste 941w
Wind power 787w

Plant Health Inspectorate
301w

Plant power
137–8w
Scotland 483–4w

Plaskitt, Mr James
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1011
Questions
Central Science Laboratory, Standards 489w
Criminal proceedings 1530–1w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, Public appointments 1374w
Standards, Dept of Health 409–10

Plastics
Waste disposal 707w

Playgrounds
530–1w
Wood 652–3w

Playing fields
1162w, 1217w
Schools 989–90w

Plutonium
942–3w

Plymouth
Railways 569w

Poland
1w
EC enlargement 842–3
Iron and steel 390–1w

Police
95w, 670–1w, 1045–6w, 1480–1w
Bromley 1468w
Compensation 1466–8w
Conditions of employment 1046w

Police—continued
Coventry 1475–6w
Diabetes 1061–2w
Dismissal 95–6w
Domestic violence 850w
Emergency calls 100–2w
Eyesight 103–4w
Firearms 1047–50w
Football 1475w
Freemasonry 1502–3w
Greater London 830w
Havering 1474w
Housing 841–2w
Manpower 563w, 837w, 1486–92w
Merseyside (16.07.02) 262–8
North West region 850–1w
Northern Ireland 508–9w, 1202–3w
Pay 836w, 849w, 859–60w
Pensions 94–6w
Portsmouth 561–3w
Private finance initiative 560–2w
Radio 98–9w, 1495–6w
Recruitment 103–4w, 857–8w
Reform 1478w
Retirement 1046–7w
Sick leave 1480w
Standards 856–7w, 1495–7w, 1522–8w
Training 559–60w
Wales 272–3, 1480w
Wandsworth 1480w
Weapons 1522w

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
Questions
856w

Police cautions
832w

Police custody
1444–5w
Death 677–8w, 1054w, 1103w
Standards 1445w

Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
Annual reports 957w

Police Reform Bill and Implementation Unit
561w

Police Reform Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
Programme motion* and Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1059–64
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080
Questions
827w

Police Standards Unit
105–6w, 1443w

Police stations
562w, 672–6w, 829–30w
Greater London 1475w

Political parties
Finance 662–4, (22.07.02) 773–7, 996–7w

Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000
Questions
1123w

Political refugees
see Asylum

Politics and government
Afghanistan 966–8
Central African Republic 717w
Kenya 764w
Sierra Leone 1136–7w
Trinidad and Tobago 5w
Turkey 764w
Young people 188–9w, 1166w, 1363–4w

Pollution
EC action 946–7w
Oil 12–3w

Pollution control
Buses 1259–60w
Carbon dioxide 39w, 786w
Noise 793–4w
Radioactive wastes 914w
Tax allowances 242w
Taxis 1259–60w

Pond, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 454
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 568, 574–5, 577–8, 583, 589, 598
Questions
Civil servants, Pensions 728–30w
English Partnerships 1211–3w

Pornography
Internet 1532–3w

Portland
Rescue services 11w

Portsmouth
Aircraft carriers 902–3w
Drugs 836w
Lone parents 813w
Military bases 756–7w
Police 561–3w
Social security benefits 521–2w

Post offices
Bank services 438–9w, 523w, 597w, 815w, 945w, 953w
Closures 944–5w
Disabled 349w
Information services 172w, 947w
Scotland 774w
Social security benefits 438w, 600–1w
Urban areas 998w

Postal services
171w, 353w
Fees and charges 348w, 445–6w
Government assistance 349w
Reform 170–1w
Theft 774w
Wirral 774w

Postal workers
Vacancies 350w
Vetting 349w

Potassium iodate
1434w

Poultry
Animal feed 297w
Animal welfare 311w, 486w, 915w, 1154w
Import controls 1155–6w

Poultry meat
Imports 1152–3w
Safety 429–31w

Pound, Mr Stephen
Questions
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries 99–100w
Warships, Procurement 19w

Poverty
44w, 73–5w, (18.07.02) 137–77wh, 254w, 469w
Children 254w, 462–3w, 1033w
Developing countries 260w, 968–70

Powers
European Police Office 223–4w

Pregnancy
1437–8w

Prentice, Ms Bridget
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 168–9

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Questions
Bishops, Housing 293w
Botswana, AIDS 963–4
Business questions 428
Cannabis, Clinical trials 1431w
Heathrow Airport, Theft 859w
Housing, South East region 465w
Hunting 483w, 723w
Immigrants, Languages 684w
Income tax, Payments 251w
Islam, Ministers of religion 686–7w
Police 1045–6w
Police, Conditions of employment 1046w
State Veterinary Service, Manpower 921w

Pre-school education
994w
Disadvantaged 188w
Fees and charges 993–4w
Special educational needs 995–6w

***Prescott, Rt Hon John**, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Local Government and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Housing, Ministerial statements (18.07.02) 438–59
Questions
Compulsory purchase 533w
Manchester City Council 340w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 1220w
Regional planning and development 533–4w
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 238w

Prescription drugs
Alzheimer's disease 1399–400w
Imports 1403–4w

Prescriptions
Cystic fibrosis 200–1w
Fees and charges 121w, 659w
Information technology 213w, 1420w

Prescriptions (Chronic Diseases) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 635

Pre-sentence reports
853w
Greater London 844w

President of the Council
Computers 413–4w, 1168w
Consultation papers 5w
Information officers 712w
Internet 453w
Ministerial policy advisors 1168w
Public expenditure 5–6w
Visits abroad 414w

Press
Cabinet Office 1014w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1037w

Press releases
Dept for Transport 733w, 1270w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Scotland Office 981w

Price, Adam
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1012–3
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 88–9

***Price, Adam**—continued*
Questions
Devolution, Liability 251w
Eastern Europe, Iron and steel 1130w
Economic and monetary union, Wales 1378w
Elections, Wales 724w
Health services, Wales 269
Hospital beds 1092w
Insurance, Employers' liability 250–1w
Livestock, Transport 1142–3w
Magistrates' courts 1378w
Military exercises, Llandovery 906–7w
Mining, Pensions 441–2w
Mittal, Lakshmi 290w
Poland, Iron and steel 390–1w
Publicity, Wales 1377w
Roads, Accidents 965–6w
Wildlife, Meat 1141w

"Pride of Place"
697w

***Primarolo, Rt Hon Dawn**, Paymaster General*
Questions
Budget April 2002, Publications 253w
Double taxation, Lithuania 959w
Double taxation, South Africa 959w
Double taxation, USA 822w
Drugs, Developing countries 1186w
EC Finance Council 338–9w
Employee share ownership schemes 1183w
Enterprise investment scheme 1184w
Exchange rates 413–4
Game, Farms 823–4w
Income tax, Payments 251w
Inheritance tax 463w
Inland Revenue 1184–5w
Inland Revenue, Administrative delays 1184w
Inland Revenue, Advertising 253w
Inland Revenue, Computer software 1183w
Inland Revenue, Expenditure 253–4w
Overseas investment, Switzerland 958w
Pay 1169–70w
Pensions, Taxation 295–6w
Personal income 1186w
Poverty 254w
Poverty, Children 254w, 462–3w
Public sector, Pensions 255w
Research and development tax credit 1170–1w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Manpower 473w
Tax allowances, Animal breeding 255w
"Tax Benefit Reference Manual, 2002/03" 960w
Tax burden, Small businesses 467w
Tax evasion, Personation 256w
Taxation 251w
Taxation, Hearing aids 1173w
Taxation, Offshore workers 1185w
Taxation, Overseas residence 1173w
Taxation, Self-assessment 472–3w, 1183w
Taxpayers, Yorkshire and Humberside 256–8w
Welfare tax credits 1179–80w
Welfare tax credits, Publicity 339–40w
Withholding tax 256w
Working families tax credit 251–2w, 1189w
Working families tax credit, Abuse 252w
Working families tax credit, Leeds 252–3w
Working families tax credit, Mitcham 462w
Working families tax credit, Regulatory impact assessments 253w

Primary care trusts
147–50
Barnsley 1386w

***Primary care trusts**—continued*
Derbyshire 1382–4w
International cooperation 419w
Mental health services 192–6w
Remploy 1429–30w

Primary education
Literacy 369w
Numeracy 369w
Standards 367–8w

Primary health care
West Sussex 1394–5w

Prime Minister
Information officers 805w
Ministerial policy advisors 890w, 1371w
Paper 802w
Recycling 75w
Republic of Ireland 1369w
Scotland 1372w

Prime Minister (Office Role and Functions) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 631

Prime Minister (Office Role and Functions) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (16.07.02) 173

Princess Royal Barracks
Death 7–9

Prisk, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 860
Questions
Crime, Hertfordshire 282
Developing countries, Education 895–6w
Fleet Air Arm 22–3w
Small businesses, Wales 319w
Tax burden, Small businesses 467w

Prison governors
Ethnic groups 835w
Females 834w

Prison Service
Annual reports 564w
Disciplinary proceedings 1516w
Disclosure of information 1515w
Environment protection 564w
Ethnic groups 1508–16w
Sick leave 1053w, 1070–6w
Standards 1075–7w

Prison visitors
1528–9w

Prisoners
2w, 1506–8w
Advisory services 1469–70w
Ethnic groups 1508–16[illegible]
Females 832–3w
Literacy 856w
Mentally ill 126w
Northern Ireland 1202w
Pay 1075w
Rehabilitation 854–5w
Repatriation 1044–5w, 1504–5w
Self-mutilation 855w
Suicide 828–9w, 1463–4w, 1519w, 1537–8w

Prisoners' release
1535–8w
Mentally disturbed offenders 1521w

Prisons
837w
Closures 1443–4w
Disciplinary proceedings 1536w
Drugs 828w
Education 1498–502w
Health services 1534w

***Prisons**—continued*
Inspections 1501–2w
Mental health services 1097w, 1529w, 1534–5w
Per capita costs 1534w

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman
Standards 845w

Private companies
Government assistance 69w

Private education
644w

Private finance initiative
1176w
Local government 941–2w
Mental health services 877w
NHS 872w, 1084–6w
Police 560–2w
Queen Alexandra Hospital 217w, 425w, 902w, 1090–1w
Scotland Office 501w

Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 558–602

Private Members' bills
Rulings and statements (19.07.02) 556

Private Pension Legislation Review
601w, 1543w

Private roads
344w
Local government services 344–5w
Road traffic offences 688w

Private sector
Electronic commerce 781w
Surgery 202w
VAT 1168w

Privy Council
712–3w

Probation and aftercare
837w, 846–7w, 1520–1w
Greater London 844–5w, 1077w, 1532w
Suicide 1519–20w

Proceeds of crime
223w

Proceeds of Crime Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Money res, programme motion* and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 478–533
Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1050–9
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080
Questions
434

Procurement
Ammunition 20w
Antiaircraft missiles 157w, 162w
Defence equipment 153–5w, 158w, 161–2w, (17.07.02) 311–86, 490w, 904–6w
EC environmental policy 354–5w
Food 447w
Navy 161w
NHS 214–5w
Warships 19w

Productivity
463w, 780w

Programme for international student assessment
66–7w

Programme motions
see Timetabling of bills

Property
Scotland Office 502w

Property development
Vacant land 353w

Proscribed organisations
Flags 505w
Northern Ireland 505–6w, 1201w

Prosser, Mr Gwyn
Questions
Sheep, Exports 921–2w

Prostitution
1058–60w
Children 1059w
Greater London 1059w

Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 (Designation of Vessels and Controlled Sites) Order 2002
Questions
1115w

Psychiatry
Armed forces 754w
Manpower 868–71w

Public appointments
Complaints Audit Committee 1448w
Environment Agency 1144w
Health Service Commissioner 1374w
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary 1487–8w
Hospitals 127w
Information Commissioner 1374w
Leicestershire Police Authority 560w
Network Rail 145w
NHS 865–7w
NHS trusts 1413w
Non-departmental public bodies 1164w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1377w
Older people consultative forums 1022w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 1374w
Treasury 337–8w, 1195–6w

Public bodies
Dept for Work and Pensions 294w

Public expenditure
465w, 468w, (23.07.02) 890–953, 1189w
Advocate General for Scotland 379w, 382w, 770w
Cabinet Office 340w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 627–31w
Dept for International Development 290w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 8w
Dept for Work and Pensions 261–2w, 1586w
Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Devolution 69w, 958w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2w
Home Office 546w, 1078w
Ministerial statements (15.07.02) 21–44
Ministry of Defence 749w, 1109–10w
Northern Ireland Office 508w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374w
President of the Council 5–6w
Scotland 984w, 1177w, 1187w
Scotland Office 382–3w, 767w, 984w, 1187w
Solicitor-General 612–3w, 617w
Standards 824w

Public finance
250w, 466w, 821w, 1190w

Public footpaths
Foot and mouth disease 1139–40w
Safety 137w

Public Guardianship Office
Annual reports 1081w
Complaints 412w

Public houses
Entertainments 649–50
Music 653–4

Public libraries
1157–8w

Public participation
Cabinet Office 1164–5w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 974w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1144–6w
Dept for International Development 1135w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265–6w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1542w
Dept of Health 1094w
Dept of Trade and Industry 172–4w
Disadvantaged (24.07.02) 290–6wh
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321w
Home Office 841–2w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1291w
Treasury 1182w

Public private partnerships
Electronic commerce 960–1w
Home Office 543–4w
London Underground 143w, 747w, 1237–8w

Public Record Office
Census 800–2w, 1080w

Public relations
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 916w
Home Office 543w, 1065w
Ministry of Defence 285w

Public Sector Classification Committee
250w

Public statues
Heath, Edward 1167w

Public transport
148w, 1261–2w
EC action 454–5w
Fuels 1177w
Greater London 1260–1w
Injuries 6w
Standards 963w

Public Works Loan Board
1193–4w

Publicity
Commonwealth Development Corporation 583w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 698w
Dept for Education and Skills 771–3w
Dept for International Development 721–2w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1584–6w
Dept of Health 1403w
Dept of Trade and Industry 945w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 887w
Home Office 1067w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 800w
Ministry of Defence 761w
Nuclear power 345w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Scotland Office 769w
Social security benefits 116w
State second pension 1545w
Treasury 821w
Wales 1377w
Welfare tax credits 339–40w

Pugh, Dr John
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 296

***Pugh, Dr John**—continued*
Police, Merseyside (16.07.02) 262–6

Pupil exclusions
183w, 978–9
Somerset 645w

Pupil referral units
North West region 1346w

Pupils
Languages 375–8w
Personal records 374–5w
Secondary education 644w, 1350w

Purchase, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 765

Purnell, James
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 78, 83
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 881–2
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 44, (23.07.02) 898, 901–2, 907, 915, 919
Questions
Greece, EC presidency 881w
Harold Shipman Tribunal of Inquiry 658w
Railways, Pennines 12w
Standards, Dept of Health 410–1

QinetiQ
911–2w
Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation 1122–3w
Environment protection 912–3w

Qualifications
Care homes 1402w
Headteachers 1345–6w

Quantocks
Military exercises 905w

Quarrying
Insurance 174w

Queen Alexandra Hospital
Private finance initiative 217w, 425w, 902w, 1090–1w

Queen Elizabeth II
Anniversaries 391–2w

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
Air conditioning 1002w

Queen Victoria School
Standards 1122w

Questionnaires
Business 1190–1w

Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 680–1
Museums and galleries, North East region (15.07.02) 129–30
Questions
Airguns, Ownership 219w
EC enlargement 880w

Quinn, Lawrie
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 688
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 621, 628
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 560, 567–9, 576, 580
Questions
Children, Protection 229–31w
Higher education, Special educational needs 452w

Quinn, Lawrie—continued
Public Guardianship Office, Annual reports 1081w
Public houses, Music 653–4
Railtrack, Finance 1239w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 835

Quotas
Fisheries 621w

Rabies
135w

Race relations
1060–1w

Racial discrimination
Armed forces 14

Racial harassment
853–4w

Racial violence
665w

Radar
Artillery 492–3w
Wind power 761w

Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001
Questions
1262w

Radiation exposure
Medical treatments 1434w

Radio
Commercial broadcasting 654–6
Emergency services 1470w
Fire services 245w, 343w
Licensing 949–50w
Police 98–9w, 1495–6w

Radioactive fallout
Chernobyl 316w

Radioactive materials
Japan 389w

Radioactive wastes
784–5w
Pollution control 914w
Railways 785–6w
Russia 776–7w
Sellafield 133–4w, 782–3w, 931w
Shipping 169w, 571w
Transport 345–6w, 784w, 786w, 1262w

RAF Brize Norton
Housing 163–4w

RAF Chilmark
1105–6w

RAF Halton
Housing 163–4w

RAF Personnel Management Agency
Standards 1116w

RAF Police
Low flying 283–4w

RAF St Athan
162w

RAF Training Group
Standards 1120–2w

Rail Regulator
see Office of the Rail Regulator

Railtrack
Finance 142w, 144w, 1239w, 1245w

Railway stations
Repairs and maintenance 143w
Safety 571w
Security 460w

Railway track
1244w

Railways
461w
Accidents 326w, 462w, 744–5w
Bridges 1244w
Commuters 569w
Fares 568w, 1242w
Finance 327w, 570w, 1240w
Franchises 744w
Freight 570w, 968–9w
Insurance 1240w
Investment 969–70w
Overcrowding 1235–7w, 1256w
Passengers 460w, 570w, 572w, 1276–7w
Pennines 12w
Plymouth 569w
Radioactive wastes 785–6w
Repairs and maintenance 1239–41w, 1244w
Safety 334w
Speed limits 1244w
Standards 461w, 969w, 1241w, 1256w
Taunton 1243w
Twyford 744w
Vandalism 745w, 1240w

Railways Interoperability (High-Speed) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(22.07.02) 820

Rammell, Mr Bill
Questions
Housing, Finance 463w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 1220w

Randall, Mr John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 182wh
Questions
Diagnostic treatment centres 1086w
Entry clearances, Macedonia 402w
Macedonia 886w
Macedonia, Elections 611w
Police stations, Greater London 1475w
Telephone services, Dept for Education and Skills 1364w
Telephone services, Dept for Work and Pensions 518w
Telephone services, Dept of Trade and Industry 791w, 954–6w
Telephone services, Home Office 848w
Telephone services, Lord Chancellor's Dept 82w
Telephone services, Northern Ireland Office 1201w
Telephone services, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 322w
Telephone services, Scotland Office 768w

Rape
835w
Trials 798–9w, 1280–8w

Rape (Consent) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (16.07.02) 174–6
2R order read (19.07.02) 640

Rapid reaction forces
EC countries 26w

Rapid transit systems
146w

Rapson, Syd
Questions
Armed forces, Personnel management 277–8w
NHS Pensions Agency, Annual reports 1083w

***Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick**, Minister for Local Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Questions
Agriculture, Non-domestic rates 315–6w
Annual reports, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 999–1000w
Business improvement districts 235–6w
Community councils 1233–4w
Councillors, Disabled 271–2w
Councillors, Misconduct 999w
District councils, Standards 249w
Fire extinguishers 235w
Fires 150–2w
Local authorities, Disclosure of information 999w
Local government, Contracts 1020w
Local government, Elections 244w
Local Government Bill (Draft) 236w
Local government finance 44–5w, 240–1w, 998w
Local government finance, Wokingham 1204w
Manpower, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 237w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 340w
Multiple occupation, Greater London 343w
National Land Information Service 151–3w
Regional assemblies 1217w
Regional planning and development, Eastern region 343w
Right to buy scheme 1019w
Town and Country Finance Issues Group 1002–3w

Recess motions
(22.07.02) 733–820

Recovered Assets Fund
1069w

Recreation spaces
New Opportunities Fund 243w
Standards 242–3w

Recruitment
Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Armed forces 13–4, 1107w
Chiropody 425w
Clergy 662
Doctors 202w, 1100–1w
Foster care 541w, 1402w
General practitioners 201w, 1393w
NHS 419w, 542w, 874–5w, 1393–4w
NHS Direct 421w
Nurses 542–3w
Police 103–4w, 857–8w
Scotland Office 1226w
Special constables 221w, 672w, 1054–5w
Teachers 372w
Treasury 1197w
West Midlands Police 1050–3w

Recycling
36w
Cabinet Office 641w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1023w
House of Commons 50–1w, 324–5w, 711w
Prime Minister 75w
Standards 35–6w

Redundancy
Commonwealth Development Corporation 576w
Hewlett-Packard 983w

Redundancy pay
Ministers 1218w, 1270w

Redundancy Payments Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (23.07.02) 887–9

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 166
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 86–7, 113, 119–20, 122
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 892
Questions
Business questions 435
Economic and monetary union 1198–9w
Economic situation 1199w
Exchange rates 413–4
Export controls, India 435w
Grammar schools 1349w
Hospitals, Consultants 138
Local government finance, Wokingham 1204w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 1237w
Network Rail 1245w
Public transport, Injuries 6w
Railtrack, Finance 1239w
Railway track 1244w
Railways, Finance 1240w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 1239–41w
Roads, Construction 1254w
Rolling stock 1244w
Stocks and shares 1199w

Redwood Hospital
1412w

Reed, Mr Andy
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 297
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 98–100wh
Questions
British Forces Post Office, Standards 1119–20w
Defence Storage and Distribution Agency, Standards 1120w
Defence Transport and Movements Agency, Standards 1119w
Developing countries, Poverty 968–9
RAF Training Group, Standards 1120–2w
Sports, Clubs 661

Referendums
Departmental responsibilities 1305w

Refrigeration
Hydrofluorocarbons 1438w

Refrigerators
Waste disposal 482–3w

Refugees
see Asylum

Regeneration
Clay Cross (22.07.02) 753–6

Regional airports
Wales 270–2

Regional arts boards
692w

Regional assemblies
1217w

Regional assistance
502w

Regional development agencies
1020–1w
Annual reports 1338w
Expenditure 791w
Finance 1213–4w
Planning 952–3w

Regional planning and development
237–8w, 533–4w
Baltic states 589–90w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1578w
Dept of Trade and Industry 792w

Regional planning and development—continued
Eastern Europe 590w
Eastern region 343w
Finance 63w, 1020–1w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1204–6w
Romania 590w

Registration of births deaths and marriages
In vitro fertilisation 1430w

Regulation of Child Care Providers Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
Questions
1495w

Regulatory Accountability Panel
345w

Regulatory impact assessments
972w
Dept for Work and Pensions 524–5w
Dept of Trade and Industry 437w
Home Office 396w
Scotland Office 274w
Working families tax credit 253w

Rehabilitation
Prisoners 854–5w

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
Questions
403w

***Reid, Rt Hon Dr John**, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 225–34
Northern Ireland government, Ministerial statements (24.07.02) 983–1002
Questions
Annual reports, Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency 1202w
Community development, Northern Ireland 1202w
Life Sentence Review Commissioners, Annual reports 1202–3w

Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 633

Religion
Armed forces 20–1w
Indonesia 609–10w

Religious broadcasting
Licensing 410w, 697–8w, 1157w

Religious Discrimination and Remedies Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 634

Relocation services
Scotland Office 500w

Remploy
Primary care trusts 1429–30w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education, Points of order (24.07.02) 1019–20
Winter fuel payments (22.07.02) 799–801
Questions
Higher education, Finance 988–9w

Renewable energy
169w, 324w, 352–4w, 358w, 787–8w, 890–2w
Developing countries 1130–1w

Repatriation
Prisoners 1044–5w, 1504–5w

Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(15.07.02) 127

Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(18.07.02) 537

Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(15.07.02) 127

Republic of Ireland
Dept for Education and Skills 1363w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1581–2w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1320w
Home Office 1055w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1292w
Ministry of Defence 762w, 1113w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1372w
Prime Minister 1369w
Scotland Office 984w
Treasury 1188w

Rescue services
Lee on Solent 11w
Portland 11w

Research and development tax credit
1170–1w

Reserve forces
Doctors 422w, 1111w

Resignations
Magistrates 796w
Nurses 1092–3w
Parish councils 1009w

Respite care
Multiple sclerosis 199w

Respite Care (Children) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (17.07.02) 307–10

Retail trade
Crime prevention 795–6w, 836w, 862–4w, 1465–6w
Crimes of violence 682–3w

Retirement
Home Office 394w
Police 1046–7w
Teachers 364w

Richmond Park
Petitions (15.07.02) 128

Right to buy scheme
48w, 1019w

Right To Self-Employment Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 633

Rights of way
Access 136–7w, 708w

Ringfenced funding
Home Office 1055–6w

Riot control weapons
Northern Ireland 507w

River Thames
Safety 334–5w

Road Safety and Speed Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 633

Road signs and markings
Cycling 965w

Road traffic
143w, 963w, 966w
Forecasts 331–2w
Greater London 1247–8w, 1255–6w
Leeds 736–7w
Petitions (16.07.02) 260
Urban areas 573w, 1255w

Road traffic control
454w
Greater London 1255w
Lorries 1247w, 1253w
Standards 1255–6w

Road traffic offences
687–8w
Fixed penalties 843w
Private roads 688w

"Road Traffic Penalties Consultation Paper"
1448w

Road works
Utilities 333–4w

Roads
740w
Accidents 739w, 741–3w, 965–7w, 1245w, 1251–3w
Carmarthenshire 965–6w
Construction 148w, 456–9w, 573–4w, 1247w, 1254w
Freight 570w
Greater London 8w, 145–6w
Leyton 12w
Noise 1254–5w
Repairs and maintenance 7–8w, 328–9w, 332–3w, 454w, 737–41w, 966w, 1254–7w
Safety 11–5w, 454w, 647w
Scotland 1253w
South West region 1247w
Tolls 149w, 573w, 736–7w, 1255–6w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Questions
Criminal Records Bureau, Administrative delays 1056w

Robbery
101–3w, 281, 1487w
Greater London 1474w

Robertson, Angus
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 701
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 494w
Armed forces, Training 276w
Arms trade, Offset arrangements 489–90w
Asylum 1323w
China, Asylum 884w
Defence Fire Service 15–6
EC action, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 359w, 498–9w, 633–4w
EC action, Dept for Education and Skills 773w, 1361–3w
EC action, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 35w, 69–70w, 79–80w, 486–7w, 922–9w, 952w
EC action, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 6–7w, 80–1w, 332w, 358w, 435w, 632w, 731–2w, 1272–5w, 1323–4w

Robertson, Angus—continued
EC action, Dept for Work and Pensions 232–4w, 249w, 269–70w, 603–4w, 1583–4w
EC action, Dept of Health 379w, 432w, 1339–40w, 1432–4w, 1595w
EC action, Dept of Trade and Industry 951–2w, 960w
EC action, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 359–60w
EC action, Home Office 632w, 1063–5w
EC action, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278–9w
EC action, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 633w
EC action, Treasury 339w, 471–2w, 636–7w, 747–8w, 1173–6w
European Energy and Transport Forum 731–2w
Government information services, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 5w
Housing benefit, Scotland 594w
Iraq, Kurds 388w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1553w
Social Security Fraud Act 2001 811w
Turkey, Politics and government 764w
USA, Terrorism 1317w

Robertson, Hugh
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 325
Defence review (18.07.02) 475
Questions
Acute beds, Kent 1102w
Agriculture, Pay 935w
Asylum, Applications 393w
Carbaryl 936w
Health services, Kent 218–9w
Horticulture, Pay 936w

Robertson, John
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 713–5, 728
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Pensioners, Income support (24.07.02) 306–11wh
Questions
International Criminal Court 882w
Warships, Procurement 19w

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Questions
Agriculture, Non-domestic rates 315–6w
Councillors, Disabled 271–2w
Dental services, Gloucestershire 141–2
Dental services, Pensioners 1438w
Ethiopia, Overseas aid 1126w
Housing, Gloucestershire 639w
Overseas investment, Switzerland 958w
Police, Reform 1478w

Robinson, Mrs Iris
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (22.07.02) 768–9

Robinson, Mr Peter D
Questions
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 977

***Roche, Mrs Barbara**, Minister of State and Deputy Minister for Women, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Disadvantaged, Public participation (24.07.02) 294–6wh

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
House of Commons, Recycling 50–1w, 324–5w, 711w
Members, Correspondence 220w, 1379w

Rolling stock
1244w

Romania
Illegal immigrants 399–400w
Regional planning and development 590w
Sustainable development 589w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Questions
Social security benefits, Abuse 1030w

Rosindell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Family practitioner services, Petitions (15.07.02) 128
Questions
Gibraltar, Spain 286, 765w, 883w
HMS Albion 905w
HMS Fearless 760–1w
Postal services, Reform 170–1w

Roy, Mr Frank
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Package holidays, Standards (23.07.02) 231–4wh
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 408w
British nationality, Children 552w
Child Support Agency, Standards 1546w
Coinage 68w
Complementary medicine 1431w
Housing benefit 1561w
Import controls, Forced labour 776w
Income support, Lone parents 511w
Jobseeker's allowance 511w
Pre-school education, Fees and charges 993–4w
Social security benefits, Abuse 1029–30w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1575w
Social security benefits, Personal injury 1578w
Social security benefits, Take-up 596w
Working families tax credit 252w

Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch NHS Trust
Steroid drugs 423w

Royal Centre for Defence Medicine
Housing 163w

Royal charters
Urban areas 799w

Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts
see Historical Manuscripts Royal Commission

Royal family
Finance 1178w, 1182w

Royal Military Academy
Sandhurst 279–82w, 756w

Royal Military School of Music
761–2w

Royal Naval Hospital Haslar
431–2w, (22.07.02) 771–3, 901–2w

Royal Preston Hospital
Kidney patients 1088w

Royal School of Artillery
278–9w, 755–6w

"Royal Society Scientific Review of Infectious Diseases in Livestock"
140–1w

RU486
1434–7w

Ruane, Chris
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 316–7w
Racial violence 665w
Regional airports, Wales 272
Regional planning and development, Finance 63w
Young offenders 664–6w

Ruddock, Joan
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 458
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 1127w
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 21–2w
Armed forces, Deployment 762w

Ruffley, Mr David
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1011
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 931–7
Questions
Animal products, EC external trade 300w
Foot and mouth disease 301w
Meat, Smuggling 299w
Plant Health Inspectorate 301w

Rural areas
Bus services 15–6w, 743–4w
Homelessness 46w
Hospitals 535w
Jobcentres 1580w
New businesses 929–30w, 1330–1w
Transport 1264w

Rural development plans
39w

Rural Payments Agency
Standards 914–5w

Russell, Bob
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 170
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 786
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 191–4wh, 198wh
Questions
A12 1247w
Armed forces, Housing 905–6w
Children, Sports 214w
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 1153w
General Service Medal, Suez 1104w
Housing benefit, Colchester 1015w
Jobcentre Plus, Training 1035w
Military bases, Colchester 1114w
Offences against children 1533–4w
Offences against children, Sports 1163w
Sixth form colleges, Finance 987w
Sports, Children 53w
Sports, Schools 691w
Sports, Vetting 52–3w, 164w
Vetting, Overseas residence 1483w
Vetting, Sports 847w
Vetting, Voluntary work 97w, 555w

Russell, Ms Christine
Questions
Combined heat and power, Greater Manchester 441w
Israel, Arms trade 842
Middle East, Peace negotiations 879w

Russia
NATO 18–9
Radioactive wastes 776–7w

Rwanda
Democratic Republic of Congo 883w
Human rights 3w

S4C
698w

SA80 rifle
757–8w, 1110–1w

Salisbury Plain
Military exercises 901w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 43, (23.07.02) 894, 907, 924, 932, 941–4
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 474–5w
Aggregates levy, Scotland 1228w
Defence, Finance 1111–2w
Energy supply 1335–6w
Fisheries 967–8w
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority 786w
Inland Revenue 1184–5w
Inland Revenue, Administrative delays 1184w
National income 1188w
North Sea oil, Scotland 984w
Public expenditure 1189w
Public expenditure, Devolution 958w
Public expenditure, Scotland 984w, 1177w, 1187w
Public expenditure, Scotland Office 984w, 1187w
Public Works Loan Board 1193–4w
Regional assistance 502w
Scottish White Fish Producers Association 1153w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1552w
Taxation, Offshore workers 1185w, 1229w
Transport, Finance 1176–7w

Salt
Nutrition 1385w

Saltburn
Combined heat and power 441w

Salter, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 450–1
Questions
Dizaei, Ali 1478w

Sanctions
385w
China 385–6w
Iraq 887w
Zimbabwe 821w, 829–33, 1307w

Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Derelict land, Planning permission (24.07.02) 271wh, 275–8wh, 281wh, 288wh
Questions
Coastal areas 324w
Diabetes 191w
Housing 238w
Local government finance 45w
Standard spending assessments [illegible]000–1w

Sandhurst
Royal Military Academy 279–82w, 756w

Saudi Arabia
Terrorism 181w, 834–5

Sausages
204w, 429w, 1154–5w

Savidge, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 471

Savidge, Mr Malcolm—continued
Questions
Crime prevention, Young people 694w
Developing countries, Education 1129–30w
Terrorism 10–1

Sawford, Phil
Questions
Bigamy, Convictions 1503w
Employer Direct 1035w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 715w
Hormone treatments, Children 422w
Lorry drivers, Training 265–6w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1015–6
Parliamentary questions, Points of order (24.07.02) 1019
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 631, 639–40
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Flood control (16.07.02) 39–41wh
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 262–5wh
Questions
Air conditioning 1154w
Air conditioning, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1002w
Air conditioning, 10 Downing Street 803w
Hazardous substances, Waste disposal 312w, 483w
Hydrofluorocarbons, Refrigeration 1438w
Sponsorship, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 921w

Schedule 7 to the Terrorism Act 2000 (Information) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(16.07.02) 259–60

Schools
367w
Admissions 56w
Animal experiments 54w
Broadband 1366w
Cheltenham 988w
Discipline 1343w
Finance 1353–4w, 1364w
Governing bodies 378–9w
Information technology 378w
Management 1341w
North West region 1343–4w
Nurses 1392w
Playing fields 989–90w
Sports 691w
Transport 13–5w, 363w, 647w, 1341w

Science
Museums and galleries 1160w

Scotland
Aggregates levy 1228w
Agriculture 308–9w
Airports 983w
Appeals Service 1557–8w
Attendance allowance 112w
Aviation 970w
Basle Concordat 76w
Broadband 76w
Care homes 198w
Channel tunnel railway line 982w
Common agricultural policy 917w
Constituencies 76–7w
Consumers 169–70w
Crown Estate Commissioners 274w, 469w
Customs and Excise 470w, 1171–2w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1159–60w
Dept for International Development 1138w

Scotland—continued
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1583w
Dept of Trade and Industry 350w
Disability living allowance 814–5w
Drug seizures 1179w
Electoral systems 77w
Food Standards Agency 1226w
Housing benefit 594w
Liquefied petroleum gas 502w, 1230–2w
Meat 1232w
Medicine 127w
Minimum wage 1228w
New deal schemes 511–2w
North Sea oil 984w
Plant power 483–4w
Post offices 774w
Prime Minister 1372w
Public expenditure 984w, 1177w, 1187w
Roads 1253w
Scotland Office 1230w
Social security benefits 1552–5w
Treasury 1171–3w
Unemployment 522–3w, 983–4w, 1232w

Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities) (Adaptation of Functions etc) (Amendment) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

Scotland Office
Advertising 382w
Annual reports 769w
Buildings 383w, 768w
Civil servants 382w
Computers 768w
Consultation papers 383w, 769w
Contracts 499–501w
Correspondence 980–1w, 1225w
EC law 382w
Equal opportunities 768w
Females 983w
Gender impact assessment 768w
Grants 767w
Holiday leave 382w
Industrial tribunals 1225w
Information officers 769w, 1226w
Manpower 1228–30w
Members' interests 982w
Ministerial policy advisors 273w, 500w, 766w, 1229w
New deal schemes 980w
Newspaper press 1227w
Non-departmental public bodies 501w, 767w
Offices 980w
Official hospitality 1225–6w
Operating costs 1225w
Orders and regulations 382–3w
Overtime 767w
Pay 382–3w, 980w
Press releases 981w
Private finance initiative 501w
Property 502w
Public expenditure 382–3w, 767w, 984w, 1187w
Publicity 769w
Recruitment 1226w
Regulatory impact assessments 274w
Relocation services 500w
Republic of Ireland 984w
Scotland 1230w
Serials 1226–7w
Standards 76w, 501–2w
Statistics 768w
Telephone services 768w
Temporary employment 1229w
Training 382w
Visits abroad 766–7w, 983w, 1225w

Scotland Office—continued
Wales 982w
Written questions 1228w

Scotland Yard
see Metropolitan Police

Scottish White Fish Producers Association
1153w

Scrapie
30w

Secondary education
Pupils 644w, 1350w

Secondment
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 32–4w
Dept of Trade and Industry 790w

Security
British Airways 970–1w
Internet 394–5w
Nuclear power stations 346w, 785w, 862w
Railway stations 460w

Security guards
Licensing 688w

Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations 2001
Questions
298w

Segregation of prisoners
1075w

Selby
Coal 165–8w

Select committees
(22.07.02) 729–32

Self-assessment
Taxation 472–3w, 1183w

Self-employed
Pensions 114–5w

Self-mutilation
Prisoners 855w

Sellafield
Radioactive wastes 133–4w, 782–3w, 931w

Selous, Andrew
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 867
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 301
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 628
Road traffic, Petitions (16.07.02) 260
Totternhoe, Petitions (19.07.02) 555
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Child Support Agency (16.07.02) 52–5wh
Poverty (18.07.02) 143–7wh, 173wh
Questions
Africa, International assistance 833–4
Public expenditure 465w
Rescue services, Portland 11w
Ringfenced funding, Home Office 1055–6w

Sentencing
85w
Appeals 287–8w
Petitions (23.07.02) 954

Serbia
Land mines 895w

Serials
Dept for Work and Pensions 605w
Scotland Office 1226–7w

Serious Fraud Office
Annual reports 615w
Information technology 612w

Set-aside schemes
488–9w

Sex Offenders Act 1997
Questions
1455w, 1533–4w

Sexual offences
864w, 1454–6w
Hospitals 536w
Life imprisonment 832w

Shadow cabinet
971–2

Shaw, Mr Jonathan
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 249–52wh
Questions
After school clubs, Inspections 1341–2w
Business questions 430
Dyslexia, Hyperactivity 990w
Special educational needs, Teachers 646w
Student Loans Company 642w

Sheep
Disease control 31w
Exports 921–2w

Sheep meat
29w, 878w
CJD 428–9w
France 936–7w
Imports 136w
Wales 277

Sheep premiums
481w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Questions
Africa, HIV infection 1131–2w
Airports, South East region 1236w
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group 1327w
British nationality 636w
Buses, Pollution control 1259–60w
Business 407–8
Cycling, Safety 965w
Design, Environment protection 1333w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 1332w
Embassies 1318w
Energy 711w
Enterprise investment scheme 1184w
Firing ranges, Imber 24–5w, 162w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 1153w
General practitioners, Conditions of employment 1393w
House of Commons, Manpower 1167w
Housing, Planning permission 1008–9w
Land use, Databases 1010–2w
Modern apprenticeships 991–2w
New businesses 1331w
New businesses, Rural areas 1330–1w
Petrol alternatives 963–4w, 1246w
Photovoltaics 952w
Public transport, Fuels 1177w
Rural areas, New businesses 929–30w
Small businesses, Accountancy 1332–3w
Sports, Young people 974w
Taxis, Licensing 1260w
Taxis, Standards 1260w
Tipping of waste 481w
Waste management, Ministry of Defence 907w
Weapons 1317w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1123–4w

Sheikh, Ahmed Omar Saeed
764w

Shellfish
Licensing 310w

Sheltered housing
Neighbourhood nuisance 687w

Sheridan, Mr Jim
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 121–4wh

Shipley, Ms Debra
Questions
British Nuclear Fuels, Contracts 782w
British Nuclear Fuels, Finance 782w
Contact orders 82–3w
Contact orders, Voluntary organisations 525–6w
Criminal Records Bureau 1481–3w
Criminal Records Bureau, Complaints 1481w
Criminal Records Bureau, Standards 1481–2w
Derelict land 1019w
NHS, Finance 1428w
Nuclear power stations, Security 862w
Police, Private finance initiative 560–2w
Regional development agencies, Planning 952–3w
Regional planning and development, Finance 1020–1w
Vacant land, Property development 353w
Vetting, Foreign workers 1482w
Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry 119–20w

Shipman, Harold
974

Shipping
Accidents 8w
Radioactive wastes 169w, 571w

Shoeburyness
Firing ranges 20w

Shops Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

***Short, Rt Hon Clare**, Secretary of State for International Development*
Questions
Afghanistan, Asylum 590–1w, 899–900w
Afghanistan, International assistance 258w, 1126–7w
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 714–5w, 1127–8w
Afghanistan, Politics and government 966–8
Africa, AIDS 717–8w, 965–6
Africa, HIV infection 1131–2w
Africa, Water 1125w
African Union 718w
Albania, Environment protection 588–9w
Angola, Asylum 719–20w
Angola, Famine 585–6w
Annual reports, Dept for International Development 594w
Baltic states, Regional planning and development 589–90w
Burundi, Armed conflict 587w
Burundi, Debts 586–7w
Cameroon, Ethnic groups 1124w
Central Africa, International assistance 591w
Central African Republic, Education 716–7w
Central African Republic, HIV infection 717w
Central African Republic, Politics and government 717w
China, Family planning 1135–6w
Commonwealth, Education 713–4w

Short, Rt Hon Clare—continued
Commonwealth Development Corporation 449–51w, 574–84w, 722w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Debts 450w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Directors 450w, 581–2w, 584w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Pay 575–6w, 580–1w, 583w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Publicity 583w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Redundancy 576w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Sub-Saharan Africa 449w, 576–7w
Community development, Dept for International Development 898w
Computers, Dept for International Development 893w
Consultants, Dept for International Development 893–4w
Consultation papers, Dept for International Development 40–1w, 591–2w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Armed conflict 585w
Democratic Republic of Congo, International assistance 584–5w
Developing countries, Agricultural products 1126w
Developing countries, AIDS 719w
Developing countries, Arms trade 1138w
Developing countries, Children 1137–8w
Developing countries, Common agricultural policy 261w, 1129w
Developing countries, Debts 971
Developing countries, Disease control 719w
Developing countries, Drugs 593–4w
Developing countries, EC external trade 1125–6w
Developing countries, Education 258–60w, 290–1w, 895–6w, 1129–30w
Developing countries, HIV infection 592–3w, 895w
Developing countries, Human rights 720w
Developing countries, Microfinance 293w
Developing countries, Multinational companies 1134–5w
Developing countries, Overseas companies 720w, 970–1
Developing countries, Poverty 260w, 968–70
Developing countries, Renewable energy 1130–1w
Developing countries, Trade 261w
Directors, Dept for International Development 1129w
Eastern Europe, Iron and steel 1130w
Eastern Europe, Overseas aid 1128w
Environment protection, International cooperation 39–40w
Ethiopia, Overseas aid 1126w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, EC enlargement 1132w
Group of Eight, Kananaskis Summit 896–7w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 715w, 1131w
India, Females 260w
India, Overseas aid 1129w
Indonesia, Forests 591w
Information officers, Dept for International Development 721w
International assistance 1133–4w
International Development Association 899w
Internet, Dept for International Development 900w
Kenya, Microfinance 293w

Short, Rt Hon Clare—continued
Know-How Fund, Environment protection 720w
Knowledge for Development Challenge Fund 44w
Lesotho, Famine 717w
Liberia, Armed conflict 260–1w
Liberia, Overseas aid 715w
Malawi, Overseas aid 588w, 1138w
Manpower, Dept for International Development 1133w
Microcredit Summit 899w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 900w, 1132w
Mittal, Lakshmi 290w
Mozambique, Food 42–3w, 587w
North Africa, Water 588w
Overseas aid 41–2w, 715–6w, 1136w
Overseas aid, Health education 1128–9w
Overseas aid, Health services 1124–5w
Overseas aid, HIV infection 894–6w
Overseas aid, Water supply 1134w
Papua New Guinea, Forests 591w
Poverty 44w
Public expenditure, Dept for International Development 290w
Public participation, Dept for International Development 1135w
Publicity, Dept for International Development 721–2w
Romania, Regional planning and development 590w
Romania, Sustainable development 589w
Scotland, Dept for International Development 1138w
Serbia, Land mines 895w
Sierra Leone, Health services 1137w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 717w
Sierra Leone, Politics and government 1136–7w
Somalia, International assistance 41w
Somalia, Livestock 41w, 1136w
South Africa, HIV infection 291w
Southern Africa, Famine 587w
Southern Africa, Overseas aid 1124w
Sub-Saharan Africa, Overseas aid 1125w
Sub-Saharan Africa, Water 291–2w
Syrian Arab Republic, Overseas aid 43w
Tanzania, Overseas aid 44w
Temporary employment, Dept for International Development 1132–3w
Uganda, Armed conflict 588w, 899w
Uganda, Microfinance 292–3w
Ukraine, AIDS 1388–9w
Veterinary medicine, Research 1135w
Visits abroad, Dept for International Development 43–4w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 258w, 1131w
Zimbabwe, Agriculture 586w
Zimbabwe, Asylum 586w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 897w, 1124w

Sick leave
Cheshire Constabulary 1538–9w
Emergency services 1053w
Metropolitan Police 1049–50w
Police 1480w
Prison Service 1053w, 1070–6w
Public sector 820w
Solicitor-General 288w

Sierra Leone
Armed forces 1308w
Elections 1309w
Health services 1137w
Overseas aid 717w
Peace keeping operations 1309–10w
Peace negotiations 886w, 1308–11w
Politics and government 1136–7w

Silverstone
Bypasses 1249–51w

Simmonds, Mr Mark
Questions
Crimes of violence, Wales 321w
Manufacturing industries, Trade competitiveness 417
Schools, Admissions 56w

Simplifying Pensions Legislation Review
see Private Pension Legislation Review

Simpson, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Domestic Combined Heat and Power (Reduction in VAT) Bill, 1R (24.07.02) 1020
Questions
Dietary supplements, EC action 413–4w, 1440–1w
Transport, Radioactive wastes 1262w

Simpson, Mr Keith
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 344w
Food, Safety 430–1w
Poultry meat, Imports 1152–3w
Poultry meat, Safety 429–31w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 1244w
Railways, Speed limits 1244w

Singapore
Air routes 17–8w

Single parents
see Lone parents

Sixth form colleges
Finance 987w

"Sixth Report on Euro Preparations"
470–1w

Skill force scheme
156w

Skin cancer
208–9w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Questions
Pensions 403

Slaughterhouses
930–1w

Sleeping rough
243w
Exservicemen 753–4w

Slovakia
Armed forces 275–6w

Small Business Service
1338w
Finance 1337w

Small businesses
172w, 1333–6w
Accountancy 1332–3w
Investors in people 993–4w
Loan guarantee scheme 778w
Regulation 351–2w, 437–8w
Tax burden 467w
Wales 319w

Small Enterprise Development Agency
Finance 292w

Small School Support Fund
369–71w

Smallpox
Vaccination 1086–7w, 1390–1w

***Smith, Rt Hon Andrew**, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Annual reports, Dept for Work and Pensions 1035w
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 1582w
Financial Services Consumer Panel, Bank services 270w
Members, Correspondence 294w, 1587w

Smith, Geraldine
Questions
Dental services, Morecambe 190w
Health services, Morecambe 656w
Speech therapy, Morecambe 656w

Smith, Helen
1531w

***Smith, Jacqui**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Questions
Acute beds 124w
Alzheimer's disease, Prescription drugs 1399–400w
Arthritis, Surgery 214w
Asthma, Medical treatments 1423–4w
Baby care units 120w
Care homes 198w, 1089–90w, 1402w
Care homes, Closures 1401–2w
Care homes, Fees and charges 202w, 654w, 1400–1w
Care homes, Finance 872–3w
Care homes, Qualifications 1402w
Care homes, Scotland 198w
Care homes, South West region 197w
Care homes, Standard spending assessments 197–8w
Care homes, Standards 124–5w, 199w, 1401w
Care homes, Surrey 121w
Care homes, Training 1089w
Care homes, Vetting 873–4w
Carers 541w
Carers, Greater London 219w
Carers, Medical records 1401w
Childbirth 119w, 208w
Children, Abuse 122–3w
Children, Diseases 124w, 1422–3w
Children, Housing 1215w
Children, Sports 214w
Children in care 123w, 1424–7w
Children in care, General certificate of secondary education 123w
Children in care, Isle of Sheppey 123w
Children in care, South West region 1100w
Chronic fatigue syndrome, Complementary medicine 538w
Cystic fibrosis, Screening 200w
Dementia 191–2w
Dental services, Morecambe 190w
Disability aids 201w, 1092w
Disabled, Young people 121–2w
Drugs, Misuse 1504w
Elderly, Staffordshire 190–1w
Epilepsy 1406–9w
Forced marriage 658w
Foster care 117–8w, 662w, 1402–4w
Foster care, Ethnic groups 119w
Foster care, Greater London 1221–2w
Foster care, Recruitment 541w, 1402w
Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption 1404w
Health services, Elderly 128–9w
Health services, Morecambe 656w
Hearing aids 215–7w, 1091–2w, 1398w
Hospital beds 867–8w, 1092w, 1094–8w, [illegible]–9w
Hospital beds, Greater London 640w, 660w, 1221w

***Smith, Jacqui**—continued*
Hospital beds, Lancashire 204–5w
Hospitals, Admissions 206w
Hospitals, Infectious diseases 1398–9w
Kidney patients, Lancashire 1088w
Local government finance 125w
Maternity services, Standards 1097w
Members, Correspondence 661w, 1091w, 1379w, 1394w
Mental Health Bill (Draft) 191w, 661w
Mental health services 126–7w, 196w, 538–9w
Mental health services, Children 123w, 125–6w, 1098w
Mental health services, Ethnic groups 197w
Mental health services, Expenditure 1098w
Mental health services, Finance 540w
Mental health services, Hospital beds 139–41
Mental health services, Physiotherapy 876–7w
Mental health services, Primary care trusts 192–6w
Mental health services, Waiting lists 197w, 1420w
Mental health services, Worcestershire 127w
Mental patients 538w, 660–1w
Mentally ill, Employment 123–4w, 126w, 196w
Mentally ill, Hospital beds 1419–20w
Mentally ill, Prisoners 126w
Multiple sclerosis, Drugs 199w
Multiple sclerosis, Respite care 199w
National Care Standards Commission, Finance 213–4w
Neurofibromatosis 1387w
Neurology 868w
Personal care services 128w
Pregnancy 1437–8w
Royal Preston Hospital, Kidney patients 1088w
Social Care Inspection Commission, Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission 1409w
Social services, Elderly 1098–9w
Social services, Expenditure 1089w
Social services, Finance 1409w
Social services, Greater London 531–4w, 654–6w
Social services, Standards 119w
Social workers, Greater London 655w
Social workers, South East region 1092w
Social workers, Southern region 1400w
Social workers, Training 541w
Social workers, Vacancies 1094w
Special hospitals 124w
Special hospitals, Hospital beds 1418w
Speech therapy, Morecambe 656w
Strokes, Medical treatments 1424w
Suicide, Females 152–4
Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry 119–20w, 541w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1431w

Smith, Mr John
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 867
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 314, 334, 363–71, 378
Defence review (18.07.02) 468
Questions
Business questions 433–4
Manufacturing industries, Wales 318w
RAF St Athan 162w
Regional airports, Wales 271

Smith, Llew
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 312
Questions
Cancer 415w
Dental services, Wales 276–7
Environment, Ministerial policy advisors 312w
Gulf War syndrome, Compensation 491w
Mixed oxide fuel 157w
Office for Civil Nuclear Security, Annual reports 353w
Office for Civil Nuclear Security, Training 353w, 1337–8w
QinetiQ, Environment protection 912–3w
Radioactive fallout, Chernobyl 316w
Renewable energy 890–2w
S4C 698w

Smith Inquiry
see Harold Shipman Tribunal of Inquiry

Smoking
426–8w
Industrial health and safety 732w

Smuggling
1173w
Drugs (22.07.02) 803–6
Meat 299w, 481–2w, 1232w
Northern Ireland 507–8w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 542
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 882
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 251, (24.07.02) 1001
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 481, 498
Questions
Credit unions 419–20
Drugs, Northern Ireland 508w
Gulf War syndrome, Compensation 878w
Herbal medicine, EC law 151
International Criminal Court, USA 846
Terrorism, Finance 387w

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 469–70
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 38
Questions
Copaxone 199w
Military bases, West Sussex 164w
Primary care trusts 147–8
Regulation, Dept of Trade and Industry 170w

Social Care Inspection Commission
Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission 1409w

Social Fund
270w, 510w, 596–7w, 1579–80w, 1582–3w
Annual reports 1034w

Social rented housing
1210–1w

Social security benefits
112–3w, 1028–9w, 1036w
Abuse 595–6w, 807–9w, 1029–31w, 1036–8w, 1555–8w
Administrative delays 596w
Appeals 114w, 1033–4w, 1557–8w
Applications 600w
Automated credit transfer 597–601w, 805–7w, 809–11w, 1029w, 1031–2w, 1550–2w, 1579w
Borders region 1552w
Carers 111–2w
Children in care 813–4w

***Social security benefits**—continued*
Deductions 1589–92w
Disability aids 1558w
Disabled 1569–73w, 1575w
Disqualification 815–8w, 1024–6w
Kirklees 1030w
Mortgages 1584w
North West region 269w
Pensioners 295w
Personal injury 1578w
Portsmouth 521–2w
Post offices 438w, 600–1w
Publicity 116w
Scotland 1552–5w
Take-up 596w
Voluntary work 1554–5w
Wales 1553w
Widowed people 1559–60w

Social Security Contributions Agency
Computers 295w
Manpower 473w

Social Security Fraud Act 2001
Questions
811w

Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997
Questions
1578w

Social services
Elderly 1098–9w
Expenditure 1089w
Finance 1409w
Greater London 249w, 531–4w, 654–6w
Oxfordshire (22.07.02) 795–9
Standard spending assessments 48w
Standards 119w

Social workers
Greater London 655w
South East region 1092w
Southern region 1400w
Training 541w
Vacancies 1094w

Socrates programme
56w

Soft drinks
Caffeine 1440w
Glucuronolactone 1440w
Taurine 1440w

Solar power
788w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 868
Questions
Trinidad and Tobago, Politics and government 5w

Solicitor-General
Annual reports 615w
Buildings 289–90w
EC law 288w
Holiday leave 288–9w
Manpower 616w
Official hospitality 614w
Orders and regulations 289w
Pay 615–6w
Public expenditure 612–3w, 617w
Repairs and maintenance 287w
Sick leave 288w
Standards 289w, 613–4w
Training 615–6w, 913–4w
Visits abroad 615w

Solicitors
Regulation 1279–80w
Treasury 1199w

Solihull Hospital
Accident and emergency departments 209–10w, 660w

Somalia
International assistance 41w
Livestock 41w, 1136w

Somerset
Bus services 1243w
Crime 1457–9w
Hospitals (23.07.02) 239–46wh
Pupil exclusions 645w

Somerset College for Arts and Technology
Finance 1351w

South Africa
Double taxation 959w
HIV infection 291w

South Bank Centre
Expenditure 696–7w

South East Asia
Disease control 281

South East region
Air routes 733w
Airports 1236w
Housing 465w, 980
Social workers 1092w
Transport 1265w

South Tyneside
Antisocial behaviour orders 830–2w

South West region
Care homes 197w
Children in care 1100w
Economic situation 467w
Roads 1247w

South Yorkshire
Acceptable behaviour contracts 557w
Antisocial behaviour orders 557–8w

Southampton
NHS Direct 421w

Southern Africa
Famine 587w
Overseas aid 1124w

Southern region
Customs and Excise 70w
Social workers 1400w
Warehouse parties 401w

Southworth, Ms Helen
Questions
Hospitals, Industrial health and safety 1418w

Sovereignty
Western Sahara 180–1w

Spain
Fisheries 621w
Gibraltar 1w, 281w, 286, 391–2w, 473–4w, 611–2w, 765w, 882–3w

Speaker and deputies
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (15.07.02) 47, 72, 92, 102, 117, (16.07.02) 177, 187, 189, 196, 199, 204, 208, 213, (18.07.02) 480, 484, 504–5, 507, 528–9, (19.07.02) 558, 594–5, 610, 630, (24.07.02) 1045, 1050, 1060
Conduct of proceedings (15.07.02) 30–1, 35, 37, 44, 72, 84, 99, (16.07.02) 160, 190–1, 230, 234, (17.07.02) 276, 278, 286, 294, 329, 332, (18.07.02) 411, 426, 443, 451, 472, 491, 497, 528, 530, 533, 545, 550, (19.07.02) 565–6, 571, 582, 613, 618, 623, 630, (22.07.02) 650, 660, 666, 681, 688, 765, 776, (23.07.02) 851,

Speaker and deputies—continued
856, 868, 881, 884, 891, 897, 919–20, (24.07.02) 964, 968–9, 983, 985, 990, 993, 1000, 1053
Deferred divisions (17.07.02) 351–2, (24.07.02) 1043
Disallowed questions (22.07.02) 656, (24.07.02) 972
Orders and regulations motions (15.07.02) 127, (16.07.02) 259, (17.07.02) 387, (22.07.02) 820
Points of order (17.07.02) 305–6, (18.07.02) 476–7, 530, 533–4, 536, (19.07.02) 556–7, 579, 631–40, (22.07.02) 705, (23.07.02) 886, 891, (24.07.02) 1018–20, 1044, 1049
Private Members' bill orders (19.07.02) 631–40
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080
Rulings and statements, Amendments and new clauses (16.07.02) 177, (18.07.02) 480
Rulings and statements, Deferred divisions (18.07.02) 537–8, (19.07.02) 556, (24.07.02) 1044
Rulings and statements, Members (24.07.02) 1018
Rulings and statements, Members' constituency work (23.07.02) 885
Rulings and statements, Parliamentary procedure (18.07.02) 477
Rulings and statements, Private Members' bills (19.07.02) 556
Rulings and statements, Twelve minutes rule (16.07.02) 225
Select Committee motions (22.07.02) 729, 732
Standing Order No 24 applications, Moorside Mining (15.07.02) 45–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Conduct of proceedings (16.07.02) 29wh, 39wh, (17.07.02) 76wh, 82wh, 88wh, 112wh, 121wh, (18.07.02) 162wh, (23.07.02) 182wh, 187wh, 189wh, 201wh, 207wh, 223wh, (24.07.02) 255wh, 259wh, 267wh, 277wh, 305wh
Rulings and statements, Speeches (24.07.02) 274–5wh

Special constables
Buckinghamshire 672w
Manpower 855–6w
Metropolitan Police 221w
Recruitment 221w, 672w, 1054–5w

Special educational needs
188w, 1354w
Finance 1354w
Higher education 452w
Pre-school education 995–6w
Teachers 646w

Special hospitals
124w
Hospital beds 1418w

Specialist schools
363w, 644w
Admissions 363w

Speech therapy
Morecambe 656w

Speed limits
328w, 675–8w, 1248w
Cameras 687w
Driving offences 105w, 827w
Railways 1244w

***Spellar, Rt Hon John**, Minister for Transport, Department for Transport*
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (23.07.02) 855

Spellar, Rt Hon John—continued
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manchester Airport (24.07.02) 302–5wh
Questions
A3 1248w
Channel tunnel, Freight 968w
Embassies, USA 145w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 1237w
London Underground, Standards 1238–40w
Network Rail 1245w
Public transport 1261–2w
Public transport, Injuries 6w
Railtrack, Finance 1239w
Railway track 1244w
Railways, Finance 1240w
Railways, Freight 969w
Railways, Insurance 1240w
Railways, Plymouth 569w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 1239–41w
Railways, Vandalism 1240w
Roads, Construction 1254w
Roads, Greater London 145–6w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 1257w
Roads, Tolls 1256w
Rolling stock 1244w
10 Downing Street, Access 1251w
Transport, EC action 1272w
Transport, Planning 145w

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 866
Questions
Afghanistan, Asylum 590–1w, 899–900w
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 714–5w
African Union 718w
Angola, Asylum 719–20w
Botswana, AIDS 964–5
Developing countries, AIDS 719w
Developing countries, Disease control 719w
Developing countries, Human rights 720w
Domestic violence, Convictions 849–50w
Liberia, Armed conflict 900w
Liberia, Overseas aid 715w
Malawi, Overseas aid 1138w
Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence 1340w
Prisoners 2w
Tanzania, Overseas aid 44w

Spicer, Sir Michael
Questions
A46 1246w
Army, Manpower 6

Spink, Bob
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 540–1, 544
Business questions intervention (18.07.02) 429
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 605
Education, Castle Point (22.07.02) 821–5
Hospices, Finance (22.07.02) 777–80
House of Commons, Points of order (19.07.02) 556–7
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 573–6, 581–2, 598–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 102–4wh, 108wh
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 74wh, 80–2wh
Flood control (16.07.02) 22wh, 36wh
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 558–9w
Baby care units 120w

Spink, Bob—continued
Business questions 432
Council housing 1205–10w
Crime prevention, Finance 794–5w
Crime prevention, Retail trade 795–6w, 862–4w, 1466w
Crimes of violence, Retail trade 682–3w
Electronic voting 664–6
Floods, Canvey Island 933–4w
Gibraltar, Spain 882–3w
Housing benefit 1562–3w
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, Annual reports 207–8w
Members, Computers 711w
Nurses, HIV infection 537w
Pension credit 510w
Planning, Castle Point 1218w
Prisons, Inspections 1501–2w
Sports, Clubs 660–1
Teachers, Training 364–7w
UK membership of EC 469w
Urban areas, Royal charters 799w

Sponsorship
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 921w

Sport England
see English Sports Council

Sports
Children 53w, 214w
Chorley 699w
Clubs 660–1
Drugs 696w
Finance 164w, 975–6w, 978w, 1162–3w
Health 975w
Holiday play schemes 693–4w
Obesity 432–4w
Offences against children 1163w
Overseas aid 473w
Schools 691w
Taunton 51w
Vetting 52–3w, 164w, 847w
Voluntary work 498w
Young people 658–9, 692w, 974–5w

Spring, Mr Richard
Questions
Africa, International assistance 834
Zimbabwe, EC action 174w

Squire, Ms Rachel
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 352–5
Questions
Criminal Records Bureau, Annual reports 554w
Pensioners, Incapacity benefit 1569w
Prison Service, Annual reports 564w
Prison Service, Environment protection 564w
Taxation, Hearing aids 1173w
United Kingdom Passport Agency, Annual reports 552–3w

Stafford
Education (22.07.02) 759–61

Staffordshire
Elderly 190–1w

Standard spending assessments
1000–1w
Care homes 197–8w
Education 1215w
Social services 48w

Standing Committee on Regional Affairs
(15.07.02) 46

Standing committees
325w

Standing Order No 24 applications
Moorside Mining (15.07.02) 45

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Questions
BBC External Services 1320–1w
Gibraltar, Spain 611–2w

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Questions
Access to work programme 1566w
Annual reports, Dept for Work and Pensions 1035w
Local government, Contracts 1020w
Members, Correspondence 477w
Security guards, Licensing 688w

State retirement pensions
114–6w, 294w, 518w, 1039w, 1539–42w
Dorset 268w

State second pension
Publicity 545w

State Veterinary Service
Manpower 921w

"Statement on the Community Budget 2002"
822w

Stationery
Dept of Trade and Industry 790w

Statistics
Cabinet Office 236w
Dept for Education and Skills 1365w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1024w
Gibraltar 765w
Home Office 397–8w, 556–7w
Scotland Office 768w

Statistics Commission
Annual reports 336w, 1170w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 878
Housing (18.07.02) 456
Questions
Bees, Diseases 489w
Data protection, Business 1326w
Deregulation Task Force 956w
Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government 1205w
Individual learning accounts 452–3w, 992w, 1351w
Jobcentres, Rural areas 1580w
Maintenance, Children 516–7w
Maintenance, Overseas residence 267w
Members, Correspondence 699w, 1091w, 1142w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 334w
Occupational pensions 469w, 518w, 520w
Pensions 518–9w
Police, Recruitment 103–4w
Poultry, Animal welfare 1154w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1299w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 167
Questions
Local government finance 240w

Steroid drugs
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch NHS Trust 423w

Stevenson, Mr George
Questions
Local government finance 44–5w

Stewart, Mr David
Questions
Airports, Landing rights 1235w

***Stewart, Mr David**—continued*
Aviation, Military bases 1114–5w, 1234–5w
Diabetes, Screening 191w
Fire services, Offshore industry 638w
Gatwick Airport 1234w
Gatwick Airport, Air routes 1241w
Gatwick Airport, Landing rights 1234w
Genetics, Identification of criminals 1517w
Heathrow Airport 1234w
Heathrow Airport, Landing rights 1234–5w
Post offices, Bank services 953w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 601w
Social security benefits, Post offices 600–1w

Stewart, Ian
Questions
Vaccination, Compensation 1593w

Stillman, Ian
Petitions (23.07.02) 953–4

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 203–5wh
Questions
Drugs, Crime 87w, 396–7w, 667–8w
Drugs, Misuse 87–8w, 404w
Homelessness, Finance 997–8w
Judges, Housing 1303–5w
Life imprisonment 1519–20w
Prisoners 1506–8w
Prisoners, Ethnic groups 1508–1[illegible]

Stoate, Dr Howard
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 452
Questions
National Land Information Service 151–3w

Stocks and shares
64w, 68w, 1199w

Strang, Eden
1531w

"Strategic Defence Review a New Chapter White Paper"
(18.07.02) 460–75

Strategic Rail Authority
567–8w
Accountancy 745–6w
Finance 12w, 746w

Strategy Unit
641w

***Straw, Rt Hon Jack**, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*
Questions
EC defence policy 611w
Government Communications Headquarters 389w
Government information services, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 5w
India, Terrorism 879w
Intelligence services 4w
Israel, Arms trade 839–42
Liberia, Armed conflict 900w
Ministerial policy advisors, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321–2w
Prisoners 2w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 834–5
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 829–33

Stringer, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Games, Manchester (22.07.02) 743–5

***Stringer, Mr Graham**—continued*
Questions
Complaints Audit Committee, Annual reports 1043–4w
Criminal Courts Review 1078w

Strokes
Medical treatments 1424w

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Questions
Convention on the Future of Europe 3w
Maintenance, Children 819w
Poland, EC enlargement 843

Student Loans Company
642w

Student numbers
Higher education 184–7w

Students
Medicine 772w
Morley 57w

Stunell, Mr Andrew
Questions
Business questions 425–7
Energy, Dept for Education and Skills 53w
Energy, Dept for Work and Pensions 1023–[illegible]
Energy, Dept of Health 663w
Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry 77–8w
Energy, Home Office 544w

Submarines
759w
Nuclear reactors 490w

Sub-Saharan Africa
Commonwealth Development Corporation 449w, 576–7w
Overseas aid 1125w
Water 291–2w

Suckler cow premiums
481w

Sudan
Armed conflict 837–9
International assistance 882w
UN Convention Against Torture 609w

Suez
General Service Medal 907–8w, 1104w

Suicide
Females 152–4
Prisoners 828–9w, 1463–4w, 1519w, 1537–8w
Probation and aftercare 1519–20w

Sure start programme
182w
Maternity payments 1559w

Surgery
426w
Arthritis 214w
Cancer 422w
Heart diseases 1380–2w
Private sector 202w
Waiting lists 418w, 536w

Surrey
Care homes 121w
Driving offences 827w
Education 1352w
Maternity services 1097w
Teachers 1343–4w

Surrey and Sussex Health Authority
Waiting lists 1416–7w

Surrey Police
Finance 1470–1w

Sussex Police
Early retirement 835w
Finance 1459w

Sustainable development
Agriculture 75w, 300w
Romania 589w

Sutton
Beta-interferon 423w

Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre
147w
Industrial health and safety 458–9w

Swayne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (18.07.02) 426
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 361–3
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 637–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 179–84wh, 189wh
Flood control (16.07.02) 35–6wh
Questions
Arthritis, Surgery 214w
Attendance allowance 1582w
Care homes 1089–90w
Care homes, Qualifications 1402w
Care homes, Training 1089w
Care homes, Vetting 873–4w
Developing countries, Debts 971
Disability living allowance 1573w
Jobcentres, New Forest 812w
Medical treatments, Radiation exposure 1434w
National income 403–4
New Forest, National parks 707–8w
Oil, Pollution 12–3w
Pain, Medical treatments 423w
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 829–30

Swimming pools
Leominster 691–2w

Swine fever
301w

Swire, Mr Hugo
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 235, 248–50
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 1127–8w
BBC 694w
Departmental expenditure limits, Home Office 1078w
Government art collection 1180w
Multiple sclerosis, Respite care 199w

Switzerland
Overseas investment 958w

Syms, Mr Robert
Questions
Crime prevention 851–2w
Fluoride, Drinking water 417–8w
Fluoride, Food 418w
Fluoride, Toothpaste 417w
Public expenditure, Home Office 1078w

Syrian Arab Republic
Overseas aid 43w

Taiwan
World Health Organisation 117w

Takeovers
350–1w

Tameside College
1367w

Tami, Mark
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 358–61

Tami, Mark—continued
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 1455–8w
Antisocial behaviour orders 664w
Crime, Wales 273–4
Flood control 934w
Playgrounds 530–1w
Police 670–1w
Private roads 344w
Private roads, Local government services 344–5w
Road traffic offences, Private roads 688w
Speed limits 675–8w
Speed limits, Cameras 687w
Tobacco, Young people 1456w

Tanzania
Overseas aid 44w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 37
Questions
Business 407

Taunton
Learndirect centres 1351–2w
Pensioners 1160w
Railways 1243w
Sports 51w

Taurine
Soft drinks 1440w

Tax allowances
Animal breeding 255w
Pollution control 242w

"Tax Benefit Reference Manual, 2002/03"
960w

Tax burden
1191w
Small businesses 467w

Tax credit
467w

Tax Credits (Definition and Calculation of Income) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determination of Rates) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

Tax evasion
Personation 256w

Taxation
251w
Hearing aids 1173w
Offshore workers 1185w, 1229w
Overseas residence 1173w
Pensions 283, 295–6w, 602w, 1200w
Self-assessment 472–3w, 1183w

Taxis
Licensing 1260w
Peterborough 459–60w
Pollution control 1259–60w
Standards 1260w

Taxpayers
Yorkshire and Humberside 256–8w

Taylor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 860–1
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1013
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 299–300
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 165
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 915, 939
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 767, 778

Taylor, Mr David—continued
Questions
EC grants and loans, Wales 320–1w
National Foundation for Youth Music 1158w
Recycling 36w
Recycling, Standards 35–6w
Special educational needs 1354w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 458

Taylor, Mr John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Derelict land, Planning permission (24.07.02) 272wh, 274wh
Questions
Inheritance tax 463w
Solihull Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 209–10w, 660w
West Midlands Police, Recruitment 1050–3w

Taylor, Matthew
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 34–5
Questions
British overseas territories, Financial services 1315–6w
Bypasses, Silverstone 1249–51w
Data protection, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1303w
Defence, USA 1113w
Government departments, Cost effectiveness 824w
Inflation 65w
National Savings Agency, Advertising 1197w
NHS, Pensions 1411w
Office for National Statistics, Codes of practice 66w
Public appointments, Treasury 1195–6w
Public expenditure, Standards 824w
Public finance 821w, 1190w
Recruitment, Treasury 1197w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Education and Skills 1363w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Work and Pensions 1581–2w
Republic of Ireland, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1320w
Republic of Ireland, Home Office 1055w
Republic of Ireland, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1292w
Republic of Ireland, Ministry of Defence 762w, 1113w
Republic of Ireland, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1372w
Republic of Ireland, Prime Minister 1369w
Republic of Ireland, Scotland Office 984w
Republic of Ireland, Treasury 1188w
Standards, Dept of Health 410
Tax burden 1191w
Taxation, Overseas residence 1173w
Teachers, Pensions 1344w
Welfare tax credits 254–5w

Taylor, Dr Richard
Questions
Acute beds 219w
Influenza, Vaccination 1391w
Sports, Health 975w
Sports, Young people 975w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 864

Taylor, Sir Teddy—continued
Questions
Asylum, Applications 90w
Defence Fire Service 16
Firing ranges, Shoeburyness 20w
Housing, Prices 466w
Immigration controls, France 219–20w
National Lottery 650
Voting rights, Young people 700w

Teachers
Ethnic groups 364w
Foreign workers 368–9w, 645w
Manpower 364w
North West region 1345–6w
Pensions 1344w
Recruitment 372w
Retirement 364w
Special educational needs 646w
Surrey 1343–4w
Training 57w, 364–7w, 1352–3w
Vacancies 57–60w
Wales 320w

Teenage pregnancy
70–4w, 416–7w, 1196–7w, 1386–8w

Telecommunications
Data protection 1465w
Disability aids 405–7w

Telecommunications masts
see Aerials

Telecommunications Transmitters (Restrictions on Planning Applications) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 637

Telecommunications Working Group
47–8w, 1009w

Telephone services
Child Benefit Centre 266w
Dept for Education and Skills 1364w
Dept for Work and Pensions 518w
Dept of Trade and Industry 791w, 954–6w
Home Office 848w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 82w
Northern Ireland Office 1201w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 322w
Scotland Office 768w
Transport 327–8w

Telephone tapping
Admissibility of evidence 1517w

Telephones
Concessions 530w

Television
Licensing 661, 1160w
Ministry of Defence 283w

Temporary employment
Dept for International Development 1132–3w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1264w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1587w
EC action (15.07.02) 127
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1322w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374–5w
Scotland Office 1229w
Treasury 1187w

10 Downing Street
Access 1251w
Air conditioning 803w
Repairs and maintenance 804w, 1368–9w

Tennis
695w

Termination of employment
Consignia 348w

Territorial Army
20w

Terrorism
9–12, 553–4w, 972–4
Chemical and biological warfare 553w
Energy supply 842–3w
Finance 387w, 959w
India 879w
Insurance 960w
Northern Ireland 975–7
Saudi Arabia 181w, 834–5
USA 1317w

Terrorism Act 2000 (Cessation of Effect of Section 76) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 310

Textiles
Training 1367w, 1594–5w
Wales (18.07.02) 546–54

Thailand
Aviation 763–4w

Thames Valley
Magistrates' courts 1081–2w, 1293w

Thameslink railway line
971w

The Tote
see Horserace Totalisator Board

Theatre
497w
Barnsley 691w

Theft
Cellular phones 555w, 825–6w, 1479–80w, 1484–5w
Heathrow Airport 859w
Postal services 774w

Thomas, Gareth, (Clwyd West)
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 303
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 560, 575, 577

Thomas, Mr Gareth, (Harrow West)
Debates etc.
Islam (19.07.02) 641–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 14wh
Questions
Army, Edinburgh 1115w
Army Personnel Centre, Standards 1118–9w
Asylum, Applications 860–1w
Centre for Management and Policy Studies, Annual reports 725–6w
Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency, Standards 1117–8w
Environment Agency, Public appointments 1144w
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, Pay 354w
Historic buildings, Finance 695–6w
Industrial health and safety 81w
Infliximab 207w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 10–1w
Playing fields 1162w
QinetiQ, Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation 1122–3w
Queen Victoria School, Standards 1122w
Renewable energy 324w, 353–4w
Sports, Clubs 660
Sports, Finance 1162–3w
War graves, Wrecks 1115w

Thomas, Mr Gareth—continued
Warship Support Agency, Standards 1115–6w
Water sports 934w

Thomas, Simon
Debates etc.
Textiles, Wales (18.07.02) 546–50
Written questions, Points of order (24.07.02) 1019
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 21–2w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 132–3w, 1378w
Dental services, Wales 276
Developing countries, Renewable energy 1130–1w
Dredging, Wales 37–8w
Elections, Wales 699w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 306w
Indonesia, Hawk aircraft 3–4w
Oral questions, Dept of Health 1431w
Pensions 1040w
Pensions, Advisory services 1544–5w
Water supply, Wales 317w

Throckmorton airfield
Asylum 1373w

Thurso, John
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 865

Timetabling of bills
(15.07.02) 46–126, (16.07.02) 176–215, (18.07.02) 478–533, (24.07.02) 1059–64

Timms, Mr Stephen, Minister of State, E-Commerce and Competitiveness, Dept of Trade and Industry
Questions
Broadband, Huntingdon 439w
Consignia, Termination of employment 348w
Electronic commerce, Private sector 781w
Electronic commerce, Public private partnerships 960–1w
Post offices, Bank services 438–9w, 815w, 945w, 953w
Post offices, Closures 944–5w
Post offices, Disabled 349w
Post offices, Information services 172w, 947w
Post offices, Scotland 774w
Post offices, Social security benefits 438w
Postal services 171w, 353w
Postal services, Fees and charges 348w, 445–6w
Postal services, Government assistance 349w
Postal services, Reform 170–1w
Postal services, Theft 774w
Postal services, Wirral 774w
Postal workers, Vacancies 350w
Postal workers, Vetting 349w
Radio, Licensing 949–50w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 687
Questions
Agriculture, Subsidies 312w, 488w
Agriculture, Sustainable development 75w
Countryside, Access 137w
Euro, Overseas trade 1198w
Rural development plans 39w
Social security benefits, Appeals 1033–4w

Tipping of waste
28–9w, 315w, 481w

Tipping of waste—continued
  Planning permission 941w

Tobacco
  Young people 1456w

Todd, Mr Mark
  Questions
  Beta-interferon, Derbyshire 203w
  Flood control 303w, 703–4w
  Herbal medicine, EC law 151
  London Underground, Standards 1238–40w

Tolls
  Roads 149w, 573w, 736–7w, 1255–6w

Tonge, Dr Jenny
  Debates etc.
  Airports (23.07.02) 867–8
  Richmond Park, Petitions (15.07.02) 128
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 104–6wh
  Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 209wh, 213wh, 216wh, 218–20wh
  Questions
  Africa, AIDS 966
  Developing countries, Arms trade 1138w
  Developing countries, Common agricultural policy 1129w
  Developing countries, Education 1130w
  Endometriosis 423–4w
  Group of Eight, Kananaskis Summit 896–7w
  Hospitals, Consultants 139
  International Monetary Fund 1139w
  Nepal, Armed forces 886w
  Nepal, Human rights 610w
  Sudan, UN Convention Against Torture 609w
  Uganda, Armed conflict 588w, 899w
  Visits abroad, Treasury 1188w

Toothpaste
  Fluoride 417w

Totternhoe
  Petitions (19.07.02) 555

Touhig, Mr Don, Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
  Debates etc.
  Textiles, Wales (18.07.02) 551–4
  Questions
  Community development, Wales 317w
  Crime, Wales 273–5
  Hospitals, Waiting lists 321w
  Mental health services, Wales 322w
  New deal schemes, Wales 322w
  Police, Wales 272–3
  Sheep meat, Wales 277
  Teachers, Wales 320w
  Water supply, Wales 317w

Tourism
  1158–9w
  Euro 695w
  Foot and mouth disease 693w
  Oxfordshire 693w

Tourists
  Expenditure 497w

Town and Country Finance Issues Group
  1002–3w

Trade
  Agriculture 177w, 775w
  Developing countries 261w, 763w
  Petitions (16.07.02) 260–1

Trade agreements
  Developing countries 947w

Trade competitiveness
  Agriculture 313–5w

Trade competitiveness—continued
  Manufacturing industries 417–8

Trading funds
  Export Credits Guarantee Dept 779–80w

Trading Schemes Act 1996
  Questions
  439w

Traffic areas
  964w

Traffic lights
  Greater London 742w

Train operating companies
  Finance 969w

Training
  Advocate General for Scotland 379w
  Armed forces 275–6w
  Care homes 1089w
  Headteachers 1345w
  Home Office 546w, 1057–8w
  Jobcentre Plus 1035w
  Judges 606–8w
  Lorry drivers 265–6w
  Metropolitan Police 848–9w
  Office for Civil Nuclear Security 353w, 1337–8w
  Police 559–60w
  Scotland Office 382w
  Social workers 541w
  Solicitor-General 615–6w, 913–4w
  Teachers 57w, 364–7w, 1352–3w
  Textiles 1367w, 1594–5w

Training and enterprise councils
  Finance 1354–5w, 1357–62w
  Manpower 1355–7w

Training Group Defence Agency
  see RAF Training Group

Transplant surgery
  216–8w

Transport
  Accidents 1242w
  Disadvantaged 1214–5w
  EC action 1272w
  Finance 734–6w, 1168–9w, 1176–7w
  Greater London 1271–2w
  Internet 1267w
  Livestock 134–5w, 922w, 1142–3w
  Planning 145w, 573w, 968w, 1272w, 1276–7w
  Radioactive wastes 345–6w, 784w, 786w, 1262w
  Rural areas 1264w
  Schools 13–5w, 363w, 647w, 1341w
  South East region 1265w
  Standards 736w
  Telephone services 327–8w
  Urban areas 1271–2w

Transport Direct
  733–5w

Transport for London
  Finance 17w

Transport Select Committee
  (22.07.02) 732

Transport Works Authorisation Branch
  45–8w
  Manpower 47w

Transsexualism
  1079–80w, 1306w
  Identity cards 555–6w

Travel
  Concessions 1264w
  Research 734w

Travel Concessions (Young Persons) Bill 2001/02
  Debates etc.
  2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Traveller Law Reform Bill 2001/02
  Debates etc.
  2R order read (19.07.02) 638

Travelling people
  Trespass 639w

Treason Felony Act of Settlement and Parliamentary Oath Bill 2001/02
  Debates etc.
  2R order read (19.07.02) 634

Treasure (Designation) Order 2002
  Debates etc.
  (17.07.02) 387–8

Treasure trove
  (17.07.02) 387–8

Treasury
  Annual reports 1190w
  Computers 66w
  Consultation papers 1181–2w
  Corporate hospitality 1199w
  EC action 339w, 471–2w, 636–7w, 747–8w, 1173–6w
  Information officers 822w
  Internet 1186w
  Manpower 1172w
  Ministerial policy advisors 1195w
  Pay 64–5w, 1192w
  Public appointments 337–8w, 1195–6w
  Public participation 1182w
  Publicity 821w
  Recruitment 1197w
  Republic of Ireland 1188w
  Scotland 1171–3w
  Solicitors 1199w
  Standards 1193w
  Temporary employment 1187w
  Visits abroad 1180w, 1188w

Treaty on European Union
  1w

Tredinnick, Mr David
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 67–76wh, 83wh

Trend, Mr Michael
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Belarus (23.07.02) 224–8wh
  Questions
  Business questions 428–9
  Civil servants, Codes of practice 803w

Trespass
  Travelling people 639w

Trespassers on Land (Liability For Damage and Eviction) Bill 2001/02
  Debates etc.
  2R order read (19.07.02) 633

Trials
  1303w
  Administrative delays 81w
  Rape 798–9w, 1280–8w

Tribunal of Inquiry into Matters Arising from the Deaths of Patients of Harold Shipman
  see Harold Shipman Tribunal of Inquiry

Trimble, Rt Hon David
  Debates etc.
  Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 216–7, (24.07.02) 990–1
  Public expenditure (15.07.02) 39

Trinidad and Tobago
  Politics and government 5w

Truswell, Mr Paul
Questions
Civil disorder, Bradford 1473–4w

Turkey
180w
EC enlargement 3w
Human rights 387w
Politics and government 764w

Turner, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 540
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 65, 82, 85–6, 95, 97–9, 103, 111–2, (24.07.02) 1029
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 238
Smuggling, Drugs (22.07.02) 803–6
Questions
Absent voting 574w
Asylum, AIDS 97w
Cancer, Health services 1422w
Care homes 1402w
Child Support Agency, Computers 1545–6w
Consultation papers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13–4w
Contraceptives 864–6w
Crime 95–6w
Crime prevention 1461w
Customs and Excise, Southern region 70w
Education, Finance 1366w
Education, Pilot schemes 1347–50w
Exchange rates 65w, 1182–3w
Foot and mouth disease, Tourism 693w
Grants, Scotland Office 767w
Higher education, EC grants and loans 187w
Homelessness 239w
Housing 1007w
Housing, Empty property 1003–6w
Industrial tribunals, Home Office 679w
Industrial tribunals, Scotland Office 1225w
Internet, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1158w
Internet, Dept for Education and Skills 1365–6w
Internet, Dept for International Development 900w
Internet, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265w
Internet, Dept for Work and Pensions 1594w
Internet, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1319w
Internet, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1279w
Internet, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1219w
Internet, Treasury 1186w
Isle of Wight, Dept of Trade and Industry 1325w
Location, Dept of Health 867w
Medical treatments, Overseas visitors 424w
Members, Correspondence 131w
Mental health services, Vacancies 1098w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scotland Office 500w
Pesticides 709–10w
Planning permission, Administrative delays 1007–8w
Police 95w
Police, Dismissal 95–6w
Police, Manpower 563w, 1486–7w
Police, Retirement 1046–7w
Prison Service, Sick leave 1070–6w
Prisoners' release 1535–8w
Prisons, Disciplinary proceedings 1536w
Prisons, Education 1498–502w

Turner, Mr Andrew—continued
Prisons, Health services 1534w
Prisons, Mental health services 1534–5w
Probation and aftercare 837w
Public participation, Cabinet Office 1164–5w
Public participation, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 974w
Public participation, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1144–6w
Public participation, Dept for International Development 1135w
Public participation, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265–6w
Public participation, Dept for Work and Pensions 1542w
Public participation, Dept of Health 1094w
Public participation, Dept of Trade and Industry 172–4w
Public participation, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321w
Public participation, Home Office 841–2w
Public participation, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1291w
Public participation, Treasury 1182w
Schools, Discipline 1343w
Socrates programme 56w
Teachers, Training 1352–3w
Teenage pregnancy 70–4w, 416–7w
Withholding tax 256w
Written questions, Home Office 686w
Written questions, Scotland Office 1228w

Turner, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Housing, Points of order (18.07.02) 476
Questions
Council tax, North West region 1216–8w
Housing benefit, North West region 1563–4w
Pay 1169–70w

12 Downing Street
Repairs and maintenance 1368w

Twelve minutes rule
Rulings and statements (16.07.02) 225

***Twigg, Mr Stephen**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Skills*
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 98
Questions
Civil servants, Dept for Education and Skills 187w
Education, Asylum 773w
Energy, Dept for Education and Skills 53w
Further education 1352w
General certificate of secondary education, Standards 772w
Higher education, Special educational needs 452w
Information officers, Dept for Education and Skills 988w
Languages, Curriculum 1351w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Education and Skills 1364–5w
Publicity, Dept for Education and Skills 771–3w
Pupil exclusions 183w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Education and Skills 1363w
Schools, Animal experiments 54w
Schools, Discipline 1343w
Special educational needs 188w
Special educational needs, Teachers 646w
Standards, Dept for Education and Skills 651w

Twigg, Mr Stephen—continued
Telephone services, Dept for Education and Skills 1364w
Visits abroad, Dept for Education and Skills 773–4w

Twyford
Railways 744w

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Political parties, Finance (22.07.02) 773–7
Select committees (22.07.02) 730–1
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 788
Questions
Organophosphates, Animal experiments 313w

Tynan, Mr Bill
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy (16.07.02) 59–63wh
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 122–3wh
Questions
Equal pay, Dept for Work and Pensions 112w
Equal pay, Home Office 546–7w
Foreign investment in UK 412–3
Overseas aid, Health services 1124–5w
Taxation, Hearing aids 1173w

Type 45 destroyers
Ballistic missile defence 158–9w

Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1013–4
Questions
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 900w, 1132w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1263w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Work and Pensions 1596w
Ministerial policy advisors, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321–2w
Ministerial policy advisors, Home Office 1492w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1219w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w
Ministerial policy advisors, Pay 1370w
Ministerial policy advisors, President of the Council 1168w
Ministerial policy advisors, Prime Minister 890w, 1371w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scotland Office 273w, 1229w
Ministerial policy advisors, Treasury 1195w
Ministerial policy advisors, Visits abroad 1370w
Ministers, Visits abroad 1370w
Private finance initiative 1176w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1263w

Uganda
Armed conflict 588w, 899w
Microfinance 292–3w

UK Debt Management Office
Annual reports 958w

UK membership of EC
469w

Ukraine
AIDS 1388–9w
Foreign relations 836–7

UN Convention Against Torture
  Sudan 609w

Unemployment
  Scotland 522-3w, 983-4w, 1232w
  Wales 321w
  Young people 522-3w

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
  781-2w

United Kingdom Passport Agency
  Annual reports 553w

United Nations
  Peace keeping operations 881w

Universities
  see Higher education

Unmanned air vehicles
  157-8w, 494w, 970w
  Afghanistan 758w

Unni, Kolathuv
  540w

Uranium
  942-3w
  Mining 347w, 782w

Urban areas
  Buildings 1211w
  Planning 639w
  Post offices 998w
  Road traffic 573w, 1255w
  Royal charters 799w
  Transport 1271-2w

Urban bus challenge
  8-10w

Urban Regeneration Agency
  see English Partnerships

Urban regeneration companies
  Gloucester 281, 1016w

USA
  Agriculture 177w, 775w
  Air routes 17w, 146w
  Aviation 1236w
  Ballistic missile defence 26w, 881w
  Defence 1113w
  Double taxation 822w
  Embassies 145w
  Health services 208w
  International Criminal Court 846
  Iron and steel 776w
  Pet travel scheme 935w
  Terrorism 1317w
  Vaccination 1391w

Utilities
  Road works 333-4w

Vacant land
  1019w
  Property development 353w

Vaccination
  218w
  Compensation 1593w
  German measles 423w, 1391-2w
  Influenza 428w, 1083w, 1391w
  Meningitis 428w
  Smallpox 1086-7w, 1390-1w
  USA 1391w

Vaccination of Children (Parental Choice) Bill 2001/02
  Debates etc.
  2R order read (19.07.02) 635

Vandalism
  Railways 745w, 1240w

VAT
  Building alterations 242w
  Care homes 822-3w

VAT—continued
  Charities 463w
  Financial services 824w
  Fuels 1171w
  Gun sports 821w
  Imports 336-7w
  Marks and Spencer 1191-2w
  Museums and galleries 335w
  Private sector 1168w
  Public sector 1168w

Vaz, Mr Keith
  Debates etc.
  Indian subcontinent, Entry clearances (22.07.02) 748-51
  Questions
  Corporate hospitality, Treasury 1199w
  Criminal Records Bureau, Administrative delays 1483w
  Criminal Records Bureau, Complaints 1483w
  Entry clearances 887w
  Entry clearances, India 1532w
  EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council 1059-60w
  Immigration and Nationality Directorate 229w
  Indian subcontinent, Entry clearances 1311-2w
  International Sikh Youth Federation 554w
  Leicestershire Police 96w
  Leicestershire Police Authority, Public appointments 560w
  Magistrates, Resignations 796w
  Manchester City Council 340w
  Members, Correspondence 1069w
  Meyer, Catherine 803w, 887w
  New deal schemes 111w
  Pensioners 1588w
  Prisons 837w
  Solicitors, Treasury 1199w
  Work permits 96w

Vehicle Inspectorate
  964w

Vehicular Access Across Common and Other Land (England) Regulations 2002
  Questions
  708w

Venture capital
  779w

Veterinary Laboratories Agency
  Annual reports 916w
  Finance 930w
  Standards 620-1w

Veterinary medicine
  Research 1135w

Veterinary Medicines Directorate
  Annual reports 915-6w
  Standards 296-7w

Vetting
  Care homes 835w, 873-4w
  Foreign workers 1482w
  Overseas residence 1483w
  Postal workers 349w
  Sports 52-3w, 164w, 847w
  Voluntary work 97w, 555w

Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry
  119-20w, 541w

Viggers, Mr Peter
  Debates etc.
  Defence review (18.07.02) 471
  Royal Naval Hospital Haslar (22.07.02) 771-3
  Questions
  Defence, Expenditure 3
  Jobcentre Plus, Gosport 813w

Viggers, Mr Peter—continued
  Queen Alexandra Hospital, Private finance initiative 217w, 902w
  Royal Centre for Defence Medicine, Housing 163w
  Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 431-2w, 901-2w

Village halls
  308w
  Construction 708-9w
  Disabled 263-4w

Vocational education
  Morley 648w

Voluntary organisations
  Contact orders 525-6w
  Grants 226-7w
  Regulation 1165w

Voluntary work
  Social security benefits 1554-5w
  Sports 498w
  Vetting 97w, 555w

Voting methods
  1016w

Voting rights
  Young people 700w

Wakefield
  Pensioners 661

Wales
  Areas of outstanding natural beauty 319w
  Armed forces 3-4
  Care homes 316w
  Community development 317w
  Court Service 319w
  Crime 273-5
  Crime prevention 320w
  Crimes of violence 321w
  Dental services 275-7
  Devolution 320w
  Dredging 37-8w
  EC grants and loans 318-21w
  Economic and monetary union 1378w
  Elections 699-700w, 724w
  Fire prevention 320w
  Foot and mouth disease 317w
  Foreign investment in UK 316-7w
  Health services 269-70
  Hospitals 321w
  Iron and steel 318w
  Jobcentre Plus 321-2w
  Manufacturing industries 318w
  Mental health services 322w
  New deal schemes 322w
  Police 272-3, 1480w
  Publicity 1377w
  Regional airports 270-2
  Scotland Office 982w
  Sheep meat 277
  Small businesses 319w
  Social security benefits 1553w
  Teachers 320w
  Textiles (18.07.02) 546-54
  Unemployment 321w
  Water supply 317w
  Young offenders 558w

Wales Office
  see Office of the Secretary of State for Wales

Walley, Ms Joan
  Debates etc.
  Forests, Petitions (24.07.02) 1071
  Questions
  Childbirth 119w, 208w
  EC environmental policy 355w
  EC environmental policy, Procurement 354-5w
  Elderly, Staffordshire 190-1w

Walley, Ms Joan—continued
"Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate" 1148–9w
Ground water 1145–7w
Housing 238w
Industrial health and safety, Smoking 732w
Land, Contamination 1147–8w
Museums and galleries, West Midlands 657–8
Petrol, Marketing 786w
Pregnancy 1437–8w
Repairs and maintenance, Home Office 1065–7w
Repairs and maintenance, Solicitor-General 287w
Specialist schools 363w
Telephones, Concessions 530w
War pensions 493w
Wood, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Wood, EC action 710–1w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1149w

Wandsworth
Crime 98w
Police 1480w

Wandsworth Prison
854w

War graves
Wrecks 1115w

War pensions
493w

Ward, Ms Claire
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 567, 571–4, 581–3
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 639–40
Questions
Playing fields 1217w

Warehouse parties
Southern region 401w

Warminster
Armed forces 159w, 752w

Warship Support Agency
Standards 1115–6w

Warships
Chile 760w
Procurement 19w

Waste Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Waste disposal
Electronic equipment 482–3w, 1332w
Hazardous substances 312w, 483w
House of Commons 189w
Livestock 135w
Packaging (24.07.02) 247–67wh
Plastics 707w
Refrigerators 482–3w

Waste management
Ministry of Defence 907w

Waste (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Water
Africa 1125w
North Africa 588w
Sub-Saharan Africa 291–2w

Water abstraction
487–8w

Water sports
934w

Water supply
Asbestos 476w
Competition 916w
Overseas aid 1134w
Wales 317w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Questions
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group 170w
Bankruptcy 355–6w
Digital broadcasting 362w
Hospital beds 284
Manufacturing industries, Job creation 633w
Mortgages, Complaints 360w
Postal services, Government assistance 349w

Watkinson, Angela
Questions
Air force, Engineers 23–4w
Best value 1017w
Police, Havering 1474w

Watts, Mr Dave
Questions
China, Overseas trade 610–1w
General practitioners, Finance 424w
Solicitors, Regulation 1279–80w

Weapons
25–6w, 1317w
Police 1522w

Webb, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 625–6, 627–30
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 562, 564, 570
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 914
Questions
Child benefit, Internet 295w
Child Support Agency, Computers 818–9w
Children, Poverty 1033w
Children in care, Social security benefits 813–4w
Housing benefit 510–1w, 809w, 1561–2w
Immigration rules, Domestic violence 229w
Incapacity benefit 1565–7w
Jobcentre Plus, Manpower 1545w
Maintenance, Children 116w, 1560–1w
Maternity benefits 264–5w
Members, Correspondence 132w
Members, Pensions 712w
ONE programme, Nottinghamshire 1593–4w
Overseas aid, Sports 473w
Pension credit 1540w
Pensions, Advisory services 1543–5w
Social Fund 596–7w
Social security benefits 112–3w
Social security benefits, Abuse 807–9w, 1030–1w, 1558w
Social security benefits, Administrative delays 596w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 806w, 809w
State retirement pensions 518w, 1541–2w

Weir, Mr Michael
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 141wh, 153–7wh, 174wh
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 123wh, 126wh

Weir, Mr Michael—continued
Questions
Agriculture, Subsidies 621w
Arms trade 491w
Arms trade, Namibia 1327w
Beef, France 934–5w
Business questions 436
Channel tunnel railway line, Scotland 982w
Child Support Agency, Computers 819w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 918w
Common agricultural policy, Scotland 917w
Consumers, Scotland 169–70w
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 477w
Correspondence, Home Office 396w
Correspondence, Scotland Office 980–1w
Disabled, Access 1574w
Financial services, Misrepresentation 335–6w
Hill farming 313–4w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 356w, 953–4w
New deal schemes, Scotland 511–2w
NHS, Private finance initiative 872w
Overseas aid 415
Pornography, Internet 1532–3w
Postal services, Fees and charges 348w, 445–6w
Radioactive wastes, Shipping 169w
Sellafield, Radioactive wastes 931w
Set-aside schemes 488–9w
Sheep meat, France 936–7w
Sheep meat, Imports 136w
Shipping, Radioactive wastes 571w
Slaughterhouses 930–1w
Social security benefits, Appeals 1557–8w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1553w
Transport, Schools 15w

Welbeck College
7

Welfare milk
Asylum 541–2w

Welfare tax credits
254–5w, 1179–80w
Jobcentre Plus 271w
Publicity 339–40w

Wellcome Trust
Finance 930w

Welsh National Assembly
see National Assembly for Wales

Wembley Stadium
498w, 1159w

West coast railway line
6w, 969w

West Mercia Constabulary
Finance 675w

West Midlands
Museums and galleries 657–8

West Midlands Police
Recruitment 1050–3w

West Surrey Health Authority
Per capita costs 1398w

West Sussex
Antisocial behaviour orders 1466–7w
General practitioners 1394–5w
Military bases 164w
Primary health care 1394–5w

Western Sahara
609w
Peace negotiations 609w
Sovereignty 180–1w

Westminster Foundation for Democracy
Annual reports 888–9w

White, Brian
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 448
Questions
Computers, Cabinet Office 84w
Computers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 499w
Computers, Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Computers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 37w
Computers, Dept for International Development 893w
Computers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13w
Computers, Dept for Work and Pensions 294w
Computers, Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Computers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w
Computers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 607w
Computers, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 244w
Computers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1378w
Computers, President of the Council 413–4w
Computers, Scotland Office 768w
Computers, Treasury 66w
Contraceptives, Clinical trials 1383–4w
Financial services, Complaints 65w
Higher education, Marketing 643w
Homelessness 341–2w
Land mines, Bomb disposal 162w
Ordnance Survey, Standards 245–6w
Schools, Transport 363w

***Whitehead, Dr Alan**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions*
Questions
Housing, Planning permission 1009w
Ordnance Survey 1012–4w
Plant power [illegible]7–8w
Poland, EC enlargement 842

Whittingdale, Mr John
Questions
Business, Questionnaires 1190–1w
Fisheries, Compensation 1327w

***Wicks, Malcolm**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Work and Pensions*
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 618, 624–7, 629
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 137–43wh, 169–78wh
Questions
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 605–6w
Child benefit 262–3w
Child benefit, Foreign students 263w
Child benefit, Internet 295w
Child Benefit Centre, Telephone services 266w
Child Support Agency 600w
Child Support Agency, Computers 818–9w, 1545–7w
Child Support Agency, Standards 819w, 1546w
Children, Poverty 1033w
Community care grants 1577–8w
Consultation papers, Dept for Work and Pensions 602–4w, 814w, 1026–8w
Council tax benefits 602w, 1037–8w

***Wicks, Malcolm**—continued*
EC action, Dept for Work and Pensions 232–4w, 249w, 269–70w, 603–4w, 1583–4w
Funeral payments 604–5w
Housing benefit 510–1w, 595w, 809w, 1022w, 1561–3w
Housing benefit, Abuse 266w
Housing benefit, Administrative delays 595w
Housing benefit, Colchester 1015w
Housing benefit, Dorset 268w
Housing benefit, Greater London 1222–4w
Housing benefit, North West region 1563–4w
Housing benefit, Scotland 594w
Housing benefit, Yorkshire and Humberside 1014–5w
Income support 1024–5w
Income support, Lone parents 511w, 813w
Jobseeker's allowance 511w
Maintenance, Children 116w, 267w, 516–7w, 599–600w, 819–20w, 1026w, 1547–9w, 1560–1w
Maintenance, Overseas residence 267w
Maternity benefits 264–5w
Members, Correspondence 817–8w, 1588w
Post offices, Bank services 597w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Work and Pensions 1581–2w
Social Fund 270w, 510w, 596–7w, 1579–80w, 1582–3w
Social Fund, Annual reports 1034w
Social security benefits 1028–9w
Social security benefits, Abuse 595–6w, 807–9w, 1029–31w, 1036–8w, 1555–8w
Social security benefits, Administrative delays 596w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 597–601w, 805–7w, 809–11w, 1029w, 1031–2w, 1550–2w, 1579w
Social security benefits, Borders region 1552w
Social security benefits, Deductions 1589–92w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1571–3w
Social security benefits, Disqualification 1025–6w
Social security benefits, Mortgages 1584w
Social security benefits, North West region 269w
Social security benefits, Post offices 600–1w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1552–4w
Social security benefits, Take-up 596w
Social security benefits, Voluntary work 1554–5w
Social security benefits, Widowed people 1559–60w
Social Security Fraud Act 2001 811w

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann
Questions
Hospitals, Waiting lists 1379–80w

Widowed people
Social security benefits 1559–60w

Wiggin, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 577–9
Questions
Accountancy, Standards 337w
Agriculture, Trade competitiveness 313–5w
AIDS, Africa 717–8w
AIDS, Drug resistance 1389w
AIDS, Research 1389–90w
Asylum 225w
Balkans, Peace keeping operations 2w

***Wiggin, Mr Bill**—continued*
Bovine tuberculosis, Compensation 932–3w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 131–2w, 931–3w, 1147w
Care homes 198w
Care homes, Finance 872–3w
Care homes, Standards 199w
Care homes, Wales 316w
Dairy farming 314w
Disabled 1038–9w
Disabled, Access 1007w
Double jeopardy 1461–2w
Employment Relations Act 1999 440–1w
Farmers, Income 1147w
Fire services, Pay 1002w
Food, Procurement 447w
Freedom of information, Codes of practice 797–8w, 1292–4w
Genetically modified organisms, EC action 37w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 36–7w
Great Western Trains 1242w
Hospital wards 535–6w
Hospitals, Sexual offences 536w
Hospitals, Standards 1417–8w
Identity cards, Costs 544–5w
Immigration 224–5w, 547–8w
International assistance 1133–4w
Manufacturing industries 356–8w
Members, Correspondence 131w
National Audit Office, Standards 1187w
Non-departmental public bodies, Public appointments 1164w
Office for National Statistics, Codes of practice 1170w
Pensions 1035w, 1584w
Planning 639w
Police, Diabetes 1061–2w
Political parties, Finance 996–7w
Politics and government, Young people 1166w, 1363–4w
Post offices, Disabled 349w
Poverty 254w
Private Pension Legislation Review 601w
Public sector, Pay 727–8w
Pupils, Personal records 374–5w
Railways, Investment 969–70w
Royal family, Finance 1182w
Small businesses 1333–6w
Sports, Finance 164w
Statistics Commission, Annual reports 1170w
Stocks and shares 68w
Swimming pools, Leominster 691–2w
Taxation, Self-assessment 1183w
Venture capital 779w
Wellcome Trust, Finance 930w
Zimbabwe 1307w
Zimbabwe, Agriculture 586w
Zimbabwe, Asylum 226w
Zimbabwe, Elections 174w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 897w

Wild Game Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995
Questions
429w

Wildlife
Meat 387–8w, 484–5w, 705–6w, 920w, 1140–1w, 1367–8w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 858
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 699
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 4–5
Cancer, Research 146–7

Willetts, Mr David
Questions
Child tax credit 1189–90w
Inland Revenue, Advertising 253w
Maternity payments, Sure start programme 1559w
Pensioners, Social security benefits 295w
Pensions, Overseas residence 1031w
Personal income 1186w
Social Fund, Annual reports 1034w
Social security benefits, Abuse 1555w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 598–600w, 1550–2w, 1579w
Social security benefits, Publicity 116w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Computers 295w
State retirement pensions 114w, 1039w
State second pension, Publicity 1545w
Welfare tax credits, Publicity 339–40w
Working families tax credit 1189w
Working families tax credit, Regulatory impact assessments 253w
Written questions, Dept for Work and Pensions 113–4w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Questions
Health services, Wales 270
National Audit Office, Business plans 979–80w

Williams, Mrs Betty
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 22w

Williams, Hywel
Questions
Employment tribunals 954w
Industrial disputes 1195w
Industrial relations 777w
Mental health services, Wales 322w

Williams, Mr Roger
Questions
Army, Discharges 15
Doctors, Recruitment 202w
Quarrying, Insurance 174w

Willis, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 162–3
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 48, 57–61, 65, 67, 72, 74, 78–81, 97–8, 101, 108–11, 121–2, (24.07.02) 1022, 1024, 1032–3
Questions
Children in care, General certificate of secondary education 123w
Further education, Finance 771w, 986–7w
Headteachers, Qualifications 1345–6w
Headteachers, Training 1345w
Languages, Curriculum 1351w
Schools, Animal experiments 54w
Teachers, Foreign workers 368w
Teachers, Recruitment 372w

***Wills, Mr Michael**, Minister for Information Technology and Criminal Justice, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Islam (19.07.02) 645–8
Questions
Correspondence, Home Office 396w

Wilshire, Mr David
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 326
Firearms Amendment (No 2) Bill, 1R (15.07.02) 46
Lords amendments, Points of order (19.07.02) 557

***Wilshire, Mr David**—continued*
Ministers, Points of order (18.07.02) 533–4
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 589
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 639
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 530
Questions
Driving offences, Speed limits 827w
Maternity services 1438w
Maternity services, Standards 1097w
Maternity services, Surrey 1097w
Police, Weapons 1522w

***Wilson, Mr Brian**, Minister of State for Industry and Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Air conditioning 1154w
British Nuclear Fuels, Accountancy 1336–7w
British Nuclear Fuels, Contracts 782w
British Nuclear Fuels, Finance 782w, 1337w
British Nuclear Fuels, Pay 783–4w
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 786w
Coal Authority, Annual reports 950w
Combined heat and power, Greater Manchester 441w
Combined heat and power, Saltburn 441w
Design, Environment protection 1333w
Diesel engines, EC action 946w
EC environmental policy 355w
EC environmental policy, Procurement 354–5w
Electricity, Distribution 1329w
Electricity generation, Markets 1330w
Electricity generation, Prices 944w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 1332w
Energy 711w, 943–4w
Energy, Competition 346w, 943w
Energy, Hacking 346w
Energy supply 347–8w, 1335–6w
European Energy and Transport Forum 1338w
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority 786w
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, Pay 354w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 350w, 352w, 356w, 953–4w
Magnox reactors 784w
Mining, Pensions 171–2w, 441–2w, 775w
Natural gas 1328–9w
Nuclear power 1330w
Nuclear power, Accidents 783w
Nuclear power, Publicity 345w
Nuclear power stations, Construction 346w
Nuclear power stations, Security 346w, 862w
Nuclear reactors 783–4w
Office for Civil Nuclear Security, Annual reports 353w
Office for Civil Nuclear Security, Training 353w, 1337–8w
Oil, Exploration 443–6w
Petrol, Marketing 786w
Petrol alternatives 951w
Photovoltaics 952w
Pollution, EC action 946–7w
Radioactive wastes 784–5w
Radioactive wastes, Railways 785–6w
Radioactive wastes, Russia 776–7w
Radioactive wastes, Sellafield 782–3w
Radioactive wastes, Shipping 169w
Radioactive wastes, Transport 345–6w, 784w, 786w

***Wilson, Mr Brian**—continued*
Renewable energy 169w, 352–4w, 358w, 787–8w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority 781–2w
Uranium, Mining 347w, 782w
Wind power 787–8w
Wind power, Planning permission 787w

Wilton Park
Standards 388–9w

Wiltshire
Armed forces 160w

Wimbledon Football Club
977–8

Wind power
787–8w
Planning permission 787w
Radar 761w

Winnick, David
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 295
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 220, 240–2, (24.07.02) 996–7
Questions
Members, Correspondence 817–8w
Political parties, Finance 663
Terrorism 12

Winter fuel payments
(22.07.02) 799–801, 1034w
European economic area 599w

Winterton, Ann
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 169
Questions
Common fisheries policy 705w
Fisheries 132w
Natural gas 1328–9w

Winterton, Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Deferred divisions, Points of order (18.07.02) 538
Questions
Herbal medicine, EC law 150–1
Livestock, Transport 134–5w
Pensions, Public sector 416

***Winterton, Ms Rosie**, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept*
Questions
Administration of justice 528–9w
Annual reports, Lord Chancellor's Dept 797w
Asylum, Appeals 1290–1w
Consultation papers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526–8w, 796–8w
Contact orders 82–3w, 525w
Contact orders, Voluntary organisations 525–6w
Departmental responsibilities, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1081w
EC action, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278–9w
Euthanasia 1301–3w
Females, Lord Chancellor's Dept 411w
Flags 82w
Immigration adjudicators, Manpower 411w
Information officers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 799–800w
Internet, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1279w
Kidnapping, Children 411–2w
Law Commission 1081w
Law Society, Complaints 412–3w
Legal Services Commission, Computers 1299–300w
"Making Decisions Consultation Paper" 1082w

Winterton, Ms Rosie—continued
Mentally incapacitated 529w
Mentally incapacitated, Medical treatments 411w
NHS, Negligence 529–30w
Prisoners, Advisory services 1469–70w
Public Guardianship Office, Annual reports 1081w
Public Guardianship Office, Complaints 412w
Public participation, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1291w
Public Record Office, Census 800–2w, 1080w
Publicity, Lord Chancellor's Dept 800w
Republic of Ireland, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1292w
Solicitors, Regulation 1279–80w
Telephone services, Lord Chancellor's Dept 82w
Transsexualism 1079–80w
Urban areas, Royal charters 799w
Visits abroad, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526w

Wirral
Postal services 774w

Wishart, Pete
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 473–4
Select committees (22.07.02) 732
Questions
Contracts, Scotland Office 499–500w
Plant power, Scotland 483–4w
Press releases, Scotland Office 981w
Public relations, Home Office 543w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1553w

Withholding tax
256w

Witnesses
93–4w

Wokingham
Local government finance 1204w

Women
see Females

Wood
248–9w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
EC action 710–1w
Health hazards 425w
Playgrounds 652–3w

Wood, Mr Mike
Questions
Malawi, Overseas aid 588w

Woodward, Mr Shaun
Questions
Crime 1441–3w
Incapacity benefit, North West region 1567w
Literacy, North West region 1346–7w
NHS, Manpower 1093w
Pupil referral units, North West region 1346w
Schools, North West region 1343–4w
Social workers, Vacancies 1094w
Teachers, Foreign workers 369w, 645w
Teachers, North West region 1345–6w
Teenage pregnancy 1196–7w
Young offender institutions, Human rights 1443w

Worcester
Drugs 202w

Worcestershire
Mental health services 127w

Work permits
96w, 107–8w, 395–6w
Information technology 107w, 831w

Working Age Agency
see Jobcentre Plus

Working families tax credit
251–2w, 1189w
Abuse 252w
Leeds 252–3w
Mitcham 462w
Regulatory impact assessments 253w

Working hours
EC law (17.07.02) 121–8wh, 710w
Junior doctors 1102w
Parents 171w

Working tax credit
1189–90w

Working Tax Credit (Entitlement and Maximum Rate) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

World Bank
1139w

World Cup
Football 554w

World Health Organisation
Taiwan 117w

World Summit on Sustainable Development
258w, 706w, 804w, 1123–4w, 1131w, 1149w

WorldCom
1327w

Wray, Mr James
Questions
Armed forces, Psychiatry 754w
Cancer 416w
Cannabis, Crime 669–70w
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 39w
Children, Day care 127–8w, 1083w
Defence equipment 907w, 1112–3w
Defence Medical Services 753w
Disabled, Young people 121–2w
Driving under influence, Cannabis 403–4w
Duchess of Kent Military Hospital 754w
East Timor 1313w
East Timor, Homicide 1319–20w
Exservicemen, Sleeping rough 753–4w
Health education, Disabled 423w
Inheritance tax 463w
National childcare strategy 128w
Passports 689–90w
Police, Greater London 830w
Renewable energy 169w, 358w
Sentencing 85w
Young people, Advisory services 204w

Wrecks
War graves 1115w

Wright, Mr Anthony D
Questions
Helicopters, Accidents 282
National Lottery 973w

Wright, David
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 87
Housing (18.07.02) 449
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 899, 908, 912, 918, 949
Questions
Credit unions 418–9
Crime prevention 826–7w

Wright, David—continued
Departmental responsibilities, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1081w
Museums and galleries, West Midlands 657
New towns 1218w
NHS trusts, Mergers 1087w

Wright, Tony
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 41–2
Questions
Standards, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1293–9w
Standards, Scotland Office 76w
Standards, Solicitor-General 613–4w

Written questions
Administrative delays 217w, 456w, 543w, 1263w, 1299w, 1431w, 1505w
Dept for International Development 292w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 456w
Dept for Work and Pensions 113–4w
Home Office 106w, 686w
Scotland Office 1228w

Wyatt, Derek
Questions
Children in care, Isle of Sheppey 123w
Copyright 169w
Outdoor education, Death 1269–70w
Pre-school education, Special educational needs 995–6w
Radio, Commercial broadcasting 655
Sports, Drugs 696w

Xenotransplantation
228–9w

Yarls Wood Detention Centre
89w, 392–3w, 684w, 1461w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1005–7
Questions
Crime, Alcoholic drinks 222–3w
Metropolitan Police, Disciplinary proceedings 856w, 1054w
Newspaper press, Dept for Work and Pensions 110w
Newspaper press, Scotland Office 1227w
Perjury 678–9w
Radio, Commercial broadcasting 655–6
Serials, Dept for Work and Pensions 605w
Serials, Scotland Office 1226–7w
Sports, Young people 659
Television, Ministry of Defence 283w

York
Housing 980–1

Yorkshire and Humberside
Employment 67–8w, 637w
Housing benefit 1014–5w
Taxpayers 256–8w

Young, Sir George
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 450

Young offender institutions
Drugs 1445–6w
Human rights 1443w

Young offenders
664–6w, 833w, 1462w
Children in care 1463–5w
Habitual offenders 1531w
Lancashire 558w
Wales 558w

Young people
Advisory services 204w

***Young people**—continued*
- Alcoholic drinks 284–5, 408w, 558–9w, 1455–8w
- Army 277w
- Crime prevention 401–2w, 694w
- Disabled 121–2w
- Driving instruction 307w
- Politics and government 188–9w, 1166w, 1363–4w
- Sports 658–9, 692w, 974–5w
- Tobacco 1456w
- Unemployment 522–3w
- Voting rights 700w

Younger-Ross, Richard
- *Debates etc.*
- Housing (18.07.02) 453
- *Questions*
- Child minding, Manpower 994w
- Children, Day care 60w, 183–4w
- Economic situation, South West region 467w

Zimbabwe
- 882w, 1307w
- Agriculture 586w
- Asylum 226w, 398–9w, 551w, 586w
- EC action 174w
- Elections 174w
- Entry clearances 4w
- Overseas aid 897w, 1124w
- Sanctions 821w, 829–33, 1307w

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 389 (Part 2)

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OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
15 July 2002—24 July 2002

£70

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15 July 2002

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 July 2002

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Post-war Expulsions

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library legal opinions on the *(a)* Beneš and *(b)* Polish expulsion decrees of 1945 that have been delivered to (i) his Department and (ii) Communities institutions. [68316]

Peter Hain: This question requires a detailed search of FCO records which may take some time. I shall write to the hon. Member when the appropriate research has been completed.

European Community Treaty

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he would list those occasions since 1 May 1997 where use has been made of Articles 308 and 95 TEC. [68338]

Peter Hain: Based on information from the European Commission's Eur-Lex database, since 1 May 1997 Article 308 of the Treaty on European Union has been used on 71 occasions and Article 95 on 82 occasions. I have placed copies of documents listing these occasions in the Library of the House.

Gibraltar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what element of the Gibraltar economy Spain asked to be modified during the talks on 26 June on the future status of Gibraltar. [R] [68457]

Peter Hain: None.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues will be discussed during the talks under the Brussels Process planned for 12 July in Madrid. [68310]

Peter Hain: No meeting took place on 12 July 2002.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the humanitarian impact of fighting between the RCD and dissident Banyamulenge forces on the Minembwe plateau in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo. [68446]

Mr. MacShane: The heavy fighting and resulting insecurity in the Haut Plateaux area has made it difficult to find reliable reports about the humanitarian situation there. However, the few reports we have received indicate that there has been some displacement of the local population, leading to fear of further humanitarian problems. We have raised our concerns about the situation with the Government of Rwanda, the United Nations Mission to the DRC and at the Security Council.

British Overseas Prisoners

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British prisoners have been incarcerated abroad for more than two years without trial, broken down by country. [68466]

Mr. Straw: We are aware of six British nationals who have been detained overseas for two or more years without trial. All six are held in Spain. Spanish law states that a detainee must come to trial within two years, but this period can be extended to four years 'under exceptional circumstances'. All six detainees have legal representation and have been offered full consular assistance throughout their detention.

UK Peacekeeping Missions

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for UK peacekeeping missions of a US withdrawal from peacekeeping forces. [68543]

Mr. MacShane: On 30 June the US vetoed the UNSC resolution renewing the UNMIBH/SFOR mandate for Bosnia. The Council has decided to extend the UNMIBH mandate until 15 July, to allow for further efforts to resolve the issue. We continue to work for a solution which meets the concerns of all Security Council members.

The US have reassured the Security Council and peacekeeping partners that it is not their intention to withdraw from peacekeeping operations in the Balkans.

Outside the Balkan region, the US contribute 153 personnel to United Nations peacekeeping missions. Were they to decide to withdraw from these peacekeeping missions, the impact on the UK would be negligible.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff have contributed to his Department's input to the Spending Review. [68691]

Mr. MacShane: The Spending Review involves a comprehensive assessment of the Department's performance priorities and resource requirements and a range of staff make a contribution.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and what proportion of the public service agreements of his Department set out in the document "Public Services for the Future, 1998" have been met; and if he will make a statement. [68710]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* Information relating to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Public Service Agreement targets can be found in the FCO's 2002 departmental report.

Rwanda

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Rwanda; and if he will make a statement. [69190]

Mr. MacShane: There are some signs that, at an institutional level, the Government of Rwanda is willing to put in place initiatives which if correctly implemented could have a positive impact on the human rights situation in the country e.g. grass roots consultations, decentralisation and reconciliation processes. But there are also some worrying signs of a treat to some political and civil rights, particularly freedom of expression and association. We are monitoring the situation closely and will continue to raise issues of concern about human rights with the Government of Rwanda at the highest level.

Turkey

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Turkish Government regarding the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [69189]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary periodically meets with senior members of the Turkish Government to review a range of issues. His last substantial discussion with the Turkish side about the EU was during a bilateral meeting with Foreign Minister Cem at the time of the EU/OIC forum held in Istanbul in February.

Future of Europe

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the report made to the convention on the future of Europe on the outcome of the UK national debate on the future of Europe. [68990]

Peter Hain: The report submitted to the future of Europe convention outlines the public consultation activities in the UK on the future of Europe so far, and the main issues that have emerged. A copy is available in the Library. It is also on the websites of the FCO and the European convention (www.fco.gov.uk and http://european-convention.eu.int/).

Indonesia

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to monitor the use of Hawk jets by the Indonesian air force. [68923]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The FCO pays close attention to the use of Hawk jets in Indonesia and, through the British embassy in Jakarta, follow up any allegations of improper use with the Indonesian Government. To date, there has been no evidence of Hawk jets being used in counter-insurgency operations in either Aceh or Papua.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if British-made Hawk jets have been deployed by the Indonesian air force in Aceh; and if he will make a statement. [68917]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our Ambassador in Jakarta recently discussed the use of Hawk aircraft with the Indonesian Co-ordinating Minister for Security, Bambang Yudhoyono and the commander of the Indonesian air force. They confirmed that no fixed wing aircraft were being used by the air force in operations against GAM in Aceh. Bambang Yudhoyono also reconfirmed Indonesian Government policy that no British military equipment would be used in counter-insurgency operations in Indonesia.

Zimbabwe

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visa applications to travel to the UK have been refused by the British High Commission in Zimbabwe in the last six months for which figures are available. [69082]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The statistical data on the number of applications refused each month in the last six months for which figures are available are as follows:

November 2001—44

December 2001—49

January 2002—58

February 2002—49

March 2002—37

April 2002—49.

Overseas Security Services

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what privileges and immunities are enjoyed by members of the security services of other countries operating in the UK. [69551]

Mr. Straw: No privileges and immunities are enjoyed by members of the security services of other countries operating in the UK unless they hold them by virtue of their status as diplomats.

Drug Enforcement Training (Iran)

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will review the type and level of hardware and training support given to Iranian law enforcers tackling drug smuggling on the Iran/Afghanistan border. [66986]

Mr. MacShane: Iran is very successful in disrupting the drugs trade: it accounted for 85 per cent. of the world's opium seizures and 47 per cent. of the world's heroin seizures in 1999. Iran is the largest recipient of UK anti-drugs assistance: around £3.5 million since 1998, including £650,000 announced by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary during his visit there last September. Much of it is spent on training and equipment for law enforcement which bears the brunt of the fight with the drugs trade; over 3,000 law enforcement officers have been killed in clashes with armed traffickers in the past 20 years.

We continually review the type of equipment and training we give to those engaged in tackling the drugs trade including Iranian law enforcers operating on the Afghan-Iranian border.

Departmental Statements

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidance his Department provides to its personnel regarding statements made in the public press. [70036]

Mr. Straw: FCO officials who deal with the press are governed by the Civil Service Code and are guided by Cabinet Office advice to Government information and communication officers (Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service), both of which can be found on the Cabinet Office website (www.cabinet-office.gov.uk). UK Heads of Mission abroad are encouraged to develop good relations with local media as part of the UK's public diplomacy strategy and to use their discretion as to media appearances.

Trinidad and Tobago

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the constitutional position within Trinidad and Tobago. [68857]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A general election was held in Trinidad and Tobago in December 2001. The result was an unprecedented tie of 18 seats each to the ruling United National Congress Party (UNC) and the People's National Movement (PNM). President Robinson appointed Patrick Manning, leader of the opposition PNM, as the new Prime Minister. We understand that this decision, once taken by the President, cannot be challenged.

Parliament has to be called within six months of a new Administration being sworn in to elect a speaker. PM Manning called Parliament on Friday, 5 April 2002. They failed to elect a speaker and Parliament was prorogued. Under the constitution, elections have to be called if Parliament has not reconvened within six months of its last sitting. This is an internal matter for the President and Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Public Consultations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 8 June 2001, indicating the *(a)* length and *(b)* number of responses received in each case. [68703]

Mr. Robin Cook: There have been no public consultations undertaken by my Department since 8 June 2001.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how many staff have contributed to his Department's input to the Spending Review. [68694]

Mr. Robin Cook: Three members of staff made a significant contribution to my Department's input to the Spending Review.

TRANSPORT

Public Transport (Safety)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people have been injured on *(a)* buses and *(b)* trains in each of the last five years through being unseated by (i) sudden braking and (ii) fast cornering. [65635]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* Information on the number of people injured through being unseated in buses and trains through (i) sudden braking and (ii) fast cornering is not available.

The numbers of bus and coach passengers who were injured while *(a)* seated and *(b)* standing when the vehicle was either stopping or turning left or right are given in the table.

Number of bus and coach passengers who were seated when injured in a road accident

	Bus/coach manoeuvre	
Accident year	Stopping	Turning left or right
1997	610	423
1998	674	441
1999	689	524
2000	670	493
2001[1]	663	415

[1] Figures for 2001 are provisional

Number of bus and coach passengers who were standing when injured in a road accident

	Bus/coach manoeuvre	
Accident year	Stopping	Turning left or right
1997	552	85
1998	523	82
1999	516	91
2000	518	122
2001[1]	499	89

[1] Figures for 2001 are provisional

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the projected costs are of upgrading the West Coast main line to allow trains to run at 140 mph. [67582]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA is carrying out a strategic review of the West Coast project. The precise costs of the project will not be known until the final outputs have been determined.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EU Restricted Committee of the Safety and Health Commission for the Mining and other Extractive Industries is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67747]

Mr. Jamieson: The restricted committee of the Safety and Health Commission for the Mining and other Extractive Industries is due to meet next on 11 December 2002.

Officials from the Health and Safety Executive, which is sponsored by my Department, represent the UK on the Committee as policy responsibility for health and safety is a reserved matter. However, officials consult the Scottish Executive on agenda items in which it might have an interest in accordance with our Concordat with the devolved Administrations.

Road and Bridge Maintenance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* guidelines and regulations and *(b)* statutory requirements issued and published within the last two years with regard to improving the co-ordination of road and bridge maintenance in urban areas. [68307]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Act 1980 places a duty on local authorities to maintain highways, but this does not extend to the co-ordination of road and bridge maintenance.

In DfT's guidance on the Local Transport Plan Annual Progress reports for 2002–03, local authorities are encouraged to adopt an integrated highway maintenance policy and to ensure that this policy contributes towards delivering the vision for towns and cities contained in the Urban White Paper.

The Code of Practice for Maintenance Management "Delivering Best Value in Highway Maintenance", published in July 2001, is an advisory code for local authorities and contains guidance on integrated highway network management.

Copies of these publications are being placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made as to the quality of road and bridge maintenance in urban areas over the last two years. [68308]

Mr. Jamieson: In July 2000 all local highway authorities in England produced local transport plans (LTPs), which set out the condition of their roads and bridges, as well as work planned over a five-year period (2001–6). These documents were examined by the then DETR, in order to calculate authorities' funding requirements for road and bridge maintenance, over the five-year period.

Last year, all highways authorities submitted annual progress reports (APRs), which included any supplementary road and bridge maintenance funding requirements, as well as progress made in this area since the previous year.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made as to the disruption to traffic caused by road and bridge maintenance in London in (i) 1998 and (ii) 1999. [69183]

Mr. Jamieson: During the period in question, my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions, through the Highways Agency, was highway authority for trunk roads in London. It was then—and still is—the Highways Agency's practice to assess the likely traffic impacts of maintenance projects before they start and plan them so as to minimise disruption. In 1998 and 1999, the planning of highway maintenance on other roads in London was the responsibility of the relevant authority.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff have contributed to his Department's input to the Spending Review. [68693]

Mr. Jamieson: A range of staff make a contribution to the Spending Review process.

Significant Accidents

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he defines a significant accident in the context of MAIB investigations. [68749]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State for Transport is guided by the criteria laid down in the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 1999. These define "accidents" but do not categorise them in degrees of severity. There is no definition of "significant" accident.

Urban Bus Challenge

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 104W, on the Urban Bus Challenge Fund, if he will list the wards served by the projects which were given awards as part of the Urban Bus Challenge. [69181]

Mr. Jamieson: Over 120 wards will benefit from projects to be supported following success in last year's Urban Bus Challenge competition. The information on wards served contained in the bids submitted is as shown in the table. In some cases, as indicated, the area to be served is not specified in terms of ward boundaries.

Authority	*Title of bid approved*	*Wards specified*
Blackpool	Lifestyle line	Park, Clifton.
Bristol	Lawrence Weston Transport Group	Kingsweston.
Essex	Harlow Community Transport dial a ride	n/a
Greater Manchester	Wythenshawe demand response service	Baguley, Benchill, Brooklands, Sharston, Woodhouse Park.
	Call centre	n/a
	Oldham bus service	Werneth, Hollinwood.
Halton	Daresbury Park bus service	n/a
	Accessible Transport	n/a

Authority	*Title of bid approved*	*Wards specified*
Hampshire	Leigh Park Links	Warren Park.
Hartlepool	Improved transport and infrastructure	St. Hilda, Brus, Hart, Dyke House, Stranton, Rosmere, Jackson Brinkburn, Rift House, Seaton.
Lancashire	Skelmersdale demand responsive transit	Tanhouse, Digmorr, Moorside.
Leicester	Community service for Braunstone	Braunstone North.
Merseyside	Atlantic Gateway demand response service; Huyton/Prescot demand response service; Kirby/Gillmoss demand response service	Cantril Farm, Cherryfield, Halewood East, Halewood South, Halewood West, Kirkby Central, Kirkby Park, Knowsley Park, Longview, Northwood, Prescot East, Prescot West, Princess, Roby, St. Gabriels, St. Michaels, Tower Hill, Whiston North, Whiston South, Allerton, Anfield, Arundel, Breckfield, Childwall, Church (Liverpool), Clubmoor, County, Croxteth, Dovecot, Everton, Gillmoss, Granby, Kensington, Melrose, Netherley, Picton, Pirrie, Smithdown, Speke, St. Mary's, Tuebrook, Valley, Vauxhall, Warbreck, Church (Sefton), Derby, Ford, Linacre, Litherland, Netherton, Orrell, St. Oswald, Rainhill.
Norfolk	(Joint proposal with Suffolk) Lowestoft corridor bus	n/a
Northumberland	Connecting Blyth	Cowpen, Plessey, Kitty Brewster, Croft.
Nottinghamshire	Mansfield access to employment	Forest Town, Lindhurst, Oak Tree, Ravenscroft.
Plymouth	East/West corridor link	City Centre, Cattedown, Hoe.
South Yorkshire	Parson Cross community bus service	Southey Green, Owlerton, Nethershire.
Stoke on Trent	Health demand response	Burslem Central, Burslem Grange, Turnstall North.
Telford and Wrekin	Integrated Taxi Network	n/a
Thurrock	Demand response service	Tilbury Riverside, Tilbury St. Chads, Grays Riverside, Grays Thurrock, Ockendon, Corringham West, Corringham and Fobbing, Belhus, West Thurrock, Chafford Hundred, Stanford-le-Hope East, Stanford-le-Hope West, Little Thurrock Blackshots, Little Thurrock Rectory.
Transport for London	Improved access for staff, patients and visitors to Hammersmith, Queens Charlotte and Charing Cross Hospitals	North Fulham, White City and Shepherds Bush.
Tyne and Wear	West Newcastle better access to employment opportunities	Elswick, Newburn, Blakelaw.
Warwickshire	Camp Hill provision to employment opportunities	Camp Hill.
West Midlands	Birchfield provision of community bus Community transport for prison visitors Dudley, provision of school mini bus service	Aston. n/a Castle and Priory, St. Thomas's, Netherton and Woodside.
West Yorkshire	East Leeds access to employment opportunities Leeds Buddying scheme	Richmond Hill, Hunslet, Seacroft, Whinmoor. n/a
Worcestershire	High frequency cross-city bus service and demand responsive orbital minibus	n/a

Bus Services, London

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average frequency of buses in London during *(a)* peak, *(b)* off-peak and *(c)* night bus services was in (i) 1998 and (ii) 1999. [69182]

Mr. Jamieson: Bus services in London are now the responsibility of the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL). I understand from TfL that the information regarding average service frequency is not available in the form requested.

Car Tax

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people whose cars were untaxed had enforcement action taken against them in each of the last five years. [69175]

Mr. Jamieson: The table details the number of vehicle excise duty evaders against whom enforcement has been taken in each of the last five years. The table breaks down the enforcement action into three categories—those who have settled out of court, those who have been prosecuted, and those who have been encouraged to relicense as a result of enforcement action.

Year	*Out of court settlements*	*Prosecutions*	*Voluntary relicensing*	*Totals*
1997–98	268,163	233,036	110,074	611,273
1998–99	218,786	256,332	125,952	601,070
1999–2000	209,678	239,291	163,822	612,791
2000–01	303,665	226,643	169,542	699,850
2001–02	392,416	249,545	157,844	799,805

Search and Rescue Helicopter, Portland

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what risk assessment has been made regarding the safety of sub-aqua divers from Portland and Weymouth should the search and rescue helicopter at Portland be moved to Lee-on-Solent. [69072]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard agency has carried out an operational risk assessment with regard to the possibility of moving the Coastguard helicopter based at Portland to Lee-on-Solent.

This analysis has demonstrated that the national criteria for response to all incidents, including sub-aqua divers, would still be met for the very high, high and medium risk areas within the Portland and Weymouth area. However, no decisions have been made about the future location of the helicopter.

Vehicle Registration (Data Access)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes have been recently made to restrictions on public access to the personal details of the registered owner of a vehicle; and if he will make a statement. [69428]

Mr. Jamieson: No recent changes have been introduced. The vehicle register remains a semi-open record.

The law allows keeper details to be made available to the police, to local authorities, for enforcement activities and to anyone who can demonstrate 'reasonable cause' for their request. All 'reasonable cause' applications must be in writing and be supported by witness details, police crime numbers, insurance claim details and repair bills.

Road Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which local authorities have carried out child road safety audits as part of their road safety plans; and what measures have been taken to implement them. [69384]

Mr. Jamieson: We do not have information from local authorities categorically stating that they conduct child safety audits. However, it is unlikely that many do not conduct the principles of audit. At its simplest, it means that local authorities should know where their child casualties are occurring, take measures to address the problem and monitor the results. Authorities are required to set local casualty reduction targets which should reflect the national targets. How they meet those targets are for local determination and the précise measures employed will depend upon local circumstances.

M11

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans exist for a relief road between the A1055 and the M11 extension near Leyton; and if he will make a statement. [69122]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* There is a proposal for such a scheme, the Lower Lea Valley Spine Road. This is the London borough of Newham's responsibility, not the Government's. Further information may be obtained from:

John Henman
Head of Environmental Engineering Services
The Environment Department
London Borough of Newham Council
25 Nelson Street
East Ham
London E6 6EH.

Strategic Rail Authority

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Strategic Rail Authority will announce the preferred bidder for the Trans-Pennine Express franchise. [69435]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has received Best and Final Offers from the three short-listed counterparties: Arriva, Connex, and the FirstGroup/Keolis consortium. The authority is evaluating those proposals and will make an announcement in due course.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the accounting subsidiaries of the SRA. [69945]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 214W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date the SRA first made a payment to Network Rail as a legal entity. [69943]

Mr. Jamieson: No payments have been made so far by the SRA to Network Rail.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Maritime and Coastguard Agency will offer a contract for a satellite tracking system to monitor oil spills; and if the contract will include night-time flying. [69687]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has concluded a trial on the potential for the use of satellite tracking systems to monitor oil spills and is currently evaluating the results. The MCA is also liaising with the Department for Trade and Industry on the best way forward for future satellite surveillance for the detection of marine oil spills in UK waters.

To improve detection of oil spills during hours of darkness, the MCA has recently ordered increased night-time flying of its contracted aerial surveillance aircraft.

Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people *(a)* were invited to respond and *(b)* responded to his consultation on (i) joint consultation with DTI and DEFRA, (ii) road traffic and (iii) electromagnetic compatibility. [69459]

Mr. Jamieson: As well as the individually directed invitations to comment that are counted in the table, full consultation papers were available on the Department's website and supplied to enquirers on request.

Consultation	*(a) Organisations and interested parties consulted*	*(b) Responses*
(i) Joint DTLR, DTI, DEFRA and Treasury consultation on the draft Powering Future Vehicles Strategy	157	77
(ii) Road traffic consultation concerning the draft Road Traffic (Authorisation of Special Types) (General) Order 2002	251	59
(iii) Electromagnetic compatibility consultation	274	107

Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69306]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport sets out the specific business requirements that software is required to meet. Suppliers are free to propose open source software to meet these requirements.

The Department's use of open source software will follow the Government's policy when published, currently planned for summer 2002. The draft policy may be viewed at http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/rfc/rfc_document.asp?docnum=429.

At present, less than 1 per cent. of departmental software is open source.

School Transport

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the allocation of funding and *(b)* the number of schemes under Safe Routes to Schools by LEA. [69486]

Mr. Jamieson: Aside from major local transport schemes (ie those with a gross cost exceeding £5 million) capital funding to local authorities for road maintenance and smaller scale integrated transport measures such as safe routes to school are provided in the form of a single block allocation. It is for the authorities to decide upon the use of such funds in line with the priorities and objectives established in their plans.

We therefore do not allocate funding for specific safe routes to school projects. However, the table shows the information provided within the local transport plan Annual Progress Reports submitted in August 2001 by those English authorities outside London who estimated the number of schools implementing their first safe route scheme, established wholly or partly using local transport plan capital funding.

Authority	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Bath and NE Somerset	4	6	6	6	6
Barnsley	4	3	2	3	3
Bedfordshire	3	4	5	5	5
Birmingham	31	15	16	15	15
Blackburn	4	2	2	2	2
Blackpool	2	2	2	2	2
Bolton	3	2	3	3	3
Bournemouth	2	2	2	2	2
Bracknell	7	7	6	5	2
Bradford	30	6	8	8	8
Brighton	1	2	3	3	2
Bristol	8	8	8	9	10
Buckinghamshire	9	11	10	10	10
Calderdale	6	6	6	6	6
Cambridgeshire	14	13	10	10	10
Cheshire	15	20	30	30	30
Cornwall	8	8	10	10	10
Coventry	11	11	11	11	11
Darlington	4	2	2	2	2
Derby	4	5	5	5	5
Derbyshire	0	4	3	2	2
Devon	5	9	9	8	8
Doncaster	2	2	2	2	2
Dorset	6	6	6	5	6
Dudley	3	3	3	3	3
Durham	15	15	20	20	20
East Sussex	2	2	2	2	2
East Riding	0	2	2	3	3
Essex	58	40	40	40	40
Gateshead	12	12	12	12	12
Gloucestershire	4	4	2	2	2
Halton	2	2	2	2	2
Hampshire	12	9	8	6	5
Hartlepool	5	5	5	6	6
Herefordshire	4	4	4	4	4
Isle of Wight	6	7	8	9	10
Kent	3	3	3	3	3
Kingston upon Hull	9	10	10	10	10
Kirklees	0	2	2	4	6
Knowsley	6	12	18	24	30
Lancashire	5	15	20	20	20
Leeds	1	0	0	0	0
Leicester	11	4	4	4	5
Leicestershire	29	28	27	27	30
Lincolnshire	2	2	2	3	2
Liverpool	3	3	3	3	3
Luton	7	6	6	6	6
Manchester	20	20	20	20	20
Medway	2	2	2	4	4
Middlesbrough	2	4	3	3	3
Milton Keynes	6	10	10	10	10
North East Lincolnshire	1	2	3	1	1
North Lincolnshire	2	2	2	2	5
North Somerset	3	6	6	6	6
North Tyneside	14	10	10	10	10
Newcastle	10	10	10	14	14
Norfolk	10	10	10	6	6
Northamptonshire	16	21	21	21	21
Northumberland	7	10	10	10	10
Nottingham	8	10	10	10	10
Nottinghamshire	6	19	20	21	21
Oldham	16	0	0	0	0

Authority	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Oxfordshire	19	29	0	0	0
Peterborough	4	3	3	3	3
Plymouth	4	4	4	4	4
Poole	4	4	4	0	0
Portsmouth	2	2	2	2	2
Reading	4	5	5	5	5
Redcar and Cleveland	2	4	4	4	4
Rochdale	4	2	2	1	1
Rutland	7	4	5	5	0
South Gloucestershire	4	5	7	10	15
South Tyneside	9	7	6	6	6
Salford	—	1	1	2	2
Sandwell	6	6	6	7	7
Sefton	7	4	4	4	4
Sheffield	6	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	12	14	14	17	12
Slough	2	4	5	5	6
Solihull	3	2	4	5	5
Somerset	8	0	0	0	0
Southampton	2	9	5	5	5
Southend	6	6	6	6	6
St. Helens	3	4	4	4	4
Staffordshire	4	4	4	4	4
Stockton on Tees	1	2	2	2	2
Stoke on Trent	12	8	8	8	8
Suffolk	13	13	13	13	13
Sunderland	9	5	5	5	5
Surrey	12	19	28	35	37
Swindon	12	5	5	5	5
Tameside	2	2	2	2	2
Telford and Wrekin	3	4	4	4	4
Thurrock	10	5	5	5	5
Torbay	4	4	4	4	4
Trafford	20	10	10	10	10
West Sussex	21	13	17	23	17
Wakefield	10	10	10	10	10
Warrington	3	4	4	5	5
Warwickshire	19	20	20	20	20
Wiltshire	19	20	12	12	12
Wirral	10	10	10	10	10
Wokingham	8	15	15	10	10
Wolverhampton	3	3	3	3	3
Worcestershire	30	60	60	60	60
York	10	10	10	10	10

Source:
LTP Annual Progress Reports 2001

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if she will make it a requirement that transport for schoolchildren and pre-school children should be fitted with seat belts. [69545]

Mr. Jamieson: All minibuses and coaches used specifically for school transport have since 1998 been required to be fitted with seat belts. This requirement would also apply to pre-school transport for children over three.

In addition, all new cars and buses (apart from buses designed for urban use and standing passengers) are now required to be fitted with seat belts.

Rural Bus Services

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 667W, how much has been *(a)* made available and *(b)* spent through the rural bus subsidy grant in each of the last five years, broken down by region; and if he will provide a regional breakdown of those services established through the rural bus subsidy grant scheme. [69351]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* The first table shows the annual amounts of rural bus subsidy grant allocated for local authorities in each region. It also shows by region the amount of grant paid to authorities in each year which was dependent on their estimates of annual expenditure taking account of any grant unspent from a previous year. In 1998–99, the first year of this scheme, grant not required was reallocated and added to the amount distributed to schemes successful in that year's Rural Bus Challenge competition.

£ million

Region	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
South East					
Allocation	6.18	6.18	6.18	7.89	9.03
Paid	4.55	6.14	6.04	7.77	NA
South West					
Allocation	6.36	6.36	6.36	8.12	9.29
Paid	6.19	6.35	6.46	7.83	NA
East					
Allocation	5.61	5.61	5.61	7.16	8.20
Paid	4.00	5.59	5.31	7.01	NA
West Midlands					
Allocation	3.40	3.40	3.40	4.34	4.97
Paid	2.16	3.33	3.32	4.12	NA
East Midlands					
Allocation	4.09	4.09	4.09	5.22	5.98
Paid	3.02	4.04	3.84	5.21	NA
North West					
Allocation	2.65	2.65	2.65	3.38	3.87
Paid	1.97	2.55	2.58	3.22	NA
Yorkshire and Humberside					
Allocation	2.88	2.88	2.88	3.68	4.21
Paid	1.17	2.88	2.86	3.59	NA
North East					
Allocation	1.33	1.33	1.33	1.70	1.94
Paid	1.07	1.12	1.29	1.65	NA

The second table shows the regional totals of new or improved services being supported by the grant in 2000–01, including those started in previous years. This has been compiled from local authority returns. Data are still being collected on 2001–02.

Regions	*Services*
South East	233
South West	389
East	147
West Midlands	259
East Midlands	242
North West	168
Yorkshire and Humberside	183
North East	111

Transport for London

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department's grant has been to Transport for London each year for the last four years. [69763]

Mr. Jamieson: Transport for London was created in July 2000.

In the nine months between July 2000 and March 2001, grant paid to the GLA for the purposes of Transport for London was £297,811,000. For the 2001–02 financial year, this grant was £720,053,000. For 2002–03, grant has been determined at £1,023,018,000.

Network Rail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 984W, on what basis the details of the notification to the European Commission are confidential. [70082]

Mr. Jamieson: Details of the notifications of potential state aid are confidential between the Commission and the member state. But once the Commission has reached a decision, it issues a letter and this is published on the Commission's web page, though the member state to whom the letter is addressed can request that any commercially sensitive information is removed from the letter before publication.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 984W, what is the total amount of public sector grant to Network Rail which will be securitised; and what funding guarantees will be required to secure such a securitisation. [70081]

Mr. Jamieson: This will be a matter for Network Rail to take a judgment upon based on future discussions with potential lenders.

US-UK Air Services

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to discuss the agreement of a liberalised US-UK air services agreement with the United States; and if he will make a statement. [70060]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are keen to liberalise the UK-US air services agreement to provide increased competition on fair terms and improved access by UK airlines to the world's largest market. All the options open to the Government are being reviewed before a decision on the best way forward is taken.

Singapore Airlines

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what decision he has made on an open skies agreement with Singapore to enable Singapore Airlines to commence services between London Heathrow and the US. [70061]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's overall objective in negotiating air service agreements is to negotiate fully liberal agreements where possible. Singapore is one of a number of countries with which the Government intend to discuss the possibility of full liberalisation. The aim of such discussions would not be restricted to enabling a particular airline to operate to a particular destination, but would be to provide benefits to the consumers, airlines and economies of both countries.

Light Dues

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received on the subject of light dues; what the nature of those representations were; and if he will make a statement. [70059]

Mr. Jamieson: We have received representations on light dues from the maritime industry in response to our Consultation Paper entitled 'Light Dues Review: Meeting the Costs of Marine Aids to Navigation' published on 10 May. The Independent Light Dues Forum and Maersk Sealand have, in addition to their formal response, written separately on the scope and format of the Consultation Document.

We will review the representations received following the end of the consultation period on 31 July.

Fire Service

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Chief Executive of the Fire College Moreton-in-Marsh was suspended; when he will tell him what specific allegations he faces; and what guidance has been given to the acting Chief Executive as to how long his services will be required. [58734]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Staffing and disciplinary matters are handled within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in accordance with the appropriate Staff Handbook. Within that framework personnel matters relating to individuals are a confidential matter between them and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

DEFENCE

Defence Estates

17. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the property disposal programme of Defence Estates. [66974]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence disposal programme is driven by the operational requirements of the armed forces. We keep the estate under regular review to ensure that it is no larger than is required for operational purposes. The principles under which we manage the estate are set out in our Estate Strategy published in 2000.

Land and property is regularly released for disposal, usually on the open market. At present, some 3,000 hectares of land, covering more than 70 sites across the United Kingdom are either in disposal or will come forward for disposal in the next 12 months. Further rationalisation and consolidation of the estate is likely to lead to additional sites and properties becoming surplus.

Infantry Manning Levels

19. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on manning levels in the infantry. [66978]

Mr. Ingram: The number of trained infantry in the Army has been increasing gradually and the current strength (as at 1 June 2002) of 25,526 is at the highest level for over five years.

British Commitments

20. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent to which British commitments are stretching Army capacity. [66979]

Mr. Ingram: We do not believe that the armed forces are overstretched, but they are very busy. The announcement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 20 June about the contribution of British forces in operations in Afghanistan demonstrates our commitment to withdraw service personnel from operations at the earliest possible opportunity, in order to ease the demands placed on them.

Currently around 25 per cent. of the Army is committed to operations compared to 44 per cent. at the height of the campaign in Kosovo. The latest assessment of the average unit tour interval is around 24 months, which is consistent with the Strategic Defence Review target.

Warship Building

21. **Mr. Pound:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on building Royal Navy warships in the United Kingdom. [66980]

Dr. Moonie: It remains our policy that all warships for the Royal Navy will continue to be built in the United Kingdom. The major programme of new naval procurement that is currently in progress will create or secure several thousand jobs in the United Kingdom shipyards and their ancillary industries throughout the country.

34. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on MOD orders for shipbuilding in the United Kingdom. [66994]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is undertaking the largest programme of warship building in this country for decades. In the last two years, 15 new warships have been ordered for service with the Royal Navy, comprising six type 45 destroyers, four Alternative Landing Ships Logistic, two survey vessels and three offshore patrol vessels.

In addition, our plans include the purchase of two new aircraft carriers, further ASTUTE class submarines and type 45 destroyers, the future surface combatant, and a number of support vessels.

It remains our policy that all warships for the Royal Navy will continue to be built in the United Kingdom. This major programme of shipbuilding will create or secure several thousand jobs in UK shipyards and their ancillary industries throughout the country.

Shoeburyness (New Ranges)

22. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future use of the new ranges in Shoeburyness. [66981]

Dr. Moonie: As I answered on 17 June, the Shoeburyness ranges are included in the arrangements being negotiated with QinetiQ for the delivery of a long-term test and evaluation capability to the Ministry of Defence.

Ordnance Production

23. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the future production of ordnance in the United Kingdom. [66982]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence considers achieving value for taxpayers' money, as well as security of supply, to be the key criteria in the procurement of safe and reliable munitions. In 1999, the MOD entered into a 10-year Framework Partnering Agreement with Royal Ordnance Defence, the United Kingdom's major producer of munitions. This agreement provides the company with a schedule of business and visibility of MOD's potential future requirements such that the company can provide the MOD with munitions at world benchmark prices.

Territorial Army

24. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future role of the Territorial Army in the war on terrorism. [66983]

Mr. Hoon: The Volunteer Reserves have important roles in both overseas operations and the defence of the United Kingdom. In overseas operations, they already have essential and well-defined duties, and the nature of their involvement is unlikely to change. The changed security threat could, however, involve the Volunteer Reserves in taking on additional roles. I announced on 12 June the publication of a discussion document, "The Role of the Reserves in Home Defence and Security", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. This contained specific proposals to enhance the support that the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces, including the Volunteer Reserves, could provide to the civil authorities. This included a proposal to create reaction forces formed from Volunteer Reservists that could be called upon to assist the police in dealing with the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack.

36. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Territorial Army. [66996]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards).

Personnel (Religions)

25. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements exist for armed forces personnel from non-Christian groups to practise their faith. [66984]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces are committed to giving all individuals the opportunity to practise their faith wherever possible. Where practical, areas for worship are made available in all service establishments, including ships and submarines at sea and, in most circumstances, arrangements can be made for daily prayer. Every effort is made to enable personnel to celebrate religious festivals and holidays, to comply with specific religious dress codes or dietary requirements, and to fast when required. However, there may be some circumstances when, in the interests of health and safety or operational effectiveness, some flexibility may be required on the part of the individual.

Eurofighter

26. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Eurofighter aircraft and the date of its entry into service. [66985]

Dr. Moonie: The first Eurofighter aircraft is now expected to enter into service by the end of this year.

Afghanistan

27. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress made in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. [66987]

Mr. Hoon: The coalition has destroyed the Taliban regime and inflicted serious damage on al-Qaeda. Although remnants of both groups continue to pose a threat, coalition forces—including strong contingents from the United Kingdom—have had considerable success during recent operations. They destroyed weapons caches and bunker positions, obtained valuable intelligence material and denied ground to the Taliban and al-Qaeda in advance of the Loya Jirga, whose outcome was very welcome. We have made clear that the tempo and location of the campaign will vary according to the situation on the ground.

35. **Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the security situation in Afghanistan. [66995]

Mr. Hoon: Overall the security situation in Kabul has greatly improved since the ISAF began its operations there last December. The security situation elsewhere in Afghanistan is more uncertain. But we were pleased with the outcome of the Loya Jirga, and are confident that President Karzai will strive to address these security concerns. The international community is also working to assist the Afghan Islamic Transitional Administration with security sector reform. This includes work on a national police force, border control force and judiciary as well as the Afghan Army.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the involvement of British personnel in southern Oruzgan in Afghanistan for the week of 26 June to 1 July; [68924]

(2) whether British *(a)* troops and *(b)* support services were involved in gun battles in southern Oruzgan in Afghanistan during the week of 26 June to 1 July. [68925]

Mr. Hoon: British personnel were not involved in southern Oruzgan at that time.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strength of the combined ISAF force will be after the planned summer withdrawal of troops. [64528]

Mr. Hoon: On 23 May 2002 the United Nations' Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1413 renewing the authorisation for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to operate only in Kabul and its immediate environs. The combined strength of the force is determined by that requirement. The reduction in the United Kingdom's contribution to the ISAF following Turkey's adoption of the Lead Nation role on 20 June 2002 is offset by the consequent increase in the size of the Turkish contingent. The overall strength of the ISAF will therefore remain at around 5,000 personnel.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on contact between the US gunship AC-130 and British personnel on 1 July; [68926]

(2) if he will make a statement on contact between US bomber planes and British personnel on 1 July in Afghanistan. [68922]

Mr. Hoon: I assume this question refers to the regrettable bombing of a wedding party on 1 July in Afghanistan. United Kingdom personnel had no contact with the US AC-130 or bomber planes at that time.

Service Personnel

28. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to improve support for service personnel on their return to civilian life. [66988]

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to improve support for service personnel on their return to civilian life. [66976]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) and for Ribble North (Mr. Borrow).

Fleet Air Arm

29. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Fleet Air Arm. [66989]

32. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Fleet Air Arm. [66992]

Mr. Ingram: The future of the Fleet Air Arm is assured as an integral part of the Royal Navy, under Flag Officer Maritime Aviation and CINCFLEET. Maritime aviation capabilities are provided on a tri-service basis, but led by seasoned Royal Navy and Royal Marines aviators in all three Service Commands. The three pillars of the Fleet Air Arm are the battlefield helicopters of the Commando Helicopter Force in Land Command, Harrier wing squadrons in Strike Command, and naval helicopters in the Fleet.

Plans to build two large aircraft carriers are well advanced, with selection of a prime contractor expected in early 2003. Two of the four planned Harrier GR9 squadrons in the Joint Force Harrier will be predominately manned by Fleet Air Arm personnel, the other two predominantly by RAF. The first Merlin Mark 1 helicopter squadron is already in HMS Ark Royal, and plans are in hand to replace Maritime Lynx helicopter beginning in 2007. The first upgraded AEW Sea King flight will go to sea later this year, and the Joint Strike Fighter will be introduced from 2012.

European Defence Capabilities

30. **Roger Casale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on improving defence capabilities among European partner countries in the last three years. [66990]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones).

18. **Mr. Kevan Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in improving defence capabilities among other allied European countries in the last three years. [66975]

Mr. Hoon: We are working within both NATO and EU structures to improve European defence capabilities. NATO's Defence Capabilities Initiative has made significant progress in a number of areas since its launch in 1999. The creation of new High Readiness Force headquarters shows that, with sufficient commitment, allies can make real improvements in capabilities. In parallel, contributions from EU member states have so far met 104 of the 144 capability requirements underpinning the Helsinki Headline Goal agreed in December 1999. The remaining targets are being addressed through the European Capabilities Action Plan.

We expect to launch a new capabilities initiative at the Prague summit in November. This will be designed to be more focused than DCI; to incorporate clear commitments from allies to making good key capability shortfalls, and to complement the EU's Headline Goal process.

Gurkha Regiments

31. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Gurkha regiments. [66991]

Mr. Ingram: We recognise that Gurkhas make a very important contribution to the Army and we intend to maintain the two existing Royal Gurkha Regiments and the current force level of trained Gurkhas in the British Army.

I am pleased to say that we plan to create two additional permanent Gurkha sub-units—a Queen's Own Gurkha Logistic Squadron, which will be part of 10 Transport Regiment RLC, and a Queen's Gurkha Signal Squadron, which will be part of 21 Signal Regiment. This move will ensure that the Army is able to deliver enhancements envisaged under the Strategic Defence Review.

RAF Engineers

33. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to improve retention of engineers in the Royal Air Force. [66993]

Mr. Ingram: Improving retention across all Branches and Trades is one of the Royal Air Force's highest priorities.

The common thread in areas experiencing retention difficulties is the employability of and the opportunities available to highly trained specialists in the civilian work place. A buoyant market place acts as a significant pull.

A number of measures have been introduced across the RAF to improve retention. These include monitoring and managing levels of separated service, enhanced and more personalised career management, improvements to welfare support services, such as child care facilities, and a re-engagement package for junior ground trade personnel.

A review of the RAF's Engineer Branch structure is currently taking place. Among other things, the Review will consider measures to address any recruiting and retention issues. It is due to be completed by the end the year.

Armed Services Housing

37. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the Deputy Prime Minister on the housing needs of former members of the armed services. [66997]

Dr. Moonie: There has been no direct discussion on this issue between my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Defence and the Deputy Prime Minister. However, under the auspices of the Veterans Task Force, the Ministry of Defence continues to work in partnership with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, other Government Departments, Veterans' organisations and other non-Governmental organisations on ways to tackle problems of homelessness among the veterans' community. Recent examples of partnership initiatives in this area include the establishment of the Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services (SPACES) at Catterick, which is managed by the English Churches Housing Group, and enhanced co-operation between the charity "Shelter" and the Military Corrective and Training Centre in Colchester through the appointment of a Shelter Project Officer at the Centre. These initiatives were originally funded as pilot schemes by the Homelessness Directorate of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. In the light of their success, the MOD has assumed continuing funding responsibility from April 2002. In addition, the Homelessness Act places a new duty on local authorities to conduct a homelessness audit and prepare a strategy to prevent future homelessness. A new Order under the Act will be issued shortly to extend the groups of homeless people considered to be in priority need of housing. This will cover those who are vulnerable to homelessness as a result of their institutionalised background, including those who have served in the armed forces. I believe that these and other initiatives will provide significant additional help to those veterans likely to be the most vulnerable to homelessness.

Imber

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many requests for access to the village of Imber his Department has received in each of the past five years. [69237]

Mr. Ingram: In recent years the roads that cross Salisbury Plain training area have been opened on about 25 days each year in order to give the general public access to Imber village. Once a year, two services are also held at St. Giles Church, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. These occasions are well publicised and certainly obviate many requests for access. In addition, however, we have received both written and telephone requests to provide access to Imber village on days other than those when the roads are already open. As far as possible, these requests are accommodated. Unfortunately, no records are kept of the telephone requests, but the number of written requests in each of the past five years are shown in the following table:

Year	*Number of written requests*
1998	1
1999	1
2000	5
2001	7
2002 to date	8
Total	22

Munitions

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the *(a)* estimated sale proceeds, *(b)* estimated redundancy lump-sum payments, *(c)* Ministry of Defence police transfer costs, *(d)* staff transfer costs, *(e)* costs of movement of stock, *(f)* cost of replacement facilities, *(g)* operating costs transferred to other locations and *(h)* T and H storage reprovision relating to the closure of Dean Hill Munitions Depot. [68907]

Mr. Ingram: Although the Ministry of Defence has assessed the disposal value of the West Dean site this is likely to be sold on the Open Market. To release our estimates of value could influence the eventual receipt. This information is therefore withheld under exception 7 of the Code of Practice to Government Information.

The other information requested is as follows:

	Number
Estimated redundancy lump-sum payments	2,097,465
Ministry of Defence police transfer costs	440,000
Staff transfer costs	160,000
Costs of movement of stock	50,000
Cost of replacement facilities	[1]570,000
Operating costs transferred to other locations	[2]86,000
T and H storage reprovision relating to the closure of Deal Hill munitions depot	450,000

[1] including 86,000 per annum

[2] per annum

All of these aspects plus others were taken into account in the Investment Appraisal supporting closure.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a timetable has been established for the completion of the WMD response initiatives suggested by the US on the 6 to 7 June meeting of the NATO Defence Ministers; what the estimated cost is of the initiatives; and if he will make a statement. [69071]

Mr. Hoon: Following the Defence Ministers' meeting, the NATO military authorities are conducting detailed work to develop and finalise the NBC Defence Initiatives for endorsement at NATO's forthcoming summit meeting in Prague in November. It is therefore too soon to estimate any costs. However, it is intended to implement all of the initiatives by 2004.

The United Kingdom strongly supports these initiatives, which will enhance Alliance capability in this important area. We shall be taking a full part in the detailed development work.

Missile Defence

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to meet the official US delegation that is visiting NATO capitals next month with the aim of launching a round of discussions on co-operation in the US Missile Defence Programme; [68669]

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he plans with the missile defence delegation from the US shortly to visit the UK. [68772]

Mr. Hoon: An inter-agency delegation of United States officials is visiting London later this month for discussions with British officials on missile defence. This is one leg of a tour of a number of NATO capitals as part of the United States' continuing dialogue with allies on ballistic missile defence. I have no plans to meet the delegation.

Joint Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the full capability of the Joint Rapid Reaction Force has been established; and if he will make a statement. [69095]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The full capability of the Joint Rapid Reaction Forces is due to be established by 2005. Initial capability was achieved, as planned, in 1999 and elements of the Joint Rapid Reaction Forces have already been successfully deployed on a number of operations and exercises.

HMS Bridport

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the operational status of HMS Bridport is; and when the vessel entered service. [69520]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Bridport is currently held at Extended Readiness at her base port, Faslane. She was first commissioned in 1993.

HMS Nottingham

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the repair of HMS Nottingham; and for how long he anticipates the ship will be out of service. [69519]

Mr. Ingram: Repair options for HMS Nottingham are being considered. It is too early to say how long she will remain out of service.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Communication Masts

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she will take in relation to the planned erection of masts in areas of outstanding natural beauty by each of the emergency services. [68120]

Alun Michael: The Airwave service which is currently being rolled out for the Police is being provided by the operator mmO2. Other emergency services are also being invited to join the network. The network has no special planning status and mm02 will need to seek planning permission for the base stations and associated masts in the normal way.

Although my Department does not have a role in the planning process for the masts, my officials have held a meeting with officials From the Home Office and the Department for Trade and Industry to discuss co-ordination of masts policy. They plan to hold a further meeting with officials from the Office of The Deputy Prime Minister to discuss the need for sensitive sighting of masts in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural beauty.

Energy Efficiency Programmes

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the advertising budget for her Department's energy efficiency programmes for each of the *(a)* past five years and *(b)* next two years. [64349]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA does not have a specific advertising budget for energy efficiency programmes. Instead we provide funding to a number of organisations to provide a range of energy efficiency activities/programmes. These organisations use funding in a number of ways to promote energy efficiency, including advertising schemes, events, marketing and awards. These activities and their funding tend to be very inter-related with other energy measures, rather than stand alone. The main organisations which manage programmes to promote energy efficiency are:

The Energy Saving Trust (DEFRA funding of about £22 million pa) encourages the sustainable use of energy in the domestic and small business sectors. Work includes an Energy Efficiency Campaign to encourage domestic consumers to take up energy efficiency measures.

The Carbon Trust (DEFRA funding of about £26 million pa) aims to enable UK business and public sectors to move towards a sustainable, low carbon economy whilst maintaining business competitiveness.

The Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme (DEFRA funding of about £17 million pa) provides energy efficiency information and advice to the public and business sectors. The programme has now been transferred to the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust.

The Government's main programme for tackling fuel poverty in England is the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, (DEFRA funding of over £600 million for the period 2000–2004) now marketed as the Warm Front Team. It is operated and marketed on the Department's behalf by scheme managers

In addition energy efficiency has formed an element of my Department's Are You Doing Your Bit programme.

Landfill

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the likely date for the introduction co-disposal practices under the landfill directive; what change to *(a)* guidance from her Department and *(b)* legislation (i) has taken place and (ii) is planned as a result; and if she will make a statement. [65627]

Mr. Meacher: The Landfill Directive bans the co-disposal of hazardous and non-hazardous waste at existing landfill sites from 16 July 2004. This requirement has been transposed into domestic legislation through the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002 which came into effect on 15 June.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the addresses of landfill sites that have successfully complied with Landfill Directive 99/31/EC in order to operate beyond 16 July; [65538]

(2) what proportion of existing landfills have demonstrated that they can comply with the Landfill Directive 99/31/EC in order to operate beyond 16 July. [65539]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* This information is not yet available. Operators of landfill sites who wish to continue to accept waste for disposal beyond 16 July 2002 must submit a site conditioning plan to the Environment agency by that date setting out how that site will meet the requirements of the Landfill Directive. On the basis of the information contained in the plans the Agency will make a decision on whether the site can or cannot meet those requirements. Sites which cannot meet the requirements will be closed. Sites which the Agency judge should be able to meet the requirements will be given a date by which they must submit an application for a Pollution Prevention and Control permit as part of the phased re-permitting of all landfill sites which will be complete by 2007.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what training programmes she has run for operators and staff at existing landfills to ensure that they are technically competent to manage the site and have the financial provisions to cover the maintenance and aftercare requirements of the site according to Landfill Directive 99/31/EC; how many staff have been made available; and if she will make a statement. [65540]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* The department does not run training courses for landfill operators and staff. Technical competence is assessed through the system of Certificates of Technical Competence awarded by the Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board. The Environment agency cannot issue a permit for a landfill unless they are satisfied that the management of the site is in the hands of a technically competent person and that final provision adequate to discharge the obligations arising from the permit has been made.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what change to *(a)* guidance from her Department and *(b)* legislation (i) has taken place and (ii) is planned as a result of changes required under the EU Landfill Directive; and if she will make a statement. [65628]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has issued an amended version of 'Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control—A Practical Guide' to reflect the requirements of the Landfill Directive and is currently preparing guidance to accompany the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002. In addition, the Environment agency has published a wide range of guidance on the regulatory and technical requirements of the Directive.

The regulatory and technical requirements of the Landfill Directive have been implemented through the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002 which came into effect on 15 June. We will bring forward primary legislation to introduce a Tradable Allowance scheme that will assist Local Authorities in meeting their targets for the diversion of biodegradable waste from landfill, as set out in the Directive, as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Sheepmeat

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what volume of sheep or lamb intestines were imported into *(a)* the EU and *(b)* the United Kingdom in each of the last three years for which figures are available from (i) China, (ii) Turkey, (iii) Iran, (iv) New Zealand, (v) Australia, (vi) USA, (vii) Syria, (viii) Pakistan, (ix) Lebanon, (x) Uruguay, (xi) Chile, (xii) Morocco, (xiii) India and (xiv) all other countries. [68497]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* Overseas trade statistics are not collected at a sufficient level of detail to separately identify sheep or lamb intestines, either on an EU or UK basis.

Animal Feed

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to ban the use of waste cooking oil as an additive in animal feed. [68487]

Margaret Beckett: The proposed Commission Regulation on health requirements for animal by-products includes a ban on the feeding of catering waste to livestock. The Commission interprets the definition of "catering waste" to include used cooking oils.

The Government opposed a total ban on cooking oils as a disproportionate method of removing the small risk of contamination, and following negotiation it is likely that we may be granted a transitional period to provide the industry with time (we have asked for a period of two years) to adjust.

Swill Feeding

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to ban the import of pig meat and other products from countries which have not banned swill feeding. [68490]

Margaret Beckett: Imports of pig meat and other products are governed by European Community rules. These do not prohibit swill feeding but do require that products imported from third countries are produced to standards at least equivalent to those applied to Community production. The products must come from approved establishments in approved countries and must be accompanied by agreed veterinary certification confirming that public and animal health requirements for import have been complied with. All imported consignments are subject to veterinary checks at an authorised Border Inspection Post to ensure that import requirements have been complied with. Consignments that do not comply are rejected and will be re-exported or destroyed.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects an EU-wide ban on swill-feeding to come into force. [68491]

Margaret Beckett: The proposed EU Regulation on health requirements for animal by-products includes a ban on the feeding of catering waste to livestock.

To secure adoption of the EU Regulation, expected this year, and to apply in member states six to seven months thereafter, it is likely that Germany and Austria, who opposed the ban, will be granted a transitional period in which to phase out swill feeding. The length of that period and the controls to apply during it will be proposed by the European Commission.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she plans to compensate swill feeders for the financial losses caused by the ban on swill-feeding. [68486]

Margaret Beckett: Farmers have not under previous Governments been compensated for changes in feed material available for their livestock, and the Government do not consider it should alter this position in the light of the ban on feeding swill.

BSE in Sheep

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she plans to implement the recommendations of the Food Standards Agency's report on BSE and Sheep, May 2002 relating to the *(a)* content and *(b)* timing of the National Scrapie Plan; and if she will make a statement. [64115]

Margaret Beckett: I assume the hon. Member refers to a report by the Food Standards Agency's Core Stakeholder Group on BSE and Sheep. The report does not recommend any changes to the content of the national scrapie plan. It recommends that the Food Standards Agency should support acceleration of the plan and should encourage sheep farmers to participate. The recommendations were directed at the Food Standards Agency itself, and I understand that the Agency's board adopted them at its meeting on 13 June. The recommendations are in line with existing Government policy.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will commission and publish an assessment of the impact on British industry of adding the intestines of all sheep to the list of specified risk material. [64114]

Margaret Beckett: We have no immediate plans to commission such an assessment. The proposal to add the intestines of all sheep to the current list of specified risk material arose in a recent report from a core stakeholder group commissioned by the Food Standards Agency. The group's recommendations have since been endorsed by the Board of the Agency. Before such a measure could apply in the UK, it would need to be agreed on a European Community-wide basis. To that end, the Agency has formally written to the Commission, to register the recommendation. We will keep the situation under review. If the European Commission make a proposal for regulation we would commission a regulatory impact assessment.

Greenhouse Gases

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate the Government have made of the contribution that the devolved Administrations in the United Kingdom will make to the reduction of greenhouse gases required for the United Kingdom to meet its *(a)* Kyoto targets and *(b)* domestic goal of a 20 per cent. cut in carbon dioxide emissions. [68322]

Mr. Meacher: Since the Kyoto target and domestic goal apply to the whole of the UK it was agreed between the devolved Administrations and the Government that no specific targets would be allocated. The devolved Administrations have agreed to make an equitable contribution towards achieving both our Kyoto target and domestic goal and are implementing broadly the same policies as in England to achieve this end. These policies are outlined in the UK climate change programme, a copy of which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

Between 1990 and 1999 (the latest year for which figures at devolved Administration level are available), carbon dioxide emissions fell in all countries except Wales, where emissions increased by 1 per cent. The increase in Wales largely reflects the growth in the production of iron and steel. This off-sets significant reductions in other manufacturing areas. Over the same period, emissions of the basket of six greenhouse gases covered by the Kyoto target fell in all countries. The table gives a full breakdown of how emissions of carbon dioxide and the basket of six greenhouse gases collectively have changed for each of the devolved Administrations between 1990 and 1999.

Table 1

	Percentage change between 1990 and 1999	
Country	*CO_2*	*Greenhouse gases*
England	−11.5	−17.5
Northern Ireland	−7.3	−3.3
Scotland	−3.3	−4.8
Wales	1.3	−1

Secondments

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 251W, on secondments, if she will list the dates of those secondments and the Government offices, European Commission Directorates and organisations in which they took place. [68775]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Details of the secondments referred to in the answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 251W, are set out in the following tables.

To Government offices

Date	*Government office*
1 April 2001[1]	East
1 April 2001[1]	East Midlands
1 April 2001[1]	London
1 April 2001[1]	North East
1 April 2001[1]	North West
1 April 2001[1]	South East
1 April 2001[1]	South West
1 April 2001[1]	West Midlands
1 April 2001[1]	Yorkshire and Humberside

[1] On-going

Date	*Organisation*
To EC Directorates	
15 September 2000[1]	Enlargement
15 September 2000[1]	Health and Consumer Protection
24 September 2001 to 28 February 2002	Health and Consumer Protection
1 March 2002[1]	Health and Consumer Protection
6 May 2002[1]	Health and Consumer Protection
16 September 2001 to 30 April 2002	Health and Consumer Protection
1 September 2001[1]	Agriculture
1 October 2001[1]	Research
18 February 2002 to 5 July 2002	Research
19 February 2001 to 1 August 2001 (2)	Environment
17 September 2001 to 18 February 2002	Environment
16 May 2001[1]	Environment
1 January 2000[1]	Environment
16 October 2000[1]	Environment
16 February 2002[1] (2)	Environment
1 January 2002[1]	Competition
18 February 2002[1]	Fisheries
1 September 2000[1]	Fisheries
17 January 2000[1]	Fisheries
1 October 1999[1]	Legal
1 July 1993[1]	Technical Assistance Information Exchange Office

Date	*Organisation*
To organisations abroad	
September 2001[1]	Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) Prague
19 November 2000[1]	UN Nairobi
26 March 2001 to 27 March 2002	MoA France
10 September 2001 to 9 January 2002	MoA Lisbon
16 July 2001[1]	Government of Gibraltar
5 February 2001[1]	UN USA
8 January 2001[1]	National Audit Office Budapest
1 October 2001[1]	MoA Latvia
To other organisations	
1 May 1998[1]	Oslo and Paris Commissions
28 February 2001[1]	Oslo and Paris Commissions
20 November 2000[1]	English Partnerships
25 May 2000 to 24 April 2002	South East Environment Development Agency
1 August 2000 to 10 June 2002	Shell
4 December 2000[1]	Rural Stress Information Network
1 November 2001[1]	National Farmers Union
1 November 2001 to 1 February 2002	National Farmers Union
2 April 2001[1]	Carbon Trust
24 April 2001 to 17 December 2001	Carbon Trust
2 April 2001 to 9 July 2001	Carbon Trust
May 2001 to January 2002	Carbon Trust
1 May 2001 to 13 October 2001	Carbon Trust
8 October 2001 to 11 January 2002	English Heritage
1 October 2001[1]	Green Alliance
6 April 1998[1]	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
12 March 2001 to 11 June 2001	Carillion Ltd.
26 July 2001[1]	South West Regional Assembly
12 June 2000 to 12 December 2001	Institute of Grocery Distribution
26 June 2000[1]	Institute of Grocery Distribution
27 May 2002[1]	Institute of Grocery Distribution
From other organisations	
16 October 2000[1]	Halcrow Ltd.
9 July 2001[1]	Glaxco Smith Kline
14 March 2001[1]	Environmental Resource Management
15 September 2000[1]	English Nature
16 January 2001[1]	English Nature
1 January 2002[1]	English Nature
15 January 2001[1]	English Nature
1 February 2002 to 31 March 2002	Environmental Campaigns
5 February 2001 to 4 February 2002	Environment Agency
2 July 2001 to 1 July 2002	Environment Agency
5 October 2000[1]	Environment Agency
30 May 2001 to 29 May 2002	Environment Agency
10 October 2001 to 10 April 2002	Environment Agency
7 January 2002[1]	Countryside Agency
15 January 2002[1]	Countryside Agency
1 March 2002[1]	World Wildlife Fund
1 October 2001 to 1 April 2002	Natural Environment Research Council
5 November 2001[1]	Forestry Commission

[1] On-going

GMOs

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the scientific assessment of GM issues announced on 31 May relates to existing regulatory processes for GM crops; and whether the findings will be submitted to *(a)* Action with Communities in Rural England and *(b)* the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes. [65516]

Mr. Meacher: The Government announced on 31 May that they will encourage a full and open debate on GM issues, including GM crops. We are promoting a genuine debate and dialogue, to identify the questions which the public has and provide information in response.

GM crops have to go through a detailed safety evaluation before they can be approved for release. As one element of the debate there will be an assessment reviewing the current state of scientific knowledge in this area. This will contribute to the wider discussion and will be made freely available. If significant new evidence comes forward during the debate which is pertinent to the regulatory status of a particular GM crop or food it will be considered by the relevant Government advisory committee. The safety of GM crops is considered by the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment and the safety of GM foods by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes.

Diseases and Pests

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what outbreaks of serious *(a)* animal, *(b)* fish and *(c)* plant diseases and pests there have been in the UK since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [69094]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The information is as follows:

(a) animal diseases

There were outbreaks of classical swine fever in 2000 and foot and mouth disease in 2001.

(b) fish diseases

There was an outbreak of infectious salmon anaemia (ISA) in Scotland between May 1998 and May 1999. ISA is a serious fish disease which, in the event of an outbreak, is required to be controlled in accordance with measures specified in the Diseases of Fish (Control) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994 No. 1447) as amended.

(c) *plant diseases and pests*

Statutory action has been taken is shown in the following table. This includes figures for Northern Ireland and Scotland provided by the devolved Administrations.

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Rhizomania (disease of sugar beet)	10	33	13	68	[1]1
Ralstonia solanacearum (potato brown rot)	0	2	1	0	0
Bemisia tabaci (tobacco whitefly)	26	20	32	19	3
Liriomyza huidebrensis (South American leaf miner)	53	42	36	13	2
Thrips palmi	0	0	1	0	0
Viteus vitifoliae (Grape phylloxera)	0	0	0	1	1
Pepino mosaic virus (on tomatoes)	0	3	6	6	0
Soil borne wheat mosaic virus	0	1	2	0	2
Phytophthora ramorum (cause of sudden oak death)	0	0	0	0	73

[1] No longer subject to statutory control after 1 April 2002.

Further information is available on the plant health pages of the DEFRA website: http://www.defra.gov.uk/planth/ph.htm.

Committee Mandates

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Committee on the Monitoring Mechanisms of Emissions of CO_2 and other greenhouse gases in the Community is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68557]

Mr. Meacher: The next meeting of the EU Monitoring Mechanism Committee is scheduled for 17 September 2002. Places per member state at this committee are limited, so officials from the Department usually represent the UK having consulted the Scottish Executive and the other devolved Administrations on the UK line.

Recycling

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what definition of recycling her Department uses to measure the statutory recycling rate for local authorities. [69113]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The definition of recycling used by the Department for measuring local authority recycling rates is that contained in the Best Value Performance Indicator 82a, under which local authorities are requested to report the percentage of household waste which has been 'sent for recycling'. 'Recycled' is defined as "reprocessed in a production process for the original purpose, or for other purposes, but excluding energy recovery".

In this context, household waste includes:

waste collection rounds (including separate rounds for collection for recyclables);

street cleansing and litter collection;

bulky waste collections;

hazardous household waste collections;

household clinical waste collections;

garden waste collections;

drop-off/bring systems;

any other household waste collected by the authority.

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what advice her Department provides to assist local authorities to calculate their level of recycling; [69114]

(2) how her Department defines community recycled programmes of household waste, as set out in Best Value Performance Indicator 82a. [69115]

Mr. Meacher *[holding reply 11 July 2002]:* Guidance on the calculation of household waste, including items that should be excluded from the calculation, is set out in the guidance on "Best Value Performance Indicators", first published in December 2000. This guidance underpins the DETR's "Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies", which was published in March 2001.

The Department has not defined the 'community recycling programmes' that may be included in this calculation. If there is any uncertainty about whether a particular approach should score in an authority's calculation, we would expect the relevant authority to raise this with their external auditor in the first instance.

GM Foods

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received regarding GM foods; and if she will make a statement. [69213]

Mr. Meacher: This year the Department has received over 40 representations on the subject of GM foods, from various organisations and individuals, including consumer groups, environmental groups, industry and members of the public.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent talks she has had regarding GM foods with members of the European Parliament; and what the conclusions from those talks were. [69015]

Mr. Meacher: In line with normal practice for reports passing through the European Parliament, written briefing setting out the UK Government's views on the Commission's proposals on the traceability and labelling of GMOs and on GM food and feed was sent to all UK Members of the Parliament in advance of the Parliament's discussions on these proposals. Officials from DEFRA and the Food Standards Agency spoke with and visited Members of the European Parliament interested in obtaining further information about the Government's view.

Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in her Department. [69303]

Alun Michael: DEFRA's IT technical policies do not indicate the use of open source software. The vast majority of DEFRA software requirements are currently met by commercial off-the-shelf software; open source software usage is insignificant in overall percentage terms. DEFRA's use of open source software will follow the Government policy when published. The draft policy can be viewed on http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/default.asp. It is understood that there are plans to publish the policy in summer 2002.

Extraction

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many licences have been issued for sand extraction in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Ceredigion in each of the last 10 years; [67030]

(2) what volume of sand was extracted through licences issued by her Department in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Ceredigion in each of the last 10 years. [67029]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

Sand extraction above mean low water comes within the planning powers of Local Minerals Planning Authorities. There are no central UK-wide, English or Welsh records of numbers of planning permissions issued for such extraction. Over the past 10 years, successive Secretaries of State with responsibility for planning have granted planning permission on appeal and in respect of called-in planning applications in England and Wales for a number of sand extraction proposals but there are no central UK-wide, English or Welsh records of the total tonnage of sand only permitted on a year-by-year basis.

Nearly all sand extraction below mean low water is licensed by the Crown Estate, which owns most of the seabed around the UK coast. The Crown Estate advise me that:

(a) it has granted the following numbers of aggregate (including sand) dredging licences in the UK and Wales over the past 10 years:

	UK	*Wales*
1991	0	0
1992	1	0
1993	1	0
1994	0	0
1995	3	0
1996	0	0
1997	2	1
1998	1	1
1999	1	0
2000	2	0
2001	1	0
Total	12	2

(b) the following tonnages of aggregates (including sand) were extracted from UK and Welsh waters through licences that it has issued in each of the last 10 years:

	Total extraction UK (tonnes)	*Total Extraction Wales (tonnes)*
1991	18,418,044	2,015,721
1992	19,271,492	2,354,782
1993	17,962,785	2,133,668
1994	20,792,887	2,211,015
1995	20,953,624	2,235,543
1996	19,392,937	1,948,028
1997	19,959,782	2,030,693
1998	20,471,191	1,878,373
1999	20,910,185	1,717,428
2000	23,056,885	1,602,394
2001	21,151,015	1,549,431
Total	222,340,827	21,677,076

and that

(c) it has granted no licences in waters off Ceredigion.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she plans to *(a)* increase and *(b)* reform sand extraction in (i) the UK, (ii) Wales and (iii) Ceredigion; and if she will make a statement. [67028]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The rates of production from areas with the benefit of planning permission for extraction of sand from the land and areas subject to marine minerals dredging licences at sea depend on demand from the market, although marine consents and some planning permissions for extraction from land specify maximum annual tonnage that can be removed. Policies for the supply of sand, administration of the development control system, and determination of applications for marine minerals dredging licences are devolved matters which are, in Wales, for the Welsh Assembly Government.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made with reducing the UK's carbon dioxide emissions in the last five years. [68187]

Mr. Meacher: The table shows the UK's carbon dioxide emissions over the five year period of 1996–2000 (2000 being the last year for which confirmed figures are available). During this period the UK's carbon dioxide emissions fell from 159.1 million tonnes of carbon to 152.1 million tonnes of carbon, a reduction of 4.4 per cent. The rise in emissions between 1999 and 2000 were mainly due to an increased use of coal in the energy mix, because of maintenance and repair at nuclear and combined cycle gas turbine stations and higher gas prices at the end of the year.

	Emissions of carbon dioxide (as million tonnes of carbon)	*Percentage change from previous year*
1996	159.1	—
1997	152.5	–4.1
1998	153.2	+0.5
1999	150.8	–1.6
2000	152.1	+0.9

Rural Development Plan

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much modulated match funds have been allocated to each devolved Administration within the UK to fund the Rural Development Plan each year since the programme commenced. [69571]

Alun Michael: Budgets have been provided to the devolved Administrations to allow for the spending of modulation receipts to be match funded, with the match funding occurring at the point that the modulated funds are spent. In 2001, the first year of modulation, the level of match funding was £3.3 million in England, £323,000 in Scotland and £53,000 in Northern Ireland. There were no modulation funded payments in Wales in 2001 and hence no match funding.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Global Environment Fund

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the replenishment of the global environment fund; and what criteria have been adopted for allocations of finances from this fund. [70000]

Clare Short: The UK has taken the lead in arguing for a substantial replenishment of the Global Environment Facility. Along with the vast majority of other contributors to the Facility, we believe new money of between $2.5 to $2.7 billion over the next four years would be a satisfactory outcome. The final meeting of the replenishment process is scheduled for 6 August and 7 August in Washington.

Criteria for funding, and funding proposals themselves, are approved by the GEF Council, which meets twice-yearly, and has representatives of all GEF participants. These criteria change in the light of experience, but include how incremental environmental costs and benefits should be defined; and how funds should be most effectively deployed in the GEF's operational areas, such as climate change, biodiversity, desertification and eliminating persistent organic pollutants.

Public Consultations

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69803]

Clare Short: We do not keep a record of all consultations held since 1997, and it would involve disproportionate cost to compile such a list. However, all current consultations are now featured on DFID's website as well as being available in printed format.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the length was of each public consultation undertaken by her Department since 8 June 2001. [68741]

Clare Short: Since June 2001 the Department for International Development has completed one public consultation process on a strategy paper for achieving the Millennium Development Goal on hunger. More than 1,000 people outside Government, in the United Kingdom and internationally, were sent copies of the consultation paper, which was also placed on the DFID website, between February 2002 and 31 March 2002.

The consultation for a DFID-wide research policy study, "Research For Poverty Reduction", commenced April 2002 and ended 10 May 2002. The consultation for "Better Livelihoods for Poor People: The Role of Agriculture" commenced November 2001 and ended 24 June 2002.

The following consultations are currently under way, with information available in print form and electronically:

"Energy for the Poor" (commenced May 2002, ends 31 July 2002)

"Making connections: Infrastructure for poverty reduction" (commenced May 2002, ends 31 July 2002).

The Department pursues more focused consultation exercises with outside bodies and experts on particular issues. The Department also regularly makes available, via its website and through civil society networks, briefing notes on major international meetings in which it is involved, such as the United Nations Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey in March, the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children in May, International Monetary Fund and World bank meetings, and European Union Development Council meetings.

The Department has just finished its third round of Development Policy Forums across the UK, to share thinking and ideas on key development issues. Over 2000 representatives from across society—including from NGOs, trade unions, private sector, faith organisations and universities—participated in the 11 one-day forums, between 6 February and 8 July 2002. The forums focused on globalisation and its potential to reduce world poverty, with participants invited to debate the specific themes of trade, environment and the private sector.

Overseas Aid

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of the Government's overseas aid budget was spent on low income countries in each year since 1995. [68817]

Clare Short: The percentage of my Department's bilateral assistance programme spent on low income countries since 1995 is set out in the table. However, the more commonly used indicator is the proportion of country specific DFID programme going to low income countries in each year so these figures have also been included.

Bilateral aid to low income countries 1995–96 to 2000–01

	Total bilateral programme (£ million)	*of which, country specific (£ million)*	*of which, to low income countries (£ million)*	*Percentage of total bilateral programme*	*Percentage of country specific aid*
1995–96	1,123	869	602	54	69
1996–97	1,075	855	575	53	67
1997–98	1,043	824	536	51	65
1998–99	1,164	920	666	57	72
1999–2000	1,323	1,056	710	54	67
2000–01	1,414	1,167	886	63	76

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what priority is given to the quality of governance in determining the allocation of financial assistance to overseas countries. [68812]

Clare Short: The primary determinants of our allocations between countries are the extent of poverty and our judgments about where we can be most effective. The quality of governance is an important factor in assessment of our potential effectiveness, alongside such issues as the policies, commitment and capacity of Government and other institutions and the adequacy of alternative sources of finance.

Somalia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what impact the ban on livestock exports is having on the humanitarian situation in Somalia. [68819]

Clare Short: The livestock trade is a very important sector for the Somali economy. The current trade restrictions are having a negative impact on people's livelihoods and on the revenue of regional administrations. We continue to lobby for the lifting of restrictions.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what difficulties have arisen in the provision of humanitarian assistance in Somalia as a result of the recent violence in the country. [68814]

Clare Short: Insecurity in Somalia has hampered the provision of humanitarian assistance over the past decade, particularly in the south. United Nations agencies and international non-government organisations (through whom the UK and EU make their contribution) provide support through cross-border operations. Violence in the regions of Bay, Puntland and Gedo continues to make humanitarian access difficult.

Mozambique

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what impact the recent dry weather has had on the production of food in Mozambique; and if she will make a statement; [68815]

(2) what steps her Department is taking to ensure the adequate provision of food supplies to people living in the northern and central provinces of Mozambique; and if she will make a statement. [68816]

Clare Short: The Crop and Food Supply Assessment undertaken jointly by the Government of Mozambique, WFP and FAO (available on www.fao.org) concluded in June and severe dry weather during the 2001–02 cropping season had sharply reduced crop yields in southern and parts of central Mozambique. In the main cereal growing areas of the northern region and remaining parts of the central region, abundant and well distributed rains led to increased production of cereals. Overall, 2002 cereal output is estimated at 1.77 million tonnes, 5 per cent. above last year, and maize output at 1.24 million tonnes, an increase of 8 per cent. The exportable maize surplus in northern and central areas is projected at 100,000 tonnes, but this cannot be transported economically to the South due to long distances, poor infrastructure, and the proximity of markets in Malawi.

Approximately 515,000 people in poor households in 43 districts of the Southern and Central regions are affected by the drought. This is about 15 per cent. of the total population of the two regions but less than 3 per cent. of the country's total population. Immediate food aid needs for these areas have been estimated at 50,000 tonnes.

Food aid is important, but measures are also needed to ensure that seeds and other agricultural inputs are available to enable drought-affected farming families to restart agricultural production during the main planting season 2002–03. Working through the Ministry of Agriculture, DFID and other donors have already supported the provision of inputs to affected households. Our latest information is that immediate food aid needs are covered by other donor countries, but we are monitoring the situation closely. We are discussing with Government and other donors how the additional £1 million allocated for Mozambique as part of DFID's regional response to the drought during the period to March 2003 can be used to best effect, particularly to facilitate access to inputs and to improve food security over the next harvest.

Syria

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department has given to the Government of Syria for the rehabilitation of the country's irrigation system since the collapse of the Zeyzoun dam. [68813]

Clare Short: My Department has not provided any direct assistance to the Government of Syria for the rehabilitation of the country's irrigation system following the collapse of the Zeyzoun dam. Information from agencies on the ground, including the Red Cross and the EC, indicate that the immediate needs of the affected population have been well attended to.

Tanzania

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to resume giving aid to Tanzania. [69241]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on Monday 8 July, *Official Report,* column 616W.

International Development Targets

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress towards international development targets. [68762]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) on 7 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 15W.

Knowledge for Development Challenge Fund

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will provide a breakdown of her Department's expenditure since 2000–01 on the Knowledge for Development Challenge Fund. [67525]

Clare Short: Our latest estimate of DFID expenditure in 2001–02 on the Knowledge for Development Challenge Fund was £671,130. The breakdown was:

Programme/project	£ *Expenditure*
Commonwealth Science Council	258,425
SciDevNet Pilot: Pilot to increase access to scientific news and information and more informed debate by scientists, policy makers and users of science and technology.	77,017
GDNet Pilot: Pilot for internet project to strengthen the capacity of research institutes	72,254
Other knowledge activities:	
1. Research report	1,200
2. Research guide	5,373
3. Knowledge management and international development workshop	35,471
4. Workshop on China and Clean Development Mechanism	26,777
Other activities:	
2. Wilton Park Conference WP644	45,000
3. LDC3 meeting	25,073
4. White Paper team	43,984
5. Information and Communication Technologies Study	11,209
6. Greater Donor Harmonisation	44,144
7. Utstein Meeting	5,203
8. Sector-wide Approaches training consultancy	20,000
Total	671,130

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in her Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68734]

Clare Short: The detailed information requested is not readily available and to compile it would involve a disproportionate cost. DFID has some 25 country and regional offices located overseas, and this, as well as the international nature of our activities, makes overseas travel a normal part of our business.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Government Finance

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will announce the details of the new system of local government finance due to be introduced in the next financial year; and if he will make a statement. [66162]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Paul Clark) on 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 680–81W.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent representations he has received from unitary authorities in respect of changes to the standard spending assessment formula. [68888]

Mr. Leslie: We have received written representations from a number of unitary authorities recently, as well as discussing SSA-related issues with councils face-to-face on occasion. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions announced to Parliament on 8 July, we are now in a period of formal consultation on options for the new grant distribution system. We will carefully consider all of the responses to the consultation before taking decisions.

Infrastructure Projects Green Paper

John McDonnell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what communications took place between his Department and Mr. Richard Everitt with regard to the preparation of and drafting of the Government's recent planning Green Paper on major infrastructure projects. [68247]

Mr. McNulty: None.

Council Tax

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the average amount of Council Tax charged per household is in each *(a)* metropolitan area, *(b)* Government office region and *(c)* local authority; [68895]

(2) what the average amount of Council Tax paid per household at Band D is in each *(a)* metropolitan area, *(b)* Government office region and *(c)* local authority. [68896]

Mr. Leslie: Figures for the average council tax payable per dwelling and the average council tax payable per Band D property in 2002–03 are given in the DTLR News Release on "Council Taxes in England—2002/03" (2002–0124, 21 March 2002).

Figures for each government office region are given in Table 1, and those for each local authority area—including each metropolitan district area—are given in Table 2.

Copies are available in the Libraries of the House and from the website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister at http://www.local.dtlr.gov.uk/finance/ctax/ctax023.htm.

Urban Allotments

Ian Lucas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the total acreage of urban allotments in *(a)* 1972, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* the latest year for which figures are available. [68882]

Mr. McNulty: Based on the "English Allotments Survey—1997", commissioned by the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, estimates are that the area of allotments in England in 1970 was 54,000 acres and in 1996 was 25,393 acres. The figures for 1972 and 1990 are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Rural Housing

Mr. Breed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 902W, on rural housing, how many households were identified as being in priority need for housing in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000, *(f)* 2001 and *(g)* 2002 in English local authorities by region. [68757]

Mr. McNulty: National and regional information on the number of households accepted by local authorities under the homelessness provisions of Housing Acts, as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need, is published in a quarterly Statistical Release. Latest figures, issued on 17 June 2002, are as follows:

Households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need: Local authorities in England

Financial year totals

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
North East	5,430	4,380	4,460	4,850	5,220	5,580
Yorkshire and The Humber	8,940	9,130	8,260	8,370	9,150	10,820
East Midlands	8,940	7,550	7,770	7,120	7,370	7,230
Eastern	8,380	8,120	8,680	8,720	9,800	10,120
London	25,930	24,570	26,470	28,440	29,630	31,130
South East	13,540	12,170	12,690	12,810	14,760	14,430
South West	9,450	9,000	8,920	9,790	11,210	11,200
West Midlands	15,510	14,670	13,970	13,210	13,860	14,600
North West	14,690	13,060	12,930	12,820	13,350	13,260
England total	110,810	102,650	104,150	106,130	114,350	118,360

Notes:

1. Figures prior to January 1997 reflect decisions under the 1985 Housing Act; subsequent decisions are under the 1996 Housing Act, plus any residual 1985 Act cases.
2. Totals may not equal the sum of components because of rounding.

Source:

ODPM P1(E) quarterly housing activity returns.

Transport Works Authorisation Branch

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the current applications for orders to the Transport Works Authorisation Branch of his Department, giving for each *(a)* the date the application was made, *(b)* the expected date the order will be made and *(c)* for what reason the order has not yet been made. [69497]

Mr. McNulty: Current applications for orders under the Transport and Works Act 1992 are listed in the table. The expected date of the decision is shown, rather than that for the making of the order, because I cannot prejudge that an order will be made in any particular case.

Title of proposed order	*Date of application*	*Expected date of decision*	*Reason for no decision to date*
London International Freight Exchange (LIFE). (Two consolidated applications)	[1]28 June 1999	August 2002	Inspector's report under consideration. Further information had to be sought from parties after close of inquiry.
Railtrack (Thameslink 2000). (Two consolidated applications)	[1]23 September 1999	Autumn 2002	Inspector's report under consideration. Major case raising complex issues.
Alconbury Airfield (Rail Facilities and Connection to East Coast Main Line)	30 December 1999	Within six months of receipt of inspector's report	Awaiting inspector's report. Inquiry closed 16 October 2001.
Railtrack (West Coast Main Line)	29 February 2000	By January 2003	Inspector's report just received (5 July 2002).
Fawley Branch Line Improvements	2 October 2000	Within six months of receipt of inspector's report	Part of ongoing inquiry into proposed Dibden Bay deep water terminal.
Yorkshire Marina (Bridlington)	9 October 2000	Within six months of receipt of inspector's report	Inquiry continuing.
Railtrack (West Coast Main Line) (No.2)	28 February 2001	Within six months of receipt of inspector's report	Awaiting inspector's report. Inquiry closed 28 March 2002.
Strand Road, Preston Railway	31 October 2001	August 2002	Decision being finalised.
Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Thames Tunnel Approach)	9 November 2001	July 2002	Decision imminent.
Greater Manchester (Leigh Busway)	31 January 2002	Within six months of receipt of inspector's report	Public inquiry to open on 10 September 2002.
London Gateway Logistics and Commercial Centre	14 February 2002	Within six months of receipt of inspector's report	Public inquiry to be arranged.
River Tyne (Tunnels)	31 May 2002	See next column	Objection period continuing; procedure yet to be determined.
Docklands Light Railway (Woolwich Arsenal Extension)	10 July 2002	See next column	Application just received; procedure yet to be determined

[1] Date of amending application

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff work in the Transport Works Authorisation Branch of his Department. [69484]

Mr. McNulty: 13.

Telecommunications Working Group

Mr. Norman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the representatives of *(a)* the mobile phone network industry, *(b)* central and local government and *(c)* other organisations sitting on the Telecommunications Working Group. [R] [69483]

Mr. McNulty: Members of the Telecommunications Working group are:

Name	*Department/organisation*
Christopher Bowden	Office of Deputy Prime Minister
Charlotte Sewell	Office of Deputy Prime Minister
Jim Davies	Department for Trade and Industry
George Hooker	Department for Health
Russell Kent-Smith	Radiocommunications Agency
Kevin O'Dell	Department for Education and Skills
Peter Roberts	National Assembly for Wales
Lee Searles	Local Government Association
Gerry Ansell	London borough of Waltham Forest
Ian Fletcher	Wycombe district council
Graham Jones	London borough of Harrow
Phil Joyce	Leeds city council
John Walker	City of Westminster
Jane Evans	Hutchison 3G
Peter Foster	02
Alan Freeman	02 (also Airwave)
Nick Greer	Vodafone
Adrian Manger	T Mobile
Adrian Reeve	Orange
Saleem Shamash	Crown Castle
Nicole Hughes	Federation of Electronic Industries

In addition, the following people do not attend meetings but receive and comment upon working group papers:

Name	*Department/organisation*
Alan Cameron	Scottish Executive
John Linden	Department for the Environment Northern Ireland
Norman Smith	Health and Safety Executive

Right to Buy

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria he plans to use for the redistribution of the pooled right to buy receipts from local authorities; and if they will include land value and development costs. [69257]

Mr. McNulty: We will be consulting on the operation of the new arrangements for pooling a proportion of future local authority housing capital receipts shortly.

Social Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the standard spending assessment was for each social services authority in England in each year from 1990–91 to 2001–02; and what it is projected to be for the financial year 2002–03, adjusted for inflation at current values. [69714]

Mr. Leslie: A table showing the information requested for both total SSA and personal social services SSA has been placed in the Library of the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

House of Commons Journal

Ian Lucas: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if the House of Commons Commission is collaborating with the History of Parliament Trust and the Humanities Research Institute of the University of Sheffield in producing an electronic version of the House of Commons Journal. [68885]

Mr. Kirkwood: I understand that in February 2001 the Trustees of the History of Parliament commissioned the Humanities Research Institute of the University of Sheffield to create a searchable electronic text of Volume 1 of the House of Commons Journal, covering the period 1547 to 1628. This was intended as a pilot study in digitising the contents of the early Journals of the two Houses, which are of great historical value but have hitherto suffered from lack of an adequate index. The electronic text of Volume 1, which has now been submitted to the Trustees, will be of particular use in the preparation of the 1604–1629 section of the History.

I also understand that, as a follow-up to the pilot study, the Trust has collaborated with the Institute of Historical Research and the Victoria County History in a successful bid to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for funding for a larger pilot project in digitisation of historical sources; this project will include the digitisation of a further volume of the Journal of this House.

History of Parliament Trust

Ian Lucas: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission (1) if he will make a statement on the size of the House of Commons Commission's grant in aid to the History of Parliament Trust for each year since 1995–96; [68883]

(2) if he will provide a specific grant to subsidise the retail cost of "The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1690–1715". [68884]

Mr. Kirkwood: The House of Commons Commission provides funds for the work of the History of Parliament Trust in line with the Trust's three-year financial plans and annual estimates. These plans allow for the work of the Trust to proceed at its present level of activity. Since 1999, the House of Lords has also provided support for the Trust. These grants in aid cover the whole of the Trust's running costs, and represent a significant subsidy.

The table shows the grant in aid made to the Trust since 1995–96:

Grant in aid

£

Year	*House of Commons*	*House of Lords*	*Total*
1995–96	947,000	—	947,000
1996–97	1,077,000	—	1,077,000
1997–98	1,057,000	—	1,057,000
1998–99	1,058,000	—	1,058,000
1999–2000	968,000	200,000	1,168,000
2000–01	1,017,000	210,000	1,227,000
2001–02	1,056,000	260,000	1,316,000

The retail price charged for the Trust's publications represents only the cost of printing and distribution of the volumes, rather than the costs of the research, which are met by the grant in aid from the Houses of Parliament. This mechanism provides more certainty of support for the research work, while indirectly subsidising the cost of the publications. I understand that there are no plans for a specific retail price subsidy. The pricing policy has always been governed by the need to strike a balance between affordability and the need to make some financial return on sales, recognising that the great majority of sales are likely to be to institutions rather than to individuals. By the standards of academic publications, the History's volumes are reasonably priced and are affordable by university libraries, country record offices and public libraries.

Recycling

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee (1) if she will state the total volume of paper purchased by the House in the last 12 months; what proportion of this comes from recycled sources; and what plans there are to increase this proportion; [65616]

(2) if she will state the *(a)* policy on and *(b)* total value and volume of the purchase and use of goods and materials from renewable or recycled sources by the House in the last 12 months; and what plans there are to (i) update the policy and (ii) increase the proportion of goods and materials used from such sources. [65617]

Mrs. Roe: The Administration Committee has oversight of the provisions of stationery for use by Members. The House's policy is to use recycled products where practicable and cost-effective; there are no plans to change the policy.

The House does not keep central records of paper used by the six House Departments; but we estimate that some 80,000 reams (200 tonnes) were used during 2001–02 at a cost of approximately £1.5 million. Over 50 per cent. of the paper used was recycled and chlorine-free. Within these figures, major users were the Vote Office (9,100 reams) and the Serjeant at Arms Department (45,000 reams).

The Serjeant at Arms Department has been providing recycled stationery to Members of Parliament for a number of years. All Members' stationery purchased through the House's central stationery contract (both paper and envelopes) is made from recycled paper. During 2001–02 approximately 162 tonnes of stationery were purchased at a cost of around £1 million. The amounts were:

Description	*Quantity*	*Volume (tonnes)*
Bespoke paper	[1]15,000	47
Photocopier paper	[1]30,000	75
Envelopes	6,500,000	40

[1] Reams

In 1998, on the recommendation of the Committee, recycled paper was introduced for all letterhead paper and envelopes purchased by Members of Parliament. All virgin pulp papers were withdrawn. Recycled photocopier paper has been supplied for a number of years.

As part of the "local paper for London" scheme organised through the BioRegional Development Group, Evolve Business photocopier paper has been introduced. Members now use this paper in their parliamentary and constituency offices and in photocopiers on the parliamentary estate.

For information on the purchase and use of other goods and materials from renewable or recycled sources, I refer the hon. Member to replies given by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), representing the House of Commons Commission, to the hon. Gentleman the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) on 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1116–17W.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

North Taunton Sports Centre

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps are taken to monitor the spending of grants awarded by the Sports Lottery Fund to local authorities, with specific reference to those made to the North Taunton Sports Centre. [68467]

Mr. Caborn: All projects supported by the Sport England Lottery Fund are subject to compliance procedures during construction and are monitored once the project has been completed and has been operating for a year. The compliance procedures provide for payments only on receipt of invoices and architects' certificates and for retention of the final 10 per cent. of the award until completion of the project. Post completion monitoring involves a site visit by a team of architects and independent consultants where the award is greater than £500,000. This investigation assesses all aspects of the project, including the design of the facility, its management and financial viability, coaching and sports development opportunities, and the project's impact on target groups. The applicant's views on Sport England and the application process are also monitored.

A proportion of projects receiving awards of less than £500,000 receive a site visit as follows:

£250,000 to £500,000 75 per cent. of projects receive a site visit

£100,000 to £250,000 50 per cent. of projects receive a site visit

under £100,000 10 per cent. of projects receive a site visit.

Projects which are not initially selected for a site visit receive a questionnaire. Cases where questionnaires are not returned or where the contents of a questionnaire raise concerns are followed up by further contact from, initially, the monitoring team at Sport England, and, if appropriate, with a site visit.

Taunton Deane borough council was awarded £2,383,020 in October 1999 for the building of The Wellspring Centre (now called North Taunton Sports Centre). So far Sport England has made payments to the Council in February, June, September, October and November 2001 amounting to 90 per cent. of the award. It is aware through discussions with Taunton Deane council that completion of the project has been delayed due to problems with the original contractor but it is understood that management consultants have now been appointed by the Council and it expects the building to be completed by the end of the year.

Criminal Records Checks

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment she had made of the cost to voluntary sports organisations of undertaking Criminal Records Bureau information checks; and if she will make a statement; [68873]

(2) if she will issue guidelines to voluntary sporting organisations who lack funding to undertake Criminal Records Bureau disclosure information checks; [68832]

(3) what discussions she has had with voluntary organisations and non-Governmental bodies on the cost of Criminal Records Bureau disclosure information checks for volunteers; and if she will make a statement. [68869]

Mr. Caborn: The Department was involved in discussions on the potential costs of the Disclosure service provided by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and supported successful representations to the Home Office that fees should be waived for higher level disclosures for volunteers. The CRB has been fully operational only since 11 March 2002 so hard data on actual costs is not yet available. The CRB itself and the Child Protection in Sport Unit both provide comprehensive guidance on requesting disclosures from the CRB which can be found on their respective websites (www.crb.gov.uk and www.sportprotects.org.uk). The costs to sports organisations deploying volunteers will be minimised because a) the CRB has waived fees on higher level disclosures for volunteers and b) Umbrella Bodies, such as governing bodies, can commission disclosures on behalf of other organisations, enabling them to keep down internal administrative costs. The Department is keeping track of developments in this area through its link with the child Protection in Sport Unit (jointly funded by the NSPCC and Sport England) and other bodies.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what additional funding has been made to enable sporting organisations to implement the Criminal Records Bureau disclosure information checks on the use of volunteers. [68872]

Mr. Caborn: No additional funding has been made available by this Department to sporting organisations to pay for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure information checks.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the status is of *(a)* referees and umpires, *(b)* referees' assistants, *(c)* match officials and *(d)* others who receive remuneration for their involvement in sports matches with regard to Criminal Records Bureau disclosure information checks; [68870]

(2) what her definition is of a volunteer for whom Criminal Records Bureau disclosure information checks are necessary. [68871]

Mr. Caborn: The Home Office announced in February of last year that Standard and Enhanced Disclosures will be issued free of charge to volunteers. The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) Regulations 2002 define a volunteer as a person engaged in an activity which involves spending time, unpaid (except for travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit some third party other than or in addition to a close relative. Those persons in the categories mentioned who met the criteria for these levels of disclosure which are set out in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 and section 115 of the Police Act 1997 and whose remuneration amounted only to travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses would, of course, be entitled to a free disclosure.

Racing Industry

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for what reasons the racing industry was charged for the acquisition of the Tote; and what account was taken of historic funding by the racing industry of the Tote when setting the sale price. [69369]

Mr. Caborn: The Government have announced their intention to introduce legislation to enable them to sell the Tote to a racing trust but no sale price has yet been set. It is appropriate for a price to be paid because there is a legitimate taxpayer interest in the Tote business.

Child Protection

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent meetings she has had with Ministers in other Departments with regard to *(a)* child protection in sport and *(b)* inter-agency working on child protection in sport. [68833]

Mr. Caborn: While there have been no ministerial meetings specifically on this issue recently, officials regularly discuss this important issue with colleagues in other Government Departments and other agencies. The Department is a member of the Steering Group of the Child Protection in Sport Unit which brings together stakeholders from within and outside Government to influence the unit's future direction, work and priorities.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Departmental Energy Use

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the estimated *(a)* level and *(b)* cost of energy use in her Department and associated agencies was in each year since 1997; what proportion of energy was generated from renewable sources; and if she will make a statement. [65953]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 3 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 385–86W.

University Students (Low Income Families)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Department has to ensure more young people from low-income families enter university. [66584]

Margaret Hodge: We are determined to encourage more young people from lower income backgrounds to enter higher education. Our secondary school reforms will help raise participation and attainment levels so that more young people will be eligible to benefit from HE. We have committed over £190 million over three years to the Excellence Challenge to raise aspirations and attainment of young people in some of the most deprived areas of the country. This includes making available 25,000 Opportunity Bursaries to encourage young students from low-income families into higher education. Young people in schools and FE colleges in Excellence Challenge areas will also benefit from the Aimhigher road show, which was launched earlier this year to promote higher education.

School Science Lessons

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills under what circumstances animals are killed specifically for use in school science lessons. [67627]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* Animals are principally used for whole mammal dissection purposes and may be used in nerve/muscle physiology demonstrations.

Teachers also buy organs from butchers, for example livers from animals eaten by humans, for science lessons. There is no requirement in the national curriculum for dissection to be carried out, although individual teachers may choose to use dissection to illustrate various aspects of the science curriculum. In the Key Stage 3 schemes of work which have been published recently by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, organ dissection is suggested as one of a range of possible teaching activities in some contexts.

Where dissection is used, teachers must always take account of potential threats to the well-being of pupils, particularly in relation to health and safety, religious or ethnic background and individual sensitivities.

National Child Care Strategy

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 1057W, on the National Child Care Strategy, if she will break the figures down by London borough. [67761]

Margaret Hodge: The available information is shown in tables 1, 2 and 3. Figures for new child care places were first collected at a local authority level from April 1999. Between April 1997 and December 2001, some 66,600 new child care places were created in London helping 122,000' children. Of these places, 9,784 places helping 18,379 children were created between April 1997 and March 1999.

The available information is shown in tables 1 and 2 and 3.

Table 1: New child care places and children helped in London between April 1999 and December 2001

London borough	New places	Children helped
Barking and Dagenham	1,283	2,378
Barnet	3,314	5,961
Bexley	1,906	3,352
Brent	2,145	3,927
Bromley	2,496	4,526
Camden	1,463	2,665
City of London	614	1,204
Croydon	2,460	4,332
Ealing	2,847	5,027
Enfield	2,013	3,495
Greenwich	2,832	5,505
Hackney	1,641	2,981

Table 1: New child care places and children helped in London between April 1999 and December 2001

London borough	*New places*	*Children helped*
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,556	3,001
Haringey	2,591	4,726
Harrow	887	1,624
Havering	599	1,096
Hillingdon	2,112	3,663
Hounslow	915	1,655
Islington	1,484	2,635
Kensington and Chelsea	682	1,252
Kingston upon Thames	1,709	3,039
Lambeth	2,971	5,609
Lewisham	840	1,530
Merton	893	1,598
Newham	1,850	3,438
Redbridge	1,035	1,932
Richmond upon Thames	1,823	3,278
Southwark	2,612	4,845
Sutton	1,631	3,003
Tower Hamlets	691	1,179
Waltham Forest	2,210	4,144
Wandsworth	986	1,813
Westminster	1,716	3,190
Total	56,807	103,594

Table 2: Child care grant funding for 2002–03

London borough	£ *Total revenue allocation*
Barking and Dagenham	427,080
Barnet	673,750
Bexley	480,940
Brent	574,580
Bromley	570,250
Camden	420,020
City of London	143,600
Croydon	705,260
Ealing	647,610
Enfield	613,560
Greenwich	561,600
Hackney	557,520
Hammersmith and Fulham	371,240
Haringey	541,380
Harrow	456,060
Havering	460,180
Hillingdon	528,420
Hounslow	486,380
Islington	439,030
Kensington and Chelsea	368,240
Kingston upon Thames	337,330
Lambeth	637,910
Lewisham	594,300
Merton	408,230
Newham	719,300
Redbridge	511,050
Richmond upon Thames	383,220
Southwark	614,800
Sutton	395,700
Tower Hamlets	584,740
Waltham Forest	545,650
Wandsworth	511,240
Westminster	422,750
Total	16,692,920

Table 3

Borough	*Total DfES revenue allocation (£)*	*Total capital allocation (£)*	*Total place target*
Barking and Dagenham	1,780,019	746,400	400
Barnet	341,047	149,280	80
Bexley	1,015,621	429,180	230
Brent	1,556,801	653,100	350
Bromley	626,913	261,240	140
Camden	1,346,621	578,460	310
City of London	0	0	0
Croydon	1,028,205	447,840	240
Ealing	1,465,426	615,780	330
Enfield	1,513,531	634,440	340
Greenwich	2,001,326	839,700	450
Hackney	2,441,802	1,026,300	550
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,022,584	429,180	230
Haringey	1,967,046	839,700	450
Harrow	0	0	0
Havering	888,725	373,200	200
Hillingdon	288,675	130,620	70
Hounslow	957,287	410,520	220
Islington	1,868,253	783,720	420
Kensington and Chelsea	936,490	391,860	210
Kingston upon Thames	0	0	0
Lambeth	2,188,580	933,000	500
Lewisham	1,966,147	839,700	450
Merton	292,385	130,620	70
Newham	2,530,851	1,082,280	580
Redbridge	1,092,386	466,500	250
Richmond upon Thames	0	0	0
Southwark	2,301,424	970,320	520
Sutton	582,176	242,580	130
Tower Hamlets	2,375,606	1,007,640	540
Waltham Forest	1,853,303	783,720	420
Wandsworth	617,139	261,240	140
Westminster	1,055,181	447,840	240
Total	39,901,550	16,905,960	9,060

[1] The figure of 122,000 quoted in the earlier answer refers to number of children helped by new places rather than the number of new places created.

EU Schools Materials

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had on the (*a*) development and (*b*) use of EU-funded Socrates material in schools. [68649]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* The material produced in the Socrâtes programme is a matter for the participants, working within the parameters of the programme, and the Department is not involved in its development, or in consultation on its use.

Schools are free to use any material in their teaching, subject to Section 407 of the Education Act 1996. This article requires school governing bodies, head teachers and local education authorities to take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure that where political or controversial issues are brought to pupils' attention, they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.

School Admissions

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many first preferences for (*a*) primary schools and (*b*) secondary schools were not met in the last five years in (i) Boston and Skegness, (ii) Lincolnshire and (iii) England. [68661]

Mr. Miliband: My Department does not collect this information.

Morley and Rothwell

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students from Morley and Rothwell have their tuition fees paid for them *(a)* in full, *(b)* in part and *(c)* not at all since 1997. [69366]

Margaret Hodge: Data on tuition fees for the constituency of Morley and Rothwell are not collected centrally.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students in Morley and Rothwell *(a)* receive full or part entitlement to Education Maintenance Allowance and *(b)* how that compares to other pilot areas. [69364]

Margaret Hodge: We do not ask the local education authorities who administer the EMA scheme to classify recipients by constituency. However, 4,624 young people in Leeds have received an allowance in this academic year. Of these, 2,579 (56 per cent.) received the full allowance and 2,045 (44 per cent.) received a part allowance. Recently published evaluation reports show that the average proportion of EMA recipients across the 56 pilot areas receiving the full allowance is 63 per cent.

Graduate Teacher Programme

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with the TTA on the reduction in the number of designated recommending bodies for the graduate teacher programme; and if she will make a statement. [69863]

Mr. Miliband: My right hon. Friend has held no such discussions with the Teacher Training Agency. The agency announced the creation of the first 80 designated recommending bodies on 24 June. There has consequently been no reduction in their number, and at least as many trainees are expected to enter the Graduate Teacher Programme next year as did so in 2001–02.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there are in each *(a)* Government office region and *(b)* local education authority. [68902]

Mr. Miliband: The tables show provisional vacancy numbers by region for January 2002 and final vacancy numbers by local education authority for January 2001. Figures are not yet available for 2002 at local education authority level.

Vacancy[1] numbers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in England by Government office region: January 2002

Government office region	*2002*[2]
North East	140
North West	320
Yorkshire and the Humber	370
East Midlands	270
West Midlands	470
East of England	680
London	1,320
South East	770
South West	170
Total vacancies	4,480

[1] Advertised vacancies for full-time permanent appointments (or appointments of at least one term's duration). Includes vacancies being filled on a temporary basis of less than one term.

[2] Provisional.

Vacancy numbers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools by LEA[1] and Government office region: January 2001

	Number of vacancies
North East	
Gateshead	6
Newcastle upon Tyne	19
North Tyneside	14
South Tyneside	0
Sunderland	20
Hartlepool	5
Middlesbrough	20
Redcar and Cleveland	18
Stockton on Tees	15
Darlington	8
Durham	37
Northumberland	0
Total	162
North West	
Cumbria	6
Cheshire	25
Halton	6
Warrington	11
Bolton	7
Bury	4
Manchester	0
Oldham	16
Rochdale	5
Salford	4
Stockport	25
Tameside	23
Trafford	0
Wigan	11
Lancashire	61
Blackburn with Darwen	19
Blackpool	5
Knowsley	12
Liverpool	0
St. Helens	8
Sefton	15
Wirral	20
Total	283
Yorkshire and the Humber	
Kingston-Upon-Hull, City of	8
East Riding of Yorkshire	6
North East Lincolnshire	20
North Lincolnshire	10
North Yorkshire	12
York	6
Barnsley	20
Doncaster	10
Rotherham	1
Sheffield	14
Bradford	0
Calderdale	7
Kirklees	10
Leeds	47
Wakefield	14
Total	185
East Midlands	
Derbyshire	45
Derby	16
Leicestershire	30
Leicester	42
Rutland	0
Lincolnshire	20

Vacancy numbers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools by LEA[1] *and Government office region: January 2001*

	Number of vacancies
Northamptonshire	20
Nottingham	41
Total	214
West Midlands	
Herefordshire	18
Worcestershire	8
Shropshire	4
Telford and Wrekin	5
Staffordshire	40
Stoke-on-Trent	20
Warwickshire	42
Birmingham	83
Coventry	24
Dudley	28
Sandwell	49
Solihull	32
Walsall	17
Wolverhampton	32
Total	402
East of England	
Cambridgeshire	3
Peterborough	7
Norfolk	71
Suffolk	89
Bedfordshire	76
Luton	63
Essex	220
Southend-on-Sea	24
Thurrock	69
Hertfordshire	50
Total	672
London	
City of London	0
Camden	59
Greenwich	63
Hackney	101
Hammersmith and Fulham	49
Islington	56
Kensington and Chelsea	36
Lambeth	51
Lewisham	71
Southwark	100
Tower Hamlets	157
Wandsworth	53
Westminster	49
Barking and Dagenham	24
Barnet	100
Bexley	85
Brent	23
Bromley	63
Croydon	77
Ealing	66
Enfield	65
Haringey	43
Harrow	58
Havering	38
Hillingdon	52
Hounslow	18
Kingston upon Thames	23
Merton	18
Newham	103
Redbridge	40
Richmond upon Thames	30
Sutton	10
Waltham Forest	7
Total	1,788

Vacancy numbers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools by LEA[1] *and Government office region: January 2001*

	Number of vacancies
South East	
Bracknell Forest	16
Windsor and Maidenhead	34
West Berkshire	10
Reading	37
Slough	62
Wokingham	18
Buckinghamshire	59
Milton Keynes	21
East Sussex	43
Brighton and Hove	17
Hampshire	175
Portsmouth	59
Southampton	50
Isle of Wight	7
Kent	196
Medway	51
Oxfordshire	16
Surrey	104
West Sussex	82
Total	1,057
South West	
Isles of Scilly	0
Bath and North East Somerset	9
City of Bristol	25
North Somerset	7
South Gloucestershire	7
Cornwall	0
Devon	47
Plymouth	1
Torbay	9
Dorset	18
Poole	19
Bournemouth	7
Gloucestershire	14
Somerset	11
Wiltshire	19
Swindon	20
Total	213
England total	4,976

[1] Advertised vacancies for full-time permanent appointments (or appointments of at least one term's duration). Includes vacancies being filled on a temporary basis of less than one term.

Source:

DfES annual 618G survey.

Child Care (Regulation)

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many professional staff she estimates need to be transferred from local authorities to Ofsted as a result of the transfer of responsibility for the regulation of child care to Ofsted. [69141]

Margaret Hodge: In September 2001, 1,431 staff transferred from local authorities to the Office for Standards in Education. No further transfers are envisaged.

Public Consultations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the length was of each public consultation undertaken by her Department since 8 June 2001. [68740]

Estelle Morris: The following table provides a list of written consultations with the public carried out by this Department since 8 June 2001 including the duration of each consultation. The Department has complied with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation in each case, applying exemptions where appropriate.

Title of consultation	*Start date*	*End date*	*Duration (in days)*
Teachers' Professional Development—Standards Framework Consultation	11 June 2001	20 July 2001	39
Teachers' Professional Development Division—Development Portfolio Consultation	11 June 2001	20 July 2001	39
Consultation on Professional Duties of Advanced Skills Teachers	26 June 2001	21 August 2001	56
July European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning	26 June 2001	28 September 2001	94
Education Development Plans from 2002—Consultation on draft guidance	27 June 2001	19 September 2001	84
Consultation on Extending the Use of Parenting Orders	9 July 2001	9 October 2001	92
Inspection of Local Education Authorities	11 July 2001	11 October 2001	92
Employment of Teachers who have successfully completed their course of teacher training but have not passed their skills test	24 July 2001	8 August 2001	15
Standards for the awards of qualified teacher status—initial teacher training	26 July 2001	2 November 2001	99
Consultation on Inspection arrangements—initial teacher training 2002–03	26 July 2001	2 November 2001	99
Draft Regulations Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as Amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001	30 July 2001	22 October 2001	84
The Way Forward—A Modernised Framework for School Governance	5 September 2001	7 November 2001	63
Better Beginnings—Improving quality and increasing provision in early years education and childcare	5 September 2001	7 November 2001	63
Consultation on School Admissions	5 September 2001	7 November 2001	63
Consultation on Exclusion Appeal Panels	5 September 2001	7 November 2001	63
Registration and Monitoring of Independent Schools	5 September 2001	9 November 2001	65
Schools Achieving Success	5 September 2001	7 November 2001	63
Improving inspection, improving schools	10 September 2001	10 November 2001	61
Consultation on targets for English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 in 2004	18 September 2001	14 December 2001	87
16–19 Organisation and Inspection: A consultation document	24 September 2001	7 November 2001	44
Expert support for the development of Foundation Stage Practice	5 October 2001	28 December 2001	84
City Academies: Arrangements for Pupils with SEN and Disabilities	8 October 2001	29 December 2001	82
Consultation on Proposals arising from the Treasury Review of teachers' Ill Health Retirement	2 November 2001	25 January 2002	84
Excellence Fellowship Awards	6 November 2001	14 December 2001	38
Teachers' Pay Reform—Performance Pay Progression Grant	23 November 2001	4 January 2002	42
Building a Strategy for Children and Young People	25 November 2001	1 March 2002	96
Consultation on Review of Learning Partnerships	17 December 2001	16 February 2002	61
Consultation on Review of Arts and Humanities Research Funding	18 December 2001	2 February 2002	46
Quinquennial Review of Investors in People UK	1 January 2002	28 February 2002	58
Consultation on Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils	14 January 2002	25 March 2002	70
Revised Guidance on Exclusion from School—Draft for Consultation	24 January 2002	19 April 2002	85
Quinquennial Review of Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	1 February 2002	15 March 2002	42
Consultation on Raising Standards—Training and Development for Leaders and Managers	4 February 2002	1 May 2002	86
14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards	12 February 2002	31 May 2002	108

Title of consultation	*Start date*	*End date*	*Duration (in days)*
National Centre for Excellence in Science Teaching	18 February 2002	8 May 2002	79
The Adult Common Basic Data Set	25 February 2002	17 May 2002	81
Early Years and Childcare Regulations	27 February 2002	24 May 2002	86
14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards: A Summary	1 March 2002	31 May 2002	91
Investors in Children Consultation Paper	14 March 2002	6 June 2002	84
Proposals to introduce a mandatory requirement for first-time headteachers to hold the (NPQH)	15 March 2002	28 June 2002	105
Consultation on Publication of School and College Performance Tables in 2002	19 March 2002	24 May 2002	66
Electronic Communications in Education: an Order under the Electronic Communications Act 2000	8 May 2002	31 July 2002	84
STRB report on teacher workload	8 May 2002	3 July 2002	56
Performance Pay Progression: Reconsultation on Revised Special Grant Report	14 May 2002	13 June 2002	30
Together From the Start—Practical guidance for professionals working with disabled children (birth to 2) and their families	28 May 2002	23 September 2002	118
Developing Early Intervention/Support Services for Deaf Children and their Families	28 May 2002	23 September 2002	118
Department for Education and Skills—Race Equality Scheme: Draft Consultation May 2002	31 May 2002	30 August 2002	91
Supporting the cost of home-based childcare	7 June 2002	30 August 2002	84
Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications	1 July 2002	30 September 2002	91

TREASURY

Regeneration Funding

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was allocated to reviving *(a)* coalfield communities, *(b)* steel communities, *(c)* rural communities, *(d)* inner-city areas and *(e)* seaside towns in each of the last 10 years. [68937]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* A large number of different funding sources support the revival of vulnerable communities and it is not possible to provide the information in the form requested. However, our strong record on support for these types of communities includes:

> coalfield regeneration by English Partnerships of £385 million over 10 years to 2006–07;
>
> Coalfield Regeneration Trust of £90 million over seven years to 2004–05;
>
> £60 million since 2000–01 on rural programmes by the Countryside Agency;
>
> some £120 million of support from the Regional Development Agencies for rural development and communities;
>
> New Deal for Communities partnerships will receive £2 billion over 10 years;
>
> Neighbourhood Renewal Fund is £900 million over three years; and
>
> Single Regeneration Budget partnerships that cover coastal areas have been allocated some £440 million since 1995.

Regeneration programmes in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in devolved areas are a matter for their devolved Administrations.

Equity Shares

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the real rate of return on equity shares quoted on the London stock exchange has been since 1 May 1997. [70075]

Ruth Kelly: Between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 2002, the total real return for the FTSE Index was 6.2 per cent. The total real return from the All-Share Index over the same period was 7.7 per cent.

Ministerial Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the annual cost was of ministerial salaries in his Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [60948]

Ruth Kelly: The level of ministerial salaries are recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body. All details are already published.

From May 1997, in this Department there was the First Lord of the Treasury on an annual salary of £58,557; two Cabinet Ministers at an annual salary of £43,991; two Ministers of State, one at an annual salary of £31,125 and one unpaid; one Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, at an annual salary of £23,623. In addition, there was also a Chief Whip for the House of Commons at an annual salary of £36,613, a Deputy Chief Whip at an annual salary of £31,125 and 14 Government and Assistant Government Whips at an annual salary of £20,029. There was also Chief Whip for the House of Lords at an annual salary of £51,838, a Deputy Chief Whip at an annual salary of £43,632 and a further five Lords in Waiting at an annual salary of £39,462.

From June 2001, in this Department there was the First Lord of the Treasury on an annual salary of £113,596; two Cabinet Ministers at an annual salary of £68,157; two Ministers of State, at an annual salary of £35,356; one Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, at an annual salary of £26,835. In addition, there was also a Chief Whip for the House of Commons at an annual salary of £68,157, a Deputy Chief Whip at an annual salary of £35,356 and 14 Government and Assistant Government Whips at an annual salary of £22,753. There was also a Chief Whip for the House of Lords at an annual salary of £68,283, a Deputy Chief Whip at an annual salary of £59,961 and a further five Lords in Waiting at an annual salary of £54,224.

Inflation

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what investigation National Statistics is making into evidence of appreciable differences in inflation rates between regions; and if he will make a statement. [69245]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 15 July 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on what investigation National Statistics is making of evidence of appreciable differences in inflation rates between regions. I am replying in his absence. (69245)

There is currently no official research being conducted into the differences in inflation rates between regions. The data required to make such calculations to an appropriate degree of accuracy are not currently available to National Statistics from either the national Retail Price Index (RPI) or other official sources.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent estimate he has made of the effect on the UK economy of long-term exchange rate stability. [69372]

Ruth Kelly: It is difficult to separate the effect of exchange rate movements on the economy from the effects of other factors. The most recent assessment of the UK economy was published in Budget 2002, and the next assessment will be published in PBR 2002.

Consumer Complaints

Brian White: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what actions are available to consumers when the FSA and PIA Ombudsman bureau do not take action on their individual grievance. [69315]

Ruth Kelly: Firms that have been authorised by the FSA are required to have their own internal complaints arrangements for their customers. Where a firm is unable to resolve a complaint itself, the customer can pursue the complaint with the Financial Ombudsman Service, which replaced the PIA Ombudsman Bureau on 1 December 2001. An ombudsman's decision is binding on the firm if the customer accepts it. If the FOS is not able to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction, this does not affect the customer's legal rights to go to court.

Software

Brian White: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69320]

Ruth Kelly: It is planned to publish the Government's policy for open source software in summer 2002. The draft policy was made available for consultation from December 2001 until 12 March 2002.

The Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Treasury use of open source software will follow the Government policy when it is published. The policy references the European Commission's initiative "eEurope—An Information Society for all".

At present there is minimal use of open source software in the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and Treasury although the new technical architectures in IR and C7E are substantially compliant with the e-Government Interoperability Framework (e-GIF) which mandates open standards and specifications.

The policy of all three Departments is to select the most appropriate software to support its business needs taking account of functionality, cost, reliability and ease of support. IT procurements will include open source software solutions alongside proprietary ones.

The draft Government policy can be viewed at http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/rfc/rfc_document.asp?docnum=429

National Statistics Code of Practice

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to *(a)* publish and *(b)* implement the final version of the National Statistics Code of Practice; and if he will make a statement. [69243]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 15 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on when the National Statistics Code of Practice is expected to be published and implemented. (69243)

I published my first draft of the Code of Practice in December 2001 to mark the start of a three-month public consultation. I will submit my proposals for final publication within a month. These will reflect both the broad level of support received for the first draft, as well as more detailed suggestions for change.

PISA 2000

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if pupils in a pupil referral unit *(a)* were eligible for selection for PISA 2000 from their original school and *(b)* permitted by their original school to sit the test. [69992]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 15 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning if pupils in a pupil referral unit (a) were eligible for selection for PISA 2000 from their original school and (b) if selected, permitted by their original school to sit the test. (69992)

The rules for school and student level exclusions in PISA are published in Appendix A of the ONS report, published in May 2002: Student Achievement in England-Results in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy among 15-year-olds from the OECD PISA 2000 study and will be more fully treated in the OECD Technical Report on PISA.

The report is available free at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=8169&More=N

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures were undertaken to ensure that the list of pupils provided by the schools selected for the PISA 2000 survey was the full list. [70010]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 15 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning what measures were undertaken to ensure that the list of pupils provided by the schools selected for the PISA 2000 survey was the full list. (70010)

The sampling frame contained information on the numbers of students in a school who were within scope for PISA. Where the list provided differed significantly from the number expected this was investigated with individual schools. All sampling procedures were subject to approval by the international sampling referees.

The report on PISA is available free at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=8169&More=N.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will break down the figure of 927 into refusals and absentees in the PISA 2000 survey. [70011]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 15 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if the figure of 927 for refusals and absentees in the PISA 2000 survey could be broken down. (70011).

The information requested is currently unavailable. I will write to you in the near future.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will break down the figure of 233 pupils in the category labelled left/no longer attending school or exempt from PISA between *(a)* left/no longer attending and *(b)* exempt from PISA. [69993]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 15 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if the 233 figure of pupils in the category labelled left/no longer attending school or exempt from PISA between *(a)* left/no longer attending and *(b)* exempt from PISA could be broken down. (69993)

The information requested is currently unavailable. I will write to you in the near future.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Challen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the number of jobs that have been created over the past six years in *(a)* Leeds, *(b)* Yorkshire and the Humber and *(c)* London expressed as a percentage of the work force in each of those areas. [69949]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Colin Challen, dated 15 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of jobs created in Leeds, Yorkshire and the Humber and London. (69949)

There are no figures for job gains or job losses but an indication can be obtained by comparing the annual surveys of employee jobs. The latest available figures are from the 2000 Annual Business Inquiry. The 2001 results are due to be published in December 2002. No annual survey was undertaken in 1994 so the 1995 Annual Employment Survey has been used. The percentages requested are as follows:

Number of jobs created in Leeds, Yorkshire and the Humber and London

Area	*Net percentage change between 1995 and 2000*
Leeds	7.6
Yorkshire and the Humber	6.5
London	17.4

Sterling Coin Types

Mr. Roy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his Department's plans are for dealing with the sterling coin types that will be withdrawn in the next five years. [69783]

Ruth Kelly: There are no current plans to withdraw any UK coins.

Investor Confidence

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to raise investor confidence in the stock market. [69751]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are committed to securing macroeconomic and financial stability. This is the best long-term basis for promoting investor and business confidence.

The Government have also reformed the regulation of the financial sector by establishing the Financial Services Authority (FSA) as the single, independent regulator, and introduced a new framework which brings together the FSA, the Bank of England, and the Treasury, to pursue financial stability.

The Government have established a joint DTI-Treasury chaired group to co-ordinate the analysis of and response to the auditing and accounting issues raised by recent US corporate failures.

Basic Bank Accounts

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of his reply to the letter from the FSA Consumer Panel on their report into basic bank accounts. [70266]

Ruth Kelly: Colin Brown, chairman of the Financial Services Consumer Panel, wrote to me on the subject of basic bank accounts and enclosed the panel's research on 23 April this year. I have placed a copy of my reply, dated 16 May, in the Commons Library.

Private Companies (Grants)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which private companies received grants over £1 million from his Department in each of the last three years, indicating the *(a)* amount and *(b)* purpose. [70262]

Ruth Kelly: HM Treasury has not made any grants to private companies in the last three years.

Devolved Administrations

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the funding rules for the devolved administrations applied in the 2002 Spending Review. [70607]

Mr. Boateng: Copies of the updated Statement of Funding Policy, which sets out the funding arrangements for the devolved administrations, have today been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

LIFE Instrument

Angus Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the EU Committee on the Financial Instrument for the Environment is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [68561]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Financial Instrument for the Environment, commonly known as the "LIFE Instrument", provides co-financing for actions both in nature conservation (LIFE-Nature) and in other fields of the environment (LIFE-Environment), as well as specific environmental actions outside the EU (LIFE Third Countries).

Decisions on funding of projects submitted under the LIFE Nature component are made by the European Commission with the assistance of the Habitats Committee. The Habitats Committee is next due to meet at a date to be arranged in November 2002. UK representation ordinarily consists of an official from my Department together with a scientific adviser from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. However, wider representation on the Committee depends on the agenda items under discussion. Officials from the Scottish Executive attend as necessary in accordance with their interests and have attended all recent Habitats Committee meetings. The Scottish Executive is kept fully informed of developments and has the opportunity to make an assessment of all projects involving Scottish participation. Decisions on funding of projects submitted under the LIFE-Environment and LIFE Third Countries components are made by the European Commission with the assistance of the LIFE Committee. This Committee is next due to meet at a date to be arranged in early 2003. UK representation ordinarily consists of an official from my Department. However, officials from the Scottish Executive have attended as necessary in accordance with their interests, most recently in February 2002. The Scottish Executive is kept fully informed of developments and has the opportunity to make an assessment of all projects involving Scottish participation.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the custom houses in the south of England; on what date each opened; and how many staff are based in each; [67624]

(2) what plans he has to *(a)* reorganise and *(b)* close custom houses in the south of England; and if he will make a statement; [67626]

(3) if he will list the custom houses in the south of England which have closed since 1997; when each *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed; and how many staff were based in each in that year. [67625]

John Healey *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* Only a small proportion of existing Customs and Excise properties are known as Custom Houses. The name is usually an historical one and does not relate to the specific functions carried out in the buildings.

Custom Houses in the South of England are located at Avonmouth, Falmouth, Gravesend, Heathrow, Isles of Scilly, London, Newhaven, Plymouth and Shoreham.

I regret that information on the dates they opened, and on buildings that have been closed in the last five years, is not readily available.

Customs and Excise keep their accommodation under constant review to ensure that it continues to meet their operational needs and is organised in the most cost-effective way. Of the Custom Houses listed above the only ones where plans for change are under active consideration are Falmouth, where the lease is due to expire, and the Isles of Scilly, following the proposed withdrawal of the Customs permanent presence there in September.

We do not provide information on staffing levels at specific locations for the reasons given in my reply to the hon. Member of 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 837W.

Conception Statistics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* conceptions, *(b)* maternities and *(c)* abortions have been recorded for girls (i) over 16 and (ii) in each age cohort under 16. [69004]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Andrew Turner, dated 15 July 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many *(a)* conceptions *(b)* maternities and *(c)* abortions have been recorded in each year since 1992 for girls (i) under 16 and (ii) in each age cohort under 16. (69004)

Figures based on conceptions occurring in 1992–2000 to girls aged under 16 are shown in the attached table.

Conceptions at ages under 16 by outcome, age cohort and year of occurrence 1992–2000 England and Wales

Age cohort—year of birth/ Conceptions leading to:	*Year of conception*								
	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[1]
1976									
Maternity	[2]1,663	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Abortion	[2]1,340	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
All conceptions	[2]3,003	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1977									
Maternity	1,604	[2]1,565	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Abortion	1,575	[2]1,352	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
All conceptions	3,179	[2]2,917	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1978									
Maternity	375	1,611	[2]1,627	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Abortion	509	1,636	[2]1,404	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
All conceptions	884	3,247	[2]3,031	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1979									
Maternity	61	402	1,758	[2]1,808	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Abortion	80	561	1,814	[2]1,424	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
All conceptions	141	963	3,572	[2]3,232	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1980									
Maternity	[3]—	55	409	1,922	[2]2,072	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Abortion	[3]—	71	607	1,787	[2]1,713	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
All conceptions	[3]—	126	1,016	3,709	[2]3,785	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1981									
Maternity	[3]—	10	72	435	1,916	[2]1,828	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Abortion	[3]—	4	86	525	1,923	[2]1,557	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
All conceptions	[3]—	14	158	960	3,839	[2]3,385	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1982									
Maternity	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	45	432	1,885	[2]1,798	[2]—	[2]—
Abortion	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	86	615	1,891	[2]1,680	[2]—	[2]—
All conceptions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	131	1,047	3,776	[2]3,478	[2]—	[2]—
1983									
Maternity	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	71	376	1,749	[2]1,600	[2]—
Abortion	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	98	558	2,031	[2]1,565	[2]—
All conceptions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	169	934	3,780	[2]3,165	[2]—
1984									
Maternity	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	69	402	1,680	1,655
Abortion	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	94	613	1,953	1,714
All conceptions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	163	1,015	3,633	3,396
1985									
Maternity	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	67	404	1,604
Abortion	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	91	586	1,989
All conceptions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	158	990	3,593
1986									
Maternity	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	57	394
Abortion	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	70	567
All conceptions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[2]—	17	127	961
1987									
Maternity	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	58
Abortions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	76
All conceptions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[2]—	4	20	134
1988									
Maternity	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	5
Abortion	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	7
All conceptions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	6	12
1989									
Maternity	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	4	[3]—
Abortion	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
All conceptions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	4	13

Conceptions at ages under 16 by outcome, age cohort and year of occurrence 1992–2000 England and Wales

Age cohort—year of birth/ Conceptions leading to:	*Year of conception* 1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000[1]
1990									
Maternity	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Abortion	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
All conceptions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
1991									
Maternity	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Abortion	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
All conceptions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
All conceptions at ages under 16									
Maternity	3,707	3,643	3,875	4,218	4,498	4,164	4,023	3,762	3,729
Abortion	3,510	3,624	3,920	3,833	4,359	4,107	4,429	4,183	4,382
All conceptions	7,217	7,267	7,795	8,051	8,857	8,271	8,452	7,945	8,111

[1] Figures for 2000 are provisional.

[2] Any conceptions at ages 16 or over are excluded from the figures presented.

[3] Figure suppressed to prevent disclosure of counts of three or less.

Development Assistance

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will produce a timetable for raising UK official development assistance to the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of GNP. [68818]

John Healey: The Government remain fully committed to the UN 0.7 per cent. oda/GNI target. The Chancellor announced in the Spending Review that UK official development assistance as a proportion of Gross National Income will rise to 0.40 per cent. in 2005–06, from a level of 0.33 per cent. in 2003–04 and 0.26 per cent. in 1997, taking the ratio to its highest level since 1981. As a result, the UK will exceed the average EU target for oda/GNI of 0.39 per cent. by 2005–06 and be more than double the current G7 country oda/GNI average of 0.18 per cent. and current OECD ratio of 0.22 per cent.

The UK will continue to use international meetings, such as G7/8 meetings, and bilateral meetings to encourage other partners to follow our lead.

Global Poverty

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the steps he is taking to reduce global poverty. [68769]

John Healey: In recent months, the UK Government have been at the forefront of efforts to mobilise the international community to tackle global poverty by promoting a global new deal between developed and developing countries—a new development compact building the foundations for a virtuous circle of debt relief, poverty reduction and sustainable development.

This effort focused on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, ensuring all children can attend school, and dramatically reducing child and maternal mortality rates.

Pledges from the US and the EU made at Monterrey in March will, from 2006, raise an extra $12 billion each year for achieving the MDGs with—following the G8 summit in Kananaskis in June—possibly half or more of these funds going to Africa.

Furthermore, following the outcomes of the Spending Review 2002, announced by the Chancellor today, the UK has increased its aid commitments to developing countries from 0.33 per cent. of national income in 2002–03 to 0.4 per cent. by 2005–06. This is the largest ever rise in UK aid, and a 93 per cent. real terms increase since 1997, which makes clear the Government's commitment to the United Nations 0.7 per cent. target. The increase means the UK's aid to national income ratio will be more than double the current G7 country average, and far ahead of the current OECD average of 0.22 per cent. In addition, the Department for International Development has announced, for the first time, a £1 billion annual bilateral programme for Africa by 2005–06.

On debt relief an extra $6 billion is being provided so far this year—taking the total to $62 billion across 26 HIPCs. At the G8 summit, leaders agreed to fund the financial shortfall in the HIPC Initiative, pledging an extra $1 billion. In return for good governance, prudent new borrowing and sound debt management, the G8 will take action to secure the participation of all creditors, and ensure a robust exit from debt.

The UK Government have endorsed the World bank's education fast tracking initiative, launched in May 2002, which provides the first focused financing framework for achieving the Education for All goals. In addition, at the G8 summit in June, Heads of Government agreed to increase significantly bilateral assistance for countries that have demonstrated a strong and credible policy and financial commitment to these goals. In the coming months the UK will work to take forward this agreement and urge other donor Governments and the multilateral development banks to join our renewed effort to ensure that, by 2015, every child can go to school.

Just as the UK Government are committed to significantly increasing investments in education, so too we should accelerate support to build universal and equitable health care systems. The UK is encouraging the World bank, UN agencies and other donors to work together to ensure that developing countries with credible policy commitments have the resources necessary to strengthen health systems. In 2002 the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria was launched. To date more than $1.9 billion has been pledged to the fund, of which the UK has committed $200 million over five years. And in addition to on-going commitments to combat these three killer diseases, the G8 Heads of Government have committed to provide sufficient resources to eradicate polio by 2005. The UK has also introduced a tax credit to encourage companies to increase research and development into vaccines and medicines for the prevention and treatment of malaria, TB and those strains of AIDS which predominantly affect people in developing countries.

In the months ahead and at the annual meetings of the IMF and World bank in October, the UK will press for further joint action in meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Waste

Sue Doughty: To ask the Prime Minister what proportion of waste produced in his Office was *(a)* recycled, *(b)* composted and *(c)* re-used, broken down into (i) paper, (ii) plastics, (iii) aluminium cans and (iv) other in each year since 1997; what plans there are to increase these proportions; and if he will make a statement. [65691]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 11 July 2002, *Official Report,* columns 1100–01W.

Future of Farming and Food

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received about implementing the recommendations of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food; and if he will make a statement. [69572]

The Prime Minister: I have received over 100 letters this year about farming, including ones on the recommendations of the Policy Commission report on the Future of Farming and Food. I have also hosted a seminar with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Sir Donald Curry, key industry and other players, to discuss how we can deliver the recommendations of the commission.

The Government's discussion document, "Sustainable Food and Farming: Working Together", invited views on how to take forward the Policy Commission's recommendations. Responses will help inform the construction of the new strategy for food and farming, to be launched in the autumn.

This strategy will announce details of the policy measures that we will put in place to deliver the vision identified in the Policy Commission's report. Today's spending review settlement demonstrates our commitment to this vision. It invests £500 million in sustainable farming, including a programme rising to £200 million in 2005–06 with which to address the report's key recommendations. And it allows for the rolling out of the proposed broad and shallow agri-environment scheme, financed through increased modulation and Exchequer matched funding in 2005–06.

SCOTLAND

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the performance targets that her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999–2002 and 2001–04; and if she will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60459]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department sponsors the Boundary Commission for Scotland. The Scotland Office has no public service agreements and no additional performance targets have been set for the Commission.

Broadband

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment she has made of the benefits of access to broadband services for Scotland; and if she will make a statement; [61795]

(2) what targets she has set for the roll out of broadband services across Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [61796]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government believe that the roll out and adoption of broadband across the UK can make an important contribution to delivering social and economic benefits. In "UK Online: The Broadband Future", published in February 2001, the Government set a target for the UK to have most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005. The Scottish Executive are taking forward the roll out of broadband in Scotland and have published "Connecting Scotland: Our Broadband Future", which aims to make broadband connections more affordable and available.

Basle II

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Treasury about the effect on the Scottish financial sector of the current terms of Basle II. [66091]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with Treasury Ministers on a wide range of issues.

The Treasury are closely following the on-going discussions on the Basle II Accord which has yet to be finalised and I am kept informed of developments. The Treasury are aware of the potential impact on the financial industry, including that of Scotland, when Basle II is transposed into an EU directive. The UK will negotiate to ensure that the directive is flexible, effective and proportionate.

Scottish Boundary Commission

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she intends to introduce orders into the House to implement the recommendations of the Scottish Boundary Commission in time for the next general election. [67114]

Mrs. Liddell: I am required by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 to lay the Boundary Commission for Scotland's report before Parliament, together with the draft of an Order in Council giving it effect, with or without modifications, as soon as may be after the Commission submits its report. The Boundary Commission is required to submit its report between December 2002 and December 2006. It is a matter for the Commission when, within that time scale, it does so.

Scottish Electoral Process

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will set up a joint commission between the UK Parliament and Government and the Scottish Executive and Parliament to discuss the Scottish electoral process. [67113]

Mrs. Liddell: There are no plans to set up a joint commission for this purpose.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Military Export Licences

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many standard individual and open individual export licences have been granted to *(a)* Georgia, *(b)* Uzbekistan, *(c)* Kyrgyzstan, *(d)* Tajikistan, *(e)* Turkey, *(f)* the Philippines, *(g)* Kenya, *(h)* Ethiopia, *(i)* Djibouti, *(j)* Bahrain, *(k)* Oman, *(l)* Jordan, *(m)* Yemen, *(n)* India, *(o)* Pakistan and *(p)* Israel in each month from January 2001 to September 2001; and if she will make a statement. [65097]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The number of Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) issued where the end users are in Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, the Philippines, Kenya, Ethiopia, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, Yemen, India, Pakistan and Israel in each month from January 2001 to September 2001, is set out in the table. During that same period no SIELs or OIELs were issued where the end user was in Djibouti.

For information on SIELs issued to end users in Israel between May 2001 and October 2001 I refer the right hon. and learned Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) of 23 November 2001, *Official Report,* columns 558–59W.

SIELS and OIELS issued

	January 2001	*February 2001*	*March 2001*	*April 2001*	*May 2001*	*June 2001*	*July 2001*	*August 2001*	*September 2001*
SIELS									
Bahrain	4	3	—	2	1	2	1	2	2
Ethiopia	—	—	—	2	—	3	1	2	1
Georgia	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
India	68	67	60	45	61	71	49	47	71
Israel	—	46	26	25	—	—	—	—	—
Jordan	6	6	5	11	5	—	26	2	5
Kenya	3	1	3	3	3	2	5	4	1
Kyrgyzstan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Oman	4	5	7	10	8	11	8	6	4
Pakistan	2	6	16	5	16	18	7	9	15
Philippines	—	—	1	—	—	2	2	2	1
Tajikistan	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Turkey	27	14	14	7	19	10	6	12	16
Uzbekistan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Yemen	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
OIELS									
Bahrain	2	1	—	1	4	2	5	1	2
Ethiopia	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Georgia	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
India	7	4	6	5	6	3	3	4	4
Israel	—	—	1	1	1	—	2	4	5
Jordan	—	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	1
Kenya	—	2	—	3	2	3	3	1	3
Kyrgyzstan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Oman	5	5	4	5	6	9	7	2	8
Pakistan	—	1	1	1	—	1	3	1	—
Philippines	2	—	1	5	2	1	2	2	2
Tajikistan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Turkey	7	5	4	5	9	12	3	3	5
Uzbekistan	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Yemen	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—

All relevant export licence applications are rigorously assessed on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time and taking account of other relevant factors.

Departmental Energy Use

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated *(a)* level and *(b)* cost of energy use in her Department and associated agencies was in each year since 1997; what proportion of energy was generated from renewable sources; and if she will make a statement. [65952]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 2 July 2002, *Official Report,* columns 245–46W, by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Rural Affairs.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Management Committee for the Control and Production of Substances that deplete the Ozone Layer is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68556]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The next meeting of the Management Committee established under Article 18 of EC Regulation 2037–2000 on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is scheduled for 18 and 19 September 2002. Places per EU member state at this committee are limited so the UK delegates to the meeting represent the interests of the Scottish Executive. As with other committees of this type, the Department consults the Scottish Executive and the other devolved Administrations on the UK line.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the Implementation of the Directive on the Incineration of Hazardous Waste is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68560]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

There have been no meetings of such a committee. None is now likely, since that directive (94/67/EC) has been superseded by Directive 2000/76/EC on the incineration of waste and is to be repealed from 28 December 2005.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the application of the regulation authorising voluntary participation by undertakings in the industrial sector in a Community eco-management and audit scheme is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68562]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 23 and October 24 this year. The European Commission has not yet circulated a final agenda.

As all foreign policy issues are non devolved, relations with the European Union are the responsibility of the Parliament and Government of the United Kingdom, as member state.

The UK is represented at the committee by DEFRA and accompanied by a representative from the designated Competent Body for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Representatives from the Scottish Executive have not attended. Other Departments and devolved Administrations are consulted prior to meetings of the committee on matters that are of direct interest to them. The Competent Body liaises with each of the devolved Administrations on routine matters concerning the operation of the scheme within the UK.

We actively support EMAS, whose aims are to encourage organisations to commit to legal compliance and continuous improvement in their environmental performance and to publish an environmental statement. The scheme was set up in 1993 by EU Regulation 1836–93 and became fully operational in April 1995. The regulation was revised in 2001 by Regulation 761–2001 which among other things widened participation from industrial sites to all forms of organisation. To register for EMAS an organisation must have its environmental management system verified and its environmental statement validated by an independent and accredited "verifier". The Competent Body for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland maintains a public register of participants together with information about the scheme at www.emas.org.uk. Similar information at the EU level is also held on the European Commission's website at http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/emas/.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the Implementation of the Directive on Concerning Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68559]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

There is no committee of that precise title. However, the European Commission has convened since 1998 five annual meetings of an 'Expert Group' on integrated pollution prevention and control (IPPC) in relation to the 1996 directive concerning that subject. The most recent meeting was in February this year and the next is expected, although not yet scheduled, in the early part of 2003. Members of the Scottish Executive have not so far attended, although they would be welcome to join officials of the Department in doing so.

Directives (Trade Barriers)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of motor vehicles and their trailers is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66420]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

No date has yet been fixed for the next meeting of this committee but we expect it to be held in the autumn. Officials from my Department represent the UK on the committee as policy responsibility for motor vehicle and trailer technical standards is a reserved matter.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of Directives on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in the Sector of Agricultural and Forestry Tractors is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66419]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

No date has yet been fixed for the next meeting of this committee. Officials from my Department represent the UK on this committee as policy responsibility for agricultural and forestry tractor technical standards is a reserved matter.

Health and Safety

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to improve corporate attitudes to health and safety. [69173]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government and the Health and Safety Commission will continue to pursue measures, launched in 2001 to implement key aspects of the Revitalising Health and Safety strategy, aimed at promoting greater corporate responsibility for health and safety. These include voluntary measures to improve the reporting of the management of health and safety by top companies from the current level of 50 per cent. and increase board and directors' responsibility for, and involvement in, managing the risks to occupational health and safety.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of magistrates court cases were adjourned in each year since 1992 *(a)* in total, *(b)* through non-attendance of witnesses and *(c)* through non-attendance of defendants. [68221]

Yvette Cooper: This information is not available. Data on adjourned cases in magistrates courts were not collected on a national basis (England and Wales) until April of this year. The first quarterly figures will be available later this year. Figures from the pilot scheme which ran for three months in nine magistrates courts committee areas (April to June 2001) show that out of a total of 6,213 trials, 1,176 were logged as adjourned trials. 338 (29 per cent.) of these adjourned trials were caused when the witnesses (prosecution and defence) failed to attend and 260 (22 per cent.) were adjourned due to the non-attendance of the defendants.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the estimated cost was of cases adjourned in magistrates courts in each year since 1992. [68222]

Yvette Cooper: This information is not available. Data on adjourned cases in magistrates courts did not start to be collected on a national basis (England and Wales) until April of this year. This new collection exercise started as a result of the National Audit Office report in December 1999 which identified that over £41 million a year was wasted on cracked and ineffective hearings. Pilot work was then undertaken and a scheme developed with the Crown Prosecution Service and other criminal justice agencies before the full national data collection scheme started in April 2002. The first quarterly figures are due to be available later this year.

Fines

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of fine-defaulters on income support and income-related jobseeker's allowance were subject to three or more attachment of benefit orders for any period since 1990 for which figures are available. [65124]

Yvette Cooper: This information is currently not collected centrally but we are examining whether it would be possible by research or sampling to estimate the data requested, as well as new ways to collect information on defendant means.

Union Jack

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Government will introduce legislation to ensure that it is always lawful to display the Union Jack. [68049]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government see no need to introduce such legislation. There are no restrictions under the general law on the display of the Union Flag on land in England and Wales other than those imposed by the provisions of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 and the Trade Marks Act 1994, which relate to the reproduction of flags in trade marks. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport issues guidance, in consultation with the Lord Chamberlain's Office, as to the days The Queen has approved for flags to be flown from Government buildings.

British ships are entitled to fly the Red Ensign, which includes a Union Flag in the corner. This is internationally recognised at sea as the flag of a British ship.

Judge Hutton

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to the answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 610W, when she will make her final decision about the conduct of Judge Hutton; and if she will make a statement. [69131]

Yvette Cooper: The Lord Chancellor has now received his officials' report about the conduct of Judge Hutton, who was alleged to have fallen asleep in court last December. He is considering the contents and expects to make a public statement about his final decision shortly.

Public Inquiries

Mr. Randall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what her policy is on using 0870 telephone numbers for inquiries by the public to the Department and its agencies. [66203]

Ms Rosie Winterton: None of the telephone lines made available by the Lord Chancellor's Department for public inquiry currently use 0870 telephone numbers.

Contact Orders

Ms Shipley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what evidence she has received from *(a)* Women's Aid, *(b)* the NSPCC and *(c)* other children's organisations regarding unsupervised contact; and will she make a statement. [68214]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have received information from the Women's Aid Federation of England, the NSPCC, Barnardos and NCH on unsupervised contact. Specifically I have received information in which it is alleged that 15 children have been killed during unsupervised contact. I have undertaken to investigate these cases in partnership with the Home Office and Department of Health.

E-voting

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people voted by *(a)* text-mail in the Sheffield area and *(b)* e-mail, telephone and mobile in St. Albans; and what plans there are to extend e-voting to other parts of the UK. [68118]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

In the three wards in Sheffield where the electoral pilot scheme was conducted in the May 2002 local election, 1,327 people voted by SMS text message. In addition, 2,833 people used the internet to vote, 61 people used electronic kiosks, 912 people used postal votes and 7,978 voted in conventional polling stations.

In the two wards in St. Albans where the electoral pilot scheme took place, 825 people voted using the internet and 744 voted by telephone (landline or mobile). In addition, 377 used postal votes and 1,095 people voted at electronic kiosks in polling stations or a local supermarket.

We intend in September to issue a prospectus inviting local authorities to participate in further pilot schemes in the May 2003 elections. Our prospectus will take account of the Electoral Commission's formal evaluation of each of the May 2002 electoral pilot schemes, which will be presented to the Deputy Prime Minister shortly.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Members' Pensions

Mr. Forth: To ask the President of the Council, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) on 7 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 74W, on Members' pensions, when the statutory instrument to give effect to the recommendations of the SSRB will be tabled. [70293]

Mr. Robin Cook: In July of last year the House voted to increase the accrual rate of the parliamentary pension from one-fiftieth to one-fortieth. The Government did not accept the proposal in the resolution that all the cost should fall on the Exchequer. I therefore announced on 7 May that I had referred the cost of this improvement to the SSRB.

The SSRB has now reported. In brief, they recommend that the cost of the faster accrual rate, which is estimated at 5.1 per cent. of pay, should in the short-term be split with Members contributing 3 per cent. and the Exchequer contributing 2.1 per cent. The SSRB further recommends that this additional Exchequer contribution should be taken into account in subsequent reviews of MPs pay so that eventually the full cost of the accrual rate is borne by MPs.

The Government accept these recommendations of the SSRB. I am therefore today laying an Order giving effect to the new accrual rate and also to other recommendations of the SSRB which the House approved last July.

There are two remaining issues, whether survivor pensions should be extended to unmarried adult dependants and whether survivor pensions should continue if a spouse remarries. It is the Government's policy that neither the cost of extending pensions to surviving adult dependants, nor that of the SSRB recommendation to pay pensions to surviving spouses for life, should fall on the taxpayer. Following the vote last year, the trustees of the pension scheme were asked to consider how these proposals could best be implemented at no cost to the Exchequer. The trustees only reported on 5 July. There has not therefore been sufficient notice for the Government to reach a view on these proposals and whether they do protect the taxpayer against any additional cost. I expect to bring forward proposals to the House in the autumn. Changes will be backdated to today's date.

The new contribution rate for Members will be 9 per cent. of pay. The statutory instrument provides that contracting into the new accrual rate will be optional for existing members of the scheme.

I hope this sensible compromise will be welcome. I believe it fairly recognises the decline in the average length of service of MPs, which has had the effect that only a handful of Members now achieve the maximum pension entitlement.

CABINET OFFICE

Software

Brian White: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69318]

Mr. Alexander: It is planned to publish the policy on the use of open source software within the UK Government in summer 2002. The Cabinet Office will implement this policy. A draft version of the policy went out to consultation between December 2001 and March 2002 and is available for viewing on Govtalk (www.govtalk.gov.uk). There are no statistics currently available on the percentage of open source software use in the Cabinet Office.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sentencing

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to strengthen the guidelines for judges for sentencing criminals. [57414]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* Sentencing is a matter for the judiciary. A review of the Sentencing Framework was established by the Home Secretary on 16 May 2000 and published its proposals on 5 July 2001. The review was asked to consider what principles should guide sentencing decisions and what type of disposal should be made available to the courts so as more effectively to reduce re-offending. Public consultation ended formally on 31 October 2001.

One of the recommendations of the review is for the creation of new, codified guidelines for the use of discretion in all criminal courts, and the establishment of a new body to draft the guidelines and be responsible for monitoring their application.

The Government are considering the options for taking this recommendation forward and will set out final proposals in a White Paper due for publication shortly.

Violent Crimes

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many violent crimes were committed in each police authority area in each *(a)* month and *(b)* year since 2000; and if he will make a statement. [66614]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* The available figures for recorded crime relate to quarter years from the beginning of 2000 to the end of March 2001, and are given in the table.

It should be noted that recorded violent crime is subject to changes in reporting and recording. For example, the 2001 British Crime Survey found that, over England and Wales as a whole, reporting to the police of common assault rose from 29 per cent. in 1999 to 39 per cent. in the year 2000. Also, the British Crime Survey has shown that, in England and Wales as a whole, the number of common assaults recorded in the survey decreased by 14 per cent. between the 1999 and 2000 calendar years, whereas common assaults recorded by the police increased by an estimated 9 per cent.

From April 2002 the Home Office has started collecting recorded crime data from the police on a monthly basis. These data will be made available in due course, although the format and frequency of publication has yet to be decided.

Number of violent crimes[1] recorded by police force area by quarter, from January 2000 to March 2001; with 2000–01 total

Police force area	*January 2000 to March 2000*	*April 2000 to June 2000*	*July 2000 to September 2000*	*October 2000 to December 2000*	*January 2001 to March 2001*	*April 2000 to[2] March 2001*
Avon and Somerset	4,973	4,576	4,583	5,246	4,666	19,071
Bedfordshire	1,477	1,583	1,548	1,540	1,675	6,346
Cambridgeshire	1,661	1,926	1,869	1,730	1,894	7,419
Cheshire	1,592	1,584	1,646	1,538	1,722	6,490
Cleveland	1,151	1,087	1,013	1,023	1,107	4,230
Cumbria	1,227	1,243	1,012	1,111	1,048	4,414
Derbyshire	2,690	2,936	2,627	2,572	2,401	10,536
Devon and Cornwall	3,350	3,352	3,677	3,233	3,093	13,355
Dorset	1,096	1,191	1,294	1,086	1,024	4,595
Durham	1,343	1,473	1,486	1,325	1,365	5,649
Essex[3]	1,853	3,303	3,152	2,918	2,859	12,232
Gloucestershire	1,239	1,418	1,440	1,463	1,388	5,709
Greater Manchester	12,278	13,650	12,964	12,511	12,799	51,924
Hampshire	4,452	4,692	4,859	5,102	4,627	19,280
Hertfordshire[3]	1,121	1,394	1,388	1,301	1,307	5,390
Humberside	2,430	2,567	2,812	2,829	2,582	10,790
Kent	3,473	4,172	4,028	3,765	3,131	15,096
Lancashire	2,734	2,877	3,236	3,845	3,912	13,870
Leicestershire	3,086	3,115	3,215	2,937	3,135	12,402
Lincolnshire	962	1,040	1,090	1,075	1,010	4,215
London, City of	138	150	159	162	134	605
Merseyside	4,515	4,794	4,920	4,966	4,562	19,242
Metropolitan police[3]	50,408	52,544	51,708	49,905	50,870	205,027
Norfolk	1,583	1,632	1,718	1,617	1,504	6,471
Northamptonshire	1,469	1,479	1,498	1,501	1,573	6,051
Northumbria	4,194	3,933	3,777	3,617	3,907	15,234
North Yorkshire	1,337	1,425	1,356	1,289	1,303	5,373
Nottinghamshire	4,491	4,622	4,297	4,362	4,560	17,841
South Yorkshire	2,338	2,360	2,514	2,646	2,557	10,077
Staffordshire	4,408	4,448	4,604	4,648	4,893	18,593
Suffolk	1,402	1,839	1,880	1,493	1,781	6,993
Surrey[3]	1,458	2,268	2,333	2,156	2,257	9,014
Sussex	4,550	5,112	5,461	4,391	4,541	19,505
Thames Valley	2,090	4,427	4,450	4,480	4,598	17,955
Warwickshire	646	696	687	770	965	3,118
West Mercia	2,268	2,216	2,053	1,904	2,592	8,765
West Midlands	13,673	15,303	15,669	15,513	15,812	62,297
West Yorkshire	5,426	5,582	5,611	5,571	5,572	22,336
Wiltshire	1,120	1,245	1,311	1,287	1,199	5,042
Dyfed-Powys	1,371	1,444	1,578	1,342	1,387	5,751

Number of violent crimes[1] recorded by police force area by quarter, from January 2000 to March 2001; with 2000–01 total

Police force area	January 2000 to March 2000	April 2000 to June 2000	July 2000 to September 2000	October 2000 to December 2000	January 2001 to March 2001	April 2000 to[2] March 2001
Gwent	3,545	3,954	3,891	3,855	3,182	14,882
North Wales	1,545	1,610	1,485	1,384	1,448	5,927
South Wales	3,441	3,378	3,643	3,544	3,697	14,262
England and Wales total	172,604	185,640	185,542	180,553	181,639	733,374

[1] Violent crimes comprise offences of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery.

[2] Financial year total.

[3] Some Metropolitan police areas were transferred to Surrey, Essex or Hertfordshire on 1 April 2000.

Drugs

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were *(a)* found guilty, *(b)* cautioned and *(c)* imprisoned for drugs offences in respect of (i) cannabis, (ii) amphetamines, (iii) LSD, (iv) cocaine, (v) ecstasy, (vi) heroin and (vii) crack in each year since 1981; [66667]

(2) how many drugs seizures there were by the police and Her Majesty's Customs of *(a)* cannabis, *(b)* amphetamines, *(c)* LSD, *(d)* cocaine, *(e)* ecstasy, *(f)* heroin and *(g)* crack in each year since 1981; [66661]

(3) what quantities of *(a)* cannabis, *(b)* amphetamines, *(c)* LSD, *(d)* cocaine, *(e)* ecstasy, *(f)* heroin and *(g)* crack were seized by the police and by Her Majesty's Customs in each year since 1981. [66666]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information requested on the number of drug seizures and the quantities seized by the police and Her Majesty's Customs is given in the Supplementary Tables volume of the annual Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics, United Kingdom". Information on people cautioned or found guilty (including custodial sentences) of drug offences is contained in the main publication volume. Copies of these volumes, together with the Area Tables volume, are available in the Library.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in the United Kingdom aged *(a)* 34 years and younger and *(b)* 35 years and older are estimated to have taken (i) cannabis, (ii) amphetamines, (iii) LSD, (iv) cocaine, (v) ecstasy, (vi) heroin and (vii) crack. [66665]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The most up-to-date estimates currently available are from the 2000 British Crime Survey. Data are only available for England and Wales.

Table 1: Estimates of the number of 16 to 34-year-olds having ever used various drugs in their lifetime, in England and Wales in 2000

	Best estimate	Lower estimate	Higher estimate
Cannabis	5,526,000	5,305,000	5,746,000
Amphetamines	2,624,000	2,807,000	2,451,000
LSD	1,345,000	1,216,000	1,486,000
Cocaine	1,217,000	1,094,000	1,352,000
Ecstasy	1,427,000	1,294,000	1,571,000
Heroin	206,000	157,000	269,000
Crack	247,000	193,000	315,000

Table 2: Estimates of the number of 35 to 59-year-olds having ever used various drugs in their lifetime, in England and Wales in 2000

	Best estimate	Lower estimate	Higher estimate
Cannabis	3,208,000	3,035,000	3,390,000
Amphetamines	1,047,000	943,000	1,161,000
LSD	489,000	419,000	570,000
Cocaine	385,000	323,000	458,000
Ecstasy	154,000	116,000	203,000
Heroin	93,000	65,000	132,000
Crack	71,000	47,000	107,000

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department succeeded in reducing access to drugs for those aged between 5 and 16 years between 1998 and 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [66290]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* Results from the 2001 Survey of Drug use, Smoking, and Drinking among school children aged 11 to 15 years in England (published in a Statistical Press Notice by Department of Health on 15 March 2002) show that 42 per cent. have ever been offered at least one or more drugs.

A revised method of measuring the prevalence of drug use was introduced in 2001 and the questions used in 2001 provide new estimates of drug use and are not strictly comparable with results from previous years. The results from previous surveys are 34 per cent. in 1998, 35 per cent. in 1999, and 35 per cent. in 2000.

Information regarding younger children is not available centrally.

Overstayers

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 498W, to the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer), how many applications have been made under the regularisation scheme for overstayers; how many applicants have had their cases decided; how many cases are *(a)* under consideration and *(b)* awaiting action; and how many applicants have had their cases refused. [65239]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* A total of 17,120 applications were received for consideration under the Regularisation Scheme for Overstayers. During the last financial year (2001–02) a sift of the cases yielded a total of 1,288 easily identifiable grants under existing policy concessions. During the current financial year significantly more caseworking staff and resources are being devoted to the more detailed consideration of the remaining cases. To date 341 further grants have been identified together with 111 refusals. This leaves 15,380 cases to be decided. Of these 10,895 cases are currently awaiting consideration in Integrated Casework Directorate (North). Work is also under way to validate the status of the remaining 4,485 cases, which are currently being dealt with in other areas of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND). Of all the applications received, 1,629 applications have been granted.

The intention is to complete consideration of all outstanding cases by April 2003.

Yarl's Wood Fire

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who took the decision not to install sprinklers at Yarl's Wood; and on what advice that decision was based. [68634]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* The Minister responsible at the time made the decision based upon advice from a number of different expert sources.

Crime and Disorder Partnerships

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 102W, on crime and disorder partnerships, what sanctions he can impose if the police do not discuss with their local partners significant changes in policing practice which might affect how the partnership delivers its crime and disorder reduction strategy. [67778]

Mr. Denham: Each police force is required under section 96 of the Police Act 1996 to obtain the views of the community on policing in that force area and their co-operation in crime prevention. The police authority for that area is responsible for making arrangements for this in consultation with the chief officer. If it appears to the Secretary of State that these arrangements are inadequate, he may ask for a report. Having considered that report, he can require the arrangements to be reviewed and a further report submitted.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 further places a statutory requirement on the police and the local authority jointly to develop and implement a strategy for tackling crime and disorder. There are no specific sanctions under the 1998 Act but this does not preclude Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary from examining and, if necessary, criticising the police if they fail to work effectively with other agencies.

The Local Government Act 1998 places a duty on police authorities, as best value authorities, to ensure continuous improvement by undertaking reviews of all the service's functions. All best value reviews must follow a process of challenge, compare, compete and consult. Any best value review which focuses on performance in service delivery to the public will therefore include consulting the users of the service. Police authorities publish information about best value reviews completed in the previous year and projected for the coming year in their annual Performance Plans.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children seeking asylum have arrived in the United Kingdom in the last five years. [67609]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that reliable information on the entry routes of asylum seekers, including when asylum seekers first enter the United Kingdom, is not available. Information on the numbers of unaccompanied children who applied at port and in-country during the last five years available, is given in the table.

Unaccompanied[1,2,3] children aged 17 or under applying for asylum in the United Kingdom, 1996 to 2000

Year of application	*Applied at port*	*Applied in-country*	*Total*
1996	477	154	631
1997	671	431	1,102
1998	1,083	1,954	3,037
1999	1,498	1,851	3,349
2000[4]	1,394	1,339	2,733

[1] Unaccompanied at the point of their arrival and not known to be joining.

[2] May exclude some cases lodged at local enforcement centres.

[3] Figures exclude disputed age cases.

[4] Provisional figures.

Corresponding data for 2001 will be published in the annual statistics bulletin 'Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2001' on 31 July, available from the Library or via the RDS website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Reliable information on the number of children who have entered the United Kingdom as asylum seekers, accompanied by an adult, could only be obtained by examination of individual case records at disproportionate cost.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons applied for political asylum in 2001; how many of those applicants came to the UK from France; and how many of the asylum seekers who came to the UK via France in 2001 had first applied for asylum in France. [69273]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional figures show that in 2001, 71,700 principal applicants applied for asylum in the United Kingdom. Including dependants, the number of applicants was estimated to be 88,300.

I regret that reliable information on the entry routes of asylum seekers from their country of origin to the United Kingdom, or on whether applicants have previously applied for asylum outside the United Kingdom, is not available. In 2001 over a third (36 per cent.) of applications were made at United Kingdom ports, while most applications (64 per cent.) were made in country.

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are living in the Greater London area. [68440]

Beverley Hughes: The information is not available in the form requested. We currently only have statistics on the number of asylum seekers supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

As at the end of March 2002 the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) supported in NASS accommodation in London was 1,870, and the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) receiving subsistence only support in London was 21,370[1].

Statistics on the number of asylum seekers supported by NASS in each region are available on the Home Office's Immigration and Asylum Statistics website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Figures exclude cases where the asylum seeker's support has been ceased.

Asylum seekers are only allocated accommodation in London in exceptional circumstances i.e. medical reasons.

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what European countries his Department are in discussions with to ensure there is co-operation in relation to asylum procedures being followed by the United Kingdom. [68442]

Beverley Hughes: We are in discussion with all European Union states on a broad range of measures designed to establish minimum standards for asylum procedures and policies across the European Union. The European Council in Seville set a timetable for their completion by the end of 2003. This includes negotiations on a revised proposal concerning asylum procedures within the European Union.

The United Kingdom will continue to play a leading role in the process through active participation in negotiations with other member states. We have done so already with regard to adopted measures, such as the directive establishing minimum standards for temporary protection or where a general approach has been agreed, as is presently the case for the reception conditions directive.

In addition, we co-operate with other member states in procedural terms in order to implement the Dublin Convention to determine the state responsible for examining an application for asylum. Although unable to accede to the Dublin Convention such co-operation has also extended to Norway and Iceland since 1 April 2001, as a result of a separate agreement between those countries and the European Union member states to apply the Dublin Convention criteria.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the proportion of asylum claimants who lose contact with his Department; what research this estimate is based upon; and if he will make a statement. [68075]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that the information requested is not available and no such estimate has been made. Asylum applicants do not always inform the Immigration Service prior to leaving the United Kingdom. We are making improvements in the area of contact management as detailed in the current Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill. This states that those in the proposed accommodation centres may be required to report on a daily basis within the accommodation centre. We will seek to maintain contact with those asylum seekers who are dispersed. Those who do not require National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation will also be required to report at the NASS address, at reporting centres or at police stations attended by staff from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. During the induction process asylum seekers will be advised of their obligations to notify any change of address and to report as required. Provision of support will be made conditional on asylum seekers reporting as required.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the research paper published by South Bank university in June on "Maintaining Contact: What Happens after Detained Asylum Seekers get Bail". [68206]

Beverley Hughes: We welcome the contribution the research conducted by South Bank university makes to the on-going debate about the use of immigration detention powers. We are aware of its conclusions and currently studying the whole report.

We are making improvements in the area of contact management as detailed in the current Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill. This states that those in the proposed accommodation centres may be required to report on a daily basis within the accommodation centre. We will seek to maintain contact with those asylum seekers who are dispersed. Those who do not require National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation will also be required to report at the NASS address, at reporting centres or at police stations attended by staff from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. During the induction process asylum seekers will be advised of their obligations to notify any change of address and to report as required. Provision of support will be made conditional on asylum seekers reporting as required.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of asylum seekers detained and subsequently released on bail lost contact with his Department's authorities in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [68077]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column 444W, on asylum seekers, when the study was commissioned; and if he will publish its conclusions. [68800]

Beverley Hughes: A study to review methods used in different countries to attempt to estimate the size of their illegally resident populations was commissioned by the Home Office in January of this year. This work will assess the applicability of those methods to the United Kingdom context. The study is still on-going and will be published later this year.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated cost to public funds is of the failure to achieve the target to increase to

85 per cent. the percentage of appealed asylum decisions applied by the Immigration Appellate Authority at Adjudicator level. [68796]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Witnesses

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research since 1992 has been conducted into interviews with *(a)* witnesses and *(b)* vulnerable witnesses; who conducted the research; and when it was published. [67654]

Hilary Benn: In 1995 the Home Office published a report entitled "Videotaping Children's Evidence: An Evaluation" by Graham Davies, Clare Wilson, Rebecca Mitchell and John Milsom.

It published a further report in 2001 entitled "National Evaluation of the PEACE Investigative Interviewing Course" by Colin Clarke and Rebecca Milne. This covers the interviewing of suspects as well as witnesses and victims of crime. It includes a literature review.

The Home Office commissioned BMRB, an independent research company, to produce the "Witness Satisfaction Survey 2000" and the "Vulnerable Witness Survey". Both were published in 2001.

Air Weapons

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of armed response team call outs were to *(a)* air weapons and *(b)* replica weapons incidents in the last 12 months. [67832]

Mr. Denham: I am advised by the Association of Chief Police Officers that this information could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Pensions

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for each police authority in England, the amount spent on pensions in *(a)* each of the last three years and *(b)* the current year, and the percentage each figure represents of that authority's total revenue spending in each of those years. [67659]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table. Figures for 2002–03 are not yet available.

Police net pensions costs in England 1999–2000 to 2001–02

	1999–2000 Net pensions		*2000–01 Net pensions*		*2001–02 Net pensions*	
Police	*Costs £000*	*As a proportion of net expenditure Percentage*	*Costs £000*	*As a proportion of net expenditure Percentage*	*Costs £000*	*As a proportion of net expenditure Percentage*
Avon and Somerset	25,869	14.84	29,290	16.16	31,585	16.65
Bedfordshire	7,595	11.94	8,292	12.48	9,078	12.84
Cambridgeshire	9,255	12.33	10,285	12.98	10,674	12.69
Cheshire	12,539	11.07	12,895	11.25	16,599	13.63
City of London	8,211	14.19	9,052	15.36	9,578	16.05
Cleveland	12,339	14.47	12,993	15.18	13,478	14.85
Cumbria	9,577	14.78	10,361	15.37	10,765	15.25
Derbyshire	11,969	11.34	14,862	13.41	14,473	12.37
Devon and Cornwall	25,008	14.29	25,535	13.96	28,313	14.81
Dorset	11,183	14.53	11,343	14.00	12,728	15.05
Durham	10,070	12.64	10,327	12.04	10,991	12.54
Essex	20,162	12.00	20,853	11.30	25,211	12.94
Gloucestershire	8,808	13.40	9,755	14.20	10,301	14.26
Greater Manchester	59,681	15.92	60,833	15.21	66,792	16.25
Hampshire	22,675	11.48	21,960	10.84	24,537	11.35
Hertfordshire	11,721	11.22	11,854	9.80	12,308	9.51
Humberside	15,189	13.33	16,963	14.15	18,572	14.49
Kent	21,132	11.35	24,134	12.50	26,759	12.94
Lancashire	23,004	12.64	25,753	13.54	28,568	14.35
Leicestershire	12,376	11.54	13,342	12.11	14,706	12.63
Lincolnshire	10,634	15.33	11,821	16.25	12,820	16.86
Merseyside	38,079	15.33	40,246	15.65	43,542	16.43
Metropolitan	215,071	11.70	243,511	13.25	254,767	12.87
Norfolk	10,141	11.63	11,570	12.64	12,354	12.55
North Yorkshire	12,901	16.50	13,657	16.31	14,757	17.19
Northamptonshire	7,425	10.74	8,706	11.91	8,484	10.83
Northumbria	29,508	13.87	31,170	14.27	32,794	14.41
Nottinghamshire	17,847	13.79	18,346	13.66	21,457	15.30
South Yorkshire	18,791	10.68	19,165	10.59	22,805	12.18
Staffordshire	19,796	15.59	18,843	14.84	22,866	17.03
Suffolk	10,479	14.86	10,029	13.54	11,130	14.34
Surrey	10,331	10.32	11,191	9.32	11,605	9.48
Sussex	24,538	14.82	27,578	15.99	29,312	15.94
Thames Valley	20,961	9.23	23,169	9.78	24,971	9.90
Warwickshire	7,983	14.47	9,000	15.25	10,300	16.51

Police net pensions costs in England 1999–2000 to 2001–02

Police	*1999–2000 Net pensions* Costs £000	*1999–2000 Net pensions* As a proportion of net expenditure Percentage	*2000–01 Net pensions* Costs £000	*2000–01 Net pensions* As a proportion of net expenditure Percentage	*2001–02 Net pensions* Costs £000	*2001–02 Net pensions* As a proportion of net expenditure Percentage
West Mercia	13,603	12.21	16,665	13.26	18,183	13.65
West Midlands	43,192	11.32	46,959	11.89	51,133	12.45
West Yorkshire	40,259	14.07	43,114	14.18	47,066	14.98
Wiltshire	7,776	11.14	8,000	11.11	9,272	12.26
Total	897,678	12.69	973,422	13.26	1,055,634	13.63

Note:
Actual expenditure for 1999–2000, estimates for 2000–01 and 2001–02.
Source:
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (police statistics)

Street Crime

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on requiring the prioritisation of street crime by chief constables; and what statutory power he has to require them to prioritise specified categories of crime. [68022]

Mr. Denham: Finding effective means of tackling street crime is a Government priority following a rapid rise in such offences in recent years (including a 13 per cent. rise in robbery offences in the year up to March 2001). To achieve this, the Government are working jointly with the 10 forces which account for over 80 per cent. of such offences, and who have agreed collectively to make street crime a priority as part of this multi-agency initiative.

Chief Constables

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statutory power he has to require chief constables to attend meetings with him on crime. [68023]

Mr. Denham: The Secretary of State does not have, nor does he need, a statutory power to have a meeting with a chief constable to discuss any topic. The Secretary of State may, however, require a chief constable to submit a report to him on any matter concerned with the policing of the chief constable's police area under s.44 of the Police Act 1996.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statutory power the Government have to require the dismissal of chief constables; and what powers he exercised in respect of the dismissal of the chief constable of Sussex. [68020]

Mr. Denham: Under current provision, a police authority has the powers to call upon its chief constable to retire in the interests of the effectiveness and efficiency of the force. Exercise of that power is subject to the safeguard of requiring the approval of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has a reserve power to direct the police authority to take action; where he does so, he is required by statute to appoint an inquiry to consider the circumstances. These powers are contained in sections 11 and 42 respectively of the Police Act 1996, which carried forward powers established under the Police Act 1964.

The Police Reform Bill, currently before Parliament, contains clauses designed to improve these existing powers, and to make them operate more effectively for all concerned.

The Secretary of State did not exercise his formal powers under the 1996 Act in relation to the chief constable of Sussex.

Crime Reports

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statutory power the Government have to require the submission of *(a)* weekly and *(b)* other reports on specified categories of crime to (i) the Prime Minister, (ii) his Department and (iii) other Ministers. [68021]

Mr. Denham: Although sections 45(1) and 58 of the Police Act 1996 enable the Secretary of State to require a range of information to be provided by chief officers, the use of this power has not been considered. The Street Crime Initiative benefits from the committed participation of the 10 police forces involved.

Work Permits

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits were granted in 2001, broken down by category. [67927]

Beverley Hughes: A total of 117,386 work permit applications were approved in 2001. The table provides a breakdown by category:

Type of permit	*Number issued*
Business and commercial	105,016
Sports and entertainments	5,532
Training and work experience	6,838
Total	117,386

Chief Constable, Leicestershire

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Chief Constable of Leicestershire in his official capacity. [68015]

Mr. Denham: I last met the Chief Constable of Leicestershire Constabulary on Monday 28 January 2002 when I visited his force.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measurements are used to assess antisocial behaviour; and what targets are given for the police to tackle antisocial behaviour. [66891]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* Antisocial behaviour is assessed using information from the British crime survey which provides a measure of the public's perception of the level of disorder and antisocial behaviour in their area. The police's contribution to the overall target of reducing antisocial behaviour is measured using Best Value Performance Indicator 122, feelings of public safety. This is a subset of the British crime survey data broken down by police force area.

Criminal Records Bureau

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent communications he has had with voluntary organisations and non-governmental bodies with regard to the cost of Criminal Records Bureau disclosure information checks for volunteers; and if he will make a statement. [69130]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) on 10 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 1079W.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is towards granting leave to remain on compassionate grounds to people who are receiving NHS treatment for HIV or AIDS. [69017]

Beverley Hughes: The United Kingdom is a signatory to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), now given effect in domestic law by the Human Rights Act 1998. Policy for cases involving HIV/AIDS or other serious medical conditions was recently reviewed to ensure compatibility with the Human Rights Act and recent developments in ECHR case law; to ensure a consistent approach in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) towards cases involving consideration of medical issues; and to take account of developments in drug therapy used to treat HIV/AIDS.

The new policy came into effect for applications made on or after 19 December 2000, and applies to all cases where an applicant is seeking to stay in the United Kingdom because they are suffering from a serious medical condition. Under this policy the United Kingdom's obligations under Article 3 of the ECHR will be engaged where the following requirements are satisfied:

(i) the United Kingdom can be regarded as having assumed responsibility for a person's care; and

(ii) there is credible medical evidence that return, due to a complete absence of medical treatment in the country concerned, would significantly reduce the applicant's life expectancy; and

(iii) subject them to acute physical and mental suffering.

All applications to stay on medical grounds are given careful individual consideration of their particular circumstances.

Crime (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* burglaries, *(b)* violent crimes, *(c)* drug offences and *(d)* thefts of vehicles were recorded by the Wandsworth police division of the Metropolitan police in each of the last five years; and what the total numbers of crimes committed in the division were in those years. [68443]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Numbers of recorded crimes for some offences and groups of offences have been collected centrally by police basic command unit since 1 April 1999, and the data for the years ending March 2000 and 2001 have been published in Home Office Statistical Bulletins 12–00 and 12–01.

The available details for the Wandsworth Basic Command Unit (BCU) are as follows:

Number of recorded crimes

Offence/offence group	*Year ending March 2000*	*Year ending March 2001*
Domestic burglary	3,379	2,716
Violent crime[1]	6,798	6,580
Theft of vehicle	1,835	1,955

[1] Violent crime consists of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery.

The figures for the year ending March 2002 are due to be published on 12 July 2002.

Passports

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the reasons underlying his decision to abolish passport exit controls in 1997. [68083]

Beverley Hughes: A detailed study of the residual embarkation control was undertaken against the background of the decision by the Government in 1994, to abolish checks on passengers travelling from sea ports and small airports to continental destinations.

The residual embarkation control did not contribute to the overall effectiveness of the immigration control but was resource intensive. In 1997, 8 per cent. of the Immigration Service's operational duties were deployed to the operation of the embarkation control. After a lengthy period of consultation with interested parties, the Government decided in March 1998 to replace the routine presence of immigration officers with a new arrangement where the control could be set up at short notice in response to specific operational need. This was combined with an increased use of closed circuit television technology.

The reconfiguration of the embarkation control means that the Immigration Service can now use its resources more flexibly, concentrating on crucial areas such as clandestine entry, removals and secure border control.

UK Airwave Project

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the UK Airwave Project, stating *(a)* its agreed cost, *(b)* how cost overruns will be dealt with and *(c)* how many suppliers will be able to supply operating equipment to the programme over its lifetime. [68067]

Mr. Denham: The projected cost of the Airwave framework arrangement over the next 19 years is £2.9 billion, at 1999 prices.

Airwave is a private finance initiative (PFI), hence the main contractor, O2, will be required to compensate police authorities for delays or failures on their part that undermine the service or cause additional expense to forces. The contract is structured such that additional costs will only fall to the public sector if changes are made to the agreed specification within the framework arrangement at the request of the contracting authority, the Police Information Technology Organisation.

It is very difficult to estimate how many suppliers of the relevant equipment there are likely to be over the lifetime of Airwave. In such a market, and with a contract of this length, it is important to maintain an open and competitive supply of equipment, which offers the opportunity to realise future technological advances.

Operation Lancet

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the Independent Review of Operation Lancet. [70608]

Mr. Denham: I am publishing today Operation Lancet—A Case Study Review report. Copies are available in the Library.

The review contains helpful recommendations about good practice in the investigation of police misconduct and lessons which can be applied in the development of the new police complaints system. We will ensure that the recommendations are taken forward as part of that work.

I am very grateful to William Taylor and the review team for completing up the review following the sad death of its initial leader, Sir John Hoddinott.

Emergency Calls

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of 999 calls was not answered within 10 seconds in each police force in each year from 1990–91 to 2001–02, ranked from best to worst performance for the most recent year for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [66887]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The information requested is available from 1993 for all police force areas in England and Wales. A complete set of 2001–02 data is not yet complete, but it will be published in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's annual report in October, a copy of which is placed in the Library. The information which is available is set out in the table. City of London calls are handled by the Metropolitan police. Police authorities set their own target times for responses to 999 calls and these are given in the table.

999 calls, 1993 to 2000–01

	1993		*1994–95*		*1995–96*		*1996–97*	
Force	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*
England and Wales	13	83	13	87	12	87	12	84
Durham	10	95	10	95	10	98	10	97
West Midlands	15	96	15	97	15	95	15	97
Humberside	15	68	15	80	15	80	15	77
Gloucestershire	10	77	15	84	15	86	15	93
Derbyshire	30	—	15	—	15	88	15	90
Suffolk	10	97	10	99	10	89	10	88
Gwent	6	98	6	99	6	99	6	99
West Mercia	10	95	10	93	10	89	10	92
Cumbria	15	99	15	99	10	99	10	99
Essex	10	88	10	85	10	90	10	91
North Wales	10	86	10	88	10	84	10	82
Norfolk	10	86	10	84	10	86	10	73
Warwickshire	15	89	15	92	15	90	15	75
Dyfed-Powys	10	95	10	95	10	96	10	—
Nottinghamshire	20	82	20	87	20	92	15	90
Leicestershire	15	84	15	80	15	69	15	76
Sussex	10	80	10	90	10	91	10	93
Avon and Somerset	10	86	10	88	10	91	10	86
South Yorkshire	30	82	30	84	20	80	20	78
Greater Manchester	15	94	15	96	15	94	15	78
Northamptonshire	10	—	10	93	10	95	10	97
Cambridgeshire	12	94	12	74	12	80	12	82
Merseyside	6	78	6	77	6	57	10	70
Wiltshire	15	93	15	92	15	93	15	88
Thames Valley	—	—	10	86	10	88	10	92
West Yorkshire	15	77	15	79	15	78	15	77
Lancashire	10	91	10	87	10	93	10	96
Surrey	15	85	15	95	15	87	15	93
Cheshire	15	—	15	91	15	94	15	92
South Wales	10	87	10	81	10	80	10	84
North Yorkshire	5	66	5	78	5	78	5	82
Bedfordshire	10	84	10	86	15	86	15	85
Kent	10	92	10	95	10	89	10	92
Hertfordshire	20	96	20	95	20	92	10	76
Devon and Cornwall	10	89	10	89	10	84	10	93
Metropolitan police	15	86	15	81	15	89	15	90
Staffordshire	15	92	15	93	15	93	15	92
Dorset	10	84	10	85	10	82	10	77

999 calls, 1993 to 2000–01

	1993		*1994–95*		*1995–96*		*1996–97*	
Force	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*
Northumbria	15	85	15	91	15	94	15	93
Cleveland	20	97	20	98	15	96	10	91
Hampshire	10	85	10	88	10	86	10	—
City of London	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Lincolnshire	10	92	10	93	10	95	10	95

[1] Data collected by the Metropolitan Police Service

	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*	
Force	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*	*Target time (seconds)*	*Percentage of 999 calls answered within target time*
England and Wales	12	89	11	89	12	84	11	87
Durham	10	97	10	98	10	98	10	99
West Midlands	15	98	15	98	15	97	15	97
Humberside	15	86	15	96	15	94	15	96
Gloucestershire	12	97	12	94	12	95	12	95
Derbyshire	15	94	10	86	10	92	10	94
Suffolk	10	96	10	98	10	95	10	94
Gwent	6	99	6	98	6	93	6	93
West Mercia	10	92	10	94	10	93	10	92
Cumbria	10	98	10	99	10	98	10	92
Essex	10	79	10	78	15	86	15	92
North Wales	10	86	10	89	10	88	10	92
Norfolk	10	70	10	87	10	93	10	91
Warwickshire	15	77	15	82	15	91	15	91
Dyfed-Powys	8	92	8	80	8	92	8	91
Nottinghamshire	15	88	15	89	15	90	15	90
Leicestershire	15	86	15	92	15	90	15	90
Sussex	10	89	10	86	10	81	10	90
Avon and Somerset	10	86	10	92	10	90	10	90
South Yorkshire	15	77	15	86	15	88	15	90
Greater Manchester	15	81	15	86	15	85	15	90
Northamptonshire	10	97	10	98	10	95	10	89
Cambridgeshire	12	82	12	81	12	90	12	89
Merseyside	10	87	10	90	10	90	10	89
Wiltshire	15	89	15	96	15	96	10	88
Thames Valley	10	92	10	92	10	89	10	88
West Yorkshire	15	89	15	90	15	86	15	86
Lancashire	10	95	10	93	10	92	10	86
Surrey	15	95	15	94	15	86	15	86
Cheshire	14	90	14	89	15	84	15	86
South Wales	10	81	10	80	10	79	10	86
North Yorkshire	5	87	5	88	5	86	5	85
Bedfordshire	15	79	15	77	15	77	15	85
Kent	10	92	10	93	10	95	10	85
Hertfordshire	10	84	10	72	10	83	10	84
Devon and Cornwall	10	93	10	93	10	86	10	84
Metropolitan police	15	91	15	87	15	71	15	84
Staffordshire	15	89	15	87	15	79	10	83
Dorset	10	76	10	78	10	81	10	80
Northumbria	15	89	10	86	10	80	10	79
Cleveland	10	95	10	95	10	92	10	79
Hampshire	10	83	10	83	10	80	10	74
City of London	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Lincolnshire	10	95	10	95	10	92	10	n/a

[1] Data collected by the Metropolitan Police Service

Robbery

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the most recent estimated annual cost to *(a)* public funds, *(b)* private citizens and *(c)* insurance companies is of robbery. [68790]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 11 July 2002]*: The most recent publicly available estimates of annual costs of robbery were published in Home Office Research Study 217 "The Economic and Social Costs of Crime" in December 2000.

(a) The annual cost to public funds of robbery

The estimated annual cost of robbery to public funds in 1999–2000 is £770 million. This figure includes costs to both the criminal justice system and health services.

(b) The annual cost to private citizens of robbery

The estimated annual cost of robbery to private citizens in 1999–2000 is £1.5 billion. This includes the value of property stolen and the physical impact of the crime on the victim.

(c) The annual cost to insurance companies of robbery

> A rough estimate of the annual insurance administration costs associated with robbery is £19.6 million. Insurance administration costs are harder to estimate than costs to public funds or private citizens.

Mentoring Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the mentoring projects in receipt of grant funding over the next three years. [68793]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The information requested is given in the table.

£

Name of organisation	*Amount of grant 2002–03*	*Amount of grant 2003–04*	*Amount of grant 2004–05*
African Family Support Centre	40,112	46,312	NIL
Age Concern Cambridgeshire	49,999	53,138	NIL
Age Concern Ledbury and District	19,498	20,044	NIL
Big Brothers and Sisters	200,000	200,000	NIL
Bishop Creighton House	24,421	28,604	NIL
Bolton Lads and Girls	57,400	59,398	NIL
Carlisle Mencap	12,028	12,392	NIL
Chance (UK) Ltd	47,089	48,548	NIL
Dines Green Streets Ahead	29,649	30,505	NIL
Enfield Business Education Partnership	21,500	22,800	NIL
Family Service Units	26,117	32,139	NIL
FOCUS	38,712	38,712	NIL
Fun in Action for Children	30,000	40,000	NIL
Home Start Bournemouth	24,500	25,113	NIL
Home Start Nottingham	31,368	32,151	NIL
Home Start Sittingbourne and Sheppey	12,715	13,034	NIL
Home Start Stoke-on-Trent	35,811	37,259	NIL
Home Start Wisbech	28,250	29,500	NIL
Lambeth Wellcare	30,157	31,033	NIL
NECA Services Ltd	50,319	51,384	NIL
Northorpe Hall Trust	35,661	37,490	NIL
One to One Youth Befriending	58,187	60,916	NIL
PACT Community Projects	30,938	31,711	NIL
RAMP- The Renewal Programme	48,435	65,622	NIL
REACH	43,900	46,425	NIL
RPS Rainer	51,413	54,413	NIL
SCOPE (Ref M45[illegible]	50,000	50,000	NIL
SCOPE (Ref [illegible]	44,803	45,982	NIL
Second City, Second Chance	16,125	15,430	NIL
SENSE	16,830	26,775	NIL
Somerset Y[illegible] Voluntary Network	45,000	45,000	NIL
SOVA	49,447	49,797	NIL
Swindon Education Business Partnership	27,000	27,000	NIL
Terence Higgins Trust	25,337	26,096	NIL
The Befriending Network	40,000	42,500	NIL
The Kings Cross Project	28,354	29,204	NIL
The Leonard Cheshire Foundation	58,369	59,267	NIL
The London Connection	12,161	NIL	NIL
Those on the Margins of Society	50,000	50,000	NIL
National Mentoring Network[1]	600,000	601,500	NIL

[1] (Mentor points) 25 per cent. costs funded by Department for Education and Skills.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects *(a)* the project establishing national recruitment standards for the police service to be completed and *(b)* the national recruitment standards to come into effect for all police services in the United Kingdom; and *(c)* what representations have been made by the Durham Constabulary regarding their eyesight criteria to the project establishing national recruitment standards. [68315]

Mr. Denham: The information is as follows:

(a) it is the intention to complete the work of the National Recruitment Standards Project during 2003.

(b) national recruitment standards on eligibility criteria and fitness have already been introduced.

New job related medical and eyesight standards are expected by the end of 2002.

A new recruitment application form for the police service is expected to be introduced by January 2003.

A new national assessment and selection process for police recruits is due to be phased in later this year and over 2003.

(c) The Home Office provides guidance to forces on eyesight standards. The present guidance for eyesight is that candidates' unaided vision must be 6/24 or better in either eye and aided vision must be 6/12 or better in either eye, 6/6 or better binocularly. All forces were asked to apply the standards consistently pending the outcome of the research to develop new job-related eyesight standards.

Durham Constabulary informed the Home Office of a pilot scheme which they had run. During this pilot they had lowered their unaided vision to 6/60, provided candidates could achieve a vision of 6/6 with the assistance of contact lenses. This had allowed them to recruit seven additional people. However, in order to co-operate with the Home Office request, the pilot scheme was terminated on 1 August 2001.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the target for the number of referrals to drug treatment through drug treatment and testing orders in 2000–01 was not met. [68784]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTOs) were rolled out from October 2000. No formal target for the number of Orders was set for 2000–01. 2001–02 was the first full year of their operation and saw 4,835 DTTOs—over 80 per cent. of our target of approximately 6,000. Some DTTO programmes were affected by local implementation problems, mainly relating to treatment capacity to handle referrals. Arrangements are now in place to ensure any difficulties are closely monitored and dealt with as they arise. Our ability to maintain effective operation is enhanced by the good working arrangements in place with the Department of Health and the National Treatment Agency to address problems quickly. The rate of the upward trend in DTTOs indicates that we should be on track to meet our target of 6,000 Orders in 2002–03.

PSA Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he will announce the outcome of his review of the PSA target to reduce the availability of class A drugs by 25 per cent. by 2005 and by 50 per cent. by 2008; [68797]

(2) when the review of the target for the proportion of people under 25 using class A drugs will be completed. [68781]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The hon. Member for Buckingham has asked two questions about the drugs strategy targets. The reply to each question is the same and I am therefore responding to them together.

The review of drugs strategy targets forms part of the current spending review (SR2002).

Mrs. Zakir Ahmadyar

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will inquire into the case of Mrs. Zakir Ahmadyar to deal with the questions raised in the letter of 27 June, from the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable); and if he will make a statement; [69426]

(2) when he will reply to the letter of 27 June from the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on Mrs. Zakir Ahmadyar; and if he will make a statement. [69425]

Beverley Hughes: The issues summarised in the hon. Member's letter of 27 June were the subject of communications between the hon. Member and my Private Office between 7 June and 17 June.

My letter to him dated 8 July sought to apologise for those aspects of the handling of this case that were not satisfactory, as well as to explain the reasons for my decision.

I am meeting the hon. Member soon to discuss this matter further.

Speeding Convictions

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers have lost their licence to drive as a result of speeding convictions in each of the last five years. [64213]

Mr. Denham: Information for England and Wales for the years 1996 to 2000 (latest available) is given in the table.

Disqualifications imposed	*Number of offences*
1996	9,587
1997	10,061
1998	12,215
1999	12,050
2000	11,283

Police Standards Unit

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Police Standards Unit was established; how much it cost in 2001; how many staff it employs; and what its remit is. [62347]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The first members of the Police Standards Unit started in post on 9 July 2001. The staffing compliment of the Unit is 29. To date £709,000 has been spent on the Unit.

The Unit's terms of reference, as set out in the White Paper 'Policing a New Century: a blueprint for reform' are as follows:

The Standards Unit exists to deliver the Government's commitment to raise standards and improve operational performance in the police and in crime reduction generally in order to maintain and enhance public satisfaction with policing in their area.

Its core objective will be to identify and disseminate best practice in the prevention, detection and apprehension of crime in all forces in order to reduce crime and disorder as well as the fear of crime.

The Unit will:

Work with forces and Basic Command Units (BCUs) to ensure the most effective use of intelligence, detection and successful prosecution procedures;

Identify BCUs or forces performing below their best based on Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) reports, statistical information, or particular cases of concern;

Engage directly with the BCU or force to establish the nature of the problems, the extent to which best practice may be lacking, and the remedial action required;

Engage similarly with other local agencies where it is apparent that they are contributing significantly to the causes of poor performance;

Identify where, in exceptional circumstances, combined cross-cutting measures engaging other agencies are required to focus on and achieve early change within a specific geographic area or BCU boundary;

Draw validated best practice from HMIC, National Police Training, the Crime Reduction College and other agencies, spread its use through local engagement, and identify for professional evaluation any new examples or techniques it comes across;

Have a capacity to provide short-term funding to support the remedial action it has identified and which could not otherwise be undertaken;

Identify cases in which the Home Secretary should consider the use of powers under the Police Act (1996), the Local Government Act (1999), or other relevant legislation;

Identify issues which raise policy, technical or legal questions for the Home Office to address.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the work carried out to date by Dr Kevin Bond in respect of the Police Standards Unit. [61181]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Dr. Kevin Bond took up post on 7 January 2002. Under his leadership, the Police Standards Unit (PSU) is now developing a number of projects related to police performance management and the identification and dissemination of good practice in key areas.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions; [49136]

(2) what the cost was to his Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated. [49094]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend, Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Cook) on 17 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 929W. The Home Office answered 4,067 written questions in 2001, at an approximate cost of £516,195.

Imported Labour

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many documented cases his Department have received from the Professional Contractors Group relating to employers in the technology sector importing labour from abroad in an effort to reduce employment costs; and what steps are being taken by his Department to ensure that the work permit system is not abused in this way. [66015]

Beverley Hughes: In March 2002, the Professional Contractors Group (PCG) provided Work Permits UK (WPUK) Allegations team a dossier of 85 cases (relating to 61 separate employers) specifically relating to the replacement of United Kingdom Information Technology contractors with lower paid employees from overseas.

Most of the cases are complaints about employment policies of employers, rather than specific allegations of abuse of the work permit arrangements, and as such it does not warrant any further action by Work Permits (UK). 12 cases contained specific information about abuse of the work permit arrangements, and these are being pursued by WPUK. A list has been returned to PCG setting out whether cases continue to be investigated.

The overall aim of the work permit arrangements is to strike the right balance between enabling employers to recruit or transfer skilled people from abroad while safeguarding the interests of the resident work force. However, the arrangements cover only those vacancies which are to be filled by an employee working on a PAYE basis, and as such, there are safeguards to ensure that resident workers willing to work on such a basis are not disadvantaged.

In the cases provided by the PCG, it is apparent that the majority refer to a 'contractor' being replaced by an incoming 'employee' (under PAYE). It is a commercial decision by the employer whether they offer employment terms on a self-employment, contractual or direct PAYE basis.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many work permit applications have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused by Work Permits UK on the grounds of shortage occupations criteria in each month since June 2001; [66014]

(2) how many permit applications Work Permits UK have approved on the grounds of shortage occupations criteria when the specific skills possessed have been described as IT skills. [66012]

Beverley Hughes: Work Permits UK currently operates shortage occupation lists in respect of the Information Technology (IT), health care and engineering sectors and a fourth list in respect of other miscellaneous shortage occupations, which currently includes actuaries, Civil Aviation Authority licensed aircraft engineers, teachers and veterinary surgeons.

The following table sets out the number of work permits approved and refused in each month in the period between 1 June 2001 and 30 June 2002 under shortage occupations criteria and those approved specifically under shortage occupations criteria in the IT sector in the same period:

	Work permit applications under shortage occupation criteria (all)		*Work permit applications under shortage occupation criteria (IT sector)*	
	Approved	*Refused*	*Approved*	*Refused*
2001				
June	4,381	72	1,139	30
July	4,979	120	1,126	27
August	4,420	99	1,197	32
September	3,617	117	1,142	55
October	4,428	97	1,315	40
November	3,975	95	1,188	28
December	3,393	142	926	33
2002				
January	4,392	211	1,476	72
February	4,082	303	1,543	99
March	4,617	321	1,596	148
April	4,439	253	1,270	149
May	4,606	255	1,136	122
June	3,916	150	834	71
Total	55,245	2,235	15,888	906

Civil Contingencies Secretariat

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 619W, on the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, if he will list *(a)* the members of the civil contingencies committee and *(b)* what reports it has made in the last five years; and if he will place the reports in the Library. [66064]

Mr. Blunkett: The only standing member of the Civil Contingencies Committee is the Chairman, the (Home Secretary). Others, including Her Majesty's Treasury and the devolved Administrations, are invited to attend, depending on the contingency.

The Terms of Reference of the Civil Contingencies Committee are:

> "to co-ordinate the preparation of plans for ensuring in an emergency the supplies and services essential to the life of the community; to keep these plans under regular review; and to supervise their prompt and effective implementation in specific emergencies".

The Civil Contingencies Committee has therefore made no reports in the last five years. However, I did update parliamentary colleagues by letter on this work on 1 November last year.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 30 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton to Mrs. Vida Obiri. [66210]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 12 July 2002.

Pathology

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the *(a)* functions and *(b)* terms of reference of the Policy Advisory Board for Forensic Pathology are; how, and for how long, the board was appointed; what the membership is and who the officers of the board are; how it is serviced; and how many times it has met in the last year; [41103]

(2) how many pathologists are approved for working with the police and coroners on suspicious deaths; what qualifications are required for a pathologist to be approved; in what circumstances a pathologist may be removed from the approved list; on how many occasions the disciplinary tribunal has met in the past 10 years; and what the results were of its deliberations. [41104]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* The Police Advisory Board for Forensic Pathology, advises the Home Secretary on forensic pathology matters with particular reference to the national aspects of forensic pathology services in England and Wales, such as appointment and accreditation, quality assurance, training and Research and Development. The Board was set up by the then Home Secretary in 1990; there was no specified time limit to the Board.

A copy of the Terms of Reference of the Board and a list of the current numbers has been placed in the Library.

Officers of the Board are Anthony Whitehead (chair) who is also the head of Science and Technology Unit (STU) in the Home Office and Trevor Rothwell (Secretary). The Board is served by the two officers and STU. The Board meets annually. It last met in January 2001.

There are currently 48 pathologists on the Home Office Register of Forensic Pathologist approved for working with the police on suspicious deaths.

Before applying to be put on the register pathologists must:

have a medical degree

be a member of the Royal College of Pathologists

have at least six months experience at an approved centre for training.

In addition they must also have either

the Diploma in Forensic Pathologists (through the Royal College of Pathologists)

or

the Diploma in Medical Jurisprudence (through the Society of Apothecaries).

A pathologist not found to be performing appropriately in the first two years of his or her time as a Registrant, can be removed from the Register as the initial approval is time limited. Otherwise pathologists can be removed from the register by invoking the Board's Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures. Suspension or removal from the register is dependent on the outcome of a hearing of a Disciplinary Tribunal.

In the last 10 years a disciplinary tribunal has been convened once. This Tribunal recused itself before the completion of the hearing.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52835]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The information requested is in the table.

DWP Library subscription to Newspapers as of 26 April 2002—cost showing annual average figure

Newspaper	*Number*	*Cost (£)*
Monday-Friday		
Financial Times	27	6,480.00
Times	21	2,016.00
Daily Telegraph	18	2,160.00
Guardian	19	2,280.00
Independent	18	2,160.00
Daily Mail	13	1,248.00
The Express	8	672.00
Daily Mirror	12	844.80
Sun	11	792.00
Eastern Daily Press	1	240.00
Le-Monde	1	240.00
Daily Star	7	504.00
Daily Record	3	252.00
Evening Standard	8	756.00
Evening Standard—News extra	10	840.00
Scotsman	4	480.00
Morning Star	2	288.00
Liverpool Echo	2	480.00
Manchester Evening News	1	240.00
Total number and (annual costs)	186	22,972.80
Saturday		
Times	2	67.20
Daily Telegraph	2	—
Guardian	2	96.00
Independent	2	86.40
Daily Mail	1	28.80
The Express	2	24.00
Daily Mirror	1	21.60
Sun	1	19.20
Le-Monde	1	48.00
Daily Star	1	16.80
Daily Record	1	19.20
Scotsman	1	48.00
Total number and (annual costs)	17	475.20
Sunday		
Sunday FT	8	384.00
Sunday Times	2	115.20
Sunday Telegraph	2	96.00
Sunday Observer	2	115.20
Sunday Independent	2	115.20
Mail on Sunday	1	52.80
The Sunday Express	1	48.00
Sunday Mirror	1	48.00
News of the World	1	31.20
Sunday People	1	31.20
Sunday Post	—	31.20
Scotland on Sunday	—	38.40
Sunday Business	1	24.00
Total number and (annual costs)	22	1,130.40

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which Ministers and officials had meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the Engineering Employees Federation, and *(c)* the Engineering Marine Training Authority during the last year; who they met; and what the subjects and outcomes of their discussions were. [62208]

Maria Eagle: During the last year Ministers and officials have met with all three of these organisations on a number of occasions.

New Deal

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many New Deal schemes *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers have visited since 7 June 2001; and if he will make a statement. [63447]

Maria Eagle: Since 7 June 2001, Ministers in this Department have made over 30 visits to New Deal schemes and related events.

Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was paid to carers through benefits and services in each of the last five years. [65138]

Maria Eagle: The requested information about benefit expenditure on carers is in the table.

Carers can also be supported by services provided by local authorities and the NHS. In addition, local authorities in England were given powers to make direct payments to carers and people with parental responsibility for disabled children in April 2001. Information about the amount of money disbursed as direct payments was not collected centrally. Expenditure on such payments made by local authorities in Scotland and Wales are matters for the Scottish Executive and for the National Assembly for Wales, respectively.

Benefit expenditure in Great Britain on carers—1996–97 to 2001–02

	£ million
1996–97	18,300
1997–98	16,950
1998–99	18,650
1999–2000	19,400
2000–01	19,400

Notes:

Based on estimates from the Family Resources Survey (FRS), 1996–97 to 2000–01, applied to actual benefit expenditure.

1. Figures are estimates based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS), applied to outturn expenditure on each benefit. 2000–01 is the latest year for which data are available.

2. Carers are those who give help on an informal basis, not as part of a paid job. This includes children who care for others.

3. On the FRS survey, what should be counted as care is not prescriptively defined. Respondents are asked about care between household members, and about care given to those outside the household.

4. The estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors that control for region, council tax band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.

5. Benefit receipt on the FRS is based on self-assessment and therefore may be subject to misreporting.

6. Figures are rounded to the nearest £50 million.

The carer status is a result of what the respondent says rather than the application on an objective definition.

Castle Award

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department has applied for a Castle award for equal pay. [65223]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions has not applied for a Castle award for equal pay. The Department is however, fully committed to ensuring that equal pay remains a priority. To achieve this objective, an equal pay review was commissioned in 2001–02, undertaken by independent consultants. The review was completed earlier this year and the findings are currently under consideration.

Attendance Allowance (Scotland)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions where he allocated the money for attendance allowance in Scotland following the decision of the Scottish Executive to implement free personal care for older people. [67151]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 633W.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with reference to the section of his Department's guidance note on replying to written parliamentary questions requiring parliamentary questions to be answered fully, and pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 22 January 2002, *Official Report* column 808W, for what reason the information requested on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 872–73W, was not held in the format requested. [66475]

Mr. McCartney: The answer to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 808W, was in response to his question regarding the cost of administering child benefit and working families tax credit. The estimated cost of administering child benefit was taken from the 1998–99 financial year. The estimated cost of administering working families tax credit was provided by Inland Revenue.

The answer provided on 10 June was in response to the hon. Member's request for a variety of individual items, including some sub-components of retirement benefit. The estimated cost of administering benefits is not maintained at such a detailed level. Consequently, it was not possible to provide a reply covering every item listed.

However, in an attempt to be as helpful as possible, the answer given on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 872–73W also explained that the Department for Work and Pensions now accounts for its administrative and programme expenditure in accordance with its key objectives, which are published in the Department's

Public Service Agreement (PSA), and the individual Requests for Resources (RfRs), which are published in the Department's Main Estimate.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many written parliamentary questions to his Department have been tabled in each month since May 1997. [68481]

Maria Eagle: Such information as is available is in the tables.

Month	*Written questions tabled*
2001	
June	108
July	291
September	9
October	371
November	579
December	294
2002	
January	432
February	337
March	453
April	249
May	239
June	240

Parliamentary session	*Written questions tabled*
2000–01	1,097
1999–2000	2,593
1998–99	1,980
1997–98	3,384

Appeals

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 941–42W, on appeals, *(a)* how many appeals were heard, *(b)* how many appeals were found in favour of the appellant and *(c)* what percentage of appeals were found in favour of the appellant, in each of the last four years for (i) attendance allowance, (ii) disability living allowance and (iii) incapacity benefit. [66837]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Neil Ward, Chief Executive of the Appeals Service. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Neil Ward to Mr. Paul Holmes, dated 11 July 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your recent parliamentary questions on the subject of appeals against attendance allowance, disability living allowance; and, incapacity benefit. The available information is as follows:

Year (ending April)	*Case load as at 30 November (thousand)*	*Number of appeals cleared at hearing*	*Number of appeals found in favour of the appellant*	*Percentage of appeals found in favour of the appellant*
(i) Attendance Allowance				
2000	1,291.3	7,640	3,420	44.8
2001	1,295.4	10,830	5,030	46.4
(ii) Disability Living Allowance				
2000	2,197.7	62,815	30,090	47.9
2001	2,298.0	86,325	45,150	52.3
(iii) Incapacity Benefit				
2000	2,310.4	42,285	16,660	40.4
2001	2,342.9	33,910	14,185	41.8

Figures are not available prior to 2000, as a change in the method of recording the type of appeal in the Generic Appeals Processing System as part of the introduction of Decision Making and Appeals regulations resulted in certain benefits being mapped incorrectly.

I hope this is helpful.

Asperger's Syndrome

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to support and develop the work of Prospects, the employment scheme for people with Asperger's syndrome. [68190]

Maria Eagle: The Department has a contract with the National Autistic Society's Prospects service to develop and test ways of helping people with Asperger's syndrome into work.

This project provides us with a valuable opportunity to support a group of disabled people with entrenched problems resulting from their disabilities, and to learn about the provision of a specialist employment service for people with disabilities by a small voluntary organisation working in partnership with the public services.

Evaluation of the project will improve our knowledge of how to support people suffering from this condition and will help the National Autistic Society in further developing the service for its clients.

State Pension

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 19 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 407–08W, why the Government decided that the higher uprating of the basic state pension should apply to basic state pension increments from April 2002. [68607]

Mr. McCartney: The decision was taken in order for the increments to maintain their proportionate value.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many self-employed people receive the full basic State Pension; and what percentage of the total this is. [69196]

Mr. McCartney: We do not colle[illegible]nformation on the number of formerly self-employed p[illegible]le who have given up work and now receive a State P[illegible]ion.

The number of people worki[illegible]n a self-employed capacity and aged above State[illegible]nsion age (60 for women; 65 for men) is in the tab[illegible]

	Number
Females over the State Pension age	94,000
Males over the State Pension age	120,000
Total	214,000

Notes:

1. Figures in the table are from t[illegible]abour Force Survey—Winter 2001.

2. The latest total number of peo[illegible]in Great Britain in receipt of a State Pension is 10.3 million—S[illegible]ember 2001 administrative data.

The total of 214,000 rep[illegible]ents about 2 per cent. of the total number of people re[illegible]ving a State Pension.

Mr. Barnes: To ask th[illegible]ecretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportio[illegible] *(a)* men and *(b)* women had contributed to national i[illegible]rance for under 25 per cent. of the years required to re[illegible]e the full basic State Pension in the latest 12 months for[illegible]hich figures are available. [69197]

Mr. McCartney: [illegible]e information is not available in the format requested. [illegible]ch information as is available is in the table.

Percentage

	Proportion of single people and couples over State Pension age and receiving a State Retirement Pension 2000–01
All single pensioners and pensioner couples	
Pensioner couples	99
Single male pensioners	98
Single female pensioners	98
Total	98
Recently retired single pensioners and pensioner couples[1,2,3,4]	
Pensioner couples	98
Single male pensioners	96
Single female pensioners	94
Total	97

[1] It is possible to defer claiming State Pension for up to five years. Therefore, particularly among the recently retired pensioners, there will be people with entitlement to a State Pension who do not yet receive an income from their pension.

[2] These results are based on Table 8 of the Pensioners' Incomes Series 2000–01.

[3] Figures for Retirement Pension also include the other contributory benefits for the elderly, Widows' Benefits and Incapacity Benefit.

[4] Recently retired pensioner units are defined as: single women aged 60–64; single men aged 65–69; and couples in which the man is aged 65–69.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of *(a)* men and *(b)* women receive the full basic State Pension. [69198]

Mr. McCartney: The percentages of males and females who are entitled to a Basic State Pension and who receive the full basic State Pension are as set out in the table.

	Percentage of males and females who are entitled to a basic State Pension and who receive the full basic State Pension
Male	91
Female	83

Notes:

1. The figures are rounded to the nearest percentage point.

1. The figures are taken from administrative data on 30 September 2001.

2. Figures are for Great Britain.

3. The table includes everyone in receipt of a Category A, AB, ABL, B, BL, or D State Pension.

4. Full pension refers to people in receipt of the maximum amount of basic State Pension that applies to the category of pension they receive.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times the Child Support Agency has requested information from the Inland Revenue regarding the income of self-employed non-resident parents; and if he will make a statement. [69021]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 15 July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You have asked how many times the Child Support Agency has requested information from the Inland Revenue regarding the income of self employed non-resident parents.

In the year to 31st March 2002 the Child Support Agency issued 19,182 self-employed earnings enquiries to the Inland Revenue's Tax Information Distribution Office. In the immediately preceding year 9,121 enquiries were made.

I hope this is helpful.

Benefits (Promotion)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 5 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 629W, what the total cost was of advertising and promoting benefits in 2000–01, broken down by each campaign. [70069]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The total cost of advertising social security benefits in 2000–01 was £4.4 million. Production, distribution and other costs totalled a further £3 million.

The breakdown of spend is shown in the following table:

£

Campaign	*Advertising and media*	*Other costs*
Minimum Income Guarantee	3,365,000	176,000
Inherited SERPS	340,000	345,000
Winter Fuel Payments	616,000	294,000
Bereavement Benefits	155,000	90,000
Benefits information leaflets for customers and advisers—production and distribution	[1]—	2,132,419.

[1] Promoted through posters, exhibitions, conferences and the internet. Individual spends could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Taiwan

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support he has provided to the Government of Taiwan in support of Taiwan's application for observer status at the World Health Organisation. [65215]

Mr. Lammy: Taiwan's relationship to the World Health Organisation was discussed at the world health assembly general committee in May 2002. There was no consensus in the committee for the matter to be discussed in the main assembly session.

Foster Carers

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many foster carers there are in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* the North-east and *(c)* England; how many foster carers there were in each year from 1997 to 2001 in (i) Jarrow constituency, (ii) the North-east and (iii) England; and what his Department is doing to address the need for foster carers. [67041]

Jacqui Smith: There is no central statistical collection in this area. Foster carer data are collected through the training support grant (TSP), and this relates to approved foster carers. Data can be found in the table shown. Figures are available from 1998 only.

Foster carer recruitment is a very important area, in which a lot of work is being taken forward. The Department is currently undertaking a major review ("Choice Protects") of the commissioning of placements, with a special emphasis on foster care services—so that choice and stability of placements may be improved for children in care. Within this, we will be examining:

Role and status of foster carers;

Recruitment and retention;

What support services are required;

Best ways to reward foster carers;

The training needs of foster carers.

Details of the numbers of approved foster carers taken from the TSP application forms for the five years 1998–99 to 2002–03

Local authority names	*Directly contracted by local council*	*Contracted via Independent agency*	*Total number of foster carers*
1998–99			
LAs covered by Jarrow and Hebburn			
Gateshead	133	0	133
South Tyneside	142	0	142
North East			
Darlington	48	0	48
Durham	237	1	238
Gateshead	133	0	133
Hartlepool	72	1	73
Middlesbrough	110	0	110
Newcastle upon Tyne	230	0	230
North Tyneside	140	0	140
Northumberland	17	0	170
Redcar and Cleveland	70	0	70
South Tyneside	142	0	142
Sunderland	218	0	218
England totals	29,805	845	30,650
1999–2000			
LAs covered by Jarrow and Hebburn			
Gateshead	120	2	122
South Tyneside	142	0	142
North East			
Darlington	54	8	62
Durham	256	1	257
Gateshead	120	2	122
Hartlepool	69	3	72
Middlesbrough	70	2	72
Newcastle upon Tyne	203	25	228
North Tyneside	185	2	187
Northumberland	160	2	162
Redcar and Cleveland	65	0	65
South Tyneside	142	0	142
Sunderland	218	0	218
England totals	30,166	1,085	31,251
2000–01			
LAs covered by Jarrow and Hebburn			
Gateshead	120	0	120
South Tyneside	142	0	142
North East			
Darlington	59	7	66
Durham	215	0	215
Gateshead	120	0	120
Hartlepool	67	0	67
Middlesbrough	77	3	80
Newcastle upon tyne	270	37	307
North Tyneside	135	0	135
Northumberland	140	2	142
Redcar and Cleveland	70	0	70
South Tyneside	142	0	142
Sunderland	218	0	218
England totals	30,645	1,532	32,177
2001–02			
LAs covered by Jarrow and Hebburn			
Gateshead	130	0	130
South Tyneside	97	15	112
North East			
Darlington	49	12	61
Durham	215	0	215
Gateshead	130	0	130
Hartlepool	67	0	67
Middlesbrough	86	11	97
Newcastle upon Tyne	321	19	340
North Tyneside	140	0	140
Northumberland	172	2	174
Redcar and Cleveland	70	0	70
South Tyneside	97	15	112
Sunderland	238	0	238
England totals	30,342	2,023	32,365
2002–03			
LAs covered by Jarrow and Hebburn			
Gateshead	130	0	130
South Tyneside	61	0	61
North East			
Darlington	51	0	51
Durham	225	0	225
Gateshead	130	0	130
Hartlepool	54	1	55
Middlesbrough	99	9	108
Newcastle upon Tyne	290	28	318
North Tyneside	155	0	155
Northumberland	172	2	174
Redcar and Cleveland	61	0	61
South Tyneside	61	0	61
Sunderland	301	0	301
England totals	30,353	1,206	31,559

Details of the numbers of approved foster carers taken from the TSP application forms for the five years 1998–99 to 2002–03

Birth Statistics

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to address women's health issues regarding *(a)* premature birth, *(b)* still birth and *(c)* miscarriage. [67064]

Jacqui Smith: In order to improve the wellbeing of pregnant women and outcome for babies, the Department has:

Commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to issue clinical guidelines on:

- use of electronic fetal monitoring—this helps evaluation of fetal wellbeing in labour with the aim of reducing perinatal mortality and cerebral palsy of the newborn.
- induction of labour—which provides safe clinical practices to reduce perinatal mortality.
- use of Anti D prophylaxis for rhesus negative mothers—which helps prevent Haemolytic disease of the newborn (HDN) and still births.

Further guidelines are awaited on antenatal care and caesarean sections, both of which will further help reduce fetal risks.

Extended the Sure Start programme which helps families in disadvantaged areas to support to women in the antenatal period as well, since women in these areas are more likely to have still births, pre mature births and miscarriages.

Invested to increase the number of midwives to provide additional support throughout pregnancy and childbirth.

Commenced the development of a children's national service framework (NSF) including maternity services. The overarching aim for the NSF is to enable childbearing women, children and young people to develop healthy lifestyles. The NSF will set national standards of care to cover pre conception, antenatal and intra partum services.

Social Services

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to direct resources towards under-performing social service authorities. [67823]

Jacqui Smith: Poor performance will not be rewarded with additional resources. In four of the 10 councils rated as zero where we do not believe they have the capacity to improve by themselves, we are providing external assistance from the performance fund.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to add an ethnicity element to the foster care adjustment in the children's personal social services formula grant. [67821]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government (Mr. Raynsford) launched a consultation on options for the reform of the local government finance system on 8 July. This included options on possible changes to the foster care adjustment in the children's personal social services formula grant. One of the options includes an ethnicity element. No decisions have yet been taken and we would welcome representation from all interested parties.

Laming Report

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the Laming report has not been published; when and by what mechanism it will be published; and when he will respond to the report. [67779]

Jacqui Smith: Lord Laming continues to receive and to consider evidence, and intends to complete his report later this year. It will be published, following its receipt by the Secretaries of State for Health and the Home Department, and will be made widely available. We will respond to the report once its findings and recommendations has been considered.

Neonatal Intensive Care

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his policy is on the co-ordination of neonatal intensive care with the paediatric surgical sub-specialisation of *(a)* cleft lip and palate, *(b)* ophthalmology and *(c)* otolaryngology; [67662]

(2) what his policy is on establishing a set of national care standards for neonatal intensive care; [67671]

(3) what his policy is on the recruitment, retention and career progression of neonatal intensive care nurses; [67672]

(4) what assessment he makes of the staffing levels for doctors and nurses in neonatal intensive care; and what plans he has to increase these; [67667]

(5) how the needs of sick or premature new-born infants are categorised in the NHS; and what changes he proposes to make to these; [67668]

(6) what assessment he has made of the availability of capacity to meet demand in neonatal intensive care; [67675]

(7) what his policy is on the co-ordination of neonatal intensive care with the paediatric sub-specialisation of *(a)* cardiology, *(b)* neurosurgery, *(c)* neurology, *(d)* nephrology, *(e)* radiology, *(f)* hepatology, *(g)* gastroenterology, *(h)* endocrinology and *(i)* haematology; [67663]

(8) what arrangements he will make to build networks to facilitate and exchange information on research into neonatal intensive care; [67664]

(9) what assessment he makes of the impact of restrictions on hours of work for junior doctors on the provision of neonatal intensive care; [67673]

(10) what action he plans to make available statistics on types of treatment given and outcomes in neonatal intensive care other than mortality; [67674]

(11) what action he intends to take to improve the co-ordination between neonatal intensive care facilities and general maternity facilities in the NHS; [67669]

(12) what provisions are made in the NHS for parents of sick or premature new-born infants who require neonatal intensive care; [67670]

(13) what assessment he has made of the changes needed in the organisation of neonatal intensive care; and if he will make a statement. [67661]

Jacqui Smith: A review has been undertaken of provision for neonatal services which addresses the issues raised by the hon. Member. I have received a report following the review. This is currently under active consideration. I expect to determine the next steps in this process shortly.

Care Home Beds

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of nursing and care home beds in Surrey which have closed since June 2001. [68041]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not available centrally.

Prescription Charges

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to review the list of medical conditions exempt from prescription charges; [68071]

(2) whether the list of medical conditions exempt from prescription charges has been reviewed since 1998. [68072]

Mr. Lammy: The list of medical conditions conferring prescription charge exemption has not been reviewed since 1998 and we have no plans to do so. Our policy is to give priority to helping people who may have difficulty in paying charges, rather than extending the exemption arrangements to people with other medical conditions.

Young Disabled People

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken since 1997 to help remove barriers to young disabled people achieving an independent social life. [68181]

Jacqui Smith: The Government are committed to maximising support to disabled young people so that they have the same chance to succeed and participate in society as their non-disabled peers. As part of the Government's Quality Protects programme we have set national objectives to improve family support and inclusive sport and leisure services for disabled children and young people. We have earmarked £60 million over three years from the children's special grant—£15 million in 2001–02 and 2002–03 and £30 million in 2003–04. The 2001 national overview report of local authority's Quality Protects Management Action Plans shows that councils are improving services by providing more: family support; accessible after-school activities; supported access to leisure facilities; transport to facilities and specialist support workers. Through the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000, we have introduced direct payments for 16 and 17-year-old disabled young people. This will increase choice, flexibility and access to services of their choice.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance he gives to disabled people who are moving into adulthood. [68183]

Jacqui Smith: In "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century", issued in 2001, the Government set a national objective to improve transition services for young disabled people as they enter adulthood and in particular to ensure continuity of care and support. We have taken action to improve services in a number of ways:

Learning disability partnership boards have been asked to identify a member with lead responsibility for transition issues. Person-centred planning is being introduced for all young people moving from children's to adult's services by 2003.

The new Connexions personal advisers will identify disabled young people in their area and will work with the school and other relevant agencies to draw up the transition plans.

New guidance on improving multi-agency transition support for young disabled people leaving school has been included in the revised SEN Code of Practice.

For disabled young people leaving care, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 places a duty on councils to provide young people aged 16 and over in and leaving care with support.

Dermatology

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to fill vacant dermatology positions in the NHS; and what plans he has to increase the trainee posts in dermatology. [69517]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service vacancy survey collects information on the number of posts, which trusts are actively trying to fill which have been vacant for three months or more. As at 31 March 2002 there were 20 posts (6.0 per cent. vacancy rate) that had been vacant for three months or more in dermatology.

Increased vacancies are to be expected at a time when we are trying to dramatically increase the size of the work force. New investment enables NHS trusts to create new posts however there can be a delay in providing sufficient staff for all the posts. The number of consultants in dermatology increased from 343 in September 1999 to 387 in March 2002. This is an increase of 13 per cent.

In the short-term we are looking to boost the number of doctors through measures such as increasing progression through training, improved recruitment and retention measures, recruiting internationally and promoting flexible retirement. In the longer term we are substantially increasing the number of doctors in training.

As at 30 September 2001 there were 265 specialist registrars in dermatology in the NHS in England. These increases, together with existing specialist registrar training places are expected to result in a consultant expansion in dermatology of 47 per cent. by 2010.

Kosmed System

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the Kosmed system of treatment produced by Eumedic Ltd.; [66795]

(2) what plans he has to assess the Kosmed system of treatment produced by Eumedic Ltd. [66796]

Ms Blears *[holding answers 4 July 2002]:* None.

Child Welfare

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* intends to commission into the cost savings which could be achieved for the NHS relating to effective measures to prevent the physical and emotional abuse of children; [67951]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the mental health consequences and the costs to the NHS associated with mental health problems consequent upon the physical and emotional abuse of children. [67950]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answers 8 July 2002]:* No such research has been commissioned or is currently planned. Child and adolescent mental health services would be expected to assess the mental health problems of physically or emotionally abused children who are referred to them and to provide an appropriate service response.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement concerning his evaluation of the 24 CAMHS innovation projects. [68163]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Each child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) innovation project is required to submit an annual report, receive annual monitoring visits and be individually evaluated. These individual evaluations are now approaching completion. The Department is working with YoungMinds on an overall evaluation of the programme and this overview report is due to be published in autumn 2002. This report will be launched at a national conference as part of the overall dissemination plan for the CAMHS innovation programme.

Looked-after Children

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 240W, on looked-after children, if he will set out his definition of *(a)* children in care and *(b)* children looked-after; and if he will make a statement. [67175]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* Children in care are those who are being looked after by the local authority as the result of a care order made by the court under section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

Children looked after is a term used to include both those children defined in *(a)*, and those provided with care by a local authority and placed in accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act (voluntarily accommodated).

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have looked-after children status in *(a)* the Isle of Sheppey, *(b)* Kent and *(c)* England. [67703]

Jacqui Smith: At 31 March 2001 there were 58,900 looked-after children in England, and 1,770 in Kent. These figures exclude children who were accommodated under an agreed series of short-term placements.

Figures for the Isle of Sheppey are not available.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1229W, on examination results (children in care), how many of those children who obtained *(a)* no GCSEs and *(b)* fewer than five GCSE passes at grade A to C went on to take resits. [67623]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The Department's data on the educational qualifications of looked-after children does not separately identify those children who re-sat GCSE examinations.

Working Minds

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has evaluated the Working Minds programme. [67954]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* An evaluation of the 'mind out for mental health' campaign, including the Working Minds programme, has been undertaken by an independent research company. We are currently considering the findings of this evaluation. A summary of the results has been shared with campaign partners and stakeholders.

High Secure Hospitals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have moved from high secure hospitals to more appropriate accommodation since 1 April 2001. [68058]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* 238 patients considered to no longer require care and treatment in the high security hospitals have moved to more appropriate settings since 1 April 2001. This includes patients moving to other national health service or private hospital facilities, returning to prison or being discharged into the community.

Mycobacterium Bovis

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of mycobacterium bovis were found in humans in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [68506]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* Information provided by the Public Health Laboratory Service show the number of cases of mycobacterium bovis (bovine TB) in humans for 2000 was 28. Data for 2001 are still being collected.

Acute Capacity

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the funding given to the NHS in 2002–03 to expand acute capacity was used to pay for the consequential costs in social care. [68517]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* In 2002–03, health authorities received an average increase of 9.9 per cent. in their unified allocations. From this growth in funding it is for local organisations to decide how much to invest in the consequential costs in social care depending on local circumstances.

Henoch Schonlein Purpura

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children broken down by age, have been diagnosed with Henoch Schonlein Purpura in each of the last 10 years. [68932]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the questionnaire that is being sent to residents in care homes as part of the annual residents' report by the NCSC; and if he will make a statement on the cost of the questionnaire. [68776]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The National Care Standards Commission is consulting service users and representative organisations as part of its inspection process.

This is a considerable challenge to a new organisation, given the wide range of service users receiving care in care homes.

Service user feedback is essential to ensure that the Commission's approach is right and a range of survey material will be produced to meet different needs. One of the approaches currently being used is a simple feedback card with six 'tick box' questions. This is based on similar cards used in the past, although it is subject to review and change.

The pre-paid method of returning these cards is currently being costed.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what ring-fenced grants were made available to local authorities in financial year 2001–02. [68291]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The table shows what ring-fenced grants were made available to local authorities by the Department in the financial year 2001–02.

Grant	*£000*
AIDS Support Grant	16,500
Drugs and Alcohol Specific Grant	8,850
Mental Health Grant	149,443
Training Support Programme	47,500
Children's Services Grant	291,750
Secure Accommodation Grant	6,228
Promoting Independence Grant	296,000
Carers' Grant	70,000
Care Direct Grant	2,000
Deferred Payments Scheme	15,000
Improving Information Management Grant	3,000
Young People's Substance Misuse Planning Grant	4,500
Building Care Capacity Grant	100,000
Invest to Save Grant	1,330

Children's National Service Framework

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for the mental health component of the children's national service framework; and if he will make a statement. [68164]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The acute care module of the children's national service framework (NSF) will be published later this year. A timetable has yet to be finalised for publication of the rest of the children's NSF.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further meetings are planned in 2002 of the child and adolescent mental health working group of the children's national service framework. [68105]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The next meeting of the child and adolescent mental health working group of the children's national service framework will be held on 11 and 12 September.

Mental Health

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many inmates in British prisons were suffering from *(a)* severe and *(b)* other mental illness on the latest date for which figures are available; and how many there were in each of the previous six years. [67704]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health crisis resolution teams have all five required characteristics. [68133]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The numbers and configuration of crisis resolution teams are being monitored by the mental health mapping project. Data from autumn 2001 have recently become available. Copies of a mental health mapping atlas, which contains this information, have been deposited in the Library.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health crisis resolution teams provide a 24 hour service; and what proportion they represent of the total number of each team. [68132]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The numbers and configuration of crisis resolution teams are being monitored by the mental health mapping project. Data from autumn 2001 have recently become available. Copies of a mental health mapping atlas, which contains this information, have been deposited in the Library.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers have met Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions to discuss ways of helping those with mental health problems to find work. [68150]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 941W.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much extra money for child and adolescent mental health services is allocated for 2002–03 and each of the next three years. [68162]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* In 2002–03 we are investing a further £20 million in funding to local authorities via the child and adolescent mental health services mental health grant. This represents an increase of £5 million over the funding allocated in 2001–02. No decisions have been made on funding for the next three years.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent reports he has received concerning the involvement of churches in working with health and social services to promote mental health; and if he will make a statement as to his assessment of the effectiveness of such involvement. [68104]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Department has received no reports recently concerning involvement of churches in working with health and social services to promote mental health.

I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 679W, on the role of the church and mental health.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health assertive outreach teams have all seven required characteristics. [68131]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The numbers and configuration of assertive outreach teams are being monitored by the mental health mapping project. Data from autumn 2001 have recently become available. Copies of a mental health mapping atlas, which contains this information, have been deposited in the Library.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many crisis resolution teams for mental health there are in *(a)* Worcestershire, *(b)* County Durham and *(c)* Darlington. [68134]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* There are currently no crisis resolution teams operating in Worcestershire, County Durham or Darlington.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of assertive outreach teams provide a 24 hour on-call service available to service users known to the team. [68130]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The numbers and configuration of assertive outreach teams are being monitored by the mental health mapping project. Data from autumn 2001 have recently become available. Copies of a mental health mapping atlas, which contains this information, have been deposited in the Library.

Hospital Trust Boards

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his policy is on the *(a)* minimum and *(b)* maximum age requirement for appointment as members of hospital trust boards; [69354]

(2) if he will make a statement on the recommended retirement age for members of hospital trusts. [69355]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answers 12 July 2002]:* There is no minimum or maximum age for chairs or non-executive members of national health service boards. Candidates are appointed on their merits, and their age is not taken into account.

Medical/Dental Education

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether undergraduate and postgraduate medical and dental education programmes in Scotland include infection control and anti-microbial prescribing. [61318]

Mrs. McGuire *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

Both the Government and the Scottish Executive want to see good training in this area. On 25 June this year, the Executive made available £100,000 to promote and enhance undergraduate teaching in Scottish Medical Schools of issues relating to anti-microbial resistance.

Child Care

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance is given to parents to help with child care costs. [68255]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

Working parents, subject to the level of their income, may receive support through the child care tax credit element of the working families tax credit or the disabled person's tax credit for eligible child care costs. This offers help with up to 70 per cent. of costs up to £135 a week for one child or £200 a week for two or more children. Support is also available through various grants and access funds for parents studying further and higher education, for participants on the New Deals and those receiving job seekers allowance.

Students in higher education in England may be entitled to the HE child care grant, which provides—during term time and short vacations—an 85 per cent. contribution towards the costs of 'approved' care up to a maximum of £135 per week for one child and £200 per week for two or more children. In the long vacation a 70 per cent. rate applies. Students in further education can apply to colleges for funding from a ring fenced national FE child care support fund of £30 million in 2001–02. £25 million was available in 2000–01.

Lone parents participating in the New Deal for lone parents programme, can receive assistance with the costs of registered child care while attending job interviews, approved training or meetings with their personal adviser.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been allocated for the National Childcare Strategy; and what measures there are to monitor spending. [68253]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1998, £498 million has been allocated to Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) under the NCS. The bulk of the funding is paid quarterly in arrears, based on claims submitted by the relevant local authorities for expenditure in line with their approved plans.

Payments are offset against the funds allocated to each Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) and expenditure is monitored against the relevant targets in their agreed plans.

NCS questions for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland should be taken up with the appropriate assembly.

National Service Framework for Older People

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available to support *(a)* the National Service Framework for Older People and *(b)* the provision of chiropody services within the National Service Framework for Older People in the current financial year. [69406]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* By 2003–04, an extra £1.4 billion is being made available for the overall development of health and social services for older people, including resources to support the introduction of the national service framework for older people, which includes actions for the development of chiropody services.

The Government are making the biggest ever investment in the history of the national health service. There will be an annual average increase of 7.5 per cent. above inflation over the next five years 2003–04 to

2007–08. This is now the largest ever sustained increase in NHS funding and older people—the biggest users of the NHS, will be among the principal beneficiaries.

Free Personal Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to evaluate the implementation of free personal care; and whether the views of self-funding residents will be sought. [69553]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* The decision to make personal care free was taken by the Scottish Executive, and the evaluation of that policy will be a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Mid-Essex Hospital Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people *(a)* were waiting for in-patient treatment, *(b)* had been waiting for over 12 months for in-patient treatment and *(c)* had been waiting over 15 months for in-patient treatment, in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area in the last two months for which figures are available. [69029]

Mr. Lammy *[pursuant to his reply, 11 July 2002, c. 1208W]:* I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should read:

The latest available information on in-patients and day cases waiting for treatment at the Mid-Essex Hospital National Health Service Trust are shown in the table:

	End of April 2002	*End of May 2002*
For in-patient treatment and day case treatment	9,874	9,986
Waiting over 12 months	269	232
Waiting over 15 months	0	0

Source:

DHSC monthly fast track figures

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 16 July 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the correspondence, dated 17 January, from the hon. Member for Leominster, on behalf of a constituent in respect of compensation for loss of his wormery. [42693]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 12 June 2002.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in her Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44940]

Mr. Morley: The Department's agreed target times for replying to correspondence from hon, Members and from members of the public is 15 days.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle of 11 June regarding policy guidance for county waste plans. [69954]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 8 July 2002.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to a letter from the hon. Member for Woking, dated 10 January concerning Mr. A. Giles and the British Cattle Movement service. [61150]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 2 July 2002.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will provide a substantive reply to the letter from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), dated 4 February, her reference 165197, on antibiotic remedies and nitrate vulnerable zones. [52403]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 10 June 2002.

Bovine TB

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which EU regulations govern the use of the gamma interferon test as applied to bovine TB. [69000]

Mr. Morley: Community legislation on the control of bovine TB for purposes of intra-Community trade is set out in Council Directive 64/432/EC. A recent amendment to this will allow for the use of gamma interferon as an adjunct test. We await publication in the Official Journal.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with members of the European Parliament about a possible inquiry into bovine TB and its causes. [69002]

Mr. Morley: My officials have had no discussions with members of the European Parliament on this matter.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 25 April from the hon. Member for Northavon regarding bovine TB. [60185]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 25 May 2002.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how long it takes on average for farmers in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales to receive the results of TB tests on their animals. [68919]

Mr. Morley: Farmers are notified immediately when TB reactors are found in their herd. The average number of days taken for the culture results of samples taken at post-mortem to become available is given in the table.

Country	*Average number of days*[1]
England	52
Wales	53

[1] The average number of days between the receipt of samples at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) and reporting of the results to the State Veterinary Service Animal Health Office. Figures are based on samples received at VLA since 1 November 2001.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what extra resources have been secured in order to clear the backlog in processing the results of TB tests in England. [68921]

Mr. Morley: A claim against the Reserve has been considering how best to use the additional funding when tackling the TB backlog.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what resources are being dedicated to ensuring that the results of TB tests on animals in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales are processed as quickly as possible. [68918]

Mr. Morley: The information is not available in the format requested, in that separate figures for England and Wales are not available. The planned expenditure for the 2002–03 financial year on the bovine tuberculosis testing programme at the Veterinary Laboratory Agency is given in the following table.

The TB skin test gives a result at reading. The owner is notified of the skin test results immediately. Skin test results are confirmed by microbiological culture of tissues removed at post mortem. The main time delay in getting results from the culture of mycobacteria taken from post mortem samples is due to the time it takes for the mycobacteria to multiply sufficiently to be identified.

	£
	Planned expenditure
Surveillance for bTB (infection status of cattle, farmed deer and exotic species in GB)	2,624,701
TB in cattle post-mortemed at VLA regional laboratories	10,673
Surveillance for bTB (infection status of badgers and other wildlife species)	573,568
TB in species apart from badgers and cattle	43,987
Total	3,252,929

Fishing

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make a statement concerning the failure to meet the required targets set under MAGP IV for the pelagic sector and the effect this will have on future EU funding for fisheries from 1 January 2003; [69212]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 71, on fishing, what assessment she has made of the impact of the United Kingdom not meeting the required targets set under MAGP IV in the pelagic sector on the quota allocations from 1 January 2003 for *(a)* pelagic species and *(b)* white fish species. [69211]

Mr. Morley: The UK has chosen the option to set MAGP IV targets for the pelagic segment of the fleet in terms of fishing effort; and we expect those effort targets to be achieved at the end of 2002, as they were at the end of 2001.

The Council of Ministers has yet to determine what penalties would apply, should a member state fail to meet its MAGP IV targets at the end of 2002.

Sellafield

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what reports she has received from the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate regarding the release of radioactive substances into the groundwater under Sellafield in Cumbria from tanks; and if she will make a statement; [65062]

(2) if she will establish an inquiry into the leaking of radioactive substances into groundwater under Sellafield in Cumbria; and if she will make a statement. [65063]

Margaret Beckett: I have not received any reports from the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate about the release of radioactive substances into groundwater under Sellafield. I am aware, however, that technetium-99 (Tc-99) has been detected in groundwater from boreholes in and around the Sellafield site. I understand that the likely source of the Tc-99 leakage is from the B24I sludge storage tanks.

The Environment Agency has carried out an assessment of the radiological impact of the levels of Tc-99 detected and is satisfied that this would be insignificant. Recent borehole data from BNFL supports this conclusion. The groundwater at Sellafield is not used for drinking water supplies.

The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and the Environment Agency, respectively, have asked BNFL to undertake further monitoring of Tc-99 levels on and off the Sellafield site. The regulators will consider whether any regulatory action is necessary. In the light of the actions of the regulators I have no reason to believe that an inquiry is necessary.

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of the staff of her Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66906]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 5 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 622W.

Subsidies

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total value was of subsidies to agriculture in the UK in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [66840]

Mr. Morley: Our latest estimates relate to 2000, and suggest that in that year UK farmers received in total £4.9 billion of support. In addition to the direct payments and market support measures that fall directly to the EU and UK budgets, this includes the effect on farmers' incomes of the higher prices paid by consumers as a result of the operation of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Foot and Mouth

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the foot and mouth disease livestock movement restrictions, with special reference to the 20-day standstill rule, on the operation and profitability of livestock producers in Cheshire; and if she will make a statement. [67200]

Mr. Morley: Discussions are in progress with industry stakeholders on the basis of preliminary work by the Department's economists in order to gain a better understanding of the economic impact of the current rules both in aggregate and for particular sectors.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the reasons for the maintenance of the foot and mouth disease livestock movement restrictions, with specific reference to the 20-day standstill rule. [67199]

Mr. Morley: There is firm veterinary and scientific advice in support of the present movement controls which are designed to protect against the rapid spread of any new incursion of disease.

The 20 day standstill is an important element of these controls for two reasons. Firstly, it allows time for the disease to become evident in animals brought on to a holding and so improves the prospect of identifying disease on infected premises before animals move off. Secondly, it also prevents potentially infected animals being moved off the holding during the 20 day period and so slows the rate of spread of any undetected disease.

Livestock Movements

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to remove foot and mouth disease livestock movement restrictions, with particular reference to the 20-day standstill rule; whether she proposes to lift the 20-day standstill rule in time for the marketing of the lamb crop at the autumn sales; and if she will make a statement. [67201]

Mr. Morley: No decisions about the future of the 20 day standstill will be taken before the publication of the reports of the Royal Society and Lessons Learned inquiries.

Rabies

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans there are to increase the number of ports that will allow the import and export of animals that have been vaccinated against rabies. [67581]

Mr. Morley: Animals subject to the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974, as amended, must enter the UK through Dover (Eastern Docks), Harwich (Parkeston Quay), Hull, Portsmouth or Southampton. If the animals are vaccinated against rabies but do not meet the requirements of the Pet Travel Scheme they must go into quarantine.

However, dogs and cats which fully meet the requirements of the Pet Travel Scheme may enter England, without going into quarantine, through the ports at Dover, Portsmouth, Harwich, Poole and Plymouth. These ports are the ones used by carriers on routes approved by this Department. My Department will consider applications for approval from transport companies for routes into England using other ports. It is currently processing an application for a route which would use Newhaven. Whether transport companies choose to seek approval is a commercial and operational decision for them.

Inland Waterways

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she holds a definitive map of the navigable inland waterways network in England. [68082]

Mr. Morley: The Secretary of State does not hold such a map. However, "Waterways for Tomorrow", the Government's policy paper on the waterways contains a general map of the inland waterways of England and Wales. A copy of this document is in the Library of the House. Maps of the inland waterway system are also available from commercial sources.

Fallen Stock

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she plans to seek derogations from the EU Animal By-Products Regulation to allow the on-farm trial of fallen stock in the upland areas of *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England, *(c)* Southern Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [68618]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* I am not planning to seek further derogations from the EU Animal By-Products Regulation with respect of on-farm burial of fallen stock.

Sheepmeat

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much sheepmeat was imported into the United Kingdom from each of the other countries of the European Union in each of the last five years. [68086]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* The table shows the volume of sheepmeat imported into the United Kingdom from each of the other countries of the European Union.

UK imports of sheepmeat from the EU 1997–2001[1]

Tonnes

Country	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Netherlands	6,456	5,106	4,809	4,419	4,425
Irish Republic	2,899	2,616	3,387	2,683	3,055
Spain	2,368	1,920	1,287	1,295	1,625
France	1,208	1,214	1,419	1,617	1,871
Germany	1,668	878	594	671	1,350
Belgium-Luxembourg	442	482	208	332	829
Italy	68	150	3	16	159
Denmark	44	32	165	28	112
Austria	16	—	10	—	—
Finland	13	—	—	—	—
Total	15,182	12,398	11,882	11,061	13,426

[1] Product weight. Excludes exports of live sheep.

Source:

H.M. Customs and Excise

granted which provides additional funding for DEFRA for several areas in the current financial year. We are now

Badger Culling

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 786W, on badger culling, what preliminary findings have emerged from badger culling triplets B, C and F. [69242]

Mr. Morley: The Independent Scientific Group for Cattle TB (ISG) advise that it is too early for an analysis of results. It is a basic rule for scientific trials that results are not published prematurely. It has however been possible to complete a preliminary analysis of the risk factors associated with cattle TB, and this is set out in the ISG's Third Report, available in the House Library.

A summary of the completed work for each triplet is shown on DEFRA's website at www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/tb/point5/p5prog.

Public Footpaths

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent steps the Department has taken to open *(a)* more footpaths in the countryside and *(b)* more private land to the public; [69411]

(2) what *(a)* discussions the Department has had with private landowners and *(b)* steps it has taken to encourage private landowners to open their land to the public. [69412]

Alun Michael: The Department recently consulted on draft guidance to local highway authorities in relation to the requirement in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and review rights of way improvement plans. Once the relevant provisions are in force, later this year, local highway authorities will be required to take a strategic look at how the local network of rights of way takes into account the needs of the public and to prepare a statement of the action that they propose to take to improve the network, including creating new rights of way where they are shown to be needed.

In January this year we issued a consultation paper on proposals for regulations under section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which enables landowners voluntarily to give people a statutory right of access to their land. The consultation ended on 15 April and we are presently considering the responses from landowners and others. The Department is also working closely with the Forestry Commission which, earlier this year, arranged a number of seminars for private woodland owners on the provision of access under section 16. In addition, private landowners are encouraged to allow permissive public access under DEFRA's agri-environment schemes. The provisions are currently the subject of a public consultation that began on 8 July and will end on 27 September 2002.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government have taken to improve safety on public footpaths and other rights of way that are *(a)* poorly lit, *(b)* in desolate areas and *(c)* in areas where crime is above average. [69410]

Alun Michael: I recently published draft guidance arising from rights of way provisions in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The draft guidance encourages local highway authorities to take positive management measures, such as consideration of the use of lighting and schemes to encourage informal surveillance to counter problems of criminal activity on public rights of way.

Where rights of way are facilitating high levels of crime in built up areas the provisions that are covered in the guidance will enable such rights of way to be diverted or extinguished.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the development of a National Access Database; what funding she has made to the Countryside Agency to fund a feasibility study into a national access database; and when the feasibility study will be published. [70041]

Alun Michael: The Government announced the plan to establish a National Access Database in the Rural White Paper "Our countryside: the future a fair deal for rural England" in November 2000. The Countryside Agency has commissioned consultants to look at the feasibility of establishing such a database. The feasibility study is being funded from within the Agency's annual grant in aid settlement. The Agency will publish a research note in September 2002 and use the findings of the study to make recommendations on how the project should proceed.

Biofuels

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reasons the UK Government did not support the development of mandatory and indicative targets for biofuels in the relevant EU draft directive. [69340]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

In common with the majority of other European Union member states, the UK Government do not support the European Commission's proposals for mandatory targets applied uniformly to every state, as originally proposed by the European Commission in the Biofuels Directive. In order to maintain the UK's ability to set national policy on the basis of the UK's own domestic circumstances, the Government favour the adoption of flexible, indicative targets; an approach endorsed by the European Scrutiny Committees of both Houses of Parliament.

The Government actively support the use of transport biofuels, in particular through the 20 pence per litre reduction in fuel duty on biodiesel—due to come into effect shortly—and through the further round of the Green Fuels Challenge, offering zero duty for pilots demonstrating innovative technologies for environmentally beneficial fuels.

Pesticides Safety Directorate

Rosemary McKenna: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets she has set the Pesticides Safety Directorate for 2002–03. [70677]

Mr. Morley: I have set the Pesticides Safety Directorate the following performance targets for 2003–03.

Quality of service

To complete evaluations and contribute to the EC Review Programme under Council Directive 91/414/EEC, according to the processing times set out in Table 1.

1. To deliver high quality scientific work to underpin the protection of human health and the environment.
2. To provide clear and accessible public information about pesticide issues consistent with sustainable and economic production.
3. To ensure the UK's objectives are reflected in the revised Council Directive 91/414/EEC and to maintain our international reputation as a leading regulatory authority.

Efficiency

1. To implement a Quality system by the end of December 2002 that enables an improvement in quality and efficiency and which takes account of priorities identified in the 2001 Customer Satisfaction Survey.
2. To deliver 3 per cent. efficiency savings through the combination of achieving reductions to processing times for applications for approval and through savings in cost of outputs.

Financial performance

1. To recover from industry and Government the full economic cost (as calculated according to resource accounting principles) of its services.

Table 1 Approvals group: predicted workflow and target processing times for 2002–03

Application type	Estimated workflow 2002–03	Target processing time (weeks) 2002–03	2001–02
UK Reviews			
Anticholinesterase programme	5	—	—
Other activity	3	—	—
EC Reviews Rapporteur (2nd stage)			
Completeness	10	26	n/a
Evaluation	4	52	n/a
New active substances			
Evaluation			
Sift	8	5	6
Full	8	42	48
Resubmission	3	42	48
Departmentals	8	42	45
Re-registration	4	40	—
Normals	135	30	35
Associated fast-normals	25	30	35
Assessed experimental approval	2	20	20
Extrapolated experimental approval	2	10	10
Emergency off label	15	9	10
Non-emergency off label	30	25	30
Mutual recognition	3	20	20
Fast	200	10	10
Parallel imports	50	9	10
Administrative fast	700	4	4
Administrative experimental	100	1	1
Simplified own-use parallel	10	2	2

Note:

Overall target—90 per cent. of applications with a stated processing time must be completed within that time.

Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the 2001–02 Annual Report for the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science. [70676]

Mr. Meacher: The 2001–02 Annual Report and Accounts for the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets she has set the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science for 2002–03. [70674]

Mr. Meacher: I have set the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science the following performance targets for 2002–03.

Quality of Service

To make satisfactory progress with the action plan resulting from the 1999–2000 Science Audit.

To manage the Agency in an effective manner including pursuit of commercial exploitation of research outputs.

Efficiency

To give satisfaction to customers in the way that outputs are provided, as measured by the CEFAS Customer Satisfaction Survey.

To achieve savings and efficiency gains in a range of key functions.

Financial Performance

To recover from Government Departments and Agencies and external customers the full economic costs of the Agency's services.

Livestock Diseases

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she has received the report of the Royal Society's Scientific Review of Infectious Diseases in Livestock; and if she will make a statement. [70949]

Margaret Beckett: I am delighted that the Royal Society have today published the report of their independent Scientific Review of Infectious Diseases in Livestock. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

This report was commissioned by the Government following the unprecedented outbreak of foot and mouth disease last year. I am very grateful to Professor Sir Brian Follett and his committee for producing such a thorough and excellent report in such a short space of time. This is a very significant contribution to our work to strengthen our ability to guard against and deal with animal disease.

I welcome the importance that the report places on the livestock industry in this country and Great Britain having animal disease free status. We are already taking action on imports and disease surveillance to protect this and the report's views on these matters will be of great assistance.

More widely, we intend to press ahead with an animal health and welfare strategy and will need to consider carefully the recommendations made by the report on research and development in the light of yesterday's spending review announcement.

The report's recommendations will be of crucial importance in developing the Government's emergency preparedness for controlling animal diseases, and we will need to study these closely, in particular the recommended approach to vaccination against foot and mouth disease. The Government has never rejected vaccination as an option in the fight against foot and mouth. The report recognises that there are aspects of vaccination, in particular trade and technical issues, which are not yet resolved, but which can and should be resolved. Even then, vaccination will not necessarily be a panacea and will not necessarily be right in all circumstances. The report notes that, even with emergency vaccination in place, culling would still be necessary.

I welcome the Royal Society's endorsement of the need to take forward the work we have in hand on a greatly improved contingency plan for foot and mouth. Its findings on biosecurity and animal movements will also be of particular importance.

In taking work forward on the report, we will need to involve stakeholders, in particular the farming industry, who have a share in the responsibility for maintaining the animal disease free status recommended by the report.

I intend to give a fuller initial response on the recommendations in this report when the Lessons Learned Inquiry has reported on Monday 22 July. It is also intended, later in the year, to issue a detailed reply to the recommendations in both these independent reports.

High Hedges

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government have taken to ameliorate the problem of *(a)* leylandii and *(b)* other rapidly growing trees associated with neighbour nuisance. [69575]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The Government supported the high hedges Bill introduced last Session by the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor). Unfortunately, it fell due to lack of time before the election. Although it has not been possible to bring forward a high hedges Bill in the current Session, we remain committed to legislation allowing local authorities to deal with complaints about high hedges as soon as parliamentary time can be found.

In December last year, we published guidelines on "Hedge height and light loss" developed by the Building Research Establishment (BRE). The guidelines explain how to calculate whether a hedge is likely to block out too much light from a garden and from the main rooms of a house. These scientifically based tests might carry some weight with hedge owners and help them to understand the impact of their hedge. As a result, they might be more willing to negotiate with neighbours.

We are now preparing a leaflet for members of the public, advising them how they might approach their neighbours to try [illegible] agree a solution to their hedge problems. The leaflet will include information on a range of factors that people might consider in settling on the right hedge height [illegible] their particular circumstances. It will cover such matters as what heights will ensure privacy; those at which a hedge can be safely maintained; and those likely to block light to neighbouring properties. We expect to publish the leaflet later in the summer and will provide copies to all Members of Parliament.

TRANSPORT

Railtrack Asset Register

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the programme developed by the ORR for Railtrack to create an asset register; and what stage *(a)* they had reached by 5 October 2001 and *(b)* they have reached. [62298]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Railtrack is required to establish and maintain a register of the condition, capability and capacity of its assets, and to demonstrate that it is taking all necessary steps to do so by the earliest practicable date. Railtrack submits plans for the Rail Regulator's review every six months.

By 5 October 2001, Railtrack had completed its assessment of the state of asset information within the company; finalised its strategy for managing asset information; defined the work that it needed to do to implement that strategy; and completed all data collection for the asset register.

The Rail Regulator is currently reviewing Railtrack's latest plans, submitted in April 2002, taking into account the views of key stakeholders. He will then consider in consultation with Railtrack what should be published and when.

Park-and-ride Schemes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the park-and-ride schemes introduced in each of the last two years, including the start date for each scheme; and if he will list the further schemes that are being proposed, including their expected start dates. [66567]

Mr. Jamieson: The following chart lists major local public transport projects that contain proposals for park-and-ride within them, that have been approved or provisionally approved. The expected start dates are those provided by the authorities in July 2001 as part of the Local Transport Plans annual progress reports.

Authority	*Scheme*	*Expected start date*
Bradford	South Bradford Integrated Transport Improvements	November 2001
Cheshire	Chester-Deeside Transport Scheme	May 2004
Durham	Belmont Interchange	October 2003
Tyne and Wear PTA	Four Lanes End Interchange	April 2002
Wiltshire	Salisbury Integrated Transport Measures	April 2002

The provision of parking facilities, including park-and-ride, is a matter for the local highway authority and rail operators. In addition to the major schemes, a number of smaller schemes have been implemented or proposed by the local authorities as part of their local transport strategies. These have included proposals for the extension of existing sites or new sites for both bus-based and rail-based schemes. The smaller schemes as presented in the local transport plans annual progress reports submitted in July 2001 are summarised in the table. Details of the smaller schemes, including proposed timetables are not kept centrally.

Schemes listed in LTP submissions

Type of scheme	*July 2001*	*July 2002*
Bus-based P and R—new	7	11
Bus-based P and R—extension	6	7
Rail-based P and R—new	4	6
Rail-based P and R—extension	7	8

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on which occasions since 7 June 2001 the minutes of ministerial meetings have been placed in the Library; what the reason was in each case; and if he will make a statement. [66246]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the undertaking he gave to the Transport Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) sent to the Committee and placed in the Libraries of the House on 27 November 2001, a copy of the minutes of a meeting he had held with John Robinson, the then chairman of Railtrack, on 25 July.

Car Use

Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to discourage car use by engineering greater road congestion. [67555]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Rural Stations

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what resources the Government will be putting into rural stations for services and maintenance of stations in the next three years. [69396]

Mr. Jamieson: Station maintenance is funded from the generality of Railtrack's income. Rural stations and services can also benefit from the £430 million funding available through the Rail Passenger Partnership (RPP) operated by the Strategic Rail Authority. Extended in December 2001 to run for 10 years, the RPP fund is designed to assist in the provision of new or enhanced local and regional rail services or facilities.

A404

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to alter the slip roads on the A404(M) and A404 approaching the junction with the M4 and the M40. [69166]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Proposed improvements to the M40/A404 junction at Handy Cross include a new slip road from the A404 to the westbound M40.

Any major changes to the junction between the A404(M) and the M4 are subject to the Thames Valley Multi-Modal Study. In the interim, it is proposed to widen the immediate approach from the A404(M) to the junction roundabout as a low cost measure to decrease queue lengths and increase throughput on A404(M).

Tubelines and Metronet Consortia

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contingency plans he has for the case where there is failure of a key partner in the Tubelines and Metronet consortia; and if he will make a statement. [69786]

Mr. Jamieson: The provisions of the PPP competition process allow for changes in the shareholders of the bidders, subject to the consent of London Underground. The contracts themselves also contain provisions relating to changes in a consortium's shareholders.

Network Rail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the SRA has made PAYE-liable salary payments to employees of Network Rail. [69944]

Mr. Jamieson: No. The Strategic Rail Authority does not employ those working on the Network Rail bid team.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date Network Rail was legally named. [69941]

Mr. Jamieson: Network Rail Limited was incorporated on 22 March 2002.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 10 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 984–85W, ref. 67062, what estimate he has made of the cost *(a)* to public funds of providing an indemnity and *(b)* to Railtrack and its shareholders if such an indemnity were not in place. [70080]

Mr. Jamieson: With Railtrack Group expected to take full advantage of exemptions in tax legislation for disposals by companies of substantial shareholdings, there would be no tax liability as a result of its disposal of Railtrack Plc and, therefore, no additional cost to public funds.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to which *(a)* organisations and *(b)* individuals the SRA has made payments in relation to the establishment of Network Rail. [69942]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has made payments to the following bodies:

Ove Arup and Partners
Natwest Card Centre—Purch
Sita Security Shredding
Pret a Manger
Coucher Pender
Specialised Contract Interior
Astor Lodge Holdings Ltd.
Claire Howard Consultancies
Durance Ltd.
Financial Dynamics
SQE Integrated Solutions
Blue Haven
Egon Zehender International
JJR Partnership
Dentons Catering Equipment
Fastways Flyers
Socite Generale
Partnerships UK plc
Yellow House Consulting
Asset Performance Man. Ltd.
Bechtel Ltd.
Coolwater (London) Ltd.
Demita Plants
Wings Catering Equipment Ltd.
Morgan Spencer c/o LSM
Supplies Team.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place a copy of the Network Rail directors' incentive plan in the Library. [70516]

Mr. Jamieson: No, Network Rail intend to prepare and publish an incentive plan annually.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to whom potential applicants to serve as members of Network Rail should apply; and if he will make a statement. [70509]

Mr. Jamieson: Applicants should apply to Network Rail at their registered address.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the members of Network Rail to approve the appointment of directors. [70510]

Mr. Jamieson: The timing of the arrangements for the appointment of directors is a matter for Network Rail.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish reports and accounts for Network Rail for the period between its inception and the date on which it becomes a private sector company in the national accounts. [70513]

Mr. Jamieson: No, this is the responsibility of Network Rail.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the members of Network Rail will be appointed. [70515]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for Network Rail, but I understand that the company wish to appoint members as soon as possible, if their bid is successful.

London to Ipswich Multi-modal Study

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to implement the recommendations of the London to Ipswich Multi-modal Study relating to the rail and road infrastructure within the Haven Gateway sub-region. [69989]

Mr. Spellar: This study will report later this year. We will then consider the recommendations once we have received advice from the east of England local government conference.

United States Embassy

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by what authority representatives of the United States embassy prevent public pedestrian access to the pavement outside the United States embassy. [69984]

Mr. Spellar: The Metropolitan police, using their common law powers, control public pedestrian access outside the United States embassy to maintain the security of those who work at, visit or live nearby the location. The United States embassy does not itself prevent public pedestrian access. The security arrangements are regularly reviewed.

Public Highway Closures

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1094W, on public highway closures, if he will list the roads in London in respect of which he has sought an order under section 116 of the Highways Act 1980. [69974]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

US-UK Air Services

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what communications he has received in the last three months from the European Commission regarding the regulation of UK-US aviation; and if he will make a statement. [70062]

Mr. Jamieson: We have had correspondence from the Commission about a complaint by bmi british midland about the operation of the Bermuda 2 agreement with the United States.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what figures his Department has collated for the SERAS report on comparative rates of growth over the past five years at *(a)* Heathrow airport and *(b)* its competitors. [70063]

Mr. Jamieson: The Civil Aviation Authority published statistics show the rate of growth in terminal passengers at Heathrow airport over the last five years. These are set out in the table below together with equivalent figures for Heathrow's main European competitors.

Terminal passengers

million

	Heathrow	*Amsterdam*	*Paris (CDG)*	*Frankfurt*
1997	57.84	31.02	35.10	39.68
1998	60.35	33.95	38.47	42.15
1999	61.97	36.43	43.48	45.43
2000	64.27	39.27	48.14	49.05
2001	60.45	39.31	47.94	48.29
Percentage increase	+4.5	+26.7	+36.5	+21.7

Source:

CAA statistics (Heathrow only) and DP statistics.

Light Rail and Tram Links

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library statistics relating to the average journey time, distinguishing between scheduled and excess, on the *(a)* DLR, *(b)* Tyne and Wear Metro, *(c)* Manchester Metro link, *(d)* South Yorkshire Supertram, *(e)* Midland Metro and *(f)* Croydon Tramlink, giving the source for each data set used. [69774]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is not available for *(c)* Manchester Metro link. The available information for the other five light rail systems has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

NATS

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what help will be given to NATS to make sure that the problems of computer failure are addressed. [69492]

Mr. Jamieson: These are operational matters for NATS, who have already introduced measures to address the problems which caused the recent computer failures.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what the overall manning level of air traffic controllers at Swanwick has been, expressed as a percentage of optimal manning levels since its opening; [70126]

(2) how much time has been lost to flight delays in the London Flight Information Region in each month since January 1999; [70124]

(3) how many overload reports have been made by air traffic controllers in the London Flight Information Region in each month since January 1999; [70123]

(4) what the full establishment of air traffic controllers in the London Flight Information Region has been in each month of the past three years; and what the current establishment of air traffic controllers is; [70122]

(5) how much time has been lost to absenteeism by air traffic controllers in the London Flight Information Region in each month since January 1999. [70125]

Mr. Jamieson: These are operational matters for National Air Traffic Services Ltd (NATS).

Bus Services

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will review the bus service operating tolerance guidelines introduced on 2 April. [70364]

Mr. Jamieson: The guidelines were introduced by the Traffic Commissioners and any review would be a matter for them.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many more buses there are on UK roads since 1997; and what improvements in bus travel have been made. [69528]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures for Great Britain from the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) show that there were 78,577 buses and coaches with nine or more seats registered on 31 December 1997. On 31 March 2002, the equivalent figure was 89,867, an increase of 11,290.

In the same period, 31.386 buses and coaches were newly registered. The average age of the local service bus fleet has fallen from 9.4 years in 1997 to 8.4 years in 2001 and the bus industry is committed to reducing it to 8.0 years and maintaining it at that level in line with the Government's 10-year plan for transport. From 31 December 2000 all new buses used on local or scheduled services have been accessible to disabled people including wheelchair users.

Bus service provision in rural areas has been enhanced since 1998 by additional funding to local authorities in the form of Rural Bus Subsidy Grant (RBSG) and Rural Bus Challenge (RBC). RBSG funding for 2001–04 is £138 million and is supporting 1,800 new and enhanced services in rural areas. The RBC competitions have provided £69.8 million to enable 213 innovative local authority schemes for rural communities to be introduced. Since 2001 the Urban Bus Challenge, targeted at urban communities suffering from high levels of deprivation, has resulted in awards of £15.3 million to 32 schemes in 24 local authority areas.

Local authorities are encouraged to consider installing bus priority measures where they are feasible and sensible. The local transport settlement for 2002–03 will help fund up to 110 bus priority measures.

RMT Strike

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with London Underground management on the strikes called by the RMT union for 17 and 18 July. [70508]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for London Underground. However, the Government are extremely disappointed that the RMT has decided to call industrial action. We urge both sides to do all they can to reach agreement and avoid making the 3 million people who rely on the tube each day suffer again.

Roads

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the Government have done since 1997 to convince people to use methods of transport apart from the car. [69527]

Mr. Jamieson: We published our Integrated Transport White Paper in 1998, and our 10-year plan for Transport in 2000. These documents set out our policy for promoting choice for the travelling public. Initiatives we have taken or are taking to promote alternative forms of transport to the car include:

Introduction of Bus Quality Partnerships; introduction of a new Urban Bus Challenge Fund; guaranteeing half-fare travel concession for elderly and disabled people;

Increased funding for rural transport; resulting in over 1,800 new or enhanced services so far in England alone. In supporting 150 innovative rural transport schemes under the Rural Bus Challenge scheme;

Rural Transport Partnerships which we aim to have in every rural community in England by next year;

Appointment of a new team of regional cycling co-ordinators, to support delivery of the National Cycling Strategy, and announced funding for the first 10 cycling projects under a new £2 million Cycling Projects Fund;

Preparation of a draft national walking strategy which will be issued for consultation in due course;

[illegible] billion for local authorities in England to implement their Local Transport Plans in 2002–03. These include many measures designed to make public transport more available, more reliable and more attractive;

Encouraging and supporting the take-up of travel plans by businesses, schools, hospitals, local authorities and other major employers;

Establishment of "traveline"; a national telephone-based public transport information system;

Working on "Transport Direct", an internet programme which aims to provide travellers with all the information they need. This will be online in 2003;

Supporting a range of travel awareness campaigns including "Walk to School, Bike Week" and "In town, without my car".

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of new road have been constructed since 1997. [69526]

Mr. Jamieson: The public road length of Great Britain at 1 April 2001 was estimated to be 3,066 miles longer than at 1 April 1997. Motorways accounted for 59 miles of this increase.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent progress has been made with the plans for new toll roads and motorways. [69529]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no such plans. The M6 [illegible] (the Birmingham northern relief road) is already under construction and is expected to open in early 2004.

Secondary Fires

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of secondary fires were *(a)* on grassland and heath, *(b)* in refuse, *(c)* in derelict buildings and *(d)* in none of the above in the last 12 months. [60448]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The information in the table relates to secondary fires attended by UK local authority fire brigades in 2000.

Secondary fires[1] by brigade area, UK 2000

		Location/Item			
Brigade	*Total secondary fires[1]*	*Derelict buildings*	*Grasslands/ heathlands[2]*	*Refuse*	*Other[3]*
United Kingdom	241,357	4	24	61	10
England and Wales	197,253	4	24	61	11
England	179,753	4	22	63	11
England—non-Met counties	86,934	4	25	59	12
Avon	2,837	4	22	66	8
Bedfordshire	1,485	5	19	60	16
Berkshire	2,054	3	28	0	69
Buckinghamshire	1,888	2	14	66	18
Cambridgeshire	1,678	4	27	51	19
Cheshire	3,778	4	22	70	5
Cleveland	5,028	1	17	79	3
Cornwall	848	2	50	41	7
Cumbria	1,538	6	19	68	6
Derbyshire	2,244	5	29	53	13
Devon	2,314	5	25	60	11
Dorset	1,646	3	52	31	14
Durham	3,317	5	26	65	4
East Sussex	1,603	3	22	62	14
Essex	4,474	3	32	51	14
Gloucestershire	929	5	23	65	7
Hampshire	4,602	3	27	58	12
Hereford and Worcester	1,514	2	33	46	18
Hertfordshire	2,127	2	26	57	15
Humberside	4,819	5	18	71	6
Isle of Wight	172	4	38	51	8
Kent	4,326	3	17	57	23
Lancashire	6,451	4	12	77	7
Leicestershire	2,346	4	31	55	10
Lincolnshire	1,105	7	30	53	10
Norfolk	1,312	4	28	61	7
North Yorkshire	1,153	3	23	64	10
Northamptonshire	1,943	4	14	60	22
Northumberland	1,339	2	37	56	6
Nottinghamshire	3,620	5	42	42	10
Oxfordshire	999	3	24	61	13
Shropshire	1,209	2	39	52	7
Somerset	745	3	22	67	9
Staffordshire	3,233	4	35	54	7
Suffolk	979	2	32	53	13
Surrey	1,623	3	29	54	15
Warwickshire	1,443	8	30	48	15
West Sussex	1,428	3	27	51	19
Wiltshire	780	3	24	63	9
Isles of Scilly	5	—	100	—	—
England—Met counties	92,819	5	19	66	10
Greater Manchester	14,189	7	12	75	5
Merseyside	12,810	4	18	73	5
South Yorkshire	6,844	8	26	53	12
Tyne and Wear	8,821	2	22	69	6
West Midlands	12,855	5	31	55	8
West Yorkshire	10,908	8	14	68	11
Greater London	26,392	3	17	64	16

Secondary fires[1] by brigade area, UK 2000

Brigade	*Total secondary fires*[1]	*Location/Item* *Derelict buildings*	*Grasslands/ heathlands*[2]	*Refuse*	*Other*[3]
Wales	17,500	3	43	46	8
North Wales	2,642	2	41	52	6
Mid and West Wales	4,309	2	50	40	8
South Wales	10,549	3	40	48	9
Northern Ireland	11,672	6	32	55	7
Scotland	32,432	5	24	65	7
Strathclyde	18,920	6	23	64	7
Highland and Islands	657	2	58	33	7
Grampian	1,537	5	29	60	7
Tayside	2,644	4	17	76	4
Lothian and Borders	5,183	3	22	69	6
Fife	1,829	2	31	62	5
Central	1,374	4	23	64	9
Dumfries	288	2	26	66	6

[1] Secondary fires are those fires which did not involve property, casualties or rescues or were attended by four or fewer appliances.

[2] Includes intentional straw and stubble burning.

[3] Includes outdoor structures and derelict vehicles.

Land Records

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what steps he has taken to encourage local authorities to adopt a policy of differential charges for providing answers to conveyancing search inquiries; what further steps he will take; and if he will make a statement; [58271]

(2) how many local authorities have digitised their local land charges and associated records and obtained the necessary computer equipment to connect to the National Land Information Service; and if he will make a statement; [58269]

(3) how many local authorities have applied to his Department for funding to assist them in digitising their land records and obtaining the necessary computer equipment to connect to the National Land Information Service; and if he will make a statement; [58281]

(4) what steps he is taking to encourage local authorities to digitise their land records and obtain the necessary computer equipment to connect to the National Land Information Service; and if he will make a statement; [58268]

(5) how many applications by local authorities have been approved by his Department for funding to assist them in digitising their land records and obtaining the necessary computer equipment to connect to the National Land Information Service; and what the total value is of the approvals granted; [58283]

(6) what steps he is taking to encourage local authorities to apply to his Department for funding to assist them in digitising their land records and obtaining the necessary computer equipment to connect to the National Land Information Service; and if he will make a statement; [58284]

(7) what the total value is of the applications which have been made by local authorities to his Department for funding to assist them in digitising their land records and obtaining the necessary computer equipment to connect to the National Land Information Service; and if he will make a statement; [58282]

(8) how many local authorities at 1 April were at level *(a)* 3 and *(b)* 2 in their development of links with the National Land Information Service; and how many local authorities he expects by December to be at level (i) 3 and (ii) 2 in their development of links with the National Land Information Service. [58270]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The National Land Information Services (NLIS) is a project, which has been developed and is run by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) for local government.

NLIS is an important part of the Government's policy to improve the home buying process. In particular it has the potential of significantly improving the turnaround times for conveyancing searches. We have written to local authorities drawing the benefits of both NLIS and the associated National Land and Property Gazetteer project to their attention. I have placed a copy of that letter in the House Library.

From information provided to us by the IDeA as at 28 May 2002, we understand for local authorities in England that: 117 of the 388 authorities are electronically connected to NLIS with 81 authorities connected at Level 2, and 36 at Level 3.

From information provided to us by the IDeA as at 28 May 2002, we understand for local authorities in England and Wales that: there are 132 local land and property gazetteers (LLPGs) produced by local authorities which are linked to the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG); with a further 117 gazetteers in prospect to be linked to the NLPG in the near future; and a further 33 local authorities known to be developing LLPGs.

There is no direct funding available from Government for local authorities to participate with NLIS. The Government are providing £155 million over the next two years to local authorities and to partnerships of local authorities targeted towards helping authorities electronically enabling all their services.

Fees for searches of the local land charges register are fixed by statutory instrument in accordance with the Local Land Charges Act 1975. Otherwise, it is for local authorities themselves to set income targets and fees for dealing with conveyancers' inquiries. However they must do so taking account of the cost of providing the service.

DEFENCE

Weapons Systems

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the forecast in-service date as at 31 March *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002 for the (i) Type 23 Frigate, (ii) Single-role minehunter, (iii) Sting Ray Torpedo, (iv) Sonar 2087 Type 45 Destroyer, (iv) Seawolf Block 2, (vi) C-17, (vii) Auxiliary Oiler, (viii) Vanguard Class and (ix) Trident II; [69564]

(2) if he will list the forecast cost of demonstration and manufacture phase as at 31 March *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002 for the (i) Type 23 Frigate, (i) Single-role Minehunter, (iii) Sting Ray Torpedo, (iv) Sonar 2087 Type 45 Destroyer, (v) Seawolf Block 2; C-17, (vi) Auxiliary Oiler, (vii) Vanguard Class and (viii) Trident II; [69568]

(3) if he will list the *(a)* date of initial gate, *(b)* target date for main gate approval and *(c)* date of main gate approval for the (i) Type 23 Frigate, (ii) single-role, (iii) Minehunter, (iv) Sting Ray Torpedo, (v) Sonar 2087 Type 45 Destroyer, (vi) Seawolf Block 2, (vii) C-17, (viii) Auxiliary Oiler, (ix) Vanguard Class and (x) Trident II; [69556]

(4) if he list the *(a)* approved cost of assessment phase at initial gate, *(b)* actual cost of assessment phase, *(c)* approved cost of demonstration and manufacture phase at main gate and *(d)* approved in-service date at main gate for the (i) Type 23 Frigate, (ii) Single-role Minehunter, (iii) Sting Ray torpedo, (iv) Sonar 2087 Type 45 Destroyer, (v) Seawolf Block 2, (vi) C-17, (vii) Auxiliary Oiler, (viii) Vanguard Class and (ix) Trident II. [69560]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the forecast in-service date was as at 31 March *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002 for the (i) COBRA (Counter Battery Radar), (ii) Chinook MSH/HC2A, (iii) Chinook MSH/HC3, (iv) BR 90 Bridge Systems, (v) SHIELDER, (vi) Combined Arms Tactical Trainer and (vii) Medium and Light Utility truck; [69567]

(2) if he will list the forecast in-service date as at 31 March *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002 for the (i) COBRA (Counter Battery Radar), (ii) Chinook MSH/HC2A, (iii) Chinook MSH/HC3, (iv) BR 90 Bridge Systems, (v) SHIELDER; Combined Arms Tactical trainer and (vi) Medium and Light Utility truck; [69563]

(3) if he will list the *(a)* date of initial gate, *(b)* target date for main gate approval and *(c)* date of main gate approval for the (i) COBRA (Counter Battery Radar), (ii) Chinook MSH/HC2A, (iii) Chinook MSH/HC3, (iv) BR 90 Bridge Systems, (v) SHIELDER, (vi) Combined Arms Tactical Trainer and (vii) Medium and Light Utility truck; [69555]

(4) if he will list the *(a)* approved cost of assessment phase at initial gate, *(b)* actual cost of assessment phase, *(c)* approved cost of demonstration and manufacture phase at main gate and *(d)* approved in-service date at main gate for the (i) COBRA (Counter Battery Radar), (ii) Chinook MSH/HC2A, (iii) Chinook MSH/HC3, (iv) BR 90 Bridge Systems, (v) SHIELDER, (vi) Combined Arms Tactical Trainer and (vii) Medium and Light Utility truck. [69559]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* date of initial gate, *(b)* target date for main gate approval and *(c)* approved cost of assessment phase at initial gate for the (i) future Carrier-Bourne aircraft, (ii) future Carrier, (iii) Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System, (iv) Lightweight Mobile Artillery Weapon System (Gun) and (v) Microwave Landing System. [69554]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the forecast in-service date as at 31 March *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002 for the (i) Tornado F3-weapon system upgrade, (ii) Sea Harrier FRS1 to F/A2 conversions, (iii) Next Generation Anti-Armour Weapon and (iv) Eurofighter Aircrew Synthetic Training Aids; [69565]

(2) if he will list the forecast cost of demonstration and manufacture phase as at 31 March *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002 for the (i) Tornado F3-weapon system upgrade (ii) Sea Harrier FRS1 to F/A2 conversions, (iii) Next Generation Anti-Armour Weapon and (iv) Eurofighter Aircrew Synthetic Training Aids; [69569]

(3) if he will list the *(a)* date of initial gate, *(b)* target date for main gate approval and *(c)* date of main gate approval for the (i) Tornado F3—weapon system upgrade, (ii) Sea Harrier FRS1 to F/A2 conversions, (iii) Next Generation Anti-Armour Weapon and (iv) Eurofighter Aircrew Synthetic Training Aids; [69557]

(4) if he will list the *(a)* approved cost of assessment phase at initial gate, *(b)* actual cost of assessment phase, *(c)* approved cost of demonstration and manufacture phase at main gate and *(d)* approved in-service date at main gate for the (i) Tornado F3—weapon system upgrade, (ii) Sea Harrier FRS1 to F/A2 conversions, (iii) Next Generation Anti-Armour Weapon and (iv) Eurofighter Aircrew Synthetic Training Aids. [69561]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the forecast in-service date was as at 31 March *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002 for the (i) E3D Sentry-Radar Improvement Programme, (ii) Skynet 4 Stage 2 and (iii) Skynet 5; [69566]

(2) if he will list the forecast cost of demonstration and manufacture phase as at 31 March *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002 for the (i) E3D Sentry-Radar System Improvement Programme, (ii) Skynet 4 Stage 2 and (iii) Skynet 5; [69570]

(3) if he will list the *(a)* date of initial gate, *(b)* target date for main gate approval and *(c)* date of main gate approval for the (i) E3D Sentry-Radar System Improvement Programme, (ii) Skynet 4 Stage 2 and (iii) Skynet 5; [69558]

(4) if he will list the *(a)* approved cost of assessment phase at initial gate, *(b)* actual cost of assessment phase, *(c)* approved cost of demonstration and manufacture phase at main gate and *(d)* approved in-service date at main gate for the (i) E3D Sentry-Radar System Improvement programme, (ii) Skynet 4 Stage 2 and (iii) Skynet 5. [69562]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Anti-armour Technology

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the jobs created by the new anti-armour technology contract will be established; whether these will be permanent; and if he will make a statement. [67418]

Dr. Moonie: The contractor for the Next Generation Light Anti-Armour Weapon programme, Saab Bofors Dynamics, estimates that a total of 520 jobs will be created or sustained in the United Kingdom as a result of this contract. The timing of the creation of these posts and their permanency is a matter for the contractor and as such I cannot comment specifically. However, work on the programme has now started and production for the UK is expected to be complete by 2010. This could be extended if the contractor wins further orders from other customers.

Storm Shadow Cruise Missile

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost is of the Storm Shadow air launched cruise missile; and if he will make a statement. [67835]

Dr. Moonie: As reported in the 2001 Major Project Report, the total estimated procurement cost of the Storm Shadow conventionally armed stand-off missile project is £981 million. This figure includes development, production and initial support costs. Information on the cost of an individual missile would enable deductions to be made on the planned size of our Storm Shadow inventory. I am therefore withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information which relates to Defence, Security and International Relations.

Skill Force Initiative

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the expansion of his Department's sponsored Skill Force initiative to assist under-achieving youngsters in schools. [67705]

Dr. Moonie: The Skill Force scheme forms part of the Ministry of Defence's contribution to wider Government social exclusion policies. The initiative aims to prevent young people from feeling long-term disaffection with school and society. It is currently being piloted in 11 areas and in 47 schools in England and Scotland.

An integral part of the Skill Force pilot scheme has been rigorous and independent evaluation by the British Market Research Bureau. The most recent evaluation report, based on the two original schemes that started in September 2000 in Newcastle and Norfolk, has been completed. The report has shown that Skill Force has helped to maintain attendance rates of over 90 per cent. among children who would otherwise have been expected to display sharply declining attendance, sometimes leading to exclusion through years 10 and 11. Exclusions among participating children in these schools have been reduced by 72 per cent. compared with those predicted by the head teachers at the start of the scheme. A copy of the full report will be placed in the Library of the House.

The positive results from the independent evaluation have encouraged DfES to work with the MOD in offering Skill Force more widely. In response to the Government's Street Crime Initiative, Skill Force is one of the schemes 11 local education authorities have been invited to consider to help them to deliver part of DfES's Behaviour Improvement Programme. The LEAs concerned have all been in discussions with the MOD and a final decision on locations and schools is expected to be made in the next month. In addition, discussions are currently being held with a view to extending the pilot scheme to Wales. A decision is expected shortly.

Eurofighter

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Eurofighter will be delayed beyond the end of the year. [67706]

Dr. Moonie: The Eurofighter In Service Date (ISD) is dependent on industry's ability to deliver an aircraft that meets the nation's requirements. The programme is hugely complex and therefore some risks are inevitable. As I stated in the initial announcement of the delay on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 478W, nations have reviewed the programme with industry and we have jointly concluded that the ISD should be achieved towards the end of the year.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* how many Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft he plans to purchase for the RAF, *(b)* how many aircraft there will be in each tranche to be ordered and *(c)* when confirmation for each tranche is planned to be completed; and what the equivalent plans were for Eurofighter procurement as at November 1998. [69862]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence plans to purchase a total of 232 Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft for the Royal Air Force. The contractual commitment for the first 55 aircraft was made in 1998. The order for a second tranche of 89 aircraft is planned for 2003; and we plan to order a third tranche of 88 aircraft in 2007. The planned numbers and timings are unchanged from those in place in November 1998.

Anti-air Missile System

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the procurement of a further five shipsets of the principal anti-air missile system; and if he will make a statement. [67709]

Dr. Moonie: It is intended that the requirement will be contracted by the end of the year, subject to the agreement of acceptable terms.

Mox Lead Test Assemblies

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the minutes of the meeting between his Department's officials, French Government officials and United States Administration officials at the Bristol Abbey Wood establishment on 1 and 2 March 2001, in respect of the project to manufacture mox lead test assemblies. [68257]

Dr. Moonie: Mixed oxide (MOX) fuelled lead test assemblies are required for a Russian/US programme for the disposal of excess plutonium. There is an international project to manufacture the assemblies. The purpose of the meeting in March 2001 was to make provisional assessment of the technical and time-scale implications of incorporating surplus UK weapons grade plutonium into the assemblies. It has subsequently been agreed not to proceed in this manner. As the meeting touched on programme and planning matters within the authority of respective Governments, I am withholding the information requested under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Defence, Security and International Relations).

Watchkeeper

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of potential barriers to interoperability between Watchkeeper and *(a)* other elements of the ISTAR capability, *(b)* systems used by US forces and *(c)* systems used by other NATO forces; and if he will make a statement; [68675]

(2) whether the platforms offered by the firms competing in the Watchkeeper tendering process are mutually compatible; and if he will make a statement; [68676]

(3) when the results of the Watchkeeper tendering process will be published; and if he will make a statement. [68674]

Dr. Moonie: In the current assessment phase of the Watchkeeper project we are considering proposals for more detailed assessment phase work from four potential prime contractors. Two of the companies will be selected to undertake a series of systems integration and assurance activities before we make our main investment decision. Studies conducted by the four contractors have not identified any significant barriers to achieving interoperability with other elements of ISTAR capability, whether national or NATO (including US). The platforms offered by the contractors within their proposed solutions are mutually compatible. We expect to announce the selection of the two companies to go forward into the next stage by the end of August 2002 and to select a preferred bidder to undertake demonstration and manufacture in the 2003–04 timescale.

Defence Projects

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is *(a)* the original in-service date, *(b)* the current in-service date, *(c)* the original estimated cost and *(d)* the current cost of the (i) advanced short range air-to-air missile, (ii) advanced landing ship logistics, (iii) Astute class submarines, (iv) Bowman, (v) directional infra-red counter measures, (vi) future aircraft carrier, (vii) future carrier borne aircraft, (viii) joint tactical information and distribution system, (ix) landing platform dock replacement, (x) Link 16 joint tactical information display system, (xi) microwave landing system, (xii) mine counter measures vessels, (xiii) NATO submarine rescue system, (xiv) primary casualty receiving ship, (xv) remote influence minesweeping system, (xvi) SeaGnat DLH project, (xvii) Sonar 2087, (xviii) Sting Ray Life Extension lightweight torpedo, (xix) support amphibious and battlefield rotocraft, (xx) type 45 destroyer, (xxi) airborne stand-off radar, (xxii) BattleGroup thermal imaging, (xxiii) combined arms tactical trainer, (xxiv) extended range ordnance/modular charge system, (xxv) future command and liaison vehicle, (xxvi) future engineer tanks, (xxvii) future integrated soldier technology, (xxviii) ground based air defence, (xxix) multi-role armoured vehicle, (xxx) Airbus A400M, (xxxi) beyond visual range air-to-air missile, (xxxii) deployable air command and control system, (xxxiii) Eurofighter, (xxxiv) future offensive air system, (xxxv) Nimrod MRA-4, (xxxvi) Skynet 5, (xxxvii) Storm Shadow conventionally armed stand off missile and (xxxviii) UK air command and control system. [67632]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Type 45 Destroyer

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the type 45 destroyer could offer a ballistic missile defence capability. [68774]

Dr. Moonie: The type 45 destroyer has been designed with substantial weight and space margins to enable its capability to be upgraded through life. At present, no Ministry of Defence studies have been done to assess its specific suitability for a Ballistic Missile Defence role.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* planned capabilities and *(b)* strategic purposes and systems for type 45 destroyer. [68773]

Dr. Moonie: The type 45 will be a versatile destroyer capable of contributing to world-wide maritime and joint operations in multi-threat environments and providing a specialist air warfare capability. With regard to the planned capabilities and systems for the warship, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 232, to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies). As the design of the type 45 progresses, opportunities to upgrade the ship's capability are being identified and acted upon. During the past year it has been confirmed that all type 45s will be fitted with sonar during build and all will be fully interoperable with Merlin helicopters.

Defence Housing Executive

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mechanisms exist for ensuring that Defence Housing Executive achieve value for money; what criteria are used to assess their performance; and if he will make a statement. [69070]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive has been set challenging targets each year since its establishment as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Defence in 1999. In 2001–02 these targets were as follows:

Key Target 1

To house at least 72 per cent. of families in accommodation that matches their entitlement by posting date or on return to Great Britain from overseas; and at least 93 per cent. within 28 days of their required date.

Key Target 2

Less than 5 per cent. of occupants should experience significant defects within 14 days of moving in.

Key Target 3

To complete the planned upgrade of 2,400 properties by 31 March 2002 as part of the programme to upgrade core stock by November 2005.

Key Target 4

To complete at least 95 per cent. of emergency repairs within 24 hours of notification; at least 90 per cent. of urgent repairs within five working days of notification; at least 95 per cent. of routine repairs within two months of notification.

Key Target 5

To reduce the management margin progressively towards 10 per cent. by November 2005, better to balance supply and demand, while delivering other key targets.

All the above targets have been met except that key target 4 on repairs indicates a slight shortfall in performance on urgent and emergency orders, although urgent repairs were considerably improved over the previous year. Targets for routine repairs were met.

Armed Services Accommodation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the standard practice for Defence Housing Executive branches on records of repairs done on housing. [69462]

Dr. Moonie: Requests for repairs are logged locally on the Defence Housing Executive IT database. The database is nationally networked and each administrative stage of the repairs process is electronically managed to the stage of financial completion. Records are stored electronically and supported by hard copies of works orders and invoices.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many married quarters there are in Warminster, broken down by standard of condition. [69695]

Dr. Moonie: There are 601 service family quarters in Warminster, of which 85 are at Standard 1 for condition, 443 at Standard 2 and 73 at Standard 3. Just under 90 per cent. are thus at Standard 2 or above.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to improve the standard of service families' accommodation in Wiltshire. [69696]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 846W.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much *(a)* single living accommodation and *(b)* single family accommodation was empty in each month since January; and if he will make a statement. [69461]

Dr. Moonie: The figures for empty single living accommodation are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The approximate figures for vacant service family accommodation (SFA) in mainland United Kingdom at the end of each month from January to June 2002 is as follows:

	Figures
January	10,500
February	10,300
March	8,800
April	8,500
May	8,600
June	8,800

Many disposals took effect in March 2002. Since January 2000, over 10,000 surplus SFA have been released for disposal. Of the properties currently vacant, some 2,400 properties are in the course of disposal; some 2,300 are held for future unit deployments; 1,100 are awaiting modernisation and the remainder are available to incoming occupants or already under offer to them.

Gulf War Veterans

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the findings of work sponsored by the US Administration that Gulf War veterans have a reduced ability to metabolise organophosphates due to reduced levels of the PON1 enzyme (paraoxonase) in their blood; [68766]

(2) what assessment he has made of the findings of work commissioned by the US Administration that N-acetylaspartate levels are reduced in the right and left basal ganglia of Gulf War veterans compared with those in a control group, resulting in reduced dopamine production; [68767]

(3) what assessment he has made of the findings of the research commissioned by the US Administration from Robert W. Haley of the University of Texas relating to variants of Gulf War Syndrome. [68768]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Procurement Executive

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of Procurement Executive operating costs *(a)* in each year since 1997–98 and *(b)* at the latest date for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [69084]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Procurement Executive (PE) was vested as the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) in 1999. The cash figures in the table show the PE/DPA operating costs for each of the years in question. There have been various structural changes over these years; accounting conventions have also changed with the move from cash to resource budgets. It has not been possible to adjust the figures fully to reflect these changes. Cash figures for 2001–02 have yet to be finalised.

	£ million
1997–98	282
1998–99	247
1999–2000	249
2000–01	237

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Procurement Executive was ready for agency status; and if he will make a statement. [69104]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Procurement Executive became the Defence Procurement Agency when the agency was vested on 1 April 1999.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of average in-year slippage for the Procurement Executive of the in-service dates of new major projects in each year since 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [69085]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The average amount of in-year slippage to the in-service dates for the Ministry of Defence's major projects in 1997–98 was four months; in 1998–99 seven months; in 1999–2000 three months; and in 2000–01 one month. The MOD is currently gathering data for 2001–02.

Strategic Lift

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action has been taken to enhance strategic lift by *(a)* securing additional roll on/roll off container ships and *(b)* purchasing additional large transport aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [69097]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* As I announced on 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1038W, an enhanced sealift capability of up to six roll on/roll off ships will be available from 2003 under PFI arrangements agreed with AWSR Shipping Ltd. Our strategic airlift capability has been enhanced by the acquisition of Hercules C130J aircraft and leased C-17s. We also plan to introduce around the end of the decade the A400M transport aircraft, the contract for which we are working to make effective at the earliest opportunity.

MoDAS

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many companies submitted expressions of interest to his Department to provide the UK with a MoDAS; and if he will make a statement. [67417]

Dr. Moonie: 16 expressions of interest were received, in reply to the Ministry of Defence's Contracts Bulletin announcement, to provide the United Kingdom with the Modular Defensive Aids System. We expect to determine which systems will be taken forward into the assessment phase of the programme later this year.

Imber

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on the preservation of St. Giles' Church in the village of Imber in each of the past five years. [69239]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 12 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 640W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn).

Land Mines

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by his Department in 2001–02 on the research and development of new technology to detect and remove land mines. [69312]

Dr. Moonie: The total expenditure on the research and development of new technology to detect and remove land mines was £9.7 million in the financial year 2001–02.

Procurement

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what difficulties have been experienced with the procurement of a further five shipsets of the principal anti-air missile system. [69934]

Dr. Moonie: Negotiations on the PAAMS production contract for the systems for ships two to six are under way. No difficulties have been experienced to date that would put at risk the in-service dates of the type 45 Destroyer.

Red Dragon Project

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the Red Dragon Project Team at DARA, RAF St. Athan. [70107]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Aviation Repair Agency Red Dragon Project Team is currently being restructured to take account of the need to move the project forward to the approval stage.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Red Dragon Project to commence following the signing of the memorandum of intent between his Department and the WDA. [70108]

Mr. Ingram: The Red Dragon Project will shortly be at the approval stage and I expect to be in a position to announce a decision by the autumn.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when work will commence on a single purpose-built facility for DARA's operations at RAF St. Athan. [70106]

Mr. Ingram: Subject to approval, the new build is currently planned to commence by the end of the year.

Service Personnel (Birmingham Hospital)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what messing, accommodation and recreational facilities are available to service personnel based at Birmingham hospitals. [69266]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* At present there is no service accommodation for permanent staff, long-term or short course students at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM). Depending on their personal circumstances and the nature of their duties, staff and students are housed either in Ministry of Defence quarters within reasonable travelling distance of the site, MOD-hired accommodation, university student accommodation, hotels or suitable bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Mess and recreational facilities at two reserve units in Birmingham (202 Field Hospital and HMS Forward) are being used by those posted to the RCDM. In the longer term, a number of options are being considered for the development of facilities for staff and students at the RCDM.

DARA, Almondbank

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to transfer MOD posts to DARA, Almondbank. [69282]

Mr. Ingram: As I advised the hon. Member in my letter dated 17 June, the Ministry of Defence has no plans to transfer any further posts to Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Almondbank in the foreseeable future.

However, a transfer of work from St. Athan will take place which can be absorbed within existing spare capacity.

MOD Holdings

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list MOD holdings; and if he will make a statement. [69552]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence's land holdings are listed in section seven of the National Asset Register published by HM Treasury on 19 July 2001, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. A number of disposals and acquisitions have taken place since.

RAF Bases

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the housing project at *(a)* RAF Halton and *(b)* RAF Brize Norton has been completed; what the total cost has been; and if he will make a statement. [69463]

Dr. Moonie: The project at RAF Halton to upgrade 110 service families' quarters is complete and was undertaken in three phases. The details are as follows:

Halton project

	Commenced	*Completed*	*Numbers*	*Cost (£ million)*
Phase	September 2000	July 2001	50	2.236
Phase 1(a)	July 2001	February 2002	50	2.223
Phase 1(b)	January 2002	March 2002	10	0.513
Total				4.972

The individual project phases started and finished on time, and within budget.

The project at RAF Brize Norton, to upgrade 129 service families' quarters on base, began in October 2001 and is planned to finish in January 2003. The total cost is estimated at £8.512 million.

Military Sites (West Sussex)

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the military sites in West Sussex. [70038]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* There are four Ministry of Defence sites within West Sussex. Baker barracks, Thorney Island and Roussillon barracks, Chichester are regular sites and the Royal Electrical Engineers TA centre at Crawley and the Infantry TA centre at Worthing are reserve sites.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sport

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the local programmes the Government have funded to encourage sports, indicating the level of the funding that each programme has received, broken down by region, over the last five years. [68537]

Mr. Caborn: The majority of Government funding for sport in England is channelled through Sport England. Details of its funding programmes in each region have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Criminal Records Checks

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had on broadening the Criminal Record Bureau's access to criminal records from other countries with regard to child protection for the forthcoming Commonwealth Games. [68830]

Mr. Caborn: Child protection issues in relation to the Commonwealth Games are being taken forward by Manchester 2002 Ltd., the Games' organisers, in close liaison with Manchester City Council's Social Services Department. They have been working to ensure that the Games' child protection policies and procedures are consistent with relevant legislation and best practice.

In relation to Games' competitors who are under 16 years of age, Manchester 2002 Ltd. is requiring each team to provide chaperones to ensure that minors can be accompanied at all times. Assistance is being given to those teams that could otherwise not afford to meet this requirement. Manchester 2002 has asked all nominated chaperones to undergo subject access checks if they are from the UK, or via a similar scheme, if available, if from outside the UK. Otherwise teams are being required to provide a letter of support for each chaperone from someone in an official capacity.

In the case of children performing in the Games' ceremonies, provisions have been made to ensure that all minors are properly chaperoned. All chaperones have been asked to undergo subject access checks.

Lottery Funding

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funds have been allocated, but not distributed, by each of the National Lottery distribution funds in each of the last five years. [70065]

Mr. Caborn: This information is not readily available. I will however, write to the hon. Member as soon as it has been collated, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many projects awarded lottery funding of over £100,000 have subsequently been shut down, closed or made inaccessible to the public; [70066]

(2) how many projects awarded lottery funding of over £100,000 are *(a)* open to the public (i) free of charge and (ii) at a cost of below £5 and *(b)* not open to the public; and if she will make a statement. [70067]

Mr. Caborn: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. According to the national lottery awards database, which is based upon information supplied to us by the distributing bodies, 15,103 lottery grants of over £100,000 have been awarded up to 11 July 2002. Of these, 6,402 are capital grants, 6,077 are revenue grants and 2,624 are both capital and revenue grants.

Racing Industry

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether the racing industry will be given additional time to respond to changes proposed by the Office of Fair Trading. [69367]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

A number of agreements have been notified to OFT by the British Horseracing Board and the Jockey Club, including the Orders and Rules of Racing. The Office is currently investigating these agreements. The Competition Act 1998 provides time for parties to consider and respond to any findings made by the Director General. If the Director General proposes to grant an individual exemption to a notified agreement, he must first consult the public.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coal Industry

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of Government policy to the coal industry and the imminent expiry of the ECSC treaty. [70298]

Ms Hewitt: The future of coal policy must be considered both within the context of the new European coal state aid rules which are to come into force following the expiry of the ECSC treaty on 23 July, and in recognition of today's announcement by UK Coal on the future of the Selby complex.

Mineworkers and their families will obviously feel great disappointment at the news that production at the Selby complex will be phased out over the next 20 months. The chief executive of UK Coal, Gordon McPhie, said today that

> 'there was no prospect of the Selby complex becoming viable'.

Our analysis supports this conclusion: the independent review undertaken on our behalf by IMC Group Consulting Ltd. has endorsed UK Coal's assessment that there is little prospect for a later closure date, concluding that there is now an inevitability of a cessation of production at the complex. Seeking to prolong the life of the pit would be hugely expensive, and become increasingly so over time, for no long term gain. Therefore it seems to be unavoidable that the mine will have to close, and it would make little sense to seek to delay this by paying extra money to the pit. I very much regret this situation.

I am committed to providing for the welfare of Selby's mineworkers and their families. The Government have worked closely with UK Coal and the local Member of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan), and are today announcing a substantial closure package for regeneration and retraining, on top of an extended redundancy settlement. UK Coal's current redundancy agreements end in March 2003. UK Coal wanted to extend the current redundancy terms to cover the whole period of job losses at Selby, but were unable to bear the full costs of doing so at a time when it is making substantial losses and when such a large programme of redundancies is in prospect. We will contribute £10 million to enable Selby miners to receive the pre-privatisation "British Coal" redundancy terms.

I can also announce a multi-agency Task Force to combat the impact of the pit closures in the Selby coalfield to be led by Yorkshire Forward member, Lord Haskins. As a major local businessman he brings broad experience to the role. By taking action now, we will be able to offer the regeneration and reskilling packages exactly when they are needed.

The terms of reference for the Task Force will be:

> to ensure a comprehensive package of services are available to individuals directly affected by closure to help them access new training and job opportunities;
>
> to produce an action plan based on detailed analysis of the socio-economic impact of the closures on the local and regional economy;
>
> to identify and prioritise required short, medium and long term key actions to address the socio-economic impact on affected communities;
>
> to allocate responsibility for their delivery to relevant agencies and to identify new economic opportunities locally;
>
> to galvanise existing and to identify new resources and opportunities for support from Government and European sources and to make recommendations by October 2002;
>
> to co-ordinate and monitor delivery of agreed actions up to October 2004.

Membership will include: Yorkshire Forward; English Partnerships; Jobcentre Plus; GOYH; Selby council; Selby Strategy Forum; North Yorkshire county council; the North Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council; UK Coal plc; NUM; NACODS; the Coalfield Regeneration

Trust; Ricall Regen Centre; North Yorkshire Business Link; Wakefield First; Barnsley metropolitan district council; and the Association for Voluntary Services.

The remit of the Task Force will not include UK Coal's responsibilities to its work force, such as arrangements for redundancy and pensions.

Yorkshire Forward will lead the multi-agency Task Force, with an immediate £1.5 million injection of funding for set-up costs and commissioning of initial research, in response to the announcement of the closure of the Selby coalfield with further funding promised in the future. A comprehensive retraining programme will be required to minimise the impact of the closure on local economies.

Jobcentre Plus will provide advice and guidance to help individuals return to work as quickly as possible. It has experience of supportive involvement in major redundancies in a number of large organisations including Corus, Rolls Royce, Vauxhall and Unipart. It will co-ordinate its input to the support package for Selby via the Task Force. Specific measures provided will include the Rapid Response Service, through which a range of direct support to redundant workers at Selby will be provided, including:

provision of advice, guidance and support—if possible by placing staff on site;

skills needs assessments for all workers, identifying skills held, future training needs and help seeking appropriate work and training;

access to existing training provision, if necessary through the Work Based Learning for Adults programme, which can address basic skills, soft skills and vocational skills needs; and

where necessary by arranging additional provision.

Jobcentre Plus will also co-operate with key partners to help ensure other necessary support measures are identified and a cohesive response package is developed to provide appropriate support when it is needed.

The North Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Government office for Yorkshire and the Humber will contribute fully, both to help the Task Force develop its strategy and to secure the effective implementation of the agreed actions.

The North Yorkshire LSC, working with the local learning partnership and others, is already heavily involved in the Selby area, helping to re-engage people into learning. It will consider in particular what re-skilling packages might be needed to help regenerate the local economy and will seek to provide funds by applying a range of funding flexibilities from its:

core funded provision;

Local Initiative Fund;

partners use of European budgets.

In addition to support Selby workers, the Government will make payments on a similar basis to mineworkers at Longannet transferred from British Coal at privatisation and not already in receipt of "British Coal" redundancy payments. This will amount to £5,000 per person.

The principle of Government support for redundancy payments in the coal and steel sectors lies in the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty, which expires on 23 July. The Government have already made use of the provisions of the ECSC treaty in similar circumstances to make special payments to steel workers following the announcement of a programme of job cuts and closures throughout the UK by Corus in 2001.

All payments are subject to agreement from the European Commission. No further coal or steel redundancy schemes will be put in place by the Government once the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty has expired.

We have the most efficient coal industry in Europe, but to date European rules have prevented us from supporting viable investment projects through Regional Selective Assistance. My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction, has therefore secured agreement at a European level to the flexibility to pay investment aid for pits that have a viable future and we will shortly be consulting on the case for introducing such a scheme in the UK.

Such a scheme could allow for coal to be treated on a level playing field with other industries. We need to be clear that any new scheme will be cost-effective and make a real contribution to the capacity of the industry to exploit viable reserves of coal in the UK. As part of this analysis we will also commission an independent study of the remaining reserves at existing deep mines to help identify where investment support might be directed. Subject to the conclusions of our work and to the availability of resources we may be in a position to make specific proposals by the end of the year. The details of any scheme will of course need to be agreed with the European Commission consistent with the new EU regime.

I am also announcing a targeted extension of the current operating aid scheme, to the end of 2002, in order to help secure the long-term future of viable mines under exceptional short-term pressure and will consult on the details shortly. Aid has been paid under the current scheme on the understanding that recipients are viable without aid beyond July 2002, so a general extension of the scheme would not be appropriate. However real concerns have been raised about the risk that short term pressures at a small number of pits may force operators to change existing mining plans in such a way as to close off for good access to significant and otherwise viable reserves of coal. I therefore intend to seek the European Commission's agreement to a modified extension of the current subsidy scheme targeted to address these specific concerns.

Company Law

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Tra[illegible] and Industry when she will publish a consultation paper on the reform of company law. [67660]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Our current company law is creaking with age. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is today publishing plans to modernise and reform it for the 21st century. Company law is central to our economy and our prosperity. A thorough overhaul is needed to make the law clearer and accessible.

The White Paper reflects the changes that have taken place in the business environment in recent years, particularly the growth of small businesses and advances in communications technology, and include plans to:

Simplify the law and reduce burdens on small firms;

Improve transparency to increase confidence in business;

Improve governance to encourage and support responsible business.

EU Copyright Directive

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations her Department will undertake during the process to implement EU Directive 2001/29/EC on copyright. [69723]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We intend to circulate a consultation document setting out our proposals for legislative changes to implement this Directive to a wide range of interested parties already known to us, representing holders of rights, users of protected material and intermediaries. The consultation document will also be posted on the Patent Office website (www.patent.gov.uk) in order that any other interested organisations or individuals may comment if they wish.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has to replace the nuclear power plants that will retire between 2010 and 2025; what renewable energy plants will be considered; and what will be done with the nuclear power plants that will be taken out of service between 2010 and 2025. [68185]

Mr. Wilson: In common with all generation options, the initiative for bringing forward proposals to construct new plant lies with the market and the generating companies. The future role of all electricity generation technologies is currently being considered as part of the work leading to the White Paper. Closed nuclear power plants will be decommissioned.

Nuclear Waste Shipments

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received from the *(a)* Government of the Republic of Ireland, *(b)* National Assembly for Wales, *(c)* Northern Irish Assembly and *(d)* Scottish Executive on the transportation of nuclear waste to Sellafield by sea. [68093]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* I have not received any recent representations from these bodies about the transportation of nuclear waste to Sellafield by sea.

Consumer Credit Act

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from organisations in Scotland on reform of procedures relating to time orders under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. [67119]

Miss Melanie Johnson: None.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding possible reform procedures relating to time orders under the Consumer Credit Act 1974; and if she will make a statement. [67118]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Scottish Executive have recently consulted on the Enforcement of Civil Obligations in Scotland and this consultation mentions time orders under the 1974 Act while recognising that any changes to the 1974 Act would be a reserved matter. DTI officials plan to meet with their colleagues in the Scottish Executive to discuss the outcome of the consultation.

British Accounting

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received from British Business regarding the review of British accounting. [69074]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Co-ordinating Group set up to bring together the responses of the key regulators to post-Enron audit and accounting issues invited comments from 80 representative bodies, firms and individuals. The invitation was also published on the DTI website. There have been 25 responses. A summary of these will be included in the Group's interim report, which is expected to be published this month.

Regulation

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer by Chancellor of the Exchequer of 5 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 628W, when she will lay the relevant regulations before Parliament. [70078]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* We will lay the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations before Parliament following a consultation exercise on certain aspects of the regulations, which will begin later this month.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the action which the Regulatory Reform Action Plan *(a)* has taken and *(b)* proposes to take for better regulation and reform across Whitehall, local government and health authorities. [70101]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* In February the Government published the Regulatory Reform Action Plan, setting out over 250 proposals that will benefit businesses, charities and the voluntary sector, the wider public sector and individual citizens. The Plan includes measures that will deliver better regulation and reform across Whitehall, local government and health authorities. This is a programme for action, and where possible, Departments have given published targets for delivery.

The Government are monitoring progress on these proposals.

Postal Services

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the reform of postal services in England. [65168]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* The Postal Services Act 2000 established an independent regulator (Postcomm). It is Postcomm's primary statutory duty under that Act to ensure the provision of a universal postal service. The Act lays down that the obligation consists of a service provided at an affordable price determined by a public tariff uniform throughout the United Kingdom, and includes the delivery each working day to the home or premises of every individual in the United Kingdom and a collection each working day from access points.

In her statement to the House on 13 June 2002, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, set out the proposals agreed by the Board of Consignia to return the company's postal business to profitability, consistent with its statutory obligations.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contribution she expects competitors in the UK mail industry to make to the universal service obligation; and if she will make a statement. [66751]

Mr. Timms: The Government laid down the universal postal service obligation in primary legislation in the Postal Services Act 2000. Under that legislation, it is Postcomm's primary duty to exercise its functions in the manner which it considers is best calculated to ensure the provision of a universal postal service, and subject to this, it is also under a duty to exercise its functions in the manner which it considers is best calculated to further the interests of users of postal services, wherever appropriate by promoting effective competition between postal operators. Any contribution to be made by postal competitors to the universal service is therefore a matter for Postcomm.

Family-Friendly Working Hours

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government's policy is on family-friendly working hours for parents of young families. [69725]

Alan Johnson: The Government are committed to helping working parents. From April 2003 parents of children aged under six or of disabled children aged under 18 will have the right to apply to work flexibly. These parents face particular challenges and their employers will have a duty to consider these requests seriously. The Government continue to encourage the wider adoption of flexible working practices through the Work Life Balance Campaign.

At the same time, the Government will be increasing and extending maternity leave and pay and introducing new rights to paid adoption and paternity leave. These new rights, together with existing rights to take parental leave and time off for dependents will provide parents with more opportunities than ever before to balance work and family life. Employers, parents and their children stand to benefit as a result.

Mineworkers Pension Scheme

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made on the scheme announced on 17 January to award one-off lump sum payments to members of the mineworkers pension scheme on the lowest pensions. [70299]

Mr. Wilson: Payments totalling £38.2 million have now been made to over 28,000 coal pensioners on the lowest incomes. This is the first tranche of the initiative I announced that will benefit around 66,000 former coal miners at a cost of £90 million.

Those who have been paid are the oldest members of the mineworkers pension scheme. The remaining members who are not yet at pensionable age will receive their payments over the next 12 months.

These lump sum payments are in addition to the average bonus increase of 30 per cent. that have been awarded to members of the British Coal pension schemes since privatisation, over and above the annual inflation increase.

Timesaver Programme

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the timesaver programme for assisting small businesses. [69677]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service has carried out work on a timesaver service to reduce the time spent by small businesses in dealing with Government and complying with regulations. As a result of this work this project is being taken forward as part of a cross-departmental programme.

Excess Profits

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list those sectors of industry in which excess profits have occurred in the past four years, using the same definition of excess profits as the Competition Commission. [68002]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* This information is not available. The Competition Commission's inquiries relate to markets not sectors.

Your Guide Scheme

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the Your Guide scheme. [66748]

Mr. Timms: The evaluation of the pilot of post offices as Government General Practitioners has been completed to schedule. Work to establish whether a national service could offer value for money to all stakeholders, including Government and post offices, is continuing.

Public Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60142]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The consultations undertaken by the Department since June 2001 are as follows:

Commission proposal for a directive on the working conditions of temporary (agency) workers;

Company Investigations: Powers for the 21 Century;

Concerns about gas prices and possible improvements to market efficiency;

Developing Energy Policy—Key Issues for Consultation for the White Paper;

Directive 2000/53/EC on End of Life Vehicles;

Directors' Home Addresses;

Directors' Remuneration;

Discussion document on Electronic Signatures Directive Implementing Regulations;

Discussion Paper on a Possible Producer Responsibility Model for Used Tyres;

DTI Reviews: Structure and Priorities and Business Support;

EC Green Paper on Corporate Social Responsibility;

EC Green Paper on the review of the ECMR;

Employment status in relation to statutory employment rights;

Final consultation on Fixed Term Work;

Flexible working;

General Product Safety Directive;

Guidance on applications for resolution of disputes over third party access to Oil and Gas Infrastructure;

High Performance Workplaces: The Role of Employee Involvement in a Modern Economy;

ICANN and the Management of the Internet Domain Name system;

IT Security Industry in connection with the Private Security Industry Act;

Joint DTI/DCMS consultation on the Draft Communications Bill;

Maternity and parental leave, and paternity and adoption leave and pay;

Modernising The Consumer Credit Act 1974;

Modernising trading standards;

Proposal on the EU Statute for a European Co-operative Society;

Proposals to Tighten Consumer Protection against Short Measure of Draught Beer and Cider;

Proposed amendments to Part-Time Workers Regulations;

Proposed changes to the legislation that deals with price marking of food and drink served in bars, restaurants and cafes;

Proposed changes to the Price Marking (Food and Drink on Premises) Order 1979;

Reform of EC Competition Regime;

Report of the Task Force on Car Servicing and Repair;

Review into the case for Government support for cleaner coal technology demonstration plant;

Routes to Resolution: Improving dispute resolution in Britain;

Second Consultation on Proposed Modifications to Licence Conditions and Ofgem Guidelines;

Second consultation on the Directive 1999/44/EC on certain aspects of the sale of consumer goods and associated guarantees;

The DTI Race Equality Scheme;

The E-Commerce Directive (2000/31/EC): draft implementing Regulations and interim guidance for business;

The preliminary decision to add new user groups to the approved users list in the Airwave mm02 Telecommunications Act licence;

The Pressure Equipment Regulations 1999;

The process for identifying the GB system operator (GBSO);

The UNIDROIT/ICAO Draft Convention on International Interests in Mobile Equipment;

Towards Equality and Diversity: Implementing the Employment and Race Directives;

Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 (TUPE) reform;

Treasury Shares;

Under-Investment in University Research Infrastructure;

Young Workers Directive.

Figures for the number of respondents and the percentage of those specifically consulted who responded are not held centrally. All DTI consultation documents are posted on the Department website and that of the Central Office of Information to ensure we consult as widely as possible.

Employment Liability (Quarries)

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the willingness of the insurance industry to provide employer liability cover for small quarries. [66762]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The provision of insurance is a matter for insurance companies in the light of their commercial understanding of the market. There is no statutory requirement on the insurance industry to provide employers' liability compulsory insurance.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Zimbabwe

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action was taken by the Government to ensure that Zimbabwe would follow the Southern African Development Community's programme for free and fair elections. [67133]

Mr. MacShane: The SADC parliamentary forum published norms and standards which set a very high standard for the conduct of free and fair elections. They formed the basis of the norms and standards adopted by the EU.

The EU sent election observers to Zimbabwe. But the Government revoked the visa of the EU team leader, which forced the withdrawal of the observer mission.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations personnel at the Foreign Office have made in the past year to the European Commission concerning the recruitment and appointment of personnel to positions in the Commission dealing with Zimbabwe, with special reference to representations made on behalf of British citizens to Commission appointment boards. [68876]

Peter Hain: It is not practical to attempt to check every contact between British officials and the Commission over the last year. But we are not aware of any representations being made over that period concerning the recruitment and appointment of personnel to positions in the Commission dealing with Zimbabwe.

British Goods Promotion

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding he gave to promote *(a)* high quality and *(b)* other British goods and services abroad in the last 12 months. [67786]

Mr. MacShane: British Trade International (BTI), has lead responsibility within Government for trade development and investment overseas and inward investment. The BTI is a joint FCO and DTI operation.

The trade promotion and development arm of BTI is Trade Partners UK (TPUK). In financial year 2001–02, TPUK's budget for promoting goods and services overseas was some £69.6 million.

Information distinguishing between funding for the promotion of *(a)* high quality and *(b)* other British goods and services is not collected.

Overseas Territories

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which UK overseas territories *(a)* have and *(b)* have not produced timely, complete and reliable statistical abstracts annually since 1997; with which United Kingdom overseas territories his office has raised queries on the timeliness, completeness and reliability of their (i) annual statistical abstracts and (ii) other statistical reports since 1997; and from which United Kingdom overseas territories satisfactory responses are still awaited. [67642]

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will place in the Library the National Income Accounts for each overseas territory received by his Department; and if he will list the date of their last submission; [67852]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of the latest official statistics for each of the overseas territories that his Department has received; [67850]

(3) with whom the duty for publishing and submitting to his Department the National Income Accounts on Official Statistics for each overseas territory lies; [67849]

(4) on which occasions he has received official statistics over the past five years from each overseas territory; and if he will indicate, in each case, if they are of the standard that he requires. [67851]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* Each overseas territory has a slightly different system for the collection and publication of statistics but we look to them all to produce suitable and regular information.

Of the nine overseas territories where there is significant economic activity, seven have regularly produced and published statistics over a five year period up to and including either 2000 or 2001. Montserrat, due to particular circumstances, has been unable to produce comprehensive statistics for several years, but expects to do so in the near future. Gibraltar has recently published a compendium of statistics after a gap of several years. I will be making arrangements for the most recent statistical returns from each of these overseas territories to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

HMG are in consultation with certain overseas territories about refining and improving their statistical returns, and where appropriate have offered assistance with this, for example by the secondment of experts.

Botswana

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the policy of the Botswanian Government to relocate the bushmen is in accordance with the terms of the programme to support and improve protected reserves agreed between the European Union and the Botswanian Government. [69224]

Mr. MacShane: The relocation of the bushmen from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve is not linked in any way to the terms of the EU programme. While the programme allows for support to inhabitants of the community-use zones adjacent to game reserves, it is not dependent on relocation of people from those reserves.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what part Her Majesty's Government played in negotiating the programme between the European Union and the Botswanian Government to support and improve protected reserves; [69223]

(2) what part her Department had in the negotiation of the programme for supporting and improving protected reserves agreed between the European Union and the Botswanian Government. [69225]

Mr. MacShane: We played no direct role in negotiating the programme to support and improve protected reserves. The European Commission does this on behalf of the EU under agreed procedures governing disbursement of the European Development Fund.

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the repatriation of refugees to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries; and if he will make a statement on the infrastructural and security situation within Afghanistan. [69370]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: So far approximately 1.2 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries. Since September 2001, the UK has contributed over £5 million to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) for their programme of assistance to Afghan refugees, and over £3.5 million to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees to Afghanistan. We are also supporting a number of other humanitarian programmes which will help to create an environment for the sustainable return of both refugees and IDPs, including the United Nations-led programme of mine clearance and mine awareness in Afghanistan.

Years of fighting and instability have taken their toll on Afghan infrastructure, which has had a direct impact on humanitarian, reconstruction and rehabilitation work in Afghanistan. A World bank trust fund has been established to co-ordinate international development assistance for Afghanistan, including for infrastructure.

The overall security situation in Kabul has improved greatly since ISAF began its operations there last December. However, the security situation elsewhere in Afghanistan is more uncertain, and there are many challenges still to face. The key to improving security throughout Afghanistan is to offer the Afghans assistance with Security Sector Reform. We are leading on the counter narcotics effort, with the US leading on army training, the Germans on police training, the Italians on judicial reform, and the Japanese on demobilisation.

United States Farm Act

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the impact of the new United States Farm Act on the *(a)* enlargement of the EU and *(b)* the development of agricultural exports from the Third World. [69227]

Peter Hain: The information is as follows:

(a) The Government are a champion of EU enlargement and are committed to concluding negotiations by the end of this year with those candidates who are ready. The US Farm Act will have no direct consequences for the substance and timing of the EU enlargement process.

(b) Further liberalisation of agricultural trade is important for fostering trade led growth, and thus poverty reduction, in developing countries. These are key UK objectives in implementing the WTO's Doha Development Agenda. Regrettably, the US Farm Act seems likely to further distort world markets.

Kashmir

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his most recent assessment is of the UK's role in relation to the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. [69498]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear in the House on 25 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 728, this is at root a bilateral matter, which can be resolved only by direct dialogue between the parties. We welcome the lowering of tensions but remain deeply concerned about the military mobilisation on both sides of the border. We will remain fully engaged in seeking further de-escalation and encouraging India and Pakistan to work towards a lasting settlement of all their differences, including Kashmir.

As part of this engagement, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence visited the region on 2–3 July, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be visiting again later this week. The purpose of both visits is to encourage dialogue between India and Pakistan.

Departmental Travel

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on using *(a)* UK and *(b)* non-UK carriers. [69689]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our policy is to use airlines that provide the best value for money in terms of cost, safety and service on the routes flown.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what internal budgetary rules govern the travel of his Department's staff, embassy staff and associated staff. [69690]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Rules governing expenditure on staff travel at home and overseas are set out in the FCO Code of Management. These cover entitlements, authorisation of expenditure, value for money and budgeting.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the British high commissioner to Cyprus has taken to bring together Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots living on Cyprus to discuss issues of general interest; when such meetings have taken place during the last 12 months; and where the meetings took place. [69732]

Peter Hain: The Government are committed to developing practical co-operation between the two communities on and off the island. I myself hosted a reception and gave a speech to an intercommunal gathering on 10 April which was attended by senior politicians from both communities. The British high commission has made a significant contribution to intercommunal dialogue, bringing Turkish and Greek Cypriots together at a wide range of events.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom Government's relations with the Government of the Republic of Cyprus. [69704]

Peter Hain: The Government enjoy excellent relations with the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what the United Kingdom Government's policy is on the United Nations resolutions that have been passed as the basis of a settlement for Cyprus; [69750]

(2) if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom Government's policy on Cyprus; [69699]

(3) what the United Kingdom Government's policy is on the development of two sovereign states for the island of Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [69705]

Peter Hain: It is for the two sides in Cyprus to agree the terms of a settlement. However, the Government are committed to UN Security Council Resolution 1250 of June 1999 which called upon the two leaders to give their full support to a comprehensive negotiation under the auspices of the Secretary-General for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement in Cyprus, which takes full consideration of relevant Security Council resolutions and treaties. We are working hard to help all involved in the current direct talks to move negotiations forward and urging both sides to co-operate fully in such an effort, in particular to work with the Secretary-General's Special Adviser, Alvaro de Soto.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if the recent statement made by Lord Hannay, during a recent Turkish television interview on Cyprus, was *(a)* a statement of United

Kingdom Government policy on Cyprus and *(b)* made with approval of his Department; and if he will make a statement; [69700]

(2) if Lord Hannay discussed his recent Turkish television interview on Cyprus with the British High Commissioner for the Republic of Cyprus before the interview took place; and if he will make a statement. [69703]

Peter Hain: Lord Hannay is the Government's Special Representative on Cyprus, and speaks with our full support.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met President Clerides of the Republic of Cyprus; what issues were discussed; and if he will make a statement. [69730]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and President Clerides both attended the European Council in Seville in June. I met him in April.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what salary has been paid to Lord Hannay as the United Kingdom adviser on Cyprus in each of the last five years; [69706]

(2) how many days Lord Hannay has been employed by the United Kingdom Government to work as the UK adviser on Cyprus in each of the last five years. [69707]

Peter Hain: Between June 1997 and June 1998 Lord Hannay was employed by the United Kingdom Government to work as the UK adviser on Cyprus for 98 days and was paid a salary of £39,200.

Between June 1998 and June 1999 Lord Hannay was employed for 79 days and was paid a salary of £31,600.

Between June 1999 and June 2000 Lord Hannay was employed for 99.5 days and was paid a salary of £39,800.

Between June 2000 and June 2001 Lord Hannay was employed for 100.5 days and was paid a salary of £45,315.

Between June 2001 and June 2002 Lord Hannay was employed for 88.5 days and was paid a salary of £39,825. His expertise, authority and the respect in which he is held by both sides shows that this is good value for money.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the policy is of the United Kingdom Government on the application of the Republic of Cyprus for the membership of the European Union. [69729]

Peter Hain: The Government welcome and indeed champions Cyprus' application to join the European Union. The Government's policy remains based on the position outlined by the Helsinki European Council, which stated that

> "a political settlement will facilitate the accession of Cyprus to the European Union".

If no settlement has been reached by the completion of accession negotiations, the Council's decision on accession will be made without the above being a precondition. In this the Council will take account of all relevant factors.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the number of settlers from mainland Turkey who are permanently settled in northern Cyprus. [69712]

Peter Hain: The number of Turkish citizens who have come from mainland Turkey to northern Cyprus is a matter of dispute between the various parties concerned. No authoritative figures are available.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Nations peacekeeping forces are based in Cyprus. [69711]

Peter Hain: As of June 2002, UN forces in Cyprus (UNFICYP) numbered 1,206 military personnel, 35 civilian police, 44 international civilians and 103 local civilians.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the British High Commissioner to the Republic of Cyprus last visited the occupied area of northern Cyprus; who he met; and what issues were discussed. [69709]

Peter Hain: The British High Commissioner and his staff in Nicosia maintain regular contacts on both sides of the green line, including on consular support for British nationals living in the north of Cyprus and support for a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement in Cyprus.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had, and with whom, on the future of the town of Famagusta; and if he will make a statement. [69731]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had no recent detailed discussions on the town of Famagusta. The future of the town of Famagusta is under discussion in the negotiations currently taking place under UN auspices for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement in Cyprus, to which the Government give their full support.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the resolution of the European Parliament of 13 June that only a single sovereign Cyprus state should be permitted to accede to the European Union. [69767]

Peter Hain: The Government fully support the Conclusions of the Seville European Council, which state that

> "as a Member State, Cyprus will need to speak with a single voice and ensure proper application of European Union law".

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many chapters the Republic of Cyprus has negotiated in its application for membership of the European Union. [69728]

Peter Hain: The Republic of Cyprus has opened 30 negotiating chapters and provisionally closed 28 in its accession negotiations with the European Union.

Western Sahara

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on sovereignty over Western Sahara. [69977]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK—in common with most other countries—regards the sovereignty of Western Sahara as undetermined pending UN efforts to find a solution to this dispute.

We supported UN Security Council Resolution 1359. This reiterated full support for the ongoing efforts of MINURSO to implement the Settlement Plan and agreements by the parties to hold a free, fair and impartial referendum for the self-determination of the people of the Western Sahara.

It also endorsed the efforts of the UN Secretary-General to invite all the parties to meet directly, or through proximity talks under the auspices of his Personal Envoy, James Baker, to discuss any proposal in order to arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement.

EU Enlargement

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards EU enlargement. [69872]

Peter Hain: Excellent progress was made under the Spanish presidency, which agreed EU positions on the four final chapters for negotiation, in line with the "road map" agreed at Nice. The Seville European Council reiterated the EU's commitment to completing negotiations with the best-prepared candidates by the end of the year, so they can join the EU in time to take part in the 2004 European Parliament elections. The UK is firmly committed to this timetable, first proposed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in 2000. 10 candidate countries are on track to complete negotiations this year, having closed between 23 and 28 of the 30 chapters.

Middle East

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Governments of Iraq, Syria, Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia concerning anti-Semitism in the media in those countries; and if he will make a statement. [70169]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We deplore anti-Semitism and make this clear to those concerned.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Saudi Ambassador and *(b)* the Saudi Government concerning recent statements made by the Ambassador relating to suicide bombing; and if he will make a statement. [70168]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The FCO has made clear to the Saudi Ambassador our well-known position on suicide bombings. We condemn them as we condemn all forms of terrorism and indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians. We have not made any other representations to the Saudi Government.

PRIME MINISTER

Sure Start

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Prime Minister what changes to ministerial responsibilities he will be making in relation to Sure Start, early years and child care. [70678]

The Prime Minister: The Chancellor announced yesterday a significant increase in the combined budget for child care, early years and Sure Start, rising to £1.5 billion in 2005–06. This includes a more than doubling of investment in child care by 2005–06, following an inter-departmental review of child care co-ordinated by the Performance and Innovation Unit.

The extra investment will support the expansion of child care places across the country, and the integration of good quality child care with early years education, family support and health services through a network of children's centres in the most disadvantaged areas.

In keeping with this new focus on integration, responsibility for early years education, child care and Sure Start will be brought within one inter-departmental unit based within the Department for Education and Skills. The Chancellor announced yesterday the PSA target for the new unit which will be shared by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions.

This new inter-departmental unit will report to a new Minister for Sure Start, early years and child care, who will be jointly appointed to the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions, to ensure that our early years and child care vision delivers on both our educational and employment objectives. I have asked Baroness Ashton, who led the inter-departmental review of child care, to take on this role.

Baroness Ashton will report to a new cross-departmental ministerial group on Sure Start, early years and child care. This Group will be a sub-Committee of MISC9, the Cabinet sub-Committee on Children's Services. The focus on health has been vital to the Sure Start programmes already up and running. To ensure that this is maintained, the sub-committee will be chaired by the Minister for Public Health. The sub-committee's other members will include the Paymaster General and the Minister for Disabled People.

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills will continue to speak on these issues in Cabinet. At junior ministerial level, the Minister for Disabled People will answer questions in the House of Commons.

I believe these new arrangements will ensure that an integrated approach is taken to the development and delivery of our early years and child care vision.

PRIVY COUNCIL

E-democracy

Rob Marris: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on E-democracy. [68012]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Government will today publish "In the service of democracy", a consultation paper on a policy for electronic democracy". Copies of the paper are available in the Vote Office. Libraries of the House and on the new e-democracy website www.edemocracy.gov.uk. A copy of the paper will be sent to all MPs and Peers.

Our strategy for e-democracy offers new ways of participating and seeks to complement rather than replace existing structures. The paper sets out our aim of using new technologies to promote, strengthen and enhance our democratic structures.

Government action is proposed in two main areas, e-participation and e-voting. We outline new ways in which the mechanisms of democracy can be enhanced, by modernising voting methods, improving access to ballots and broadening the scope of Government consultations.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) provide a means to increase public participation, and we hope that with an active Government policy the potential benefits can be maximised.

The period of public consultation will end on Wednesday 31 October 2002.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

School Exclusions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many exclusions from *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools there have been in each English local education authority in each year since 1980–81; and if she will make a statement. [67105]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* Tables showing the available information have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Child Care (Regulations)

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans there are to advertise the existence of the national register of child minders and day care providers; [69117]

(2) what action has been taken to advertise the existence of the national register of child minders and day care providers; [69118]

(3) when the national register of child minders and day care providers will be available online; [69119]

(4) how many child care professionals are listed on the national register of child minders and day care providers; [69132]

(5) how many child care professionals are listed on the national register of child minders and day care providers within the area of the Devon county council. [69140]

Margaret Hodge: The establishment of a national register of child minders and day care providers is a matter for the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The HM Chief Inspector for Schools, David Bell, will write to the hon. Gentleman and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library. Ofsted routinely transfers information from its database of child care providers to local Childcare information Services (CISs). The Government have made funds available to local CISs across England in order to make child care information available to parents. The Department has set up the ChildcareLink national information line (0800 0 96 02 96) to help parents find their local CIS. There is also a ChildcareLink website www.childcarelink.gov.uk that includes a search facility to find local child care provision.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) when assessment of child care providers against OFSTED's satisfaction criteria will *(a)* commence and *(b)* be completed; [69142]

(2) what OFSTED'S draft satisfaction criteria for child care providers are; [69143]

(3) when OFSTED's satisfaction criteria for child care providers will be finalised. [69145]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). The HM Chief Inspector for Schools, David Bell, will write to the hon. Gentleman and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what further training is necessary for staff as a result of the transfer of responsibilities for child care regulation to OFSTED; and what plans there are for its provision. [69144]

Margaret Hodge: Training for staff employed by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) is a matter for OFSTED. The HM Chief Inspector for Schools, David Bell, will write to the hon. Gentleman and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library.

Higher Education

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Government have, to consult students on higher education courses. [63936]

Margaret Hodge: Students' views are at the heart of the new arrangements for quality assurance in higher education, which will be introduced from September 2002. Students and graduates will be asked to rate their courses through a range of surveys and their views will be published. A national survey of graduates will be piloted in October 2002 and will be followed by full implementation in Autumn 2003.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of young people in each English county entered higher education in the latest year for which information is available; and if she will make a statement. [67106]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The latest available information, showing the proportion of 18 year olds from each local education authority in England entering full-time undergraduate courses in the UK via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), is shown in the table.

Our programmes to raise standards in schools and colleges will have a major impact on increasing participation in HE. We have introduced the Excellence Challenge in Excellence in Cities areas and Education Action Zones, working with young people from the age of 13, which, together with the AimHigher campaign, will encourage more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to aspire to HE. We are also encouraging more Higher Education Institutions to introduce a range of measures to enable more people to participate in higher education including part-time learning and access programmes for mature students.

Proportion of English domiciled students aged 18 accepted through Ucas to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK autumn 2001 entry

Local Education Authority (LEA)	*17 year old population in 2000*	*18 year olds accepted to HE in 2001*	*Proportion entering Higher Education percentage*
Barking and Dagenham	2,029	231	11.4
Barnet	3,872	1,234	31.9
Barnsley	2,723	437	16.0
Bath and North East Somerset	1,913	479	25.0
Bedfordshire	4,729	1,119	23.7
Bexley	2,671	488	18.3
Birmingham	13,765	2,447	17.8
Blackburn with Darwen	2,059	368	17.9
Blackpool	1,734	254	14.6
Bolton	3,449	826	24.0
Bournemouth	1,564	363	23.2
Bracknell Forest	1,439	305	21.2
Bradford	6,797	1,209	17.8
Brent	3,177	976	30.7
Brighton and Hove	2,602	370	14.2
Bromley	3,163	989	31.3
Buckinghamshire	6,017	1,826	30.3
Bury	2,332	597	25.6
Calderdale	2,424	513	21.2
Cambridgeshire	6,711	1,467	21.9
Camden	1,929	359	18.6
Cheshire	8,179	2,491	30.5
City of Bristol	4,541	797	17.5
City of Derby	2,859	558	19.5
City of Kingston upon Hull	3,197	356	11.1
City of London	31	54	175.9
City of Westminster	2,032	330	16.2
Cornwall	6,012	1,303	21.7
Coventry	3,942	762	19.3
Croydon	4,125	1,038	25.2
Cumbria	5,931	1,305	22.0
Darlington	1,255	259	20.6
Derbyshire	8,620	1,891	21.9
Devon	8,323	1,710	20.5
Doncaster	3,886	711	18.3
Dorset	4,796	1,017	21.2
Dudley	3,731	753	20.2
Durham	6,540	1,191	18.2
Ealing	3,609	998	27.7
East Riding of Yorkshire	3817	883	23.1
East Sussex	5,769	1,188	20.6
Enfield	3,088	877	28.4
Essex	15,402	3,483	22.6
Gateshead	2,541	432	17.0
Gloucestershire	7,067	1,656	23.4
Greenwich	2,797	406	14.5
Hackney	2,286	319	14.0
Halton	1,793	293	16.3
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,444	295	20.4
Hampshire	15,830	3,617	22.8
Haringey	2,399	432	18.0
Harrow	2,770	1,059	38.2
Hartlepool	1,226	224	18.3
Havering	2,758	525	19.0
Herefordshire	2,015	503	25.0
Hertfordshire	12,421	3,401	27.4
Hillingdon	2,921	686	23.5
Hounslow	2,521	646	25.6
Isle of Wight	1,494	301	20.2
Isles of Scilly	18	10	55.9
Islington	1,849	302	16.3
Kensington and Chelsea	1,665	320	19.2
Kent	16,431	3,622	22.0
Kingston upon Thames	1,607	507	31.5
Kirklees	4,973	1,056	21.2
Knowsley	2,371	319	13.5
Lambeth	2,848	448	15.7
Lancashire	14,806	3,418	23.1
Leeds	8,655	1,743	20.1
Leicester City	3,758	826	22.0
Leicestershire	7,466	1,844	24.7
Lewisham	2,827	442	15.6
Lincolnshire	7,487	1,705	22.8
Liverpool	5,893	1,032	17.5
Luton	2,447	422	17.2
Manchester	5,955	715	12.0
Medway Towns	3,079	602	19.6
Merton	1,991	456	22.9
Middlesbrough	2,098	406	19.4
Milton Keynes	2,828	499	17.6
Newbury	2,138	448	21.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,239	754	23.3
Newham	3,421	688	20.1
Norfolk	9,044	1,624	18.0
North East Lincolnshire	2,124	339	16.0
North Lincolnshire	1,991	363	18.2
North Somerset	2,303	531	23.1
North Tyneside	2,374	417	17.6
North Yorkshire	7,397	1,882	25.4
Northamptonshire	8,030	1,726	21.5
Northumberland	4,094	916	22.4
Nottingham City	3,423	424	12.4
Nottinghamshire	9,230	1,913	20.7
Oldham	3,004	570	19.0
Oxfordshire	7,889	1,737	22.0
Peterborough	2,174	396	18.2
Plymouth	3,232	537	16.6
Poole	1,635	289	17.7
Portsmouth	2,174	306	14.1
Reading	1,637	348	21.3
Redbridge	2,962	944	31.9
Redcar and Cleveland	1,824	353	19.4
Richmond upon Thames	1,878	608	32.4
Rochdale	2,942	537	18.3
Rotherham	3,204	568	17.7
Rutland	746	118	15.8
Salford	2,804	359	12.8
Sandwell	3,772	594	15.7
Sefton	3,708	1,028	27.7
Sheffield	5,775	981	17.0
Shropshire	3,706	892	24.1
Slough	1,388	341	24.6
Solihull	2,545	757	29.7
Somerset	6,313	1,349	21.4
South Gloucestershire	2,758	497	18.0
South Tyneside	1,959	336	17.2
Southampton	2,397	395	16.5
Southend	1,900	350	18.4
Southwark	2,448	362	14.8
St Helens	2,304	503	21.8
Staffordshire	10,282	2,459	23.9
Stockport	3,633	919	25.3
Stockton-on-Tees	2,495	534	21.4
Stoke on Trent	3,119	502	16.1
Suffolk	8,006	1,679	21.0
Sunderland	3,905	617	15.8
Surrey	12,979	3,618	27.9
Sutton	2,011	558	27.7
Swindon	2,199	315	14.3
Tameside	2,823	407	14.4
Telford and the Wrekin	2,148	399	18.6
Thurrock	1,574	168	10.7
Torbay	1,489	278	18.7
Tower Hamlets	2,522	367	14.6
Trafford	2,857	710	24.9
Wakefield	3,974	749	18.8
Walsall	3,454	624	18.1
Waltham Forest	2,485	522	21.0
Wandsworth	2,100	501	23.9
Warrington	2,404	573	23.8
Warwickshire	6,311	1,553	24.6
West Sussex	8,658	1,910	22.1
Wigan	3,836	661	17.2
Wiltshire	5,426	1,283	23.6
Windsor and Maidenhead	1,876	464	24.7

Proportion of English domiciled students aged 18 accepted through Ucas to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK autumn 2001 entry

Local Education Authority (LEA)	*17 year old population in 2000*	*18 year olds accepted to HE in 2001*	*Proportion entering Higher Education percentage*
Wirral	4,284	1,099	25.7
Wokingham	1,986	640	32.2
Wolverhampton	3,200	682	21.3
Worcestershire	6,735	1,549	23.0
York	2,161	533	24.7
Known total	610,936	131,254	21.5
Unknown	—	68	—
Total	610,936	131,322	21.5

Sources:

Office of National Statistics (ONS), Government Actuary Department (GAD),

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service(UCAS)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* courses and *(b)* chairs in British universities are funded by the EU; and what process ensures the academic rigour and impartiality of these arrangements. [68648]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* The European Commission co-funds, with Universities, courses and academic posts in relevant subjects via its Jean Monnet project. The project did not operate last academic year, but according to the Commission website, this programme contributed funding towards 94 academic posts and 209 course modules in UK universities in the year 2000. There will be another round of the project this year. The posts supported are referred to by the Commission as 'Chairs' but are not always professorships. Academic institutions make their own appointments, which are then subject to approval by the Commission. Further information about the Jean Monnet project and the activities it supports can be found on the European Commission website www.europa.eu.in/comm/education

In addition to this source, UK universities and research institutions derive significant amounts of funding from the European Union's Framework Programmes for Scientific research. The Government do not however hold any figures on how many courses are being funded as a result of successful UK applications made under the Improving Human Potential Programme in this Programme.

The quality and standards of all the programmes and awards delivered by UK higher education institutions are encompassed within the quality assurance arrangements of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). University Chairs are institutional appointments and as such, standards are a matter for institutions in respect of their own recruitment policies.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff were employed by her Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60920]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for State at the Cabinet Office on 13 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 1402W.

Special Educational Needs

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 4 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 498W, on MLD and SLD schools, on what basis the Government allocates funding to meet SEN requirements. [69501]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Most provision for the education of children with special needs (SEN) is included within general revenue grant support for local authorities. The Education Standard Spending Assessment formula through which this general support is distributed allows for different levels of additional educational need, between authorities, but does not specifically allocate funding for SEN needs. In practice, about 11 per cent. of local authority schools expenditure is attributable to SEN and to other "special" kinds of provision such as pupil referral units. In addition to general grant support, the Government pay specific grant through the Standards Fund which will support £91 million of expenditure on SEN in 2002–03. This specific support is distributed to authorities on the following basis: 70 per cent. on full time equivalent pupil numbers in all LEA maintained schools and 30 per cent. by entitlement to free school meals.

Early-years Education

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of three-year-olds in deprived areas have access to early-years education. [69382]

Margaret Hodge: The Department does not collect data in the format requested.

However, we have increased the national percentage of three-year-olds able to access a free, part time, early education place from 34 per cent. in January 1997 to more than 66 per cent. in January 2002. By September 2004, all three-year-olds will be able to access a free place.

Already, 65 of the most deprived local education authorities offer a free nursery education place to all three-year-olds whose parents want one. The remaining authorities are responsible for devising eligibility criteria for the distribution of free places in their area according to social need.

Children and Young People's Unit

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she will take in response to the publication of the 'Yvote?/Ynot?' report by the Children and Young People's Unit. [69615]

Mr. Denham: The Children and Young People's Unit will be working with the Electoral Commission and a wide range of young people's organisations to extend the debate about the report's findings. We plan to make the materials from the project available to teachers, youth workers and organisations working directly with young people. We shall be working with the All Party Group on Youth Affairs to explore how honourable Members can be helped to improve their communication with young people. The report also identified the importance of information about the political process and this will be a key feature of citizenship education which will be part of the national curriculum for secondary schools from August 2002.

My objective is to seek to ensure that all young people who have the opportunity to vote for the first time at the next general election should have considered the issues involved.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many places there were in each state grammar school in each English local education authority; what percentage this represented of the total number of secondary school places in these local authorities; and how many and what percentage of children was entered for the admission test for each of these schools in each of the last three years. [68172]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not regularly collect information on the number of school places in any type of school. Nor does it collect information on the number of children entered for admission tests.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

S/Waste Paper

Mr. Mullin: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how much waste paper was produced by the House in each of the last two years; how it was disposed of; and if he will make a statement. [2635]

Mr. Kirkwood *[pursuant to his reply, 17 June 2001, c. 156W]:* In July 2001 I said that some 3,000 tonnes of waste were incinerated per year. In fact the total quantity of domestic waste (that is, not including builders' waste) removed from the parliamentary estate and burned over the last three years has been under 1,500 tonnes per year. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for this error; the wrong information was provided by a contractor, and that mistake has only just come to light in the course of preparing an answer to a recent question.

HEALTH

NHS Dentistry

9. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on dental health. [67272]

Mr. Lammy: Since the inception of the NHS oral health has improved greatly and NHS dentistry has worked well over this period. There have been dramatic falls in the numbers of adults and children with decayed, missing or filled teeth. However variations remain across the country and we are taking action to tackle these. We are also working with representatives of the profession to modernise NHS dentistry and to see how new demands on the service can be met for the benefit of patients and dentists.

31. **Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of adults are registered with an NHS dentist. [67295]

Mr. Lammy: Arrangements are now in place to ensure that patients can gain access to national health service services simply by calling NHS Direct. This means that even if a patient is not registered with a dentist it will still be possible for that patient to access all forms of dentistry that are provided by the NHS.

Forty-three per cent. of adults were registered with a general dental service dentist in England at 31 May 2002. Registrations lapse if patients do not return to the dentist within 15 months. Patients who are not registered can be seen under occasional treatment arrangements that were introduced last year.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available to the Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency for NHS dental provision. [60776]

Jacqui Smith *[pursuant to her reply, 24 June 2002, c. 727–28W]:* I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should read:

Information on funding of national health service dental provision is not available on a constituency basis.

The gross fees paid to general dental practitioners (GDP) within the old Morecambe Bay health authority area, for providing NHS dental treatment, were £9.28 million in 2001–02. Additional sums are paid to GDPs, for example to reimburse business rates. Funding for hospital and community dental services is drawn from the health authority's main allocation. This information is not identified separately.

In 2001–02 the following additional funds were made available to Morecambe Bay health authority to improve NHS dental services:

£308,000 revenue and £312,000 capital to establish a personal dental services dental access centre pilot scheme (DAC). The DAC has a surgery in Barrow offering unregistered patients access to dental services. A second surgery, to be located in Morecambe, has been funded and should be operational from April 2003. In the interim Morecambe Bay PCT is looking into proposals to provide an alternative DAC site in Lancaster on a part-time basis.

The revenue funding available for the current year for this DAC is up to £820,000 and a further capital payment will be made of around £160,000. The service aim is to treat up to 17,000 patients a year when both centres are fully operational.

An allocation of £270,800 was made in 2001–02 to GDPs from the modernisation fund for grants to local dental practices to provide practice improvements and additional facilities.

£7,500 was allocated to the health authority from the dental action plan fund to enable additional patient registrations to be secured.

Elderly Care

11. **Ms Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on implementing the elderly care strategy in north Staffordshire. [67274]

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend has worked hard over many years to ensure better care for the elderly in the north Staffs area. I am aware that following concerns expressed by herself and the Community Health Council about plans for the future of elderly care services in north Staffs, Professor Brian Edwards was commissioned to make an independent report on the best way forward.

I understand that the Shropshire and Staffordshire health authority are on target with the implementation of their elderly care strategy and are addressing all recommendations made in Professor Edwards' independent report including ensuring an extra 48 places in community hospitals over and above Professor Edwards' recommendation of 163 long-term beds.

Diabetes

12. **Mr. Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made with the diabetes national service framework; and if he will make a statement. [R] [67275]

Mr. Hutton: We published the standards for the Diabetes National Service Framework last December. The delivery strategy for the Framework is currently being developed with the help of an Implementation Group and will be published later this year.

32. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to introduce a high-risk screening programme for type-2 diabetes. [67296]

Mr. Lammy: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State (Jacqui Smith) on 11 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 260W. Any decision about a start date for a possible programme will depend on the advice the Department receives.

Community Health Services

13. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to encourage the role of social and mutual enterprise in community health services. [67276]

Ms Blears: We are actively exploring the contribution that social enterprise can make to Primary Care Trusts' delivery of the Department's aim of a modernised and responsive health service. I hosted a workshop on this which was attended by key stakeholders, including experts from the not for profit sector, universities, trade unions and Government Departments and we will continue to discuss practical steps we can take to encourage full developments.

Mental Health

16. **Mr. Mark Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the contributions his Department has received in response to the consultations prior to the publication of the new draft Mental Health Bill. [67279]

Jacqui Smith: The consultation responses received in respect of the draft Mental Health Bill will be available to the public after the consultation period ends unless respondents ask for confidentiality.

38. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* causes of and *(b)* treatment for dementia. [67302]

Jacqui Smith: The most common causes of dementia are degeneration of brain nerve cells (Alzheimer's disease) and insufficient blood flow to the brain (vascular dementia).

The National Service Framework for Older People published last year outlines the appropriate components for the treatment and care of people with dementia. It sets standards for the delivery of improved and comprehensive health and social care services to support people with dementia and their carers.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding allocated to primary care trusts for mental health services has been ring-fenced. [60567]

Jacqui Smith: In 2002–03 £75 million was earmarked for mental health services. The funding is allocated to health authorities (HAs), which then allocate funding to primary care trusts (PCTs), on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. HAs were instructed to allocate earmarked funding to PCTs on the same basis as allocations were made to HA. PCTs share of the earmarked funding for mental health is shown in the table. Special consideration will need to be given to improving access to mental health services through crisis resolution, assertive outreach and early intervention teams; increasing capacity and improving service quality.

Earmarked funding for mental health

Primary care trust	*£000*
Adur, Arun and Worthing	355
Airedale	170
Amber Valley	178
Ashfield	117
Ashford	138
Ashton, Leigh and Wigan	479
Barking and Dagenham	258
Barnet	514
Barnsley	380
Basildon	156
Bassetlaw	148
Bath and North East Somerset	236
Bebington and West Wirral	159
Bedford	205
Bedfordshire Heartlands	313
Bexhill and Rother	133
Bexley	298
Billericay, Brentwood and Wickford	184
Birkenhead and Wallasey	356
Blackburn with Darwen	242
Blackpool	254
Bolton	438
Bournemouth	255
Bracknell Forest	127
Bradford City	225
Bradford South and West	226
Brent	465
Brighton and Hove City	417
Bristol North	342
Bristol South and West	283
Broadland	150
Bromley	417
Broxtowe and Hucknall	194
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	396
Burntwood, Lichfield and Tamworth	195
Bury	268
Calderdale	292
Cambridge City	182
Camden	408
Cannock Chase	171
Canterbury and Coastal	247
Carlisle and District	172
Castle Point and Rochford	223
Central Cheshire	343
Central Cornwall	285
Central Derby	181

Earmarked funding for mental health

Primary care trust	*£000*
Central Liverpool	457
Central Manchester	301
Central Suffolk	125
Charnwood and North West Leicestershire	314
Chelmsford	153
Cheltenham and Tewkesbury	207
Cherwell Vale	160
Cheshire West	227
Chesterfield	169
Chiltern and South Bucks	207
Chingford, Wanstead and Woodford	179
Chorley and South Ribble	285
City and Hackney	461
Colchester	226
Cotswold and Vale	262
Coventry	489
Craven, Harrogate and Rural District	286
Crawley	154
Croydon	508
Dacorum	195
Darlington	159
Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley	313
Daventry and South Northamptonshire	116
Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire	115
Derwentside	140
Doncaster Central	162
Doncaster East	134
Doncaster West	170
Dudley Beacon and Castle	160
Dudley South	280
Durham and Chester-Le-Street	227
Durham Dales	142
Ealing	544
Easington	177
East Birmingham	393
East Cambridgeshire and Fenland	206
East Devon	176
East Elmbridge and Mid Surrey	359
East Hampshire	262
East Kent Coastal	383
East Leeds	232
East Lincolnshire	397
East Staffordshire	171
East Surrey	209
East Yorkshire	199
Eastbourne Downs	281
Eastern Cheshire	255
Eastern Hull	193
Eastern Leicester	266
Eastern Wakefield	284
Eastleigh and Test Valley	187
Eden Valley	97
Ellesmere Port and Neston	124
Enfield	404
Epping Forest	151
Erewash	141
Exeter	180
Fareham and Gosport	247
Fylde	105
Gateshead	339
Gedling	135
Great Yarmouth	144
Greater Derby	218
Greenwich	375
Guildford and Waverley	323
Halton	187
Hambleton and Richmondshire	152
Hammersmith and Fulham	307
Haringey	424
Harlow	120
Harrow	293
Hartlepool	150
Hastings and St. Leonards	157
Havering	345
Heart of Birmingham	464
Herefordshire	238
Hertsmere	124
Heywood and Middleton	121
High Peak and Dales	144
Hillingdon	364
Hinckley and Bosworth	122
Horsham and Chanctonbury	118
Hounslow	365
Huddersfield Central	257
Huntingdonshire	183
Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	172
Ipswich	205
Isle of Wight	207
Islington	401
Kensington and Chelsea	373
Kingston	243
Knowsley	265
Lambeth	539
Langbaurgh	151
Leeds North East	226
Leeds North West	257
Leeds West	167
Leicester City West	217
Lewisham	439
Lincolnshire South West	244
Luton	274
Maidstone Weald	304
Maldon and South Chelmsford	102
Mansfield District	138
Medway	357
Melton, Rutland and Harborough	178
Mendip	143
Mid Devon	137
Middlesbrough	315
Mid-Hampshire	228
Mid-Sussex	179
Milton Keynes	297
Morecambe Bay	467
New Forest	249
Newark and Sherwood	166
Newbury and Community	132
Newcastle	449
Newcastle-Under-Lyme	153
Newham	484
North and East Cornwall	224
North Birmingham	233
North Bradford	139
North Devon	215
North Dorset	121
North East Lincolnshire	239
North East Oxfordshire	85
North East Warwickshire	246
North Eastern Derbyshire	226
North Hampshire	241
North Hertfordshire and Stevenage	261
North Kirklees	210
North Lincolnshire	218
North Liverpool	187
North Manchester	273
North Norfolk	148
North Peterborough	166
North Sheffield	205
North Somerset	262
North Stoke	218
North Surrey	285
North Tees	273
North Tyneside	326
North Wilts and Kennet	253
Northampton	292
Northamptonshire Heartlands	378
Northumberland Care Trust	463

Earmarked funding for mental health

Primary care trust	*£000*
Norwich	203
Nottingham City	474
Oldbury and Smethwick	169
Oldham	363
Oxford City	253
Plymouth	376
Poole	244
Portsmouth City	288
Preston	228
Reading	289
Redbridge	243
Redditch and Bromsgrove	204
Richmond and Twickenham	276
Rochdale	214
Rotherham	379
Rowley, Regis and Tipton	131
Royston, Buntingford and Bishop's Stortford	94
Rugby	119
Rushcliffe	151
Rushmore and Hart	231
Salford	389
Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale	236
Sedgefield	152
Selby and York	373
Sheffield South West	188
Sheffield West	181
Shepway	154
Shropshire County	384
Slough	177
Solihull	288
Somerset Coast	202
South and East Dorset	214
South Birmingham	533
South Cambridgeshire	116
South East Hertfordshire	225
South East Oxfordshire	100
South East Sheffield	269
South Gloucestershire	286
South Hams and West Devon	150
South Huddersfield	122
South Leeds	227
South Leicestershire	184
South Liverpool	150
South Manchester	237
South Peterborough	123
South Sefton	263
South Somerset	201
South Stoke	214
South Tyneside	260
South Warwickshire	325
South West Dorset	202
South West Kent	236
South West Oxfordshire	233
South Western Staffordshire	241
South Wiltshire	161
South Worcestershire	368
Southampton City	354
Southend On Sea	272
Southern Norfolk	267
Southport and Formby	175
Southwark	451
St. Albans and Harpenden	174
St. Helens	295
Staffordshire Moorlands	148
Stockport	422
Suffolk Coastal	131
Suffolk West	303
Sunderland Teaching	477
Sussex Downs and Weald	199
Sutton and Merton	529
Swale	132
Swindon	257
Tameside and Glossop	356
Taunton Deane	145
Teignbridge	155
Telford and Wrekin	219
Tendring	219
Thurrock	202
Torbay	209
Tower Hamlets	360
Trafford North	147
Trafford South	183
Uttlesford	88
Vale Of Aylesbury	244
Wakefield West	218
Walsall	398
Walthamstow, Leyton and Leytonstone	276
Wandsworth	469
Warrington	274
Watford and Three Rivers	245
Waveney	181
Wednesbury and West Bromwich	186
Welwyn Hatfield	136
West Cumbria	204
West Gloucestershire	299
West Hull	250
West Lancashire	158
West Lincolnshire	308
West Norfolk	209
West Of Cornwall	234
West Wiltshire	153
Western Sussex	307
Westminster	472
Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead	224
Witham, Braintree and Halstead PCG[1]	177
Woking Area	245
Wokingham	171
Wolverhampton City	387
Wycombe	181
Wyre Forest	146
Wyre	187
Yorkshire Wolds and Coast	208
Total	75,000

[1] Planned care trust from 1 October 2002

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to take steps to collect centrally information on *(a)* the proportion of individuals with a diagnosis of severe mental illness who are in employment and *(b)* trends in the prevalence of employment among such individuals. [68126]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Department is taking steps to ensure that this information is collected for both local and national monitoring. Local services have been asked to ensure that written care plans for people with mental health problems on the enhanced level of the care programme approach show plans to secure suitable employment or other occupational activity. The outcomes implementation programme and the implementation of the mental health minimum data set will ensure that these data are collected routinely.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of community mental health teams are fully integrated as between NHS and social services. [68128]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on black and ethnic minority groups of the proposals contained in the draft Mental Health Bill. [68665]

Jacqui Smith: The Government acknowledge the inequalities that people from black and minority ethnic groups face in mental health services and the over-representation, in particular, of young black men in the mental health system has been well documented (Mental Health Act Commission Biennial Report 2001). The mental health task force has been given a specific remit to look at black and ethnic mental health and are developing a strategy that will address the provision of services to people from these groups, while the proposals contained in the draft Mental Health Bill will offer individuals greater safeguards of their rights.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effect he estimates extending compulsion, as envisaged in the draft Mental Health Bill, will have on average waiting times for treatment. [68252]

Jacqui Smith: We anticipate that the impact on waiting times for urgent treatment will be minimal. The implementation of the "national service framework for mental health", and the development of new services such as assertive outreach, crisis resolution and early intervention, will help to ensure that fewer people become so ill that they need compulsory treatment.

Care Homes

17. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of care home places in the south-west. [67280]

Jacqui Smith: At 31 March 2001, there were 44,791 registered residential care places and 24,073 registered nursing care beds in the south-west.

25. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with Government Departments and other organisations about the treatment of elderly people in residential and nursing care for the purposes of the standard spending assessment. [67288]

Jacqui Smith: I have had a number of recent discussions with other Government Departments and organisations about the older people's standard spending assessment formulae. I also commissioned independent research into this formula. As a result of these discussions and research there are a number of possible options for change to the existing formula that we are considering. A consultation document was issued on 8 July setting out these options and councils have 12 weeks to comment on them.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new admissions to care homes during each of the last five years in England and Wales he is aware were previously resident in Scotland. [69439]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not centrally held on the previous place of residence of residents in care homes in England. Questions relating to Wales are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residents of England and Wales he is aware have chosen to enter into a care home in Scotland in each of the last five years. [69438]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not held centrally in respect of individuals normally resident in England and in care homes. Information in respect of residents in care homes in Scotland and of individuals normally resident in Wales and in care homes are the responsibility of the respective devolved Administrations.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a list, by region, of the publicly funded elderly care homes in the last five years; and how much money they received in real terms. [68527]

Jacqui Smith: Prior to April this year, local councils were responsible for the registration of residential care homes. Lists of registered homes were not maintained centrally. Nor are there central records of the size of contracts entered into with individual homes either by councils or by people who used income support to purchase care which they had arranged for themselves. However, the following table shows the gross expenditure on residential care and nursing provision by councils with social services responsibilities in each region in England at 2000–01 prices for the five years from 1996–97 to 2000–01.

Elderly residential and nursing homes placements—gross expenditure by local authorities at 2000–01 prices

£ million

Region	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*[1]
North West	475	486	512	533	568
North East	143	161	174	202	237
Yorkshire and the Humber	294	319	337	355	411
East Midlands	233	242	258	286	305
East	254	273	295	313	344
London	394	415	431	437	489
South East	405	428	443	457	483
South West	244	265	298	325	357
West Midlands	278	312	330	353	371
Total England	2,721	2,901	3,077	3,262	3,565

[1] 2000–01 figures are inclusive of overhead costs.

Source:

Form RO3 (PSS EX1 from 2000–01)—annual return of social services expenditure made by local authorities.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a study comparing the quality of care between public and private care homes. [68528]

Jacqui Smith: There is no need for such a survey. Under section 7(1)(b) of the Care Standards Act 2000, the National Care Standards Commission has a duty of keeping my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State informed about the quality of services regulated under Part II of the Act.

MS Sufferers

18. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered respite care homes for MS sufferers there are; and how many have closed since 1997. [67281]

Jacqui Smith: We do not collect this information centrally.

I understand from the MS Society that there are 204 registered nursing or residential homes providing respite care, where staff have attended an MS study day and so have a basic knowledge of the condition.

In addition, I understand that the society provides respite specifically for people with multiple sclerosis at three registered nursing homes in England. It also operates three homes which provide holidays for people with MS who have lower dependency, for carers, and for people with other conditions.

The management of these homes is a matter for the MS Society.

29. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of drug treatments for patients suffering from multiple sclerosis. [67293]

Jacqui Smith: Up to 9,000 patients in England and Wales may be eligible to receive a drug treatment for their multiple sclerosis under the risk-sharing scheme, which started on 6 May 2002. Patients are now being treated under the scheme, but we recognise that appropriate infrastructure is not yet in place in some localities.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Copaxone is available at St. Bartholomew's Hospital; and for what reasons a valid prescription for Copaxone would be inadmissible. [66741]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* Copaxone (glatiramer acetate) is available on the national health service under the risk-sharing scheme for disease modifying drugs for multiple sclerosis (MS) that came into operation on 6 May 2002.

Barts and the London NHS Trust met with specialist commissioners on 5 July and agreed funding arrangements for MS therapy. A clinical discussion forum took place on 11 July. As a result of these discussions, all patients who are under the NHS for their MS care but are receiving MS therapy on a private prescription, are now eligible for NHS treatment, as long as the Association of British Neurologists criteria has been met. Consequently, all patients in this category will now be called in for review.

Hospices

19. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on funding for hospices in Lancashire. [67282]

Ms Blears: During 2001–02, primary care trusts in Lancashire provided a total of £2.5 million to hospices in their respective areas. These included: Trinity Hospice in Fylde; St. John's Hospice in Lancaster; St. Catherine's Hospice in Preston; Derian House Hospice in Chorley; Burnley and Pendle Hospice; Rossendale Hospice; Springhill Hospice in Rochdale; East Lancashire Hospice; St. Joseph's Hospice, Jospice International; and Queenscourt Hospice.

23. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his oral answer of 18 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 140W, on hospices, what evidence he used to base his estimate of the need for funds for palliative care in hospices. [67286]

Ms Blears: It is for the national health service locally to make arrangements for financial support for hospices based on the agreed strategic plans for palliative care provision within each cancer network's service delivery plan.

The National Council for Hospices and Specialist Palliative Care Services undertake an annual survey on investment in palliative care. They estimate the total expenditure on adult palliative care services to be around £300 million of which around £170 million is provided by the voluntary sector and £130 million by the NHS. The Government have pledged in the NHS Cancer Plan that funding for specialist palliative care services, including hospices, will increase by £50 million by 2004.

NHS Menus

20. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in introducing the new NHS menus. [67283]

Mr. Lammy: Good progress is being made in introducing the new menu and ward housekeeping. This long term initiative, supported by £38.5 million, is already delivering more choice and better quality to patients across the NHS. Two thirds of trusts were on course to include three leading chef dishes by April.

Cystic Fibrosis

21. **Mr. Best:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to ensure that neonatal screening for cystic fibrosis will be made universally available and free of charge. [67284]

Jacqui Smith: A developmental programme is in place to plan for the NHS provision of neonatal cystic fibrosis screening. Further advice from the UK National Screening Committee about time scales and details on the implementation of a national programme, is expected in the autumn.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will add cystic fibrosis to the list of conditions exempt from prescription charges. [67339]

Mr. Lammy: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) on 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W.

Overseas Treatment

22. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the assessment of the initial project involving sending patients overseas will be complete; and if that assessment will be made public. [67285]

Mr. Hutton: Following a competitive tender exercise the York University Health Economics Consortium was commissioned to evaluate the pilot scheme to refer NHS patients overseas for routine elective surgery. Copies of the final report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament and published on the Department of Health website.

Health Care Expenditure

24. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of household expenditure on health care in the period 1997 to 2001. [67287]

Mr. Hutton: Expenditure on the national health service in England increased from £1,620 per household in 1996–97 to £2,095 per household in 2000–01.

GPs

26. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase the number of general practitioners. [67290]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS is working towards a target of 2,000 more general practitioners by 2004 and to continued growth thereafter.

We are increasing the number of doctors training to be GPs. There are now 1,910 General Practice Registrars, the highest ever number of doctors in training for general practice.

30. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from general practitioners who say they cannot admit further patients to their GP practices; and if he will make a statement. [67294]

Mr. Hutton: We have received no recent representations on this subject from general practitioners or their representative organisations.

Disability Equipment Services

27. **Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve disability equipment services. [67291]

Jacqui Smith: In relation to the five disability equipment services covered by the Audit Commission's 'Fully Equipped' reports, plans are: to continue to invest in and modernise audiology and community equipment services; to improve the commissioning of orthotic and prosthetic services, and for the Department of Health to work with the Modernisation Agency to identify and spread good practice for wheelchair services.

Drug Addicts

28. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the availability and effectiveness of treatment for drug addicts in Worcester. [67292]

Mr. Lammy: No formal assessment of local drug action teams currently takes place, but this is being developed. The National Treatment Agency (NTA) was established in 2001 to set standards and ensure that every drug treatment programme is of the highest effectiveness. The NTA has agreed a business plan to deliver its targets up to March 2003.

Locally, the Worcestershire Substance Misuse Action Team (SMAT) is responsible for ensuring quality services for drug addicts, in line with the national drug strategy, and is developing a framework for assessing the effectiveness of treatment. The SMAT also reports regularly to the NTA. Worcestershire primary care trusts commit over £2 million to the treatment of substance misuse.

Free Personal Care

33. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the provision of free personal care. [67297]

Jacqui Smith: The Government's policy on the funding of personal care is set out in paragraph 15.20 of the NHS Plan, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Doctor Numbers

34. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policies to increase the number of general practitioners and consultants in the NHS. [67298]

Mr. Hutton: We recognise the need for increases in the number of general practitioners (GPs) and consultants. "Delivering the NHS Plan", published in April this year, now includes the latest forecasts for growth in the national health service work force. By 2008, we expect there to be 15,000 more doctors and GPs than in 2001.

Privately Funded Operations

35. **Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to collate information on an annual basis on the number of people who have funded their operations themselves. [67299]

Mr. Hutton: The Department collects and publishes information on the number of patients who are treated privately in national health service hospitals, but it does not collect information on who pays for such treatment. We have no plans to collect that information, nor to collect information on the number of people who have operations performed privately in the independent sector.

Refugee Doctors

36. **Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support he will introduce to enable refugee doctors to get the training and qualifications needed to work within the NHS. [67300]

Mr. Hutton: We are committed to enabling refugee doctors to access the training opportunities they need to succeed in the national health service. Over the last two years £1 million has been made available to various projects designed to help refugee health professionals prepare for work in the NHS, by providing English language and clinical skills training, along with guidance on gaining employment in the NHS.

NHS Hygiene

37. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to improve standards of cleanliness in NHS facilities. [67301]

Mr. Lammy: The NHS Plan, which was published in July 2000, set out a work programme for the national health service to improve the standards in cleanliness within hospitals and initiated an immediate nationwide campaign to clean and smarten up the NHS. Patient environment action teams (PEAT) undertook unannounced visits to assess progress. Over £60 million has been invested to make improvements to the hospital environment since the NHS Plan was launched, which will directly benefit patients and visitors.

The clean hospitals programme has been a clear success and has had a significant impact on standards of cleanliness, decoration and supporting services, to the extent that by October last year there were no hospitals in England where cleaning standards were found to be less than acceptable. Standards are now much more in line with patients' expectations. National results of the PEAT programme, as set out in the table, were published on 31 October 2001.

	Red (poor)	*Yellow (acceptable)*	*Green (good)*
Autumn 2001	0	387	300

New national standards for cleanliness in the NHS, which form part of the performance assessment framework, were issued to the NHS last year. They describe what a "clean" hospital looks like and will help all hospitals further raise the levels of cleanliness and, importantly, they will help to ensure that the standards achieved are maintained in the future. This means that for the first time there is a definitive set of cleaning standards with which all trusts will have to comply.

Beta Interferon

39. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when beta interferon will be available to those assessed as needing it in South Derbyshire. [67303]

Mr. Lammy: Beta interferon has already been made available to a number of patients previously paying for beta interferon. The local health community are discussing issues connected with delivering the national guidance. The new arrangements will be fully in place later this year.

Health Prioritising

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made on the impact of his prioritising certain services and disease areas on those services and disease areas not so prioritised. [67278]

Mr. Hutton: Since 1997, the Department of Health has put in place comprehensive performance management and assessment procedures to ensure that the national health service provides services that can meet the needs of all patients.

Sausage Casings

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the incidence of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in the national sheep flocks of *(a)* EU member states and *(b)* non-EU countries which process and export natural sausage casings. [68499]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

Information on the number of scrapie cases in member states is available on the European Commission's website at www.europa.eu.int. Between 1998 and 2000, the following numbers of cases have been reported: Belgium 19 cases; Denmark nil; Germany three cases; Greece 130 cases; Spain five cases; France 97 cases (1998–99 only); Ireland 198 cases; Italy 208 cases (1998–99 only); Luxembourg nil; Netherlands 32 cases (1998–99 only); Austria five cases; Portugal nil; Finland nil; Sweden nil; UK 1,652 cases.

Information on scrapie cases in non-EU countries is available on the website of the Office Internationale des Epizooties at www.oie.int. The main exporters of sheep casings are Pakistan, Turkey and New Zealand. According to OIE data, Pakistan, which has a scrapie surveillance programme, has not reported any occurrence of the disease. The last reported occurrence of scrapie in New Zealand was in 1954. No information is available in relation to Turkey.

Health and Social Policy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals the Government have to improve the co-ordination of health and social care, youth and leisure, careers, guidance, education and benefits services. [68179]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Connexions Service, which is currently being rolled out across the country, brings together a range of services working with young people to make sure 13–19 year olds receive cohesive advice, guidance, support and personal development opportunities.

The Government's consultation document, "Building a Strategy for Children and Young People", included proposals for improving the co-ordination of services for all children and young people aged 0–19, building on the experience of Connexions and other initiatives. We are currently considering the responses to this consultation exercise.

Bed Blocking (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans to tackle bed blocking in Lancashire. [48596]

Jacqui Smith: In 2001–02, the Government allocated in excess of £2 million to the three social services departments, Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen and

Blackpool, in the form of the Building Care Capacity Grant to reduce delayed transfers of care. In 2002–03, these authorities will receive £4 million. In addition, they will receive more than £1.75 million from the performance fund towards improvements in intermediate care. Delayed transfer numbers in Lancashire are among the lowest in the country.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the EU directives relating to his Department which have been *(a)* amended and *(b)* repealed in 2002. [64951]

Mr. Lammy: The following European Union directives have been amended and repealed in 2002:

European Parliament and Council directive 2001/83/EC on the Community Code Relating to Medicinal Products for Human Use, which incorporated Commission directive 2000/38/EC on administrative action relating to medicinal products (pharmacovigilance), repealed the following EU directives: Council directive 65/65/EEC of 26 January 1965 on the approximation of provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action relating to medicinal products, as amended by:

Council directive 66/454/EEC
Council directive 75/319/EEC
Council directive 83/570/EEC
Council directive 87/21/EEC
Council directive 89/341/EEC
Council directive 92/27/EEC
Council directive 93/39/EEC.

Council Directive 75/318/EEC of 20 May 1975 on the approximation of the laws of member states relating to analytical, pharmacotoxological and clinical standards and protocols in respect of the testing of medicinal products, as amended by:

Council directive 83/570/EEC
Council directive 87/19/EEC
Council directive 89/341/EEC
Commission directive 91/507/EEC
Council directive 93/39/EEC
Commission directive 1999/82/EC
Commission directive 1999/83/EC.

Council directive 75/319/EEC of 20 May 1975 on the approximation of provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action relating to medicinal products, as amended by:

Council directive 78/420/EEC
Council directive 83/570/EEC
Council directive 89/341/EEC
Council directive 92/27/EEC
Council directive 93/39/EEC
Commission directive 2000/38/EC.

Council directive 89/342/EEC of 3 May 1989 extending the scope of Directives 65/65/EEC and 75/319/EEC and laying down additional provisions of immunological medicinal products consisting of vaccines, toxins or serums and allergens.

Council directive 89/343/EEC of 3 May 1989 extending the scope of directives 65/65/EEC and 75/319/EEC and laying down additional provisions for radiopharmaceuticals.

Council directive 89/381/EEC of 14 June 1989 extending the scope of directives 65/65/EEC and 75/319/EEC on the approximation of provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action relating to medicinal products and laying down special provisions for medicinal products derived from human blood or human plasma.

Council directive 92/25/EEC of 31 March 1992 on the wholesale distribution of medicinal products for human use.

Council directive 92/26/EEC of 31 March 1992 concerning the classification for the supply of medicinal products for human use.

Council directive 92/27/EEC of 31 March 1992 on the labelling of medicinal products for human use and on package leaflets.

Council directive 92/28/EEC of 31 March 1992 on the advertising of medicinal products for human use.

Council directive 92/73/EEC of 22 September 1992 widening the scope of directives 65/65/EEC and 75/319/EEC on the approximation of provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action relating to medicinal products and laying down additional provisions on homeopathic medicinal products.

The Medical Devices directive (93/42/EEC) was amended by directive 2001/104/EC and directive 2000/70/EC as regards medical devices incorporating stable derivatives of human blood or human plasma.

Rapid Response Units

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many rapid response units are operating in each NHS region to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions. [65141]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of rapid response units is not collected centrally.

Buildings Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of buildings insurance to his Department was *(a)* before and *(b)* after 11 September 2001. [66925]

Mr. Lammy: Departments are required to comply with the Government's general policy on insurance, which is set out in Government Accounting, Chapter 30, para.30.2.5, which notes that Government do not need to purchase insurance to protect the viability of their business, and should consider insurance only where the value of claims met would exceed the cost of insurance premiums. Commercial insurance of a building is acceptable in cases where *(a)* insurance is a condition of a lease *(b)* the lessor will not accept a Government indemnity; or *(c)* incurring the total cost of the accommodation in question, including the cost of the insurance, is more cost-effective than other accommodation options.

Financial records show the following payments in respect of buildings occupied by the Department (excluding Agencies) against the heading of building insurance:

2000–01: £67,050

2001–02: £56,443.

Meaningful comparisons between one year and another are difficult to make, due to changes in the estate and consequent insurance obligations. The following four premises were occupied during all or part of 2000–01 and not during all of 2001–02:

Temple Way, Bristol (Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry)—finally cleared/vacated 1 August 2001;

Norwich House, Liverpool (Alder Hey Inquiry)—vacated 15 December 2000;

Trevelyan House, London SW1 (HDA)—vacated 15 March 2002.

The timing of payments during the year, to meet policy renewal notices, mean it is not possible as yet to identify any effects of the events of 11 September on premium levels.

Infliximab

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place between his Department and the National Institute of Clinical Excellence about the use of infliximab. [66815]

Mr. Lammy: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on infliximab for Crohns Disease in May 2002 and recommended to the national health service in England and Wales that infliximab should be available to some people with severe active Crohn's disease.

In March 2002 NICE recommended that, etanercept and infliximab, new drugs for the treatment of arthritis, may be given as part of the management of rheumatoid arthritis in adult patients who have rheumatoid arthritis that has not responded adequately to at least two disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs, including methotrexate.

As a stakeholder the Department and National Assembly for Wales are given the opportunity to comment on draft scopes and the provisional guidance. The NICE review of infliximab is due May 2005, and during revision the Department and National Assembly for Wales will be given the opportunity to comment on the draft appraisal.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reason the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority 2001 annual report and accounts diverged from previous practice in not providing performance data on *(a)* IVF data, *(b)* multiple births, *(c)* two and three embryo transfer and *(d)* donor insemination; [67137]

(2) for what reason the publishing of the HFEA 2001 annual report and accounts was delayed for nine months. [67052]

Ms Blears: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) has identified some problems with its information technology infrastructure. These problems are now being resolved, but they have delayed the availability of recent performance data.

The annual report was held back in the hope that the data would be ready to include. When this proved not to be possible, the decision was taken to go ahead and publish the annual report without the data.

The data will be made available shortly on the HFEA's website.

Birth Statistics

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set for the reduction of *(a)* premature births, *(b)* stillbirths and *(c)* miscarriages. [67074]

Jacqui Smith: Although specific reduction targets have not been set, we are continuing to support the work of the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy to improve care during pregnancy and provide the right quality and level of support. The difficulties of premature birth and the tragedy of losing a child through stillbirth and miscarriage have some associations with, and are always compounded by, poverty and social exclusion. We are addressing this through the 'Sure Start' initiative, including pilot programmes to provide personal co-ordinated support for pregnant teenagers, and parents under the age of 18. We are also investing more in the provision of maternity care and seeking to ensure the most effective configuration of these essential services.

Kaiser Permanente

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* special advisers have held with Kaiser Permanente in the last six months. [67607]

Mr. Lammy: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met with David Laurence of Kaiser Permanente on Wednesday 19 June 2002. Both special advisers attended the meeting.

NICE

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to ensure NHS staff are involved in deciding on the future work programme of NICE. [67686]

Mr. Lammy: The Department consulted recently on a series of proposals to make it easier for national health service staff to propose topics for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's (NICE) future work programme, and to involve them more fully in the process of assessing and prioritising proposals. The response to the consultation is now being analysed and an announcement will be made as soon as possible. That response will also take account of recommendations made by the Health Select Committee in its recent report on NICE.

Sun Awareness

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to fund a nationally co-ordinated sun awareness programme for the United Kingdom; [67769]

(2) whether he plans to launch a follow-up campaign to the sun know how campaign; [67768]

(3) how much money has been allocated annually to sun awareness campaigns since April 2000; [67767]

(4) what the cost was of the Health Education Authority's sun know how campaign from April 1999 to April 2000; [67765]

(5) how much the Government have invested in sun awareness campaigns in each year since 1995. [67766]

Ms Blears: The health education authority (HEA) was originally commissioned by the Department in 1996 to provide sun awareness information. The HEA then developed the "Sun Know How" campaign up until the HEA's functions were moved to the health development agency and health promotion England in March 2000. As the "Sun Know How" messages had been successful, existing HEA promotional material continued to be made available but on a smaller scale. The success of the campaign was acknowledged and it was recognised that a new approach was needed.

From 2001 work has been undertaken towards a co-ordinated programme of work to counter skin cancer. A collaboration group was formed by the departmental funded national radiological protection board (NRPB) with other key organisations such as Cancer Research (UK), the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the British Association of Dermatology (BAD). Various initiatives are taking place to raise awareness of sun safety and information is available from NHS Direct. On 14 March a new website, www.doh.gov.uk/sunsafe, providing sun safety advice, was launched. We are also collaborating with other key stakeholders this year in ensuring that a range of sun safety advice is publicly available. For example, the Department funds the Meteorological Office ultra violet index for radio, television and newspaper forecasters. The NRPB is currently running a sunsense campaign and the HSE is targeting outdoor workers in their advertising campaign.

We have no current plans to launch an equivalent to the "Sun Know How" campaign as run by the then HEA.

The HEA's campaign launched in 1996–97 anticipated spending £1.5 million over three years to 1998–99. Detailed figures on the final spend by year by the HEA are not available.

In 1999–2000 spending on the "Sun Know How" campaign by the HEA was £543,000. Since then, spending on sun awareness by the Department in 2000–01 was £50,000, and in 2001–02 was £126,000.

Solihull Hospital

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new recruitment will be needed at Solihull hospital to facilitate its proposed improved accident and emergency service; and whether the necessary resources are in place to support that recruitment. [67613]

Mr. Lammy: The Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull National Health Service Trust will recruit two additional consultants specialising in accident and emergency medicine, a new tier of four critical care/clinical fellow grades, specialist physicians and additional nurses including emergency nurse practitioners. The resources required are still being finalised but Solihull Primary Care Trust has agreed to pre-commit revenue resources in emergency care during the forthcoming priority setting process.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that recruitment difficulties do not stand in the way of proposed improvements to accident and emergency provision at Solihull hospital. [67612]

Mr. Lammy: Responsibility for the recruitment of staff for local services rests with local national health service trusts. The Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS Trust is confident that recruitment difficulties will not occur and believe the new tier of critical care/clinical fellow grades, a rigorous recruitment campaign and the trust's commitment to "Improving Working Lives" will ensure the right calibre and number of staff will be recruited.

Prescription Drugs

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy for payments made to pharmacists by the NHS in respect of the supply of prescription drugs to comply with the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Act 1998 and the Late Payment Directive. [68372]

Mr. Lammy: We do not consider that the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 applies to payments made to pharmacists by the national health service in respect of the supply of prescription drugs. We are considering the position in relation to Directive 2000/35/EC on combating late payment in commercial transactions.

NHS Trust Reviews

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it the Government's policy that the Commission for Health Improvement should respond positively to a request by an NHS trust to conduct a review of any department identified by the trust as in need of review. [68042]

Mr. Lammy: The Health Act 1999 requires the Commission for Health Improvement to undertake local reviews (known as clinical governance reviews) to examine the quality of care provided by national health service bodies. The commission may also undertake investigations into the management, provision and quality of health care NHS bodies provide. The commission will consider all requests for investigations against its published criteria. Copies of the commission's "Policy on assessing requests for investigations and fast track clinical governance reviews" are available in the Library and on its website at www.chi.nhs.uk.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* terms of reference and *(b)* timetable for the independent scientific advisory group of the Medical Research Council on CFS and ME due to be set up in spring 2002; and who the members of the group are. [68079]

Mr. Lammy: The Medical Research Council (MRC) have now agreed to set up an advisory group. Their final report should be made available early in 2003.

The proposed terms of reference are:

to consider the report of the independent working party on chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)/myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), including its recommendations for research;

to consider other recent reviews of current knowledge and understanding of CFS/ME;

to take account of patient and lay perspectives;

to recommend to MRC a research strategy to advance understanding of the aetiology, epidemiology and biology of CFS/ME; and

in the light of current knowledge, suggest what areas of further research are needed with regard to possible treatments.

The group members are:

Professor Nancy Rothwell (Chair)
Professor Janet Darbyshire
Professor Diana Elbourne
Professor Alan McGregor
Professor Jonathan Weber
Professor Jackie Oldham
Professor Til Wykes
Professor Philip Cowen
Professor Jon Nicholl
Jacqueline Apperly
Sue Haselhurst
Observer Department of Health.

Performance Targets

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 306W, on performance targets, how many performance targets he has set for the NHS; and how many that were included last year have been dropped this year. [68313]

Mr. Lammy: It has been the Government's policy to reduce the number of priorities facing national health service organisations in order to shift the balance of power away from the centre. A reduction was achieved in the 2002–03 planning and priorities framework in comparison to the previous year.

An on-going commitment to this approach has been made, with the Government's "Delivering the NHS Plan" document stating very clearly that our plans to modernise the NHS do not constitute a raft of extra targets.

Energy Efficiency

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made on achieving energy efficiency targets by the NHS. [68227]

Mr. Lammy: The national health service in England successfully achieved the 20 per cent. reduction in energy use from a base year of 1990 to 2000. In line with the Government's climate change programme, the NHS in England has now been set a new mandatory target to reduce the level of primary energy consumption by 15 per cent. or 0.15 million tonnes carbon from March 2000 to March 2010.

NHS Estates (an Executive Agency of the Department) is working with the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme (now Action Energy) to assist the NHS to meet this challenging target. Progress and activity continues to be monitored using the agency's database. It is too early to determine progress against this new target.

AIDS

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent *(a)* on research and *(b)* on care in connection with AIDS in each of the past three years. [67799]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* Expenditure on AIDS research was £20.2 million in 1999–2000 and £21.3 million in 2000–01. Data for 2001–02 are currently being compiled and are expected to be in line with spend for previous years.

Expenditure on HIV/AIDS treatment and social care is shown in the table.

£ million

	NHS	*Local authorities*	*Total*
1999–2000	233	15.5	248.5
2000–01	234.6	16	250.6
2001–02	276.2	16.5	292.7

Cancer

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the differences are in treatment for *(a)* colon cancer and *(b)* other cancers. [67802]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* The NHS Cancer Plan set out our intention to ensure that people with all types of cancer get the best treatments. Evidence based guidance to improve outcomes in each of the tumour groups is being published by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE). NICE also continue to appraise and issue guidance on the use of new chemotherapy treatments. When developing its guidance, NICE takes into account relevant evidence from all over the world.

Public Interest Company

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 303W, on mutual organisations, if he will make a statement defining the modus operandi of a public interest company. [68511]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* The public interest company is one option being considered by the Department for the legal status of national health service foundation trusts. We will publish further details in due course.

Departmental Memos

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many written communications were sent to *(a)* NHS hospitals and *(b)* primary care trusts in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001 by his Department; [68280]

(2) how many written directives were sent to *(a)* NHS hospitals and *(b)* primary care trusts in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001 by his Department. [68282]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* The number of written directives and communications which where sent to national health service hospitals, primary care trusts in 2000 and 2001 by the Department are shown in the tables.

Health service circulars sent to chief executives of NHS trusts and primary care trusts in 2000 and 2001

	To chief executives of:		
	NHS trusts	*Primary care trusts*	*To chief executives of NHS trusts and chief executives of primary care trusts*
2000	16	2	15
2001	1	1	19

Electronic bulletins and other e-communications to chief executives of NHS trusts and primary care trusts in 2000 and 2001[1]

	E-bulletins	*Other e-communications*
2000	52	100
2001	111	111

[1] Both chief executives of NHS trusts and chief executives of primary care trusts were on the distribution list for all e-communications.

E-prescriptions

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities' general practitioners are able to write prescriptions produced by computer and issued electronically. [68283]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* Almost every general practitioner (GP) has a desktop PC. Software suppliers must meet Requirement for Accreditation standards for GP's to be reimbursed. Therefore they must ensure that systems support the ability to write prescriptions via the desktop. Limited numbers of GPs are able to issue prescriptions electronically via the Electronic Transmission of Prescription pilots, which are currently being run by three private sector consortiums on behalf of the Department.

National Care Standards Commission

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the amounts taken from local authorities to fund the National Care Standards Commission. [69170]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has received six letters regarding the amounts taken from local authorities through the standards spending assessment (SSA) to fund the National Care Standards Commission.

Before deciding to transfer local authorities net expenditure on registration and inspection from the national SSA we consulted local authorities. This method of transferring funds was supported by most local authorities. However, as a result of the comments we received we reduced the amount of the transfer. We believe the adjustments made represent a fair way of deciding what to deduct from local authority budgets.

Child Protection in Sport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings he has had with Ministers in other Departments with regard to *(a)* child protection in sport and *(b)* inter-agency working on child protection in sport. [69123]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has had no meetings with ministerial colleagues specifically regarding child protection in sport or inter-agency working on child protection in sport. However, officials have attended meetings of the child protection in sport unit steering group—a joint initiative between the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Sport England. The child protection in sport unit advises organisations on how to introduce child protection policies, commissions research into abuse within sport and raises the profile of child protection among sports' governing bodies. One of the unit's key aims is that sport will play a full and positive part in inter-agency child protection work.

Arthritic Knee Conditions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is with respect to promoting alternatives to surgery for arthritic knee conditions; and if he will make a statement. [69064]

Jacqui Smith: The ultimate responsibility for deciding what treatment is best for an individual patient rests with health professionals, who in consultation with the patient, are required to exercise their clinical judgment. These decisions can be complex and may need to take account of a range of factors; chief among these must be the ability of the patient to benefit from the treatment proposed. Non-surgical treatments for arthritis include the new drugs, infliximab (Remicade) and etanecerpt (Enbrel) which were recently approved by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

The importance of good arthritis services, particularly for the health and well being of older people is recognised in the national service framework for older people.

ICT Procurement

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his director of procurement is in charge of ICT procurement. [68108]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Department's head of procurement is responsible for information and communication technology (ICT) procurement for the Department itself.

Procurements undertaken by national health service trusts and authorities in England are formally the responsibility of the relevant chief executive. They are advised and supported by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency. As an integral part of the Department, the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency is in a key position to advise on policy and the strategic direction of procurement, and its impact on developing healthcare, across the NHS. The agency contracts on a national basis for products and services that are strategically critical to the NHS (including ICT). It also acts in cases where aggregated purchasing power will yield greater economic savings than those achieved by contracting on a local or regional basis.

National strategic procurements for the NHS in England are undertaken by the NHS information authority in conjunction with the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency.

Overall direction of the NHS information management and technology strategy for the NHS in England, including ICT procurement policy, is led by the director of research, analysis and information, Sir John Pattison.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 156W, on audiology services, what the cost was to the NHS of purchasing each digital hearing aid under the previous contract; and what the cost is under the newly negotiated contract. [69518]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* Under the national health service contract, digital hearing aids had been available at a cost of between £140 and £205 each, for moderately powered aids. The contracts and prices have been renegotiated by a team set up by Ministers and led by James Strachan, Chief Executive of Royal National Institute for the Deaf, which includes representatives from the Department and the purchasing and supply agency, and allows moderate powered digital aids to be purchased at £65 to £75 each plus value added tax.

Organ Transplants

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many organs were made available for transplant in each of the regional retrieval zones in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; what the population estimate is for each retrieval zone; and if he will make a statement. [69272]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is in the following tables.

Kidneys retrieved from cadaveric donors for transplantation, England, 2000, 2001, by kidney retrieval centre, including per million population values (pmp)

	Kidneys retrieved—2000		Kidneys retrieved—2001		
Retrieval/alliance centre	*Number*	*Per million population*	*Number*	*Per million population*	*Retrieval population estimates (million)*
Newcastle	138	46.9	135	45.9	2.94
Leeds	65	17.3	63	16.8	3.76
Leicester	54	25.2	26	12.1	2.14
Nottingham	38	27.3	26	18.7	1.39
Sheffield	40	21.3	44	23.4	1.88
Cambridge	41	17.2	65	27.2	2.39
N Thames	123	17.1	169	23.5	7.19
S Thames	202	30.0	185	27.5	6.73
Portsmouth	61	26.6	62	27.1	2.29
Oxford	82	27.4	60	20.1	2.99
Bristol	24	12.2	46	23.5	1.96
Plymouth	52	29.2	52	29.2	1.78
Birmingham	70	15.5	93	20.6	4.51
Coventry	40	50.0	28	35.0	0.80
Liverpool	85	25.8	67	20.3	3.30
Manchester	125	30.9	96	23.7	4.05
England	1,240	24.8	1,217	24.3	50.10

Cardiothoracic organs retrieved from cadaveric donors for transplantation, England, 2000, 2001, by donation zone, including per million population values (pmp)

	Organs retrieved—2000		Organs retrieved—2001		
Donation zone	*Number*	*Per million population*	*Number*	*Per million population*	*Retrieval population estimates (million)*
Newcastle	56	7.5	54	7.2	7.51
Sheffield	41	9.6	46	10.8	4.27
Papworth	90	9.6	65	6.9	9.36
Harefield	76	6.1	113	9.1	12.38
St. George's	62	9.1	68	10.0	6.83
Birmingham	36	5.0	30	4.2	7.14
Manchester	51	7.8	32	4.9	6.54
England	412	8.2	408	8.1	50.10

Note:

Cardiothoracic organs comprise hearts and lungs (sometimes transplanted in combination).

Livers retrieved from cadaveric donors for transplantation, England, 2000, 2001, by donation zone, including per million population values (pmp)

	Organs retrieved—2000		Organs retrieved—2001		
Donation zone	Number	Per million population	Number	Per million population	Retrieval population estimates (million)
Newcastle	53	16.3	49	15.1	3.25
Leeds	120	13.6	93	10.6	8.81
Cambridge	83	10.3	81	10.1	8.05
The Royal Free	50	8.9	59	10.5	5.64
Kings College	164	11.4	174	12.1	14.42
Birmingham	138	10.0	145	10.5	13.86
England	608	12.1	601	12.0	50.10

Note:

Drafting guidelines are attached to the PQ Reference Guide.

Queen Alexandra Hospital

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the cost is of the proposed private finance initiative expansion of Queen Alexandra Hospital, Cosham; [69268]

(2) what the latest annual running cost was of Queen Alexandra Hospital, Cosham. [69269]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* I have been advised by Portsmouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust that the cost of the private finance initiative, to reconfigure services to focus on the Queen Alexandra Hospital, is currently estimated at £173 million.

The trust also informs me that its 2000–01 accounts record a turnover of £212.5 million. It is not possible to separate out individual hospital sites. The 2001–02 accounts are to be presented to the trust board for adoption this month.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the question of 13 June 2002 from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South, reference 61670, on Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth; and if he will make a statement. [70429]

Ms Blears: I replied to the hon. Member on 11 July.

NHS Estates

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the annual report and accounts 2001–02 for the NHS Estates Executive Agency. [70807]

Mr. Hutton: We have received the report and copies have today been laid in accordance with the requirements of section 5 of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

Audiology Services

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2002 to the hon. Member for Kingswood, *Official Report*, column 156W, on audiology services, what the new price of individual digital hearing aids purchased by the national health service is. [70349]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) today.

Immunisation Statistics

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the NHS immunisation statistics for England for 2001–02 will be published. [70355]

Ms Blears: It is planned to publish the statistical Bulletin, "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2001–02", in September 2002. A copy of the Bulletin will be placed in the Library and will be available on the Department's website.

Saxon Square Health Centre

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the former health centre premises in Saxon Square, Christchurch, are to be sold; and if he will make a statement about the reasons for the delay in the sale. [70358]

Ms Blears: Terms for the sale of Christchurch Health Centre to Christchurch borough council were agreed in the financial year 2001–02, and terms for its disposal were endorsed by the district valuers office.

The borough council advised that they were unable to complete by March 2002 due to funding difficulties, but indicated their willingness to proceed in the early part of the financial year 2002–03.

Health Services (East Kent)

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps have been taken to develop *(a)* cottage hospitals and *(b)* GP surgeries in advance of the re-organisation of acute services in east Kent; [70360]

(2) when he intends to make a decision on the re-organisation of acute hospitals in east Kent. [70361]

Ms Blears: Since Kent and Medway health authority made its recommendation on the reconfiguration of services at East Kent Hospitals National Health Service Trust, the local community health councils have registered objections with my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health. Ministers will need to give careful consideration to these objections before deciding whether to accept the health authority's recommendation. At this time it is not possible to give an indication of when this may be. I will be visiting the trust on 18 July to hear the views of local stakeholders.

The development of primary and secondary care services are a matter for the Kent and Medway health authority, in partnership with local primary care and NHS trusts. All four primary care trusts in east Kent are actively working to develop community services to support the reorganisation of the acute service provided by East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust.

Acute Medical Services

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 46 hospitals in England referred to in table 1 on page 16 of the recent report from the Royal College of Physicians entitled "Isolated Acute Medical Services". [70158]

Mr. Hutton: The report, "Isolated Acute Medical Services", was prepared by the Royal College of Physicians following collection of survey data. The Department did not take part in the research and does not have access to the survey data.

Carers

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many carers in London are over the age of *(a)* 60, *(b)* 70 and *(c)* 80 years. [69168]

Jacqui Smith: In 2000, there were an estimated 140,000 carers aged 60 and over in London, based on the general household survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics. A more detailed age breakdown is not available.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Air Weapons

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the deliberations of the Firearms Consultative Committee on the use and ownership of air weapons. [53452]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government are determined to tackle the misuse of air weapons and welcome the Firearms Consultative Committee's (FCC's) views on how the problem might be dealt with. A copy of their annual report was placed in the Library on 19 March. In taking forward their recommendations for better education on safe air weapons use and enforcement of the existing law, the possible use of anti-social behaviour orders will also be explored. We will also explore with the police, the practicalities and benefits of changes to the age of ownership of air weapons and registration of ownership.

Asylum Seekers

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has to return asylum seekers to France who have already applied for asylum in that country. [69274]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* Section 11 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 provides for the removal of asylum claimants under standing arrangements agreed between member states. Such standing arrangements are currently provided by the Dublin Convention.

The Dublin Convention provides an agreed framework to determine which member state is responsible for consideration of asylum claims made in the European Union (EU) where applicants have travelled between states. This includes provision for the return of an applicant to the member state where a claim for asylum has already been made.

Section 12 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 provides for the removal of asylum claimants in circumstances other than those set out in section 11, including the return to the appropriate member state of any identified individual already recognised as a refugee by that state.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total value is of the civil penalties issued under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 to the *(a)* UK and *(b)* foreign-based transport industry since April 2000. [68807]

Beverley Hughes: Since 3 April 2000 when the penalty provisions of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 were introduced, and as at 31 March 2002, a total of 1,429 penalty notices have been issued in respect of 7,516 clandestine entrants detected concealed in road vehicles arriving in the United Kingdom. The combined value of these penalties is £15,032,000.

No records are held centrally distinguishing where transport companies that have received penalties are based, and reviewing each of the 1,429 individual cases to obtain this information would involve disproportionate costs. Records are kept centrally of the nationality of drivers who have been penalised. These show that a total of £3,314,000, or approximately 22 per cent., of penalties have been imposed on United Kingdom drivers and £11,492,000, or approximately 76 per cent., on foreign nationals. The remaining approximately 1.5 per cent. of penalties were imposed in respect of clandestine entrants who arrived in unaccompanied detached trailers.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about the possibility of a public inquiry into plans for an accommodation centre for asylum seekers near Bicester. [57967]

Beverley Hughes: None.

Correspondence

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne of 12 February, 12 March, 10 April and 21 May, relating to her constituent, Mrs. Svitlana McLean of Waltham Cross. [59231]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* My noble Friend the Lord Filkin wrote to the hon. Member on 15 July 2002. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 22 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Ashraf Khan and Zakia Jan Lehan. [68201]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 15 July 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 17 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. K. Mohammed Haji. [68198]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 15 July 2002.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when a subtantive reply will be given to Mr. M. Egdell's letter of 17 April 2002, concerning asylum seekers. [68268]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* A reply to the hon. Member's letter is currently being prepared.

A substantive response will be sent as soon as possible.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will respond to the letter of the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire of 4 February, ref 2513/2. [66253]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 16 July 2002. I am very sorry for the delay in replying.

Special Constables

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police about procedures designed to make it easier for special constables to enlist. [65491]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner has regular bilateral meetings with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) in which the subject of recruitment and retention of specials has been discussed.

al-Akhbar

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the content of the newspaper al-Akhbar; and what plans he has to monitor anti-semitic propaganda. [67537]

Beverley Hughes: Allegations that articles in the al-Akhbar newspaper contain extreme anti-semitic language have been reported to the police and are being investigated.

We are very much aware of the deep anxiety extreme language causes to the Jewish community, particularly at a time when, following the terrorist atrocities in the United States and the current difficult situation in the Middle East, it is inevitably feeling vulnerable.

The investigation of behaviour or material that may incite racial hatred under Part III of the Public Order Act 1986 is an operational matter for the police. However, the increase in the maximum penalty for incitement to racial hatred from two to seven years' imprisonment, a change we made as part of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, is a clear indication of the seriousness with which we view this offence. I would continue to encourage anyone to report to the police any material they believe breaches the incitement to racial hatred laws.

The police and Jewish bodies continue to work closely to safeguard Jewish people and property. We are in close touch with the Community Security Trust of the British Board of Deputies, which provides up-to-date details of anti-Semitic activity in the UK, such as assaults and criminal damage.

Cannabis

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effects on community safety and overall policing of the Lambeth cannabis relaxation pilot project; and if he will make a statement. [66737]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) has noted carefully the emerging findings of the ongoing evaluation of the Lambeth cannabis policing pilot, whose aim is to provide police officers with more time to concentrate on more serious offences in relation to Class A drugs and other core policing business—in particular, robbery, gun crime and burglary.

He has noted that from July 2001 to May 2002 there was a 10 per cent. increase in arrests for Class A drug trafficking offences in comparison with the 12 month period July 2000 to June 2001; that, according to a Police Foundation/MORI poll, 83 per cent. of Lambeth residents supported the cannabis scheme and 74 per cent. believed the scheme would result in more police time being redeployed to tackle serious crime; and that this is what has happened. 1,350 hours of police time, the equivalent of 1.8 officers, were saved in the first six months of the pilot.

My right hon. Friend has also taken note of a survey of headteachers in Lambeth, conducted by the Metropolitan Police, which revealed that the policing of cannabis pilot operating in that borough has revealed no adverse impact in terms of increased prevalence (levels of use) problems or problems such as truancy.

He recognizes that continued community confidence in the scheme and community safety depend upon police officers continuing to spend more time dealing effectively with serious crime in the borough. In particular, he expects the police to respond swiftly and effectively to any attempt to defy the law by those dealing in drugs.

Alcohol-related Crime

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of crimes committed that were alcohol related and their cost in each of the last five years. [67019]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Precise information on this subject is not available except where intoxication is an element of the definition of the offence (as with driving while intoxicated). The term alcohol-related crime potentially covers any criminal act where the perpetrator may have been drinking alcohol prior to, or at the time of, the offence. While the relevant offence may be recorded, there is at present no requirement on police forces to record whether or not the offender had been drinking.

We know from the British Crime Survey that about 40 per cent. of all violent crime is alcohol-related, that is where the victim considers that the offender had been drinking prior to the commission of the offence. But victims are less able to make such an assessment where the offence does not involve direct contact with the offender.

The suite of Best Value Performance Indicators for the police for 2002–03 will provide a more consistent measure of alcohol-related violence across all police forces in England and Wales, by including both a measure of violent offences committed in connection with licensed premises and a measure of violent offences committed under the influence of an intoxicating substance.

The Government is determined to tackle the range of problems that arise from alcohol misuse, including alcohol-related crime and disorder. This includes tackling under-age drinking, recognising that young people are generally less likely than adults to differentiate between legal and illegal substances. As part of the response to this, each Drug Action Team has now drawn up a Young People's Substance Misuse Plan detailing how education, prevention and treatment activities for drugs and alcohol will be expanded according to local needs and integrated within wider provision for children and young people.

Confiscated Criminal Assets

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was confiscated from convicted criminals in each of the last three years. [68438]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The receipts realised in England and Wales from confiscation orders made against convicted criminals in respect of the proceeds of their crimes for the last three years for which figures are available are £16,510,000 in 1998–99, £25,044,000 in 1999–2000, and £19,833,000 in 2000–01. The value of confiscation orders made for those years were £34,947,000, £49,146,000 and £50,031,000 respectively.

Deportees

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the financial cost involved in the removal of people being deported from the United Kingdom in each of the last three years. [68441]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that it is not possible to provide a breakdown of the specific costs requested by my hon. Friend. The provision of such information would require an examination of individual case files and would incur disproportionate cost.

Europol

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards extending the *(a)* competence and *(b)* executive powers of Europol. [68335]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Europol Convention gives Europol the power to deal with a full range of serious international crime where an organised criminal structure is involved. This includes drug trafficking, people smuggling, crime committed in the course of terrorism, counterfeiting and money laundering. The Government would look sympathetically at any proposal to extend Europol's competence to cover other forms of serious organised international crime, provided a need had been identified, and Europol could add value.

Europol does not have executive police powers in the member states. The Government would not support giving Europol such powers. Europol's role is to support member states own law enforcement operations by, for example facilitating the exchange of information between the member states and analysing information and intelligence.

Immigration

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures the Government have in place to keep track of immigrants who enter the UK; and if he will make a statement. [69013]

Beverley Hughes: A great many people who are not British citizens come to the United Kingdom each year. Excluding European Union citizens, approximately 13 million people were given leave to enter the United Kingdom in 2000, the last year for which data has been published.

Foreign nationals who are granted limited leave to enter or remain for longer than three months for employment, and foreign nationals granted limited leave to enter or remain for a total period in excess of six months for any other reason are required to register with the police. Failure to do so is an offence. For this purpose, "foreign nationals" excludes European Economic Area (EEA) nationals and citizens of Commonwealth countries. This requirement does not apply to anyone who has been granted indefinite leave to enter or indefinite leave to remain.

Arriving passengers awaiting a decision on whether or not they should be given leave to enter, passengers who have been refused entry, and people liable to deportation or to removal as an illegal entrant or under the powers contained in section 10 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 may be granted temporary admission pending a decision whether or not to grant leave or pending removal. This temporary admission may be subject to conditions as to residence, employment and reporting to the police or an immigration officer. Failure to comply with these conditions is also an offence. A person detained under Immigration Act powers may also be released on bail, again subject to conditions, which may include a requirement to report.

The Immigration Service has seven designated reporting centres, which have been established to assist the Immigration Service in managing these reporting regimes. Alternatively a person may be required to report to a police station near their address.

We are seeking to further improve our ability to remain in contact with persons seeking leave to remain in the United Kingdom. In particular, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill will provide for the creation of accommodation centres for asylum seekers, and we will also seek to improve arrangements in respect of asylum seekers outside those centres. During the new induction process all asylum seekers are advised of the importance of informing the Home Office of any change of address and of the need to report as required. The Bill provides that the provision of support to asylum seekers will be conditional on their reporting as required.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the definition used for each category of immigrant to the UK; and if the European Union has agreed upon these categorical definitions. [69206]

Beverley Hughes: Our immigration system is formed around the concept of categories of entry, each with its own eligibility criteria, conditions and restrictions. The categories are broadly for the purposes of visiting, study, economic activity, family reunion and humanitarian protection.

Details for each category are set out in the Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules, HC395. In addition there are a number of concessions that operate outside the rules under which individuals may qualify if they meet the requisite criteria. The European Community (EC) does have competence under Title IV of the EC Treaty in the area of visas, asylum and immigration. The European Commission has brought forward a number of proposals for Community legislation on rules on admission of third country nationals to the member states, covering family reunification, admission for the purposes of employment and self-employment, the status of those who are long-term residents and the conditions in which third country nationals have the freedom to travel. None of these proposals have so far been adopted by the Council of Ministers. The United Kingdom has not exercised its right to opt in to the adoption and application of these measures. The United Kingdom has legislation which governs the rights of entry and residence of European Union (EU) citizens, as defined in the EC Treaty.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers entered England in the past five years, broken down by country of origin; what proportion this total represented of the total number of immigrants to enter England in these periods; and how many emigrants to England were recorded from each of the countries listed in this period. [69210]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that information on how many asylum applicants entered England in the past five years is unavailable. Regional information is available on where asylum applications in the United Kingdom were made (by port of application) but not on the entry routes of asylum seekers. In 2001 over a third (36 per cent) of applications were made at United Kingdom ports, while most applications (64 per cent) were made in country.

Information on the numbers of asylum applications (excluding dependants) at port and in country, by nationality, for 1999 to 2001 is published on the Home Office Research Development Statistics website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html in Table 3b of the quarterly web pages "Asylum Statistics: 1st Quarter", and corresponding data for 1997 and 1998 are published in Table 2.2 of the annual statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics 2001" (also available from the Library).

Information on the numbers of persons granted settlement annually, by nationality, is published in Table 6.5 of the Command Paper "Control of Immigration Statistics 2000", available from the Library and from the Research Development Statistics website.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what criteria are used to determine which asylum seekers from Zimbabwe are allowed to stay in Great Britain until the new elections in Zimbabwe; and when they will be required to return to Zimbabwe; [69005]

(2) what changes are planned to the criteria relating to asylum seekers from Zimbabwe. [69007]

Beverley Hughes: Applications for asylum from people from Zimbabwe are considered on their individual merits, in accordance with our obligations under the 1951 United Nations' Refugee Convention.

On 15 January, we announced a temporary suspension of returns of unsuccessful asylum applicants to Zimbabwe. We will resume returns only when we are satisfied that it is safe to do so. We are monitoring events in the aftermath of the Zimbabwe presidential election and other developments in the country situation. A decision on resumption of returns will be made when we have properly assessed the risks to returnees. That process is under way.

Time Limited Development Fund

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the assessment of applications for grants from the Time Limited Development Fund will be completed. [68791]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) announced the allocation of grants to organisations successful under the Time Limited Development Fund at the re-launch of the Home Office Active Community Unit on 29 May this year. 113 projects in deprived areas of England will benefit from £13.5 million grant aid over the next three years.

Volunteering Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown by organisation of the annual grants for 2001–02 that have been paid to voluntary and community organisations pursuing volunteering projects. [68794]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The requested information is provided in the table:

£

Organisation	*Annual grant*
African Family Support Centre	22,195
Age Concern	38,000
Age Concern Ledbury and District	9,918
Alzheimer's Society	5,208
Big Brothers and Sisters	200,000
Bishop Creighton House	15,273
Bolton Lads and Girls Club	27,775
Business in the Community	258,362
Carlisle Mencap	7,320
Chance (UK) Ltd.	20,518
Children's Society	24,500
Community Service Volunteers—Make a Difference Day	60,000
Community Service Volunteers—Media-Community Action Desks	300,000
County of Northampton Council on Addiction	29,000
Dines Green Streets Ahead	15,929

Organisation	£ *Annual grant*
Enfield Business Education Partnership	2,500
Experience Corps	5,292,000
Family Service Units	15,462
Focus Mentoring	27,381
Focus—Interaction Volunteer Development Initiative	69,000
Foyer	50,000
Fun in Action (FUN) for Children	12,000
Halton Voluntary Action	289,286
Help and Care	55,000
Help the Aged	25,032
Home-Start Bournemouth	12,250
Home-Start Nottingham	16,753
Home-Start Sittingbourne and Sheppey	6,219
Home-Start Stoke-on-Trent	19,543
Home-Start Wisbech	12,000
Lambeth Wellcare	8,378
Media Trust—Teletext	50,000
Media Trust—Community Channel	190,000
Media Trust—New Year New You	111,000
Media Trust—Voluntary Matters	180,000
Mersey Volunteer Bureau	50,000
MSF Union	50,000
National Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders—Walsall	32,009
National Association of Volunteer Bureaux—Media Skills	100,000
National Centre for Volunteering	8,000
National Centre for Volunteering—Diversity Challenge Website	16,215
National Centre for Volunteering—IYV 2001 Consortium	127,711
National Centre for Volunteering—IYV 'Image Bank'	50,000
National Centre for Volunteering—Volunteering Convention	14,000
National Centre for Volunteering—Volunteering Supplement	28,000
National Mentoring Network: A Plan to Equality	430,000
National Trust—Sharing the Caring	45,752
National Trust	26,542
National Youth Agency—Philip Lawrence Awards	100,000
North East Council on Addictions Services Ltd.	25,223
North Tyneside Voluntary Organisations Development Agency	270,000
Northampton Volunteer Bureau	32,000
Northorpe Hall Trust	15,954
One to One Youth Befriending	27,846
Pabulum	23,330
PACT Community Projects	15,091
RAMP—The Renewal Programme	15,857
Ravidassia Community Centre	10,000
Retired Executives Action Clearing House	22,725
Regional Interactive Safety Centre	19,000
Routes to Volunteering in Havering	25,000
Royal National Institute for Deaf People	52,654
Royal Philanthropic Society Rainer	47,223
Salford Business Education Partnership	90,000
Sandwell Volunteer Bureau	60,928
SCOPE—South West	27,000
SCOPE—North West	22,356
Second City, Second Chance	12,200
SENSE	5,250
SKILL	8,672
Somerset Youth Voluntary Network	35,000
South Northants Volunteer Bureau	36,000
SOVA	26,793
Swindon Education Business Partnership	24,900
Terrence Higgins Trust	13,859
The Befriending Network	15,000
The King's Cross Project	12,946
The Leonard Cheshire Foundation	34,285
The London Connection	5,798
Those on the Margins of Society	40,000
TimeBank	710,000
Voluntary Action Camden	227,690
Voluntary Action Luton	250,456
Voluntary Action Sheffield—Doing it Locally Campaign	39,928
Whitbread Volunteer Action Awards	60,000
Youthnet—Developing Diversity Project	134,508
Youthnet—Do It Database	29,701
Total	11,081,204

Private Office Guidelines

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines his private office operates under when dealing with requests from hon. Members on exceptional, urgent and compassionate cases. [69424]

Beverley Hughes: My predecessor, my right hon. and noble Friend, Lord Rooker, wrote to hon. Members on 15 May 2002 setting out how their representations in relation to immigration cases would be dealt with. In exceptional, urgent and compassionate cases, private office staff will intervene directly and act according to the nature of the case to try and seek an urgent resolution.

However, due to the nature of exceptional, urgent and compassionate cases, there are no specific guidelines which private office staff follow. Each case is considered separately, dependent on its individual circumstances. Private office staff liaise with the relevant departmental officials to obtain the necessary information to enable the Minister to make an informed decision.

Asylum (Iraqis)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's policy is regarding *(a)* Iraqi Kurds seeking asylum and *(b)* removals in the event of their claims being unsuccessful; and if he will make a statement. [69344]

Beverley Hughes: The Government recognise that there may be certain people from northern Iraq who are in need of international protection under the terms of the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees. However, there are also some asylum seekers from that region who, after careful consideration of their application, do not appear to meet the criteria set out in the convention. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner is on record saying that it would not object to the return to northern Iraq of asylum seekers from that area who have been found, through fair and objective procedures, not to be in need of international protection.

Iraqi citizens of Kurdish origin are able to return voluntarily to northern Iraq. We are exploring the options for enforcing returns to northern Iraq using routes that will not cross territory controlled by the Government in Baghdad. We hope to be in a position to begin enforced returns shortly.

Pig-to-Primate Organ Transplant

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reasons behind the decision not to allow a judicial inquiry into the circumstances surrounding pig-to-primate organ transplant research by Imutran Limited at Huntingdon Life Sciences. [68393]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Home Office Ministers considered the matter very carefully, but concluded that the issues, including those regarding compliance with the authorities granted to Imutran Limited under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 for its xenotransplantation research programme, did not merit such an inquiry. Nor were they considered to justify any other form of special investigation. Instead, in November 2000, the then Home Secretary (Mr. Straw) asked the Chief Inspector of the

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate to carry out a routine assessment of compliance with the relevant authorities issued to Imutran Limited under the 1986 Act. The Chief Inspector's report, which covered five years work, was published on 13 July 2001 and copies placed in the Library. It confirmed that the general level of compliance was good and identified no new factors justifying a judicial inquiry.

Passport Control (Biometric Techniques)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 886, on the meeting with the French Interior Minister, if he will make a statement on the use of biometric techniques in establishing more secure methods of passport control. [66745]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The use of biometric techniques to link a travel document to the rightful holder has long been recognised as a policy goal by passport issuing authorities around the world. The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) is developing a biometric standard for use in machine readable travel documents to ensure global interoperability. The United Kingdom (UK) is supporting the work of ICAO in establishing this standard. In addition the UK Passport Service is investigating ways to use biometrics information in UK passports and in passport cards as the latter are developed; and in its efforts to counter fraud.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last visited the Public Inquiry Office of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. [67926]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) visited the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's Public Inquiry Office in Croydon on 26 June 2001.

My noble Friend, (Lord Rooker), the former Minister for Immigration also visited the Public Inquiry Office, as did I, on 20 June 2002.

Foreign Nationals (Domestic Violence Provisions)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the provisions relating to domestic violence have been applied to allow a foreign national who has married a UK citizen to remain in the UK despite the break-up of that marriage due to domestic violence. [70035]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* Up to the end of 2000, the latest available data from case records, 63 applicants under the domestic violence concession have been granted settlement.

Internet (Child Protection)

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times the Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet has met since it was set up last year; what progress has been made; and if he will make a statement. [70809]

Hilary Benn: The then Home Secretary (Mr. Straw) announced the establishment of the Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet on 9 May 2001. Since then, the full Task Force has met four times and most recently on 3 July 2002. The work of the Task Force has been taken forward by a number of Sub Groups which have met regularly and have been looking at the criminal law, law enforcement, child protection measures, public awareness, training and further developing co-operation between the industry and others on reporting and handling child protection issues.

Members of the respective Sub Groups have given freely of their time to support the aim we set last year: to make the United Kingdom the best and safest place in the world for children to use the internet, and to help protect children the world over from abuse fuelled by criminal misuse of new technologies.

The Task Force has developed, run and now evaluated a successful national awareness campaign. Research had confirmed two key gaps: first, that parents are ill-informed about their children's use of the internet and chat rooms, and second that young people give out their personal details without considering the consequences. Two campaigns were designed, one to target 14 to 16-year-olds and the other parents/carers of 11 to 13-year-olds. The media used included press advertising, cinema, radio, on-line and viral marketing from December 2001 until spring 2002. Independent evaluation of the campaigns shows significantly improved awareness of the key messages in both target audiences. The Task Force is now considering that evaluation and how to build on the momentum created.

The Task Force has also developed proposals for a criminal offence to tackle the "grooming" of children by paedophiles online or offline. This is intended to allow prosecution at an early stage when children are being groomed, before an existing sexual offence has been committed. In addition, the proposals include the creation of a new civil protection order relating to behaviour towards a child for an illegal or harmful sexual purpose.

Practical online child protection measures have been drawn up in a draft good practice document for service providers which deals with chat, instant messaging and web services. These encourage, among other things, clear and accessible safety messages and advice and user-friendly ways of reporting abuse. The drafts are being considered by the wider industry through the Internet Service Providers' Association (ISPA) and the London Internet Exchange (LINX).

Work is also in hand to develop a shared matrix for reporting and handling child protection issues, and developing good practice for dealing with law enforcement requests for information from Internet Service Providers (ISPs). This is being taken forward, with the oversight of the Task Force, by the Internet Crime Forum.

The Task Force will continue to work in partnership with the industry to: consider the extent to which the criminal law currently covers unsuitable material being sent to children and all forms of indecent representations of children; assess the new challenges posed by development of 3G mobile phones; and develop basic training materials for child protection staff on children's internet use.

In parallel with the Task Force, the United Kingdom has played a leading role in the development of a G8 strategy for protecting children from sexual exploitation on the internet. The strategy, which is not yet finalised, will cover issues such as: victim identification; intelligence gathering and sharing; location of suspects; enforcement tools and training; awareness building and prevention; and police working with industry and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Forensic Science Service

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will lay before Parliament the annual report for the Forensic Science Service. [70810]

Mr. Denham: Copies of the Forensic Science Service's (FSS) Annual Report and Accounts for 2001–02 have today been laid before Parliament.

Performance against Agency targets 2001–02

The FSS met seven of its 10 targets and concluded the financial year with a strong performance.

Financial targets

A 12.9 per cent. return on capital employed was produced against a target of 10 per cent.

A three-year rolling efficiency gain of 10 per cent. was achieved against a target of 10 per cent.

Service Delivery

An average turnaround time of 35 days was achieved against a target of 26 days.

94 per cent., 92 per cent. and 90 per cent. of agreed dates were achieved in urgent, critical and persistent young offender cases (respectively) against targets of 97 per cent., 97 per cent. and 100 per cent.

89 per cent. of agreed delivery dates in all categories were achieved against a target of 93 per cent.

Service level agreements were put into place with 92 per cent. of police forces—against a target of 90 per cent.

A biennial customer satisfaction survey was conducted.

A baseline overall measure for putting into place routine and robust customer satisfaction measurement processes based on transactional approach, and for demonstrating year on year improvements in police (customer) satisfaction was established.

External quality accreditation to ISO standards was maintained—and extended.

Application for 50 per cent. of reporting officers for accreditation to the Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners, where appropriate, was achieved.

The targets for 2002–03, the agency's fourth year of trading fund, are:

Finance:

Target: a 10 per cent. return on capital employed.

Target: a 10 per cent. efficiency gain (over three years).

Service delivery:

Target: a five per cent. increase in transactional index of customer satisfaction (baseline 100 per cent).

Target: agreements on service levels implemented with 92 per cent. of police forces.

Target: maintain quality accreditation.

Target: meet dispatch dates in 98 per cent. of urgent and critical cases and 99 per cent. in persistent young offenders cases.

Target: meet dispatch dates in 93 per cent. of all categories of cases.

Target: achieve a 70 calendar day turnaround time in 90 per cent. of standard jobs (violent and volume crime cases) by the year end, demonstrating improvements through the year.

Target: su[illegible] applications for accreditation to the Council for the Registration [illegible] Forensic Practitioners (CRFP) of 100 per cent. of reporting officers in areas where the CRFP is registering people.

Dungavel Detention Centre

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further renovations are planned to transform Dungavel detention centre into a removal centre; what the estimated cost is; and from which budget line such renovation costs will be met. [69281]

Beverley Hughes: There are no physical alterations needed to transform Dungavel House from a detention to a removal centre. Any future proposals to alter the building will be considered and if found to be economically advantageous the costs will be met by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND).

EU Committees (Scottish Executive Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the EU Advisory Committee on the Free Movement of Workers is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67751]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The EU Advisory Committee on the Free Movement of Workers is next due to meet in November 2002 (date to be set by the European Commission). Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been and are not currently members of this committee. The advisory committee is composed of six members for each member state of the European Union, two of whom represent the Government (normally only one representative attends), two the trade unions and two the employers' associations, plus one substitute member for each of these. The committee and its composition were established by regulation (EEC) No. 1612/68.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the EU Technical Committee for the Implementation of Regulations concerning the Free Movement of Workers is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67744]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The EU Technical Committee for the Implementation of Regulations concerning the Free Movement of Workers is next due to meet in November 2002 (date to be set by the European Commission). Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been and are not currently members of this committee. The advisory committee is composed of one member for each member state of the European Union, plus one substitute member. The committee and its composition were established by regulation (EEC) No. 1612/68.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when *(a)* the EU Advisory Committee on Social Security for Migrant Workers and *(b)* its working parties are next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members; and if he will make a statement. [67743]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The EU Advisory Committee on Social Security for Migrant Workers is next due to meet on 2 October 2002. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been and are not currently members of this committee. UK representation consists of two officials from the Department for Work and Pensions (normally only one attends), three trade union representatives and three employers' representatives (the latter two includes substitute members). The committee and its composition were established by regulation (EEC) No. 1408/71.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in his Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE Directive. [60747]

Mr. Leslie: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Industry, Energy and Environment, on 12 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 1266W.

Sprinkler Systems

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many sprinklers were installed in properties owned by local authorities last year; and if he will make a statement. [65857]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the Government's policy is on encouraging the installation of sprinkler systems in *(a)* local authority owned houses and *(b)* new build houses; and if he will make a statement. [65856]

Mr. Raynsford: The information is as follows:

(a) The Government have no formal role in encouraging local authorities to install sprinkler systems. It is a matter for local consideration, although authorities will be assisted by the proposed introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). This will provide a risk based approach to the implementation of safety measures in dwellings. The HHSRS provides an analysis of risk from 24 broad hazards, including hazards from fire, and of the counter-measures to address those risks. Sprinklers are listed as one of the measures to promote fire safety.

(b) Although there are currently no plans to revise the building regulations to include provisions for domestic sprinkler systems into new build houses, we are keeping this under review in the light of emerging standards and improvements in sprinkler technology. We have recently let two research contracts to look at the whole issue of residential and domestic sprinklers, including an assessment of their actual effectiveness and the undertaking of a regulatory impact assessment to consider their costs and benefits. The results and conclusions of this work should be available around the end of 2003.

We will need to await the findings of the research work referred to above, before we are in a position to consider more fully if the provision of residential sprinklers should be a requirement of the building regulations.

Local Taxation

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans the Government have to introduce forms of local taxation in addition to the council tax; and if he will make a statement. [65863]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government's White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" detailed our scheme for Business Improvement Districts (BIDS). Under a BID, projects of benefit to the local community will be funded by a levy on the business rate paid by local businesses. Before a BID can be established a majority of the ratepayers liable for the levy will need to have voted in favour. The draft Local Government Bill published on 12 June contains the necessary primary legislation.

Apart from the BIDs levy, the Government have no plans to introduce other forms of local taxation in addition to the council tax.

We said in the White Paper that once some further analysis had been done, we would establish a high-level working group, involving Ministers and senior figures from local government, to look at all the aspects of the balance of local government funding, reviewing the evidence and looking at reform options. We intend to make an announcement regarding this review in due course.

Local Government Bill

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 820W, on the draft local government Bill, if councils have been informed of *(a)* the consultation and *(b)* the availability of paper copies. [66086]

Mr. Raynsford: We have ensured that the launch of the Local Government Bill was widely publicised. Individual councils were informed of the consultation via local government association bulletins and "Info4Local". "Info4Local" is a one-stop portal for local authorities to get quick and easy access to information on the websites of Government Departments, and we used its e-mail service to send out information on the draft Bill as soon as it was published. Paper copies were also sent to key representative organisations and have been made available to others on request. The consultation document itself contains details on how to obtain paper copies.

Data Services

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new data services, broken down by *(a)* sex, *(b)* race, *(c)* disability and *(d)* age have been commissioned by his Department since it was created. [66713]

Mr. McNulty: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Romsey on 10 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 83W. I am not aware of any new data series being commissioned since the establishment of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Equal Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) whether he has established a baseline for policy appraisal; against which to measure progress on equal treatment; and what progress has been achieved. [66714]

(2) if he will list the subjects of the gender impact assessments drawn up by his Department, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [66715]

Mr. McNulty: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her on 10 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 83W.

Regeneration

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Minister in his Department has responsibility for regeneration; and if he will make a statement. [67444]

Mr. McNulty: The Deputy Prime Minister has decided that for the time being Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will take on the portfolios of their predecessors. This means that Lord Rooker, Minister of State and I, Parliamentary Under-Secretary have responsibility for regeneration issues.

Civil Servants

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many civil servants there are in his Department, broken down by pay band; and if he will make a statement. [67454]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Central) (ODPM(C)) employs approximately 4,216 staff. This figure is composed of staff working on policy areas and an estimate of 50 per cent. of the support staff who worked for the former Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). This figure may change when restructuring is complete and final decisions have been taken on whether support staff are allocated to ODPM(C) or Department for Transport (DfT). The table shows these staff split by pay band.

Band	*OPCM (C)*
SCS	75
Band 7	37
Band 6	264
Band 5	204
Band 4	355
Band 3	383
Band 2	274
Band 1	44
Secretarial	78
Total	1,714

The ODPM also includes Government office staff and the following table shows the grade breakdown of these staff.

Band	*Total*
SCS	54
Band 7	30
Band 6	212
Band 5	225
Band 4	542
Band 3	635
Band 2	489
Band 1	86
Secretarial	87
Total	2,360

Finally ODPM also includes 142 staff who have transferred across from the Cabinet Office. A breakdown by pay band is not yet available for these staff.

Housing

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the adequacy of housing supply for the next 10 to 15 years; and if he will make a statement. [67217]

Mr. McNulty: Annual rates of housing provision to be kept under regular review are established through regional planning guidance and the spatial strategy it sets out. We expect local authorities to provide sufficient housing land to meet this housing provision. A central feature of "plan, monitor and manage" is the process of review and adjustment if indicators show that more or less housing is needed. This should occur as a minimum every five years, and sooner if there are signs of under or over provision.

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will take into account low cost housing in North Staffordshire when assessing the need for affordable housing for key public sector workers in *(a)* the West Midlands, *(b)* Cheshire and *(c)* South Manchester; and if he will make a statement. [69688]

Mr. McNulty: In each region the Government Office and the Housing Corporation produce a Regional Housing Statement working closely with local and regional stakeholders including local authorities and housing associations. This highlights key housing issues and pressures in each region and helps to identify regional priorities. The corporation also produces a Regional Investment Strategy which contains priorities for investment in that region. These priorities are also discussed with local and regional stakeholders.

Multiple Occupation Houses (Deaths)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many deaths there have been in houses of multiple occupation in each of the last five years for which records are available, broken down by the causes of death; and if he will make a statement. [68245]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Priority Development Areas

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the Government's priority development areas. [68357]

Mr. McNulty: Priority areas for development are identified in Regional Planning Guidance issued by the Deputy Prime Minister, in the draft London Plan published by the Mayor and in development plans adopted by local planning authorities.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68729]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Homelessness (Local Authority Powers)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what statutory powers local authorities possess to *(a)* refuse housing to, *(b)* refuse services to and *(c)* return to their place of origin rough sleepers and homeless people. [68663]

Mr. McNulty: Authorities cannot refuse to secure accommodation or provide advice and assistance, as appropriate, to applicants where this is required as a result of a specific duty being owed to them under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. Rough sleepers or homeless people who apply to a housing authority for accommodation or advice and assistance must be treated in the same way as all other applicants.

Authorities do not have a power to return homeless people or rough sleepers to another area, but where an authority decide that an applicant is owed the main homelessness duty and (a) he or she does not have a local connection with the area of the authority and (b) does have one with the area of another authority, the case may be referred to that other authority.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what assessment he has made of the advantages of the system of the area cost adjustments within the local government finance system; [68893]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that regional wage differentials are reflected in the local government finance system. [68892]

Mr. Leslie: As we set out in the Green Paper, "Modernising Local Government Finance", we believe that the case for recognising that pay levels vary across the country is clear-cut. There will therefore continue to be an area cost adjustment in the new local government finance system that we intend to introduce in 2003–04.

We do, however, recognise that how the adjustment is calculated is difficult and contentious. That is why the formula grant distribution consultation paper we published on 8 July includes a range of alternative options on which we are inviting comments. We will be carefully considering the views that are put to us during the consultation period before taking final decisions on the best way forward.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the average SSA per head of population for local services after discounting area cost adjustment is in each *(a)* metropolitan area, *(b)* Government office region and *(c)* local authority; [68897]

(2) what the average SSA per head of population for local services is in each *(a)* metropolitan area, *(b)* Government office by area and *(c)* local authority. [68898]

Mr. Leslie: The average 2002–03 SSA per head of population, using the mid-2000 population estimates, for each metropolitan area is:

£

Metropolitan area	*SSA per head*
Greater Manchester	1,061
Merseyside	1,141
South Yorkshire	1,027
Tyne and Wear	869
West Midlands	1,114
West Yorkshire	1,015

The area cost adjustment (ACA) factor for each of the metropolitan areas is 1,000, and hence the ACA contribution for each of these areas is zero. The average 2002–03 SSA per head of population, excluding the ACA contribution is, therefore, the same as that in the table.

The average 2002–03 SSA per head of population, both including and excluding the ACA contribution, for each Government office area is:

£

Government office	*SSA per head Including the ACA contribution*	*SSA per head Excluding the ACA contribution*
South-west	876	876
South-east	892	833
London	1,265	1,085
Eastern	909	865
East Midlands	906	906
West Midlands	989	989
Yorkshire and Humberside	992	992
North-east	1,043	1,043
North-west	1,027	1,027

A table showing the 2002–03 SSA per head, both including and excluding the ACA contribution, for each local authority has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to impose transitional arrangements on the implementation of changes to the local government finance system; and if he will make a statement. [68890]

Mr. Leslie: As we announced in the local government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", we will continue to operate the floors and ceilings scheme to limit changes in grant to councils in any one year. Precise details of our proposals for the scheme for 2003–04 will be announced in the provisional local government finance settlement around the end of November 2002.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many local authorities spent *(a)* at or below SSA levels and *(b)* above SSA levels in each of the last three years.

Mr. Leslie: In 1998–99, 78 out of 433 authorities incurred a Net Revenue Expenditure at or below SSA. In 1999–2000 there were 52 and in 2001–01 there were 54.

SSA includes Police Grant in the case of police authorities and, in 2000–01, General GLA grant in the case of the Greater London Authority.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to ensure that the new grant formula that will replace SSA will be fairer and simpler and address the needs of all classes of authority. [69985]

Mr. Raynsford: On 8 July, we published a consultation paper setting out a number of options for reforming the distribution system for general revenue grants. One of the aims of the consultation paper is to make the system simpler overall, but it must be recognised that the formula will never be completely simple.

Central and local Government have worked together to develop the options contained in the consultation paper to make the system fairer for all local authorities. Decisions on the future funding system will be taken only after all consultation responses have been fully considered.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on how many occasions a local authority has put into the public domain the confidential draft of the local authority's corporate governance inspection by the Audit Commission prior to publication; and what action he intends to take against such local authorities. [69692]

Mr. Leslie: Of the corporate governance inspections that have been carried out to date four reports have come into the public domain prior to publication. Such premature disclosure does not help authorities to derive full benefit from inspections. The Audit Commission strongly advises local authority officers and members not to reveal the contents of draft reports prior to an agreed release date. Confidential drafts are provided in order to allow full discussion and deliberation of the recommendations within the council; and between the council and the inspectors, and the incorporation of any subsequent changes to the report before publication of a final report. The detailed management of these arrangements is a matter for the Audit Commission and the authority concerned.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 25 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 820W, on the Millennium Dome, if he will *(a)* commission from Jones Lange Lasalle and *(b)* publish estimates of the value of the Millennium Dome site to Meridian Delta Ltd. (i) with and (ii) without the Dome. [69202]

Mr. McNulty: English Partnerships, with professional advice from Jones Lang Lasalle, undertook full assessments of the value of the deal with Meridian Delta Ltd. and Anschutz Entertainment Group, and of alternative development scenarios with and without the Dome.

The net present value of the deal, assuming the full scheme is developed, is around £240 million. This is higher than both the estimated value of the site developed under alternative development scenarios with the Dome, and the estimated value of the site developed without the Dome. Our professional advice was that the establishment of a successful and iconic venue enhances the value of the rest of the development.

Precise valuations are commercially confidential, in order not to compromise the joint venture arrangements, negotiations between the joint venture and third parties, and the ability of English Partnerships to secure value for money through their commercial negotiations.

The National Audit Office is examining the sale process, including valuations and value for money assessments, and will report to Parliament in due course.

"Our Towns and Cities: The Future"

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made towards the goal in section 4.10 of the DETR document, "Our Towns and Cities: The Future", on 100 per cent. capital allowances for creating flats over shops for letting. [69377]

Mr. McNulty: We have introduced 100 per cent. capital allowances for owners and occupiers to cover the costs of creating flats over shops and similar commercial premises for letting. This measure was introduced in the 2001 Budget and has been available since May 2001. The Government are committed to undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of all the fiscal measures in the urban White Paper.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made towards the goal in section 4.10 of the DETR document, "Our Towns and Cities: The Future", to bring about VAT reforms to encourage conversion of properties for residential use. [69375]

Mr. McNulty: We have reduced VAT to 5 per cent. on the cost of conversions of residential property into residential communal homes, such as care homes and homes with multiple occupation, and on the cost of renovating residential properties that have been empty for three years or longer. A similar VAT reduction on the cost of converting residential properties, which have been empty for three years of more, into a different number of dwellings has been introduced. An adjustment has also been made to the zero rate of VAT to provide relief for the sale of renovated houses that have been empty for 10 years or more.

The measures above were introduced in the 2001 Budget. The reduction in VAT on residential conversions has been available since May 2001 and the relief from VAT on the sale of renovated homes has been available since August 2001. The Government are committed to undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of all the fiscal measures included in the urban White Paper.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made towards the goal in section 4.10 of the DETR document, "Our Towns and Cities: The Future", on accelerated payable tax credits for cleaning contaminated land. [69376]

Mr. McNulty: We have introduced an accelerated payable 150 per cent. tax credit on qualifying expenditure incurred on or after 11 May 2001 on cleaning-up contaminated land ('land remediation expenditure') for companies that acquire contaminated land for the purposes of a trade or schedule A letting business. The tax credit is intended to make the development of contaminated sites more viable, helping to tackle the legacy of previous industrial usage and reducing pressure to develop greenfield sites. This measure was introduced in the 2001 Budget and has been available since May 2001.

The Government are committed to undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of all the fiscal measures in the urban White Paper.

Open Spaces

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made towards the introduction of the Green Flag Award scheme for recognising excellence in local parks, play areas and open spaces; and if he will make a statement. [69381]

Mr. McNulty: Work to further develop the Green Flag Award scheme began on 1 April 2001. This has already led to an increase in the number of awards from 50 in 2000 to 81 this year. A new award category—the Green Pennant—was introduced in May 2002 to recognise the achievements of community managed and maintained spaces, and a further award category is being developed to recognise excellence in play space provision.

Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Programme

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much money has been provided for the New Opportunities Fund Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Programme since its establishment. [69383]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

The New Opportunities Fund was directed by the Government to distribute £125 million to green spaces and sustainable communities by 2002. So far more than £30 million has been awarded to over 900 projects.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people were sleeping rough in each year from 1998. [69423]

Mr. McNulty: On 3 December 2001, the Prime Minister announced that the Rough Sleepers Unit had met its target to reduce rough sleeping by at least two thirds by 2002. The latest figures on the number of people sleeping rough since June 1998 are as follows:

	England	*Reduction (per cent.)*
June 1998	1,851	—
June 1999	1,633	11.8
June 2000	1,180	36.3
June 2001	703	62.0
November 2001	532	71.3

The new Homelessness Directorate within my Department brings together the Rough Sleepers Unit, the Bed and Breakfast Unit and a new team to advise local authorities on the development of strategies to tackle homelessness. The Directorate will continue to work on sustaining the two-thirds reduction in rough sleeping.

Public Inquiries

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance his Department issues to the Planning Inspectorate in respect of the *(a)* starting dates for major public inquiries and *(b)* avoidance of overlapping dates for separate major public inquiries affecting the same objectors. [69625]

Mr. McNulty: There is no specific guidance issued by the Department to the Planning Inspectorate for:

(a) the start date for inquiries. The Inspectorate is in general expected to handle cases as quickly as possible and statutory rules require most inquiries to start within 22 weeks of the announcement of the intention to hold them;

(b) the avoidance of overlapping dates for separate major public inquiries affecting the same objectors. The Inspectorate takes account of potential overlaps: where they occur, programmes for the inquiries concerned can usually be arranged to avoid problems for objectors.

Local Elections

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Government Minister is responsible for the administration of local elections. [69359]

Mr. Raynsford: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) on 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 197W, ministerial responsibility for policy, including for reform and modernisation, on elections to English, and to the extent issues are not devolved Welsh, councils, the Greater London Authority, and any future English regional assembly is for my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

Software

Brian White: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69319]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister sets out the specific business requirements that software is required to meet. Suppliers are free to propose open source software to meet these requirements.

The Department's use of open source software will follow the Government's policy when published, currently planned for summer 2002. The draft policy may be viewed at http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/rfc/rfc_document.asp?docnum=429.

At present, less than 1 per cent. of the Office's software is open source.

Council Tax Bands

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many and what percentage of properties are in council tax Band F and above, broken down by *(a)* RSLs and *(b)* local authority properties in (i) London and (ii) England. [70032]

Mr. Leslie: Information on the number of properties in each council tax band is shown on the valuation list compiled by the Valuation Office Agency. The number and percentage of properties in council tax Band F and above, as at 26 March 2002, for London and England is shown in the table. A breakdown by RSLs or local authority properties is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	London	*England*
Number of properties in Band F and above	486,089	1,932,365
Total number of properties	3,125,684	21,436,841
Number of properties in Band F and above as a percentage of the total number of properties	15.6	9.0

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many and what percentage of properties are in each council tax band in *(a)* England and *(b)* each Government office region. [70031]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) on 25 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 397W.

Fire Service (Radio Communications)

Geraint Davies: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the Government's proposed revised national strategy for the replacement of the fire services main scheme radio system will *(a)* provide and *(b)* fund a solution which will meet the user requirements determined by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. [70002]

Mr. Leslie: The Government have undertaken to fully fund the new national procurement strategy for the fire service radio system. This work will be taken forward in close co-operation with fire authorities, including the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

Alconbury Airfield

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the timetable is for his decision on the Planning Inspectorate's report concerning the proposed development at Alconbury airfield, Cambridgeshire. [69727]

Mr. McNulty: The Planning Inspectorate has advised that it expects to send the report to the Deputy Prime Minister towards the end of August. Until we have received and considered the report, I cannot say when the decision on the appeal might be made.

Ordnance Survey

Brian White: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what performance targets have been set for the Ordnance Survey Executive Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [70808]

Mr. McNulty: The following performance targets have been set for Ordnance Survey for 2002–03:

To achieve revenue target of £98.0 million (excluding the National Interest Mapping Service Agreement)

To achieve an efficiency gain of 6 per cent. over the period April 2000 to March 2004. The target for 2002–03 is 4.5 per cent. against the baseline of 1999–2000.

To complete national coverage of the OS Explorer Map series by 31 March 2003, and for our principal national paper map series, we will issue full up-to-date revisions:

Years

	On average not more than every	*and, no longer than every*
Explorer May (403 sheets)	2.5	6.5
OS Landranger Map (204 sheets)	3	6

To increase the number of users of Ordnance Survey websites by 35 per cent.

To represent 99.5 per cent. of significant real world features in the database within six months of completion.

To reduce the carbon emissions from the Ordnance Survey Headquarters building by at least 1 per cent. year-on-year.

These targets reflect Ordnance Survey's continuing commitment to customers and to improved value for money for all its stakeholders.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many asylum seekers are supported by *(a)* each local authority and *(b)* local authorities in each Government office region. [68901]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

From the grant claims sent to the Home Office by local authorities, as at September 2001, 26,800 single adult asylum seekers and 14,600 families were supported by local authorities. Figures including dependants are not available.

Of these cases, the following number were supported by each local authority.

	Total number of:	
Local authority[1]	*Single adults*[2]	*Families*[2]
Barking and Dagenham	490	470
Barnet[3]	260	380
Barnsley	50	10
Bath and North East Somerset	*	*
Bedfordshire	210	50
Bexley[3]	120	60
Birmingham	360	150
Blackburn with Darwen	10	*
Blackpool	20	*
Blaenau Gwent County	0	0
Bolton Metro	20	10
Bournemouth	120	30
Bracknell Forest	*	*
Bradford	30	20
Brent[3]	330	450
Bridgend County	0	0
Brighton and Hove	170	20
Bristol City	160	40
Bromley[3]	80	100
Buckinghamshire	40	10
Bury	10	10
Caerphilly County	*	0
Calderdale	20	0
Cambridgeshire	110	30
Camden[3]	280	270
Cardiff	40	20
Carmarthenshire	0	0
Ceredigion CC	*	0
Cheshire	20	10
City of Newcastle	160	40
Conwy CBC	0	0
Cornwall	*	*
Corporation of London[3]	100	30
Coventry	50	20
Croydon[3]	70	160
Cumbria	*	0
Cyngor Gwynedd Council	0	0
Darlington	0	0
Denbighshire County	0	0
Derby	100	20
Derbyshire	*	0
Devon	10	0

Local authority[1]	*Total number of:* *Single adults*[2]	*Families*[2]
Doncaster	10	10
Dorset	40	*
Dudley	20	10
Durham	0	0
Ealing[3]	150	190
East Riding of Yorkshire	10	0
East Sussex	160	20
Enfield[3]	420	470
Essex	140	40
Flintshire	*	0
Gateshead	40	0
Gloucestershire	90	30
Greenwich[3]	500	340
Hackney[3]	0	0
Halton	0	0
Hammersmith and Fulham[3]	520	420
Hampshire	50	10
Haringey[3]	1,290	1,360
Harrow[3]	150	160
Hartlepool	0	0
Havering	190	100
Herefordshire	*	*
Hertfordshire	340	90
Hillingdon[3]	570	170
Hounslow[3]	120	190
Isle of Anglesey CC	0	0
Isle of Wight	*	*
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Islington[3]	1,400	520
Kensington and Chelsea[3]	390	270
Kent	3,020	460
Kingston Upon Hull	40	10
Kingston Upon Thames[3]	60	80
Kirklees	30	10
Knowsley	10	10
Lambeth[3]	980	740
Lancashire	10	*
Leeds	70	20
Leicester	110	60
Leicestershire	50	20
Lewisham[3]	460	450
Lincolnshire	100	20
Liverpool	180	70
Luton	460	130
Manchester	450	180
Medway	20	10
Merthyr Tydfil County	0	0
Merton[3]	160	200
Middlesbrough	80	10
Milton Keynes	80	30
Monmouthshire County	*	0
Neath Port Talbot	*	0
Newham[3]	1,110	1,130
Newport County (South Wales)	20	10
Norfolk	110	30
North East Lincolnshire	60	10
North Lincolnshire	*	*
North Somerset	10	*
North Tyneside	20	10
North Yorkshire	10	*
Northamptonshire	580	110
Northumberland	0	0
Nottingham	110	20
Nottinghamshire	20	*
Oldham	10	10
Oxfordshire	490	140
Pembrokeshire	0	0
Peterborough	60	30
Plymouth	10	10
Poole	0	0
Portsmouth	150	30
Powys CC	0	0
Reading	240	80
Redbridge[3]	670	330
Redcar and Cleveland	20	*
Rhondda Cynon Taff County	10	*
Richmond Upon Thames[3]	570	260
Rochdale	20	10
Rotherham	30	10
Rutland	10	*
Salford	80	40
Sandwell	250	50
Sefton	20	10
Sheffield	320	120
Shropshire	*	0
Slough	340	190
Solihull	10	*
Somerset	*	*
South Gloucestershire	10	10
South Tyneside	*	*
Southampton	310	50
Southend on Sea	210	100
Southwark[3]	1,100	500
St. Helens	*	0
Staffordshire	80	10
Stockport	20	10
Stockton On Tees	*	0
Stoke-on-Trent	50	*
Suffolk	20	10
Sunderland	20	10
Surrey	210	40
Sutton	110	80
Swansea City and County	0	0
Swindon	60	20
Tameside	20	*
Telford and Wrekin	20	*
Thurrock	90	30
Torbay	0	0
Torfaen CBC	0	0
Tower Hamlets[3]	700	250
Trafford	20	10
Vale of Glamorgan	10	*
Wakefield	50	10
Walsall	20	10
Waltham Forest[3]	470	360
Wandsworth[3]	110	220
Warrington	*	0
Warwickshire	90	20
West Berkshire	10	*0
West Sussex	120	20
Westminster[3]	490	370
Wigan	10	*
Wiltshire	10	10
Windsor and Maidenhead	*	*
Wirral	0	*
Wokingham	10	*
Wolverhampton	20	10
Worcestershire	40	10
Wrexham	0	0
York	10	*
Total	26,230	14,180

[1] All figures rounded to the nearest 10. Figures between 1 and 4 are represented by a *. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

[2] Supported as at end of September 2001.

[3] Greater London

Note:

Figures by government office region are not available.

Chipboard Manufacture

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research his Department has commissioned on the environmental impact of chipboard manufacture. [68353]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for environmental matters rests with the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Environment Agency. Neither DEFRA, the Environment Agency, nor the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have commissioned any research into the environmental impact of chipboard manufacture.

Local Public Service Arrangements

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to extend local public service arrangements to district councils. [69987]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government are keen to involve districts in local PSAs, but believe that better outcomes can be achieved through co-operation between county and district councils than by districts acting alone. It therefore offers incentives to encourage county councils to work with their districts in drawing up and implementing their local PSAs. Most of the county councils involved in the roll-out of local PSAs to top tier authorities have involved their districts, including Suffolk county council, whose local PSA was recently agreed. There are no plans to extend local PSAs to districts alone.

Social Services

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those London boroughs that are anticipating overspending on their social services budgets in this financial year. [69150]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Social Exclusion

Angus Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the EU Advisory Committee on the implementation of the community action programme to combat social exclusion is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67750]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The Programme Committee set up under the programme of Community action to encourage co-operation between member states to combat social exclusion is next due to meet on 10 October 2002. The United Kingdom members of the Committee are two named DWP officials. Representatives of the Scottish Executive are not, and have not been, members.

TREASURY

Energy Efficiency

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Government propose to take forward their Budget announcement to consider ways in which economic instruments might be used to improve household energy efficiency. [70865]

John Healey: A consultation document "Economic instruments to improve household energy efficiency" will be published today on the Treasury website. Copies are also available in the Libraries of both Houses. Responses to this consultation, which should be sent to HM Treasury by 8 October, will help to inform the Government's policy development in this area.

Public Finances

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the members of the Public Sector Classifications Committee; and if he will make a statement on the process by which they were selected. [70512]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Chope, dated 16 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the list of members of the Public Sector Classification Committee, and the process by which they were selected. (70512)

The Public Sector Classification Committee's members are selected for their National Accounts expertise. Most are automatically entitled to membership through holding particular jobs in The Office for National Statistics. The committee may co-opt others in particular cases if their areas of expertise are relevant. The membership is:

Head of National Accounts Group (chair)
Head of National Expenditure & Income Division (vice-chair)
Head of National Accounts Co-ordination Division
Head of Balance of Payments & Financial Sector Division
Head of Short-term Output Indicators Division
Head of Public Sector Accounts Branch
Expert on Gross Domestic Product
Expert on Financial & Sector Accounts
Expert on Gross National Income
Others as appropriate.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the statement by the Head of National Accounts at the Office for National Statistics publicised in a news release of 11 July on responsibility for deciding on classifications in the monitoring and control of public finances. [70514]

Mr. Boateng: The Office for National Statistics is responsible for classifying institutions and transactions for national accounts in accordance with international guidelines. Ministers have decided to adopt national accounts definitions in the monitoring and control of public finances. Similarly in the EU, the Council has decided to adopt national accounts definitions in the Maastricht Treaty, its protocols, and in the Stability and Growth Pact.

Employer Liability Insurance

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from companies in high-risk sectors on their ability to secure cover for mandatory employer liability insurance; and if he will make a statement. [69864]

Ruth Kelly: The Government do not generally intervene in the terms and conditions of insurance policies. There is no statutory requirement for insurers to offer particular types of cover.

The Government are aware that some companies are experiencing difficulties in obtaining employers liability cover and are monitoring the situation closely.

Contingent Liabilities

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether there are limits on the extent to which the devolved Administrations can enter into contingent liabilities. [70040]

Mr. Boateng: It is for the devolved Administrations to manage their contingent liabilities from within their existing Departmental Expenditure Limits if the contingent liabilities materialise.

Tax Contracts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff of the Inland Revenue have investigated and monitored *(a)* negotiated tax contracts for individuals and companies, *(b)* tax domicile status and *(c)* multinational company transfer pricing in each year since 1996. [62023]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that this information is not available.

Tax Returns

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals have entered into agreements with the Inland Revenue in each year since 1997 to pay a specified sum in tax in lieu of submitting an annual tax return; what the rationale is for this policy; and if he will make a statement. [62055]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue have not entered into agreements that absolve individuals from the general obligation to submit an annual tax return. Under Inland Revenue's power of care and management agreements of the type described were entered into and intended as a practical basis for taxing future income and gains where there would otherwise have been particular difficulties in establishing an exact figure. The Inland Revenue are no longer making these agreements.

No central records were kept of these agreements at the time they were made, but the number of individuals so far identified to have been covered by them in the years in question is as follows:

1997: 7

1998: 4

1999: 3

2000: 2.

These figures include one case (covering four individuals, in 1998) that has come to light following recent publicity. Agreements in other cases have also covered the tax affairs of more than one individual.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the administrative cost of replacing the working families tax credit with the working tax credit and the child tax credit. [67776]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the revised Regulatory Impact Assessment for the new tax credits which is available in the Library and from the Inland Revenue's website www.ir.gov.uk.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the proportion of fraudulent claims for working families tax credit which result in prosecution in each of the last three years. [67775]

Dawn Primarolo: The Revenue's approach to compliance is based on the progressive use of civil penalties and it prosecutes in more serious cases of fraud.

The table gives the numbers of cases investigated which were found to be non-compliant, the number of penalties imposed and the number prosecuted in the last three years.

	As at 31 March		
	2000	*2001*	*2002*
Cases found to be non-compliant	250	5,213	8,595
Penalties imposed	3	237	524
Successful prosecutions	0	2	29

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much compensation has been paid as a result of working families tax credit fraud since 31 December 2001. [67774]

Dawn Primarolo: The information cannot be supplied in the form requested.

As with other parts of the tax system the Inland Revenue Code of Practice (COP 1) allows for certain exceptional payments to be made to working families tax credit (WFTC) applicants where they suffer loss or inconvenience as a result of mistakes in dealing with their application. The Inland Revenue classifies the compensation payments it makes according to the nature of the complaint: for example, delay or mistake.

Mr. Roy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families receiving working families tax credit have an allowed claim for child costs. [69735]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of recipients of the working families tax credit (WFTC) who benefit from the child care tax credit is shown in Table 1.3 of each WFTC Quarterly Enquiry, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are claiming working families tax credit, expressed as a percentage of the working population in *(a)* Leeds and *(b)* each of the English regions. [69952]

Dawn Primarolo: For the number of recipients of working families tax credit in each region and local authority, quarterly from May 2001, I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn), on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 293W.

Estimates of the average population in employment in the same areas in the year to February 2001 appear in the January 2002 issue of Labour Market Trends. Quarterly estimates for regions, most unitary authorities and larger districts appear in the labour Force Survey Quarterly

Supplement. Copies of these publications are in the Library. All these estimates are based on the Labour Force Survey, and are subject to sampling uncertainty.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the accuracy of the estimates in the 'Tax Credits Act 1999 and Accompanying Regulations: Regulatory Impact Assessment', published in December 1999 of the costs for employers of administering the working families tax credit; and if he will place the assessment in the Library. [69935]

Dawn Primarolo: The accuracy of the estimates is being assessed through a survey of employees, which is part of the working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit evaluation programme.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1393–94W, for what reasons the figures for the cost of advertising the working families tax credit are lower than the figures offered to the former hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) on 22 June 2000, *Official Report*, column 288W. [68608]

Dawn Primarolo: The figures for working families tax credit given to the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty), included other promotional activity such as a freephone helpline, while the figures given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) included only direct advertising expenditure.

Budget Summary

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent on designing, producing and distributing the Budget 2002 summary leaflet; and to whom it was distributed. [67811]

Dawn Primarolo: The Budget 2002 summary leaflet was designed, written and edited by Treasury officials. The costs of production and distribution of the leaflet were met from within Departmental Expenditure Limits and amounted to approximately £208,000.

The leaflet is available free of charge from the Treasury and is published on the Treasury website. Copies of the leaflet were also distributed nationwide through libraries, educational establishments, citizens advice bureaus, Jobcentres, NHS hospitals, GPs' surgeries, and other organisations.

Expenditure

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Inland Revenue department's Vote on Account provision for 2002–03 will be sufficient to finance spending until Royal Assent to the Appropriation Act later this summer. [68862]

Dawn Primarolo: Royal Assent to the Appropriation Act was given on 8 July. Prior to that point, the overall Vote on Account provision for the Inland Revenue Estimate was sufficient in terms of both resources and cash to finance spending until Royal Assent. However, the Valuation Office Agency's Request for Resources (RfR) 4 had consumed £500,000 more resources than anticipated in the Vote on Account because of a change in the profile of the liabilities.

The increase in resources was offset by lower resource consumption on RfR1 enabling resource consumption on the Estimate as a whole to remain within the overall Vote on Account resource provision. The net cash requirement remained unchanged.

Vote on account provision

£

	Before	*After*	*Change*
RfR1	1,006,990,000	1,006,490,000	–500,000
RfR2	—	—	—
RfR3	93,600,000	93,600,000	—
RfR4	14,045,000	14,545,000	500,000
Total	1,114,635,000	1,114,635,000	0

Child Poverty

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made on recent steps taken to alleviate child poverty. [68801]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's annual anti-poverty report, "Opportunity for All" shows progress on a range of poverty and social exclusion indicators linked to child poverty—low-income, worklessness, health, education and housing—each of which is reflected in a short-term Public Service Agreement (PSA).

The Government will continue to make progress towards their goal of eradicating child poverty with the introduction in April 2003 of two new tax credits—the child tax credit and the working tax credit. The Government are also making substantial investment in services for children.

Poverty Policy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are planned in relation to the Government's poverty policy. [69010]

Dawn Primarolo: This Government are committed to halving child poverty by 2010 and abolishing it within a generation. As a result of personal tax and benefit changes announced since 1997, by April 2003 the poorest families with children will be on average £2,400 better off in real terms.

To make further progress towards its eradication goal, Government are introducing two new tax credits—the child tax credit and the working tax credit—in April 2003. The Government are also making substantial investment in services for children.

The Government are also committed to tackling pensioner poverty. It has introduced the minimum income guarantee and is committed to raising it in line with earnings throughout this Parliament. From 2003, the pension credit will enable those with a modest amount of second pension or savings to gain on average just over £400 a year.

Tax Credits

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the reply from HM Treasury to the Statistics Commission, dated 2 July, to the Head of Profession for Statistics at HM Treasury concerning tax credits; and if he will make a statement. [69244]

Ruth Kelly: Yes. I have arranged for the Treasury's reply to the Statistics Commission to be placed in the Library.

Horse Breeding

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide tax reliefs for *(a)* the horse breeding industry and *(b)* stallion owners, similar to those which exist in Ireland. [69368]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keep all taxes under review as part of the normal Budget process.

In the UK, racehorse owners, including breeders, already benefit from the VAT Registration Scheme for Racehorse Owners which allows owners, breeders, dealers and trainers who generate business income through horseracing, to register for VAT and thus recover the full VAT costs on the purchase and training of their horses. In addition to this stud farming is treated as farming for tax purposes and is therefore subject to special reliefs such as the Agricultural Buildings Allowance and Agricultural Property Relief.

Pensions (Public Servants)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time public servants for whom no occupational retirement pension provision exists; whether such provision will be made by Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make retrospective pension arrangements for such public servants. [69255]

Dawn Primarolo: Most public servants now are covered by occupational pension schemes and any that are not have access to stakeholder pensions. Individuals may opt out of their employer's pension arrangements.

Precise eligibility for membership is a matter for the individual pension schemes. Since 1995 public service occupational schemes have been required to provide access to part-timers. Where eligibility has been extended retrospective membership has not usually been allowed unless it is legally required.

A recent ECJ ruling on the Preston case, concerning a part-timer working for the NHS who claimed retrospective admission, means that many thousands of part-timers will be admitted into public service scheme prior to 1995, once the outstanding legal issues have been resolved in the Employment Tribunals.

Health Funding

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of health care systems in other countries funded by charges and private medical insurance. [69233]

Mr. Boateng: Further to the answer given by my predecessor (Mr. Andrew Smith) on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 772W, in April Derek Wanless published a study commissioned by his review on international health care systems, considering health systems in individual countries around the world.

A copy of this study, prepared by the European Observatory on Health Care Systems, is available in the Library and can be accessed from the Treasury's website at: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/mediastore/otherfiles/observatory_report.pdf.

False Identity

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the *(a)* estimated annual number of people and *(b)* amount of tax unpaid by people using false identities, broken down by (i) VAT, (ii) other Customs and Excise duties and (iii) Inland Revenue taxes; and how much he estimates would have been prevented if everyone had been required to possess an ID card. [69311]

Dawn Primarolo: HM Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue do not keep records of the number of people specifically using false identifies involving VAT, Customs or Excise frauds or in connection with tax evasion.

Savings Tax Directive

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in negotiations to encourage non-EU countries to adopt measures equivalent to the Savings Tax Directive. [69371]

Dawn Primarolo: The Presidency and Commission of the European Union are now engaged in negotiations with all of the third countries named in the Conclusions of the European Council when meeting in Santa Maria da Feira on 20 June 2001 (Switzerland, United States of America, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Andorra and San Marino). The ECOFIN Council reported to the Seville European Council on 21–22 June on progress in the negotiations, and this report can be found on the Council's website, www.europa.org.

Companies (Ilford, North)

Linda Perham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many VAT-registered companies in the Ilford, North constituency have an annual turnover of £100,000 or less. [69616]

John Healey: Customs data on VAT registered traders is maintained on a national and regional basis. Each of the seven Customs regions incorporates a number of parliamentary constituencies. It would involve disproportionate cost to produce this turnover data in the format requested.

Higher Rate Taxpayers

Mr. Challen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many higher rate taxpayers there were in *(a)* Leeds, *(b)* Yorkshire and Humber and *(c)* London expressed as a percentage of the total population of each area in each of the past 10 years; [69950]

(2) what percentage of the population of *(a)* Leeds, *(b)* Yorkshire and Humber and *(c)* London have an income (i) twice, (ii) three times, (iii) four times, (iv) five times and (v) more than five times the national average in each of the past 10 years. [69951]

Dawn Primarolo: Available estimates are in the tables.

Number of higher rate taxpayers[1] as a percentage of the total population[2] for the respective geographical areas

	Leeds	Yorkshire and Humber[3]	London	UK
1995–96	3.0	2.5	5.3	3.6
1996–97	2.8	2.5	5.2	3.5
1997–98	2.7	2.4	5.3	3.6
1998–99	3.2	2.7	6.0	4.0
1999–2000	3.7	2.8	6.4	4.2

[1] Number of higher rate taxpayers based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

[2] Source for population estimates: Office for National Statistics, General Register Office for Scotland, and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

[3] Government Office Region of Yorkshire and the Humber.

Number of individuals[1] with total income over twice GB average earnings[2] as a percentage of the total population[3] for the respective geographical areas

	Leeds	Yorkshire and Humber[4]	London	UK
1995–96	1.8	1.5	4.1	2.5
1996–97	1.7	1.4	3.9	2.4
1997–98	1.7	1.4	3.6	2.2
1998–99	1.8	1.4	3.5	2.2
1999–2000	1.6	1.4	3.3	2.1

Number of individuals[1] with total income over three times GB average earnings[2] as a percentage of the total population[3] for the respective geographical areas

	Leeds	Yorkshire and Humber[4]	London	UK
1995–96	0.7	0.6	1.9	1.0
1996–97	0.7	0.6	2.0	1.0
1997–98	0.6	0.6	1.8	0.9
1998–99	0.7	0.5	1.6	0.8
1999–2000	0.6	0.5	1.6	0.8

Number of individuals[1] with total income over four times GB average earnings[2] as a percentage of the total population[3] for the respective geographical areas

	Leeds	Yorkshire and Humber[4]	London	UK
1995–96	0.4	0.3	1.2	0.6
1996–97	0.4	0.3	1.2	0.6
1997–98	0.3	0.3	1.1	0.5
1998–99	0.3	0.3	1.0	0.5
1999–2000	0.2	0.2	1.0	0.4

Number of individuals[1] with total income over five times GB average earnings[2] as a percentage of the total population[3] for the respective geographical areas

	Leeds	Yorkshire and Humber[4]	London	UK
1995–96	0.2	0.2	0.9	0.4
1996–97	0.3	0.2	0.9	0.4
1997–98	0.2	0.2	0.8	0.3
1998–99	0.2	0.2	0.7	0.3
1999–2000	0.2	0.1	0.7	0.3

[1] Number of individuals based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

[2] Average earnings based on the New Earnings Survey.

[3] Source for population estimates: Office for National Statistics, General Register Office for Scotland, and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

[4] Government Office Region of Yorkshire and the Humber.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her oral answer of 26 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 866, what the result is of her inquiries into the use of landmines by Afghan cultivators to protect poppy crops; and if she will make a statement. [66746]

Clare Short: Inquiries into the use of land mines by poppy cultivators in Afghanistan indicate that this was predominantly a case of rumour to disrupt the crop eradication programme. There has been only one reported incident since the start of the eradication campaign: on 22 April 2002 25 people were injured, seven seriously when a land mine was detonated in a poppy field in Uruzgan. Two deaths were reported but these were not verified. Casualties included people undertaking the crop eradication.

Both the Afghan Transitional Administration and the international community remain committed to the eradication of the opium poppy and the development of alternative livelihoods for all poor people in Afghanistan.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the UK Government with other EU member states will encourage other Governments to join the 'Everything But Arms' proposal at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [69479]

Clare Short: The European Union's 'Everything But Arms' initiative provides all Least Developed Countries with duty and quota free access. As of 1 January 2003, the Government of Canada will extend duty free and quota free access to all imports except dairy products, poultry and eggs from the Least Developed Countries. The European Union is committed to pressing other OECD countries to also provide the Least Developed Countries with duty and quota free access. The World Summit on Sustainable Development will provide another opportunity for the EU to press for this.

Education for All

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what resources to support the Education for All programme were agreed at the G8 Summit. [69252]

Clare Short: At Kananaskis, G8 leaders undertook to significantly increase the support provided by their bilateral aid agencies to basic education for countries with a strong policy and financial commitment to the sector, particularly in Africa; but no specific sums were pledged. Leaders agreed that each G8 donor will make public the steps it will take to fulfil this commitment. And they viewed the World bank's Fast Track proposal as a welcome first step in mobilising financial resources for countries committed to Education for All and demonstrating credible performance.

G8 Leaders also called upon the World bank and the Regional Development banks to provide additional support to countries that have made a strong commitment to education and gender equality, and have a proven track record of strong management or are demonstrating strong management progress.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to ensure that qualified teachers in developing countries are encouraged to contribute to the Education for All initiative in their own countries. [69253]

Clare Short: Attaining universal primary education by 2015 will require a major increase in the supply and retention of trained teachers. National governments will need to determine appropriate policies and strategies for achieving this. Teachers' salaries absorb a very large share of education expenditure and in many countries national resources will need to be supplemented by external financing. We believe the international community should provide recurrent expenditure support for basic education to countries that are clearly committed to Education for All and are demonstrating strong management of their resources. The World bank's Fast Track initiative provides an opportunity for accelerating such support and we are working closely with the bank on taking this forward.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contribution her Department is making to the Education for All initiative. [69251]

Clare Short: The Government believe that education is a basic human right which enables people to transform their own lives and the society in which they live. Education also has a vital role to play in enabling developing countries to achieve the levels of economic growth that are necessary for tackling poverty and achieving sustainable development. We are strongly committed to the Millennium Development Goals on education: achieving universal primary education by 2015 and eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary schooling by 2005. We believe that these goals are achievable if the governments of poor countries implement effective policies and receive the right assistance from the international community.

Since May 1997, DFID has committed over £700 million to support primary education for poor people. We are using these funds to support national education policies which form part of developing country governments' broader poverty reduction strategies. We want to see an end to the fees and other costs which have prevented many poor children from attending school in the past. We also seek a commitment from developing country governments to prioritise primary education, especially of girls, in their own spending plans.

The Government are also working to mobilise the international community in support of Education for All. Our aim is to achieve consensus by the end of 2002 on well co-ordinated international action for mobilising new resources and better co-ordinated programmes designed to meet this goal. We are working with the World bank to develop its new Action Plan for accelerating progress towards Education for All. We believe the Action Plan's fast-track initiative marks an opportunity to try to ensure that no country genuinely committed to economic development, poverty reduction and good governance is denied the chance to achieve universal primary education through lack of resources.

DFID is committed to further increasing UK support for basic education, particularly in Africa. We will continue to work with the World bank to support their fast-track proposals. Our target Strategy Paper "The challenge of universal primary education" and Issues Paper "Children Out of School" provide further details of DFID's policy and proposals.

World Bank/IMF Programmes

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development by when the World bank and IMF will report on their analysis of the poverty and social impact of substantial macro-adjustments or structural reforms supported by their programmes in poor countries. [69440]

Clare Short: The International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) of the Board of Governors of the IMF Communiqué of April 20, 2002 noted the importance of using poverty and social impact analysis and will be reviewing the progress that the World bank and IMF have made on this issue at its next meeting. This will be at the annual meetings of the World bank and IMF in autumn 2002.

To date, progress on integrating PSIA in developing countries' poverty reduction strategies has been reported in "Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers—Progress in Implementation", a bi-annual report prepared by the World bank and IMF. The next such report will be for the annual meetings of the IMF and World bank, scheduled for 28–29 September 2002.

Self-employed Women's Association

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funds have been allocated to the Self-employed Women's Association in India for work *(a)* in the state of Gujarat and *(b)* in the rest of India. [69232]

Clare Short: DFID has allocated to the Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA) about £15,000 for work in Gujarat on alternative resources for rainwater harvesting, and £17,000 to support the work of the National Labour Commission in helping women and child workers. SEWA has also been allocated £26,000 to support activities in Gujarat to help respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action has been taken *(a)* through bilateral assistance and *(b)* through co-operation with international agencies working in the region to ensure that armed combatants fleeing Liberia do not destabilise Sierra Leone. [69230]

Clare Short: Effective procedures are already in place to disarm combatants fleeing Liberia, and hand them over to the responsible authorities.

Common Agricultural Policy

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the European Commission's proposal for CAP reform on farmers in developing countries; and if she will make a statement. [69473]

Clare Short: The UK Government welcome the publication of the European Commission's proposals for CAP reform. The UK Government recognise the need for CAP reform in order to ensure that developing countries' agriculture sectors are given the right incentives to grow and thus support poverty reduction. My Department is currently analysing these proposals, to determine their impact on developing countries. This analysis will then feed into the UK's response to the proposals.

Fair Trade

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what she estimates the World Summit on Sustainable Development will do to promote fair trade between developed and developing countries. [69477]

Clare Short: The Government will be pushing for an outcome which is consistent with the Doha Development Agenda. This resulted in the following achievements:

Agreement on TRIPS and public health, recognising the need for a flexible interpretation of TRIPS to enable developing countries to protect public health.

Action on some 50 measures from the developing countries' implementation agenda from the Uruguay Round.

On agriculture, commitment to real progress on market access and action on export subsidies.

Continuing negotiations on services, which offer real prospects for developing countries to make substantial benefits through liberalisation and economic growth.

Commitment to tackle tariff peaks, high tariffs and tariff escalation as well as non-tariff barriers on non-agricultural products.

A commitment to a work programme on trade, debt and finance.

Systematic attention throughout the text to the issue of capacity-building.

A comprehensive set of commitments on the particular needs of the least-developed countries, including a commitment to the objective of duty and quota free market access plus a commitment to make their accession process faster.

A review of Special and Differential Treatment—across all WTO business areas—to strengthen these provisions and make them more precise, operational and effective.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61010]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Boateng), on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Buildings Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost of buildings insurance to his Department was *(a)* before and *(b)* after 11 September 2001. [66924]

Mr. McCartney: Departments are required to comply with the Government's policy on insurance, which is set out in Government Accounting, Chapter 30, para 30.2.5, which notes that government do not need to purchase insurance to protect the viability of its business, and should consider insurance only where the value of claims met would exceed the cost of insurance premiums. Commercial insurance of a building is acceptable in cases where *(a)* insurance is a condition of a lease *(b)* the lessor will not accept a Government indemnity *(c)* incurring the total cost of the accommodation in question, including the cost of the insurance, is more cost-effective than other accommodation options [Government Accounting, para 30.2.11a].

The only circumstance where the Department incurs insurance costs is where this is a condition of a lease, with payment being made as part of the service charge paid to the landlord. Information on these charges is not held centrally.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff have contributed to his Department's input to the Spending Review. [68695]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Spending Review involves a comprehensive assessment of the Department's performance, priorities and resource requirements and a range of staff make a contribution.

Child Benefit

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families failed to respond to the child benefit verification form sent to parents in the summer of 2001; and of these how many have lost benefit. [67530]

Malcolm Wicks: Each summer an exercise is carried out to verify the education plans of those children approaching the end of compulsory education. A form is issued asking the parents of these children to confirm the child's continuance in education, and to report a change of circumstances, applying, where appropriate, for continuing payment of benefit. There is no requirement to return the form as benefit entitlement will automatically cease from September. This procedure ensures those parents whose child is continuing in full-time education continue to receive child benefit uninterrupted.

In June 2001, 411,000 forms were issued, of which 197,000 were returned applying for continuing benefit. 60,000 were returned notifying that the child had commenced employment or training. In the remaining cases child benefit would cease from September.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information the Government have collated about the use of child benefit in families where there are young people aged between 16 and 19 years. [67529]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pensions has not collected information about how families with children aged 16 to 19 years use their child benefit.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will take measures to allow the payment of child benefit to continue beyond 12 weeks when parents choose to have a child educated in a country outside the European Economic Area without the written approval of the school which the child previously attended; and if he will make a statement. [70098]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* There are no plans to change the provisions on child benefit for children being educated abroad outside the European Economic Area (AWAY). Generally child benefit is not payable for children who are absent from Great Britain (GB), and the current rules provide for most exceptions. The written approval of the school the child normally attends ensures there is a continuing link with GB throughout the temporary absence. Although entitlement for children being educated in non AWAY countries ceases after they have been absent for 12 weeks, if they return for home visits and then go abroad temporarily again, a new 12 week easement begins.

Disabled Access

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of *(a)* the number of village halls requiring adaptation and *(b)* the estimated total cost of such adaptations to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, so far as access is concerned. [65639]

Maria Eagle: A village hall is covered by Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act where it provides services to the public. We have made no separate assessment of the number of village halls requiring adaptations or the costs involved.

All service providers, including village halls, will only ever have to do what is reasonable to meet their access obligations. There is no question of unreasonable costs being imposed on village halls, or on any other service provider. The Disability Rights Commission will act as a source of information and guidance to service providers, like Village Halls, and the Commission's Code of Practice—Rights of Access: Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises provides examples of good practice and how the Act is likely to work.

Making adjustments to assist disabled customers need not necessarily be costly or difficult. Recent research commissioned by the Disability Rights Commission and the Department for Work and Pensions, with co-funding from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, has examined the costs and benefits to service providers when making adjustments to meet the needs of their disabled customers and clients (DWP Research Report 169).

The research surveyed a UK-wide representative sample of 1,000 establishments in scope of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act. The establishments surveyed covered a range of sectors, including public and private sector organisations. The research found that for many service providers that had made adjustments costs were not seen as the dominant issue when making adjustments. The research identified a wide range of types of adjustments, and found that the costs of these adjustments varied significantly depending on the type. For most kinds of adjustments, the mean initial costs lay between £100 and £1,000. The mean on-going costs for most adjustments lay below £100 per annum.

Contributory Maternity Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was spent on contributory maternity benefits in each of the last 30 years; and which categories of national insurance contributions generated eligibility to such benefits in each year. [66523]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* Maternity benefits are being reformed as part of the Government's drive to help pregnant women and parents financially and to achieve a better balance between their work and home lives.

The improvements introduced by the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 mean that entitlement to maternity allowance is now based on a woman's earnings and that help is extended to women earning at least £30 a week but less than lower earnings limit applied to national insurance contributions. As a result of these changes, an additional 16,000 low-paid expectant mothers a year can get maternity allowance. Our reforms have also increased maternity allowance by 15 per cent. for around 11,000 self-employed women who previously received less benefit than employed women.

Prior to 20 August 2000, entitlement to maternity allowance was based on the payment of either Class 1 or Class 2 national insurance contributions by the mother within the relevant qualifying period.

We have also introduced Sure Start Maternity Grants to help people on low incomes meet the cost of buying essential items for a new baby. These grants have been increased this year to a significant £500 for babies due or born on or after 16 June 2002. The new scheme means more than just a cash payment. Mothers and expectant mothers also receive health advice for themselves and, importantly, for their child.

Prior to March 2000, Social Fund Maternity Payments were available to women or families in receipt of qualifying benefits or tax credits. These payments replaced the maternity grant in April 1987. Between 1982 and 1987 eligibility for the maternity grant was based solely on a test of residency in Great Britain. For confinements taking place before 4 July 1982, eligibility for the maternity grant was linked to the contribution record of either the mother or her husband using national insurance contributions of any class.

The information on expenditure on contributory maternity benefits is in the table.

Expenditure on contributory maternity benefits

£ million

	Maternity allowance	*Maternity grant*
1972–73	42	18
1973–74	42	17
1974–75	47	16
1975–76	55	16
1976–77	81	15
1977–78	92	15
1978–79	105	16
1979–80	125	16
1980–81	149	16
1981–82	158	16
1982–83	152	[4]16
1983–84	141	—
1984–85	161	—
1985–86	164	—
1986–87	168	—
1987–88	51	—
1988–89	27	—
1989–90	30	—
1990–91	34	—
1991–92	31	—
1992–93	32	—
1993–94	33	—
1994–95	27	—
1995–96	29	—
1996–97	33	—
1997–98	36	—
1998–99	38	—
1999–2000	38	—
2000–01	[5]45	—

[1] Figures are expressed in cash terms to the nearest £1 million.

[2] Statutory maternity pay was introduced in 1987 replacing maternity allowance for most employees.

[3] Figures are consistent with the Budget 2002 expenditure tables.

[4,5] Conditions of entitlement to maternity grant and maternity allowance changed during the course of the financial years 1982–83 and 2000–01 respectively. Figures include expenditure under both the contributory and non-contributory conditions.

Source:

Departmental reports and benefit forecasting model development. Maternity grant expenditure prior to 1978–79 is estimated from the published number of grants in each financial year.

Large Goods Vehicle Drivers

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his Department is doing to provide training for large goods vehicle drivers. [61485]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our welfare to work initiatives provide unemployed people with a range of help to overcome the barriers they face in the labour market. National programmes such as Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA), the New Deal 25 plus and the New Deal for Young People can offer participants training opportunities tailored to their needs so they have the skills they require to find and remain in work.

Each Jobcentre Plus District is responsible for identifying training requirements for their unemployed clients, and for putting provision in place, including training for heavy goods vehicle drivers. If such provision is not in place in a particular area, Districts have the discretion to purchase 'one-off' training to meet an individual's need.

In the East of England and East Midlands Jobcentre Plus regions, there are a total of 478 contracts to deliver training and related programmes to unemployed adults, including those in my hon. Friend's constituency. These contracts cover many occupational areas, such as construction, manufacturing and transportation. Heavy goods vehicle training is in place in most Districts in the regions through WBLA and New Deal 25plus.

Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones are helping disadvantaged people in the most deprived areas of the country into work. They give help tailored to the needs of individual clients, developing innovative ways to help people overcome the barriers they face when looking for work. This has included paying for heavy goods vehicle training where this has been judged to be the most effective way to help the people concerned into work.

Child Benefit Centre (Tyne and Wear)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many telephone inquiries were made to the Child Benefit Centre in Washington, Tyne and Wear during 2001. [56131]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of telephone calls made to the Child Benefit Centre's helplines between January 2001 and December 2001 was 2,589,348.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many successful prosecutions for fraud involving housing or council tax benefit were undertaken by local authorities in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [69859]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* For the number of successful prosecutions for benefit fraud I refer my right hon. Friend to the written answer given to him on 23 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 542W. Local authorities are not required to inform the Department of prosecutions which are subsequently abandoned or result in an acquittal.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff were employed by local authorities to investigate suspicions of fraud involving housing or council tax benefit in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [69861]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is in the table.

	Average total number of fraud investigators (full-time or full-time equivalent) employed by local authorities
1997–98	1,990
1998–99	2,170
1999–00	2,140
2000–01	2,160

Note:

Information is not available for all 408 local authorities. The total includes estimates for local authorities that have not responded. These estimates are based on historical and regional data. This type of estimate is standard practice in reporting totals where there have been non-respondents.

Source:

Housing Benefit Management Information System

Child Support

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will amend the Child Support (Maintenance and Special Cases) Regulations 1992, Schedule 1 Part II Para 7, to exclude working families tax credit awards from the assessment of child support maintenance. [70097]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* No. There are no plans exclude working families tax credit awards from the assessment of child support maintenance. It is only fair that the same level of income in different cases should be treated the same for assessment (current scheme) or calculation (new scheme) regardless of the source of that income.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received about the inclusion of working families tax credit awards in the assessment of child support maintenance. [70096]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* Some individual clients have written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to their MP, or to the Agency commenting adversely that awards of working families tax credit are taken into account for the non-resident parent's income, but not for that of the Parent with Care. No organised representations have been made.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of how long it will take to transfer existing cases to the new child support scheme for calculating maintenance payments made by non-resident parents. [69530]

Malcolm Wicks: No decision on the date for the commencement of the new child support scheme has been taken. The Government have made clear that they will see how the new scheme is progressing before reaching a decision on new cases, but our current assumption is that existing cases will convert to the new scheme around a year after the new scheme is introduced for new cases.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the average sum in maintenance paid by non-resident parents under the child support scheme which existed prior to April; and how many of these will see their payments *(a)* increased and *(b)* decreased under the new child support scheme, with an average calculation made of increase and decrease. [69532]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table.

Average maintenance paid in the current child support scheme

Number of qualifying children	*Average per week (£)*
One	7.98
Two	10.65
Three	10.23

Note:

Includes nil assessments.

Source:

5 per cent. scan of the Child Support Computer System August 2001.

It is not possible to make firm estimates of the change to the average payment of child support maintenance as a result of the introduction of the new child support scheme.

Benefits (East Dorset)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the total cost of housing benefit paid in *(a)* Christchurch borough and *(b)* East Dorset was in each and of the last five years; [70352]

(2) what the total cost of council tax benefit paid in *(a)* Christchurch borough and *(b)* East Dorset was in each of the last five years. [70353]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the tables.

Christchurch borough council: Housing benefit and council tax benefit expenditure

£000

	Housing benefit	*Council tax benefit*
1995–96	5,436	1.271
1996–97	5,548	1,255
1997–98	5,782	1,453
1998–99	5,890	1,576
2000–01	6,079	1,691

East Dorset district council: Housing benefit and council tax benefit expenditure

£000

	Housing benefit	*Council tax benefit*
1995–96	6,294	1,894
1996–97	6,486	1,845
1997–98	6,809	2,057
1998–99	6,765	2,179
2000–01	7,091	2,298

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. The figures for 2000–01 are provisional. All other figures are actual annual expenditure but are subject to change as local authority activity is fully audited.

Source:

Annual subsidy returns by local authorities to the Department for Work and Pensions and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in receipt of retirement pension in the Christchurch constituency receive payment of their benefit *(a)* directly into their bank accounts and *(b)* through local post offices. [70357]

Mr. McCartney: The available information is in the table:

	Number
All methods of payment	29,600
Payment by Order Book	12,300
Payment by automatic credit transfer	17,100
Other	200

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100.
2. Figures under 500 are subject to a high degree of sampling variation and should be used only as a guide tot he current situation.

Source:

Figures taken from the Pensions Strategy Computer System on 30 September 2001.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Christchurch constituency are eligible for the minimum income guarantee; and how many are in receipt of it. [70354]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of the number of people eligible for the Minimum Income Guarantee are not available below National level. As at February 2002 there were 2,300 Minimum Income Guarantee claimants in parliamentary constituency of Christchurch.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry February 2002

Income-related Benefits

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people in *(a)* the north-west, *(b)* Lancashire and *(c)* Burnley were claiming housing benefit at the latest date for which figures are available; [65549]

(2) how many people in *(a)* the north-west, *(b)* Lancashire and *(c)* Burnley had claimed (i) jobseeker's allowance and (ii) income support at the latest date for which figures are available. [65547]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Income-related benefit recipients in north-west England, Lancashire and Burnley

	Government Office Region of North-west England	*Lancashire*	*Burnley*
Housing Benefit	515,000	63,000	7,000
Jobseeker's Allowance	119,000	14,000	1,000
Income Support	579,000	79,000	8,000

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Lancashire figures for Housing benefit refer to the local authorities of Burnley, Chorley, Fylde, Hyndburn, Lancaster, Pendle, Preston, Ribble Valley, Rossendale, South Ribble, West Lancashire and Wyre. Figures for jobseeker's allowance and income support include all or part of the following parliamentary constituencies which fall within Lancashire boundaries: Blackpool North and Fleetwood, Burnley, Chorley, Fylde, Hyndburn, Lancaster and Wyre, Morecambe and Lunesdale, Pendle, Preston, Ribble Valley, Rossendale and Darwin, South Ribble and West Lancashire.
3. Burnley figures refer to Burnley borough council area for housing benefit and Burnley parliamentary constituency for jobseeker's allowance and income support.
4. Housing benefit figures refer to households which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one household can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.
5. Housing benefit figures exclude any Extended Payment cases.
6. Jobseeker's allowance figures have not been seasonally adjusted.
7. Income support figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are subject to a degree of sampling variation.

Sources:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. case load count, February 2002 (figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated);

100 per cent. count of Jobcentre Plus computer system, May 2002.

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, February 2002.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the EU Advisory Committee on employment is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67739]

Malcolm Wicks: The Employment Committee is next due to meet on 18 July 2002, which will be an informal meeting under the Danish Presidency. Each member state has two nominated delegates to the Committee and for the UK those represent the Departments of Work and Pensions and for Education and Skills. The main business of the Committee is the European Employment Strategy and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has lead responsibility for the Strategy. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has a significant interest, as do my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Scottish Executive Ministers, Secretaries of the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Executive Ministers.

There is close contact between relevant officials to ensure that ministerial responsibility is properly represented at the Employment Committee and, indeed, on any activity under the Employment Strategy. For example, the main UK output under the Strategy is the UK Employment Action Plan and the devolved Administrations actively contribute. The Plan will be discussed with the European Commission in the autumn and the devolved Administrations have been invited to attend that meeting.

Basic Bank Accounts

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of his reply to the letter from the FSA Consumer Panel on their report into basic bank accounts. [70412]

Mr. Andrew Smith: A copy of my Private Secretary's letter of 17 May 2002 to the Chairman of the Financial Services Consumer Panel has been placed in the Library.

Social Fund

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans his Department has to review the operation of the social fund with respect to those benefit recipients whose income is marginally above the basic income support level; and if he will make a statement; [69277]

(2) what plans his Department has to review the operation of the Social Fund as far as access thereto on the part of 16 and 17-year-olds is concerned; and if he will make a statement. [69279]

Malcolm Wicks: The Social Fund plays an important role in the welfare system by helping the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society with the cost of intermittent expenses. Access to the Social Fund is therefore generally limited to people receiving income-related benefits or, in the case of Sure Start Maternity Grants and Social Fund funeral payments, tax credits. Crisis loans are available to anyone where there is a serious risk to their health or safety.

We keep all elements of the Social Fund under review to see whether further improvements can be made to its operation and to ensure that the Fund supports our wider welfare reforms. However, we have no plans to broaden the eligibility criteria.

Jobcentre Plus

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether it will be part of the duties of Jobcentre Plus staff to provide assistance with completing application forms for the new tax credits. [67243]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Yes. From 2003 customers, if they choose, will be able to have their new tax credits business (including assistance with claim form completion) dealt with by Jobcentre Plus staff.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assistance he intends Jobcentre Plus staff will provide to people who do not have the information and evidence of income they are required to provide in connection with an application for new tax credits. [67241]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: From 2003 Jobcentre Plus staff will help people complete their new tax credits claims, including the income information they need to supply. Guidance for staff will therefore cover all the options available in helping people calculate the income details they need to enter on the claim form.

The help available from Jobcentre Plus will complement that provided by the Inland Revenue and the comprehensive guidance to the new tax credits claim form.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what programme of training will be provided to Jobcentre Plus staff on the new tax credits. [67242]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: All Jobcentre Plus staff dealing with NTC business will receive a full package of training so that they can provide people with information about new tax credits, and assist with new tax credits claims and related inquiries.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to bring occupational pension schemes under the jurisdiction of TUPE. [67700]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government carried out full public consultation at the end of last year on the proposed reform of the TUPE Regulations. The issue of the Regulations' coverage of occupational pension rights was one of those on which comments were sought. We are currently considering the responses received and hope to announce our decisions shortly.

Local Government Councillors

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many elected local government councillors are registered disabled; and if he will make a statement. [61949]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

There is no longer a register of disabled people. However, the 2001 National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England and Wales carried out by the Improvement and Development Agency indicates that just over 13 per cent. of [the 21,268] councillors consider themselves to have a disability.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Law Commission Report

Mr. Flook: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 257W, when he will announce his decision concerning Law Commission report No. 270. [68019]

Yvette Cooper: The Government accept in principle the Law Commission's recommendations on limitation of actions, subject to further consideration of certain aspects of its report, and will legislate when a suitable opportunity arises.

Freedom of Information Act

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she plans to publish guidance on publication schemes under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 for central Government and non-departmental public bodies. [70811]

Yvette Cooper: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. I am pleased to inform the House that I have today published guidance for Central Government and non-departmental public bodies on Publication Schemes under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Copies of the Guidance have been placed in the House Library.

CABINET OFFICE

Fast Stream Recruitment

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he will publish the 2002 Civil Service Fast Stream Recruitment report. [70675]

Mr. Alexander: The seventh annual Civil Service Fast Stream Report was today placed on the Cabinet Office website at www.faststream.gov.uk and in the Libraries of the House. It covers the year from 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, and reports the results of Fast Stream competitions completed during that period and the developments that have taken place.

The standard of entry to the Fast Stream Development Programme has remained consistently high and the report shows that the Civil Service has had increasing success in filling its vacancies. In addition there has again been steady progress in broadening the diversity of Fast Stream recruits. Women and men were recruited in equal numbers and the proportions of those recruited from ethnic minority groups, those with disabilities, and those attending universities other than Oxford and Cambridge have all increased.

SCOTLAND

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58781]

Mrs. Liddell: One special adviser accompanied me on a trip to Brussels in October 2001. The cost to my Department was £545.87.

All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many members of her Department have been employed in its regulatory impact unit in the past five years; and if she will make a statement. [65975]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office does not have a regulatory impact unit. Staff in the Department maintain contacts with the regulatory impact unit in the Cabinet Office as required.

Crown Estates Commissioners

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations she has received about the role of the Crown Estates Commissioners in Scotland. [69288]

Mrs. Liddell: One representation on this subject has been received.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 17 July 2002

DEFENCE

HMS Fearless

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to extend the life of HMS Fearless. [69856]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans to extend the life of HMS Fearless.

Training Costs

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what funding the UK will provide for the staff training course beginning in April 2003 at Liptovsky Mikulas Military Academy in Slovakia; how long the training will last; and if he will make a statement. [70055]

Mr. Ingram: The Junior Staff Officers' Course (JSOC) (Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)) project is a joint initiative between the United Kingdom and The Netherlands, together with the Slovak Republic as the host nation. Its purpose is to set up a Regional Training Centre in Central and Eastern Europe similar to the UK initiatives at Vyskov in Czech Republic and Bucharest in Romania. The division of costs, less personnel related funding, is UK 75 per cent. and The Netherlands 25 per cent. The Netherlands will provide and fund 25 per cent. of the personnel. The Slovak Republic will provide the infrastructure, food and accommodation and some locally employed staff.

The aim of the JSOC is to provide command and staff training in English, based upon British/NATO Defence Doctrine, for Senior Lieutenants, Captains and Majors from the Partnership for Peace partners. This will enable them to participate effectively within a multinational environment in training, exercises, military operations and 'operations other than war' (OOTW) operations. OOTW includes Peace Support, Humanitarian and Natural Disaster operations.

It is intended to run three courses per annum, each for up to 60 students, of approximately 12 weeks' duration. It is intended to begin the first course in late April or early May 2003.

The JSOC project is an initiative within the Outreach Programme, part of the Defence Diplomacy Mission. This programme of bilateral and multilateral defence co-operation in CEE contributes to international stability by assisting countries in the region to establish democratically accountable, cost effective armed formes capable of contributing both to national and regional security and, increasingly, to international security through participation in peach support operations.

The UK funding for this project will come from the Global Conflict Prevention Fund (GCPF)(GEE Strategy). The estimated cost to the UK in the Financial Year 2002–2003, including personnel, is £1.2 million as setting up costs. Running costs in subsequent years are estimated to be £1.3-£1.4 million.

Flying Training

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will extend the scope of the Hunting Aviation contract to provide aircraft and crews for routine training. [69995]

Mr. Ingram: Hunting Contract Services is now part of the Babcock group. We currently have two contracts with Babcock HCS in support of non-operational flying training. One contract covers support services at RAF Cranwell, including engineering support of Jetstream and Dominie aircraft, which are used for Multi-Engine Flying training and for Navigator/rearcrew training. This contract ends on 30 March 2004. A competition will be held for a replacement contract and the scope of the contract will be increased to include the provision of aircraft.

The other current contract provides aircraft and the majority of the instructors for the Joint Elementary Flying Training School's tasks. This contract ends on 7 July 2003 and following a competition Babcock HCS have been awarded the follow on contract.

For the longer term the future delivery of flying training is being considered by the United Kingdom Military Flying Training System project.

HMS Nottingham

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long he expects HMS Nottingham to be out of service; and if he will make a statement. [70058]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 26W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the damage to HMS Nottingham from collision with a rock off Australia. [69409]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The damage to Nottingham is severe. There has been extensive structural damage and flooding in the forward part of the ship. This has been controlled. She is in a safe, stable condition and is at anchor. Specialist teams are on board and they are continuing with their assessments. A further, more comprehensive survey of her structure and equipment will be necessary to determine the full extent of the damage.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on members of the armed forces using mobile telephones for personal purposes on deployments and operations. [69524]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The use of personal mobile phones by members of the armed forces during deployments and operations is at the discretion of the local Commander.

Afghanistan

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what showering and washing facilities are in place for

British armed forces personnel serving in Afghanistan; when these facilities were installed; and whether hot water was available. [69521]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* There have been showering and washing facilities with hot water in place for both the International Security Assistance Force and Task Force JACANA personnel since early in their deployments.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what latrine facilities are in place for British armed forces personnel serving in Afghanistan. [69522]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* There are deep trench latrines in place for troops in Afghanistan; this is in line with normal procedure for expeditionary operations. However, 20 toilet combination units containing showers and WCs are currently being put in place for those United Kingdom ISAF elements that will be in Kabul until the early winter months.

Weapons Regulations

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the content was of the applicable regulation in force concerning the qualifying age for a private in the army to carry a weapon when engaged on general security duties in each year since 1994; and how *(a)* general security duties, *(b)* weapon, *(c)* engaged and *(d)* carrying are defined for the purposes of such regulation. [69286]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* I am withholding information on the detail of the regulations in force since 1994 in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. In general terms, however, the regulations outline the eligibility of Army personnel for armed security duties, covering principally the training standards to be met, but also stipulating the minimum age requirement, namely having reached the age of 17 years.

The following definitions apply:

(a) general security duties

Security duty on the Defence Estate including access/egress control, issue of passes, vehicle searching, patrolling and Quick Reaction Force duties.

(b) weapon

Generally regarded as a service issue rifle, pistol or baton.

(c) engaged

Carrying out a task

(d) carrying

The way in which a weapon is held, which will depend on the nature of duties and weapon.

Armed Forces (Review)

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for a review of armed forces personnel processes. [71291]

Mr. Ingram: A review of armed forces personnel processes is to be carried out this year. Preliminary work (Phase 1) has defined the scope of the study and identified the processes concerned. The aim of the review os to ensure that the outcome of the processes (providing the armed forces with the right number of people with the right skills in the right place at the right time) is achieved effectively and as efficiently as possible.

The review will proceed in two further phases, under the sponsorship of the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Personnel). Phase 2 will identify management, organisational, and structural options for improving the delivery of the personnel process outputs. The examination will include the business planning and performance management framework within which these processes operate. The sponsor expects to receive the report early in 2003. Phase 3, to be completed in mid-2003, will develop more detailed proposals for improvements in future performance and service delivery.

This process-based review, whose approach is supported by the Treasury and Cabinet Office, will replace planned quinquennial reviews of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA), the Army Training and Recruiting Agency (ATRA), and the RAF's Training Group Defence Agency (TGDA). Although the future of these agencies will be considered in detail, the review will focus on end-to-end processes, and not primarily on historical agency performance.

The review team will conduct wide consultation with representatives of stakeholders. However, the team would be interested to hear the views of other organisations or individuals (including people currently in the armed forces) who would like to make a contribution to the review. Those wishing to do so should send their contributions by Monday 16 September by post to:

Service Personnel Processes Review Team,
c/o 2nd Floor Open Plan,
Ministry of Defence
St. Giles Court,
1–13 St. Giles High Street,
London, WC2H 8LD.

or by email to: dgmo-traqqr3@defence.mod.uk

Royal School of Artillery

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's total expenditure relating to the Royal School of Artillery in each year since 1997. [69668]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

Financial year	*Expenditure*
1997–98	23.102
1998–99	21.733
1999–2000	22.206
2000–01	23.022
2001–02	25.096

The costs shown exclude the salary costs of students at the school.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many enrolled at the Royal School of Artillery in each year since 1997; and what percentage were graduates broken down by *(a)* age, *(b)* sex and *(c)* nationality. [69667]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Royal School of Artillery is a Phase 2 and 3 training school and all students will be serving soldiers or officers. For officers we assess the broad percentage of graduate entry to the Royal Artillery to be 85 per cent.

Cyprus

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the recent disturbance in the sovereign base areas in Cyprus; and what steps his Department has taken since July 2001 to ensure the safety of his Department's *(a)* personnel and *(b)* property. [69647]

Mr. Ingram: A peaceful protest against construction of a new antenna at the Salt Lake site in the Western Sovereign Base Area (WSBA) on 2 July was later hijacked by a few trouble-makers throwing stones and petrol bombs and setting fire to property. Order was restored quickly by the SBA police with support from military personnel. One SBA police officer was sightly injured and there was limited damage to property.

Following the unprecedented riots of 3 July 2001, public order training and procedures, as well as physical security arrangements, were thoroughly reviewed by the SBA police and British Forces Cyprus. We do not, however, disclose detailed information on security arrangements at defence establishments, so I am withholding such details under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Royal Military Academy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many students were sent to Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in each year since 1997 broken down by country. [69651]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is as follows:

Country	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*[1]
Bahrain	4	4	3	4	4	2
Barbados	0	2	0	1	0	0
Belize	3	4	5	2	3	2
Botswana	3	2	2	2	1	0
Brunei	2	1	3	2	8	5
Czech Rep	1	1	0	0	0	1
El Salvador	0	0	1	1	0	0
Fiji	2	2	2	2	0	0
Georgia	0	0	1	1	1	0
Ghana	2	1	0	1	0	0
Guatemala	1	1	1	1	1	1
British Guiana	1	1	0	1	0	0
Hungary	2	0	0	0	0	0
Ireland	0	0	1	0	0	0
Jamaica	7	9	2	4	2	4
Jordan	1	1	4	1	1	4
Kenya	2	0	0	0	0	0
Kuwait	8	8	4	5	4	5
Latvia	0	0	0	0	1	0
Lesotho	0	1	0	0	0	0
Lithuania	0	0	0	1	0	1
Luxembourg	0	0	0	0	1	0
Malawi	2	2	3	2	1	1
Malaysia	1	1	0	0	0	0
Maldives	0	0	1	0	0	0
Malta	1	2	2	1	1	0
Mauritius	1	0	0	0	0	1
Morocco	0	0	0	1	0	0
Mauritania	1	0	0	0	0	0
Mozambique	1	0	0	0	1	0
Namibia	2	0	1	0	0	0
Nepal	2	2	2	2	2	2
Nigeria	0	0	0	2	4	1
Oman	3	6	3	4	6	2
Pakistan	2	2	2	0	2	0
Papua New Guinea	1	2	1	0	0	0
Paraguay	1	1	0	2	0	1
Philippines	0	0	0	0	1	0
Qatar	4	7	3	1	4	0
Saudi Arabia	1	0	1	1	1	1
Senegal	0	0	3	2	3	0
Seychelles	0	1	0	0	0	0
Singapore	2	0	0	1	2	2
South Africa	0	0	0	1	1	0
Sri Lanka	1	1	0	1	0	0
Swaziland	0	1	0	0	1	0
Tanzania	1	1	1	0	1	1
Thailand	1	1	2	1	1	1
The Gambia	0	0	0	1	0	0
Tonga	0	0	0	1	0	0
Trinidad and Tobago	0	2	0	1	0	0
Uganda	0	1	2	0	0	0
Ukraine	1	1	1	1	1	1
United Arab Emirates	6	2	3	2	7	7
Uruguay	1	0	0	0	0	0
Yemen	1	0	0	2	0	3
Zimbabwe	3	2	2	0	0	0

[1] To date

The figures relate to candidates from the countries named who are members of that Country's armed forces. It does not include candidates from Commonwealth countries who join the British Army.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many enrolled for the *(a)* war studies, *(b)* defence and international affairs and *(c)* communications studies departments at Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst in each academic term since 1997. [69648]

Mr. Ingram: All students who attend the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst complete all modules of the Commissioning course, which includes War Studies, Defence and International Affairs and Communications Studies. For information, the total number of students entering RMAS each year since 1997 is as follows:

	Total intake
1997	797
1998	734
1999	660
2000	704
2001	798
2002 (at July)	495

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many enrolled at Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst in each year since 1997; and what percentage were graduates broken down by *(a)* age, *(b)* sex and *(c)* nationality. [69650]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However the average age on entry at present is 23 years six months, a rise from 22 years six months as the age limit for entry was raised in 1999–2000 from 25 to 29. The percentages of graduates shown are all British: we do not record whether foreign students were graduates.

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*[1]
Total intake	797	734	660	704	798	495
British male numbers	606	552	514	526	629	373
British female numbers	112	108	84	119	102	73
Foreign male numbers	77	68	60	56	67	45
Foreign female numbers	2	6	2	3	0	4
Percentage of British males shown as graduates	76	75	76	88	75	78
Percentage of British females shown as graduates	84	83	81	87	87	90

[1] As at July 2002

Gibraltar

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning his Department's policy regarding Gibraltar. [69653]

Mr. Hoon: The Government's policy recognises that Gibraltar has been and continues to be an important overseas base for the British Armed Forces, and contains valuable support, logistic, communications and training facilities.

University Officers' Training Corps

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list total membership of the University Officers' Training Corps, by contingent, for each year since 1997; and if he will break down the membership by *(a)* age and *(b)* sex for each year. [69670]

Mr. Ingram: Membership of the University Officers' Training Corps, by contingent, for each year since 1997, and a breakdown of the membership by sex, is shown in the table. I regret that statistics for age are not held. In light of the fact that most officer cadets are undergraduates, we would expect the majority to be in the 18 to 22 age bracket.

UOTC/year	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Aberdeen	156	194	167	173	215
Birmingham	215	221	216	219	211
Bristol	182	214	173	183	168
Cambridge	278	289	287	248	218
East Midlands	201	178	171	216	184
Edinburgh	201	190	167	121	143
Exeter	217	199	233	184	172
Glasgow and Strathclyde	155	162	164	156	190
Leeds	200	184	157	145	173
Liverpool	188	172	198	220	199
London	314	398	376	391	433
Manchester and Salford	169	156	162	166	174
Northumbrian	168	209	237	227	254
Oxford	220	235	212	201	248
Queen's Belfast	163	197	171	213	147
Sheffield	172	183	175	212	223
Southampton	165	139	161	201	202
Tayforth (Dundee)	247	228	184	246	219
Wales	211	166	189	209	202
Officer Cadets Male	2,490	2,570	2,553	2,655	2,667
Officer Cadets Female	1,332	1,344	1,247	1,276	1,308
Total	3,822	3,914	3,800	3,931	3,975

Note:

Information taken from "The Officers' Training Corps Annual Report 2001".

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's total expenditure on the University Officers' Training Corps, for each year since 1997. [69671]

Mr. Ingram: The expenditure on the University Officers; Training Corps, for each year since 1997, is shown in the table.

£

	Expenditure
1997	17,112,000
1998	17,454,000
1999	18,410,349
2000	18,679,050
[1]2001	20,627,053

[1] Consequent on the introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting this figure reflects resource costs.

Source:

The Officers' Training Corps Annual Report 2001.

Akrotiri

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what environmental impact assessments were conducted at Akrotiri prior to antenna construction. [69646]

Mr. Ingram: An assessment of the likely environmental impact of the project to build new antennas at Akrotiri was undertaken by a firm of consultants in 1997 and its results were reviewed by the company in 2001.

Last year the British and Cypriot Governments agreed that these environmental impact assessments should be reviewed by an independent panel of international environmental experts. This review was co-ordinated by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. The panel found that there were significant deficiencies in the original assessments, when judged against today's best practice standards and that there was not sufficient information on which to base a decision to proceed with the second phase of the project. The Ministry of Defence therefore commissioned further studies to fill the information gaps identified by the panel and to address their criticisms of the approach to mitigating the potential environmental impact. The panel confirmed in May that this additional work satisfactorily addressed the deficiencies in the original assessments.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out for each Civil Service grade within his *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45,

(D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39150]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1072W, by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie).

Digital Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by his Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose; [48345]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by his Department. [48344]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the staff of his Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66910]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 5 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 622W, by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander).

Low Flying

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hours were booked for low flying broken down by *(a)* day flights, *(b)* night flights and *(c)* by NATO air force within low flying areas 16 and 20T since 1995. [70325]

Dr. Moonie: The number of hours of military low flying training booked in the United Kingdom Low Flying System (UKLFS) is published annually. Figures quoted are in respect of hours booked by day and by night, with the night Low Flying Areas (LFA) mapped to the day system in order to produce the final total.

Tactical Training Area (TTA 20T), when activated for Operational Low Flying (OLF), partly overlays LFA 16, approximately two-thirds of LFA 13 and a small area within LFA 12.

The raw data prior to training year 2000–01 are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Night data mapped to the day system does not distinguish between United Kingdom and foreign forces and therefore cannot be shown. Foreign military aircrew do not undertake OLF.

Year—calendar/training	*Hours low flying booked in LFA 16*	*Hours OLF flown in LFA 20T*	*Hours low flying booked by foreign aircrew in LFA 16 and surrounding overseas areas*
1995	4,715	555 hours	—
1996	4,440	310 hours 31 minutes	—
1997	4,023	199 hours 45 minutes	—
1998	3,680	221 hours 2 minutes	—
1999–2000	3,408	280 hours 59 minutes	—
2000–01	3,735	205 hours 59 minutes	100 hours 43 minutes
2001–02	4,080	297 hours 33 minutes	32 hours 12 minutes

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations and dates of periods of covert monitoring of low-flying operations conducted by Royal Air Force police *(a)* with and *(b)* without Skyguard deployment since 1993 within Low Flying Area 16 and 20T. [70324]

Dr. Moonie: Covert monitoring of low flying military aircraft is only undertaken using mobile Skyguard radar equipment by teams from the Defence Flying Complaints Investigation Team of the RAF police. Deployments of the Skyguard radar in Low Flying Areas 16 and 20T since 1993 are identified in the table. Full dates are quoted where this information is held centrally and I shall write to the hon. Member with supplementary information and place a copy in the Library of the House when this is to hand.

Year	*Day/month*	*Location*
2001	6–9 February	Castle Douglas, Galloway and Upper Nithsdale
2001	23–25 October	East Fortune, Gifford and Torness, East Lothian
2000	4–7 April	Duns, Berwickshire
2000	3–6 October	East Fortune and Torness, East Lothian
1999	6–8 September	Castle Douglas, Dumfries and Galloway
1998	February	St. John's Town of Dalry, Dumfries and Galloway
1998	June	Dunbar, East Lothian
1997	February	Biggar, Strathclyde
1996	June	Moffat, Dumfries and Galloway
1995	April	Galashiels, Scottish Borders
1995	September	Maybole, Strathclyde
1994	March	Moffat, Dumfries and Galloway
1994	November	Galashiels, Scottish Borders
1993	October	Chirnside, Berwickshire

Monitoring of low flying training without the Skyguard mobile radar is accomplished on an informal basis when members of the Defence Flying Complaints Investigation Team visit or pass through an area, for example, in connection with an investigation of a complaint.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilians are deployed on aircraft carriers; and how many were deployed in 1987. [70164]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* In general terms there are approximately 10 civilians who deploy with each aircraft carrier, of these are six employed in the laundry and four in the NAAFI. The numbers of civilians on board may vary depending on the type of deployment. Information on civilian numbers deployed on aircraft carriers in 1987 is not available.

Public Relations

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the public relations firms his Department has employed since 1997; and if he will list total moneys paid to each firm since 1997. [69652]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In recent years, information on expenditure and publicity which incorporates public relations has been included in the Ministry of Defence's annual Departmental Performance Report. Copies of these reports are available in the Library of the House.

Defence Munitions

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of munitions will be stored in *(a)* DM(N) and *(b)* DM(S); and what the percentages will be if DM Dean Hill closes. [70177]

Mr. Ingram: Currently the Defence Munitions distribution of stock by volume is as follows:

Stock	*Percentage*
DM (North)	19.5
DM (Central)	68.5
DM (South)	12

Should DM Dean Hill close as proposed and stock from there dispersed to other DM locations the resultant stock distribution by volume would be as follows:

Stock	*Percentage*
DM (North)	21
DM (Central)	69
DM (South)	10

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage decrease in DM's operating costs has been achieved since its inception. [70175]

Mr. Ingram: At inception the Defence Munitions (DM) set a challenging strategic goal to reduce total operating costs by 20 per cent. by financial year (FY) 2003–04 ie by 31 March 2004. By the end of FY 2001–02 delivery towards the target stood at 9.3 per cent. The inclusions of Defence Munitions Rationalisation Study 2 reductions (including savings arising from the proposed closure of DM Dean Hill) will, if implemented, deliver operating cost reductions of 16.7 per cent. by the end of FY 2003–04 with the full 20 per cent. being delivered in the course of the following year FY 2004–05.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions over the last two years the storage capacity of DM Gosport has been exceeded; and where the excess munitions were stored on each occasion. [70179]

Mr. Ingram: For safety reasons the volume of explosives that can be stored at any particular location at any one time is very strictly controlled by licence. Defence Munitions (DM) has an obligation to operate within these licensed limits. Steps (including dispersal to other locations if necessary) are taken to ensure that all DM establishments do not exceed their licensed limits. As a result the storage capacity at DM Gosport has not been exceeded at any time over the last two years.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which unions were represented during the consultations on the Defence Munitions rationalisation study 2; and which areas of the country they represented. [70178]

Mr. Ingram: The proposal to close Defence Munitions Dean Hill has the potential to affect more than 25 staff. Therefore, in accordance with Ministry of Defence regulations, formal consultation with the trade unions is being carried out at departmental level ie with the MOD Council of Civil Service Unions (MOD CCSU) and the MOD Industrial Whitley Council (MOD DIWC). This includes the following: Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), Amicus (previously Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU) and Manufacturing, Science and Finance (MSF), General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union (GMB), Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT), Prospect, Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), Association of First Division Civil Servants (FDA), Defence Police Federation, the Chief Police Officer's Association and the Retired Officers Association.

The formal trade unions consultation period is due to complete on 16 August 2002.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account has been taken of the whole life assessment of munitions, and increased travel times, in the event of the recommended closure of DM Dean Hill proceeding. [70174]

Mr. Ingram: The process of weapon design addresses, inter alia, the issue of transportation. Where necessary to maintain the integrity and reliability of a weapon, customised packaging is provided to protect and preserve it during movement by whatever transportation medium is used, whether by road, rail or sea. Movement in approved packaging and by approved modes of transport has no impact on overall weapon life.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate has been made of the increase in munitions carried by road and rail if the recommended closure of DM Dean Hill proceeds broken down by *(a)* volume carried and *(b)* increase in length of time during which munitions will be transported. [70176]

Mr. Ingram: If the closure of Defence Munitions Dean Hill proceeds as planned the munitions currently stored at the Depot would be transferred to other Defence Munitions Establishments. As part of this dispersal activity it is planned to work together with customers and stakeholders to ensure that the resultant distribution of munitions stock more readily lines up with the required outload points for the munitions themselves. Once this re-positioning is completed, the overall planning assumption is that there would be no increase in the volume of munitions carried by road or rail. Likewise there would be no increase in the length in transportation time for the munitions stockpile as a whole.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Solicitor-General when the Director of Public Prosecutions will publish his Annual report. [70726]

The Solicitor-General: I can confirm that I have today placed copies of the Annual report in the Libraries.

Certified Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59772]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, has plans to refurbish a part of the building it occupies within the next six months. This refurbishment involves painting and re-carpeting. It is unlikely that this process will involve the procurement of timber.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has no refurbishment projects in progress. It is planned to carry out repairs and decoration works to the external street frontages of the Department's headquarters building within the next six months. The project is unlikely to involve the procurement of timber.

When timber is required, it is the Department's policy to instruct contractors that it must be obtained lawfully only from sustainable sources, and to verify that this is done.

The Crown Prosecution Service has only one refurbishment project for the period in question, at Crown House, Portsmouth, which will commence in August 2002. The Crown Prosecution Service will procure the work by competitive tender through its managing agents. The agents use the National Building Specifications as part of the standard specification and this includes the requirement to use certified timber.

The Serious Fraud Office has no refurbishment projects either in progress or due to start within the next six months.

Sentence Referrals

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Solicitor-General how many requests for referral of a sentence to the Court of Appeal on the grounds of undue lenience were received by her Department after the expiry of the 28 day time limit for such referrals in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [56586]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* Relevant records are available only for the year 2000 onwards. The following figures are available:

Year 2000

one request for referral of a sentence to the Court of Appeal on the grounds of undue lenience was received by my Department after the expiry of the 28-day time limit;

Year 2001

three requests for referral of a sentence to the Court of Appeal on the grounds of undue lenience were received by my Department after the expiry of the 28-day time limit;

Year 2002

to date no request for referral of a sentence to the Court of Appeal on the grounds of undue lenience has been received by my Department after the expiry of the 28-day time limit.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Solicitor-General how many days of sick leave were taken in her Department last year; how many related to employees suffering from *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to her Department. [56478]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The latest annual report published by Cabinet Office "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service—2000" provides the latest figures available for each of the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible. The figures given for Treasury Solicitor's Department includes the figures for my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers.

The number of days relating to stress and other mental health problems and the cost could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the EU directives and regulations that have been implemented through her Department in 2002; and what was the cost of each to public funds. [64987]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* None of the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible has implemented any EU directive or regulation.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the EU directives relating to her Department which have been *(a)* amended and *(b)* repealed in 2002. [64937]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* None of the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible has had policy responsibility for the amendment or repeal of any EU directive in 2002.

Annual Leave

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the average annual leave entitlement is for staff in her Department in 2002. [64660]

The Solicitor-General [holding answer 1 July 2002]: The Cabinet Office has set the leave entitlement for all staff in the senior civil service at 30 days.

Leave entitlement for staff below the SCS is determined by grade and length of qualifying service and, in the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, varies from 22 days to 31 days per annum.

Average leave entitlement could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's public service agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61038]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The Law Officers' Department's public service agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its service delivery agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money—and the resources it has used in its departmental report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of service delivery agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61647]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I have given him today in respect of a similarly worded question.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by her Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64626]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* The information is as follows: *(a)* None; *(b)* none; and *(c)* none.

Buildings Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the cost of buildings insurance to her Department was *(a)* before and *(b)* after 11 September 2001. [66939]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible follow the Government's general policy on insurance, set out in Government Accounting, Chapter 30, paragraph 30.2.5, which notes that Government do not need to purchase insurance to protect the viability of its business, and should consider insurance only where the value of claims met would exceed the cost of insurance premiums.

None of the Law Officers' Departments has entered into commercial insurance contracts in relation to buildings they occupy.

Building Values

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the buildings owned by her Department and estimate the market value of each of them. [66957]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The National Asset Register, published in July 2001 (Cm 5221), lists assets owned by each Department and their valuation.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

LNM Holdings

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 4 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 539W, if the repayment schedule of the International Finance Corporation loan to Nova Hut steelworks has been renegotiated as a result of its recent acquisition by LNM Holdings. [70043]

Clare Short: I understand that the International Finance Corporation (IFC) is considering restructuring the loan to Nova Hut steelworks, but no proposals have yet come to the IFC Board.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff have contributed to her Department's input to the Spending Review. [68679]

Clare Short: Work by staff on the Spending Review was led by our Finance and Corporate Performance Division but also entailed contributions from many staff across all divisions of DFID. No staff have worked full-time on the Spending Review.

Education Taskforce Report

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans there are for *(a)* taking forward the education task force report, officially endorsed at the G8 Summit, and *(b)* committing funds to do so. [69464]

Clare Short: The G8 Education Task Force Report made recommendations about the need for developing country commitment to Education for All (EFA), the response required from developed countries, and the need for better assessment of performance. It concluded that political commitment at the country level, the provision of adequate domestic financing, and the development of sound education strategies are the foundations for achieving EFA.

At Kananaskis, G8 leaders undertook to significantly increase the support provided by their bilateral aid agencies to basic education for countries with a strong policy and financial commitment to the sector, particularly in Africa; but no specific sums were pledged. It was agreed that each G8 donor will make public the steps it will take to fulfil this commitment.

The Report also addresses the development of a more coherent international process for delivering EFA. It supported closer cooperation between the World bank and UNESCO in moving the EFA process forward. More specifically, it suggested that the UNESCO High Level Group on Education for All continues to meet annually to provide broad political direction and maintain the momentum for EFA; and that a high-quality, annual monitoring report on global progress toward EFA be produced, based on the best data available from national governments, the World bank and other sources.

Primary Education

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the G8 will provide the additional resources required to deliver good quality primary education to the group of 18 countries selected to receive immediate financing. [69465]

Clare Short: At the Kananaskis summit, G8 leaders agreed to significantly increase the support provided by their bilateral agencies to basic education for countries with a strong policy and financial commitment to the sector, and to make public the steps that each G8 donor will make to fulfil this commitment.

The World bank's fast track initiative is to offer 18 poor countries the chance to qualify for additional financing for primary education if they can demonstrate that their Governments are fully committed and have effective policies in place. A further five countries can apply for assistance in building capacity, filling gaps in data and developing effective policies for primary education. Further discussions about implementing this initiative will be held in Washington on 17 July.

HIV/AIDS

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the contribution to the crisis in Southern Africa of *(a)* HIV/AIDS, *(b)* sanitation and *(c)* quality and quantity of water; and how it is taking its findings into account in its approach to the emergency. [69476]

Clare Short: HIV/AIDS is both a contributor to and a likely consequence of current food shortages in Southern Africa. The burden of disease has contributed to families' inability to grow enough food or earn the money to buy it; and shortage of food is leading women to trade sex for survival, to family separations and to reduced access to medical care. In assessing vulnerability NGOs and international organisations through whom we are working are taking account of the need to provide AIDS-affected families with appropriate rations and to design delivery mechanisms which will reach them; and to prevent widespread hunger leading to large scale population movement.

We have made no specific assessment of the contribution of lack of access to water and sanitation to the current crisis, but expect needs in this sector to figure in forthcoming UN appeals.

Sub-Saharan Africa

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to ensure adequate storage facilities for clean water in Sub-Saharan Africa. [70490]

Clare Short: At the national and regional level reservoirs provide security against inter and intra annual variations in rainfall. At the local and household level water storage systems are an important factor to ensure that drinking water does not become contaminated. Our focus in water supply is on sustainable access to safe and affordable drinking water. Storage is an important part of this, and we support initiatives ranging from the work of the World Commission on Dams to rainwater harvesting, and groundwater development. But we also emphasize the importance of other factors that affect sustainability, such as appropriate institutional structures, cost recovery for operation and maintenance, and the involvement of local communities to ensure that services respond to their needs. Last year we provided £30 million for water related programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what impact a lack of decent transport facilities has had on the supply of clean drinking water to people in sub-Saharan Africa. [70491]

Clare Short: Good transport facilities help provide access to school and health care facilities, and improved access to agricultural inputs and markets. We have not made any specific studies of the impact of transportation on access to clean water. But improved transport facilities clearly improve access for construction materials, for spare parts and for maintenance of existing water systems. Intermediate transport, such as improved bicycles, donkey carts and handcarts all contribute to reducing the load carrying drudgery of the poor—particularly women and children—releasing time for other livelihood and household activities and to attend school.

Parliamentary Questions

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she has taken to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* record the length of time between tabling of ordinary written questions to her Department and her Department's answers. [69645]

Ms Keeble: Monitoring and recording of the time between tabling written questions and sending them to *Official Report* is done both manually and electronically. These are checked daily to ensure that, wherever possible, the time is within the approved target of five working days as prescribed by the Cabinet Office.

Small Enterprise Development Agency

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has recently received regarding the institutional development of the Small Enterprise Development Agency. [69641]

Ms Keeble: Since 1999 we have supported the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) with almost £1 million to enable it to expand its micro-finance services to the poor, especially women and the rural poor. SEDA has recently discussed with officials the possibility of further support to strengthen its institutional capacity and resources. Any future support to SEDA will be considered as part of our new integrated programme to support the pro-poor development of Tanzania's financial services sector.

Micro-finance Institutions

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has recently received regarding her Department's support of micro-finance institutions in Uganda. [69642]

Clare Short: DFID is providing £7.1 million for micro-finance institutions in Uganda for financial services to poor people, particularly in rural areas. These programmes are at very early stages and their first formal review is due later this year. However preliminary indications are that they are on track to meet the programme's targets. Several initiatives are also co-funded with other donors, and we are co-operating closely with them, industry stakeholders and the Government of Uganda to ensure best practice, maximum co-ordination and impact.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations her Department has received regarding the review of microfinance institutions in Kenya which her Department supports. [69644]

Clare Short: We are not aware of any review of DFID-supported microfinance institutions specific to Kenya. However, a peer review of DFID's international activities in microfinance, including those in Kenya, by other international agencies took place in May. We are currently considering our response to the review report which arrived in early July.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of microfinance institutions supported by her Department make available voluntary savings facilities. [69643]

Clare Short: Where local banking laws permit, and practice varies from country to country, microfinance institutions are invariably keen to make available voluntary savings facilities. In eastern Africa, two-thirds of DFID-supported microfinance programmes make voluntary savings facilities available in some form. This proportion is likely to be reasonably representative of DFID-supported programmes elsewhere.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Bishops' Residences

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what the cost was of maintaining the bishops' residences for the most recent year for which figures are available. [68879]

Mr. Bell: The overall spending by the Commissioners on bishops' housing and office premises in 2001 was £3.3 million, broken down as follows:

	£ million
Building maintenance and repairs	1.1
External property management costs	0.2
Staff	0.9
Council tax, insurance and other running costs	0.6
Lambeth Palace Library running costs	0.4
Support services	0.1
Depreciation	0.2
Rent paid	0.1
Rental income	(0.3)

Suffragan bishops' houses are owned by the dioceses.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 11 June from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Miss G. Persse. [70346]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 15 July.

Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69305]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions will follow the Government policy when published in summer 2002.

Currently open source software (OSS) is not deployed in any of the Department's national or mainstream IT systems. Figures for any use by individuals within the Department are not available, but any such use is minimal and isolated from the Department's major business systems. The Department actively reviews its position on OSS with our IT providers, on a continuous basis, ensuring we are aware of the latest IT industry thinking.

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to his Department. [56463]

Mr. McCartney: All advisory, executive and tribunal non-departmental public bodies are required to adopt a board members' code of practice, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office. Copies are being placed in the Libraries with the exception of:

> Disability Employment Advisory Committee (DEAC)—This group was established on 1 April 2002. Members have yet to be appointed.
>
> National Employment Panel (NEP)—This group was established in October 2001. The Code of Practice will be placed as soon as it becomes operational.
>
> The pensions ombudsman is an individual appointment and conduct is covered in the appointment letter.

Retirement Pensions

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if pensioners who have entitlement to two Category B retirement pensions will continue to be able to claim and receive the higher one. [71446]

Mr. McCartney: It has always been the intention to pay the higher Category B pension but because of the way the legislation was consolidated in 1992, the choice to take the higher amount was removed. This was unintentional. We will continue to pay the more beneficial rate as an extra statutory payment. We shall note the annual departmental resource account and will legislate to correct the position at the earliest opportunity.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), of 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1066W, if he will break down the total sum for spending on means-tested benefits for pensioners into figures for each of the main means-tested benefits. [69947]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. The cost of the main income related benefits to people aged 60 and over for 2002–03 are shown in the table:

Income related benefits	*£ million*
Minimum income guarantee	4,275
Housing benefit	4,620
Council tax benefit	1,520
Total	10,415

Source:
Departmental Report 2002

Child Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his letter of 5 July 2002 to members of the Committee that considered the Social Security (Electronic Communication) (Child Benefit) Order 2002, what proportion of downloads of child benefit claim forms from the existing website are made by women; and what proportion of existing child benefit claimants are women. [69259]

Malcolm Wicks: It is not possible to differentiate between men and women downloading existing electronic claim forms. 95.5 per cent. of child benefit customers are women.

NIRS2

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what basis the figures on page 38 of the latest departmental report, Command Paper 5424 on NIRS2 availability was calculated with particular reference to the other 1 per cent.; and if he will make a statement on those for whom NIRS2 is not available. [68479]

Mr. McCartney: The availability of the NIRS system is a contractional matter between the Inland Revenue and the supplier, Accenture. The figures used in the latest departmental report were supplied under these arrangements.

Pension Funds

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his reply of 1 July 2002, to the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), *Official Report*, column 8, how much tax has been paid by pension funds in each year since the withdrawal of advance corporation tax relief; and if he will make a statement on the level of extra business investment there has been in each year since 1997. [70068]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply

Pension funds are not normally liable to tax and the abolition of advance corporation tax, which was widely welcomed, did not impose a tax liability. Total business investment, measured at constant prices, has increased markedly from £93.1 billion in 1997 and stood at £113.1 billion in 2001.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets she has set the Veterinary Medicines Directorate for 2002–03. [71400]

Mr. Morley: I have set the Veterinary Medicines Directorate the following performance targets for 2002–03.

Safety and quality

1. Provide high quality scientific assessment work.
2. Provide high quality policy advice to Ministers.
3. Comply with the timetables for entering SAR reports set out in the plan and to report to the VPC each quarter reviewing trends in SAR reports and identifying areas requiring evaluation.
4. Meet, in full, the requirements of the Residues Surveillance Plans.

Standards of service

5. Comply with the timetables for handling applications under the centralised, decentralised and UK procedure set out in the plan.

Efficiency

6. Continue to collect data for 2002–03 with a view to establishing a three-year rolling average cost efficiency index. Establish a numerical baseline for timeliness of delivery from the results of customer satisfaction surveys.

Financial control

7. Recover from industry and Government the full economic cost taken as a whole of its main business activities of:

Licensing and surveillance,

Policy work, and

Residues monitoring,

without any cross subsidy between these businesses.

PLAN

Suspected Adverse Reaction Surveillance Scheme Reports.

Enter human reports onto the database within two working days.

Enter serious animal reports onto the database within two working days.

Enter non-serious animal reports onto the database within 10 working days.

Centralised procedures

All assessments (including MRLs) to be submitted within timetables agreed with the EMEA.

Decentralised procedures

All authorisations to be determined within the established regulatory timetables.

UK procedures

New Marketing Authorisations to be determined or referred to VPC in an average of 120 clock days; all to be determined within 210 clock days.

Type I variations

Average time to complete first assessment to be less than 25 clock days.

Average time to sign off assessment to be less than 50 clock days.

99 per cent. of applications to be signed off by 60 clock days.

Type II variations

Average time to complete first assessment to be less than 55 clock days.

Average time to sign off assessment to be less than 110 clock days.

99 per cent. of applications to be signed off by 120 clock days.

Renewals

Average time to complete first assessment to be less than 80 clock days.

Average time to sign off assessment to be less than 165 clock days.

99 per cent. of applications to be signed off by 180 clock days.

Game Birds (Feed Additives)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many game birds have been tested for dimetridazole in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what proportion of them had unacceptable dimetridazole levels. [69025]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* No residue of dimetridazole is considered acceptable in a food producing animal. Since 1997 the Veterinary Medicines Directorate has tested 272 samples from game birds. In 1997 dimetridazole residues were detected in four samples. Since then there have been no residues of dimetridazole detected in game birds. The following table sets out these figures in detail.

Year	*Number of samples tested*	*Number with dimetridazole residues*
1997	120	4
1998	54	0
1999	33	0
2000	33	0
2001	32	0

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from *(a)* the French Government, *(b)* the European Commission and *(c)* other organisations regarding the use of feed additives in exported game birds. [69023]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The European Commission has recently raised with us an issue on the authorisation of dimetridazole for use in rearing of game birds in the UK. We expect these discussions to continue over the next few weeks. As part of this process we have been discussing this issue with a number of interested parties, including representatives from the UK game bird industry. We have not, to date, had any representations on this issue from the French Government.

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed dated 3 December 2001 and 13 May 2002, concerning the rights of residents under section 54 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. [67643]

Mr. Morley: We have no record of receiving the hon. Member's letters of 3 December 2001 and 13 May 2002.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason she has not responded to the letter from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire of 18 April regarding agrimonetary compensation for dairy farmers. [63181]

Mr. Morley: We have no record of receiving the hon. Member's letter of 18 April.

Seeds

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 20 June 2002, *Official Report,* columns 473–74W, what the timetable is for consultation and changes to the Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations. [69334]

Mr. Morley: Ministers are still considering options for amending the arrangements for requesting a hearing on proposed National List decisions, in consultation with the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We intend to consult all interested parties during the summer on proposals for change.

Food Imports

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the percentage of containers which were subjected to inspection at ports of entry as a proportion of *(a)* containers whose shippers declare them to contain food products and *(b)* containers overall in each of the last three years. [69620]

Mr. Morley: Commercial consignments declared as meat or most other products of animal origin from non EU countries must be pre notified to the Border Inspection Post of arrival and all are subject to documentary and identity checks. The minimum proportion subject to physical checks is set out in EU law and is dependent on the product—at least 20 per cent. in the case of beef, pork and lamb and at least 50 per cent. in the case of poultry, game and honey.

Consignments of other food products do not generally have to be pre-notified nor do they have to arrive at a Border Inspection Post but they must be accompanied by an accurate manifest. Checks on other food products are determined by the food safety risk associated with the product.

Checks are carried out on consignments rather than containers. The number of containers involved is not recorded as a consignment may consist of part of a container load or of one or more containers. The numbers of consignments of products of animal origin imported from non EU countries and submitted for veterinary checks in the last three years were as follows:

1999: 50,434

2000: 52,305

2001: 55,562.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policy in relation to standards of animal hygiene and welfare in countries exporting meat to the United Kingdom. [69617]

Mr. Morley: Imports into the United Kingdom of animal products are governed by Community legislation, which protects both animal and public health. Under these rules only third countries approved by the Commission on the advice of the Standing Committee on Food Chain and Animal Health may export into the Community, and only from establishments which meet Community hygiene standards. The lists of countries and establishments allowed to export particular products into the Community, are available on the Commission's website at the following address: http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/sanco/vets/info/data/listes/table0.html.

Responsibility for ensuring that third countries meet these requirements lies with the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) of the European Commission. FVO mission reports are published on their website at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/inspections/vi/reports/index_en.html.

The Government have made clear the importance they attach to developing and maintaining high welfare standards for all animals both domestically and internationally.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the restrictions imposed and warnings given at ports and airports against the covert importing of meat. [69619]

Mr. Morley: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is working closely with all the enforcement bodies and with stakeholders to ensure that we have the necessary controls in place to reduce the risk of illegal imports of meat and animal products entering the country.

An Action Plan of work for 2002–03 to reduce this risk is being implemented by the Department. Key elements of the plan include a risk assessment, a strengthening of the legal powers available to enforcement officers, and enhanced deterrence and detection alongside improved publicity for the issue.

On 8 July DEFRA launched a summer publicity campaign aimed at making the public more aware of the restrictions on importing meat and animal products for personal use from outside the EU and the reasons for these restrictions. Baseline research was commissioned to establish general awareness before the campaign and this will be followed up in the autumn to assess the effectiveness of this first stage of the publicity campaign. This campaign is just part of a longer term strategy to inform and educate the public on this matter.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to discuss the introduction of a fixed penalty system applying to illegal imports carried as personal baggage. [69548]

Mr. Morley: The Government published an Action Plan in March that aims to reduce the risk of introducing animal and plant diseases entering the country. In carrying out this Action Plan the Government are investigating a variety of deterrents, taking into account the experience of other countries. One of the deterrents being considered is on-the-spot fines and initial discussions are being held with the enforcement agencies on the practicalities of such a deterrent, as well as with officials of other countries who have adopted this measure.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department has been involved in with regard to the proposals for harmonising the regulation and inspection of imports throughout the EU. [69547]

Mr. Morley: Harmonised EU rules are already in place for the control and inspection of imports from third countries of live animals and animal products.

The UK Government have been pressing the European Commission for clarification and strengthening of the rules on personal imports of meat and animal products throughout the EU since January 2001.

The Commission produced a draft regulation in June 2002 and following discussion with the UK and other member states this was redrafted, reflecting the concerns of the UK, among others. The new draft Commission Regulation is due to be voted on in September 2002.

Curry Report

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from farmers in respect of the proposal in the Curry report to raise the level of modulation from 4.5 per cent. to 10 per cent. [69624]

Mr. Morley: This proposal has attracted a varied response from farmers and farming organisations—including concern about the possible impact on farm incomes and support for the potentially positive effect on rural development funding. The Government are committed to shifting expenditure from production-linked subsidies to wider agri-environment and rural development measures.

A final decision on the proposal will be taken after extensive consultation, including with the devolved Administrations. The decision will also need to take account of negotiations on the European Commission's "Mid-Term Review" proposals for reform of the common agricultural policy, which include the introduction of compulsory modulation across the European Union, initially at 3 per cent. but rising to a level of 20 per cent. after six or seven years.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken on implementing recommendations of the Curry report. [69623]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 26 March a series of early actions as a first step towards implementing the report. At the same time, a comprehensive process of engagement with a wide range of stakeholders was launched. This process has included a series of regional and sectoral events and the publication of a document, "Sustainable Food and Farming: Working Together", both of which have explored how to translate the Commission's vision into action.

Feedback from stakeholders is now being analysed and will help inform construction of a Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming in England, to be launched in the autumn. The strategy will incorporate a definitive response to all of the Policy Commission's recommendations.

Plant and Animal Control Systems

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to harmonise the control systems for plants and animals with special reference to improving co-operation between the port health authorities and the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate. [69549]

Mr. Morley: The Cabinet Office are undertaking a study into how the various parts of Government control the import of animals, plants, and animal and plant products. The study will take place over the summer. Arrangements for co-operation between port health authorities and DEFRA's Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate will be reviewed in the light of the outcome of that study.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what strains of *(a)* swine fever and *(b)* foot and mouth disease have been found over the past five years. [69550]

Mr. Morley: In the United Kingdom, the outbreaks of classical swine fever that occurred in East Anglia during 2000 were caused by a strain of virus belonging to genotype 2.1 and the foot and mouth disease outbreak during 2001 was caused by the pan asia strain of type O virus.

Other than these outbreaks in the United Kingdom, the most comprehensive source of information of disease strains identified is on the OIE website. http://www.oie.int/eng/info/hebdo/A—DSUM.htm gives information of outbreaks of disease worldwide since 2001 and http://www.oie.int/eng/press/a—20000922a.htm gives information on strains of diseases found in outbreaks in Europe in 2000. Both of these sites give information on swine fever and foot and mouth disease.

Advisory Committee Mandate

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee on organic production of agricultural products and indications referring thereto on agricultural products and foodstuffs is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55245]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Regulatory Committee on Organic Farming is set out in Article 14 of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91. Standard rules of procedure were adopted by the Commission on 31 January 2001 in accordance with Council Regulation 1999/468/EC.

The Regulatory Committee on Organic Farming met three times during 2001. (The UK attended a further 18 meetings of working groups supporting the Committee.) The meetings were attended by officials from the Department.

The annual costs are estimated to be £14,000 in travel and subsistence expenses. The meetings, including preparation time and activities following the meetings, take approximately 150 staff days per annum.

Items under consideration by the Committee in the last year include:

amending Commission Regulation (EEC) No. 94/92 laying down detailed rules for implementing the arrangements for imports from third countries provided for in Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91;

amending Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1788/2001 laying down detailed rules for implementing the provisions concerning a certificate of inspection for imports from third countries;

amending Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 in respect of labelling and inspection requirements and precautionary measures for animal feeding stuffs, compound feeding stuffs and feed materials; and

amending Annexe VI parts A and B to Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 with regard to livestock products and fruit wines.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final.

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Lapwings

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations have been made to her Department regarding rural lapwing population decline; and what measures her Department is taking to address this decline. [69630]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has sponsored extensive research over a number of years with the British Trust for Ornithology, the RSPB, and other organisations to try to identify the causes of the decline in lapwing and other farmland birds. The Department works closely with these organisations on formulating remedial measures. The Department is already diverting money from agricultural subsidies in the UK to double the size of our agri-environment scheme over the seven years of the England Rural Development Programme. The schemes include valuable incentives to encourage farmland birds such as the lapwing.

Water Level Management

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department has taken to ensure that water level management plans are commensurate to their intended purpose; and what resources her Department has made available to implement these measures. [69629]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA provides guidance to the operating authorities (Environment Agency, internal drainage boards and local authorities) which prepare water level management plans (WLMPs). However, the Department does not approve the final plans and it is down to the operating authority to ensure that the plan is fit for its intended purpose. In terms of nature conservation, WLMPs must be agreed with English Nature.

While the Department has not funded the preparation of plans, we are grant-aiding flood management works arising from their implementation. We also fund and maintain a database of sites which records operating authorities progress in producing and implementing plans.

In 1999 DEFRA set up a WLMP Advisory Group which considers significant issues arising from the WLMP preparation and implementation processes and endeavours to identify solutions. The advisory group is currently preparing guidance to operating authorities on the impact of the habitats regulations on WLMPs.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to make the production of water level management plans eligible for grant aid. [68189]

Mr. Morley: The majority of water level management plans are now either complete, or awaiting approval by English Nature. The next stage is to ensure that the plans are implemented and reviewed. There are no plans by this Department to provide grant aid to assist with WLMP preparation.

Wildlife Preservation

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* information and *(b)* incentives her Department provides to farmers regarding the establishment of field margins for wildlife preservation. [69631]

Mr. Morley: Cereal field margins are a priority habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, with a target of 12,725 hectares under sympathetic management in England by 2010. The Department has been actively encouraging the management of field margins by making grants available in schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Areas. As a result, the cereal field margin target has been exceeded almost 10 years ahead of schedule.

Grant aid is available for six and two-metre grass margins, beetle banks and uncropped strips. The new Countryside Stewardship arable options, introduced earlier this year, have added wildlife mixtures and conservation headlands to this list.

The Department funds ADAS and FWAG to provide free advice to farmers on a range of conservation issues, including the wildlife friendly management of field margins. DEFRA also co-funds a range of conservation leaflets with RSPB, which include advice and guidance on practical management of field margins.

Rights of Way

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out the timetable for implementing part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in order to achieve her Public Service Agreement target of opening up public access to mountain, moor, heath and down and registered common land by the end of 2005. [69392]

Alun Michael: Various regulations must be put in place in order that land may be opened up for access under Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. I recently laid before Parliament regulations on the issue of provisional and conclusive maps of open country and registered common land, including appeals against provisional maps. This will enable the Countryside Agency to issue the first provisional map in England which will apply to the south-east. The table records the overall progress we have made towards consulting on these provisions and bringing them into force together with our current timetable for completing the process. The precise timing of each of the remaining intermediate stages may vary but we are firmly committed to meeting our Public Service Agreement target and I am currently considering whether the final stage can be implemented region by region ahead of the target date.

Regulations	*Section*	*Consultation commenced*	*Consultation ended*	*Date regulations in force*
Regulations regarding mapping of access land and consultation on draft maps	11	March 2001	20 June 2001	1 November 2001
Regulations regarding issue of provisional maps, appeals, and issue of conclusive maps	11	November 2001	8 February 2002	29 July 2002
Regulations regarding the establishment of local access forums and the appointment of members	[1]94	July 2001	23 October 2001	August 2002
Regulations regarding dedication of land for access	16	January 2002	15 April 2002	November 2002
Regulations relating to exclusion or restriction of access under Chapter II, including appeals (but not emergencies)	32	December 2001	22 March 2002	December 2002
Regulations on removal or relaxation of restrictions on access land and to exclude access in emergencies (including appeals)	[2]31	January 2003	—	August 2003
Regulations on appeals relating to notices	38	February 2003	—	September 2003
References to public places in existing enactments	42	February 2003	—	October 2003
Regulations regarding review of conclusive maps	11	February 2004	—	August 2004

[1] Part V

[2] Paragraph 7, Schedule 2

Under the Countryside Agency's current published timetable for the mapping of open country and registered common land, the final provisional map in England would be issued by the end of March 2004.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61696]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Scientific Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment is set out in Commission Decision 97/579EC. The UK is not formally represented on the Committee; members are directly appointed by the Commission, drawn from across the EU, on the basis of their scientific expertise.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture and the Environment is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61712]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Environment is set out in Commission Decision 98/235/EC. The UK is not formally represented on the Committee; members are directly appointed by the Commission, drawn from across the EU.

The Commission, together with member states, is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to 'simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission'. As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be available through its website.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) from where the pig suspected of foot and mouth and swine vesicular disease which was slaughtered in Leicestershire on 21 June originated; [66168]

(2) what measures her Department is taking to identify the origin of the pig suspected of foot and mouth disease and swine vesicular disease. [66169]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* All farms supplying pigs to the abattoir in question, together with a market and a collecting centre, were traced and inspected by official veterinarians. No disease was found. However, due to deficiencies in the identification of the suspect pig and a number of others in the same batch at the abattoir, inquiries so far have not established which of 17 farms was the farm of origin of the suspect animal. I have met pig industry representatives to discuss the implications of this episode. Investigations continue into what appear to have been serious breaches of identification regulations and prosecutions may follow. This could have had major consequences for the livestock industry should this pig had been proved to be carrying a disease.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many invoices remain to be paid to contractors over work carried out on foot and mouth; how many contractors are owed money; how many companies are owed over *(a)* 10 per cent., *(b)* 20 per cent., *(c)* 30 per cent., *(d)* 40 per cent., *(e)* 50 per cent., *(f)* 60 per cent., *(g)* 70 per cent. and *(h)* 80 per cent. of invoices submitted to her Department; what the length of period is of unpaid invoices; how much has been paid on account of unpaid invoices; how many contractors have money paid on account; and what the percentage terms are per contractor. [70167]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to Figure 60 in Chapter 4 of the recent NAO report 'The 2001 Outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease' published on 18 June 2002. The report is available on the NAO's website on: http://www.nao.gov.uk/publications/naoreports/01–02/0102939.pdf. Information other than that provided in the NAO report cannot be provided for reasons of legal and commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the UK Government have applied for EU compensation under Article 20 of Council Regulation 2759/1975 for farmers who were subjected to movement restrictions during the recent foot and mouth crisis; and if she will make a statement. [68916]

Mr. Morley: Article 20 of Regulation (EEC) No. 2759/75 of the Council of 29 October 1975 on the common organisation of the market in pigmeat provides that exceptional measures may be taken to support any market affected by restrictions on free circulation imposed in consequence of measures to prevent the spread of animal disease.

Introduction of exceptional support measures is dependent on the member state being able to demonstrate that the restrictions due to a disease outbreak have caused severe market distortion. While the impact on those caught up in the control measures was severe, the UK pig market overall did not exhibit clear indications of distortion.

The cull sow market was most severely affected by the export restrictions linked to the foot and mouth outbreak, and officials explored the possibility of a market support based solution with the European Commission—either exceptional market support under the CAP pigmeat regime and/or a cull sow disposal scheme. The Commission were not encouraging on either; although there are precedents for exceptional market support measures in animal disease situations, these have always been restricted to protection/surveillance zones. A scheme restricted in this way was not seen by the pig industry as being of any help to the cull sow market. A nationally funded cull sow disposal scheme was considered by the Commission to be income support; which is prohibited by state aid rules. Therefore no application for such support was made.

Driving Lessons (Teenagers)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 18 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 213W, on driving lessons (teenagers), if she will list the 21 schemes by location and the *(a)* numbers and *(b)* proportion of teenagers who will benefit. [69335]

Alun Michael: The 21 locations in which Wheels to Work schemes are currently operating are:

Cambridgeshire
Suffolk
Norfolk
Hampshire (New Forest)
Isle of Wight
Kent (Aylesham area)
Devon (Torridge)
Devon (West Devon)
Dorset
Gloucestershire
Somerset
Wiltshire
Nottinghamshire
Herefordshire
Shropshire (Bridgnorth, N. Shropshire)
Telford and Wrekin
Warwickshire
Worcestershire
South Lancashire (Runshaw College)
Hambleton and Richmondshire
Selby.

Of the 21 schemes, six offer subsidised driving lessons: the Isle of Wight, Devon (West Devon), Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire.

Information on the numbers of teenagers benefiting from the schemes is not held centrally. The good practice guide on Wheels to Work schemes, due to be published later this month, will includes some information on beneficiaries and target groups together with case studies and costings for a number of Wheels to Work schemes.

Green Ministers

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcomes of meetings of Green Ministers have been in respect of her Department's activities; and if she will make a statement. [64839]

Alun Michael: Following the general election in June 2001, the previously informal Green Ministers Committee was upgraded to a Cabinet Sub-Committee of ENV and it is established practice under exemption two of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

The terms of reference for the Committee include the commitment to improve the performance of all Departments in contributing to sustainable development. DEFRA has been active in this area, for instance the Department's strategy for sustainable development "Foundations for our Future" was published in June 2002. The purpose of this strategy is to initiate change in the way the Department approaches its responsibilities and to ensure better and more sustainable outcomes. The strategy will be supported by a programme of events and activities for all DEFRA's staff over the next few months. These will explore the way in which the Department carries out is business and how each person can contribute to achieving our aim of sustainable development. This will put the spotlight on projects demonstrating best practice.

Environmental Protection Act

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if it is the policy of the Government to modify the requirement in section 151 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 that a dog when in a public place must wear a collar with a tag or a plate attached giving the name and address of the owner even if it is microchipped. [67999]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* Dogs in a public place are required to wear a collar with a tag or a plate attached giving the name and address of the owner, as specified under section 151 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, even if the dog is microchipped. We have no plans to modify this.

Village Halls

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the recent research published by the Countryside Agency relating to the number of parishes with access to a village hall. [69405]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* In 1997 the Countryside Agency published research which showed that 72 per cent. of villages had a village hall. The definition has been refined following responses to that research which indicated that some villages have a community hall which is technically not a "village hall" but fulfils largely the same purpose. In November 2001 the Countryside Agency published a report entitled "Rural Services in 2000" which revealed that 85 per cent. of parishes had a village hall or a community hall in 2000. The proportion of parishes with a hall is 32 per cent. for those below 100 population, 77 per cent. for those with between 100 and 300 people, 92 per cent. for those between 300 and 500, 94 per cent. for those between 500 and 1,000, 95 per cent. for those between 1,000 and 2,000, 98 per cent. for those between 2,000 and 5,000, and 96 per cent. for those over 5,000.

Village halls can play a vital role in rural communities as multi-purpose community centres and hubs for village life. We are supporting the development of active local communities and parish and town councils in a variety of ways; the village hall as a hub for social activity and service provision fits in well with our policy objectives, and support of village halls and the activities that take place there is available from a range of public sector and other sources.

Scottish Agriculture

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from NFU Scotland with respect to the defence of Scottish agricultural interests in the European Union. [69284]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, receives representations from the NFU Scotland from time to time on a range of agricultural issues. However, there have been no recent examples.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from the Scottish Executive with respect to the defence of Scottish agricultural interests in the European Union. [69285]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* There is an on-going dialogue with the Scottish Executive across a wide range of issues which affect Scottish agriculture. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met with Ministers, or their representatives, from the devolved Administrations in Brussels on 15 July prior to the EU Agriculture Council meeting. The Commission's communication on the mid-term review of the common agricultural policy was the main focus of discussion.

French Beef Ban

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she last discussed the French beef ban with *(a)* the French Agriculture Minister, *(b)* the Scottish Executive, *(c)* the EU Commission and *(d)* the Prime Minister. [69283]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The Secretary of State regularly discusses the French ban on British beef with the French Agriculture Minister and EU Commission, including at Agriculture Councils. She also regularly discusses the ban with Ministers in the devolved Administrations. The Prime Minister raised the ban with the French Prime Minister on 15 July and with the French President on 19 June.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Agriculture Council held on 15 July; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [70881]

Margaret Beckett: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Agriculture Council in Brussels on 15 July. The Welsh Minister for Rural Development and Wales Abroad and the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development also attended.

This was the first Council meeting of the Danish presidency which accordingly introduced its work programme for the six months ahead.

The main item of business was a public debate on the mid-term review of the CAP. The Commission introduced its outline proposals and member states gave initial reactions. I welcomed the general direction of the changes proposed, but indicated where they fell short of what the UK believes is required to modernise the CAP. The proposals will be further considered by Ministers in September; officials will start detailed examination of them next week.

The Council discussed the Commission's proposal for a mandate to open negotiations on modification of the bound duties for rice and cereals. Delegations, including the UK, expressed a range of reservations about the proposal. The Commission will be looking to narrow its scope and take further soundings at official level.

The Council held a policy debate on Commission proposals for control of zoonoses. The Commission reported progress on establishment of the European Food Safety Authority and briefed the Council on progress made on its food safety White Paper.

Shellfish

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress relating to the shellfish licensing system. [64385]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 June 2002]:* We are committed to the introduction of a shellfish licensing scheme. Officials are currently considering the timing and format of such a scheme.

DEFRA *v.* Asda Stores and Others

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the judgment of the High Court in the case of DEFRA *v.* Asda Stores and others. [66150]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* The Department's appeal in this case was dismissed in the High Court on 24 June. The Department has considered the implications of the judgment and has lodged an application for leave to appeal to the House of Lords. EU horticultural marketing standards continue to be directly applicable in the UK as in other member states, and the holder of products covered by the marketing standards is responsible for observing them.

Flooding

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research has been undertaken to update maps of indicative inland flood risk areas as a result of recent flooding; and if she will make a statement. [69193]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency, with support from DEFRA, has a number of current initiatives to improve information on flood risk. These include a national database of all defences and further investments in flood risk mapping. The best means of presenting all this information in a readily accessible form is currently under active discussion.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evaluation has been undertaken of the effectiveness of the Environment Agency in responding to the flooding of autumn 2000; and if she will make a statement. [69192]

Mr. Morley: The Autumn 2000 Lessons Learned report gathered information from the Environment Agency and all of its emergency partners. I support the main conclusion of this report, that a seamless and integrated flood forecasting, warning and response service had been delivered. The report put forward a number of actions and recommendations that have largely been concluded. Some of these have been further considered as part of the recent consultation on the Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review, and others were referred to in the Cabinet Office Emergency Planning Review—The Future of Emergency Planning in England and Wales. The Agency has also recently commissioned an independent external audit, which should provide a further independent assessment of its effectiveness.

Egg Industry

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made of the egg industry's ability to pay the cost of implementing the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2002. [70336]

Mr. Morley: A full regulatory impact assessment concerning the cost of implementing the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2002 has been published. The long implementation times for the Regulations mean that the industry has a lengthy period over which to write off the required capital investment.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether UK producers in this country will be permitted to continue using conventional egg laying cases until the EU deadline of 1 January 2012 as provided for by Council Directive 1999/74/EC. [R] [70337]

Mr. Morley: The date for the ban on conventional egg laying cages across the EU is 2012 and this is the date we have stipulated in the English implementing regulations. We have no plans to bring that date forward unilaterally but the matter may be reviewed in 2005 at EU level.

Chewing Gum

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* representations she has received from and *(b)* discussions he has had with (i) local authorities and (ii) manufacturers with regard to cleaning up chewing gum; how many local authorities have charged people with chewing gum litter under the Environmental Protection Act 1990; what action she plans to take to ensure that local authorities take action against chewing gum offenders; what action she plans to take regarding cleaning up chewing gum litter; and if she will make a statement. [69160]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA has not received direct representation from, or had discussions with, local authorities about the clear up of chewing gum. However, the environmental charity, Environmental Campaigns (ENCAMS), who DEFRA grant funds, has been working with the Wrigley's Company and local authorities over many years to develop best practice to clear up gum. ENCAMS has produced advice and guidance on prevention and cleansing for local authorities under the banner, "Become an Authority on Gum".

Information on how many local authorities have charged people with chewing gum litter under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 is not collected centrally by my Department. However, in 2000–01, 2,310 fixed penalty notices (FPNs) were issued for litter offences. The Department increased the FPN for littering offences from £25 to £50 on 1 April, and we are currently looking to see how local authorities will be able to retain these moneys and redirect the funds to measures that improve local environmental quality; which could include cleaning up chewing gum.

Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what types of waste, previously not hazardous waste, will be reclassified as hazardous waste. [69235]

Mr. Meacher: The European Hazardous Waste List (94/904/EC) has recently been extensively revised, and over 200 additions have been made. It will be transposed into UK law as part of the current review of the UK special waste regulations. The most significant additions include end-of-life vehicles containing hazardous liquids or components, electrical equipment containing CFC/HCFC/HFC (fridges/freezers), and the following items if they contain hazardous substances: electrical equipment, contaminated soils, insulation materials and bottom ash.

Environmental Adviser

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who has been appointed as Environmental Adviser to the Minister for the Environment. [63850]

Mr. Meacher: Stephen Hale was appointed as Environmental Policy Adviser to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 17 June.

CAP

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many payments of financial support under the CAP in England and Wales were *(a)* between £200,000 and £499,999, *(b)* between £500,000 and £999,999 and *(c)* in excess of £1 million, in the last year for which figures are available. [70044]

Mr. Morley: The following table gives numbers of individual payments of financial support under the CAP to addresses in England and Wales in each category. Some businesses may have received more than one payment, or may have had trading interests outside the region of the address to which the payments were made.

	£200,000 to £499,999	*£500,000 to £999,999*	*Over £1 million*
Grants and subsidies			
England	158	11	3
Wales[1]	0	0	0
Market support			
England	523	125	33
Wales	82	42	33

[1] Relates to the EAGGF budget year ending in 2000, the last year for which those figures were readily available.

Note:

Other figures relate to the 12 months ending June 2002.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 933W, when the research study by CBD Porton Down into the dose effect profiles for organophosphate sheep dips on brain electrical activity and sensitive behaviour indices in non-human primates will be completed. [69407]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The laboratory work on this research study has been completed and a statistical analysis of the results is currently being carried out. We anticipate receiving a final report of its findings before the end of September this year.

Hill Farmers

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she had made of the ability of hill farmers to diversify into other areas of business. [70371]

Alun Michael: The Government recognise that all farms have their own set of individual circumstances which influence the scope for diversification and that the same approach will not be appropriate in all circumstances. The opportunity to pursue a successful diversification enterprise will depend upon a range of factors, including the resources and assets of the farm, the skills and expertise of the farmer and their family, and the farm's geographic circumstances.

In England, DEFRA provides grants for farmers seeking to pursue good diversification projects under the Rural Enterprise Scheme, which forms part of the England Rural Development Programme. The Department also offers assistance in the form of free planning consultancy advice to farmers who intend to pursue an eligible diversification project through the Rural Enterprise Scheme and we are considering how to improve the provision of help and information to farmers considering diversifying their business.

Dairy Industry

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many dairy *(a)* farms and *(b)* businesses have been (i) opened and (ii) closed in the last five years, broken down by region. [68992]

Mr. Morley: The Department does not hold the precise information sought. However, according to figures from the June Census, the number of dairy farms by region in England over the last five years was as follows:

1. Number of holdings classified as farm type dairy

Government office region	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
North East region	325	285	275	251	215
North West region including Merseyside	4,241	4,058	3,904	3,630	2,983
Yorkshire and Humberside region	1,654	1,532	1,484	1,358	1,306
East Midlands region	1,336	1,273	1,226	1,122	1,156
West Midlands region	2,694	2,531	2,446	2,305	2,213
East of England region	250	239	231	203	215
South East region including Greater London	972	888	864	779	805
South West region	6,535	6,207	5,883	5,478	5,213
England	18,007	17,013	16,313	15,126	14,106

2. Number of holdings with any dairy cows

Government office regions	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
North East region	510	467	428	398	343
North West region including Merseyside	4,993	4,862	4,671	4,315	3,440
Yorkshire and Humberside region	2,340	2,248	2,129	1,983	1,814
East Midlands region	1,836	1,785	1,729	1,599	1,567
West Midlands region	3,354	3,261	3,124	2,936	2,768
East of England region	641	637	584	517	527
South East region including Greater London	1,518	1,500	1,431	1,350	1,321
South West region	7,740	7,556	7,230	6,819	6,345
England	22,932	22,316	21,326	19,917	18,125

Notes:

1. Holdings shown as of June each year, not 'opened' or 'closed'.
2. Table 1 shows holdings where dairy farming is the predominant activity.
3. Table 2 shows holdings which returned at least one dairy [illegible] in the June Census.
4. A dairy cow is classed as any dairy cow or heifer that has ca[illegible]
5. All figures relate to main holdings only.

Source:

June Agricultural and Horticultural Census

British Farmers

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps she has taken to help British farmers remain competitive in international markets; and if she will make a statement. [69003]

Mr. Morley: The Government want the farming industry to succeed and become more competitive. That is one reason why we established the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food and why, following its report, we will launch a new strategy for sustainable food and farming in England in the autumn.

We have already demonstrated our commitment to helping food and farming business increase their competitiveness. For example, we plan to introduce a new Agriculture Development Scheme offering grants to help farmers improve their competitiveness through better marketing. The proposed priorities are developing and improving assurance schemes, encouraging co-operation/collaboration, benefiting primary producers and benchmarking and spread of best practice.

Success is also dependent on changes at the international level. The Government are working to bring farmers closer to their markets by securing a more economically rational Common Agricultural Policy and further liberalisation of agricultural trade in the World Trade Organisation negotiations.

Funding

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will announce funding allocated for Guisborough Market Town initiative. [68025]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* Funding of an Action Plan for a market town follows the completion of a process of partnership working at the local level which starts with an initial "health check" to identify strengths and weaknesses. I am pleased to report that the Guisborough partnership is currently finalising its action plan following successful completion of the initial health check. I understand that One North East (the Regional Development Agency) has set aside £200,000 for approved projects within the action plan both in this and the next financial year.

Landfill

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many occasions since 1997 waste disposal authorities have been consulted by local planning authorities regarding developments within 250 metres of landfill sites; if she will list the location and nature of the development on each occasion; and if she will make a statement. [65602]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Business Rates

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on what constitutes agricultural usage when considering the setting of business rates; and if she will make a statement. [66521]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

Most agricultural usage is exempt from non-domestic rates under paragraph 1 of schedule 5 to the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The types of agricultural land and buildings covered by this exemption are set out in paragraphs two to eight of that schedule.

In the White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" we confirmed our intention to amend the agricultural exemption. First, we intend to ensure that the exemption applies to a range of flexible farming arrangements such as share farming, contract farming and machinery rings, which do not currently qualify for the exemption.

Second, we intend to ensure that the exemption is properly targeted on agricultural activities. Case law has determined that a body corporate can qualify for the agricultural exemption in respect of ancillary activities such as food processing and packaging operations, provided that the corporate body includes a member who occupies agricultural land. The Government are proposing to amend the legislation so that ancillary premises occupied in connection with agricultural land and buildings can become exempt only where the occupiers of the agricultural land have a controlling share in the body corporate that occupies the ancillary premises. A consultation paper on these proposals was published on 31 May 2002.

Provisions for both of these proposed amendments to the agricultural exemption are included in the draft Local Government Bill that was published for consultation purposes on 12 June.

Chernobyl

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost to farming in the United Kingdom of radioactive contamination from Chernobyl. [54170]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

No estimate of the total costs to farming in the United Kingdom arising from radioactive contamination from Chernobyl is available. However, the "Mark and Release" sheep compensation scheme which controls the sale of sheep from the areas affected by radioactive contamination is intended to compensate farmers for losses arising from these controls.

WALES

Care Homes

8. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly regarding the use by English patients of care homes in Wales. [67879]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I discuss the NHS and other health issues on a regular basis with the First Minister and the Health and Social Services Minister.

Inward Investment

9. **Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about inward investment by European companies in Wales. [67880]

26. **Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about inward investment by European companies in Wales. [67897]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Minister regularly to discuss a range of issues, including inward investment in Wales. I am pleased to note that recent figures published by Invest UK show that the UK remains Europe's number one investment location.

Investment by EU companies is vitally important to Welsh industry—in particular in the manufacturing sector. European companies represent more than a quarter of overseas-owned employment in Wales and around 10 per cent. of total manufacturing employment.

Water Provision (Mid-Wales)

10. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with Ofwat regarding future water provision in mid-Wales. [67881]

Mr. Touhig: None. This is primarily a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Valleys Communities

12. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the special economic needs of isolated South Wales valleys communities. [67883]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office has not made such estimations.

The Government understand the difficulties that the South Wales Valleys communities have faced in recent years, including the Corus redundancies.

The Government welcome the announcements from the Assembly which have been aimed at assisting these specific communities and is confident that such moves will improve the prosperity in Wales, particularly in relation to the manufacturing industry.

Foot and Mouth

13. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the foot and mouth outbreak in Wales. [67884]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I am naturally pleased that Wales has not had a confirmed case of foot and mouth since 12 August last year.

19. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly regarding the need for a public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak. [67890]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I regularly meet the First Secretary and discuss a range of farming issues.

The Government has always maintained that we will hold no public inquiry, as we want reviews carried out fully and effectively, and to uncover answers expeditiously at low cost. The review following the 1967 outbreak took 18 months. The three inquiries commissioned by the Government will consider the same issues in a much shorter time.

Steel Industry

14. **Dr. Francis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales and Cabinet colleagues about the steel industry in Wales. [67885]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet regularly with the First Minister and Cabinet colleagues to discuss a range of issues including the steel industry in Wales.

I regret the news that the board of ASW Holdings plc has been unable to secure the agreement of its banks to provide continued support and has invited them to appoint administrative receivers over the business and assets of the company.

This is a potential blow to workers, their families and the company, but we hope that the receiver can find a way to enable the company to continue trading without a loss of jobs.

I know that the Wales Office, the National Assembly, the Welsh Development Agency and all the other organisations will work together to either find a new owner for the company or to help workers find alternative jobs.

Manufacturing Industry

15. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales and other Cabinet colleagues about the manufacturing industry in Wales. [67886]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet regularly with the First Minister and Cabinet colleagues to discuss a range of issues including manufacturing in Wales.

The Government recognise it is a particularly tough time for manufacturers in the UK, due to the slow down in the world economy and weakness of the euro. However, these problems are not confined to the UK or Wales in particular.

The manufacturing industry is now seeing the first signs that recession in this sector may be coming to an end. The latest CBI and EEF surveys point to stabilisation in manufacturing output over the next three to four months, with the latest CIPS survey even more positive, indicating output may have risen early this year.

Objective 1 Funding

16. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last visited the European Union institutions in Brussels to discuss Objective One funding; and if he will make a statement. [67887]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I visited the European Union institutions in Strasbourg at the beginning of July. During that visit I had meetings with Welsh MEPs and with Sir Nigel Sheinwald, the UK's Permanent Representative to the European Union, to discuss a number of European issues, including Objective One. This built on my meeting with Commissioner Barnier in Brussels in November 2001 and on discussions with the President of the Commission and Commissioner Kinnock, during their visit to the new European Commission office in Cardiff at the end of May.

The Government have renewed their commitment to ensuring that Wales receives the full benefit of Objective One funding, by providing full public expenditure cover for the Objective One programme in Monday's Spending Review. Once again, this is outside Barnett and additional to increases to the Welsh block.

Small Businesses

17. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary concerning the role of small businesses in economic development in Wales. [67888]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Minister regularly to discuss a wide range of issues, including small businesses in Wales.

Small and medium sized enterprises account for over 99 per cent. of all businesses in Wales and are therefore crucial to the economic success of Wales. A number of measures in the Chancellor's budget will make a significant contribution to supporting small businesses in Wales. 6,000 Welsh SMEs will benefit from the corporation tax starting rate cut from 10 per cent. to zero and a further 13,000 will be helped by the 1 per cent. reduction in the small companies' rate. In addition, thousands of Welsh SMEs will benefit from measures to simplify their VAT.

Environmental Protection

18. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly on environmental protection for areas of outstanding natural beauty. [67889]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with the First Minister on a range of matters affecting Wales.

The Assembly is keen to see appropriate protection afforded to the five areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs) in Wales. As well as the resources provided through the local authority revenue settlement for AONBs, the Countryside Council for Wales provides additional core funding support.

The Assembly also provides £750,000 each year, for the administration of the Environment Development Fund, which is designed to support innovative, sustainable development projects to support communities within the AONBs.

Court Service

20. **Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Lord Chancellor's Department concerning proposed changes to the Court Service in Wales. [67891]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with colleagues about matters affecting Wales.

The Court Service report "Modernising the Civil and Family Courts", which was published on 23 May, forms part of a wider Courts and Tribunals Modernisation Programme. This is a major programme of investment, which will enable the Court Service to change radically the way that courts across all jurisdictions work. I understand that the National Assembly for Wales was consulted about the implications of this programme.

Teachers' Work Load

21. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will implement for teachers in Wales the key objective of the Review Body on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions of Service of reducing the work load of teachers. [67892]

Mr. Touhig: Teachers' conditions of service are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

Consultation on the recommendations in the report of the School Teachers Review Body on teachers' work load came to an end on 3 July. The Department for Education and Skills' consultation letter of 8 May said that my right hon. Friend would consult again on practical measures, as appropriate in the light of the initial consultation.

For the time being, the Department for Education and Skills is evaluating the initial consultation responses. Further consultation is likely to take place in the early autumn.

Fire S[illegible]

22. **Mr. Caton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has held with Secretaries in the National Assembly about improving fire safety in Wales. [67893]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I hold regular meetings with the First Minister on a range of matters.

Devolved Powers

23. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent assessment he has made of public attitudes to the operation of devolved powers in Wales. [67894]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I believe that people increasingly understand the split of responsibilities between Cardiff and London and that they welcome the new arrangements.

Crime Reduction

24. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the measures taken by the Government to tackle crime in Wales. [67895]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Tackling crime is a priority for the Government.

Through the Safer Communities Initiative, all 22 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in Wales will benefit from extra cash during the current financial year, with an extra £1.1 million in total. In addition, the Crime Fighting Fund will be providing Welsh forces with up to 136 new police recruits over and above their previous recruitment plans.

Since 1997, police numbers in Wales have been rising steadily and the passage of the Police Reform Bill will ensure that police officers can spend more of their time on front line crime fighting duties.

EU Funding

25. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to his answer of 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 169W, what the *(a)* 2001–02 EU

structural funding and agricultural support payments in Wales and *(b)* the share of United Kingdom's net EU contributions represented by the Welsh share of UK GDP, were. [67896]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Structural fund payments in Wales amounted to £146 million and agricultural support payments amounted to £155 million in 2001–02. Wales accounts for around 4 per cent. of UK GDP.

Violent Crime

27. **Mr. Simmonds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary regarding violent crime in Wales. [67898]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with colleagues about matters that impact on Wales, including measures aimed at reducing violent crime.

The Government remain committed to improving the reporting and detection of violent crime, and to tackling its underlying causes.

Waiting Lists

28. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly over funding to reduce waiting lists in Wales. [67899]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I discuss health issues on as regular basis with the First Minister and the Health and Social Services Minister.

This year health authorities have again received £35 million as part of the health authority allocation to help reduce waiting times and tackle emergency pressures.

Unemployment

29. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary about levels of unemployment in North Wales. [67900]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with the First Secretary about a number of issues, including unemployment in North Wales. Today's labour market statistics, show that we are making excellent progress towards our long term aim of getting more people into employment than ever before.

Today's labour market statistics show that claimant counts are down compared to a year before in every North Wales constituency. Claimant counts have come down an average of 44.4 per cent. since the 1997 election across the 10 North Wales constituencies (Alyn and Deeside, Caernarfon, Clwyd, South, Clwyd, West, Conwy, Delyn, Meirionydd Nant Conwy, Vale of Clwyd, Wrexham and Ynys Mön).

Jobcentre Plus

30. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about Jobcentre Plus offices in Wales. [67901]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular meetings with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues. I welcome the fact that Jobcentre Plus—which was launched at the pathfinder office in Bridgend—is being rolled out to other offices in the Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taff and South East Wales districts. District managers across Wales are now in the process of developing service delivery plans as the first step in the full rollout of Jobcentre Plus to all 144 former Employment Service and Benefit Agency offices in Wales.

Mental Health Services

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Welsh Assembly Secretary for Health regarding the legislative framework for mental health services in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [67877]

Mr. Touhig: The draft Mental Health Bill is currently out to public consultation, as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process.

It has been the subject of a long process of consultation by the Government, starting with the Green Paper Reform of the Mental Health Act 1983 published in November 1999. The Assembly are statutory consultees, and will respond formally in due course.

New Deal

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues about the operation of the New Deal in Wales. [67882]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend meets Cabinet colleagues regularly to discuss a range of issues, including the operation of the New Deal in Wales. I am also pleased to have had the opportunity to discuss the operation of the New Deal with the Wales New Deal Task Force, at the meeting in Brecon on 16 May.

New Deal has been a huge success in Wales, particularly in helping young people back into work. 24,800 young Welsh people have secured jobs through New Deal since its launch and 80 per cent. of those have retained their jobs for 13 weeks or more. Today's labour market statistics show that there has been a 67 per cent. fall in youth JSA claimants since the launch of the New Deal programmes in Wales.

0870 Telephone Numbers

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his policy is on using 0870 telephone numbers for inquiries by the public to the Department and its agencies. [66197]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I do not currently envisage any need for my Department to use 0870 numbers.

Planning

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if she will make a statement regarding the planning powers of the National Assembly for Wales. [64711]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The National Assembly for Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 1999, as amended, sets out the land use planning powers of the National Assembly which were formerly vested in the Secretary of State for Wales. They include: the determination of policies; the issue of guidance to local authorities; the determination of planning appeals; and the 'calling-in', where necessary, of planning cases for decision by the Assembly.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of service delivery agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61639]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Department's service delivery agreement was published in November 2000. It sets out the Department's agreed strategy for delivering its objectives and the necessary internal procedures to achieve the best value for money. It is not possible to measure in a quantifiable and meaningful way *(a)* costs or *(b)* savings to the Department from pursuing service delivery agreement targets.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the EU directives relating to his Department which have been *(a)* amended and *(b)* repealed in 2002; [64948]

(2) if he will list the EU directives and regulations that have been implemented through his Department in 2002; and what was the cost of each to public funds. [64997]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 April 2002 (volume 383, column 522). My Department has not had responsibility for the implementation, amendment or repeal of any European Union directives since its creation in July 1999.

PRIME MINISTER

Government Scrutiny

Q11. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to strengthen the scrutiny of Government by the legislature arising from his meeting on 16 July with the Liaison Committee; and if he will make a statement. [67912]

The Prime Minister: I was pleased to answer questions from the Liaison Committee yesterday on a range of matters.

Channel Tunnel

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 10 July 2002, what action the Government will take against the French Government if a full and reliable service of 100 freight trains each way each week through the channel tunnel is not restored by September. [70034]

The Prime Minister: Both Governments are determined to see freight traffic returning to normal out of Calais Frethun rail depot by September. To help achieve that, the SRA will contribute around half of the euro 7.5 million cost of fixed security installations at the site. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will visit Frethun in September with his French colleague to confirm the effectiveness of security measures taken to ensure normal services.

Seaside Resorts

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) of 10 July, on visitor costs to seaside resorts, to what consultation he referred; and which options cover the question raised. [70297]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Raynsford) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Clark) on 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 680–81W. The specific options can be found on pages 65 and 66 of the consultation document.

Sustainable Energy

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister what action he has taken to establish a cross-Government sustainable energy unit. [70225]

The Prime Minister: The Government launched a consultation on energy policy on 14 May, following the publication of the Energy Review by the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit earlier this year. The Government plan to publish an Energy White Paper around the turn of the year. The consultation is being carried forward by a team drawn from DTI, DEFRA, and other Government Departments

The work on the White Paper will include further consideration of the PIU's recommendations for a Sustainable Energy Policy Unit and decisions on this will be made in the context of broader decisions on the White Paper as a whole.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Departmental Waste

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee, what the total volume of waste produced by the House was in each year since 1995, broken down into *(a)* paper, *(b)* plastic, *(c)* aluminium and *(d)* other; what proportion of waste from the House was (i) recycled, (ii) composted and (iii) re-used; and what plans she has to increase these proportions. [65618]

Mrs. Roe: The annual quantities of domestic waste removed from the parliamentary estate were as follows:

	Total waste[1] *(tonnes)*	*Recycled*	*Recovered (percentage)*
1995–96	—	684 tonnes	—
1996–97	—	777 tonnes	—
1997–98	—	818 tonnes	—
1998–99	—	874 tonnes	—
1999–2000	1,333	30%	100
2000–01	1,493	30%	100
2001–02	1,274	32%	100

[1] The total amount of waste was not recorded until financial year 1999–2000.

Under the contract which has operated since 1999–2000, paper, glass and cooking oil are separated for recycling. Other waste is incinerated to generate electricity; metals are extracted from the ash, which itself is used for road construction.

The House Administration has set the following targets for the financial year 2002–03:

	Percentage of total waste
All recycling	37
Paper and cardboard recycling	26
All recovery	100

For April 2002, the most recent month for which full information is available, the figures were:

	Tonnes	*Percentage of total waste*
Paper and cardboard recycling	19.9	22
Glass recycling	10.4	11
Oil recycling	0.6	0.7
All recycling	30.9	34
All recovery	91.4	100

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, if he will take steps to provide for those hon. Members who request it notification by e-mail of their nomination to serve on standing committees. [69762]

Mr. McWilliam: The Committee of Selection recently agreed to establish on a trial basis arrangements for notifying hon. Members by e-mail of the meetings of forthcoming Standing and Select Committees to which they have been appointed. The trial encompasses the First Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, European Standing Committee A and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee and its Sub-Committees. The purposes of the trial are to test the effectiveness, and acceptability to hon. Members, of using e-mail to notify them of Committee meetings and to assess the technical and resource implications of wider e-mail use. Recipients of e-mail notification messages have continued to receive notification cards, as before. I will invite the Committee of Selection to discuss the outcome of the trial and decide how to proceed early in the new session.

In addition, hon. Members can already receive e-mail notification of meetings of Standing Committees to which they have been appointed, on request to the Clerk of the Committee of Selection.

Website

Michael Fabricant: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the redesigned parliamentary website will be available. [71489]

Mr. Kirkwood: Subject to final security tests, the redesigned parliamentary website will replace the existing site on 23 July. The Content Management System associated with the redesign will allow staff to make further improvements in the future, so the site available on 23 July should be viewed as the start of a continuing process of development and improvement. Feedback on the site, using the newly provided feedback option, will be welcome.

TRANSPORT

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 781–82W, on rail safety, if he will list for each incident the *(a)* county, *(b)* Railtrack operating zone and *(c)* line where it took place; and if he will make a statement. [62179]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested, for the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2002, has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate's (HMRI's) accident database (SIGNAL), which came into operation in early 2000, records the county of the location of the incident and line route details. Prior to 2000 HMRI did not collect comprehensive details of the county line route. This could be provided at only disproportionate cost.

Health and Safety Commission

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he has *(a)* met and *(b)* corresponded with the Chair of the Health and Safety Commission in the last month; and what the subject was of each communication. [66249]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State met the Chair of the Health and Safety Commission and corresponded with him in relation to a number of departmental responsibilities for the Commission and the Health and Safety Executive.

Local Transport Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place copies of his Department's appraisal summary tables relating to the local transport plan annual progress reports in the Library. [66674]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not produce appraisal summary tables (ASTs) in relation to local transport plan annual progress reports.

ASTs are used as a tool under our appraisal criteria to set out the key consequences of a strategy, plan or intervention for tackling a particular issue using the Government's five key transport objectives, namely environment, safety, accessibility, economy and integration. Local transport plan annual progress reports are monitoring documents. For this reason we do not make ASTs a requirement for such reports.

Local authorities putting forward proposals for new major local transport schemes are required to produce ASTs for such schemes in line with our guidance on major scheme appraisal in local transport plans. Copies of ASTs accompanying new major scheme proposals due to be submitted by 31 July 2002 will be placed in the Library when received.

Network Rail

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport under the Network Rail structure, which body would be held responsible with regard to corporate manslaughter charges. [66594]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* If Network Rail successfully completes its purchase of the shares of Railtrack plc, any potential criminal or civil liability arising from past accidents would reside in the acquired Railtrack plc within the Network Rail group.

Transport Telephone Line

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made towards setting up one national telephone number on which the public can receive transport information for all forms of transport; and if he will make a statement. [69764]

Mr. Jamieson: "traveline", the national public transport information system, is now available throughout Great Britain. It provides route and timetable information for bus, coach, tram, underground, train, ferry and metro through a national-rate call to a single telephone number—0870 608 2 608. "traveline" is also available on the internet in some areas, and full coverage should be available by the end of the year.

The Department is developing Transport Direct, a comprehensive travel information and ticketing service which aims to provide the traveller with all the information they need before and during a journey anywhere in the UK, and with the ability to buy the associated tickets. The vision, which will take several years to be fully realised, covers travel by all modes—air, car, train, tram, tube, taxi, bus, coach, ferry, bike and on foot—plus, importantly, mixtures of these modes.

The centrepiece of Transport Direct will be a one-stop internet portal information point for all forms of travel information. In addition to schedules and details of any disruption on the chosen route, travellers will be able to look at maps of the area they are intending to visit. The initial portal service will go on-line during 2003.

M25

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the M25 between junctions 7 and 8 to be resurfaced. [70344]

Mr. Jamieson: The M25 between Junctions 7 and 8 was resurfaced as part of the M25 Junctions 6 to 8 widening works that were completed in 1997. We therefore have no immediate plans to resurface this section of the M25.

Roads

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on road maintenance in the UK in each year since 1997. [69525]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The figures (£ million) for maintenance expenditure in "England", since 1997 are given in the table. Road maintenance figures for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the devolved administrations.

£ million

	Motorways and trunk		*Local roads*		*London local roads capital*	*Transfer to TfL for former trunk roads*
	Capital	*Revenue*	*Revenue*	*Capital*		
1996–97	408	142	1,712	194	—	—
1997–98	410	172	1,658	200	—	—
1998–99	425	216	1,721	247	—	—
1999–2000	449	252	1,763	309	—	—
2000–01	462	274	1,783	476	—	—
2001–02	[1]421	[1]244	[1]1,905	[1]545	[1]32	[1]73

[1] Provisional out-turn figures

Special Purpose Vehicles

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply of 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 807W, on special purpose vehicles, if he will list the possible opportunities identified to which he refers; and if he will make a statement. [70638]

Mr. Jamieson: In addition to Chiltern and South Central, Special Purpose Vehicles may be appropriate for works on South West Trains, for the East London Line, for the East Coast Main Line and for other cases not yet identified.

Variable Speed Limits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the locations on Highways Agency roads where there are variable speed limits. [70646]

Mr. Jamieson: There are variable speed limits on the M25 between junctions 10 and 16, the A646 at Cliviger and Todmorden, the A5092 at Lowick, the A1 Gateshead and Newcastle Western Bypass between Birtley and Seaton Burn, the A47 at Thorney, and the A59 at Pemworthan.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many freight services used the channel tunnel in each month since January. [70658]

Mr. Jamieson: According to the operator, English, Welsh and Scottish Railways, the total number of freight services (inbound and outbound) using the channel tunnel since January is as follows:

2002	*Number of freight services*
January	329
February	357
March	[1]244
April	352
May	274
June	278
July	[2]154

[1] Reduced owing to two weekend closures for CTRL work

[2] To 14 July

Road Maintenance

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply of 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 359W, on road maintenance, if he will *(a)* list the ways in which his Department is working with local authorities and *(b)* provide a definition of an efficient management system. [70641]

Mr. Jamieson: The Roads Liaison Group (RLG) was set up in 2001, by the then DTLR. Its membership includes DfT, the Local Government Association, and representatives of national and local highway authorities in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. It is charged with advising on technical, financial, and administrative policy on the construction and maintenance of highways in the United Kingdom, and with progressing initiatives to further those objectives. These initiatives include the introduction of a computerised system of highway management (UKPMS), a revised version of the street lighting code of practice, and the development of a computerised bridge database and management system.

An efficient management system in the highway maintenance field is one that delivers infrastructure fit for the needs of users while providing good value for the resources used.

New Road Schemes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the local authority road schemes which have been provisionally accepted by his Department for funding. [70619]

Mr. Jamieson: The following local authority road schemes (listed by region) have been fully or provisionally approved by my Department under the local transport plan process:

North East

Approved:

A689 Sedgefield to Wynyard Improvement (Durham)

South Stockton Link (Stockton-on-Tees)

Provisionally Approved:

Eastern Transport Corridor (Darlington)

A688 Wheatley Hill to Bowburn Link (Durham)

A167 Chilton Bypass (Durham)

Pegswood Bypass (Northumberland)

Scotswood Road Improvement (Newcastle)

Southern Radial Route (Sunderland)

North West

Approved:

Manchester/Salford Inner Relief Road (Greater Manchester/Salford)

Provisionally Approved:

Alderley Edge Bypass (Cheshire)

Carlisle Northern Development Route (Cumbria)

Glossup Spur (Tameside)

Hall Lane (Liverpool)

Bridgefoot Bypass (Warrington)

Yorkshire/Humber

Approved:

Leeds Inner Relief Road Stage 7 (Leeds)

East Leeds Link Road (Leeds)

Coalfields Link Road Phases 2 & 3 (Barnsley)

Provisionally Approved:

A6023 Denaby Main Diversion (Doncaster)

Scarborough Integrated Transport Scheme (North Yorkshire)

Cudworth Bypass (Barnsley)

A57 M1 to Todwick Crossroads (Rotherham)

West Bawtry Road Improvement (Rotherham)

Sheffield Inner Relief Road Phase 2 (Sheffield)

Hemsworth—A1 Link (Wakefield)

Glasshoughton Link Road (Wakefield)

East Midlands

Approved (and open to traffic):

Ashby Bypass (Leicestershire)

A6002/A6007 Coventry Lane Improvement (Nottinghamshire)

Provisionally Approved:

A6096 Ilkeston-Awsworth Link (Derbyshire)

Markham Employment Growth Zone (Derbyshire)

A47 Earl Shilton Bypass (Leicestershire)

A607 Rearsby Bypass (Leicestershire)

A158/C541 Coastal Access Improvements (Lincolnshire)

A1073 Improvement (Lincolnshire/Peterborough)

A617 Mansfield Ashfield Regeneration Route (Nottinghamshire)

A612 Gedling Integrated Transport Scheme (Nottinghamshire)

Oakham Bypass (Rutland)

West Midlands

Approved:

A53 Hodnet Bypass (Shropshire)

Biddulph Bypass (Staffordshire)

Burntwood Bypass (Staffordshire)

Wyre Piddle Bypass (Worcestershire)

Provisionally Approved:

A38 Selly Oak Link Road (Birmingham)

Rugeley Bypass (Staffordshire)

Hanley-Bentilee Link (Stoke)

Barford Bypass (Warwickshire)

Rugby Western Bypass (Warwickshire)

A38 Northfield Regeneration Scheme (Birmingham)

Owen St. Level Crossing Relief Road (Sandwell)

Cradley Heath Town Centre (Sandwell)

Eastern

Approved:

Great Leighs Bypass (Essex)

Broome and Ellingham Bypass (Norfolk)

Provisionally Approved:

Ridgmont Bypass and Woburn Link (Bedfordshire)

Bedford Western Bypass (Bedfordshire)

A1198 Papworth Everard Bypass (Cambridgeshire)

A142 Fordham Bypass (Cambridgeshire)

Baldock Bypass (Hertfordshire)

East Luton Corridor (Luton)

Nar-Ouse Regeneration Project (Norfolk)

Stowmarket Relief Road (Suffolk)

South Lowestoft Relief Road (Suffolk)

West Thurrock Riverside Regeneration Scheme (Thurrock)

South East

Provisionally Approved:

Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western Bypass (Buckinghamshire)

East Kent Access Phase 1 (Kent)

A228 Main Road to Ropers Lane (Phase 1) (Medway)

Bletchley Link (Milton Keynes)

M4 J11 Improvement (Reading)

Kiln Lane Link (Surrey)

South West

Approved:

Bridgewater Northern Distributor (Somerset)

Provisionally Approved:

A39 Camelford Bypass (Cornwall)

Barnstaple Western Bypass (Devon)

Poole Harbour Bridge (Poole)

N.W. Taunton Package (Somerset)

Weymouth Relief Road (Dorset)

A350 Semington-Melksham Diversion (Wiltshire)

Brunel Link & Harnham Relief Road (Wiltshire).

Traffic Forecasts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply of 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 975W, on traffic forecasts, from whom his Department has commissioned work; what the scope of this work is; what the cost of work commissioned is; and what the timetable for this work is. [70640]

Mr. Jamieson: Work on different aspects of a multi-modal modelling and forecasting capability has been commissioned from:

Faber Maunsell

Institute for Transport Studies, Leeds University

Marcial Echenique and Partners

MDS Transmodal

TRL (formerly the Transport Research Laboratory)

WS Atkins.

This work has included:

a review of requirements and approach,

development of rail and highway network models,

development of a central model of travellers' mode choice decisions,

development of a national model of freight movements, and

updating of previous work on the impact of different transport policies, to be consistent with the new framework.

The resulting modelling system incorporates elements of the forecasting framework previously used to inform development of the 10-year plan. Work has included developing interfaces between various model components, and general integration and testing.

The total value of the contracts awarded is of the order of £1.38 million.

An initial version of the new framework is operational and being tested. Certain further improvements are being incorporated, and a programme of longer-term development has been identified.

Dangerous Substances

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EU Advisory Committee on the Control and Reduction of Pollution Caused by the Discharge of Hydrocarbons and other Dangerous Substances at Sea is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70576]

Mr. Jamieson: The Advisory Committee on the Control and Reduction of Pollution Caused by the Discharge of Hydrocarbons and other Dangerous Substances at Sea (known as ACPH) no longer exists and has been replaced by the Management Committee on Marine Pollution, which was established under Decision No. 2850/2000/EC of 20–12–2000 of the European Parliament and the Council. This set up a Community framework for co-operation in the field of accidental or deliberate marine pollution.

The committee is scheduled to meet on 4 October 2002 in Brussels. Officials from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), part of my Department, represent the UK on the committee. However, my officials consult the Scottish Executive on agenda items in which it might have an interest in accordance with our concordat with the devolved Administrations.

Roadworks

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a full set of roadworks in 2002–03 area maps published by the Roadworks and Traffic Information Unit of the Highways Agency. [70778]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency does not have a Roadworks and Traffic Information Unit.

The Highways Agency provides, fortnightly, an electronic Current Roadworks Information Bulletin on its website. This is a listing of planned roadworks on England's strategic road network. This information is not provided in any other format. Road users are given advanced warning of major road works by a variety of methods.

Departmental Reorganisation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library his Department's last accommodation requirements review. [70770]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport is assessing its future accommodation requirements in the light of the machinery of Government changes in June 2002 and will be reviewing the position in the autumn. No documents are currently available.

Highways Agency

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent changes *(a)* have taken place and *(b)* are planned relating to (i) the organisation of the Highways Agency and [illegible] the Highways Agency website; and if he will make a statement. [70748]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is as follows:

(a) (i) In 2001 the Highways Agency established the Operations, Network Strategy and Corporate Directorates as part of an internal reorganisation, primarily to help improve its focus on delivering operational services.

(a) (ii) As part of that reorganisation the Highways Agency is currently migrating some staff and functions from London, increasing its regional presence so that most of the Agency's staff and functions are located close to its customers.

(b) (i) The Highways Agency's website was redesigned in April 2002. The changes were made to enable the website to better meet its key customers' requirements and make the website generally more accessible.

(b) (ii) The Highways Agency's website will continue to evolve to improve the supply of information about the Highways Agency's network and developments.

Utility Costs

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what the change in cost of utilities has been arising from the pilot study of the working of section 74A of the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991; [70378]

(2) what his estimate is of the likely annual change in cost of utilities to the average household following the national implementation of section 74A of the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991; [70377]

(3) if he will place in the Library a copy of the assessment of the pilot study of the working of section 74A of the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991; and when this will be available. [70379]

Mr. Jamieson: Pilot schemes to test powers under which local authorities can charge utility companies "lane rental", under section 74A of the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991, began on 4 March 2002 in Camden and Middlesbrough. No decision has yet been taken on whether to make these powers available nationally. However, the Government have appointed Halcrow to measure the impact of lane rental, in terms of its effect on the level of disruption caused by utility works, the costs which it imposes on those utilities, and the possible impact on utility customers.

Halcrow are due to deliver their first report to my Department, covering the first few months of the scheme, later this year. I will arrange for copies of their report to be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Ladbroke Grove Inquiry

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many train operating companies have not implemented recommendation 69 of the Ladbroke Grove public inquiry report. [69868]

Mr. Jamieson: Recommendation 69 was that

> "the provision on board of explanatory information about the emergency facilities of individual trains is endorsed".

The industry has reported to the Health and Safety Executive that currently four train operating companies (TOCs) have not fully implemented this recommendation. However, all TOCs will comply with recommendation 69 by September 2002.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he takes to verify that Lord Cullen's recommendations in the Ladbroke Grove public inquiry report have been implemented. [69867]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have asked the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) to ensure that all recommendations are implemented. HSC published progress reports covering the six-month recommendations from Lord Cullen's 1 and 2 reports on 20 March and 23 May, respectively. In the autumn, HSC will publish a report that will cover progress on all 295 railway safety recommendations arising from the recent railway public inquiries.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much revenue has been raised by vehicle excise duty in each of the last five years. [70182]

Mr. Jamieson: The figures, in millions and net of rebates and refunds, are as follows:

	£ million
1996–98	4,252
1997–98	4,487
1998–99	4,855
1999–2000	4,738
2000–01	4,941

River Thames

Alan Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the recommendations made by Lord Justice Clarke to increase safety on the River Thames. [71290]

Mr. Jamieson: On 29 November last year I announced that I had, that day, placed in the Libraries of the House an updated summary of the action taken on each of Lord Justice Clarke's 74 recommendations. I have placed a further update in the Libraries of the House today.

Roads (At-work Accidents)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what targets the Government have set for reducing death and injuries to Government employees at work while on the road. [66669]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply as Minister for the Civil Service.

No specific targets have been set for reducing deaths and injuries to civil servants at work while on the road. The Government and Health and Safety Commission have, however, set a broad based target to reduce the rate of all fatal and major injury accidents by 10 per cent. by 2010. This target covers all accidents reportable under the Reporting of Injuries, Deaths and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995. This includes the reporting of accidents to employees at work on the road, but not generally work-related traffic accidents.

A high level forum has also been established to explore ways in which the civil service can act as an exemplar for reducing all accidents to its employees.

TREASURY

VAT

Alan Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much irrecoverable VAT was paid, in each of the last three years for which information is available, in respect of the activities of the university museums and galleries which have collections that have been designated by Resource as outstanding. [70039]

John Healey *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* There is no requirement for such bodies to record VAT that cannot be recovered. As a consequence this information is unavailable.

Mis-selling

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints of mis-selling of *(a)* endowment policies and *(b)* other financial products by (i) tied agencies and (ii) independent financial advisers have been made to the Financial Services Authority in each of the last five years. [70370]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services Authority, as regulator, makes rules for IFAs and for tied agents. These include rules designed to prevent mis-selling and rules which require regulated firms to follow specified complaints procedures. Where firms are unable to resolve complaints themselves, FSA rules require them to allow complainants to pursue their complaints with the Financial Ombudsman Service and to comply promptly with an ombudsman's decision.

The FOS has provided the following figures for complaints handled either by itself or by its predecessor bodies.

Mortgage Endowment Complaints

	IFAs	Percentage	Tied Agents	Percentage	Total
2001–02	2,312	15.84	12,283	84.16	14,595
2000–01	[1]—	—	[1]—	—	9,067
1999–2000	[1]—	—	[1]—	—	3,135
1998–99	[1]—	—	[1]—	—	2,856
1997–98	n/a	—	n/a	—	2,751

[1] See table 3.

Other investment related financial products (personal pension plans, whole of life/non mortgage-linked endowments and other 'packaged' investment products)

	IFAs	Percentage	Tied agents	Percentage	Total
2001–02	1,952	15.76	10.434	84.24	12,386
2000–01	[1]—	—	[1]—	—	8,019
1999–2000	[1]—	—	[1]—	—	6,112
1998–99	[1]—	—	[1]—	—	5,642
1997–98	n/a	—	n/a		4,042

[1] See table 3.

Table 3. Figures for the percentage split between IFAs and tied agents across the range of investment related complaints are as follows[1]

	IFAs (percentage)	Tied agents (percentage)
2001–02	15.8	84.2
2000–01	13.9	86.1
1999–2000	14.9	85.1
1998–99	15.5	84.5

[1] Breakdown figures are not available for the separate categories of investment complaints.

Pharmaceutical Companies

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tax incentives exist to encourage donations of medicines to developing countries by UK-based pharmaceutical companies. [70495]

John Healey: Clause 55 of the Finance Bill 2002 will remove a potential tax charge on corporate donations of medical supplies and equipment made for humanitarian purposes. It will also make the cost of delivering those gifts tax deductible and will apply to goods donated on or after 1 April 2002. Similar tax treatment is already available under section 83A of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 for gifts in kind made to United Kingdom charities by businesses.

Statistics Commission

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Statistics Commission's annual report and accounts for 2001–02 will be published. [71293]

Ruth Kelly: The Statistics Commission's annual report and accounts, covering the 2001–02 financial year, are being published today having been laid before both Houses of Parliament. Copies are available in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office.

Imported Goods (VAT)

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the consultation on the VAT treatment of imported goods, announced in the Budget. [71292]

John Healey: Customs have today issued a consultation document entitled "Easing the Impact of VAT on Business: Consultation on the Delayed Accounting for VAT at Import Scheme (DAVIS)". Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. Responses to the consultation are invited by 31 October 2002.

Corporate Accounting

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to reform corporate accounting measures; [69753]

(2) what *(a)* British and *(b)* EU legislation is in place regarding corporate accounting measures; and what plans the Government have to change that legislation. [69752]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The White Paper on Modernising Company Law, published on 16 July 2002, sets out the Government's proposals for modernising company accounting. Copies are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Fourth Council Directive 78/660/EC, the Seventh Council Directive 83/349/EEC, Directive 86/635/EEC and directive 91/674/EEC set out the requirements in respect of the preparation of annual and consolidated accounts of companies, banks and insurance undertakings. On 3 June 2002, the European Commission issued a draft directive designed to modernise the first three of these directives; negotiations commenced this month.

The European Regulation on International Accounting Standards was adopted on 7 June 2002. It requires companies admitted to trading on regulated markets in the EU to prepare their consolidated accounts on the basis of accounting standards issued by the International Accounting Standards Board, from January 2005. The regulation gives member states the option to extend its application to other companies; the Government intend to consult on this in due course.

Departmental Appointments

Mr. Forth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* taskforces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33879]

Ruth Kelly: *(a)* The Chancellor is responsible for three public bodies.

Royal Mint Advisory Committee on the design of coins, medals, seals and decorations

Professor Sir Christopher Frayling was appointed as chairman in February 2001. Members of the committee are appointed on a seven yearly basis and are unpaid.

Public Services Productivity Panel

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury chairs the panel.

Statistics Commission

Sir John Kingman was appointed as chairman in May 2000 and receives an annual salary of £28,000 per annum.

Further information about these bodies is available on the Treasury website.

We have nothing to report under categories *(b)*, *(c)* and *(d)*. The Bank of England is a public corporation and does not fall into the categories *(a)* to *(d)* however the relevant details are:

Court of the Bank of England

The chairman of the Court of Directors is the Governor of the Bank of England, whose present salary as Governor is £250,567. Sir Edward George has held this post since 1 July 1993, and was reappointed for a second five-year term on 1 July 1998.

(e) Information on the number, remit and membership of taskforces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period between 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999.

A second report was published on 27 July 2000, and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. A third report was published on 27 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report: "Taskforces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews", which was issued in October 2001, covers the period of the financial year 2000–01. Copies of these reports are available in the Library.

Since the publication of the last annual report, a number of significant reviews have been commissioned and have issued reports. These include:

Howard Davies report on "Enterprise and the Economy in Education", published on 14 February 2002;

Derek Wanless' report—"Securing Our Future Health: Taking a Long-Term View", published on 17 April 2002;

Ron Sandler's report on his "Review of Retail Savings", published on 9 July 2002.

Information on the political affiliation of chairs of the bodies listed is not collected. Membership and voting behaviour is a matter on which all citizens have the right to privacy.

Correspondence

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to letters from the hon. Member for Workington concerning correspondence from Mr. Proctor, a Cockermouth constituent. [57294]

Ruth Kelly: I have replied to my hon. Friend, and apologise for the considerable delay which occurred while we listened to all interested parties and resolved the issue.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held on 12 July; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [70624]

Dawn Primarolo: I attended the ECOFIN meeting on 12 July.

The Presidency introduced their work programme for ECOFIN. I and a number of other Ministers, stressed the importance of ECOFIN discussing the economic and budgetary aspects of enlargement.

ECOFIN then had an orientation debate on the Commission's Communication on company taxation "Towards an Internal Market without tax obstacles".

I stressed that we could consider some of the proposed targeted measures based on existing directive but could not accept harmonisation of the corporate tax base or rate. The Presidency asked the Commission to take forward further work, concentrating on the proposed short term targeted measures.

ECOFIN adopted conclusions on financial services, agreeing to extend the Lamfalussy procedures for securities legislation to the banking and insurance sectors. There will be further discussion of this at the October ECOFIN. ECOFIN agreed a mandate for an inter-institutional monitoring group to report on the progress of the Lamfalussy procedures in the securities markets. The Council also noted a brief oral update from the Commission on implications of the current market situation for financial services.

The chairman of the Economic Policy Committee (EPC) gave an oral report to the Council, and presented two EPC papers on the relative merits of different pension systems. ECOFIN invited the Commission and the Economic Policy Committee to continue their work, focusing on the long term sustainability of pensions systems. There will be a joint Commission-Council report on pensions to the spring 2003 European Council.

The Commission made a short presentation to the Council on public finances in EMU.

ECOFIN noted the Commission's annual report on the protection of the Community's financial interests and the fight against fraud, and will discuss this again once the report has been considered by the relevant committees.

ECOFIN agreed conclusions on Council reform as a follow up to the Seville European Council, and on methods of evaluating output gaps.

No votes were taken at this meeting.

EU Committees (Scottish Executive Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the European Securities Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70903]

Ruth Kelly: The European Securities Committee is next due to meet on 19 and 20 September 2002. The UK is represented by an official from HM Treasury. Financial regulation is not a devolved matter. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not attended the Committee.

Tax Credits (Advertising)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the advertising campaigns for *(a)* the working families tax credit, *(b)* the disabled person's tax credit, *(c)* the children's tax credit, *(d)* the child care tax credit and *(e)* the baby tax credit, have cost; and what the total annual spend on advertising each of these tax credits has been in each year since 1999–2000. [68478]

Dawn Primarolo: The total campaign costs for tax credits are as follows.

£

Campaign	*Total campaign costs*
1999–2000	
Working families' tax credit	13,800,000
2000–01	
Working families' tax credit	7,184,000
Disabled person's tax credit	219,000
Children's tax credit	7,161,000
2001–02	
Working families' tax credit	2,546,000
Disabled person's tax credit	957,000
Children's tax credit	364,000

Note:

All figures include advertising, VAT and other promotional activity such as freephone helpline.

The 1999–2000 campaign costs for disabled person's tax credit were included within the working families' tax credit total campaign expenditure. The cost of obtaining a further breakdown of the total campaign costs between the two credits for that first year of their launch would be disproportionate.

The child care tax credit is a component of working families' and disabled person's tax credit and the baby tax credit is a component of the children's tax credit. Figures for child care tax credit and baby tax credit expenditure are not, therefore, accounted for separately.

For advertising costs alone I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1394W.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Manchester City Council

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he last met the leader of Manchester city council. [64226]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I last met the leader of Manchester city council on 25 September 2001.

Special Advisers

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many special advisers serve in his Department; and what the total of their annual salaries is. [67551]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has three special adviser posts, two and a half of which are currently filled. It is not normal practice to release details of salaries paid.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff have contributed to his Department's input to the spending review. [68690]

Mr. Leslie: The spending review involves a comprehensive assessment of the Department's performance, priorities and resource requirements and a wide range of staff make a contribution.

Homelessness

Brian White: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people were accepted as homeless in each of the unitary authorities in each of the last five years; and how many were accommodated in bed and breakfast establishments. [69345]

Mr. McNulty: Summary information on activity under statutory homelessness provisions is reported to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by local authorities in England. This includes the number of households accepted under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, and the number of these households resident in various types of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast hotels, at the end of each quarter.

National and regional figures are presented in a quarterly Statistical Release, and an accompanying Supplementary Table also summarises reported information at local authority level. Both of these are available in the Library and via the ODPM website.

A summary of available information for the 46 unitary authorities in England is presented in the following table.

	Households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need during year					*Home'ess households in bed and breakfast accommodation as at end March*					
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Bath and North East Somerset	405	299	294	269	364	10	3	5	4	27	24
Blackburn with Darwen	444	187	198	182	232	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Blackpool	89	98	96	118	132	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Bournemouth	257	281	393	496	512	16	14	[1]—	76	102	96
Bracknell Forest	62	55	73	65	59	2	6	4	8	15	3
Brighton and Hove	914	631	868	925	1,112	135	142	171	248	282	291
Bristol	1,621	1,408	974	1,153	1,444	44	49	86	65	96	149
Darlington	87	51	72	211	197	[1]—	8	2	6	1	1
Derby	1,114	1,245	1,258	1,065	1,085	[1]—	1	[1]—	3	1	1
East Riding of Yorkshire	244	281	307	305	289	4	1	[1]—	[1]—	2	1
Halton	308	163	147	126	216	3	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	5	[2]—
Hartlepool	209	161	131	223	240	1	[1]—	3	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Herefordshire	324	187	254	304	278	1	8	11	7	7	11
Isle of Wight	283	322	270	296	297	27	56	71	54	68	72
Kingston upon Hull	273	114	153	230	270	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—
Leicester	1,021	282	747	692	774	1	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—
Luton	260	195	209	229	261	10	5	4	5	33	25
Medway	262	238	113	170	355	[1]—	1	3	16	58	52
Middlesbrough	472	484	406	408	414	7	6	7	2	2	12
Milton Keynes	559	578	537	613	1,035	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	2	2
North East Lincolnshire	234	163	131	87	95	[1]—	2	2	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
North Lincolnshire	166	230	260	249	259	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1
North Somerset	215	214	362	318	343	7	14	1	5	23	27
Nottingham City	1,074	908	943	881	880	7	2	[2]—	[2]—	6	[2]—
Peterborough	169	125	95	127	170	5	[1]—	3	8	16	3
Plymouth	791	940	911	1,019	1,112	17	24	36	70	55	94
Poole	135	153	134	125	170	[1]—	40	48	43	60	42
Portsmouth	559	413	670	547	529	18	19	14	20	18	21
Reading	590	583	464	433	468	3	3	2	7	31	36
Redcar and Cleveland	657	479	505	419	439	54	45	32	21	50	[2]—
Rutland	24	16	10	6	10	1	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Slough	142	148	213	249	291	[1]—	1	8	14	16	22
South Gloucestershire	401	403	392	403	570	31	47	47	74	128	142
Southampton	537	584	663	758	686	3	1	[1]—	[1]—	1	7
Southend-on-Sea	71	77	83	91	121	[1]—	3	3	21	50	24
Stockton-on-Tees	390	158	199	242	287	3	[1]—	7	2	1	9
Stoke-on-Trent	232	171	163	193	233	[1]—	1	[1]—	1	[1]—	[1]—
Swindon	432	408	377	255	277	[2]—	[2]—	10	9	14	7
Telford and Wrekin	374	341	341	316	352	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Thurrock	88	174	163	130	186	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	5	[2]—
Torbay	184	253	226	185	139	5	6	11	4	13	[2]—
Warrington	371	295	215	273	335	[1]—	[1]—	3	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—
West Berkshire	237	225	209	204	169	[1]—	1	1	6	11	[1]—
Windsor and Maidenhead	250	105	42	77	49	6	12	20	26	8	5
Wokingham	136	112	122	143	94	1	[1]—	2	1	16	[2]—
York	196	280	393	282	495	13	18	26	24	68	41

[1] Denotes nil (0)

[2] Denotes data not reported

Sources:

Acceptances: ODPM annual Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns

Bed and breakfast: ODPM quarterly P1E housing activity and HIP returns

Social Exclusion

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action he is taking to identify deprived communities at sub-ward level to ensure that they are not excluded from future Government programmes to combat poverty and social exclusion. [69511]

Mr. McNulty: The Government's Neighbourhood Statistics initiative will aim to provide deprivation-related data at sub-ward level in the future.

In addition, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will shortly award a contract to investigate how the Indices of Deprivation 2000 (the current measure used to identify deprived neighbourhoods) may be further developed and, where possible, updated.

As part of this contract, the researchers will assess the potential for further developing the indices to sub-ward level.

Fire Services (Radio Communications)

Geraint Davies: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what effect the time scale proposed for the procurement of a national radio communications system for the fire services in England and Wales will have on the ability of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority to have in place a new radio system by December 2005. [70001]

Mr. Leslie: The project to procure a national radio communications system for the fire service is now under way. A prior indicative notice was published under EU procurement rules on 11 July, and the project team are taking forward work on the development of project plans and system specification. We expect to publish a formal notice in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities by the end of this year. The new national procurement strategy will deliver new radio systems to fire authorities, including the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, from 2005 up to December 2007—but with higher levels of resilience and interoperability than planned under the previous regional procurement.

Haven Gateway Partnership

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will take steps to ensure that the Haven Gateway Partnership is treated as a legitimate stakeholder when economic and social regeneration initiatives and policies are being considered affecting the eastern region. [69988]

Mr. Raynsford: I recognise the important role that the Haven Gateway Partnership, working with the East of England Development Agency and other partners, is playing in raising the economic profile of the area, and it will continue to be consulted about policy proposals and initiatives in the east of England region that are relevant to that role.

Residential Property Conversions

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many existing dwellings were converted into multi-occupancy dwellings in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* Hertfordshire in each year since 1981. [69770]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many non-residential properties were converted into residential dwellings in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* Hertfordshire in each year from 1981. [69769]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Coalfield Regeneration Trust

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much money from *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other Government Departments has been granted to the Coalfield Regeneration Trust since February 2001. [70263]

Mr. McNulty: Since February 2001 the Coalfields Regeneration Trust has received the following sums of money for England:

(a) From ODPM—£26,107,681; and

(b) From DCMS (Heritage Lottery Fund)—£69,064.

The Trust has also received European funds of £1,272,112.

As announced in February 2001, from 1 April 2002 another £45 million will be made available from the ODPM to the trust over the three years to 2005.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action he is taking to restrict the erection of telecommunications masts in residential areas. [70159]

Mr. McNulty: Mobile phone mast development in residential areas is subject to the normal telecommunications planning arrangements in place throughout England, set out in Part 24 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (GPDO). These arrangements were significantly strengthened last year and include improved requirements for consulting local people about mast proposals. The changes to the GPDO were underpinned by revised guidance, set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 8, Telecommunications.

The Stewart Report on Mobile Phones and Health, published in May 2000, did not recommend that the erection of mobile phone masts should be restricted in residential areas and we have no plans to introduce such a restriction.

Unadopted Roads

Mark Tami: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance he gives to local authorities regarding the adoption of *(a)* unadopted and *(b)* un-made roads. [70397]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

My Department does not give formal guidance to local authorities regarding the adoption of unadopted or unmade roads. However, the governing legislation applying to the adoption of unadopted roads is contained in sections 205–218 of the Highways Act 1980. Any decision to adopt these roads which are not highways maintainable at the public expense is a matter for the local highway authority.

Mark Tami: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance he provides to local authorities regarding the provision of services to properties located on unadopted roads. [70398]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government do not provide any specific guidance to local authorities relating to waste collection or street cleaning on unadopted roads.

However, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 places a duty on each waste collection authority to arrange for the collection of household waste in its area, except where the waste is situated at a place which, in the opinion of the authority, is so isolated or inaccessible that the cost of collecting it would be unreasonably high.

The Act also puts a duty on local authorities and statutory undertakers to keep their relevant land, including roads, clear of litter and refuse. However, this duty does not apply to unadopted roads as they are not 'relevant land' as specified under section 86 of the Act. The clearance of litter on these roads is therefore the responsibility of the residents on that road.

Abandoned Cars

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what date he sent new guidelines on dealing with abandoned cars to local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [70005]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

New Regulations (Statutory Instrument 2002–746) to reduce the time after which local authorities can remove vehicles abandoned on the highway came into force on 9 April. These were sent on 11 April under a letter of guidance to the chief executive of each waste collection authority, waste disposal authority and joint waste disposal authority in England.

Regulatory Accountability

Brian Cotter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many regulatory proposals the ministerial panel on regulatory accountability has scrutinised in the last 12 months. [69678]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

It is established practice under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information that information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committee business is not disclosed.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Energy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received concerning *(a)* current and *(b)* projected expenditure on nuclear energy publicity campaigns. [69447]

Mr. Wilson: None.

Nuclear Waste

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what testing procedures are employed, and at what cost, to ensure the safety of storage flasks used in the transportation of nuclear waste. [69038]

Mr. Wilson: In the UK, flasks used for the transport of radioactive material are approved by the Department of Transport to all relevant national and international regulations based on the recommendations of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The IAEA's recommendations, "Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material, 1996 Edition (Revised)", contain very stringent design test requirements that all packages, including flasks, must meet.

The costs associated with testing such flask designs and the flasks themselves, are borne by the industry.

Nuclear Security

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent measures she has implemented to increase the Office of Civil Nuclear Security's anti-terrorist inspections at nuclear facilities. [69450]

Mr. Wilson: As stated in his recent Annual report, the Director of Civil Nuclear Security is recruiting extra staff to strengthen oversight and inspection at civil nuclear facilities.

Nuclear Plant Construction

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what sites are being considered for the construction of nuclear plants. [69443]

Mr. Wilson: None. In common with all generation options, the initiative for bringing forward proposals to construct new plant lies with the market and the generating companies. British Energy and BNFL have said they have no current plans for such proposals.

Energy Industry (Hackers)

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations have been made to her Department regarding *(a)* the level of hacker activity against the energy industry and *(b)* the origin of such activity. [69453]

Mr. Wilson: No recent representations have been received on these topics.

Energy (Economic Competitiveness)

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received and by what measures she assesses the economic competitiveness of (i) nuclear, (ii) renewable, (iii) coal and (iv) fossil-fuel energy. [69455]

Mr. Wilson: Following the Performance and Innovation Unit's Energy Review, the Government launched a consultation on energy policy on 14 May with a view to publishing a White Paper around the turn of the year. The consultation document states that competitiveness is a key objective of energy policy.

We shall shortly be posting the early replies which we have received to the consultation on the DTI's website, and a number of these have raised issues related to the competitiveness of different energy sources.

A key measure of competitiveness is relative cost but other aspects which may be relevant include market share, openness to trade, measures of productivity and levels of innovation.

Our view of the competitiveness of particular fuels is influenced by the extent to which external factors such as the impact on the environment or security are significant and have been taken into account.

Uranium Mining

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry where the uranium mines are from which the United Kingdom has obtained uranium since 1997. [69441]

Mr. Wilson: This is a matter for the companies concerned.

Fuel Companies

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment the Government have made of the trend in the number of transfers of fuel supply by energy companies without customers' consent. [68821]

Mr. Wilson: The number of complaints about the erroneous transfer of gas supply received by Energywatch rose from 2,511—one and a half per 1,000 transfers—in January to June 2001 to 4,204—two per 1,000 transfers—in July to December 2001. In the same period, the number of complaints about the erroneous transfer of electricity supply rose from 2,905—one per 1,000 transfers—to 4,837—one and a half per 1,000 transfers. Complaints about marketing for 2001 also include involuntary transfers that occurred as a result of the sales process. The number of gas marketing complaints rose from 1,201 in January to June 2001 to 1,753 in July to December 2001. In the same period, electricity marketing complaints rose from 1,776 to 3,116. Energywatch complaints figures will shortly incorporate erroneous transfers arising from both administrative or data error and mis-selling. Although involuntary transfers remain very low in relation to the level of transfer activity—there were almost 1 million registrations in 2001—the Government are concerned about the distress and inconvenience caused by erroneous transfer of energy supply. They welcomed the Erroneous Transfer Customer Charter, which came into force on 1 January 2002. They have also encouraged the industry in its development of an action plan to address mis-selling, which should remove a key cause of erroneous transfers.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will require fuel companies staff to be trained in consumer protection laws which relate to the fuel industry. [68823]

Mr. Wilson: The gas and electricity supply industry is working with the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) and Energywatch on an action plan to address the problem of sales malpractice. Among other things, this will involve the establishment of an industry-wide code of practice. Six companies will also pilot the Electricity Association's EnergySure scheme, which was launched on 15 July. This will ensure that all agents are trained to an agreed, externally monitored standard. It will specifically require that sales agents understand the range of general and specific regulations that protect energy consumers.

Fuel Supply Transfers

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what sanctions exist for energy companies which carry out transfers of fuel supply without customers' consent. [68822]

Mr. Wilson: The treatment of erroneous transfers is governed by the Erroneous Transfer Customer Charter, which was developed by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) and Energywatch. The charter, which is intended to improve co-operation between suppliers with a view to resolving problems quickly, with minimal involvement on the consumer's part, was agreed by the industry last year and came into force on 1 January 2002. OFGEM will review the industry's performance against the charter in October 2002, and has made clear that, if the industry's performance against the charter is inadequate, it will consider the modification of standard licence conditions or the introduction of guaranteed standards of performance, which carry an automatic right to compensation.

Where erroneous transfers arise from mis-selling, the mis-selling may be dealt with under the appropriate consumer legislation or under condition 48 of the gas and electricity supply licence—the marketing licence condition. OFGEM may take a wide range of action in respect of breaches of licence conditions, including levying financial penalties.

Consignia

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 988W, on Consignia, if she will list the total severance pay, broken down by *(a)* redundancy pay, *(b)* pension contribution and *(c)* other payments, for (i) Neville Bain and (ii) Mike Kinski; what notice period was served by each; and if she will make a statement. [67532]

Mr. Timms: Neville Bain's employment ceased at the end of a fixed-term contract. No redundancy or other payment was provided. Mr. Bain is in receipt of a pension in accordance with his contract. There was no explicit notice period other than the duration of the fixed-term contract.

Mike Kinski resigned his Directorship. There was no notice period applicable, no redundancy or other payment, and no pension entitlement.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has made to Consignia in relation to their proposal to charge businesses for deliveries prior to 9 am. [70367]

Mr. Timms: None. Consignia's proposals are an operational matter for the company, who will consult fully with the regulator, the Postal Services Commission, and the consumer body, Postwatch.

Post Office

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on small businesses in rural areas of *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England of the proposal to impose charges for delivery of mail prior to 9 am. [70368]

Mr. Timms: None. Consignia's proposals are an operational matter for the company, who will consult fully with the regulator, the Postal Services Commission, and the consumer body, Postwatch.

Postal Services

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the implications for United Kingdom postal services of the decision of the European Commission that Deutsche Post should repay illegal state aid. [64495]

Mr. Timms: The Government have not yet studied the details surrounding the Commission's decision in this case. However in general we welcome the Commission's determination to tackle state aid which illegally distorts competitive markets. The decision will have no impact on our proposed funding for the post office network and mails business as this will be dictated solely by the need to ensure that the company continues to perform its vital social and economic role in a context of growing competition in postal services. Such objectives are legitimate in state aids terms and we will ensure that any aid or investment we provide will be fully compatible with the European rules.

Post Office (Disabled Access)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether provision will be made in the review of the urban and rural post office network for the provision of disabled access for those offices that need them. [68070]

Mr. Timms: As a matter of general policy, provision for disabled access to post offices will be taken into account in reviewing the future structure of the network. Compliance with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act at any specific post office location is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. in respect of Crown offices and of the individual subpostmaster in respect of sub post offices.

I have been informed by Post Office Ltd. that subpostmasters have been provided with packs enabling them to audit their own offices for Disability Discrimination Act compliance and that advice will be provided by Post Office Ltd. throughout this process.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list, by region, the post offices that are accessible by the disabled; and what proportion these post offices comprise of the total in their respective region. [68533]

Mr. Timms: Accessibility for the disabled at post offices is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. together with individual subpostmasters and I have asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Post Office (Casual Workers)

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what checks were carried out by the Post Office on *(a)* agency and *(b)* directly recruited casual workers employed in 2001. [65045]

Mr. Timms: These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Subpostmaster Vacancies

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many subpostmaster vacancies there were in each year since 1997, including 2002 to date. [68356]

Mr. Timms: Subpostmaster vacancies are an operational matter for the Post Office Ltd. and I have asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Vibration White Finger

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former miners suffering from vibration white finger who had mixed employment with both British Coal and other mining contractors have received their compensation; and how many claims are outstanding. [69460]

Mr. Wilson: There have been around 3,700 settlements of general damages compensation in co-defendant cases. We estimate that there are around 17,000 claims outstanding.

Departmental Staff (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many and what percentage of *(a)* civil service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of her Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [56314]

Ms Hewitt: A number of the activities carried out by DTI and its agencies are the responsibility in Scotland of the Scottish Executive, so that direct comparisons are inappropriate. Bearing in mind that caveat, the following table sets out the numbers of staff in DTI and its executive agencies who are located in Scotland.

Organisation	*Staff based in Scotland*	*All staff*	*Percentage of staff based in Scotland*
DTI Headquarters	166	5,178	3.21
ETS—Employment Tribunals Service	70	934	7.49
INSS—Insolvency Service	6	1,385	0.43
NWML—National Weights and Measures Laboratory	0	57	0.00
PATS—Patent Office	0	801	0.00
R—Radiocommunications	12	607	1.98
SBS—Small Business Service	0	279	0.00
CH—Companies House	42	1,193	3.52
Grand Total	296	10,434	2.84

Information about NDPBs and the number of posts relocated since May 1997 cannot be answered without incurring disproportionate cost.

Company Takeovers

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the operation of Section 429(4) of the Companies Act 1985 and Schedule 12 to the Financial Services Act 1986. [66590]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Schedule 12 to the Financial Services Act 1986 introduced Part XIII A into the Companies Act 1985 which is designed to deal with the problems of residual minority shareholdings following a successful takeover bid. The principal provisions are:

(a) Rights enabling a successful takeover bidder which has acquired not less than 90 per cent. in value of the shares to which the offer relates to compulsorily acquire the remaining residual minority shareholding (known as "squeeze-out" rights); and

(b) Equivalent rights to a minority shareholder to require the successful bidder in these circumstances to acquire the shares owned by the minority shareholder ("sell-out" rights).

To ensure that these rights are not abused, important safeguards are in place (including strict time limits during which squeeze-out rights and sell-out rights may be exercised, a requirement that the price offered to minority shareholders must be the same as that of the original offer and the right to apply to court in exceptional circumstances).

Section 429(4) of the Companies Act lays down the mechanisms by which a successful takeover bidder may exercise squeeze-out rights.

Small Business Service

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures the Small Business Service is taking to ensure that regulations do not impose unnecessary burdens on small businesses. [70100]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The Small Business Service is taking a number of steps to mitigate the effects of regulation and to reduce the burden on small businesses. The SBS has:

produced clear guidance on a number of complex regulations.

made help and advice available through the Business Link website www.businesslink.org. This is now attracting 80,000 users per month—and businesses can register to receive alerts about regulations automatically.

established close working links with the Small Business Council.

secured (as a result of its "Think Small First" strategy) the right to be consulted on all new regulations to ensure that the impact on small businesses is not disproportionate. Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) have to be produced for all regulations setting out clearly the costs and benefits with full recognition of small business concerns.

secured for small businesses a 12 week period between regulations being agreed and implemented, allowing small businesses time to adapt to the new regulations.

regularly brought together groups of small businesses to express their views directly to policy officials such as for Patrick Carter's review of payroll administration, a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

we have also set up an independent office to represent the views of small firms to the European institutions, headed by Ben Butters, which takes its lobbying lines from small firms in the United Kingdom.

the OECD assessment of regulatory barriers ranks the UK as having the fewest barriers.

Further to all this and following the recent review of the Department of Trade and Industry, the regulatory challenge function within DTI has been strengthened. A new team has been created specifically to consider how the Department should challenge existing and future legislation as well as how to ensure all policy makers fully consider alternatives to regulation at the outset of the policy making process.

Mine Workers Compensation

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid in England and Wales by the Government in recompense for legal fees to solicitors in respect of industrial compensation claims for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* chest disease for former mine-workers, (i) in total and (ii) broken down by (A) individual legal practices and (B) parliamentary constituency. [68875]

Mr. Wilson: The information is as follows:

Total costs paid to solicitors as at 9 July 2002

£ million

	COPD	*VWF*
Total costs paid to solicitors	66	52

I have placed details of the breakdown by (A) individual legal practices and (B) parliamentary constituencies in the Libraries of the House.

Renewable Energy

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what percentage of energy consumed in the UK in each of the last five years came from renewable sources; [68237]

(2) what proportion of UK energy consumption she expects being derived from renewable sources in each of the next five years. [68236]

Mr. Wilson: The percentage of total UK inland energy consumption that was accounted for by all renewable sources in each of the last five years was as follows:

	Total use of renewable sources[1]	*Total inland energy consumption*[2]	
	thousand tonnes of oil equivalent		*Percentage*
1997	2,326	226,814	1.0
1998	2,583	230,785	1.1
1999	2,757	231,353	1.2
2000	2,957	233,423	1.3
2001	3,099	237,727	1.3

[1] includes non-biodegradable wastes and renewables used to generate heat

[2] non-energy uses of gas and oil are excluded; energy consumption is expressed in terms of primary energy inputs (i.e. electricity's contribution to consumption is measured by the energy content of the fuel used to generate the electricity).

Source:

Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 2002

On the same basis, the available projections, published in Energy Paper 68, "Energy Projections for the UK", are for 2005 and 2010. These projections give percentages for 2005 of 2.3 or 2.4 per cent. of UK energy consumption being met from renewable sources, depending on the scenario, and for 2010 between 4.3 and 4.8 per cent. These figures reflect the projected increase in the amount of electricity generated from renewable sources which is planned to reach 10 per cent. by 2010.

Post Boxes

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to increase the accessibility of post boxes. [68233]

Mr. Timms: These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Regional Development Agencies

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much financial support RDAs have provided for building projects on previously undeveloped land in the last financial year. [66250]

Alan Johnson: During the three years after the RDAs were created on 1 April 1999 up to the introduction of their single programme funding on 1 April 2002, the RDAs reported to each funding Department individually on the outcome of their separate programmes. Building projects on undeveloped land were funded by what is now the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Accordingly DTI does not hold any figures for the last financial year.

Office for Civil Nuclear Security

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which bodies carry out the training of new recruits to the Office for Civil Nuclear Security. [63843]

Mr. Wilson: The Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS) employs applicants with a suitable background in the area. In addition to providing specialist training within its own organisation, new recruits undergo training as applicable and necessary with a number of other Government agencies.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 11 June 2002 to the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham), *Official Report*, column 1157W, on the Director of Civil Nuclear Security, when she received a copy of the report from the Director of Civil Nuclear Security; whether a press release was issued to accompany the release of the report; and to which individuals, bodies and organisations in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* elsewhere the report has been sent. [63934]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry received a copy of the Director of the Office for Civil Nuclear Security's (OCNS) first annual report during May. No press release was issued about its publication. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) on 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1157W when I said that the report was being placed in the Libraries of the House that day and was also being made available on the DTI website, www.dti.gov.uk. The report was also sent to all civil nuclear companies in the United Kingdom subject to security regulation, to overseas liaison contacts of OCNS and other Government Departments and agencies as appropriate.

Ofgem

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the Ofgem board about the development of renewable energy in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [70235]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I have regular discussions with the chairman of the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, who is also the chief executive of Ofgem, on matters including the development of renewable energy.

The responsibilities of Ofgem are defined by legislation. The aim of discussions between this Department and Ofgem is to explore how Ofgem, in carrying out its statutory responsibilities, can best assist in the furtherance of Government energy policy objectives, including the development of renewable energy.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the levels of remuneration for members of the Ofgem board. [70234]

Mr. Wilson: The non-executive members of the board are paid £12,000 per annum.

The executive members of the board are paid annual salaries as follows:

Range (£)	*No. of members*
95,000 to 100,000	1
110,000 to 115,000	1
120,000 to 125,000	1
140,000 to 145,000	1
160,000 to 165,000	1

Source:
Ofgem Annual Report

Environmental Criteria

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had on the proposed EU Commission directive on public procurement relating to environmental criteria; and if she will make a statement. [68030]

Mr. Wilson: The Government have been heavily involved in discussions—both domestically and in Brussels—on the proposed new public procurement directive which, among other things, clarifies the scope to take account of environmental issues in public procurement. My hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Competition, Consumers and Markets, signed up to a political agreement on the proposed directive at the Internal Market Council on 21 May. The proposed new directive will make it clear how environmental issues can be taken into account at all stages of the procurement process. This clarification, which is very much in line with UK objectives, should be particularly helpful in confirming the scope to take account of green production processes, eco-label criteria and environmental management systems.

Environment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will take steps to support integration of environmental considerations into the public procurement process at the EU Council meeting in September; and if she will make a statement. [68031]

Mr. Wilson: Political agreement was reached on the proposals to simplify, clarify and update the existing public procurement directives at the Internal Market Council on 21 May. In the discussions leading up to this agreement, the UK strongly supported proposals to incorporate legitimate environmental considerations into the procurement process. The proposed new directive will, in particular, clarify the scope to use non-discriminatory specifications, which can include relevant eco-label criteria and green production processes. It will also confirm the scope to consider relevant elements of a company's environmental management systems in selecting tenderers, and to take account of whole life cost and quality issues, such as energy and disposal savings which benefit the contracting authority, at the award stage. This is all very much in line with UK objectives. Discussions are continuing on parallel proposals to amend the utilities directive, where it is expected that the scope to take account of environmental issues, under this directive, will be very similar to that for the public sector. It is not yet clear whether procurement will be a matter for the September Internal Market Council.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to incorporate environmental criteria into public procurement policies by EU member states. [68029]

Mr. Wilson: Each member state is responsible for its own public procurement policies within the framework set by the treaty and the EC public procurement directives. The Government have been very active—both domestically and in Brussels—in considering how environmental issues can be taken into account in public procurement within the EC legal framework and the Government's policy of achieving value for money for the taxpayer. The UK played a full part in the discussions in Brussels leading up to the publication of the Commission's interpretative communication on environmental issues and in the clarifications, in the proposed new public sector directive, of how environmental considerations can be taken into account at each stage of the procurement process.

EU Policy Decisions

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what account she has taken of the treaty of Amsterdam in seeking to integrate environmental considerations into policy decisions by the EU; and if she will make a statement. [68028]

Mr. Wilson: Especially bearing in mind the treaty of Amsterdam, the Department has played an active and constructive part in those formations of the Council where the Department leads, to implement the conclusions of the Cardiff and subsequent Councils on integrating the environment and sustainable development in all areas of European Union policy making.

Bankrupts

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what extra resources have been granted to the Official Receiver to ensure that the distinction between culpable and non-culpable bankrupts under the Enterprise Bill can be made. [69079]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Service has been given additional funding equivalent to some 8 per cent. of the Service's gross administration budget for the next two years to train specialist staff and introduce the procedures and new IT systems required to deliver the reforms, including the new BRO process.

Ex-miners (Compensation Claims)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how long she estimates it will take to process the compensation claims by ex-miners who are suffering from vibration white finger, chronic bronchitis and emphysema; what steps she is taking to speed up the processing of claims; what plans she has to simplify and speed up the medical assessments required in compensation claims; and how many claimants have died while awaiting compensation. [69573]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* We currently receive around 700 new claims per week for vibration white finger (VWF) and around 900 per week for respiratory disease. It is therefore not possible to estimate how long it will take to process all claims.

In order to speed up the claims process, we are continuing to work closely with the contractors and the claimants' solicitors, and have systems in place such as national ministerial monitoring groups in order to monitor the process. We are therefore ensuring that all parties are able to work together to make sure that any delays are dealt with promptly.

The medical assessment processes for both respiratory disease and vibration white finger are detailed thoroughly in order to ensure that each claim is dealt with fairly and on an individual basis. They were agreed between the parties and there are no current plans to change them. The medical assessment is not a bottleneck causing delay in either scheme.

The handling agreement for compensation for VWF was formally signed on 22 January 1999, and the respiratory disease handling agreement was formally signed on 24 September 1999. Claims under either scheme could not have been settled before this date. The number of claimants who initiated their claim after the date of the agreement, but have died since registering their claim, is 9,071 for respiratory disease and 3,151 for VWF.

British Manufacturing

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent steps have been taken to support British manufacturing. [69214]

Alan Johnson: The Government's Strategy for Manufacturing, published on 16 May this year sets a strategic framework for action, in partnership with key stakeholders, to help UK manufacturing companies fulfil their potential and move up the value chain to high-skilled, knowledge-intensive, highly productive operations. The strategy identifies seven pillars with objectives and actions for Government and industry to develop:

Macro-economic stability
Investment
Innovation
Best practice
Raising skills and education levels
Modern infrastructure
The right market framework.

It has been warmly received by manufacturers and trade unions.

Recent steps taken within the strategy include:

The roll out of the Manufacturing Advisory Service across the Regions.

An example of practical measures to build manufacturing excellence, the MAS will provide free information to all UK manufacturers and practical help for smaller and medium sized firms in England and Wales who want to introduce world class manufacturing practices and technologies but who can find it difficult to access the information they need.

Action on skills and training.

The Government are determined to raise skills and education levels with vocational GCSEs and modern apprenticeships offering high quality vocational training to young people. We are establishing a network of employer-led Sector Skills Councils to drive up demand and give employers a voice in skills supply.

Support for investment.

Through regional selective assistance, through the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme and inward investment through Invest UK. The Government are promoting more investment in basic science and have introduced R&D tax credits for SMEs and recently for larger companies to encourage innovation.

Innovation and Growth teams.

The DTI has set up a number of Innovation and Growth teams in key sectors, drawing upon the expertise of their major stakeholders to identify key issues which will shape their future and help the UK to respond to competitive challenges. The first of these teams, covering the automotive sector reported on 16 May.

Expansion of best practice programmes.

To drive up national competitiveness and productivity. Best Practice, enables innovation and investment to be turned into profitable products. The Government's policies include support for the new manufacturing advisory service, expansion of the business-led Industry Forum schemes and promotion of partnership in the work place by people focused programmes such as the Partnership Fund. At the manufacturing summit last December, an additional £20 million was earmarked for Best Practice activity.

A substantial boost to the science budget.

To encourage a vibrant flow of skills and ideas into manufacturing from our science base. The Chancellor's announcement on the spending review, included an increase in resources for knowledge transfer from £84 million in 2003–04 to £114 million in 2005–06.

DTI manufacturing policy team.

A strengthened DTI manufacturing policy team and plans to strengthen inter-departmental action on manufacturing.

Alternative Energy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* geothermal plants, *(b)* wind power farms, *(c)* wave power and *(d)* biogas plants have opened since 1997. [68184]

Mr. Wilson: The Department does not maintain a register of all renewable energy facilities.

The British Wind Energy Association maintains a list of wind farms in the UK on its website at http://www.bwea.com/map/list.html.

This includes 38 wind farms opened between 1997 and March 2002.

The Department is aware of 126 biogas plants that have opened since 1997. All derive the biogas from landfill sites. A list of these plants has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

A wave power plant on the island of Islay commenced generation in November 2000. The Department is not aware of any geothermal plant that has opened in the UK since 1997.

Directives (Trade Barriers)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of Directives on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in the Sector of Measuring Instruments and Methods of Metrological Control is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66424]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

No date has yet been fixed for the next meeting of this committee. Officials from the Health and Safety Executive, which is sponsored by my Department, represent the UK on the committee as policy responsibility for health and safety is a reserved matter. However, officials would consult the Scottish Executive in the event that there were agenda items in which it has an interest, in accordance with our concordat with the devolved Administrations.

Export Licences

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many open individual export licence applications relating to exports to India have been *(a)* not renewed, *(b)* not extended on a temporary basis and *(c)* refused since 1 May; and if she will make a statement. [66506]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* Information on the number of open individual export licences (OIELs) relating to exports to India, that have not been renewed or extended on a temporary basis since 1 May 2002, is not readily available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Between 1 May 2002 and 1 July 2002 no OIEL applications were refused in full where India was one of the permitted destinations.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many open individual export licences have been modified so as to exclude exports to India since 1 May. [66505]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 2 July 2002]*: Between 1 May 2002 and 1 July 2002 no extant open individual export licences (OIELs) have been amended to exclude India from the coverage of the licence. However, a number of OIELs have been issued in respect of applications, which included India as an end user, where India has for the time being been excluded from the list of permitted end user countries in the issued licence.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee for cooperation in the field of tourism is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64916]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

The Tourism Advisory Committee is mandated to facilitate exchange of information, consultation and co-operation on tourism by a Council Decision of 22 December 1986 (86/664/EEC). The Committee meets on an ad-hoc basis, some three or four times yearly, and at the request of the Commission. The next meeting has not yet been scheduled.

There are no representatives of the Scottish Executive on the Committee. The UK is represented by officials from my Department. Under concordats with the devolved administrations, my Department leads on EC tourism issues, consulting with the devolved Administrations.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on the arrangements for implementing Europe Agreement with the countries of central and eastern Europe and free trade agreements with the Baltic states is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64925]

Peter Hain: I have been asked to reply.

The EU holds annual Association Committees with each candidate, including the three Baltic countries, to review implementation of the Europe Agreements. The next meeting of an Association Committee is expected to be on 4 December this year, with Romania. The Central European Working Group, in which member states prepare for Association Committees and discuss the arrangements for implementing the Europe Agreements, usually meets weekly in Brussels. The most recent meeting was Monday July 15. A UK official always attends and represents the concerns of the UK, including those of its devolved Administrations.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on the development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law and on the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms is next due to meet; what the UK representation is on it; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64913]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

The next meeting of the EU Committee on Human Rights and Democracy is provisionally set for October 2002. Officials from the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office represent the UK Government on the Committee which allocates EU budget resources to human rights and democracy projects in third countries. Scottish Executive officials have never attended this Committee. But consultation is made on issues of interest arising from the Committee's work and Scottish Executive officials can make their views known, in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations.

Mortgage Rates

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to deal with complaints about mortgages in the financial year 2001–02, with specific reference to dual mortgage rates. [69078]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The financial ombudsman service has been established under the Financial Services and Markets Act to deal with complaints against financial services firms which the firms have been unable to resolve themselves. In 2001–02 it received 3,876 new complaints about mortgage loans, of which 575 were about dual variable rate mortgages.

Regulation

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she plans to take in response to the Commission's Action Plan for Better Regulation presented to the Seville European Council. [70103]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

Firstly, the Government will be producing a formal written response to the Commission's Action Plan on Better Regulation. Through this response, it will welcome the Commission's adoption of a strategy aimed at simplifying and improving the regulatory environment and call for full and timely implementation of the measures contained in the Action Plan. The Action Plan is a key element of the Lisbon economic reform process and its implementation is required if the EU is to achieve its Lisbon goal of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world.

Secondly, the Government will play an active role in the structures which are currently being established to monitor implementation of the Action Plan, attaching great importance to the involvement of member states in the monitoring process.

Thirdly, the Government will continue to work with the Community Institutions and other member states, at official and ministerial level, to promote better regulation within the EU, recognising that achieving progress in this area involves commitment and action by all parties which play a part in the EU's law-making processes.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has *(a)* made to and *(b)* received from the Commission of the European Union regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandelkern report on better Regulation; and if she will make a statement. [70102]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

Since its publication in November 2001, the Government have been active in pressing for the full and timely implementation of the Mandelkern Report's recommendations. In particular, the Government have focused on encouraging the Commission to draw on the report as a solid basis for its Action Plan to improve and simplify the European regulatory environment, called for at the Lisbon European Council (March 2000). In January 2002 the Government issued a formal response to a Commission Communication on this issue, reiterating the need for the rapid implementation of the Mandelkern Report and informing the Commission of the action we are taking at the national level in line with the Report's recommendations.

For its part the Commission has responded by including the majority of the Mandelkern recommendations in its Action Plan, presented to the Seville European Council in June. The Government welcomes the Action Plan which sets out a clear strategy for better regulation at the European level and contains 16 specific measures with defined deadlines for implementation. We will now be working hard to ensure that it is swiftly and effectively implemented.

Public Houses

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to reduce the regulatory burden on public houses. [68867]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

Our plans for the modernisation of the alcohol and entertainment licensing regimes were set out clearly in the White Paper "Time for Reform" (Cm.4696) published on 10 April 2000. Alcohol and public entertainment licensing will be integrated into a single scheme. This will remove at a stroke a considerable amount of existing red tape and reduce licensing costs. Our estimate is that the existing costs of the licensing regimes to industry of around £4–5 billion over ten years would be reduced by £1.9 billion under the new regime. The reforms will be implemented by means of primary legislation to be brought forward as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Digital Services

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what deadline the Government have set for NTL to build a new cable and digital network to broadcast the channels of the Digital Terrestrial Alliance; and by what date NTL will put into operation their new digital and cable network. [69073]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

The award of digital terrestrial television multiplex is a matter for the Independent Television Commission. On 4 July, the Commission announced that it had made a conditional decision to award the licences to the BBC and Crown Castle and not to the Digital Terrestrial Alliance, whose bid included a rebuild of the digital network by NTL.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Specialist Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list *(a)* the new specialist schools announced on 4 July, *(b)* the schools short-listed but not successful and *(c)* the schools which applied but were not short-listed; and, in each case, (i) what specialism was applied for, (ii) what the category of school is, (iii) whether the school is (A) selective and (B) a non-selective school in an area with selective education and (vi) what other departmental awards have been won by the school in the last five years. [67631]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will review the funding formula for specialist schools in respect of the threshold of 1,200 pupils; and if she will extend the funding so that every child attracts the same funding. [70613]

Mr. Miliband: There are no plans to increase specialist school recurrent grant to include funding for pupil numbers from 1,001 to 1,200.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact on school transport and traffic congestion of the proposed increases in specialist secondary schools. [69543]

Mr. Miliband: No assessment of school transport or traffic congestion has been made in relation to the proposed expansion of the Specialist Schools Programme.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has issued to specialist schools in respect of the processes and criteria to be *(a)* adopted and *(b)* avoided in the selection of pupils by aptitude; and what measures she has put in place to evaluate these selection processes. [68174]

Mr. Miliband: The flexibility for admission authorities to give priority to some pupils on the basis of aptitude is not restricted to schools in the Specialist Schools Programme, but does require the school to have a particular expertise or facility. The Code of Practice on school admissions provides guidance on what is and is not permitted under Section 102 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 where the admission authority of a school with a specialism wishes to give priority to up to 10 per cent. of pupils who can demonstrate an aptitude for one of the prescribed subjects. The arrangements made are subject to local challenge and there has been no central evaluation of the processes.

Teacher Statistics

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher retirements due to *(a)* old age and *(b)* ill health there were in each Government office region, broken down by (i) last known sector of service and (ii) grade in the latest year for which figures are available. [69969]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many qualified teachers in each Government office region aged under 60 have never worked in teaching, broken down by *(a)* calendar year qualified, *(b)* sex and *(c)* age, at the latest date for which figures are available. [69968]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many qualified teachers aged under 60 were working outside the service in each Government office region, broken down by *(a)* last known employment, *(b)* calendar year of last employment, *(c)* sex and *(d)* age in the latest year for which figures are available. [69967]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not collected centrally.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will provide a breakdown of the ethnic group of *(a)* primary school teachers and *(b)* secondary school teachers by local education authority area at the latest date for which figures are available. [69970]

Mr. Miliband: This information is not available. For the short-term, information on the number of teachers in service by ethnic group will be collected via the Annual Survey of Teachers in Service. The next survey will be carried out in January 2003. In the longer term, ethnicity data for all the schools' workforce is likely to be collected through a proposed common dataset for adults, on which the Department has recently consulted.

Teacher Training

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will give a breakdown of the average proportions of SCITT funding that are directed to the *(a)* HE partner, *(b)* school and *(c)* mentor. [70229]

Mr. Miliband: Most SCITTs are formed only from groups of schools working in a consortium. It is the consortium that gains accreditation, receives the funds and decides how the funds are distributed to manage and run the training programme. Some choose to buy in services from a higher education institution but they are not obliged to do so. Most choose to reward the staff involved in school-based tutoring by providing release time or with remuneration. In all cases, no central rules or regulations are set down.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she plans to ensure that schools and mentors receive an appropriate proportion of SCITT funding. [70230]

Mr. Miliband: It is for the teacher training provider to decide how best to allocate its funds to deliver initial teacher training (ITT), including what element of available resources to provide to support mentor training and mentoring activities across schools.

The Teacher Training Agency (TTA), which has responsibility for teacher training matters, does not regulate the day-to-day management of ITT providers, including SCITTs. The quality of the training provided, including the quality of the management, is subject to periodic inspection by Ofsted. Providers would be expected to take action to address problems which affect the achievements of trainees.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to increase the number of schools involved in SCITT programmes. [70228]

Mr. Miliband: We welcome proposals from consortia of schools to become accredited providers of initial teacher training (ITT). Revised accreditation criteria were introduced last year following a consultation period. These should strengthen the SCITT sector by ensuring proposers of new provision understand the commitment they need to make to secure quality and viability and that they develop robust proposals. The further growth of the sector will depend on how many groups of schools can meet this challenge.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many SCITT schemes have been funded; and how many graduate teachers they have yielded in each of the last three years. [70231]

Mr. Miliband: 30 SCITT schemes were funded in 1998–99, 36 in 1999–2000 and 46 in 2000–01. In 1998–99, 555 trainees were awarded qualified teacher status (QTS), of whom 483 gained teaching posts; in 1999–2000, 624 trainees were awarded QTS, of whom 569 gained teaching posts; and in 2000–01, 762 trainees were awarded QTS, of whom 708 gained teaching posts.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to extend school centred initial teacher training to include people other than postgraduates in certain clearly defined circumstances. [69680]

Mr. Miliband: It is Government policy that teaching will remain an all-graduate profession. This policy applies to all types of provider of initial teacher training (ITT), including school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) providers.

Around 25 per cent. of the ITT places allocated to teacher training providers are for undergraduate courses. No SCITT providers currently offer undergraduate ITT. There is however nothing in principle to prevent them from offering such courses providing they meet the standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and requirements for the provision of ITT.

Other non-graduate ITT may be offered through the Registered Teacher Programme. This is an employment based route to QTS whereby unqualified teachers are employed by schools, having completed two years of higher education and receive training for QTS while studying for the award of a degree. Provision is managed by a recommending body, which may be different to the school offering the training, and applications are considered on a case by case basis.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what policy she has to increase the opportunity for students on the school centred initial teacher training scheme to work with professionals outside their designated school. [69683]

Mr. Miliband: The standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and requirements for the provision of initial teacher training (ITT) are set out in the publication "Qualifying to Teach". These come into effect from 1 September 2002. The standards are the same no matter what route an individual trains under, and offer opportunity for trainees to gain experience in a variety of settings.

The standards include the requirement that trainee teachers have experience in at least two schools and also that those awarded QTS must demonstrate that they understand the contribution that support staff and other professionals make to teaching and learning. Trainees may well work with a range of professionals, such as social workers, educational psychologists, education welfare officers and health professionals during their training in order to demonstrate that they have met the standards.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to strengthen the partnerships between schools and higher education institutions in the delivery of school centred initial teacher training. [69681]

Mr. Miliband: Many schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) already have strong links in the provision of teacher training. Most school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) providers offer a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) to their trainees, alongside the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), and these are validated by HEIs. Some HEIs are integral partners in SCITT consortia and several HEIs act as managing agents to the consortia.

The Teacher Training Agency, which has responsibility for teacher training issues, is working with all providers to increase schools' capacity to deliver teacher training in partnership with ITT providers, including HEIs and schools.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to increase the funding of school centred initial teacher training. [69686]

Mr. Miliband: The mainstream unit of funding for all providers of initial teacher training (ITT), including school-centred ITT (SCITT) providers, has increased by 3.5 per cent. each year for the past two academic years. This represents an increase in real terms over the past two years.

SCITT providers are eligible for start-up funding of up to £30,000 over their first two years of operation and can also bid for capital funding of up to £20,000 a year to support the purchase of equipment, materials and to upgrade accommodation. The capital budget for SCITTs increased by over 10 per cent. between 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to improve *(a)* the administration and *(b)* the evaluation of school-centred initial teacher training. [69685]

Mr. Miliband: The new inspection framework for monitoring the quality of initial teacher training (ITT) will come into effect from September 2002. The framework places increasing importance on the management, administration and quality assurance of training delivered by all ITT providers, including school-centred provision.

Furthermore, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), which has responsibility for teacher training matters, undertakes stringent risk analysis and auditing procedures of all SCITTs to ensure that they manage and administer their funding in line with best practice.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to improve the consistency of quality of training given under the school-centred initial teacher training scheme. [69684]

Mr. Miliband: The quality of training delivered by all accredited providers of initial teacher training (ITT), including school-centred ITT, is inspected by Ofsted. The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) has responsibility for teacher training issues and, as part of its statutory function, it uses Ofsted evidence of the overall quality of provision to determine the allocation of teacher training places to providers.

All providers are required to submit to Ofsted and the TTA an action plan setting out how they would implement inspection findings. The TTA and Ofsted work closely with the provider to implement the plan.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional support she will give to schools to help in the delivery of school-centred initial teacher training. [69682]

Mr. Miliband: The Teacher Training Agency (TTA), which has responsibility for teacher training matters, offers a range of support to school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) providers. SCITTs are eligible for start-up funding over their first two years of operation and can also bid for capital funding to support the purchase of equipment, materials and to upgrade accommodation. The capital budget for SCITTs increased by over 10 per cent. between 2001–02 and 2002–03.

The TTA also offers partnership funding to schools providing ITT, which can be used to provide training for school-based mentors and school staff. The Agency's work to promote school involvement in teacher training should help improve the quality of school-based placements.

Advanced Schools

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to decide where the new advanced schools will be located; what the time scale will be for establishing these schools; and if she will make a statement. [71001]

Mr. Miliband: We intend to establish a network of up to 300 advanced schools by 2006 and would want to see an initial group in operation from September 2003. Decisions about the location of these schools will be taken before next June. Advanced schools will be at the forefront of our drive to reform the education system and will provide opportunities for our best schools to lead the transformation of secondary education in their local areas.

Literacy Tests

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 243W, what research she has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated to corroborate trends in the results of the Key Stage 2 literacy tests. [70073]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has established an annual testing programme to provide data on pupils' attainment and progress in Years 3, 4 and 5. The data, collected and analysed by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NfER), augment those already available through the national curriculum tests at Year 2 and Year 6 and is reported in Ofsted's annual evaluation reports on the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Ofsted's report on the third year of the National Literacy Strategy said that:

> "For Pupils in Year 4 and Year 5, the average age-standardised score was significantly higher in 2001 than 2000".

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT) has also been commissioned to evaluate the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. They will publish their final report early next year.

Overseas Teachers

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on recruiting teachers for work in the UK from third world countries which are the aimed beneficiaries of the Education for All initiative. [69254]

Mr. Miliband: The Government are committed to helping developing countries achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015. We recognise that in many countries this will mean a major increase in the supply and retention of well-trained teachers. The Government do not directly recruit teachers, either here or abroad. Neither do we actively encourage recruitment by others from developing countries. But suitable teachers choosing to come and work in England for a time are welcome. Some are likely to return to their home countries, taking with them valuable experience of initiatives such as the numeracy and literacy strategies. We are committed to making the experience of those overseas teachers who do choose to work here as productive and developmental as possible, not least to maximise the benefits to their home countries. We have introduced a Quality Mark scheme, which will badge agencies that demonstrate, among other things, good practice in the recruitment and induction of overseas teachers. And we have established a new Recruitment and Retention Unit in the Government office for London which will support London LEAs in improving the experience of overseas-trained teachers.

Foreign Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many overseas-trained teachers were teaching in English schools in 2001–02; and how many of these *(a)* have been and *(b)* are on the training scheme to allow them to receive qualified teacher status. [70630]

Mr. Miliband: Information on numbers of teachers with overseas qualifications is not available. In the 2001–02 academic year to date, 720 people have been awarded places on the special variant of the Graduate Teacher Programme that is available to overseas trained teachers who wish to gain Qualified Teacher Status.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many foreign teachers were working in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) St. Helens Metropolitan borough council area, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the north-west and (iv) England in (A) 1997, (B) 1998, (C) 1999, (D) 2000 and (E) 2001. [70180]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not collected centrally.

Literacy and Numeracy

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of 11-year-olds meet the standard of *(a)* literacy and *(b)* numeracy for that age. [69302]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the percentage of pupils who achieved level 4 or above in the Key Stage 2 tests in England in 2001.

	Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above
English	75
Mathematics	71
Science	87

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupils aged 11 met the standard of literacy for that age on *(a)* 1 May 1997, *(b)* 31 December 1998, *(c)* 31 December 2001 and *(d)* the latest date for which information is available. [69298]

Mr. Miliband: The available information is shown in the table. It shows the percentage of pupils who achieved level 4 or above in English in the Key Stage 2 tests in England since 1997. The tests were carried out in May each year.

	English
1997	63
1998	65
1999	71
2000	75
2001	75

Small Schools

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 16W, on small schools, how much Small Schools Fund was allocated to each local education authority. [69336]

Mr. Miliband: The following table shows the amount of Small Schools Fund allocated to each local education authority in 2001–02 through the Standards Fund. The figures include both Government grant and local authority contributions.

2001–02 Standards Fund Allocations for the Small Schools Fund

	£
Barking	32,056
Barnet	168,303
Barnsley	288,519
Bath and North East Somerset	376,676
Bedfordshire	1,170,106
Bexley	104,188
Birmingham	913,645
Blackburn with Darwen	240,433
Blackpool	80,144
Bolton	304,548
Bournemouth	40,072
Bracknell Forest	104,188
Bradford	1,049,890
Brighton and Hove	192,346
Bromley	144,260
Buckinghamshire	1,001,803
Calderdale	384,692
Cambridgeshire	937,688
Camden	136,245
Cheshire	1,346,424
Cornwall	1,410,539
Coventry	232,418
Croydon	216,390
Cumbria	1,907,433
Darlington	128,231
Derby City	304,548
Derbyshire	1,907,433
Devon	1,681,477
Doncaster	304,548
Dorset	937,888
Dudley	144,260
Durham	1,578,842
Ealing	136,245
East Riding of Yorkshire	713,284
East Sussex	721,298
Enfield	88,159
Essex	1,867,361
Gateshead	328,591
Gloucestershire	1,378,481
Greenwich	216,390
Hackney	136,245
Halton	280,505
Hammersmith and Fulham	138,245
Hampshire	1,739,130
Haringey	136,245
Harrow	58,101
Hartlepool	96,173
Havering	104,188
Herefordshire	601,082
Hertfordshire	1,851,332
Hillingdon	160,289
Hounslow	160,289
Isle of Wight	408,736
Isles of Scilly	40,072
Islington	120,216
Kensington and Chelsea	88,159
Kent	2,087,722
Kingston upon Hull	72,130
Kingston upon Thames	200,361
Kirklees	673,212
Knowsley	152,274
Lambeth	216,390
Lancashire	2,708,876
Leeds	657,183
Leicestershire	1,065,919
Lewisham	192,346
Lincolnshire	1,867,361
Liverpool	536,967
Luton	188,303
Manchester	424,765
Medway	240,433
Merton	168,303
Milton Keynes	384,692
Newcastle upon Tyne	328,591
Newham	112,202
Norfolk	2,179,924
North East Lincolnshire	160,289

2001–02 Standards Fund Allocations for the Small Schools Fund

	£
North Lincolnshire	336,806
North Somerset	264,476
North Tyneside	232,418
North Yorkshire	1,975,837
Northamptonshire	1,538,770
Northumberland	1,306,351
Nottingham City	448,808
Nottinghamshire	1,498,698
Oldham	280,505
Oxfordshire	1,546,784
Peterborough	160,289
Plymouth	165,278
Poole	48,087
Portsmouth	160,289
Reading	176,317
Redbridge	72,130
Redcar and Cleveland	168,303
Richmond upon Thames	96,173
Rochdale	256,462
Rotherham	440,793
Rutland	120,216
Salford	384,692
Sandwell	256,462
Sefton	328,591
Sheffield	416,750
Shropshire	857,544
Slough	128,231
Solihull	136,245
Somerset	1,370,467
South Gloucestershire	320,577
South Tyneside	224,404
Southampton	248,447
Southend-on-Sea	88,159
Southwark	208,375
St. Helens	200,361
Staffordshire	1,610,900
Stockport	330,000
Stockton-on-Tees	192,346
Stoke-on-Trent	336,606
Suffolk	1,739,130
Sunderland	320,577
Surrey	1,474,654
Sutton	88,159
Swindon	240,433
Tameside	264,476
Telford and the Wrekin	280,505
Thurrock	104,188
Torbay	104,188
Tower Hamlets	200,361
Trafford	224,404
Wakefield	536,967
Walsall	232,418
Waltham Forest	168,303
Wandsworth	192,348
Warrington	232,418
Warwickshire	1,081,948
West Berkshire	384,692
West Sussex	1,081,948
Westminster	180,289
Wigan	388,664
Wiltshire	1,282,306
Windsor and Maidenhead	352,635
Wirral	280,505
Wokingham	208,375
Wolverhampton	288,519
Worcestershire	1,274,294
York	264,478
Total	78,278,023

Golden Hello

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reasons RE has not been included in the Golden Hello scheme. [70631]

Mr. Miliband: Golden Hellos are available for the five secondary shortage subjects in which the Government aim to recruit the most trainee teachers each year and in which demand for teachers is greatest.

Free School Meals

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of school children are entitled to free school meals in each *(a)* Government office region and *(b)* local education authority. [68904]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained nursery, primary, secondary and all special schools: School meal arrangements as at January 2001, by local education authority

	Percentage of day pupils[1] known to be eligible for free school meals		
	Nursery and primary schools[2]	*Secondary schools[2]*	*Special schools*
England	17.6	15.8	38.6
North East	24.0	21.1	50.9
Darlington	17.3	15.8	48.9
Durham	19.8	17.9	57.1
Gateshead	24.1	21.6	46.2
Hartlepool	25.2	25.8	41.4
Middlesbrough	29.1	35.8	60.9
Newcastle upon Tyne	34.4	25.3	67.1
North Tyneside	21.0	17.6	33.5
Northumberland	14.3	12.1	41.4
Redcar and Cleveland	23.7	22.8	36.9
South Tyneside	28.8	24.1	55.9
Stockton-on-Tees	20.1	20.0	61.4
Sunderland	31.4	30.0	47.9
North West	21.7	20.3	46.4
Blackburn with Darwen	25.2	26.0	42.8
Blackpool	25.8	22.0	44.3
Bolton	17.8	15.5	37.7
Bury	14.6	15.0	25.4
Cheshire	11.9	10.0	35.6
Cumbria	14.5	12.4	40.5
Halton	26.6	24.0	47.3
Knowsley	37.0	45.0	62.9
Lancashire	16.1	14.9	46.0
Liverpool	37.2	36.0	61.1
Manchester	42.7	43.8	56.7
Oldham	23.3	21.9	47.1
Rochdale	23.5	25.2	51.5
Salford	30.3	25.6	33.6
Sefton	19.3	19.8	41.4
St. Helens	20.5	19.2	46.9
Stockport	13.1	14.0	32.5
Tameside	19.3	20.1	41.9
Trafford	14.6	15.4	32.3
Warrington	11.2	10.1	32.2
Wigan	16.3	14.7	46.1
Wirral	29.7	26.7	51.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	18.3	17.2	41.3
Barnsley	21.8	24.7	49.7
Bradford	22.1	26.8	42.9
Calderdale	17.7	16.6	36.7
Doncaster	20.3	17.9	44.1
East Riding of Yorkshire	10.3	8.6	36.9
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	25.9	27.0	43.5

Maintained nursery, primary, secondary and all special schools: School meal arrangements as at January 2001, by local education authority

	Percentage of day pupils[1] known to be eligible for free school meals		
	Nursery and primary schools[2]	*Secondary schools[2]*	*Special schools*
Kirklees	18.7	18.0	50.3
Leeds	19.1	18.0	35.6
North East Lincolnshire	23.6	20.6	51.2
North Lincolnshire	15.3	13.5	38.7
North Yorkshire	8.9	6.4	26.5
Rotherham	19.6	15.8	44.6
Sheffield	21.5	20.0	47.6
Wakefield	17.5	17.0	40.5
York	11.1	8.9	32.0
East Midlands	13.6	12.6	35.6
Derby	20.3	20.2	35.6
Derbyshire	12.8	10.7	38.0
Leicester	23.9	22.3	38.0
Leicestershire	7.8	6.9	47.4
Lincolnshire	6.6	8.4	31.5
Northamptonshire	9.9	10.7	29.8
Nottingham	32.3	37.2	44.0
Nottinghamshire	13.4	12.7	34.4
Rutland	5.0	5.0	3.0
West Midlands	19.1	17.4	38.9
Birmingham	32.8	33.2	43.6
Coventry	19.3	20.1	43.0
Dudley	14.3	15.0	38.9
Herefordshire	8.1	7.9	17.4
Sandwell	23.5	24.3	47.6
Shropshire	10.2	8.1	25.0
Solihull	12.6	12.0	33.2
Staffordshire	12.1	9.2	36.6
Stoke-on-Trent	28.5	24.3	50.3
Telford and Wrekin	20.4	20.0	36.3
Walsall	18.0	17.2	46.4
Warwickshire	10.3	7.6	25.0
Wolverhampton	22.3	22.4	45.3
Worcestershire	9.0	10.3	32.6
East of England	12.4	10.5	28.6
Bedfordshire	11.1	10.1	29.3
Cambridgeshire	9.5	7.8	22.0
Essex	11.7	10.0	29.9
Hertfordshire	9.1	7.4	25.9
Luton	21.3	26.9	38.2
Norfolk	14.3	10.7	30.2
Peterborough	22.0	17.5	36.6
Southend-on-Sea	19.2	13.1	35.1
Suffolk	11.9	10.5	27.7
Thurrock	15.3	15.3	26.5
London	25.9	25.8	45.7
Inner London	38.2	42.1	53.7
Camden	42.3	28.9	39.5
City of London	33.8	0.0	0.0
Hackney	39.6	44.4	59.1
Hammersmith and Fulham	43.2	33.1	54.5
Haringey	36.9	40.2	52.6
Islington	41.3	45.6	55.8
Kensington and Chelsea	38.2	31.8	7.0
Lambeth	37.7	41.7	66.2
Lewisham	32.7	39.6	57.2
Newham	34.2	44.9	26.5
Southwark	35.9	52.8	49.6
Tower Hamlets	54.3	65.1	78.3
Wandsworth	28.9	26.8	48.2
Westminster	36.8	32.9	51.7
Outer London	18.9	18.3	40.4
Barking and Dagenham	23.2	26.0	34.8
Barnet	17.0	15.7	38.1
Bexley	14.0	12.7	37.5
Brent	26.9	24.5	43.3
Bromley	13.9	11.8	34.4
Croydon	20.9	19.4	43.0
Ealing	24.0	31.2	47.6
Enfield	22.1	20.3	39.5
Greenwich	35.5	33.6	59.5
Harrow	12.0	17.5	32.0
Havering	11.9	11.1	30.9
Hillingdon	14.0	14.8	38.0
Hounslow	22.0	19.7	45.3
Kingston upon Thames	6.9	9.1	22.4
Merton	15.1	16.3	30.6
Redbridge	15.8	15.2	34.5
Richmond upon Thames	10.5	15.7	30.3
Sutton	12.3	7.8	42.7
Waltham Forest	26.6	29.9	44.8
South East	10.8	9.1	29.4
Bracknell Forest	6.9	4.8	18.6
Brighton and Hove	18.6	17.6	36.0
Buckinghamshire	5.6	6.7	36.5
East Sussex	14.7	13.1	35.4
Hampshire	9.0	6.6	22.7
Isle of Wight	18.8	16.7	36.2
Kent	13.1	9.8	33.9
Medway	12.9	9.8	29.8
Milton Keynes	13.2	11.9	45.7
Oxfordshire	9.1	9.5	22.6
Portsmouth	17.1	16.1	34.6
Reading	14.9	13.1	29.0
Slough	15.6	15.5	35.0
Southampton	22.7	17.2	38.3
Surrey	7.4	6.1	20.7
West Berkshire	6.4	4.7	21.1
West Sussex	7.6	6.9	24.7
Windsor and Maidenhead	6.6	5.6	40.2
Wokingham	3.8	4.7	35.6
South West	12.0	9.7	30.3
Bath and North East Somerset	10.5	7.9	25.2
Bournemouth	9.8	10.7	37.4
Bristol, City of	22.6	20.5	40.6
Cornwall	13.1	12.2	29.1
Devon	12.4	10.2	26.3
Dorset	4.6	6.2	19.9
Gloucestershire	9.7	7.0	26.0
Isles of Scilly	6.4	6.3	0.0
North Somerset	10.0	7.8	33.7
Plymouth	20.7	14.0	38.8
Poole	6.2	7.2	25.7
Somerset	10.7	9.0	28.2
South Gloucestershire	8.2	7.5	25.7
Swindon	12.5	9.4	35.0
Torbay	19.4	13.9	30.4
Wiltshire	8.8	6.5	27.9

[1] Excludes boarders

[2] Includes middle schools as deemed

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Annual School Census

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what personal information the annual school census collects. [69009]

Mr. Miliband: The Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) was introduced for all maintained primary, secondary and special schools and City Technology

Colleges in January 2002. The following information was collected for each pupil on the school's register on the Census day:

Unique pupil number (UPN)

Full name

Date of birth

Gender

Home postcode

Date of entry

National Curriculum year

Enrolment status

Courses of study (for post-16 pupils only).

and the following information for each pupil permanently excluded from the school during the previous school year:

UPN

Full name

Date of birth

Gender

Date of exclusion

Ethnic group

Stage on SEN Code of Practice scale (at the time of exclusion).

From January 2003 information will also be collected on whether or not registered pupils are in local authority care on the Census day, and whether they have been in care at any time since joining that school.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what safeguards there will be in the school census following the inclusion in the list of children in care. [67587]

Mr. Miliband: The Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC), which was introduced for all maintained primary, secondary and special schools and City Technology Colleges in January 2002, will from January 2003 also collect details of whether or not pupils are in local authority care on the Census day, and whether they have been in care at any time since joining that school.

Information about the safeguards in place to ensure that there is no unauthorised access to PLASC data was provided in the answers to previous questions from the hon. Member on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 112W and on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 115–16W. All of these safeguards will continue to apply, and to be kept under review in the light of advice from the Information Commissioner and other developments.

English Language

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of children speak English as an additional language in each *(a)* Government office region and *(b)* local education authority. [68903]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained Primary and Secondary schools: Number of pupils for whom English is an additional language by local education authority—January 2001

	Percentage of pupils for whom English is an additional language'	
	Primary schools	*Secondary schools*
England	9.3	8.0
North East	2.5	1.8
Darlington	1.8	1.4
Durham	1.0	0.5
Gateshead	1.5	1.0
Hartlepool	0.8	0.5
Middlesbrough	6.8	6.3
Newcastle upon Tyne	9.6	7.2
North Tyneside	1.3	1.3
Northumberland	0.7	0.4
Redcar and Cleveland	1.1	1.0
South Tyneside	1.7	1.5
Stockton-on-Tees	2.4	1.7
Sunderland	1.9	1.1
North West	6.0	4.8
Blackburn with Darwen	29.3	23.2
Blackpool	0.8	0.9
Bolton	12.4	10.1
Bury	7.1	6.8
Cheshire	0.8	0.7
Cumbria	0.3	0.5
Halton	0.3	0.2
Knowsley	0.3	0.2
Lancashire	6.8	5.9
Liverpool	3.5	2.4
Manchester	18.7	16.8
Oldham	20.5	15.4
Rochdale	15.8	15.4
Salford	2.4	1.4
Sefton	0.7	0.5
St. Helens	0.5	0.2
Stockport	3.1	2.3
Tameside	5.5	5.5
Trafford	7.6	6.
Warrington	1.3	1.2
Wigan	0.6	0.3
Wirral	0.7	0.6
Yorkshire and the Humber	7.8	6.8
Barnsley	0.4	0.1
Bradford	30.0	29.4
Calderdale	8.2	8.5
Doncaster	1.6	1.3
East Riding of Yorkshire	0.6	0.3
Kington Upon Hull, City of	1.5	0.8
Kirklees	18.0	14.8
Leeds	8.3	7.4
North East Lincolnshire	0.7	0.6
North Lincolnshire	2.7	1.8
North Yorkshire	0.6	0.5
Rotherham	4.4	3.7
Sheffield	9.5	7.1
Wakefield	2.2	1.8
York	1.5	1.0
East Midlands	5.8	5.5
Derby	11.5	11.1
Derbyshire	0.5	0.5
Leicester	38.4	39.3
Leicestershire	5.1	6.4
Lincolnshire	0.7	0.8
Northamptonshire	2.8	3.5
Nottingham	11.1	8.9
Nottinghamshire	1.4	1.4
Rutland	0.7	0.6
West Midlands	11.6	10.5
Birmingham	30.8	28.9
Coventry	14.5	14.4

Maintained Primary and Secondary schools: Number of pupils for whom English is an additional language by local education authority—January 2001

	Percentage of pupils for whom English is an additional language[1]	
	Primary schools	*Secondary schools*
Dudley	6.3	5.8
Herefordshire	0.5	0.6
Sandwell	18.2	19.2
Shropshire	0.6	0.7
Solihull	3.2	2.5
Staffordshire	1.8	1.6
Stoke-on-Trent	6.8	6.1
Telford and Wrekin	3.9	3.9
Walsall	14.2	13.0
Warwickshire	3.7	3.8
Wolverhampton	15.6	18.4
Worcestershire	2.2	2.2
East of England	4.3	3.9
Bedfordshire	6.5	5.6
Cambridgeshire	3.0	2.4
Essex	1.6	1.7
Hertfordshire	5.2	5.0
Luton	28.2	29.7
Norfolk	1.0	0.6
Peterborough	14.4	13.1
Southend-on-Sea	4.5	2.9
Suffolk	1.2	0.8
Thurrock	3.1	2.4
London	31.8	29.2
Inner London	46.0	42.3
Camden	46.6	31.8
City of London	48.0	0.0
Hackney	54.4	50.9
Hammersmith and Fulham	36.1	31.6
Haringey	49.3	43.1
Islington	34.1	40.0
Kensington and Chelsea	39.7	37.5
Lambeth	41.7	35.6
Lewisham	28.6	24.2
Newham	60.2	53.4
Southwark	38.7	43.4
Tower Hamlets	66.5	62.0
Wandsworth	31.2	30.0
Westminster	60.0	48.7
Outer London	24.0	23.3
Barking and Dagenham	9.9	9.4
Barnet	31.0	27.2
Bexley	6.6	6.2
Brent	51.4	57.9
Bromley	3.9	4.3
Croydon	16.4	16.6
Ealing	44.8	46.1
Enfield	29.3	25.0
Greenwich	20.7	19.7
Harrow	38.9	38.8
Havering	2.1	1.8
Hillingdon	19.2	18.0
Hounslow	39.4	44.9
Kingston upon Thames	16.0	14.7
Merton	23.6	16.6
Redbridge	40.2	42.4
Richmond upon Thames	9.2	8.3
Sutton	7.0	7.9
Waltham Forest	32.5	31.1
South East	4.1	3.8
Bracknell Forest	2.9	1.7
Brighton and Hove	3.9	2.8
Buckinghamshire	8.7	7.1
East Sussex	1.5	1.2
Hampshire	1.2	1.0
Isle of Wight	0.7	0.5
Kent	2.5	2.4
Medway	3.7	3.2
Milton Keynes	6.3	6.5
Oxfordshire	3.9	4.8
Portsmouth	4.0	3.6
Reading	10.7	9.5
Slough	36.3	35.0
Southampton	7.5	6.7
Surrey	3.9	3.7
West Berkshire	1.4	1.0
West Sussex	3.1	2.5
Windsor and Maidenhead	9.5	10.6
Wokingham	3.7	5.2
South West	1.4	1.0
Bath and North East Somerset	1.3	0.9
Bournemouth	2.9	1.0
Bristol, City of	5.6	4.7
Cornwall	0.4	0.3
Devon	0.7	0.4
Dorset	0.6	0.4
Gloucestershire	1.5	1.4
Isles of Scilly	[2]—	[2]—
North Somerset	0.7	0.7
Plymouth	1.2	0.9
Poole	1.1	0.2
Somerset	0.5	0.4
South Gloucestershire	1.1	1.1
Swindon	3.1	2.7
Torbay	0.7	0.7
Wiltshire	0.7	0.9

[1] The number of pupils for whom English is an additional language expressed as a percentage of the number of pupils of compulsory school age.

[2] Less than 5 pupils

School IT Equipment

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps are being taken to ensure that teachers who take home school/LEA IT equipment for their work do not have to insure such equipment with their own private home and contents policies. [68204]

Mr. Miliband: The Government have no plans to legislate on the insurance of IT equipment owned by schools or LEAs. In cases where there is an understanding that a teacher uses such equipment at home for professional purposes, we would not expect him or her to have to cover loss or accidental damage to the equipment while at home or travelling to and from work.

Disabled School Governors

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals she has to improve opportunities for disabled school governors to fulfil their role; and if she will make a statement. [67679]

Mr. Miliband: Steps the Department has already taken to assist disabled governors include offering the Guide to the Law for School Governors in Braille and making the governors' induction training package available through distance learning.

School Governing Bodies can, under the Education (Governors' Allowances) Regulations 1999, create schemes to meet expenses from the school budget. These schemes may include the cost of transport for disabled governors to and from meetings. In revised guidance to be issued following the Education Bill, we shall encourage all governing bodies to make schemes and to ensure that disabled governors can claim all expenses they incur.

The Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Bill's provision for reasonable adjustments to premises to allow access for disabled people, should help for physically disabled governors.

EU Committees (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the EU Advisory Committee on the training of chemists is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66453]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

The Advisory Committees on midwifery, medical, dental, nursing and pharmaceutical training were set up to advise the European Commission and member states on matters relating to the training of workers whose professions come under sectoral directives guaranteeing free movement and automatic recognition of qualifications.

Each Advisory Committee has three members from each member state—one each from the practising profession, the education establishments and the competent authorities concerned. Three alternates are appointed on the same basis. Some of the United Kingdom's members and alternates of the Advisory Committees are Scottish, but the membership is there to represent the interests of all four UK countries.

The Advisory Committees have not met during the last 12 months, and are not likely to do so again.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61063]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61029]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60904]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, at column 381w.

Ministerial Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what the annual cost was of ministerial salaries in her Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [60945]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, at column 382W.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by her Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64631]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland at column 383W.

Annual Leave

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what the average annual leave entitlement is for staff in her Department in 2002. [64653]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, at column 382W.

Buildings Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what the cost of buildings insurance to her Department was *(a)* before and *(b)* after 11 September 2001. [66932]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, at column 383W.

Public Consultations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 8 June 2001, indicating the *(a)* length and *(b)* number of responses received in each case. [68700]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, at columns 383–84W.

Staff Party

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas Party; and how many people attended. [61659]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, at column 382W.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how many staff have contributed to her Department's input to the Spending Review. [68684]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, at column 383W.

SCOTLAND

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60903]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 68W.

The information requested on planned expenditure on press and advertising campaigns in 2002–03 is not yet available.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61062]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Since then my Department has spent £10,486 in 1999–2000, £21,364 in 2000–01 and £10,058 in 2001–02. My staff also has access to a comprehensive range of training and development opportunities through the Scottish Executive for which there is no charge to my Department.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much and what proportion of the Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61030]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for 2001–02 was £7.236 million, of which approximately 51 per cent. was for staff costs. Information on what proportion of the DEL for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs is not yet available.

Ministerial Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the annual cost was of ministerial salaries in her Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [60944]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

The level of ministerial salaries are recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body. From June 2001, in my Department there was one Cabinet Minister, at an annual salary of £68,157; and one Minister of State, at a salary of £35,356. The Department also provides administrative support services to the Advocate-General for Scotland, who had an annual salary of £59,386.

Staff Party

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas Party; and how many people attended. [61660]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department did not hold a Christmas Party for staff in 2001.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the EU directives relating to her Department which have been *(a)* amended and *(b)* repealed in 2002. [64942]

Mrs. Liddell: No EU directives relating to my Department have been amended or repealed in 2002.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the EU directives and regulations that have been implemented through her Department in 2002; and what was the cost of each to public funds. [64992]

Mrs. Liddell: No EU directives or regulations have been implemented through my Department in 2002.

Annual Leave

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the average annual leave entitlement is for staff in her Department in 2002. [64654]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 629W.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by her Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64632]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has originated or made five statutory instruments since 1 January 2002. They are:

1. SI 2002/261—The Scotland Act 1998 (Agency Arrangements) (Specification) Order 2002;
2. SI 2002/653—The Scottish Water (Transfer of Functions, etc.) (Tax Provisions) Order 2002;
3. SI 2002/800—The Scotland Act 1998 (Agency Arrangements) (Specification) (No. 2) Order 2002;
4. SI 2002/801—The Scottish Administration (Offices) Order 2002;
5. SI 2002/1264—The Water Industry (Scotland) Act 2002 (Directions in the Interest of National Security) Order 2002.

An Article in the third statutory instrument in the above list revoked the Scotland Act 1998 (Agency Arrangements) (Specification) Order 2001 (SI 2001/3917). No other statutory instruments have been revoked by my Department since 1 January 2002.

No statutory instruments have been amended by my Department since 1 January 2002.

There are no separately identifiable costs or savings for the statutory instruments above, but I expect them to be minimal in each case.

Buildings Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost of buildings insurance to her Department was *(a)* before and *(b)* after 11 September 2001. [66933]

Mrs. Liddell: Departments are required to comply with the Government's general policy on insurance, which is set out in "Government Accounting", chapter 30, paragraph 30.2.5, which notes that Government does not need to purchase insurance to protect the viability of its business, and should consider insurance only where the value of claims met would exceed the cost of insurance premiums. Commercial insurance of a building is acceptable in cases where (a) insurance is a condition of a lease (b) the lessor will not accept a Government indemnity (c) incurring the total cost of the accommodation in question, including the cost of the insurance, is more cost-effective than other accommodation options ("Government Accounting", paragraph 30.2.11a).

My Department has not purchased any buildings insurance.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff have contributed to her Department's input to the spending review. [68685]

Mrs. Liddell: A range of staff in my Department have contributed to spending review issues as part of their normal duties.

Public Consultations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 8 June 2001, indicating the *(a)* length and *(b)* number of responses received in each case. [68699]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has undertaken one public consultation exercise since 8 June 2001; the consultation paper on the size of the Scottish Parliament on 18 December 2001, which required responses by 29 March 2002. A total of 237 responses were received.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Trade

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has had from BAE Systems regarding unlicensed production of G3 rifles and MP5 submachine guns by the Defence Industries Organisation in Iran. [61985]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are aware of no representations from BAE systems in this regard. We are not aware of any such unlicensed production of the weapons in question.

Consular Services

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to improve the services offered by consular staff to UK nationals. [68235]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We continually seek ways to improve the consular services offered to British nationals who get into difficulties overseas. Recent initiatives include the Know Before You Go campaign which encourages British travellers to make better preparations before they go overseas, producing guidelines on forced marriage for the police and improving our travel advice by including travellers tips for gay travellers.

Arms Exports

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional safeguards his proposed changes to guidelines on UK arms exports will give to the terms of the Export Control Bill. [69467]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The factors which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced on 8 July 2002, *Official Report,* columns 650–52W, were an elaboration of the Consolidated Criteria.

The Government's proposed Export Control Bill imposes a requirement on the Government to issue guidance about the general principles to be followed when exercising licensing powers, requires that this guidance must address certain issues and provides that the Consolidated Criteria shall be treated as such guidance under the Bill.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether exports licensed under the new criteria on arms export components will be highlighted as such on the annual reports on strategic exports; and whether information as to end-use and ultimate destination of the finished products will be provided in these reports. [69506]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: HMG is committed to openness and accountability in arms exports. Our annual reports on strategic export controls are among the most detailed such reports produced by any arms exporting country. The reports will continue to provide details of all export licences approved and refused, as at present.

However, export licences approved or refused on the basis of the factors outlined by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), on 8 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 650–52W, will not be highlighted as such in the annual reports. Nor does the Government intend to provide in the reports information as to end-use and ultimate destination of finished products produced overseas incorporating UK components. Commercial confidentiality means that we usually cannot reveal such information. And in some cases, when taken with other parts of the Report, this information might reveal details of the recipient country's defence strategy. It would not be practicable to reveal this information selectively in the reports.

Departmental Travel

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are made to ensure that his Department's staff travel by British carriers; and on what ground his Department's staff, Embassy employees, and associated staff use non-UK carriers. [69500]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our policy is to use airlines that provide the best value for money in terms of costs, safety and service on the routes served.

Sanctions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries are subject to *(a)* political, *(b)* diplomatic, *(c)* trade and *(d)* economic sanctions and arms embargoes by the UK in consequence of their policies on *(a)* human rights and *(b)* their minority ethnic and religious groups. [69932]

Mr. MacShane: Details of sanctions regimes, arms embargoes and restrictions on export of strategic goods by country and region can be found on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website at the following address: http://fco.gov.uk/sanctions. The website currently lists 42 countries for which such measures have been implemented by the UN, EU, OSCE and UK.

The EU ban on the sale of defence equipment to China was one of a number of measures put in place following human rights abuses and the suppression of pro-democracy activists in Tiananmen Square in 1989. EU measures applied to Burma, Zimbabwe and those taken against Milosevic and those associated with him were all also imposed, at least in part, as a result of human rights abuses.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what political, diplomatic, trade and economic sanctions the Government have had in place against the Government of the People's Republic of China since May 1997 in consequence of its policies on human rights, with particular reference to *(a)* Tibet and *(b)* its minority ethnic and religious groups. [69931]

Mr. MacShane: An EU arms embargo has been in force against China since the suppression of pro-democracy activists in Tiananmen square in 1989.

Tibet

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent efforts have been made by Her Majesty's Government to ascertain the whereabouts and welfare of the Panchen Lama of Tibet; and what response they have received from the Government of the People's Republic of China. [69933]

Mr. MacShane: We raised the case of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima most recently at the UK/China Human Rights Dialogue in Beijing on 15 May. The Chinese responded that he was in good health and leading a "normal and happy life" with his parents, who did not want him exposed to international attention.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent discussions he has had with the Turkish Government on the increased deployment of Turkish troops in the occupied area of Northern Cyprus; [69708]

(2) how many Turkish troops are stationed in the occupied area of Northern Cyprus. [69710]

Peter Hain: The 1960 Treaty of Alliance allows for there to be 950 Greek troops and 650 Turkish troops on Cyprus. The actual numbers of Greek and Turkish national forces on the island are a matter of dispute between the various parties concerned. No authoritative figures are available.

Pakistan

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Pakistani Government concerning violent attacks perpetrated upon Christian women by Muslim extremists. [69836]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We and our EU partners regularly raise our human rights concerns, including those of Christians and women's rights issues, with the Pakistani authorities. We are concerned by reports of violent attacks perpetrated upon Christian women by Muslim extremists. If the reports are substantiated, we look to the appropriate authorities in Pakistan to ensure that the perpetrators are swiftly brought to justice. We continue to monitor closely the position of religious minorities in Pakistan including women's human rights, and will continue to remain engaged with the Pakistani authorities.

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Pakistani Government concerning the whereabouts of Naira Nadia. [69835]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Together with our EU partners, we have raised our human rights concerns at regular intervals with the Pakistani authorities, citing specific cases. We raised Naira Nadia's case with the EU on 10 April and on 14 June the Spanish presidency underlined our concern to the Pakistani authorities about various cases including that of Naira Nadia.

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he will make to the Pakistani Government concerning the treatment of Shakeela Siddique by the authorities; and if he will make a statement. [69837]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have asked our High Commission in Islamabad to ensure Shakeela Siddique's case is raised with the Pakistani authorities and further information sought about the circumstances of the case. We express concern where appropriate about human rights issues in Pakistan.

EU Staff

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of existing staff it is envisaged will apply for special severance payment offers at the time of enlargement in the *(a)* Commission, *(b)* Council of Ministers, *(c)* European Parliament, *(d)* European Court of Justice and *(e)* Court of First Instance. [69820]

Peter Hain: We have no information on what individual members of staff of the EU institutions might do in the wake of concluding enlargement negotiations.

International Terrorist Organisations

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy for the United Nations proscribed list of international terrorist organisations to be applied uniformly to all domestic terrorist organisations. [69761]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No. The United Nations Sanctions committee has, with active UK participation, named and frozen the assets of a number of suspected terrorists and terrorist organisations, under the terms of Security Council resolutions 1267, 1333 and 1390. However, these resolutions provide authority to name and freeze only those which have suspected links to al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden or the Taliban. None of the domestic terrorists organisations proscribed under the Terrorism Act (2000) have such links.

Turkey

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Turkish Government on their policy on human rights in Turkey; and if he will make a statement. [70270]

Peter Hain: On 19–20 June, a senior official from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office led a UK delegation at the first formal UK/Turkey Human Rights Dialogue, in Ankara. There was a frank and constructive discussion of the human rights situation in Turkey, the measures recently taken to improve it and what remains to be done. As a candidate for EU membership, Turkey must comply with the Copenhagen political criteria. Guaranteeing the rights of all individuals is one of Turkey's priorities for reform; we and EU partners encourage them in their efforts. The European Commission will publish their regular progress report on Turkey in October.

Bush Meat

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what briefings his Department's environmental attachés in countries in Central and West Africa have received on the bush meat trade. [70311]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has kept posts responsible for the six African states that are members of the CITES Bushmeat Working Group informed about its progress. Posts were asked to emphasise the group's importance to their host government. In February FCO sent a telegram to around 80 posts (including in West and Central Africa) highlighting the major issues, such as bush meat, of the forthcoming CITES Conference of the Parties. Many posts took this opportunity to discover the extent to which bush meat trade was a problem in their host country.

The FCO briefed posts in all 23 African and Asian great ape range states, and also in potential donor states, about the UK's financial support of £175,000 to UNEP's Great Ape Survival Project (GrASP). The FCO contributed £75,000 to the UK's donation and I plan to make an announcement of further funding soon. Posts were also informed about GrASP's aims and asked to provide logistical and political support to the GrASP technical team which is led by Ian Redmond and the UK NGO Born Free. Posts that have provided support so far include those in Kinshasa, Yaounde, Abidjan, Kuala Lumpa, Kigali, Kampala, Dakar, and Jakarta. UNEP Executive-Director Klaus Töpfer has paid tribute to the support that UK Missions overseas have given, saying that

> "the personal commitment they have shown is very encouraging for our GrASP team."

DEFRA and the FCO have used UK diplomatic missions in Harare, Accra, Cairo, Pretoria, Kampala, Abidjan, Maseru, Dakar, Luanda, Nairobi, Kigali, Mbabane and Tunis to raise the profile of UK import restrictions and rules on meat and animal products.

Kurdish Prisoners (Iraq)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what information his Department sought from the Government of Iraq and its representatives abroad concerning the *(a)* location of, *(b)* condition of and *(c)* justification for the retention of Kurdish prisoners in Iraq since April 1980; and if he will make a statement; [70432]

(2) what steps his Department has taken since 3 April 1991 to gain information on Kurdish prisoners in Iraq; and if he will make a statement; [70434]

(3) what his Department's strategy is to secure the release of Kurdish prisoners in Iraq; and if he will make a statement; [70430]

(4) what diplomatic steps his Department has taken since 1 May 1997 to ensure the release of Kurdish prisoners in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [70433]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK does not have any diplomatic relations with the Government of Iraq. However, we are deeply concerned about reports, such as those documented by Andreas Mavrommatis, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iraq, of the maltreatment of prisoners by the Iraqi regime. We remain committed to doing what we can to bring about improvements in the human rights situation in Iraq, including the treatment of political opponents to the regime, and take every opportunity to raise this issue in international fora.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications his Department had with the Government of Iraq and its representatives abroad between April 1980 and 2 August 1990 concerning Kurdish prisoners in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [70431]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This question could be answered comprehensively only by researching FCO files for the 10-year period in question. This could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Wilton Park Executive Agency

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the Wilton Park Executive Agency performed against the targets agreed for 2001–02; and what the agreed targets are for the current year. [71351]

Mr. MacShane: Wilton Park met all four of the agreed targets set for the 2001–02 financial year, for income, cost recovery, the number of conference participants, and cost per head to the FCO overall. Wilton Park's performance in 2001–02 and some of the targets for the current year are shown in the table:

	2001–02 targets	*2001–02 performance*	*2002–03 targets*
Income (£)	2,963,000	3,210,000	3,278,000
Cost recovery (percentage)	85.9	87.2	86.1
Number of conference participants	2,400	3,033	—
Cost to FCO per participant (£)	203	156	—

Wilton Park's targets have been adjusted from 2002–03 to give greater emphasis to service delivery. Measures for number of conference participants and cost to the FCO per participant have been dropped. Wilton Park's annual targets now work from framework targets for cost recovery (which is to recover all its cash costs ie excluding non-cash costs), quality of conference programmes and standards of service. New measures have been added for 'excellent' ratings awarded respectively for conference programmes and for conference administration. The 2002–03 targets for the two new measures are:

'Excellent' ratings awarded for conference programmes: 56 per cent. (an increase of 2 per cent. on the informal target for 2001–02)

'Excellent' ratings awarded for conference administration: 89 per cent. (an increase of 1.1 per cent. on the informal target for 2001–02).

Morwenstow Facility

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the purpose of the facility at Morwenstow. [69415]

Mr. Straw: As I told the hon. Member on 22 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 775W, GCHQ Bude, previously known as the Composite Signals Organisation Station at Morwenstow, provides intelligence support serving the interest of the UK and its allies. It is long standing policy not to provide details about the operations carried out at Bude.

New Zealand

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received from New Zealand regarding the transport of nuclear fuel near its territory. [69654]

Mr. MacShane: The New Zealand Government made a representation on 12 July through its High Commission in London on the return of MOX fuel from Japan to the UK.

Nuclear Waste Negotiations

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations his Department has received concerning negotiations between Russia and Iran on spent nuclear fuel; and if he will make a statement. [69674]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Russian co-operation with Iran's nuclear industry, including issues concerning spent fuel, are regularly discussed with appropriate governments.

Côte d'Ivoire

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether UK observers were present to monitor the recent local elections in Côte d'Ivoire, including the campaign and polling day; and if he will make a statement. [69666]

Mr. MacShane: The UK did not send any observers to cover the Côte d'Ivoire district elections, nor did the European Union. However, members of our embassy visited polling stations in several areas of Abidjan and reported no serious incidents on polling day.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of the Côte d'Ivoire on the failure to distribute identity cards in time for the local elections on 7 July; and if he will make a statement. [69665]

Mr. MacShane: EU and other western diplomatic missions in Côte d'Ivoire, including our own, were in regular touch with the Ivorian Government and Independent Electoral Commission in the run-up to the elections. They made clear, among other things, the need to ensure that arrangements for voter identification were as comprehensive as possible. The Interior Minister gave an assurance that the distribution of identity cards would continue up to and including polling day itself.

BBC World Service

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the salary of the Director of the BBC World Service and Global News is paid out of his Department's grant to the BBC World Service. [70382]

Mr. MacShane: Mark Byford was appointed Director World Service and Global News in October 2001. As soon as the new division is formally established Mr. Byford's remuneration will initially be met two-thirds from the grant in aid and one third from BBC World. This would be subject to review after a year. Pending the creation of the new division, Mr. Byford's remuneration is met entirely from the grant in aid. His remuneration is set by the BBC Board of Governors, and is published in the BBC Annual Report and the BBC World Service Annual Review.

Polish Steel

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions officials of his Department have held with the Polish Government in relation to the privatisation of the Polish Steel company. [69865]

Peter Hain: FCO officials have regularly discussed with the Polish Government the need to re-structure Poland's steel industry and to bring its support for the sector into line with the European Union rules on state aids. Privatisation is likely to be part of that restructuring.

The EU has to agree a restructuring plan with the Polish Government before the competition chapter of the EU enlargement negotiations can be closed.

Gibraltar

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations his Department has received concerning the status of telephone services between Spain and Gibraltar. [69662]

Peter Hain: Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials hosted a meeting on 17 April with representatives of Gibraltar Nynex Communications Ltd. (GNC) and the Government of Gibraltar to discuss the status of telecommunications services between Spain and Gibraltar. On 26 June officials received a follow-up letter on behalf of GNC. We replied on 12 July.

The most recent representation from the Government of Gibraltar on this issue was a letter from the Chief Minister to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 18 March, to which I replied on 19 April.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received regarding changes to the constitution of Gibraltar. [69664]

Peter Hain: We understand that the Gibraltar House of Assembly Select Committee on Constitutional Reform has produced proposals. The Government of Gibraltar has not yet passed these to Her Majesty's Government. We will consider carefully any proposals we receive.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's latest assessment is of progress with negotiations with Spain concerning Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [69661]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made in the House by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 12 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1165.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what members of his Department participated in public ceremonies celebrating the Golden Jubilee on Gibraltar; if he will list the ceremonies on Gibraltar members of his Department attended; and if he will make a statement regarding the celebration of the Golden Jubilee on Gibraltar. [69660]

Peter Hain: To date there have been a total of 10 public events in Gibraltar in celebration of HM the Queen's Golden Jubilee. In addition to those events hosted by His Excellency the Governor (and detailed in my reply to the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) at column 391W, the following events have taken place:

Date	*Event*
3 June	Golden Jubilee Celebrations at Nuffield Pool (including fireworks and lighting of a beacon)
8 June	Golden Jubilee Concert—St. Michael's Cave
10 June	Inter-faith Service of Thanksgiving
13 June	Queen's Birthday/Golden Jubilee Parade at the Victoria Stadium
13 June	Queen's Golden Jubilee Command Reception
10–21 June	Model Soldier Exhibition to commemorate HM the Queen's Golden Jubilee
27 June	Golden Jubilee Celebration Concert at St. Michael's Cave

His Excellency the Governor, together with other members of his staff, attended all the events.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Golden Jubilee celebrations took place hosted by the Governor of Gibraltar; what the costs were; and what local elected officials were invited to the functions. [69658]

Peter Hain: The Governor hosted a Tree-Planting Ceremony on 6 February, a Golden Jubilee Medal Presentation on 7 June and HM the Queen's Golden Jubilee Garden Party on 14 June. The costs were £913, £458 and £8,630 respectively. All local elected representatives were invited to the Tree Planting ceremony and the Garden Party. The Medal Presentation was a purely military affair.

The Governor also took the Royal Salute at the Queen's Birthday/Golden Jubilee Parade on 13 June and was guest of honour at the reception which followed. Both these events were arranged and funded by the Ministry of Defence.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations his Department has received from Spain regarding allegations of smuggling from Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [69663]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave to the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) on 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 151W.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many individuals who live in Spain work in Gibraltar. [R] [68455]

Peter Hain: The Government of Gibraltar do not have these figures available.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the average length of time spent at Yarl's Wood is from arrival to removal from this country; [38664]

(2) whether any persons at Yarl's Wood awaiting removal have been at Yarl's Wood for over *(a)* 14, *(b)* 21, *(c)* 28, *(d)* 35 and *(e)* 42 days; [38663]

(3) how many of those persons who are still at large following the Yarl's Wood fire are *(a)* current asylum seekers and *(b)* failed asylum seekers awaiting removal; [38665]

(4) if any of those removed from Yarl's Wood into prisons since the fire are current asylum seekers; [38668]

(5) what proportion of those who escaped from Yarl's Wood following the fire but were recaptured were *(a)* current asylum seekers and *(b)* failed asylum seekers awaiting removal; [38671]

(6) how many of the persons detained at Yarl's Wood are *(a)* awaiting removal and *(b)* in the process of making an asylum claim. [38666]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* In terms of the status of those individuals who have been transferred to Prison Service accommodation from Yarl's Wood, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend, the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 411W.

The majority of the individuals who are considered to be at large from Yarl's Wood are failed asylum seekers who were detained pending their removal or the outcome of outstanding appeals.

The remaining information requested is not available and could be obtained only by examination of individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many clandestine entrants were found in *(a)* freight trains and *(b)* lorries in each year since 1997. [68806]

Beverley Hughes: The figures for clandestine entrants found in freight trains have only been recorded separately since 2001.

In 2001, locally collated, provisional statistics show that 1,563 clandestines arrived at Dollands Moor rail freight depot having boarded an open sided freight shuttle. For the 1st quarter of 2002 the figure was 454.

The annual figures for clandestine entrants found in lorries and dealt with by Dover Immigration staff were 969 in 1997, 3,274 in 1998, 8,961 in 1999, 12,717 in 2000 and 6,397 in 2001. For the 1st quarter of 2002 the figure is 2,709.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the asylum application of a constituent the name of whom has been communicated to him. [70362]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The hon. Gentleman's constituent's application for asylum was refused on 30 August 2000 and an independent adjudicator upheld this decision on 23 March 2001. He currently has an application for leave to remain here on the basis of marriage, on 15 June 2001, to a British Citizen. On 6 November 2001 the hon. Gentleman's constituent was asked to provide further information in support of this application and I understand that he passed this to his solicitors to forward to the Home Office. This has not been received and my officials will be contacting him shortly to provide further information regarding his marriage.

Medical Retirements

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many employees of his Department retired through work-related ill health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost to the Department was. [56061]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Records are not maintained by the Home Department which enable ill health retirements to be separately identified as work-related. Our records indicate that for the Home Department the number of staff with a medical retirement certificate issued by the Civil Service pension scheme medical adviser for the period 1 January 2001–31 December 2001 was 505. Benefits provided on medical retirement are set out in the rules of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme and laid before Parliament, and provide for an immediate payment of enhanced pension and lump sum. Ill health retirement expenditure is met centrally from the Civil Superannuation Vote. For the year ending March 2002, provisional expenditure met from the vote was £310 million in respect of all Civil Service cases for which an ill health pension has been awarded. These cases number approximately 67,000 and include those who have formally been ill health retired but who have now reached and exceeded the normal retirement age.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is held by his Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61822]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Ministers and officials in this Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business. Information may also be held by the Home Office in connection with the security clearance of any hon. Member who has worked for or on behalf of the Home Office, but not in connection with his or her work as an MP.

Internet (Security)

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken by the Government to ensure that individuals using the internet to buy goods have their bank details and other personal information kept secure. [64799]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government are taking forward a number of initiatives to ensure security of information when purchasing goods on the internet. Last year the Government, working closely with stakeholders, launched their Safe Internet Shopping Campaign to help explain how consumers can shop on-line with confidence. This included guidance on safe payment and data protection, together with directions to the Government's Consumer Gateway (www.consumer.gov.uk) which provides links to sources of detailed information. In addition, existing consumer protection law applies on-line. This includes the Consumer Protection (Distance

Selling) regulations 2000, which give consumers protection against payment card fraud and rights to information and cooling off periods.

The use of personal information on the internet is regulated by the Data Protection Act 1998, which sets rules for the handling of data about living, identifiable individuals throughout the United Kingdom. Among other things, these require personal data to be held securely. The Act is administered independently of the Government by the Information Commissioner, who has the power to take enforcement action if any of the Act's requirements is breached.

The Home Office has actively encouraged the finance and retail sectors to implement secure means of protecting cardholder information. These include the cardholder address and card security code checking system to make transactions over the internet more secure.

Work Permits

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps are being taken to ensure that work permits applied for under shortage occupations criteria are only granted in circumstances where the skill required is classified as a shortage occupation skill; [66013]

(2) if he will make a statement on the process of investigation undertaken by Work Permits (UK) into work permit applications that are submitted on the grounds of shortage occupations criteria. [66016]

Beverley Hughes: Should an employer make a false declaration there are a number of safeguards built into the application process.

The work permit arrangements are designed to strike the right balance between enabling employers to recruit or transfer skilled people from abroad while safeguarding the interests of the resident labour force. The arrangements are labour market led.

Before a work permit can be issued the employer will normally be expected to demonstrate by advertising the post that there is no suitably qualified resident workers. However, this requirement is waived where the vacancy is in respect of an occupation included on Work Permits (UK) shortage occupation list. Such applications will nevertheless need to meet the other criteria of the work permit arrangements as to the skills, qualifications and experience of the employee and the terms and conditions of employment.

If Work Permits (UK) has any doubts about the validity of the information provided on the application form, they can request further evidence, such as a job description, copies of qualifications and references from previous employers to assess whether the overseas worker has the necessary qualifications and skills.

In order to maintain the accuracy of the shortage occupation list, Work Permits (UK) has established a number of industry sector panels. The panels, including one for the Information Technology, Communications and Electronics (ITCE) sector, meet on a quarterly basis to review changes in the labour market and make recommendations on the occupations that should form the shortage list. Members of the ITCE sector panels include other Government Departments, trade unions, relevant industrial bodies and independent representative organisations such as the Professional Contractors Group (PCG).

Work Permits (UK) is also developing arrangements to ensure that the work permit arrangements are not abused once the work permit has been granted. In addition to the existing Allegations Team, Work Permits (UK) is setting up a new Intelligence Team, which is expected to be operational by autumn. This team will facilitate links with the Immigration Service, the police and other interested bodies and allow a more thorough and coherent investigation of allegations. Additionally, a Post Issuing Checking (PIC) team, which will take a pro-active role in targeting sectors and visiting employers, overseas nationals or representatives who Work Permits (UK) suspect are not abiding by the scheme criteria.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of his Department have been employed in its regulatory impact unit in the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [65971]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Home Office departmental responsibility for regulatory impacts is located in the Performance, Delivery and Strategy Unit.

A breakdown of the numbers of staff employed, in each financial year, on regulatory impact matters is as follows:

1997–98 (1 April 1997–31 March 1998): 1

1998–99 (1 April 1998–31 March 1999): 2

1999–2000 (1 April 1999–31 March 2000): 2

2000–01 (1 April 2000–31 March 2001): 2

2001–02 (1 April 2001–31 March 2002): 1.

The Performance, Delivery and Strategy Unit regulatory impact co-ordinator works closely with the officials responsible for developing policies within the Home Office and with the Cabinet Office Regulatory Impact Unit.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters were received by each Minister in his Department in each month since June 1997. [59312]

Mr. Wills: The figures for the number of letters received by each Minister in each month since June 1997 have been placed in the Library.

Drugs

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what he estimates to be the value of the *(a)* domestic and *(b)* international trade in (i) cannabis, (ii) amphetamines, (iii) LSD, (iv) cocaine, (v) ecstasy, (vi) heroin and (vii) crack in the most recent year for which figures are available. [66663]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There are no estimates of the value of the United Kingdom (UK) domestic and international trade in the drugs specified in the question. However, a study by National Economic Research Associates (NERA) produced the following estimates of the value of the market in 1998–99 for the following specific drugs: amphetamines £257.7 million; cannabis

£1,577.9 million; cocaine £352.8 million; crack £1,817.4 million; ecstasy £294.6 million; and heroin £2,313.0 million. These figures should not be regarded as definitive since the purpose of the study "Sizing the UK market for illicit drugs" was to carry out research into different methodologies for assessing the size of illicit drug market. Her Majesty's Customs believe the cocaine (and probably ecstasy) figure from the NERA study is likely to significantly understate the true position by missing much recreational use. This work was in large part derived from the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) and therefore reflects drug users who have come to the attention of the criminal justice system—which is more likely to be the case with heroin or crack users.

A United Nations study published in January 1998 reported that estimates of the turnover of the global illicit drug industry varied considerably from US$100 billion to US$1,000 billion a year, with the most frequently found figures in the literature in the range US$300 billion to US$500 billion a year.

Buildings Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of buildings insurance to his Department was *(a)* before and *(b)* after 11 September 2001. [66922]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Departments are required to comply with the Government's general policy on insurance, which is set out in Government Accounting, Chapter 30, para 30.2.5, which notes that Government do not need to purchase insurance to protect the viability of its business, and should consider insurance only where the value of claims met would exceed the cost of insurance premiums. Commercial insurance of a building is acceptable in cases where *(a)* insurance is a condition of a lease *(b)* the lessor will not accept a Government indemnity *(c)* incurring the total cost of the accommodation in question, including the cost of the insurance, is more cost-effective that other accommodation options [Government Accounting, para 30.2.11a].

The Home Department complies with this policy and with rare exceptions self-insures buildings in which it is the sole occupier. Where part of a building is leased and insurance forms part of the services provided to the building as a whole by the lessor, an element of the service charge payment will relate to the insurance cost, but extracting this element from such charges could only be done at disproportionate cost.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts involving accommodation provision an insurance element also forms part of the overall PFI charge. The Department's policy, based on advice from the Office of Government Commerce is that any additional insurance costs following 11 September is primarily a matter for the private sector.

Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the statistics that are collected by his Department by English parliamentary constituency; and if he will make a statement. [67095]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The Home Department undertakes a wide range of research activities that support the development of information-led policy, including scientific and engineering research, market and opinion research and social research. My Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) conducts social research supporting all seven Home Office aims. However, RDS do not collect statistics at parliamentary constituency level for a number of reasons. In particular, many of the statistics collected locally are based on administrative areas, such as local and police authorities, and these do not always share boundaries with parliamentary constituencies.

In the past, following each United Kingdom (UK) Parliamentary General Election a House of Commons Paper compiled by RDS was laid before Parliament in the form of a Return to an Address, and similarly, after each European Parliamentary Election a Home Office Statistical Bulletin was published by RDS. Each publication contained statistics of individual candidates' Election Expenses (except for the bulletin covering the 1999 European Parliamentary elections where, because of the voting system used, individual candidates did not have control over their expenses). Both publications also contained details, by UK Parliamentary or European Parliamentary constituency, of rejected ballot papers, postal and proxy votes, and votes polled. The responsibility for compiling and publishing these figures passed on 1 December 2000 to the Electoral Commission.

The full list of RDS publications is available on the Home Office website and copies are also placed in the Library.

May I also refer you to the letter sent to you on 8 July 2002 by the National Statistician in which he stated that the Office for National Statistics do not collect statistics at parliamentary constituency level.

Zimbabwe

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons arriving at a port of entry *(a)* from Zimbabwe and *(b)* claiming to be citizens of Zimbabwe from another port of embarkation have been refused entry by immigration officers and returned to Zimbabwe in the last six months for which figures are available. [69081]

Beverley Hughes: The available information relates to the number of Zimbabwean nationals refused leave to enter the United Kingdom and removed. The latest six months for which data is available is for July to December 2000, and is shown in the table.

Information on the original port of embarkation, and the destination of persons removed from the United Kingdom is only available by examination of individual case files at disproportionate cost.

2000	*Zimbabwean nationals refused entry to the United Kingdom and removed*[1]
July	110
August	130
September	160

2000	*Zimbabwean nationals refused entry to the United Kingdom and removed*[1]
October	170
November	220
December	300
Total refused and removed July-December 2000	1,090

[1] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action has been initiated against them and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntarily Return Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). All figures are rounded to nearest five.

Information on the number of people refused leave to enter the United Kingdom and removed during 2001 will be published later this year in the Command paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 2001", and will be available from the Library and the website of the Research Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Romanian Immigrants

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Romanian Government on the issue of illegal immigrants by Romanian citizens into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [68450]

Beverley Hughes: Home Office officials met their Romanian counterparts in November 2001 and March 2002 to negotiate the terms of a readmission agreement between our two countries. The draft agreement is intended to improve co-operation between the United Kingdom and Romania in order to contribute to the prevention and combating of illegal migration. This it will do by facilitating the readmission to each country of its own citizens and third country nationals whose residence in the other country is illegal. Officials are currently working on finalising the text of the agreement, which we expect to be formally signed later this year.

The United Kingdom has also deployed two officers to Romania in an advisory capacity, to assist the Romanian government in creating a professional intelligence unit for combating organised immigration crime. The unit aims to provide intelligence packages to support operational activity to target the criminal gangs operating in and through Romania.

Removals (Injuries)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been injured during removal from the UK during the last six months; what the nature of the injuries was and how they are documented; what the policy of the IND Enforcement Directorate is on removal of injured persons, and if he will make a statement. [68835]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Home Office does not keep statistics centrally recording those individuals injured during removal from the United Kingdom and these figures are available only at disproportionate cost.

Medical staff at the removal centre will examine any detainee who states that they are ill or injured prior to travel to ascertain if they are fit to travel.

A detainee injured during removal, while still in the United Kingdom would be referred to the Port Medical Inspector who would assess whether the detainee is fit to travel.

The escorting contractors complete an incident report detailing any incident occurring during removal.

Asylum Applications (Iraqis)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqis have claimed asylum in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; how many of them claimed to be Kurdish; and how many of those claiming to be Kurdish *(a)* were granted refugee status, *(b)* were granted exceptional leave to remain, *(c)* were refused both and *(d)* were refused both after appeal. [69342]

Beverley Hughes: The table shows the applications and initial decisions of Iraqis, excluding dependants, claiming asylum from 1997 to 2001:

	1997[1]	*1998*[1]	*1999*[1]	*2000*[1,2]	*2001*[1,2]	*Total*
Applications received	1,075	1,295	1,800	7,475	6,805	18,450
Initial decisions[3]	660	1,100	735	5,520	4,060	12,075
Cases considered under normal procedures[4]						
Granted asylum	255	510	315	845	805	2,730
Granted ELR	295	500	320	2,455	1,800	5,370
Refused	110	90	100	2,220	1,455	3,975
Backlog clearance exercise[5]						
Granted asylum or ELR under backlog criteria	—	—	5	10	—	15
Refused under backlog criteria[6]	—	—	*	*	—	*

[1] Data rounded to the nearest 5 with * = 1 or 2

[2] Provisional data

[3] Initial decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications received in the same period

[4] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions

[5] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre 1996 asylum application backlog

[6] Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds

Data for refusals after appeal are available only for 1998 when 25 appeals were dismissed.

It is not possible to say how many of the applicants are of Kurdish origin. Data on the ethnic origin of asylum seekers are not collated centrally and are therefore not available; the number of those who applied would be available only by examination of individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those Iraqi Kurds who have been refused refugee status and exceptional leave to remain after appeal have *(a)* been removed from the United Kingdom and *(b)* left voluntarily in the last three years. [69343]

Beverley Hughes: The number of Iraqi nationals removed in the last three quarters of 2001 after making an application for asylum in the United Kingdom is given in the table, figures prior to this are not available. It is not possible to say how many of these are of Kurdish origin or at what stage of their application they were removed, it is also not possible to determine the number of persons who leave voluntarily without informing the Home Office of their departure.

Iraqi principal asylum applicants removed[1,2,3,4]

	Number
Q2 2001	25
Q3 2001	15
Q4 2001	15

[1] Provisional estimated data, subject to change.

[2] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Returns Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration.

[3] Nationality breakdown of dependants is unavailable.

[4] Data rounded to the nearest 5.

Information on the number of asylum removals is published on a quarterly basis. The next set of data will be available on 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Raves

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many raves took place in South England in the last two years, broken down by county. [69393]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: This information is not held centrally and could be gained only at disproportionate cost.

Positive Futures Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the existing positive futures projects; [68780]

(2) if he will make a statement on the 33 new positive futures schemes referred to on page 170 of the 2002 Departmental report. [68779]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The existing Positive Futures projects have recently been subjected to independent evaluation which found that they are achieving their aims of increasing sports participation and reducing youth crime and drugs misuse. It found:

a reduction in recorded crime (of up to as much as 77 per cent.) in every area with a Positive Futures project;

Positive changes in behaviour and lifestyle for many of these youngsters who were deemed to be 'at risk', for example returning to the education system;

An increase in sports participation with many youngsters joining sports clubs, gaining coaching and leadership qualifications.

New projects were awarded to 33 agencies that demonstrated how sports projects would complement the work of local youth offending and drug action teams. The majority of projects that started in April 2002 have now appointed staff and are working with statutory services to identify the 50 young people most 'at risk' of offending to ensure their involvement in the sports programmes.

PSA Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated cost to public funds is of achieving the PSA target to make significant progress towards one million more people being actively involved in their communities by March 2004. [68795]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor (Mr. Brown) announced in January 2001 that he was making available £300 million as part of a package which almost doubled the Government's commitment to encourage more people to get involved in their communities. This includes expenditure on a range of initiatives including:

£60 million to be used to develop mentoring, and modernise infrastructure in voluntary and community organisations;

£70 million for the Children's Fund, which was announced as part of the Spending Review 2000;

£50 million for community groups in deprived areas; and

£120 million to fund volunteering in public services and a new National Experience Corp for the over 50's to pass on their skills and experience to help others.

Macedonian Nationals

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Macedonian nationals are prohibited from entering the UK. [69777]

Beverley Hughes: There is no international travel ban applying to Macedonian nationals at present. Nor have any Macedonian nationals been excluded from entering the United Kingdom within the last 10 years at the personal direction of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary using the powers available to him under the Immigration Rules. There will, however, be Macedonian nationals who are excluded on an individual basis under immigration powers, such as those who have been deported from the United Kingdom. It would entail disproportionate cost to identify all such individuals.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated level of losses to fraud and corruption was in *(a)* his Department's Vote 1 budget and *(b)* his Department's Vote 2 budget for (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [54722]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is as follows:

£000

Description	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Vote 1[1]	210.2	86.9
Vote 2[2]	159.5	77.3
Total	369.7	164.2

[1] Vote 1—interpreted as core Home Office, agencies and no departmental public bodies and

[2] Vote 2—interpreted as Prison Service

The Home Office has a comprehensive anti-fraud and corruption policy and a response plan that is applied vigorously. All cases of reported fraud and theft are investigated with follow-up action taken, which includes prosecution where appropriate. There has been a decrease in overall reported cases of fraud and theft during 2001–02.

Criminal Justice System Annual Report

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the Criminal Justice System annual report for 2001–02. [71447]

Mr. Blunkett: My noble and learned Friends the Attorney-General, the Lord Chancellor and I will today be publishing jointly an annual report for the criminal justice system for England and Wales.

The document is a report back on the criminal justice system business plan 2001–02. It summarises the progress which has been made in modernising the criminal justice system, building on that reported in the previous two annual reports.

Copies of the report will be placed in the Library.

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 will report. [71448]

Hilary Benn: The review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 has completed its work. The report, "Breaking the Circle", is published today. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Cannabis (Road Deaths)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many road deaths are estimated to be a result of the influence of cannabis in each of the last three years. [70136]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

National road accident statistics do not identify cases where drivers involved in fatal road accidents were under the influence of drugs. There are no estimates of the numbers involved in accidents where drivers had been under the influence of cannabis. Recent research shows that 12 per cent. of those killed in road accidents had traces of cannabis in the body. However, the presence of the drug cannot be taken as evidence of accident causation. In addition, the inactive element of cannabis remains detectable for a long time after any impairing effect.

Drug Deaths

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of deaths related to misuse of *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* tobacco, *(c)* cannabis, *(d)* ecstasy, *(e)* amphetamines, *(f)* LSD, *(g)* heroin, *(h)* cocaine and *(i)* crack cocaine in the past 12 months. [67615]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The available information estimates that between 5,000 and 40,000 deaths per annum are caused by alcohol in England and Wales, reflecting the wide range of methods of calculation used in many studies.

It is estimated that smoking causes 120,000 deaths in the United Kingdom each year. Source: "The UK Smoking Epidemic: Deaths in 1995" Health Education Authority.

Figures published by the Office for National Statistics indicate the number of times cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines, LSD, heroin, and cocaine are mentioned on death certificates. These figures are shown in the table. Separate figures are not available on crack cocaine.

Figures for these substances are not on a comparable basis to those given for alcohol and smoking related deaths which are estimates.

Number of deaths where selected substances were mentioned on the death certificate—England and Wales 2000

	All deaths with substance mentioned
Heroin/morphine[1]	926
Cocaine (including crack cocaine)	80
Amphetamines	59
Ecstasy	36
Cannabis	11
LSD	0

[1] As heroin breaks down in the body into morphine, the latter may be detected at post mortem and recorded on the death certificate

Source:

"Death related to drug poisoning: England and Wales 1993–2000" Health Statistics Quarterly 13, spring 2002, Office for National Statistics; ONS database of drug-related poisonings

CABINET OFFICE

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by his Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64639]

Mr. Alexander: My Department has not introduced, removed or amended any Statutory instruments from 1 January to the present day.

Buildings Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the cost of buildings insurance to his Department was *(a)* before and *(b)* after 11 September 2001. [66927]

Mr. Alexander: Departments are required to comply with the Government's general policy on insurance, which is set out in Government Accounting, Chapter 30, paragraph 30.2.5, which notes that Government do not need to purchase insurance to protect the viability of its business and, should consider insurance only where the value of claims met would exceed the cost of insurance premiums. Commercial insurance of a building is acceptable in cases where (a) insurance is a condition of a lease, (b) the lessor will not accept a Government indemnity, (c) incurring the total cost of the accommodation in question, including the cost of the insurance, is more cost-effective than other accommodation options (Government Accounting, paragraph 30.2.11a). For the Cabinet Office the figures requested are as follows:

1 April 2001 to 11 September 2001: £14,799.00

12 September 2001 to 31 March 2001: £27,746.00.

The increase in the post 11 September 2002 figure is primarily due to changes in the Cabinet Office's estate.

Building Values

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the buildings owned by his Department and estimate the market value of each of them. [66947]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) gave the hon. Member for Buckingham on 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 339W.

Civil Service Pay

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what his policy is on the inclusion of Civil Servants within national pay scales. [68894]

Mr. Alexander: Responsibility for pay and grading outside the Senior Civil Service is delegated to Departments and agencies. The Government's policy is to give greater freedom and autonomy to front line managers, including for pay and grading, in order to encourage innovation and improve delivery. A system which included all Civil Servants within national pay scales would be incompatible with this policy.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Communications Bill

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy to place a duty upon Ofcom *(a)* to ensure that inclusive design principles inform the development of all future digital communication technologies, facilities, services and equipment, *(b)* to promote the need for disability awareness and equality training throughout the communication industries and *(c)* to ensure that accessible communications services, equipment and facilities, with special emphasis on training and continuing support in their use, are made readily available at no extra cost to consumers who are disabled. [67783]

Dr. Howells: Ofcom must have regard to the needs of people with disabilities in carrying out all of its functions—this requirement is in Clause 3(2)d of the draft Communications Bill.

Although there is no specific requirement on Ofcom to ensure that communications equipment is provided for disabled users the EC Radio and Telecommunications Terminal Equipment Directive permits the EC Commission to decide that particular types of apparatus shall support certain features for disabled users. The Government is working to improve the range of communications equipment available for disabled users through raising awareness of their needs among equipment designers and manufacturers.

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Although there is no specific requirement on Ofcom to ensure that communications equipment is provided for disabled users the EC Radio and Telecommunications Terminal Equipment Directive permits the EC Commission to decide that particular types of apparatus shall support certain features for disabled users. The Government are working to improve the range of communications equipment available for disabled users through raising awareness of their needs among equipment designers and manufacturers.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what savings she envisages by replacing existing regulators with the Office of Communications with regard to *(a)* staff and *(b)* expenditure; and what qualitative change in the culture of regulation she expects to be achieved by replacing the existing regulators with Ofcom. [69373]

Dr. Howells: The Government expect the replacement of the existing regulators by Ofcom to result in savings through greater administrative efficiency and the elimination of duplication. It is, however, too early to quantify any such savings at this stage.

The creation of Ofcom should allow a more coherent, integrated and balanced approach to be taken to regulation across the communications sector as a whole.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received on the creation of the Contents Board as part of the Office of Communications; and if she will make a statement. [67856]

Dr. Howells: A number of representations have been made which refer to the creation of the proposed Content Board as part of Ofcom as part of the consultation process following the publication of the draft Communications Bill.

These representations will be considered along with all other responses to the consultation and the report of the Joint Committee undertaking pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy to enshrine a grant-making power for the Secretary of State in the forthcoming Communications Bill similar to that enshrined in section 93 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 to defray or contribute towards expenses incurred in developing and providing accessible communications apparatus and technologies for disabled people. [68305]

Dr. Howells: The grant making powers under section 93 of the Telecommunications Act have never been used and it is not intended to carry them forward into the forthcoming Communications Bill. The Government will continue to work to improve the range of communications equipment available for people with disabilities through raising awareness of their needs among equipment designers and manufacturers.

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action her Department has taken since July 2000 to ensure that those in receipt of grants for construction, restoration and refurbishment projects conform to Government requirements regarding timber procurement; and if she will make a statement. [67079]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is fully aware of the importance of procuring timber from responsibly managed and sustainable sources and actively encourages all of its non-Departmental public bodies (NDPBs) to take account of the principles of sustainable development in making grants. We are currently consulting Lottery distributors on ways in which a practical link between funding, projects and sustainable development, that can be trialed and measured, can be developed. We are also in the process of mapping the environmental practices of all our NDPBs with the intention of issuing further specific guidance, as appropriate.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff have contributed to her Department's input to the Spending Review. [68686]

Dr. Howells: The Spending Review involves a comprehensive assessment of the Department's performance, priorities and resource requirements, and a range of staff make a contribution.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in her Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68739]

Dr. Howells: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Images of England

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received regarding the initiative entitled Images of England by English Heritage; what steps she is taking to preserve the privacy of home owners who do not wish to have their houses displayed; and if she will ask English Heritage to abandon this scheme. [69818]

Dr. Howells: English Heritage's Images of England project is currently taking a single external photograph of each of England's 370,000 listed buildings. The project is grant aided by the Heritage Lottery Fund and began in 1999. Details of all listed buildings are already in the public domain. The photographs are primarily being taken from public land and will be published on the project's website. Where it is not possible to take a photograph from publicly accessible land, the Images of England photographer will seek consent from the owner, and if it is refused, will not take a photograph.

English Heritage has also asked the Heritage Lottery Fund to approve an exemption scheme whereby photographs of private dwellings taken from public land will not be placed on the website for a period of 10 years if the owner requests this. I believe this strikes the right balance between the interests of the individual and the public.

The Government are keen to improve access to all publicly available information. We have no plans to ask English Heritage to abandon the scheme.

Alcopops

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what research she has commissioned into the ages of the purchasers of alcopops. [69746]

Dr. Howells: Neither my Department, nor the Home Department which previously had responsibility for alcohol licensing, have commissioned their own research into the ages of the purchasers of alcopops. In formulating policies regarding alcohol Ministers have, however, considered research from a number of sources, including the Department of Health's teenage drinking survey, the British Medical Association's alcohol and young people survey and other work carried out by the Alcohol Education and Research Council.

I am pleased to say that the Portman Group's second review of its Code of Practice, on the naming, packaging and merchandising of alcoholic drinks found that "underage appeal" of alcoholic drinks, which was the predominant cause for complaint in the code's first years, has now virtually disappeared as a problem. The Government are not, however, complacent about these issues and the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 strengthened the ability of the police and trading standards officers to use young people to carry out test purchases of alcohol with the aim of ensuring that young people do not obtain alcohol illegally.

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was of publishing her Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70474]

Dr. Howells: The cost of publishing the Department's annual report for each of the past five years was as follows:

Annual report costs 1998–2002

£

	Design, typesetting, pdfs etc.	Print[1]	Proof reading	Total
1998	38,664	16,800	—	55,464
1999	46,142	25,000	—	71,142
2000	40,212	18,310	648	59,170
2001	45,144	24,648	533	70,325
2002	56,105	24,774	570	81,449

[1] Buy back copies from The Stationery Office.

The costs for 2002 include the development of a new design template which the Department plans to follow for the next two to three years.

Commonwealth Games

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish the Government's response to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's Fifth report, Session 2001–02, "Revisiting the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games". [71207]

Tessa Jowell: I am today publishing the Government's response to the Select Committee's Fifth report entitled "Revisiting the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games". The response is available on the DCMS website (www.culture.gov.uk) and copies of the response have been laid before Parliament and deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Historical Manuscripts Commission

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the future of the Historical Manuscripts Commission in the light of the recommendations in the Chipperfield report. [71352]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts announced on Friday 12 July the publication of the report into the review of the functions carried out by the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (HMC) by Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield.

The Government accept the key recommendations of the report and as a result of consultations with the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Public Record Office and the Historical Manuscripts Commission my right hon. and noble Friend was able to announce that the Government intend to establish a new body, the National Archives. This will bring together functions relating to public and private records, in order to serve the nation's archives in a more efficient and effective way. It will also enhance access by members of the public to this uniquely rich national resource. The new body will report to the Lord Chancellor.

To help facilitate the establishment of this new body, my Department has agreed to provide additional investment to enable the HMC to upgrade the National Register of Archives.

Copies of the report are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Religious Broadcasting

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she plans to maintain the ban on religious organisations owning many categories of broadcasting licence; and if she will make a statement. [70779]

Dr. Howells: The Government's position is set out in the document 'The draft Communications Bill—The Policy' which states that where there is sufficient spectrum availability, restrictions on religious bodies holding licences will be removed (para 9.3.3).

The Radio Authority, which licences all independent radio services in the UK, is currently given discretion under the Broadcasting Act 1990 to award local analogue, satellite and cable licences to religious bodies, subject to compliance with the authority's codes, and the ITC can also award cable and satellite TV licences to religious organisations. The draft Bill increases the number of types of licences which religious bodies can hold by giving Ofcom discretion to award local digital sound programme service licences, digital additional service licences, digital programme service licences and TV restricted service licences.

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether her Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [70982]

Dr. Howells: Yes, the Department does have a designated consultation-co-ordinator.

ITV Licences

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list *(a)* the regional managing directors of ITV licences, *(b)* members of the boards for licence management and maintenance and *(c)* conditions for membership of such boards. [69673]

Dr. Howells: The regional managing directors of ITV licences are as follows.

ITV regional company	*Managing director*
Anglia	Graham Creelman
Border	Paddy Merrall
Carlton Central	Ian Squires
Carlton London	Colin Stanbridge
Carlton Westcountry	Mark Haskell
Channel	Michael Lucas
Grampian	Derrick Thomson
Granada	Brenda Smith
HTV	Jeremy Payne
LWT	Christy Swords
Meridian	Lindsay Charlton
Scottish	Sandy Ross
Tyne Tees	Margaret Fay
UTV	John McCann
Yorkshire	David Croft

Membership of the boards and conditions of membership are matters for individual ITV companies and details can be obtained from the regional managing directors listed above.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mentally Incapacitated Patients

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the definition of giving basic care to a helpless patient includes the provision of fluids. [67209]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government's position is that the definition of basic care includes the offer of food and fluids. These should always be offered to patients who are capable of swallowing them. Where nutrition and hydration have to be provided by artificial means, their possible withdrawal is, in all cases, a matter of clinical judgment which is undertaken in accordance with professional advice provided by a responsible and recognised body of medical opinion and the general law. The current consultation paper, "Making Decisions: Helping People who have Difficulty Deciding for Themselves", reflects this position.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice will be given based on consultation on "Making Decisions: Helping People who Have Difficulty Deciding for Themselves" in the advisory leaflets on the effects of dehydration. [67208]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Consultation Paper, "Making Decisions: Helping People who have Difficulty Deciding for Themselves", seeks responses by 9 July 2002. Following the closure of the consultation period, all responses received will be thoroughly considered and will inform the final published version of the guidance leaflets. I will make a statement on responses to the consultation in due course.

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of the staff of the Lord Chancellor's Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66908]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 5 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 622W.

Adjudicators

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many adjudicators were in post in January of each of the last 10 years. [68642]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information can be produced, but it has not been possible to do so in the time available. I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Child Abduction

Ross Cranston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the return rates for the United Kingdom to and from *(a)* Europe and *(b)* the United States were under the Hague Child Abduction Convention for each of the last two years. [69817]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The four tables show the return rates for England and Wales to and from *(a)* Europe and *(b)* the United States, for European and USA signatories to the Hague Convention:

Figure 1: Return rates to England and Wales—European signatories

	2000	*2001*
Cases received during the year	88	96
Cases outstanding at end of the year	26	29
Cases where return of child achieved	40	38
Return rate (percentage)	64.5	56.7

Figure 2: Return rates from England and Wales—European signatories

	2000	*2001*
Cases received during the year	139	155
Cases outstanding at end of the year	51	55
Cases where return of child achieved	57	58
Return rate (percentage)	64.8	58

Figure 3: Return rates to England and Wales—USA signatories

	2000	*2001*
Cases received during the year	38	41
Cases outstanding at end of the year	12	20
Cases where return of child achieved	17	13
Return rate (percentage)	50	39

Figure 4: Return rates from England and Wales—USA signatories

	2000	*2001*
Cases received during the year	28	24
Cases outstanding at end of the year	11	11
Cases where return of child achieved	15	14
Return rate (percentage)	53	58

Public Guardianship Office

Mr. Evans: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints have been made about the standard of service in the Public Guardianship Office in 2001. [70241]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In the financial year 2001–02, 815 complaints were made to the Public Guardianship Office about the standard of service. A further 53 complaints were made about judicial decisions, fees, the conduct of solicitors or the provision of security bonds. This was the first full year of PGO's existence.

Access to Justice Act

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Law Society in handling complaints with reference to the reserve powers that are contained in the Access to Justice Act 1999. [70243]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We continue to have concerns about the Law Society's performance in complaints handling, particularly in relation to the quality of casework. The Lord Chancellor has therefore asked the Legal Services Ombudsman to maintain increased oversight of the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors, the Law Society's complaints handling wing. He has warned that unless speedy and substantive improvements are made across the board, he will not hesitate to implement his reserve powers, which allow for the establishment of a Legal Services Complaints Commissioner.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Software

Brian White: To ask the President of the Council what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69322]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department's computer software requirements are met via a Cabinet Office contract. Accordingly, I refer to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office on 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 84W.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68730]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information requested is as follows:

	Country	*No. of officials*	*Purpose of trip*	*Overall cost of trip*[1] *(£)*
September 2000	Croatia	1	Official ministerial trip	2,481.07
September 2000	Switzerland and Germany	3	Official ministerial trip	6,697.21
October 2000	Mexico	4	Official ministerial trip	16,012.17
October 2000	Netherlands	1	Human Resource Management seminar	500.68
January 2001	America	5	Official ministerial trip	48,387.01
October 2001	Ireland	1	Information already available[2]	348.13
October 2001	Netherlands	1	Human Resource Management seminar	585.43

[1] Includes travel, accommodation and subsistence costs.

[2] I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 727W.

All overseas travel by officials in my Department is undertaken in accordance with the principles set in Chapter 8 of the Civil Service Management Code, and the detailed rules and guidance set out in the Cabinet Office Management Code. Information requested prior to September 2000 was not collected, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Lactose

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the UK Medicines Control Agency will approve the issuing of new licences for medicines containing lactose. [53427]

Ms Blears: The Medicines Control Agency has approved the new licences for medicines containing lactose, and these licences will now be issued.

EU Food Supplements Directive

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what position the UK Government have taken on the proposed EU food supplements directive, with specific reference to *(a)* possible banning of certain nutrients and *(b)* limits on the potency of others. [57960]

Ms Blears: The European Union food supplements directive has been adopted. In negotiations the Food Standards Agency (FSA), that represented the United Kingdom, argued that there should be no unnecessary restrictions on the sale of food supplements that are safe and properly labelled.

The directive includes lists of vitamins and minerals, and vitamin and mineral sources, that may be used in food supplements. The FSA secured a position enabling member states to allow continued sale of products containing additional sources for up to seven years after the directive comes into force, pending safety assessment. The Government intend to take full advantage of this flexibility when implementing the directive.

The directive lays down principles for setting maximum limits for vitamins and minerals in food supplements, but does not set specific limits. The FSA argued that limits should be based on thorough scientific risk assessments.

Breastfeeding

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the proportion of mothers who breastfeed their babies; and how this has changed in the last five years. [68037]

Ms Blears: There has been an increase in the proportion of women who initiated breastfeeding between 1995 and 2000. The results of the infant feeding survey 2000 showed that 71 per cent. of the mothers in England and Wales initiated breastfeeding compared to 68 per cent. in 1995. The increase in England and Wales was particularly marked in low-income households, where the proportion of women who initiated breastfeeding increased from 50 per cent. to 59 per cent. between 1995 and 2000.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support the Government provides to assist in the promotion of breastfeeding. [68038]

Ms Blears: The Government are fully committed to the promotion of breastfeeding, which is accepted as the best form of nutrition for infants. We currently have a commitment in the NHS Plan for "increased support for breastfeeding" and have identified a number of key projects. They include:

the development and dissemination of the evidence base on good practice through 'Best Practice' projects funded under the infant feeding initiative with funding of £3 million for three years. A total of 79 'Best Practice' projects have been funded across all regions. These projects were funded to enable effective communication and evaluation of current good practice, to address the barriers to breastfeeding, and thereby lead to improved breastfeeding rates among those least likely to breastfeed. This is a goal shared by all Sure Start initiatives and several health action zone programmes.

embedding messages into national health service practice and other policies through the national breastfeeding awareness week and national network of breastfeeding co-ordinators.

ensuring effective monitoring of infant feeding practices through quinquennial infant feeding surveys.

Other related departmental activities include support for four main voluntary organisations involved in the promotion of breastfeeding and maintaining close links with UNICEF's baby friendly initiative.

This work will be developed in the context of the forthcoming children's national service framework and will include maternity services that allow children to start their lives well and grow into healthy adults.

Cancer

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish a national set of standards for primary care for cancer. [61422]

Ms Blears: Hospital cancer services have been assessed against national standards and we are working to develop primary care services for cancer patients. Cancer clinical leads have recently been appointed in every primary care trust.

Cancer standards will be included in the quality framework of the new general medical services contract. This is being negotiated by the National Health Service Confederation and the British Medical Association and will be made public in due course.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the work published in the International Journal of Cancer, volume 99, by University of Newcastle researchers in respect of cancer risks from the BNFL plant at Sellafield. [68258]

Ms Blears: This study has been referred to the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE). COMARE will advise on this study and several other much larger studies concerned with the incidence of cancer in the children of radiation workers, in the committee's seventh report, which is expected to be published shortly.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that the NHS Cancer Plan and the implementation of the NICE guidance do not suffer while the structural changes to the NHS become established. [64387]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 27 June 2002]:* We recognise the need to maintain and improve delivery of services for patients while structural changes in the national health service are made. Strategic health authorities, primary care organisations and trusts are responsible for implementation of the Cancer Plan. They need to work through existing cancer networks to do this.

Primary care trusts have a legal requirement to ensure that funding for the appropriate implementation of National Institute for Clinical Excellence technology appraisals will be available within three months.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the reasons underlying the lower survival rate for *(a)* cancer and *(b)* colon cancer in the United Kingdom than in (i) Germany and (ii) the United States. [67800]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* While other developed countries have broadly similar incidence of cancer, there is evidence to suggest that for many cancers, including colon cancer, survival rates for patients diagnosed a decade ago are lower in this country than in comparable European countries and the United States. Experts in the field suggest that the reason for the lower survival rates is due at least in part to patients in the United Kingdom having more advanced disease at the time of treatment.

That is why, in September 2000, we published the "NHS Cancer Plan" which sets out a programme of action to improve cancer prevention, detection, treatment and research which are intended to bring our survival rates in line with the rest of Europe.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government have taken since 1997 to raise awareness of *(a)* testicular cancer and *(b)* other cancers in men. [66358]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 3 July 2002]:* The Department contributed to the recent production of Cancer Research UK's leaflet, "Testicular Cancer—Spot the Symptoms". Copies are available in the Library and also on both Cancer Research UK's and the Department's websites. We have also been working with Cancer Research UK on the development of information to support the prostate cancer risk management programme.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cancer specialist units there were *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [66360]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 3 July 2002]:* Cancer services in England are organised in 34 cancer networks. Cancer networks bring together primary, secondary, tertiary and voluntary service providers to plan and deliver specialist services across the patient pathway. Information on the number of participating institutions is not collected centrally.

Teenage Pregnancy

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which authorities hold lead responsibility at local level for the preparation and delivery of teenage pregnancy strategies. [63332]

Ms Blears: Since April 2001, every top tier local authority in England has a local teenage pregnancy strategy and rolling three-year action plan, developed jointly by health and local authority partners and agreed by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit in the Department. Responsibility for the implementation of the local strategy is held jointly by the local authority and relevant primary care trusts (PCTs).

Since April 2002, funding to support implementation of agreed local strategies has been routed to local authorities through a teenage pregnancy local implementation grant. The local authority is the accountable body and must take decisions on the expenditure of the grant to ensure that it is used to support the aims of the agreed local strategy. The local teenage pregnancy partnership board, with representation from the local authority, PCTs and key local partners, should make recommendations on the use of the grant and oversee implementation of the local action plan.

BSE

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reasons why the Food Standards Agency are making representations to the Commission to ban the use of sheep intestines in sausages; and what scientific evidence his Department has collated on whether scrapie in sheep could mask the detection of BSE. [63676]

Ms Blears: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that the Agency's Board endorsed a report on bovine spongiform eucephalopathy (BSE) and sheep from a core group of stakeholders at its meeting in Armagh on 13 June. It contained a recommendation that the European Commission be requested to add sheep intestine to the current list of specified risk material for sheep as an additional precautionary measure. The Board agreed the recommendation on the basis that the measure, added to the current controls, could reduce potential infectivity entering the food chain by up to two-thirds if BSE were found in sheep. Current precautionary measures are estimated to reduce risk by approximately one-third.

There is a theoretical risk that BSE exists in the national flock as some consumed the same type of feed that is thought to have infected cattle. A sheep apparently suffering from scrapie could instead be suffering from BSE as it is currently not possible to differentiate between the symptoms of the two diseases. In an Opinion issued in February 2001, the Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) of the European Union stated: 'the agent causing scrapie, the expression of clinical disease in scrapie-affected sheep, cannot currently be distinguished from BSE by any means other than biological strain typing of the agent responsible.' Bioassays in mice take up to two years to complete. It has only been possible to test a small sample of brains from sheep thought to have scrapie to determine whether a BSE-like strain is present.

Fluoride

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy for fluoridated toothpaste to carry health warning labels. [64464]

Ms Blears: No. The only risk to health identified from the use of toothpaste containing fluoride is dental fluorosis. I am satisfied that the instructions on use which manufacturers include on packets and tubes of toothpaste protects the public from this risk.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if disodium fluorosilicate and hexafluorosilicic acid are safe to use for the purpose of fluoridating drinking water. [64465]

Ms Blears: Yes. In dilute aqueous solution, sufficient to increase the naturally occurring fluoride concentration to one part per million, hexafluorosilicic acid yields fluoride ions, hydrogen ions and silica. Disodium hexafluorosilicate yields sodium ions in addition. All of these products occur naturally in water supplies. The only product whose concentration is significantly raised by fluoridation is the fluoride ion.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy on water fluoridation. [64471]

Ms Blears: We have asked the Medical Research Council for advice on how the research base on the safety and efficacy of water fluoridation in reducing tooth decay might be strengthened and their report is expected shortly. In the meantime our advice to health communities in areas of high dental decay is to consider consulting their local populations on whether they should have their water fluoridated.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what restrictions there are on the concentration of fluoride permitted in water used to manufacture baby foods. [64472]

Ms Blears: The quality of drinking water is subject to The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 (SI 1147) as amended. This sets a maximum limit for fluoride at 1.5 mg per litre. Therefore, companies making baby food or infant formula using tap water would have less than 1.5 mg per litre for the water component of the feed, plus any other source of fluoride. As the limit for fluoride is the same for Private Water Supplies (The Private Water Supply Regulations 1991 SI 2790), manufacturers using such a supply would not be expected to produce baby food with a different level of fluoride.

Hospital Waiting Times

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank health authorities in England in order of the highest waiting times for hospital operations, according to the numbers waiting *(a)* over six months and *(b)* over 12 months for in-patient treatments. [64537]

Mr. Hutton: Information about waiting times in the current year is not available by health authority. We are currently progressing work to collect waiting times data from primary care trusts to reflect the new organisations that came into being in April 2002.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was for a patient to see *(a)* a general practitioner and *(b)* a consultant in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [65581]

Mr. Hutton: Data on actual or average patient waiting times to see a general practitioner are not collected or held by the Department.

From September 2001 data are being collected quarterly on the lead time for the first available appointment with each GP practice.

From the March 2002 survey, results showed that 75 per cent. of practices, with appointment systems in place, could offer a patient an appointment with a GP within two working days.

The table shows the average (median) waiting time for patients to be seen for their first out-patient appointment following GP written referral. Over this period the number of out-patient attendance's have increased by 407,000 (5.3 per cent.)

Average (median) consultant out-patient waiting times: NHS Trusts, England

	Median wait (weeks)
1997–98	6.3
1998–99	6.8
1999–2000	7.3
2000–01	7.3
2001–02	7.2

Source:
Department of Health form QM08

Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set for 2002–03 for the Director of International Recruitment for Health Services for the number of foreign recruited nurses working in the NHS. [66161]

Mr. Hutton: A combination of international recruitment, return to practice, improved retention and increased output from training has meant that the NHS Plan increase of 20,000 more nurses by 2004 has been achieved well in advance of the 2004 target.

The same methods will be used to ensure delivery of the manifesto target and further increases in the nursing workforce.

NHS Recruitment

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Department in the NHS is responsible for organising recruitment by way of the internet; and what its budget is. [68119]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's human resources directorate is currently undertaking procurement for a national electronic (internet) recruitment service.

Full costings will be available once the contract has been awarded through the procurement process.

Primary Care Trusts

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what incentives will be given to primary care trusts and strategic health authorities to encourage long-term use of international establishments. [65499]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts, working with their strategic health authorities, are responsible for identifying the health needs of their local populations and for arranging to meet these needs, commissioning services from an increasingly diverse range of healthcare providers. International establishment schemes that offer good value and high quality care services will have an increasingly important role in meeting these healthcare objectives. "Growing Capacity" sets out our plans for developing and managing the market to enable commissioners to make best use of the opportunities available.

Cervical Screening

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether funding and co-ordination of liquid based cytology training for pathologists, screeners and smear-takers will be organised centrally through the NHS Cervical Screening Programme following the NICE review; [67071]

(2) who will be responsible for reviewing the requirements for liquid based cytology processing centres in England and Wales following the NICE review. [67068]

(3) what plans have been put in place to train staff in preparation for the roll-out of liquid based cytology cervical screening within six months of a positive NICE review; [67073]

(4) what additional data relating to liquid based cytology is expected as a result of the English cervical screening pilot trials; [67066]

(5) if it is anticipated that every laboratory which wants to offer liquid based cytology screening will be appropriately funded following the NICE review; [67069]

(6) when NICE's review of the English pilot trials will be published; and who will be consulted as part of the review; [67067]

Ms Blears: Changing to liquid based cytology (LBC) would be a major change to the way in which the national health service cervical screening programme is delivered. Before any new technology is introduced in the NHS, we must be sure that it is safe and effective, and that quality standards can be maintained.

The evaluation report of the three sites in the English LBC pilot is due in the autumn, and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) will give their decision on its implementation across the NHS cervical screening programme in 2003. As part of this process, NICE will consult all relevant stakeholders including manufacturers, patient and professional groups.

We are discussing with experts in the field, NHS cancer screening programmes and the NHS Purchasing and Supplies Agency how best to introduce LBC if the NICE decision is positive, including training in laboratories and primary care and the potential impact of LBC on laboratory provision.

The evaluation of the pilot will provide data on the effects, costs and practical implications of introducing LBC technology into the NHS cervical screening programme.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if funding for setting up liquid based cytology cervical screening services will be provided direct to the laboratories, and if such funding will be ring-fenced. [67070]

Ms Blears: The April 2002 Budget provides the highest sustained growth in national health service history: annual average increases of 7.4 per cent. per annum real terms over the five years 2003–04 to 2007–08. Decisions about the allocation of the increased funding will be announced later this year.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if companies will be allowed to work in partnership with the NHS to provide a better cervical screening service for women in the UK. [67072]

Ms Blears: The National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency has supported the NHS cancer screening programmes within England by negotiating contracts for liquid based cytology for pilot study sites, and by providing commercial input into the development of the supply markets.

The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency is involved in ongoing discussions with suppliers of pathology products and services. The discussions include the potential benefits of working in partnership, the impact of partnerships on the NHS cervical screening programme and potential future developments which may enhance the service further.

NHS Direct

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on staffing shortages at the NHS Direct walk-in centre in Shirley, Southampton; [67603]

(2) what the cost was of the flights of the NHS Direct nurses who travelled from Manchester to Southampton; and what their accommodation costs were. [67605]

Ms Blears: Shirley national health service walk-in centre is one of 42 such NHS centres which have been established in most of the major conurbations as part of a national programme to pilot nurse-led walk-in services. Each centre is managed by a project manager or lead nurse who is accountable to the local primary care trust. The overall pilot programme is co-ordinated by a national team.

On the weekend of Saturday 29 June and Sunday 30 June 2002, due to staff illnesses, and the lack of local suitably trained nurses, the NHS walk-in centre found that it would have had to close or run a reduced service unless cover could be found by temporarily redeploying nurses from other centres. Among those who provided this cover were two nurses from Manchester who, exceptionally, travelled by air from Manchester to Southampton. Their flight and accommodation costs totalled £669.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures he is taking to address staff shortages in NHS Direct walk-in centres; [67606]

(2) what the vacancy levels are at each NHS Direct walk-in centre. [67604]

Mr. Hutton: Recruitment of National Health Service walk-in centre nurses is a local matter for primary care trusts and as such data on vacancies are not held centrally.

The NHS Plan sets out our commitment to implementing a range of measures to increase nurse recruitment and retention. As a new service which is expanding the role of nurses, NHS walk-in centres are contributing to this by offering an attractive option for nurses to expand and develop their skills and experience.

Recombinant Drugs

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to extend the availability of recombinant drugs to all haemophiliacs in England; and if he will make a statement. [67839]

Ms Blears: The Government are considering whether to make recombinant clotting factors available to all haemophiliacs in England taking full account of representations made by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia, the haemophilia society, the United Kingdom haemophilia centre doctors organisation and others. A decision will be taken later this year.

Oncology Patients

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical oncology patients were waiting for elective admission for *(a)* ordinary and *(b)* day cases in each (i) quarter and (ii) year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [67869]

Ms Blears: The table shows the number of medical oncology patients waiting for elective ordinary admission and day cases. Quarterly data is available only for the final quarter of the financial year 1997–98.

Patients waiting for elective admission: Medical oncology specialty
Position at end of quarter: NHS Trusts, England

Quarter end	*Ordinary admissions*	*Day case admissions*
March 1997	281	105
March 1998	300	175
June 1998	260	174
September 1998	290	165
December 1998	277	158
March 1999	131	66
June 1999	115	80
September 1999	108	54
December 1999	85	48
March 2000	122	77
June 2000	92	59
September 2000	63	19
December 2000	88	32
March 2001	53	35
June 2001[1]	65	70
September 2001[1]	74	79
December 2001[1]	66	68
March 2002[1]	69	61

[1] The data does not include results from Leicester NHS Trust due to the Trust recording clinical oncology data against the medical oncology specialty.

Source:

Department of Health form KH07

Reserve Forces Doctors

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on the NHS of the compulsory mobilisation of reserve forces doctors on 16 May. [R] [67685]

Mr. Hutton: The compulsory mobilisation to date has had minimal impact on the ability of the national health service to meet its commitments on delivery, timing, planning and organisation. The Department has been liaising closely with the Ministry of Defence throughout the planning of the compulsory mobilisation.

Somatropin

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive advice from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence on Somatropin. [67734]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on human growth hormone in children in May 2002. I understand that NICE's guidance on human growth hormone in adults was due to be issued this month. However, since the final appraisal determination has been appealed against, the guidance will be issued at the earliest in October 2002, subject to the outcome of the appeal.

Rubella Vaccine

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 311W, how much rubella vaccine has been supplied to each clinic over the last year. [68609]

Ms Blears: In the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, the total amount of rubella vaccine issued to non-national health service accounts by Farillon Ltd was 8,576 doses. As these are private transactions, it would be for these customers to disclose the individual details.

Young Disabled People

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals the Government have to provide adequate information about sex to disabled young people; and if he will make a statement. [68182]

Ms Blears: All mainstream and special schools have a duty to ensure that children and young people with special educational and learning difficulties are properly included in sex and relationship education (SRE). As part of our teenage pregnancy strategy work is in hand to improve SRE for all disabled young people, including those with physical and learning disabilities, mental health and behavioural problems and severe disability.

MS Drugs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made to make *(a)* beta interferon and *(b)* glatiramer available for MS sufferers by (i) primary care trusts and (ii) hospital trusts serving Sutton and Cheam. [68991]

Mr. Hutton: Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust (PCT) has implemented National Institute for Clinical Excellence recommendations of prescribing drugs for patients with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). All eligible patients are being fully funded. These services are being provided to MS patients in Sutton and Cheam, at Atkinson Morley Hospital which is part of St. George's Healthcare National Health Service Trust.

Copaxone (glatiramer acetate) is available on the NHS under the 'risk-sharing scheme for disease modifying drugs for multiple sclerosis (MS) that came into operation on 6 May 2002.

Royal Bournemouth and Poole Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients at the Royal Bournemouth and Poole Hospitals NHS Trust are awaiting treatment with steroids for the management of chronic pain; what financial constraints have affected the availability of the treatments; and if he will make a statement. [69063]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Endometriosis

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is being undertaken in the UK to find possible causes of a treatment for endometriosis. [69420]

Ms Blears: There are nine ongoing and 49 recently completed projects about endometriosis shown on the national research register, which gives information about research funded by, or of interest to, the national health service. In addition, there are 11 relevant abstracts from the Cochrane database of systematic reviews shown. Details of all these can be found on www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

NHS Treatment (Entitlement)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what checks are made on foreign nationals to determine their entitlement to NHS treatment. [69433]

Ms Blears: Entitlement to national health service hospital treatment is based on residence in the United Kingdom. People who are not normally resident in the UK are subject to the provisions of the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) regulations, as amended in 1991 (SI No:438), 1994 (SI No:1535), 2000 (SI No: 602), 2000 (SI No:909). These regulations place a duty on hospitals and other NHS bodies to establish the residence qualification of all patients.

General practitioners are encouraged to consider residency before accepting a patient for NHS treatment but are not bound by the same regulations. Under the NHS (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992 a general practitioner does not have to accept any patient for NHS treatment unless specifically allocated by a primary care trust. The general practitioner's decision does not automatically exempt the patient from charges for hospital treatment they may subsequently need.

Health Funding

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to change the funding arrangements for GP practices in England; and what progress has been made on the reform of the present health funding system. [69248]

Mr. Hutton: The framework document for the new general medical services contract, which was agreed with the British Medical Association's general practitioners' (GP) committee in April, contains proposals for new ways of funding GP practices. Detailed negotiations on the contract are taking place now the framework has been approved in a ballot of GPs.

With regard to the reform of the present health funding system, a wide ranging review of the weighted capitation formula used to allocate resources to health authorities and primary care trusts in England is currently taking place. A key criterion of the new formula will be to contribute to the reduction of avoidable health inequalities. The intention is that, following the review, the new formula will be ready for 2003–04 allocations.

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by health authority in England and Wales the spending per head of population in each year since 1995. [69776]

Mr. Hutton: The expenditure per head of population by health authority in England has been placed in the Library. Information for Wales is a matter for the National

Assembly for Wales. Health authorities were established on 1 April 1996. Data for 1995–96 is not available on a consistent basis as district health authorities and family health services authorities were not coterminous.

Queen Alexandra Hospital

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additions have been made to the originally agreed Private Finance Initiative scheme for the Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth, which have affected the cost of the initiative; and if he will make a statement. [70426]

Mr. Hutton: No additions have been made to the scheme that have added to the projected costs.

Wood Preservatives

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received regarding risk assessments his Department has performed on CCA pressure-treated wood. [69659]

Ms Blears: The Department has not carried out any risk assessment of wood pre-treated with copper/chromium/arsenic (CCA) wood preservative, nor has the Department received any representation on this issue.

In the United Kingdom wood preservative products are regulated under the Control of Pesticide Regulations (1986) and the Health and Safety Executive lead on such non-agricultural pesticides. CCA is approved for use in products for pressure impregnation at industrial sites. This follows the advice to Ministers from the independent advisory committee on pesticides that such products do not present any risk to human health or the environment.

Recently an expert advisory committee to the European Commission, the scientific committee on toxicity, ecotoxicity and the environment has reviewed the safety of wood treated with this preservative and has concluded that there may be a risk to health of children from the use of such treated timber in playground equipment and also when treated wood is burnt or disposed.

The European Commission has drawn up proposals under the Marketing and Use Directive to prohibit the use of CCA wood preservatives but by way of a derogutim to continue to allow its use in a number of essential areas where human contact is limited. Draft proposals are currently being considered by member states.

Podiatric Surgery

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce plans to recruit more domestically trained and qualified podiatric surgeons. [70375]

Mr. Hutton: Podiatric surgery is a specialism within chiropody/podiatry. We do not plan numbers of podiatric surgeons centrally but would expect the national health service locally to consider how to develop the role of chiropodists as numbers expand.

Between 1999 and 2001 the number of chiropodists employed in the NHS has increased by 190 (5.5 per cent.) and our latest estimates, based on historic trends and planned increases in students entering training, suggest a further increase of 750 (20 per cent.) in the number of chiropodists working in the NHS by 2009.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry), of 25 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 864W, on cancelled operations, how many operations were cancelled in the past three quarters in each NHS trust. [67176]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* Data on the total number of operations cancelled are not collected. The number of operations cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons on, or after the day the patient was due to be admitted, broken down by national health service trust, are available in the Library.

Smoking

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effect on health outcomes of smoking in the last five years, broken down by region. [59792]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The information is not available in the form requested. In 'The UK Smoking Epidemic: Deaths in 1995' (published by the Health Education Authority, 1998) it was estimated that in the United Kingdom in 1995, smoking caused more than 120,000 deaths of people aged 35 years or more; one in five deaths at all ages. Men of 35 who smoke will, on average, die seven years earlier than men who have never been smokers. Similarly, women of 35 who smoke will, on average, die six years earlier than women who have never been smokers. As well as being the prime cause of cancer and heart disease, smoking also causes other fatal conditions and chronic illnesses among adults.

In 'Smoking Kills' published in 1998, the Government set out a comprehensive programme to tackle smoking. A key element of this programme has been the development of smoking cessation services which were launched in the health action zones in 1999–2000, and were rolled out to all health authorities in England in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

Regional prevalence data shows how the burden of smoking has varied over the past five years. Table 1 shows a regional breakdown of the prevalence of smokers among adults aged 16 and over. Table 2 details by region the number of people who had successfully quit at the four week follow-up and rates per 100,000 population for April to December 2001. Table 3 illustrates the regional variations in coronary heart disease. Table 4 illustrates the regional variation in cancer mortality.

Table 1: Prevalence of current cigarette smoking among adults aged 16 and over, by standard region, 1996 to 2000

Per cent.

			Weighted	
Standard Region	*1996*	*1998*	*1998*	*2000*
England	28	27	28	27
North	31	27	28	28
Yorkshire and Humberside	28	28	29	28
North West	30	31	32	30
West Midlands	26	26	27	25

Table 1: Prevalence of current cigarette smoking among adults aged 16 and over, by standard region, 1996 to 2000

Per cent.

			Weighted	
Standard Region	*1996*	*1998*	*1998*	*2000*
East Midlands	28	28	29	26
East Anglia	25	22	23	26
Greater London	29	30	31	27
Outer Metropolitan Area	25	24	25	25
Outer South East	28			
South West	27	24	25	27

Notes:

1. Data for 1998 and 2000 weighted for under representation in some groups (eg young men). Comparisons for 1996 and 1998 should be done on unweighted data: comparisons between 1998 and 2000 should be done on weighted data.

Source:

Office for National Statistics: General Household Survey 2000, published as 'Living in Britain: Results from the 2000 General Household Survey'.

Table 2: People successfully quitting during the period April to December 2001 and success rate per 100,000 population aged 16 and over (based on self-report), by NHS regional office area

NHS regional office area	*Number of people who had successfully quit at four weeks (self-report)*	*Per 100,000 population*[1]
England	79,051	198
Northern Yorkshire	19,518	385
Trent	6,866	166
Eastern	6,453	148
London	6,271	107
South East	6,801	97
South West	8,092	201
West Midlands	9,602	227
North West	15,448	295

[1] Number of people who had successfully quit at four weeks (self-report) per 100,000 population aged 16 and over.

Notes:

1. A client is counted as having successfully quit smoking at the four week follow-up if he/she has not smoked at all since two weeks after the quit date. The figures presented here are based on self-report of smoking status by the client at the four week follow-up.

2. The population rates in this table have been calculated using the 1991 census based population estimates of persons aged 16 and over for mid year 2000 (provided by the Office for National Statistics).

Source:

DH Statistical press release: Statistics on smoking cessation services in Health Authorities England, April to December 2001

Table 3: Trends in mortality from coronary heart disease (ICD410–414): standardised mortality ratios (SMR) 1995 to 2000 annually, all ages, by Government office region (standard rates are age-specific mortality rates in 1993)

Government office region	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
England	89	86	81	78	74	69
North East	107	104	99	97	88	82
North West	103	98	93	92	86	79
Yorkshire and the Humber	96	94	90	88	80	75
East Midlands	89	86	81	79	75	68
West Midlands	95	91	86	81	79	73
East of England	80	78	73	72	67	64
London	84	80	73	71	68	65
South East	78	75	71	68	64	61
South West	81	79	74	72	69	66

Source:

Department of Health: Compendium of Clinical and Health Indicators 2001

Table 4: Trends in mortality from cancer (ICD9 140–208): standardised mortality ratios (SMR) 1995 to 2000 annually, all ages, by Government office region (standard rates are age-specific mortality rates in 1993)

Government office region	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
England	97	96	94	93	91	89
North East	112	114	109	111	105	103
North West	104	105	102	101	100	98
Yorkshire and the Humber	100	100	97	97	95	91
East Midlands	96	94	92	91	89	87
West Midlands	99	97	94	94	91	90
East Of England	92	90	88	88	85	84
London	96	95	93	93	88	86
South East	92	91	89	88	86	84
South West	91	89	88	86	86	84

Source:

Department of Health: Compendium of Clinical and Health Indicators 2001

Pneumococcal Meningitis

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answers of 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1075W, and of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 519W, if he will make a statement on the correlation between the irregular dispensation of pneumococcal vaccines and the number of pneumococcal meningitis cases over the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [67691]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine has been recommended for some years for people over the age of two years who are at particular risk from pneumococcal infection such as those people with chronic renal, heart or lung disease. It is not given annually and in most patients is given once only. Once at-risk groups have been targeted for immunisation, the number of people requiring vaccine the following year should fall. Conjugate vaccine, suitable for those under two, has only recently become available.

The number of notified cases of pneumococcal meningitis over the last five years has declined from 300 cases in 1997 to 201 cases in 2001.

A correlation between the dispensation of pneumococcal vaccine and the number of pneumococcal meningitis cases notified in the same year cannot be made.

CJD

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the quantitative risk of human beings contracting new variant CJD from consuming *(a)* lamb and matter from animals more than 12 months old and *(b)* lambs' brains. [68498]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that as the risk of BSE in sheep is theoretical, there is no quantitative assessment of the risk of consuming sheepmeat. Current precautionary controls require the removal as specified risk material of the spleen from all animals and the skull (including brain and eyes), spinal cord and tonsils of sheep over one-year-old. A report on BSE and sheep compiled by a group of stakeholders was endorsed by the Board of the FSA on 13 June 2002. The assessments taken into account in this report indicate that animals over one year would represent a higher risk, if BSE were present. Removal of lamb brain from younger animals was assessed to have a minimal impact on increasing the level of risk reduction compared with the current requirement to remove brains from sheep over one-year-old.

Sausage Casings

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the risks to consumers of antibiotic residues in natural sausage casings imported into the United Kingdom from non-EU countries. [68495]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* Natural sausage casings are not routinely included in the United Kingdom's surveillance programme for veterinary medicines, including antibiotics. Following recent reports that antibiotic residues have been found in natural sausage casings from China and hence might pose a risk to consumers, a European Commission Decision has been implemented whereby 20 per cent. of all consignments of casing from China are required to be sampled and tested for a range of chemical residues including antibiotics. No other countries have been implicated to date.

Wild Game Meat

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent *(a)* assessment he has made and *(b)* representations he has received relating to the Wild Game Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995; and if he will make a statement. [69024]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* I have not received any recent representations, nor made any recent assessments, relating to the Wild Game Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995.

However, the Food Standards Agency (FSA), which advises the Government on matters of food safety, has recently received representations from the wild game meat industry about certain of the requirements laid down in the regulations, notably the post mortem health checks on small venison carcases. As a result, FSA officials are working with the wild game meat industry on practicable ways to comply with the post mortem inspection requirements that also provide the appropriate safeguards for food safety and public health.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the time taken to establish the Food Standards Agency following the date of Royal Assent to the relevant Act of Parliament. [69087]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* It took less than five months to establish the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

The Food Standards Act 1999 received Royal Assent on 11 November 1999 and the FSA started work on 1 April 2000.

Food Safety

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he was informed that imported frozen chicken breasts adulterated with beef protein powder could present a risk of BSE. [68850]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* I have not received any scientific advice that imported frozen chicken could present a risk of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). When the Food Standards Agency conducted a survey in 2001 it did not detect any deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of bovine origin in imported frozen chicken. A subsequent survey published by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland in May 2002 detected bovine DNA in some samples, which was associated with protein derived low risk materials such as hides and milk.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Food Standards Agency began to test imported frozen chicken breasts to determine whether they contained foreign DNA which was not declared on the label; and if he will make a statement on the results of the tests. [68845]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Following an earlier survey in 2000, the Food Standards Agency found that some retail frozen chicken breast has excessive amounts of added water. Therefore in 2001, the Food Standards Agency and 22 local authorities conducted a joint survey investigating the composition and labelling of frozen chicken breast from catering suppliers. The survey found two samples tested positive for porcine deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), but none of the samples tested positive for bovine DNA. The results of this survey were made public in December 2001.

The main finding of the survey was the problem of mislabelling of this type of product as to its description, its excessive water content, and the presence of undeclared hydrolysed chicken and pork protein.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are taken by his Department to monitor the labelling of imported frozen chicken breasts. [68851]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The monitoring and enforcement of labelling of all foods, including imported frozen chicken breasts, is the responsibility of local authorities. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has also carried out two surveys on the accuracy of labelling of frozen chicken breast, one in 2000 on retail samples and a further joint survey with 22 local authorities of frozen chicken breast destined for the catering sector in 2001. Both surveys have been published on the FSA's website.

As a result of these surveys and subsequent work undertaken by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, the European Union Commission has asked the Dutch authorities to take action to ensure correct labelling of chicken exported to other member states.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to prevent the import of frozen chicken breasts adulterated with beef protein powder which could present a risk of BSE. [68849]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* As a result of the Food Standards Agency's survey and subsequent work by the Food Safety Authority-Ireland, the agency has approached the authorities of the exporting countries to ensure correct labelling of these products. The agency is working with local authorities to follow up survey findings and take prosecutions where appropriate. The issue has also been raised with other member states, and the European Commission have agreed to take action against the Dutch authorities if they do not ensure correct labelling of frozen chicken breast exported to member states.

All bovine material entering the food chain is subject to European Union-wide BSE controls. Therefore, provided these controls have been applied, any traces of beef that may be in any other products would not raise new food safety concerns.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment of risk to human health has been made by his Department with regard to bovine DNA contained in imported frozen chicken breasts. [68843]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that no bovine deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) has been detected in agency surveys of imported frozen chicken.

A survey undertaken by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, published on 21 May 2002, detected bovine DNA in the form of milk protein or collagen. Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) infectivity has never been detected in milk, so milk protein is not considered to present a BSE risk. The European Commission Scientific Steering Committee concluded at its meeting of 10–11 May 2001 that the parts of the hide used for the production of collagen do not present a risk with regard to BSE provided contamination with potentially infected material is avoided. In addition it is a requirement throughout the European Union that food or food products (including bovine proteins) must not be derived from either confirmed or suspected BSE cases, specified risk material, or animals slaughtered at over thirty months of age that have not tested negative for BSE.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the countries from which the UK imports frozen chicken breasts which were suspected of containing foreign DNA of bovine origins in the last 12 months. [68846]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Food Standards Agency's survey in 2001 did not detect any DNA of bovine origin in the samples of imported frozen chicken breasts. Those samples of chicken found with DNA of porcine origin were imported from Belgium and The Netherlands.

Royal Hospital, Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the financial arrangements are between the NHS and the Ministry of Defence relating to the cost of running the Royal Hospital, Haslar; [69270]

(2) what the cost to the National Health Service will be of *(a)* opening a diagnostic and treatment centre at the Royal Hospital, Haslar and *(b)* closing it in 2007. [69271]

Ms Blears: From April 2001 the responsibility for the delivery of most clinical services from the Royal Hospital Haslar transferred from the Ministry of Defence to the National Health Service, for both military and civilian patients. Arrangements have been made with the Ministry of Defence to ensure resources are made available to reflect this transfer. Financial arrangements for military patients reflect the principles contained within the circular HSC 1999–112, Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs)—Financial Arrangements.

The development of a diagnostic and treatment centre is under way, the first phase taking place in April 2002. The Department has provided capital funding of £725,000 this year to support the development. Last year £40,000 was made available for project management costs. The centre will move to the Queen Alexandra Hospital in Cosham on completion of the private finance initiative re-development. This is scheduled to take place in 2007 and cost associated with the transfer cannot be estimated at this time.

EU Committees (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the EU Advisory Committee on the training of midwives is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [66413]

(2) when the EU Advisory Committee on medical training is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [66411]

(3) when the EU Advisory Committee on the training of dental practitioners is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [66414]

(4) when the EU Advisory Committee on training in nursing is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [66412]

Mr. Hutton: I have asked to reply.

The Advisory Committees on midwifery, medical, dental, nursing and pharmaceutical training were set up to advise the European Commission and member states on matters relating to the training of workers whose professions come under sectoral directives guaranteeing free movement and automatic recognition of qualifications.

Each advisory committee has three members from each member state—one each from the practising profession, the education establishments and the competent authorities concerned. Three alternates are appointed on the same basis. Some of the United Kingdom's members and alternates of the advisory committees are Scottish, but the membership is there to represent the interests of all four UK countries.

The advisory committees have not met during the last 12 months, and are not likely to do so again.

Obesity

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the role of sport in tackling obesity. [67996]

Ms Blears: (pursuant to her reply 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, 783W): I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should read:

Increasing participation in sport has a role to play in raising the rates of physical activity. Low rates of physical activity together with an unhealthy diet contribute to increased rates of obesity. Major cross-Government work has been put in place to raise the level of physical activity, and participation in sport. This includes: £581 million from the New Opportunities Fund for a PE and sports programme; the national Active Sports Programme and the Department's recently announced £2.5 million programme of community physical activity pilots, which will test out different community approaches to increasing physical activity. All pilots will be based in neighbourhood renewal areas and three will also involve Sport Action Zones.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 18 July 2002

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EU Committees (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Standing Committee for Implementation of the Directive on Marketing of Biocidal Products is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68558]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

No date has yet been fixed for the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Biocidal Products but we expect it to be held in Spring 2003. The UK representation at such meetings would depend on the subject(s) under consideration, and would normally consist of officials from the Health and Safety Executive. However, the legislation implementing the Biocidal Products Directive in Great Britain specifies the competent authorities in or as regards Scotland as the Secretary of State and the Scottish Ministers, acting jointly, and so my officials consult the Scottish Executive on agenda items in which it might have an interest.

Military Exports

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licence renewals have been held up for *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan in the last two months. [63346]

Nigel Griffiths: Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) generally allow shipments of specified items, to a specified consignee, up to the quantity specified in the licence, within a specified period. The Export Control Organisation does not renew SIELs.

Applications for renewal of Open Individual Export Licences are being processed as quickly as possible consistent with the Government's determination to manage the transfer of all goods and technology controlled for strategic reasons in a responsible manner.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what licences have been granted for equipment on the military and dual-use lists to *(a)* Georgia, *(b)* Uzbekistan, *(c)* Kyrgyzstan, *(d)* Tajikistan, *(e)* Turkey, *(f)* the Philippines, *(g)* Kenya, *(h)* Ethiopia, *(i)* Djibouti, *(j)* Bahrain, *(k)* Oman, *(l)* Jordan, *(m)* Yemen, *(n)* India, *(o)* Pakistan and *(p)* Israel in each month from January 2001 to September 2001, including military list and dual-use ratings; and if she will make a statement. [65096]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The number of Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) covering items on the military and dual use lists, issued where the end users are in Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, the Philippines, Kenya, Ethiopia, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, Yemen, India, Pakistan and Israel in each month from January 2001 to September 2001, is set out in the tables which are placed in the Libraries of the House. During that same period no SIELs or OIELs were issued where the end user was in Djibouti.

Individual licences might cover a range of items with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the tables in the total for all relevant ratings.

Pursuant to my answer to the right hon. and learned Member of 11 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 1156W, I regret that one OIEL covering the ratings 5A002 & 5B002 issued in September 2001, where the end user was Uzbekistan, was inadvertently excluded from the table in that answer.

The summary descriptions of the items covered by these ratings are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. The 2001 Annual Report will be published soon.

In addition some of the countries are permitted destinations on certain Open General Export Licences, copies of which are also placed in the Libraries of the House.

All relevant export licence applications are considered very carefully on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received concerning the acquisition by India of Hawk aircrew training simulators. [65445]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation has received various representations regarding the export of arms and other items controlled for strategic reasons to India from a number of different sources, including Members of Parliament, exporters and the general public.

It is not possible to establish the extent of representations received concerning the acquisition by India of Hawk aircrew training simulators as the information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list those countries which have during the last 12 months imported defence equipment from another country which incorporates equipment exported from the UK to that other country following the granting of an export licence by her Department. [69111]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* End use monitoring is undertaken by the FCO, not the DTI.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what system is in place to ensure that priority is given to applications for export licences in respect of goods which are urgently required by customers and where delay in making a decision will result in the cancellation of the order. [68050]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government process all export licence applications as quickly as possible consistent with our determination to manage the transfer of all goods and technology controlled for strategic reasons in a responsible manner. All relevant export licence applications are rigorously assessed on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time and taking into account of other relevant factors. At the same time, every effort is made to be helpful and responsive to exporters who inform the DTI that they are under time pressure.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many members of her Department have been employed in its regulatory impact unit in the past five years; and if she will make a statement. [65979]

Nigel Griffiths: From July 1997 to April 1999 the unit comprised two members of staff. This was increased to three members of staff in May 1999. There are currently six members of staff in the better regulation team which now incorporates the regulatory impact unit.

It is the job of departmental regulatory impact units to establish and promote the principles of good regulation in their departments. The staff in each unit work closely with the officials responsible for developing policies within their department and the regulatory impact unit within the Cabinet Office. They focus on those regulations that impact on business, charities and the voluntary sector.

Following the recent review of the DTI, the regulatory challenge function within the Department has been strengthened. The former regulatory impact unit has been enhanced to support a more robust challenge function and offer broader advice to policy makers, including on considering alternatives to regulation.

Small Businesses

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken, in the last 12 months, to reduce the regulatory burdens on small businesses; and if she will make a statement. [66824]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government has put in place a number of measures to reduce the burden of regulations on small businesses, including:

Introducing in October 2001 that employers with four or fewer employees will be exempt from the requirements to provide access to stakeholder pensions and deduct pension contributions.

An estimated 900,000 SMEs benefiting from measures announced in Budget 2002, including 485,000 businesses whose corporation tax bill has been cut or abolished, and 700,000 small businesses who will be able to benefit from our flat rate VAT scheme.

The Small Business Service has produced clear guidance on a number of complex regulations.

The Business Link website is now attracting 80,000 users per month—and businesses can register to receive alerts about regulations automatically.

Ensuring that the view of small business influenced Patrick Carter's review of payroll administration, a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

In February we published the regulatory Reform Action Plan—setting out over 250 proposals for better regulation and reform.

Further to these measures:

Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) have to be produced for all regulations setting out clearly the costs and benefits with full recognition of small business concerns. The Department's policy is to 'think small first': the Small Business Service has to be consulted on all RIAs to ensure that the impact on small firms is not disproportionate. Guidance on producing RIAs is currently being updated to include the effect on competition and the SBS Small Business Litmus Test.

Following the recent review of the DTI, the regulatory challenge function within the Department has been strengthened. The former regulatory impact unit has been enhanced to support a more robust challenge function and offer broader advice to policy makers, including on considering alternatives to regulation.

Urban Post Offices

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government will take to replace the loss of revenue in urban post offices arising from moves towards automated credit transfer in pensions and benefits. [68828]

Mr. Timms: The Government are committed to the future of the post office network. As agreed following the Performance and Innovation Unit report "Counter Revolution: Modernising the Post Office Network", the Government are supporting an urban restructuring programme intended to provide improved facilities which meet customers' needs and expectations and are in the right location for the local community.

Banking will be a central part of post offices' strategy to move forward. Universal banking services, together with Post Office Limited's plans for an expansion of network banking—the provision of counter services for ordinary current accounts—should lead to substantial increases in the range and volume of banking at post offices, tapping into a very much larger customer base than benefit recipients alone. This should benefit subpostmasters both directly and through increased footfall, providing a major income stream offsetting the loss over time of the benefit book related revenue.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact the Universal Bank will have on the number of post offices in urban areas. [68829]

Mr. Timms: Banking services should help ensure a viable future for many urban post offices which might otherwise struggle to keep and attract customers as banking will be a central part of post offices' strategy to move forward. Universal banking services, together with Post Office Limited's plans for an expansion of network banking—the provision of counter services for ordinary current accounts—should lead to substantial increases in the range and volume of banking at post offices, tapping into a very much larger customer base than benefit recipients alone. This should benefit subpostmasters both directly and through increased footfall, providing a major income stream offsetting the loss over time of the benefit book related revenue.

The current value to Consignia of business from the Department of Work and Pensions is some £400 million a year. The migration of benefit payment to ACT is scheduled to begin in 2003. How that migration affects the revenue of subpostmasters will depend on a number of factors, not least how benefit recipients and other post office customers respond to change.

Universal banking services are due to be introduced in 2003 when migration of benefit payments by ACT is scheduled to begin. When that happens and whatever account people chose to have their benefits paid into, the

Government are committed to ensuring that those who wish to do so will be able to continue to get their benefits in cash at post offices in full without charge.

In many urban areas, there are too many post offices in very close proximity to each other for them all to be viable, regardless of the migration to ACT. That is why the Performance and Innovation Unit recommended a programme of modernisation and restructuring designed to ensure that urban sub post offices can operate as viable businesses for their owners and offer improved services from the right locations to serve their communities. The Government are providing up to £210 million of financial support for Post Office Limited's urban reinvention programme.

Trading Schemes Act

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many investigations of complaints have been carried out under the Trading Schemes Act 1996. [70006]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Trading Schemes Act 1996 does not contain powers of investigation. It extends certain provisions of Part XI of the Fair Trading Act 1973 which deals with pyramid selling and similar trading schemes. Schemes may be investigated under section 29 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 which is also used for other types of investigation. There have been 13 investigations under section 29.

Regional Newspapers

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she collates about the concentration of ownership in *(a)* regional morning and *(b)* regional evening newspapers; and if she will make a statement. [70135]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Applications for consent to a newspaper transfer under the Fair Trading Act 1973 address the effect the transaction would have on concentration of ownership in the relevant markets. In addition, the Department has access to the Joint Industry Committee for Regional Press Research (JICREG) and Newspaper Society databases, which provide information on local and regional newspaper circulation.

Competition Commission reports on newspaper transfers also address the issue of consolidation in the regional newspaper industry.

Broadband Access

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of households in the Huntingdon constituency have access to broadband lines. [70558]

Mr. Timms: Broadband services by one or more of ADSL, cable and wireless are available to around 66 per cent. of the population. Satellite broadband is available throughout the country.

A map showing geographical availability of broadband services can be found in the UK Online Annual Report [http://www.-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/champions/anrepmenu.htm].

Corporate Governance Report

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the report by Professor Higgs commissioned by the Government on corporate governance issues will be published. [70557]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Derek Higgs has said that he intends to publish his report around the end of the year.

Foreign Workers

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what checks are carried out to ensure that foreign workers engaged *(a)* in contracts at UK power stations and *(b)* on ferry services with the United Kingdom are not being exploited while employed within the United Kingdom to the disadvantage of British workers. [70623]

Alan Johnson: Under section 1(2) of the National Minimum Wage Act (NMWA) 1998 a person qualifies for the national minimum wage if he works or ordinarily works in the United Kingdom under his contract. The United Kingdom includes UK territorial waters.

The minimum wage applies to all workers in all of the United Kingdom's power stations regardless of nationality. Similarly national minimum wage applies to all ferry service workers working within territorial waters. For mariners in general the right to receive at least the national minimum is extended to include any individual employed on a UK registered ship unless the employment is wholly outside the United Kingdom or the worker is not ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom.

It is the role of the Inland Revenue to enforce the National Minimum Wage. They do that by responding to all complaints made about employers suspected of not paying the minimum wage and by visiting a sample of employers about whom no complaints have been made to check that all employers meet their obligations under National Minimum Wage Law. Checks are not made on the basis of worker nationality.

If any worker is being underpaid, or if anyone has knowledge of a company underpaying of the National Minimum Wage, they can ring the Inland Revenue Helpline number (0845 6000 678) to report the fact. Callers can remain anonymous.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether EU companies which obtain major contracts within the United Kingdom are required to pay their employees the minimum wage while working here. [70622]

Alan Johnson: Under section 1(2) of the National Minimum Wage Act (NMWA) 1998 a person qualifies for the national minimum wage if he works or ordinarily works in the United Kingdom under his contract.

We would therefore expect all EU employees working in the United Kingdom to qualify for the minimum wage.

Employment Relations Act

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her assessment is of the impact of the Employment Relations Act 1999. [70885]

Alan Johnson: We believe that the Employment Relations Act 1999 is having a generally positive impact on employment relations. However, in line with our previous commitments, on 11 July 2002 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced a review of the detailed operation of the Act.

Combined Heat and Power

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will announce her decision on Basell Polyolefins Ltd.'s proposal to build a combined heat and power gas-fired power station at the Basell Polyolefins works at Carrington. [71999]

Mr. Wilson: I have today given consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to Basell Polyolefins UK Ltd. to build a 65 megawatt gas-fired combined heat and power station at the Carrington works at Urmston, Manchester. Planning permission for the station was granted subject to 38 conditions agreed with Trafford Metropolitan borough council.

Combined heat and power plants are designed to produce both electricity and usable heat. They have environmental benefits due to their high levels of energy efficiency.

The decision demonstrates the Government's continuing commitment to promote CHP, wherever practicable, and our commitment to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases to fulfil the promises we gave at Kyoto.

Copies of the Press Notice and decision letter are being placed in the Libraries of the House.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will announce her decision on Cleveland Potash Ltd.'s proposal to build a combined heat and power gas-fired power station at the Boulby mine works at Saltburn, Cleveland. [71803]

Mr. Wilson: I have today given clearance under section 14(1) of the Energy Act 1976 to Cleveland Potash Ltd. to build a 22.4 megawatt gas-fired combined heat and power station at the Boulby mine works.

Combined heat and power plants are designed to produce both electricity and usable heat. They have environmental benefits due to their high levels of energy efficiency.

The decision demonstrates the Government's continuing commitment to promote CHP, wherever practicable, and our commitment to reducing emissions of carbon to fulfil the promises we gave at Kyoto.

Copies of the press notice and decision letter are being placed in the Library of the House.

Miners' Pension Fund

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with the trustees of the Miners' Pension Fund with regard to the Government's share of the fund surplus. [68418]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is having ongoing discussions with the trustees of the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme and the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme to review the arrangements for the Government's guarantee of members' basic pension benefits as I announced on 17 January. The review will consider how best to ensure that there continues to be an equitable sharing of risks and rewards.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of bills were paid on time by Government Departments and their agencies during the financial year 2000–01. [71802]

Nigel Griffiths: The overall payment performance of Government is 95.86 per cent. Figures for the financial year 2000–01 show that there has been a slight decrease in overall performance this year. However, there has been an improvement in the payment performance of a number of Departments and agencies with 60 per cent. achieving the average and 20 per cent. paying 99 per cent. or more of their invoices on time.

Government Departments and their agencies are required to monitor their payment performance and to publish the results in their departmental or annual reports. The table lists, by Department, the proportion of bills paid within 30 days, or other agreed credit period, of receipt of a valid invoice.

Main Departments	*Percentage for each Department paid on time*
Ministry of Defence	100.00
National Investment and Loans Office	100.00
Privy Council Office	99.70
Scotland Office[1]	99.51
Office of Water Services	99.45
Office of Telecommunications	99.30
Public Records Office	99.14
Land Registry	99.07
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	99.05
Inland Revenue	98.90
Health and Safety Executive	98.86
HM Treasury	98.74
Office of the Rail Regulator	98.71
Government Actuary's Department	98.57
Office for National Statistics	98.30
DTLR Total	98.28
DTI and its agencies	97.68
Export Credit Guarantee Department	97.94
Ordnance Survey	97.84
HM Customs and Excise	97.38
Charity Commission	97.10
Department for National Savings and Investments	96.90
Forestry Commission	96.73
Department for International Development	96.62
Treasury Solicitors Department	96.50
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	96.39
Cabinet Office (OPS)	95.75
Lord Chancellor's Department (Overall Total)	95.14
Department for Education and Skills	95.09
Department of Health (Total of DOH and agencies)	94.97
Home Office (agencies) (Total)	94.58
Food Standards Agency	93.88
Northern Ireland Office	93.81
Crown Prosecution Service	93.69
Office for Government Commerce (OGC)	93.29
Department for Work and Pensions	93.01
Office of Fair Trading	92.65
Serious Fraud Office	91.29
Office for Standards in Education	88.61
Royal Mint	88.25

Main Departments	*Percentage for each Department paid on time*
Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM)	87.72
DEFRA (includes all agencies in totals)	86.99
Wales Office	86.67
Total percentage paid on time	95.86

[1] Figures only available to 31 Dec 2001

Petroleum Licensing

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 323W, on petroleum licensing, what decisions she has made on licence awards in the 20th Offshore Licensing Round. [72019]

Mr. Wilson: I have decided to award 25 production licences to licence groups made up of 33 different companies. They include six companies acquiring their first offshore licences as well as more familiar names, and range from the super-giants to small new niche players.

It is encouraging that so many companies see further opportunities for investment and development in the North sea's core areas, even after nearly 40 years of intensive exploration there. It bodes well for future licensing rounds, which will cover a lot of acreage that, by contrast, is still under-explored and under-exploited. The DTI, with PILOT (formerly the Oil and Gas Industry Task Force), will seek to give every opportunity to small, innovative companies eager to exploit the UK's hydrocarbon resources with new technology. I am particularly delighted to see the response from newcomers who fully understand the potential rewards still to be made in the North sea.

In an effort to concentrate licensees' minds and prevent the appearance of fallow acreage in future, in pursuit of recommendations by PILOT I have made some significant changes to the licences compared with earlier versions. The first two terms will last for four years each instead of six and 12 years respectively, and there will be a mandatory relinquishment of all acreage that is not covered by a development plan at the end of the second term. The Government will also be enabled to publish information three years after receiving it, instead of five (or at licence surrender, whichever is sooner). All this is part of the Government's strategy of bringing together acreage and the companies best fitted to exploit it.

The companies within each licence group (with the operator named first), the blocks covered and a brief resumé of the Work Programmes, are as follows:

Companies (operator first)	*Block(s)*	*Work Programme—firm commitments unless indicated otherwise: (K) Contingent commitments; (D/D)Drill or Drop commitments*	*Marks*[1]
Talisman, Intrepid	14/18c	Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	83
EnCana, OMV, Paladin	15/18b, 15/19b	1 well Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (K)	117
Kerr McGee, EDC, Enterprise	[2]15/20a	1 well Reprocess 3D seismic data Perform one Front End Engineering and Design Study 1 well (K) Acquire 3D seismic data (K)	156
OilExCo[3]	15/25b	Acquire 3D seismic data Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	42
OilExCo[3]	15/25c	Acquire 3D seismic data Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	38
EnCana, Paladin, Tullow, Montrose	15/28c	Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	71
Phillips, EnCana	16/18b	Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	78
EnCana, Intrepid, Edinburgh Oil and Gas	20/2c	Acquire 3D seismic data Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (K)	91
EDC, Enterprise, Bow Valley	20/3c, 20/7b, 20/8	1 well 2 wells (K) Acquire 3D seismic data Reprocess 3D seismic data	153
Reach	[4]20/10b, 20/15, 21/6a, 21/11b	Acquire 3D seismic data Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	38
Kerr McGee	21/5b, 22/1c	1 well	111
Chevron, Gaz De France, Ruhrgas	22/2b	Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D) Acquire 3D seismic data (K)	116

Companies (operator first)	*Block(s)*	*Work Programme—firm commitments unless indicated otherwise: (K) Contingent commitments; (D/D)Drill or Drop commitments*	*Marks*[1]
Amerada Hess, Agip, Dana	23/11	Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	69
Phillips, Statoil, TotalFinaElf, Agip	30/20	1 well (D/D) Acquire 3D seismic data (K)	58
CNR	[5]30/25	Acquire 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	103
RWE, Consort, Egdon	42/27	Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	63
Gaz De France, Tullow, Consort	44/11, 44/12	Acquire 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	125
CMS Energy,	44/13	Acquire 3D seismic data Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	96
Gaz De France, Tullow, Consort	44/16	Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	87
Conoco, Gaz De France, Tullow	44/18b, 44/23b	Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	94
Conoco, Gaz De France, Tullow	44/28a	Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	94
British Gas, Amerada Hess	47/3h	Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	68
Warwick[6]	[4]48–21	Acquire 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D) Perform a Front End Engineering and Design study (K)	57
Shell, Esso	49/12b, 49/13c	Acquire 3D seismic data Reprocess 3D seismic data	84
OilExCo[3]	49/25b, 50/21	Acquire 3D seismic data Reprocess 3D seismic data 1 well (D/D)	45

[1] Marks awarded are not comparable between blocks.

[2] Only parts of these blocks were available for licensing.

[3] Licence offer conditional on creation of a UK (or EU) subsidiary to hold it.

[4] Only parts of these blocks are awarded.

[5] That part of 30/25 that includes part of the Ardmore field is awarded to Tuscan by extending Licence P1035. The remainder of the block is awarded to CNR.

[6] Licence offer conditional on submission of a satisfactory parent company guarantee.

Post Office

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what impact the decision by Consignia to impose a charge to businesses to deliver letters before 9 am will have on the Universal Service Obligation. [70366]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* Consignia has not decided to impose a charge of £20 per week to businesses for deliveries before 9 am. The company is currently running pilots of their new Tailored Delivery Service in 14 delivery offices across the country. Under the pilot, customers who receive 20 or more letters on a regular basis will get a delivery before 9 am. Other customers will receive their mail between 9 am and lunchtime. A new, additional service will allow customers who do not receive 20 or more items to choose to pay for a delivery before 9 am. The service will be trialled at £5, £10 and just over £14 per week for the pilots but the Chairman of Consignia has said that the final proposed price will be part of the evaluation of the pilots in consultation with the regulator, the Postal Services Commission (Postcomm), and the consumer body, Postwatch.

Under the terms of the licence issued to it by the Postal Services Commission (Postcomm), Consignia is required to provide a universal postal service. The licence sets out services which are to be provided by Consignia in meeting a universal postal service. This includes a requirement to make at least one delivery of mail every working day to all addresses in the UK except in circumstances that Postcomm considers exceptional. It is for Postcomm to decide whether the new Tailored Delivery Service meets this requirement.

EU Employment Directive

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her plans are for *(a)* implementing the European directive on information and consultation of employees and *(b)* the review of employment status. [69675]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are today publishing a paper setting out our vision for the future of the UK labour market, one based on the objectives of full employment, diversity and choice, and high productivity. The Government are also publishing a complementary analysis of European labour markets. Modernisation of our employment relations framework is a central feature of delivering this vision.

I am also publishing discussion documents on information and consultation and employment status in relation to statutory employment rights and have placed copies in the Vote Office and the Libraries of the House.

Public Procurement Policy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to modify the public procurement policy so public bodies have to buy local fresh food; what recent representations she has had on this subject; and if she will make a statement. [69016]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Government's public procurement policy requires all purchases of goods and services to be based on value for money, having due regard to propriety and regularity. Value for money is defined as "the optimum combination of whole life cost and quality (or fitness for purpose) to meet the customer's requirement". Public bodies are also required to comply with the EC Treaty, the EC procurement directives and the UK Regulations that implement them. These are designed to ensure that public procurement is fair, transparent and not used to discriminate by setting up barriers to free trade. Member States reached political agreement on a revised public procurement directive at the Internal Market Council on 21 May. This revised directive maintains the principles set out above.

This policy and legal framework for public procurement not only secures value for money for the taxpayer but also helps to improve the competitiveness of, and opportunities for, our suppliers. It does not, however, permit public sector buyers to restrict their purchases to specific locations or suppliers.

However, it is permitted to specify requirements that might provide the opportunity for local suppliers to make use of their proximity to customers. For example, a requirement for frequent delivery of fresh food would be acceptable provided it was reasonable and not contrived to create an artificial barrier to free trade. In principle a foreign supplier is not denied an opportunity to compete on equal terms by, for example, setting up an operation in Britain. Public bodies can also ensure that their contract specifications do not discriminate against local suppliers. For example, requiring the supply of mangetout throughout the year would necessitate purchases from overseas and deny local suppliers an opportunity to compete. To avoid such difficulties for local suppliers the buying authority can require seasonal vegetables instead.

Issues relating to public procurement policy have also been raised by several respondents, including the organic sector, to the Department's Sustainable Food and Farming Working Together consultation paper. These are also under consideration.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Angola

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people in Angola she estimates are threatened by starvation; and if she will make a statement. [70671]

Ms Keeble: The United Nations estimates that some half a million people are facing starvation in Angola, and that more than a million others are completely dependent on food aid for their survival. Thousands are reported to have died of hunger over the last few months and many more are dying every day.

My Department is deeply concerned about the situation and is providing direct assistance to the humanitarian agencies responding to the emergency. We are continuing to monitor the situation closely—a DFID assessment team is visiting Angola this weekend to supplement our information about the situation and help us to respond quickly to further support needs. We are also playing an active part to ensure that the international donor community and the Government of Angola together respond effectively to the urgent humanitarian needs of the Angolan people.

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much bilateral aid has been given to Angola over the last 12 months; for what purposes the aid was directed; and if she will make a statement. [70672]

Ms Keeble: Over the last 12 months DFID has contributed £1.7 million to the 2002 United Nations appeal for Angola to ensure that critical humanitarian needs are met and to assist in the reception areas for ex-UNITA fighters. We have also committed some £2 million to the ICRC and MSF, who are at the forefront of the humanitarian response.

In addition, DFID's development programme to Angola has spent some £2 million pounds over the last 12 months on the Luanda Urban Poverty Programme, which aims to provide the urban poor with improved access to basic services and economic livelihoods. We have also assisted the Government of Angola to consider the case for the World bank to put in place an effective demobilisation and reintegration programme for ex-UNITA fighters.

Indonesia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with EU partners on Strek Plots in East Kalimantan; and if she will make a statement. [70790]

Ms Keeble: The research undertaken on Strek Plots is of critical importance for the sustainable management and exploitation of Indonesia's forest resources. The plots are under immediate threat from illegal logging. A secondary threat from mining operations is currently the subject of amicable, but unconcluded, negotiations.

DFID is working with the Government of Indonesia to promote a sustainable timber industry, which protects the interests of poor people who are dependent upon forest resources for their livelihoods. We co-ordinate this work closely with other donors supporting the Government's efforts to reform the forestry sector. This includes the European Union with whom we are in regular contact.

The UK Government have recently concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Indonesia that commits us to working together to combat illegal logging. This will help secure the future of the Strek Plots. My officials are currently working with their Indonesian counterparts to finalise an action plan to implement the memorandum. Details were given in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 995W.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will list the CDC Capital Partners' offices in the United States; and what the locations of those offices are; [67389]

(2) if she will list *(a)* the countries in which CDC Capital Partners has opened offices in the past three years and *(b)* the location of those offices; [67387]

(3) how many CDC Capital Partners' offices are in non-Commonwealth countries; and if she will list *(a)* those offices and *(b)* when they were opened. [67415]

Clare Short: CDC has offices in the United States in Miami (Latin America regional office), Houston (for GlobeleQ power fund) and Vienna, Virginia (India representative office). In the last three years, in addition to the three offices in the United States, CDC has opened in Beijing, Lagos, Mexico City, Cairo and Singapore.

CDC has offices in 10 non-Commonwealth countries. They are: Bolivia (1997), the People's Republic of China (2000), Costa Rica (1978), Cote d'Ivoire (1987), Cuba (1997), Egypt (2000), Indonesia (1971), Mexico (2000), Thailand (1971) and the United States (all three US offices opened in 2000).

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the *(a)* target, *(b)* current and *(c)* projected rate of return on CDC Capital Partners' investments is, by sector, in (i) sub-Saharan Africa, (ii) South Asia, (iii) Latin America, (iv) Asia-Pacific and (v) China. [67349]

Clare Short: CDC will seek to make a rate of return on an individual investment commensurate with the associated risk involved. This will vary across sectors and geographies. Information about the target, current and projected rate of returns for individual investment is commercially sensitive.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on CDC Capital Partners' scheme for assessing the environmental impact of its investments. [67366]

Clare Short: Each new deal investigated by CDC is given a risk rating for health and safety, environmental and social issues. A formal environmental impact assessment is carried out by independent consultants, and an environmental management plan is put in place, where there is perceived to be a high risk of the investment potentially having a significant environmental impact (as may be the case with mining, cement manufacture, and projects involving large construction sites). Otherwise the deal team will review the possible environment impact of investments as part of its due diligence exercise and, if any specific areas of concern are identified, external appropriate consultants may be brought in to advise on these specific issues. CDC reviews any environmental concerns arising from existing investments via a formal investment valuation review every six months and through its Business Principles Unit.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what meetings she had with CDC Capital Partners' executives in April; what was discussed; and if she will make a statement. [67350]

Clare Short: I had meetings in April with the chairman, chief executive and finance director of CDC about the annual results in 2001 and the progress of the Public/Private Partnership.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what CDC Capital Partners' stock options are held by *(a)* each executive director, *(b)* each non-executive director, *(c)* each office director and *(d)* other mid-level executives. [67385]

Clare Short: None.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development by how much CDC Capital Partners' net debt increased in 2002; to whom the debt is liable; and at what interest rate in each case. [67345]

Clare Short: At the start of the year CDC Group plc had net cash of £207 million and loans due to the Department of International Development (DFID) of £755 million, producing a net debt figure of £548 million. At 30 June 2002, the net cash was approximately £225 million and loans due to DFID remained at £755 million. The loans due to DFID are interest free.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will describe CDC Capital Partners' criteria for assessing human rights conditions in the countries in which it invests. [67363]

Clare Short: CDC has developed a framework for assessing the human rights conditions in the countries in which it invests. This is informed by reference to international, governmental and NGO sources. CDC does not make investments in countries which are subject to UN sanctions. Specific issues may also be highlighted during due diligence into possible investments. The decision on whether to make a particular investment in a certain country will also be determined in part by whether acceptable labour practices will be able to be pursued and the investment will result in a positive benefit for the wider community.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the years of CDC Capital Partners service of *(a)* the chairman, *(b)* the Chief Executive, *(c)* each member of the Board of Directors and *(d)* each member of the Management Committee. [67405]

Clare Short: Information about the background and length of service of Directors and other members of the Management Committee was published in CDC Group plc's annual report for 2001. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what CDC Capital Partners' criteria are for sustainability by *(a)* sector and *(b)* country; and what steps are followed to (i) approve and (ii) reject investments. [67343]

Clare Short: Sustainability in the context of private sector investment combines a judgment about both an investee company's commercial viability and about social and environmental responsibility, so that the investment is not at the expense of people and the environment. This applies across investments in all sectors and countries. In the power sector, renewable energy sources are not always an option but CDC's strong preference is for cleaner fuels and every plant is committed to operating to international environmental standards.

All potential investments are subject to a social and environmental review, whether internally or by external consultants. I refer the hon. Member to the reply to Question 67366 at columns 449–50W. Any social or environmental concerns are fully investigated and any necessary action plans put in place before the investment is made.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what representations her Department has received regarding CDC Capital Partners' investments in African smallholders since 1997; [67368]

(2) what representations have been made to her Department regarding the effectiveness of CDC Capital Partners' website; [67354]

(3) what representations her Department has received regarding CDC Capital Partners' procedures for measuring the *(a)* infrastructure and *(b)* employment effects of its investments; [67394]

(4) what representations have been made to her Department concerning hours worked per month by CDC Capital Partners' executives since 1997. [67355]

Clare Short: None.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will list the rate of return on each CDC Capital Partners' investment, broken down by sector, since 1997; [67352]

(2) if she will list the rate of return on each CDC Capital Partners' investment, by country, since 1997. [67346]

Clare Short: This information is commercially sensitive.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she expects to complete the privatisation of CDC Capital Partners. [67407]

Clare Short: In the current market conditions, the Government do not believe that it will be possible to sell a majority of CDC's shares in the near future at a price that represents good value for the development assistance programme. We are therefore exploring alternative ways to achieve the objective of the public-private partnership, to mobilise increased investment for the benefit of poorer developing countries.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with *(a)* the Chancellor of the Exchequer and *(b)* CDC Capital Partners' senior executives regarding the future tax position of CDC Capital Partners. [67347]

Clare Short: Extensive discussions took place in 1998 and early 1999 about the future tax position of CDC. Provisions for the future tax treatment of CDC were set out in Schedule 3 of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 1999.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Special Educational Needs

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many higher education institutions in England submitted successful bids under the Special Educational Needs Training and Development Fund 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [71686]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Special Educational Needs Training and Development Fund 2002–03 was established to provide one-off pump priming support to aid the creation of new, or extended, in-service training and development opportunities for teachers and other staff, both in mainstream and special schools, to help improve and reinforce skills in the area of special educational needs and disabilities. Under the fund, higher education institutions were invited to submit competitive bids, in the range of £50,000–100,000. There was a good response, with 41 individual bids received from 34 institutions. Within the £1 million available for allocation we have approved 16 bids from the following institutions:

Bishop Grosseteste college, Lincoln
Canterbury Christ Church university college
Institute of Education University of London
Leeds Metropolitan university
Nottingham Trent university
Sheffield Hallam university
St. Martin's college of higher education, Lancaster
Manchester Metropolitan university
University of Birmingham
University College Chichester
University of Greenwich
University of Surrey, Roehampton
York St. John College, university of Leeds.

The training and development opportunities will, in the main, be available either in the autumn of 2002 or the spring of 2003.

In addition, a further £1 million has been also been allocated, under Strand 2 of the Department's SEN Small Programmes Fund 2002–03, in support of work by voluntary organisations, to produce a range of training resources for SEN and disabilities.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of ILA learning provider claims have been met since the closure of the Individual Learning Account programme. [70446]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: At the end of June 95 per cent. of Individual Learning Account learning provider claims had been paid since the closure on 23 November 2001.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what loss of public funds has been identified, and what frauds have been uncovered, in the work of learning providers using individual learning accounts. [70444]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The loss to public funds will not be identified until investigations are complete. From the start of the programme to date £16.8 million has been withheld from 267 learning providers, subject to validation checking.

The potential frauds under investigation are: funding removed from individual learning accounts (ILAs) without the account holder's consent; no, or incorrect, learning delivered; fictitious account holders created; and accessing account holders' details on the ILA Centre database—using information to claim funds or selling information to providers. In addition other abuses identified are: personal contribution not sought from the account holder; cash or other incentives offered to enrol on course; and ILA discounts claimed for ineligible learning.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of how many ILA learners have had to leave their courses because of the closure of individual learning accounts. [70448]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We do not have information on the number of individual learning account holders who were in training at the point of closure of the ILA programme on 23 November 2001 and who subsequently may have been required to leave their courses.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Departmental Website

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to make changes to his Department's website. [69870]

Mr. Robin Cook: I am today re-launching my Department's website www.privycouncil.gov.uk.

The website has been redesigned by XM London to better reflect my responsibilities as Leader of the House of Commons and also to give a better overview of the work of the Privy Council Office.

New additions to the website include:

News—will include the weekly Business Statement, briefings with the Lobby, recent statements, speeches and dates of forthcoming meetings of the Privy Council.

Parliamentary Reform—information on the Government's Modernisation agenda for Parliament and details of my work to date on Commons Modernisation.

Performance Standards—for my private office and more importantly a

Search Engine.

TRANSPORT

Residential Property

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the empty residential properties in each London borough in the ownership of his Department and its agencies, giving *(a)* the type of accommodation, *(b)* how long each property has been vacant and *(c)* what the intended future use is of the property. [69496]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department currently owns no empty residential properties in any of the London boroughs.

M4

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase the number of lanes on the M4 from London to Reading. [69165]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The capacity of the M4 motorway is currently being considered by the Thames Valley Multi Modal Study, which is expected to report in November.

Roads (Expenditure)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* public resource expenditure, *(b)* private resource expenditure and *(c)* private investment is provided under the 10-Year Plan for road maintenance by (i) local authorities and (ii) the Highways Agency, (A) at today's prices and (B) at outturn prices. [70651]

Mr. Jamieson: Planned public resource expenditure on road maintenance over the period of the 10-Year Plan for Transport amounts to: £19.2 billion at today's (ie 2001–02) prices and £21.5 billion at outturn prices for local authorities; and £2.5 billion at today's prices and £2.8 billion at outturn prices for the Highways Agency.

There is no planned private resource expenditure on road maintenance in the 10-Year Plan. There is no planned private investment on road maintenance on local roads.

All of the Highways Agency's new build private finance schemes include a provision for maintenance in the contract. However it is not possible to identify separately a figure for this maintenance work.

Road Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what work has been conducted by and for his Department and predecessor Department to update the findings of the report entitled "Road Safety Strategy: Current problems and future options"; and if he will make a statement. [70659]

Mr. Jamieson: "Road Safety Strategy: Current problems and future options", published in October 1997, was a forerunner to the Government's current strategy document "Tomorrow's roads—safer for everyone", published in March 2000. Quarterly progress reports on implementing the new strategy are published on the Department's website.

Roads Circular

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place a copy of the Roads 2/92 Circular in the Library. [70648]

Mr. Jamieson: Circular Roads 2–92 is already available in the Libraries of the House.

EU Public Service Requirement Regulation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* discussions, *(b)* correspondence and *(c)* representations his Department has had with (i) the European Commission, (ii) the Council of Transport Ministers and (iii) Members of the European Parliament regarding the February 2002 draft EU Public Service Requirement Regulation; and if he will make a statement. [70649]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 359W.

Additionally, officials from my Department have attended a number of council working groups where the Commission's proposals have been discussed and they have liaised with the Commission officials who have responsibility for the draft regulation.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place copies of the progress reports relating to the July 2000 European Commission Proposal for Regulation of Public Service Requirements *(a)* produced and *(b)* received by his Department in the Library. [70650]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has neither produced nor received written progress reports on the Commission's proposal. The progress reports that I referred to in my reply to the hon. Member of 3 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 359W, were given orally by the Commission.

European and International Business

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the role is of the division in his Department responsible for European and international business; if he will list the responsibilities of the posts within the division; and if he will make a statement. [70654]

Mr. Jamieson: Within the Department for Transport, the Europe and International Division (EID) leads on European and international issues. EID is responsible for providing advice on the impact of EU affairs on DfT's policies as a whole; planning, preparation and support for the Minister for Transport at EU Transport Council; policy on EU horizontal or cross-cutting issues; and is a focal point for cross-cutting international issues.

EID comprises a divisional manager and three branch heads responsible for particular areas. The head of Europe and International Branch, supported by five staff, provides advice and guidance to DfT on EU and international issues and developments, including EU enlargement; co-ordinates briefing and arrangements for ministerial committees, EU contacts, bilateral initiatives and visitors from overseas; and develops and promotes European awareness and expertise among DfT officials who deal with EU issues.

The head of Transport Council Branch, supported by six staff, co-ordinates the UK position and briefing on EU Transport Council business; co-ordinates UK parliamentary scrutiny of EC transport legislation; monitors the transposition of EC transport directives; co-ordinates the response to infraction proceedings; co-ordinates transport briefing for UK MEPs and co-ordinates the Department's interest in the European Conference of Ministers of Transport and the Inland Transport Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

The head of European Transport Policy Branch, supported by six staff, co-ordinates policy on EU cross-modal transport issues including the proposed extension of the working time directive to mobile workers in road transport, proposed regulations on land transport public service requirements, the EU Common Transport Policy, the integration of the environment into EU transport policy, charging for the use of transport infrastructure and also co-ordinates policy and negotiates UK funding in respect of the transport trans-European Network (TEN).

Further information on the work of Europe and International Division can be found on the Department's website at www.dft.gov.uk/europe/index.htm.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what occasions since 7 June 2001 he has asked the chief executives of the *(a)* Highways Agency, *(b)* DVLA, *(c)* DSA, *(d)* Maritime and Coastguard Agency, *(e)* Vehicle Certification Agency and *(f)* Vehicle Inspectorate to write to an hon. Member in response to a parliamentary question; under what guidance such decisions are made; and if he will make a statement. [70645]

Mr. Jamieson: Where a written parliamentary question is about a matter assigned to an agency under the terms of its Framework Document, the responsible Minister normally asks the chief executive to provide the substantive reply to the hon. Member. This has been the practice for many years. Since 7 June 2001, about 90 parliamentary questions (less than 1 per cent. of the total) have been answered by a chief executive letter. The letters are published in the *Official Report,* in accordance with the guidance issued by the Cabinet Office in 1994.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will answer the questions from the hon. Member for Maidenhead of 1 July 2002, concerning park and ride schemes and 2 July 2002, concerning Network Rail. [71492]

Mr. Jamieson: The question concerning park and ride schemes was answered on 16 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 142W and the question concerning Network Rail on 17 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 327W.

New Road Schemes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list new *(a)* Government funded and *(b)* other agency funded trunk road and bypass schemes which have been given approval and the expected start date in each case. [70612]

Mr. Jamieson: The following lists all the schemes in the Government's targeted programme of improvements and when construction is planned to start. The actual date for the start of works for those schemes not already under construction is subject to the satisfactory completion of any remaining statutory procedures and the availability of funding.

Completed

A27 Polegate Bypass (opened June 2002)

Under Construction

A1 Willowburn-Denwick Improvement

A5 Nesscliffe Bypass

A6 Great Glen Bypass

A6 Clapham Bypass

A6 Rothwell—Desborough Bypass

A11 Roudham Heath-Attleborough Dualling

A41 Aston Clinton Bypass

A46 Newark-Lincoln Improvement

A43 Whitfield Turn—Brackley Hatch Improvement

A43 Silverstone Bypass

A43 M40-B4031 Dualling

A63 Selby Bypass

A66 Stainburn and Great Clifton Bypass

A120 Stansted—Braintree

A500 Basford, Hough, Shavington Bypass

A650 Bingley Relief Road

A1033 Hedon Road Improvement, Hull

2002–03

A1(M) Ferrybridge to Hook Moor

A1(M) Wetherby to Walshford

A6 Rushden and Higham Ferrers Bypass

A6 Alvaston

A10 Wadesmill—Colliers End Bypass

A21 Lamberhurst Bypass

A34 Chieveley/M4 J13 Improvement

2003–04

M25 J 12–15 Widening

M60 J 5–8

A2 Bean-Cobham Widening Phase 1

A5 Weeford—Fazeley Improvement

A63 Melton Grade Separated Junction

A249 Iwade—Queenborough Improvement

A500 City Road/Stoke Road Junctions

2004–05

M6 Carlisle-Guardsmill

A1 Peterborough—Blyth Grade Separated Junction

A2 Bean—Cobham Widening Phase 2

A14 Rookery Crossroads Grade Separated Junction

A30 Bodmin-Indian Queens Improvement

A66 Temple Sowerby Bypass and Improvements at Winderwath

A421 Great Barford Bypass

2005–06

M62 Junction 6 Improvement

A2/A282 Dartford Improvement

A3 Hindhead Improvement

A11 Fiveways to Thetford Improvement

A11 Attleborough Bypass Improvement

A14 Haughley New Street—Stowmarket Improvement

A38 Dobwalls Bypass

A303 Stonehenge

A595 Parton—Lillyhall Improvement

A5117/A550 Deeside Park Junctions

2006–07

A1(M) Bramham—Wetherby

A46 Newark—Widmerpool Improvement

A47 Thorney Bypass

A64 Rillington Bypass

A419 Blunsdon Bypass

A483 Pant—Llanymynech Bypass

2007–08

A1(M) Dishforth—Leeming

A1(M) Leeming—Barton.

The Highways Agency is also progressing a number of schemes partly or fully funded by developers. The following is a list of those costing over £5 million with the date on which construction is planned to start, where known to the Department.

Under construction

A120/M11 Stansted Slip Roads

M62 J8 and J8–9 Widening

M1 J15A Swan Valley

A1 Newcastle Great Park

2003–04

M25 Heathrow Terminal 5 Spur Road

Not known

A13 M25—Lakeside Widening

A19 Wolviston Second Samsung Access

A428 Caxton Common—Hardwick

M49 Intermediate Junction at Severnside

M56 (J5) Manchester Airport Access.

London Bridge Railway Station

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of the 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 981W, on London Bridge railway station, if he will define the intended output given in his 10-year plan for additional capacity at London Bridge, at paragraph 6.72, page 71; and if he will make a statement. [70559]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack's proposals for the Thameslink 2000 project include scope to raise the number of services calling at London Bridge to eighteen an hour in each direction, with the operation of 12-car trains.

I would refer the hon. Member to my answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1113W where I stated that the public inquiry Inspector's report into Railtrack's proposals is currently under consideration in the office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Air Traffic Control

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answers of 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1134W and of 10 June 2002 to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), *Official Report*, column 759W, on Swanwick, what statutory restrictions on the disclosure of information obtained by HSE in pursuance of its powers apply in relation to the HSE report on IT systems in operation at Swanwick. [70732]

Mr. Jamieson: The statutory restrictions on the disclosure of information obtained by HSE in pursuance of its powers are set out in Section 28 of the Health and

Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. These restrictions apply in relation to HSE's report on the IT systems in operation at Swanwick.

Road Widening

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 220W, on road widening, what the total cost of the schemes referred to is; and what the cost of each scheme is. [70733]

Mr. Jamieson: The total cost of the schemes listed in the answer to the question of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 220W is £809 million. The latest available cost of the individual schemes is as follows:

Road scheme	*£ million*
M25 Junctions 12–15 widening	94
M60 Junctions 5–8	82
A74(M) Carlisle to Guardsmill upgrading to motorway	65
A1 Bramham to Wetherby	38
A1 Dishforth to Leeming	125
A1 Leeming to Barton	100
A1 Willowburn to Denwick improvement[1]	[1]8
A2 Bean to Cobham widening phase 1	17
A2 Bean to Cobham widening phase 2	74
A11 Fiveways to Thetford improvement	34
A11 Attleborough bypass improvement	14
A11 Roudham Heath to Attleborough Dualling[1]	[1]30
A43 M40 to B4031 dualling	18
A46 Newark to Lincoln improvement[1]	[1]28
A46 Newark to Widmerpool improvement	82

[1] Contract award figure

Television Advertising

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money his Department spent on each television advertising campaign in the last 12 months. [70384]

Mr. Jamieson: The amount spent by the then DTLR on TV advertising for each of its campaigns in the last financial year was as follows:

TV media spend: April 2001 to 2002[1]

Campaign	*£ million*
Road safety	5.11
Fire safety[2]	2.40
Traveline	0.12
Total	7.63

[1] Figures exclude VAT

[2] Responsibility now with ODPM

Taxis

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the effects on the public of GNER's decision to award sole rights to operate at Peterborough station to Taxibank; [70851]

(2) what plans he has to review legislation on access to transport termini by taxicabs. [70850]

Mr. Jamieson: It is for GNER to ensure that its agreement with Taxibank meets the needs of its passengers. Access to taxi ranks at GNER's stations is a matter for that company. Exclusive contracts can bring significant benefits for passengers, including ensuring that taxis are always available at off-peak times and that certain standards of service are met. The Government are currently considering what taxi and private hire vehicle measures might be reformed through a regulatory reform order.

Secure Stations Scheme

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 208W, which stations have been accredited under the secure stations scheme in each of the last three years. [71157]

Mr. Jamieson: I have placed in the Libraries of the House a list of stations which have been accredited under the Secure Stations Scheme in each of the last three full years. Also listed are stations, which have been accredited this year to June 2002.

There are 149 stations accredited so far, which cover approximately one third of passenger journeys on the overground.

Rail Travel

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passenger kilometres were travelled on *(a)* strategic rail routes, *(b)* London and the South East, *(c)* regional networks, *(d)* intercity lines and *(e)* all routes, in each of the past three years. [71060]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is set out in 'National Rail Trends,' published quarterly by the Strategic Rail Authority, most recently on 6 June. Copies are held in the Libraries of the House.

Bus Mileage

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the total local bus mileage was operated by tendered bus services in each of the last five years. [71049]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on the proportion of bus mileage operated through tendered services, comprising services run under contract to Transport for London, and socially necessary services subsidised by local authorities outside London, is shown in the following table. The commercial (deregulated) local bus mileage proportion is also shown. Outside London, the tendered services column includes some local authority contracts negotiated under "de minimis" rules with individual operators, although most are provided following competitive tendering.

Percentage

	Commercial[1]	*Tendered*
England		
1996–97	73	27
1997–98	72	28
1998–99	72	28
1999–2000	72	28
2000–01	72	28

Percentage

	Commercial[1]	*Tendered*
England outside London		
1996–97	84	16
1997–98	84	16
1998–99	83	17
1999–2000	84	16
2000–01	84	16

[1] deregulated

Journey Times

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will explain the statement, on page 20, paragraph 48 of the 10-year plan background analysis, that improvements in journey times are expected to have almost a one for one impact on demand for the services concerned. [71054]

Mr. Jamieson: The statement reflects standard railway industry modelling assumptions that changes in journey time have a demand elasticity of around unity. Therefore, on average, a one per cent. change in journey time is expected to result in a change in demand of approximately one per cent.

Customer Satisfaction Statistics

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what rail customer satisfaction statistics he has collated for each quarter of each of the last four years, relating to *(a)* overall satisfaction, *(b)* punctuality satisfaction, *(c)* reliability satisfaction, *(d)* frequency of trains satisfaction, *(e)* value for money satisfaction, *(f)* station quality satisfaction and *(g)* train information provision satisfaction. [71156]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has conducted a twice yearly national on-train passenger satisfaction survey since Autumn 1999. Results are reported at national and individual Train Operating Company level and are published in the SRA's 'On Track' publication in June and December each year. The most recent results were published on 6 June 2002.

The latest publication and earlier editions are already available in the Libraries of the House and can also be found on the SRA's web site: "www.sra.gov.uk".

Tendered Bus Services

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of recent trends in the costs of contracts for tendered bus services. [71050]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department commissioned last year a three-year research project into trends in tendered bus services including tender prices. Recent interim findings indicate rises in real terms in prices of around 20 per cent., as compared with the last time (typically two or three years ago) when the contracts surveyed were offered. This is in line with the findings of the annual survey conducted by the Association of Transport Co-ordination Officers. There are however significant variations within this overall figure. Our research will be published in due course.

Rail Accident Investigation Body

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish proposals for the setting up of an independent rail accident investigation body; and if he will make a statement. [71750]

Mr. Darling: We have today published our proposals for the establishment of an independent rail accident investigation branch. Copies of the document are in the Libraries of the House. The consultation exercise will run for 12 weeks from today. The responses will help us to ensure that the right provisions are written into the draft primary legislation that we shall in due course put before Parliament.

Illegal Fuel

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what facilities in the supply of illegal fuel are estimated to exist in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK; and if he will make a statement. [62940]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

There are no estimates available for the number of illicit fuel laundering plants in the UK.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of fuel in the UK fuel market is illegally produced; and what targets have been set for reducing this market share. [62941]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

Latest estimates of the size of the non-UK paid oils market were set out in "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud", published alongside the 2001 pre-Budget report. Budget 2002 set out a comprehensive strategy to tackle all aspects of the problem of oils fraud, without which the illicit share of the UK diesel market would have risen by 8 per cent. to 2004–05.

This strategy will reduce that market share to 2 per cent. and save around £550 million against the pre-Budget revenue by 2004–05.

TREASURY

Working Family/Children's Tax Credit

12. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are benefiting from the *(a)* working family tax credit and *(b)* children's tax credit in the Mitcham and Morden constituency. [68409]

Dawn Primarolo: At February this year 1,697 families in the Mitcham and Morden constituency were benefiting from the working families tax credit.

It is estimated that 475,000 families in the London area are eligible for children's tax credit. I regret information is not available at constituency level.

Child Poverty

13. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of his Department's measures to tackle child poverty in Worcester. [68411]

Dawn Primarolo: All 12,000 families with children in Worcester will have benefited from the increases in child benefit since 1997; increases of 25 per cent. in real terms for the first child. Around 90 per cent. of families will be eligible for the child tax credit, which together with child benefit, for those earning £50,000 or less, will deliver a minimum of £26.50 and up to £54.25 a week in support for the first child from April 2003.

Inheritance Tax

14. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to amend inheritance tax. [68412]

Mr. Boateng: My right hon. Friend's plans for this year are reflected in the Finance Bill.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the threshold of inheritance tax to recognise the increased proportion of most personal estates represented by the family home. [70832]

Dawn Primarolo: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer reviews the threshold every year, and has increased it this year by more than required by statutory indexation.

Public Sector Housing

15. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on planned public sector housing investment levels for the next three years. [68413]

Mr. Boateng: By 2005–06, investment in housing will have more than doubled in real terms from the levels we inherited in 1997.

Productivity

16. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures the Government are taking to improve productivity in British industry. [68415]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have set out a comprehensive strategy for raising productivity across the economy. The Government's approach centres around maintaining macroeconomic stability to allow businesses and individuals to invest for the future and implementing microeconomic reforms to address the barriers that prevent markets from functioning efficiently. The Government's reforms target five key areas that can affect the rate of productivity growth—competition, enterprise and innovation, skills, investment and the productivity of public services.

Budget 2002 and the 2002 Spending Review take forward a wide range of measures to address historic weaknesses in each of these areas.

Charitable Organisations (VAT)

17. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the rates of VAT applicable to charitable organisations. [68416]

John Healey: While charities already benefit from a range of special VAT reliefs, we remain alive to opportunities to modernise and update the VAT system for charities.

Health Outputs

18. **Mr. Djanogly:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on what targets he has set for health outputs from the Spending Review. [68417]

Mr. Boateng: Targets for health outputs were published in the new Department of Health Public Service Agreement on Monday 15 July.

International Debt Arbitration

19. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made on his proposed international debt arbitration procedure for the resolution of current and future sovereign debt crises. [68419]

John Healey: The Government have been at the forefront in calling for a more effective mechanism for sovereign debt restructuring to be established, to ensure that the burden of adjustment during a crisis is not placed unfairly on the poor and most vulnerable. At the Spring Meetings of the IMFC and G7, the international community agreed to take forward work to develop a new approach to sovereign debt restructuring, to facilitate greater private sector involvement and to improve the framework for crisis resolution. The IMF is currently assessing the various options that may be available for achieving this and the G7 is implementing an Action Plan, which was agreed at the Spring Meeting, towards this objective. The Government welcomes these efforts and continues to take an active role in the developments.

Global Poverty

20. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to meet G8 Finance Ministers to discuss the reduction of poverty in developing countries. [68421]

John Healey: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) earlier today.

29. **Ross Cranston:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made through World bank/IMF action in tackling global poverty. [68430]

John Healey: Tackling global poverty is central to the activities of the World bank and the IMF, and both institutions are committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Macroeconomic stability is a pre-condition of poverty reduction, and the IMF plays a lead role in creating the conditions for stability and growth in the global economy, and the prevention and resolution of financial crisis. In recent years the World bank and the IMF have adopted a new country-led approach to poverty reduction, where developing countries prepare Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in consultation with civil society. As part of this, the UK is seeking to ensure that the institutions collaborate to include poverty and social impact assessments of the policy choices available to developing country authorities.

Poverty rates have declined in most parts of the world, and recent projections by the World bank show that it is possible to achieve the poverty reduction goal in most regions if growth in per capita income accelerates to an average of 3.6 per cent. a year.

30. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress made by the G7/G8 countries in respect of tackling debt in the developing world. [68431]

John Healey: The UK continues to be at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief issues, and continues to press for the rapid and full implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. We were pleased to have achieved the recent announcement of an extra US$1 billion for the HIPC initiative at the G8 summit in Kananaskis and the agreement of leaders to take action to secure the participation of all creditors, to complete the financing of the initiative and to address the issue of debt sustainability at completion point.

Full details of the commitments on HIPC agreed to at the summit can be found in the document, "Statement by G7 Leaders: Delivering on the Promise of the Enhanced HIPC Initiative", which is available at http://www.g8.gc.ca

Public Sector Capital Investment

22. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect a 1 per cent. change in the growth forecast for the United Kingdom economy for 2002–03 would have on public sector capital investment. [68423]

Mr. Boateng: A change in the growth forecast for 2002–03 would have no direct effect on public sector capital investment. The majority of capital expenditure is covered by departmental expenditure limits (DEL). Firm limits for DEL for 2002–03 were set in the 2000 Spending Review.

Pension Funds

23. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the assessment he has made of the effects of his policies on pensions funds. [68424]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have introduced reforms that have delivered and will continue to deliver a stable economic environment based on low levels of inflation and sustainable growth. This environment is designed to benefit all investors, including pension providers, because it supports longer-term investment and planning.

House Prices

24. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what economic instruments he has to moderate the rise in house prices, with specific reference to the south-east of England. [68425]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are designing planning, housing and transport reforms to promote economic growth in every region and balanced growth across the UK.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Governor of the Bank of England on the level of house prices. [68422]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England have regular discussions on a range of economic issues.

Annuities

25. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on annuities. [68426]

Ruth Kelly: The consultation document, Modernising Annuities, published jointly with the Department for Work and Pensions in February, provoked considerable interest and strong feedback. I am today placing in the Library a summary of the responses.

The feedback confirmed that individuals need to be better informed about their annuity purchase. It is clear that many people could improve their retirement income if, at retirement, they were able to select the right annuity for their personal circumstances. It would be in their best interest to look for the best rate in the marketplace, which is not necessarily from the same financial institution that helped them save for retirement. The Government are working with the Financial Services Authority (FSA) and providers to ensure that people are able to make the right choices at the right time. One specific idea under consideration is encouraging the provision of information and advice through the work place.

As the consultation document explains, there is no case for abandoning the requirement that people should buy a lifetime annuity by age 75. This rule ensures that they can take advantage of insurance pooling to make efficient use of their pension savings.

Without prejudicing this rule and consistent with the principles outlined in the consultation document, the Government plan to bring forward powers to make it possible to offer people buying annuities more choice and flexibility. The aim will be to empower people approaching retirement to make the right choices for their circumstances by encouraging competition and transparency in the market for annuities. It will be important that this liberalisation dovetails with simplification and other reforms being considered in the pensions Green Paper this autumn.

Net Cash Requirement

26. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the accounting principles underlying the net cash requirement. [68427]

Mr. Boateng: For those bodies classified by the Office for National Statistics to the appropriate sector in national accounts, the net cash requirement represents the sums borrowed by those bodies, in cash, from outside that sector, plus interest capitalising on certain of those borrowings. Full details of how the net cash requirement is measured and its relation to other measures of borrowing and debt are given in "Monthly statistics on public sector finances: a methodological guide" (No. 12 in the Government Statistical Service Methodology Series).

Small Enterprises (Tax Burden)

27. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the tax burden on small enterprises. [68428]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's aim is to make Britain one of the most competitive environments for business in the world—since 1997 the Government have cut the corporate tax bills of small companies by around 30 per cent., rewarding the entrepreneurial spirit and promoting growth. The Government have introduced numerous measures to help small enterprises since 1997, including:

> taking forward the recommendations of the Carter Review of Payroll Services;
>
> cutting the small companies rate of corporation tax from 23 per cent. to 19 per cent. and introducing a starting rate which we are now cutting from 10 per cent. to zero;
>
> introducing a 10p starting rate of income tax;
>
> making 40 per cent. first year capital allowances permanent; and
>
> introducing measures to ease the impact of VAT on small business.

Dividend Tax Credits

28. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the impact of dividend tax credits on the level of savings. [68429]

Ruth Kelly: No such assessment has been made. The abolition of payable tax credits was part of a wider reform of corporate taxation, including lower rates of corporation tax, designed to foster economic growth and in time generate better rates of return for savers and investors generally.

South-West Economy

31. **Richard Younger-Ross:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what analysis his Department has undertaken on the impact of the slowdown in the world economy on the *(a)* manufacturing, *(b)* service and *(c)* tourism economies of the south-west of England. [68432]

John Healey: The Government closely monitors and assesses the sectoral incidence of economic developments in all countries and regions of the UK, including the south-west.

The Government's assessment of the impact of last year's global slowdown on the UK economy was published in the pre-Budget report 2001 (ISBN 0–10–153182–6) and in Budget 2002 (ISBN 0–10–291477-X).

Alternative Fuels

32. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what financial incentives he has made available for the development of alternative fuels for motor vehicles. [68433]

John Healey: The Government has introduced a wide range of incentives for the development and use of alternative fuels for motor vehicles, ranging from fuel duty incentives for alternative fuels to the tax credit for general research and development. These measures include:

> company cars using alternative fuels and technologies, such as road fuel gases, receive discounts on their company car tax. This is expressed as a discount calculated on a percentage of the car's list price;
>
> alternative fuelled cars first registered from March 2001 attract up to a £10 discount per year on their rate of vehicle excise duty;
>
> Budget 2002 announced a 20p per litre duty differential between biodiesel and ultra low sulphur diesel;
>
> the duty on road fuel gases is set at 9p per kilogramme;
>
> the Government has granted fuel duty exemptions to pilot projects for research into hydrogen, biogas and methanol under the Green Fuel Challenge and has also invited bids for more duty exemptions or reductions in more pilot projects;
>
> R and D tax credits have been introduced for small companies in 2000 and extended to all companies in 2002. These credits reduce the after-tax cost of R and D, including R and D directed towards new alternative fuel technologies; and
>
> the Department for Transport has allocated £10 million this year to each of the Powershift and CleanUp programmes it administers. The Powershift programme offers grants for the conversion of existing vehicles to road fuel gases and electricity and the CleanUp programme offers grants to purchase new vehicles fuelled by road fuel gases and electricity.

Council Tax

33. **Mrs. Brooke:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent estimate his Department has made of the proportion of income paid in council tax by *(a)* the poorest quintile of households and *(b)* the richest quintile of households. [68434]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested can be found in table 3 of the analysis "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2000–01" in the May issue of *Economic Trends*. The information is based on the Family Expenditure Survey.

Performance Targets

34. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the research he commissioned in connection with performance targets to inform his decisions on the Spending Review. [68435]

Mr. Boateng: Performance against Public Service Agreement targets was one of the factors taken into account when making decisions on resources and reform in the Spending Review.

35. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in improving public services through public service agreements. [68436]

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury, reporting against target 7 of its own PSA on page 67 of its 2002 departmental report, included and overall assessment of Departments' progress against their PSA targets.

Financial Services Compensation Scheme

36. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [68437]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services Compensation Scheme acquired its powers and responsibilities under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 on 1 December 2001. Since then it has been an important part of the overall framework of consumer protection provided under the Act.

Crown Estates Commissioners (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about the role of the Crown Estates Commissioners in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [69287]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* I have received no recent representations about the role of the Crown Estate Commissioners in Scotland.

EU Membership

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of membership of the EU to the UK in the last year for which figures are available. [71125]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the estimated outturn for the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC Budget in 2001–02 were set out in the answer which my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 835–37W. Estimates of the trend in the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC Budget for the period 2002–03 to 2005–06 are shown at footnote 4 to Table A.2 (page 165) of the Spending Review 2002 (Cm 5570) published on 15 July.

Poverty

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the measures he has introduced to tackle poverty in disadvantaged areas. [68402]

John Healey: Spending Review 2002 reinforced our commitment to improving public services in disadvantaged areas—more jobs, better results in schools, improved health, safer and cleaner neighbourhoods—with Departments being held accountable for delivering improvements through their Public Service Agreement targets.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what incentives he provides to encourage employers to offer occupational pension schemes for their employees. [70442]

Ruth Kelly: Employers get tax and National Insurance relief to encourage them to offer occupational pensions schemes for their employees.

Employer contributions to occupational pension schemes are normally exempt from corporation tax. And, where the scheme is contracted-out of SERPS, the employer pays a lower rate of National Insurance contributions.

Customs (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs staff were employed in Scotland in each year since 1995. [70634]

John Healey: The total number of full-time equivalent staff employed by Customs and Excise in Scotland since 1995 is as follows:

1995: 1,589

1996: 1,507

1997: 1,355

1998: 1,413

1999: 1,376

2000: 1,324

2001: 1,259

2002: 1,185

Note:

All figures are for the financial year to 1 April.

Five Pound Notes

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why some of the new 'Elizabeth Fry' five pound notes had serial numbers which rubbed off; and when the Bank of England plans to start reissuing the new note. [71907]

Ruth Kelly: The Bank of England suspended issuance of the new Elizabeth Fry five pound note after it was discovered that, on some notes, it was possible to remove part or all of the serial numbers, when the note was rubbed vigorously. The problem was traced to unexpectedly slow drying of the numbering ink on some of the notes, when the numbers were printed over the new varnish coating. This varnish had been introduced to make the note more durable. In future the Bank will put the varnish over the numbering, as tests have shown that this solves the problem. The notes already printed will undergo extensive drying treatment to ensure that the numbering ink dries thoroughly.

The Bank plans to resume issuing the new note in the week commencing 19 August 2002 and is announcing this today.

The total cost of finding and solving this problem amount to less than £250,000 (or approximately half of one per cent. of the annual costs of note issue and production). The Bank is looking to find cost savings elsewhere in note production to ensure that the taxpayer does not suffer any loss of revenue.

Euro Preparations

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on euro preparations. [71908]

Mr. Gordon Brown: As I said in my Mansion House speech in June 2002, our decision on the euro is of immense, historic importance to the long term future of our economy and our country as a whole. In 1997 we set out the case in principle for the single currency, and said that the determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership is the national economic interest, and whether the economic case is clear and unambiguous.

As part of our commitment to prepare and decide, the Government are continuing work on EMU preparations—in partnership with business—to ensure that the UK has a genuine option to join the euro if that is what Government, Parliament and the people, in a referendum, decide.

I am today depositing in the Libraries of both Houses a copy of the Sixth Progress Report on Euro Preparations. The report describes the changeover to the euro in the euro area and sets out lessons from the euro area changeover.

It also sets out what Government and partners are doing to raise awareness of the potential impact on UK businesses and gives an update on planning for possible UK entry.

Alongside the Sixth Progress Report on Euro Preparations, I am also laying a report on the changeover in the euro area which was commissioned by the Standing Committee from the Private Sector Learning Group.

EU Committees
(Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when the EU Committee on recovery of claims is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70917]

(2) when the EU Committee on excise duties is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70906]

(3) when the EU Advisory Committee on value added tax is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70911]

(4) when the EU Customs Code Committee on duty-free arrangements is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70920]

(5) when the EU Customs Code Committee on tariff quotas is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70918]

(6) when the EU Committee on administrative cooperation in the field of indirect taxation, including the Fiscalis programme (SCAC): anti-fraud (SCAF) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70909]

(7) when the EU Customs Code Committee on origin is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70921]

(8) when the EU Customs 2002 Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70914]

(9) when the EU Customs Code Committee on tariff and statistical nomenclature is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70919]

(10) when the EU Committee on administrative cooperation in the field of indirect taxation, including the Fiscalis programme (SCAC): information technology (SCIT) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70907]

(11) when the EU Committee on mutual assistance for the recovery of claims is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70910]

(12) when the EU Committee on administrative co-operation in the field of indirect taxation, including the Fiscalis programme (SCAC): training (SCAT) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70908]

John Healey: The following table indicates when the various EU Committees are next due to meet:

EU Committee[1]	*Next meeting*
Tariff Quotas	[2]9 or 10 September 2002
Training (SCAT)	[3]—
Customs 2002	[2]September or October 2002
Duty-Free Arrangements	[3]—
Mutual Assistance—Recovery of Claims	31 July 2002
Excise Duties	[2]November 2002
Tariff and Statistical	5 and 6 September 2002
Origin	[2]16 or 17 September 2002
Value Added Tax	[2]November 2002
Information Technology (SCIT)	2 November 2002

[1] The Anti-Fraud Committee (SCAF) was dissolved on 29 May 2002. There is no EU VAT or Customs Committee on the recovery of claims other than that on mutual assistance.

[2] Date yet to be finalised.

[3] Not yet set.

The UK is normally represented by one or two officials from HM Customs and Excise on each of these Committees. The Customs delegates at these Committees represent all of the UK.

Online Tax Return Services

Mr. Bell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Treasury is reconsidering the strategy of Government and the private sector performing the functions of tax return preparer on the Internet as direct e-commerce service providers to consumers. [71601]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue continues to encourage third parties to provide e-filing products alongside the free Inland Revenue product, SA Online.

Mr. Bell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Treasury intends to revise its strategy of providing online tax return services where such services can be provided by the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [71602]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue have no plans to withdraw their electronic self assessment product, SA Online. 88 per cent. of customers using the Internet Service for Self Assessment used the Inland Revenue product last year.

Mr. Bell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Treasury's proposed investment in the Inland Revenue's internet self-assessment programme is for *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004, including its marketing and advertising budget; and if he will make a statement. [71603]

Dawn Primarolo: The proposed investment in the Inland Revenue's self assessment programme for 2002 is £7 million. The marketing and communications budget for 2002 which covers the marketing and advertising of e-filing is £2 million.

Our plans for 2003 onwards are still being considered.

National Insurance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff of the Contributions Agency are employed on soliciting national insurance contributions for non-employed persons currently resident abroad; at what cost in the last year for which figures are available; and what the average annual revenue from such overseas residents was over the last three years. [71181]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is not available.

Commonwealth Education Fund

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his press release of 26 June on the Commonwealth education fund, under which expenditure heading of which Department matching funding for Sports Relief fund-raising appears; what his provisional estimate of expenditure under this heading is; and whether such matched funding represents net additional Government expenditure which would not have occurred in the above of Sports Relief's activities. [70940]

John Healey: Matching funds provided by the Government to Sports Relief will be disbursed through the Department for International Development and will form part of DFID's development assistance spending on education. Based on provisional estimates provided by Sports Relief, DFID is expecting to provide up to £4.4 million to support Sports Relief's education projects in Commonwealth developing countries.

The matched funding provided to Sports Relief represents net additional Government expenditure, and is additional to the provision made for DFID in 2002–03 and 2003–04.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent representations he has received from the citizens of Gibraltar about the future status of their territory; [69657]

(2) what measures his Department has undertaken to collect the views of *(a)* citizens of Gibraltar and *(b)* the elected local representatives of those citizens regarding negotiations with Spain; [69655]

(3) what recent representations his Department has received regarding the views of *(a)* citizens of Gibraltar and *(b)* the elected local representatives of those citizens regarding negotiations with Spain. [69656]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* I visited Gibraltar on 6 September and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Gibraltar on 3 May. We both met a wide range of citizens and local representatives, many of whom I have also subsequently met during their visits to London. We remain in regular contact with the Chief Minister in writing and through the Governor of Gibraltar.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in the House on 12 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1167, we have wanted the Chief Minister of Gibraltar at the Brussels Process talks. The Chief Minister has been invited to all three Brussels Process meetings since the Process was relaunched in July 2001. He has chosen not to attend. That offer still stands under the long-standing "two flags three voices" formula. Both we and Spain want the Government and people of Gibraltar to be fully engaged in talks about their own future.

International Criminal Court

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts with regard to the United States Government's position on the International Criminal Court; and if he will make a statement. [70670]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was in close contact with his European counterparts in the period leading up to the unanimous adoption by the UN Security Council, on 12 July, on the International Criminal Court.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns her Department undertook in the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current parliamentary Session in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and, for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current Session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) England, (B) Wales and (C) Northern Ireland. [37416]

Mr. Morley: As DEFRA did not exist prior to June 2001, information on expenditure for previous years is unavailable. DEFRA centralised publicity expenditure is not recorded in the format requested.

Supporting the eradication of the foot and mouth disease outbreak overshadowed all normal DEFRA media campaign activity during the financial year 2001–02. The

Department chose to focus its publicity activities on poster campaigns, events, shows, publications and direct targeted mailings.

Separate to the foot and mouth crisis, one major advertising campaign was launched. This was the 'Your Countryside, You're Welcome' campaign which cost £250,000.

Centralised DEFRA publicity expenditure by geographical territory for the financial year 2001–02 is as follows:

	£
England	688,907
England and Wales	421,855
United Kingdom	2,209,319
Total	3,320,081

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by her Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39093]

Mr. Morley: As DEFRA was created in June 2001; information prior to this date is unavailable.

The purpose of any DEFRA publicity or advertising campaign is determined by the Department's aims and objectives. In the financial year 2001–02, DEFRA's centralised publicity expenditure was £3.5 million. A list of publicity activities including advertising is as follows: the items shown include campaigns, events and literature.

The average number of staff in the publicity section of DEFRA's communications directorate is 20.

Publicity and advertising campaigns for financial year 2001–02

Corporate publicity campaign
Action Plan for Farming material
'Countryside Matters' campaign
State Veterinary Journal (recruitment advertising)
Pet Travel Scheme material
Fruit Focus 2001 event
The East of England Show 2001
The Game Fair 2001
The Hampton Court Palace Flower Show 2001
The Tatton Park Flower Show 2001
BBC TV Gardeners' World Live 2001 event
Countryside Stewardship Letter
DEFRA Touring Exhibition
Agenda 2000 and Rural Payments Agency (CAP)

Literature

Arable Area Payments Scheme literature
Beef Special Premium Scheme literature
Hill Farm Allowances literature
Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) literature
Sheep Annual Premium Scheme literature
Sheep Annual Premium Scheme Quotas literature
Suckler Cow Premium Scheme literature
Agricultural Wages Board literature
Arable Stewardship Scheme literature
Countryside Stewardship Scheme literature
Environmentally Sensitive Areas literature
EAGGF Objective 1 (CAP scheme) literature
EAGGF (Objective 5B and Leader II Programme CAP schemes) literature
Farm Waste Grant (Nitrate Vulnerable Zone) Scheme literature
Farm Woodland Premium Scheme literature
Flock Record Book/Herd Register material
Habitat Scheme literature
Organic Conversion Information Service literature
Organic Farming Scheme literature
Pet Passport Certificates
Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme literature
Producer Organisations Aid Scheme literature
Rural Development Regulations literature
Scrapie National Plan literature
Slaughter Premium Scheme literature
Extensification Payments Scheme literature
England Rural Development Programme material
Energy Crops Scheme literature
Hill Farm Allowance Scheme literature
Processing and Marketing Scheme literature
Rural Enterprises Scheme material
Vocational Training Scheme literature
Agricultural Wages Board literature
Landscape (Staff Magazine) re-design
Managing Stress Booklet
Modernising Government Booklet
'Leader Plus' staff development project literature
Stewardship Newsletter
Environment R and D Newsletter
Flood Defence Newsletter
Good Agricultural Practice Codes.

Asbestos

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the level of water supply in the UK carried through blue asbestos pipes. [39243]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The principal asbestos constituent of water supply pipes has been white asbestos. No water supply in the UK is carried through pipes constructed in blue asbestos, although traces of blue and brown asbestos are likely to have been present in the white asbestos construction materials.

Regional use of asbestos cement water supply pipes varied considerably but approximately 10 per cent. of existing pipes in the UK are believed to consist of that material.

The World Health Organisation included an opinion on asbestos cement pipes in their 1993 edition of "Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality". The guidelines include the following statement "Although well studied, there has been little convincing evidence of the carcinogenicity of ingested asbestos in epidemiological studies of populations with drinking water supplies containing high concentrations of asbestos. Moreover in extensive studies in animal species, asbestos has not consistently increased the incidence of tumours of the gastrointestinal tract."

Correspondence

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the letters from the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West of 21 October and 13 December 2001, pursuant to her oral statement of 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1288. [56848]

Mr. Morley: A response was sent on 21 January 2002.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many letters were received by each Minister in her Department in each month since June 1997. [59314]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA was created on 8 June 2001.

The number of letters received by each Minister from hon. Members in each month since June 2001 is detailed in the table.

Month	*Margaret Beckett*	*Michael Meacher*	*Alun Michael*	*Elliot Morley*	*Lord Whitty*
June 2001	148	44	9	36	20
July 2001	454	185	116	86	64
August 2001	486	213	58	107	72
September 2001	236	236	77	95	109
October 2001	174	197	115	115	199
November 2001	205	246	111	187	69
December 2001	141	154	49	108	68
January 2002	256	322	91	266	86
February 2002	271	480	91	161	64
March 2002	341	332	106	430	89
April 2002	323	309	131	209	72
May 2002	302	212	120	309	70
June 2002	288	141	68	168	58
July 2002[1]	173	91	28	136	46
Total	3,798	3,162	1,170	2,413	1,086
Grand total			11,629		

[1] Up to 12 July

In addition, over the same period, the Department received a further 886 letters from other Government Departments that had originally been sent to them for reply rather than DEFRA Ministers.

Information on the number of other letters received by each Minister would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the representations of the hon. Member for Hexham of 2 January on cattle passports. [65645]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* We have no record of receiving the hon. Member's letter of 2 January.

Livestock Movements (Cumbria)

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to remove the 20-day restriction on the movement of livestock in Cumbria. [64867]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 June 2002]:* The 20-day standstill rule is backed by firm scientific and veterinary advice. A number of exceptions to the standstill have been permitted, subject to veterinary advice, where other risk mitigation measures can be operated.

The Government are in dialogue with industry stakeholders about the economic impact of the standstill and to assess whether it should be retained in the short and medium-term. No decisions will be made prior to publication of the FMD inquiry reports.

London Underground

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research has been carried out by her Department into air pollution within the London underground system and its effects on the health of London Underground staff and passengers; and if she will place a copy of the research in the Library. [69347]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) is currently considering the findings of a recent review of the existing evidence on the possible health impacts of exposure to dust within the London underground. The review, "Dust in the London Underground: a review of the health implications of exposure to tunnel dust", which was carried out on behalf of London Underground Ltd. (LUL), considers the extent to which London Underground staff and passengers are exposed to dust, and the possible health impacts. Copies are available from the London Underground website at: http://www.thetube.com/content/pressreleases/0110/31.asp#dust.

COMEAP are expected to comment on the review shortly, and their comments will be available via their website (www.doh.gov.uk/comeap) in due course.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which pollutants are monitored within the London underground system; and what the recorded levels of each were in the last five years. [69346]

Mr. Meacher: London Underground Ltd. monitors levels of a number of pollutants in the underground system to ensure that the exposure limits prescribed in health and safety legislation are adhered to. The results of this monitoring are not held centrally, but are summarised together with an analysis of the possible health impacts in a recent review carried out on behalf of London Underground Ltd: "Dust in the London Underground: a review of the health implications of exposure to tunnel dust". Copies of this review are available via the London Underground website at: http://www.thetube.com/content/pressreleases/0110/31.asp#dust'

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who has responsibility for monitoring air quality within the London Underground system; and what controls are in place to ensure air quality in the London Underground system adheres to national standards. [69348]

Mr. Meacher: Air quality in the London Underground system is required to meet occupational exposure limits as required by Health and Safety legislation. Guidance notes, issued under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, prescribe maximum occupational exposure limits for a variety of pollutants, including all of the pollutants covered by the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, published in January 2000. Details of the limits for each pollutant are available from the Health and Safety Executive. London

Underground Limited (LUL) are responsible for ensuring that these limits are adhered to. LUL are in the process of developing an air quality monitoring standard, which would set out the monitoring arrangements and requirements in the Underground system. To date, all monitoring carried out during operational hours has indicated that levels of all pollutants are below the prescribed occupational exposure limits.

Road Traffic Pollution

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made towards the goal of halving emissions of pollutants from road traffic from the 1997 levels by 2010. [69374]

Mr. Meacher: Emissions of air pollutants from road transport have fallen significantly since the beginning of the 1990s, despite traffic growth. This is largely the result of the progressively tighter new vehicle and fuel standards introduced over this period by the European Union. Our latest modelled estimates show that by 2001, total national emissions of oxides of nitrogen and particles from road transport (two of the air pollutants of most concern) had dropped to 77 per cent. and 74 per cent. respectively of their 1997 levels. By 2010, they are projected to fall to 41 per cent. and 44 per cent. respectively of their 1997 levels. These further reductions are forecast to come about partly because older, more polluting vehicles will be gradually phased out of the UK fleet, and partly because of the even more stringent EU emissions standards for new vehicles which will apply from 2005.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many buildings her Department has made cheaper to keep warm through the installation of energy efficiency measures since December 1998. [69301]

Mr. Meacher: Since the creation of DEFRA in June 2001, over 280,000 households in England have been assisted through the Government's Warm Front Scheme, which provides a mix of insulation and heating measures to eligible households.

The Department also funds the Energy Saving Trust to encourage the sustainable use of energy in the domestic and small business sectors through advertising programmes, provision of advice and endorsement of energy efficient products. The Energy Efficiency Advice Centres, which are funded by the Trust, report some 345,500 households in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have installed at least one energy efficiency measures as a result of advice from those Centres since June 2001. It should be noted that some of those homes will have been assisted through Warm Front and similar schemes in Northern Ireland and Wales.

The Trust also funded the HECAction scheme to assist local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities under the Home Energy Conservation Act. Under this scheme an estimated 18,500 energy efficiency measures have been installed across England, with some households having received more than one measure.

Milk Industry

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effects of the break-up of Milk Marque. [69622]

Mr. Morley: There has been no formal assessment; it would be difficult to separate the effects of this action from other influences on the market. However, since Milk Marque decided to break itself up, its successors (Zenith, Axis Milk and Milklink) have proved to be dynamic players in the sector.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the sustainability of UK milk production at current price levels. [69621]

Mr. Morley: For many, the current prices being achieved are clearly unsustainable in the longer term. They are back to the levels seen in 2000. The reasons for this appear many and varied but one—the unusually high early season peak of production that put a strain on processing capacity—should now be behind us. The recent strengthening of the euro against sterling should also have a beneficial effect once it has worked through.

Teaching (Environment and Conservation)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial resources and support is being put into teaching children at school about the environment and conservation in the current financial year. [69394]

Mr. Meacher: Through the Environmental Action Fund, the Department funds a range of projects providing educational materials and other support which can be used by teachers and children. Many of the projects in the current programme of £4.2 million are relevant in varying degrees to young people's understanding and awareness of environmental issues both in and outside school, but it is not possible to assign specific amounts to the schools element.

In addition, the Department has, with the Department for Education and Skills and the devolved Administrations, funded and supported the World Wildlife Fund school initiative, the Our World Project, in the run up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. A schools 'makeover' competition and internet debates have offered pupils of all ages the opportunity to engage with key sustainable development issues.

All pupils between the ages of five and 16 study the national curriculum in maintained schools in England. Environment and conservation are covered within a range of subjects including science, geography and citizenship. The Department for Education and Skills is funding web-based resources to support teachers on sustainable development issues.

Sustainable development in schools has also been addressed by the Government's Sustainable Development Education Panel, which is jointly supported by my Department and the Department for Education and Skills.

Waste

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on plans for local authority utilisation of duty of care provisions in the waste movement field. [69238]

Mr. Meacher: As part of the local public service agreement initiative, some local authorities have argued that to assist their ability to combat fly tipping, they should be given the power that the Environment Agency has to require companies and individuals to provide the Agency with copies of the duty of care paperwork which these companies and individuals are required to maintain. This proposal is supported by the fly tipping stakeholders' forum. The Government are currently seeking the views of key stakeholders not represented on the forum, but who may be affected, with a view to making the necessary legislative change as soon as possible.

Livestock Premium Quota

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers successfully applied for reinstatement of quota which was withdrawn by the Agenda 2000 Suckler Cow Premium Scheme quota cut on the grounds that they qualified under an extensification scheme in *(a)* Gloucestershire and *(b)* the UK. [69871]

Mr. Morley: Under the Agenda 2000 Suckler Cow Quota Cut Exercise, four extensification reinstatement applications were received from farmers in Gloucestershire, none of which were successful. In the United Kingdom as a whole, a total of 83 extensification reinstatement applications were received, of which five were successful.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much *(a)* suckler cow and *(b)* sheep annual premium quota has been purchased by the Government; and at what cost. [69819]

Mr. Morley: Up to and including the 2002 scheme year, no sheep or suckler cow quota has been purchased by the Government.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions the British Government have had with African counterparts on the question of illegal imports of meat. [69990]

Mr. Morley: Since 1997, concern about the increasingly unsustainable nature of the bushmeat trade and its effects on endangered species led to my Department raising the issue within the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). This resulted in the establishment of a Bushmeat Working Group to help Central and west African range states develop and implement their own solutions. We have contributed £55,000 to the working group to help the range states participate and to support the recruitment of consultants to revise and harmonise their own wildlife policies and legislation. Work on this is currently under way and progress will be reported to the next conference of CITES parties, to be held in Chile in November.

We have also funded research analysing existing knowledge and expertise on the bushmeat trade, highlighting gaps in data and understanding, and making recommendations on further action. The results of this research have been made available to the CITES Bushmeat Working Group and we expect them to be discussed at the group's next meeting. This is due to take place in Brazzaville later this month and the UK will be represented at the meeting by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, we have also been using the UK diplomatic missions in Harare, Accra, Abuja, Cairo, Pretoria, Kampala, Abidjan, Maseru, Dakar, Luanda, Nairobi, Kigali, Mbabane and Tunis to raise the profile of UK import restrictions and rules.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the tonnage of illegal meat imports from Africa in the last five years. [69948]

Mr. Morley: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) set up a centralised database of seizures of illegal meat and animal products last year, receiving data from all the enforcement agencies. From 1 April 2001 until 12 July 2002, 797 seizures of consignments that included meat and animal products were reported to the database that had arrived on flights and ships from African countries. The volume of these seizures was approximately 1.58 tonnes.

However, under-reporting and differences in the reporting procedures of the different agencies mean that these are likely to be underestimates of both the total seizures that included meat and animal products and their volume.

The number of seizures does not reflect the total amount of meant and animal products brought into the country illegally. However, a risk assessment is currently being carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency which will provide information on the likelihood of an animal disease outbreak linked to illegal imports of meat and animal products. The risk assessment will provide an estimate of the probable amount of illegally imported meat from a number of countries, including African countries, per year. This risk assessment is due to be completed in autumn 2002.

Refrigerators

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultations she has had, and with which organisations, on the *(a)* directive on the disposal of refrigerators and *(b)* draft directive on waste electronic electrical equipment. [69821]

Mr. Meacher: The regulation on substances that deplete the ozone layer sets requirements related to the recovery of CFCs and HCFCs contained in waste refrigerators. We consulted widely during the negotiations of the regulation. More recently we have continued to work closely with retailers, local authorities, the Environment Agency, the waste management industry and others to implement the regulation.

A formal DTI consultation on the waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) directive was issued in summer 2000. Results were published in December 2000. Approximately 300 consultation documents were sent out. Government Departments are in regular contact with industry about the proposed WEEE directive and its implementation in the UK, and report back to industry on developments in the negotiations in Brussels as they happen. A series of meetings is currently being held with local authorities and with retailers to discuss the collection and recycling requirements of the WEEE directive and possible implementation methods. A series of events has been arranged by the Small Business Service to raise awareness in the regions and discuss the directive with all stakeholder groups. Officials will also be visiting several other member states to discuss implementation of the directive and to learn from those who already have legislation in this area.

Hunting

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she plans to hold public hearings as part of the consultation on hunting with dogs. [69791]

Alun Michael: Hearings will take place in Portcullis House on 9, 10 and 11 September as part of the current consultation on hunting with dogs.

The hearings will explore the issues of preventing cruelty and recognising utility and how best to apply principles, building on the conclusions reached by the Committee of Inquiry chaired by Lord Burns. A number of expert witnesses will be invited to provide evidence. This process will help towards the drawing up of legislation based on clear principles, as indicated in my statement to the House on 21 March and is being organised in co-operation with the Countryside Alliance the Campaign for Protection of Hunted Animals, and the Middle Way Group. Details will be posted on the DEFRA website from early August (http://www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/hunting/hunting.htm).

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect on disposal routes of the reclassification of waste as hazardous. [69748]

Mr. Meacher: Reclassification of waste as hazardous will restrict its disposal via landfill to those sites classified as landfill sites for hazardous waste by the Environment Agency. Landfill site operators should have submitted site conditioning plans (required by 16 July) detailing what classification they are seeking for their site. It is still too early to assess what hazardous waste capacity will be available after 16 July but the waste management industry have informed us that they do not foresee a shortfall.

Energy Crops

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans there are to introduce a processing plant for energy crops in Scotland; when it will come into force; how much it will cost; and if she will make a statement on where responsibility for this project lies. [70095]

Mr. Morley: Responsibility for this is with the Scottish Executive. I understand the Executive has no knowledge of a project being developed to utilise energy crops.

Pet Travel

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which ports allow animals into the UK through the PETS scheme; and if she plans to extend the number of ports in this scheme. [70268]

Mr. Morley: At present there are five sea ports where animals that meet the rules of the Pet Travel Scheme can enter England. These are Dover, Portsmouth, Harwich, Poole and Plymouth. Pets can also enter England under the scheme through Heathrow and Gatwick airports. Under the requirements of the Pet Travel Scheme, any transport company wishing to transport animals to England under the scheme must seek written approval to do so from the Government. My Department has written in the past to all ferry and airline companies operating passenger routes into England to invite expressions of interest for approval to join the scheme. Whether companies choose to seek approval is a commercial and operational decision for them.

Aujeszky's Disease

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will announce the results of the tests for Aujeszky's disease taken this month on a number of premises in Lancashire, Cheshire, West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, West Sussex and Lincolnshire. [70267]

Mr. Morley: The final results of these tests were received on Monday 15 July, and I am pleased to say they were all negative.

A press release was issued on the same day announcing that no trace of disease has been found following the investigations.

Bush Meat

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations her Department has received about the issue of the unsustainable bush meat trade and its inclusion in the World Summit on Sustainable Development. [70302]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State has received the following recent representations about this issue:

Two letters from my hon. Friend himself, dated 16 April and 24 May.

A letter from the director of International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW UK), Ms Campbell-McRae, dated 27 May.

The Secretary of State has replied to each correspondence.

UK Government officials, including a DEFRA representative, attended the UK Bushmeat Campaign meeting on 28 May. The aim of the workshop was to draw attention to the bush meat crisis and to call for it to be raised at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD).

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about her Department's intention to include the issue of the unsustainable bushmeat trade in her preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. [70300]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's work to tackle unsustainable bushmeat trade is ongoing, predominantly through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITIES) and the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). We have funded research to analyse knowledge on the bushmeat trade, highlight gaps in data and understanding, and recommend further action. The Government supports a number of initiatives with links to bushmeat, such as the UK Bushmeat Working Group.

Our priorities for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) include poverty eradication and sustainable livelihoods, with a focus on implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, linked with the need for good domestic, regional and international governance and institutional capacity building. Action in these areas will address the diverse underlying causes of bushmeat trade. The draft Programme of Action (PoA) for WSSD recognises that the Conventions on Biodiversity (CBD) and International Trade in Endangered Species (CITIES) are the key routes for achieving the conservation and sustainable sue of biological diversity and thereby tackling trade in bushmeat. The draft PoA calls for all countries to implement the CBD's programme of work on forest biological diversity. As you know, the work programme specifically calls for the establishment of a group to develop a work plan to bring harvesting of non-timber forest products, with particular focus on bushmeat, to sustainable levels.

Energy Saving Trust

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the *(a)* Create and *(b)* Lightswitch grant regimes administered by the Energy Saving Trust were discontinued; and what will replace them with respect to schools. [70227]

Mr. Meacher: The school sector is an area where we now expect the Carbon Trust to have a lead role as part of their work on the promotion of energy efficiency in the public sector. We have asked the Carbon Trust to work with the Energy Saving Trust to develop a new approach for the schools sector, and they intend to draw on the previous experience of the EST as well as other key players such as CREATE.

In addition, as part of their work to promote energy efficiency in business and the public sector, the Carbon Trust is currently considering how the promotion of energy efficient lighting, including in schools, can be improved and will shortly be consulting with all key players, manufacturers, suppliers and retailers in developing and expanding their approach.

In the meantime, the EST will be discussing with the Carbon Trust how to handle certain programmes and initiatives that they had previously managed, such as Lightswitch and SchoolEnergy. The EST is also expected to continue to have an important and proactive role in energy efficiency education and in energy services for schools. I understand that these considerations will form part of the proposal from the Trusts on a future strategy for schools.

Egg Industry

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to make compensation available to egg producers in respect of the capital cost of converting from egg production in cage systems to egg production in non-cage systems. [70334]

Mr. Morley: The EC CAP regime for this sector is a light one and no grants are currently available as these would contravene existing rules on state aids. Any compensation would need to be laid down by measures that apply fairly across the EU. The long implementation times for the regulations mean that the industry has a lengthy period over which to write off the required capital investment.

Doha Development Agenda

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the EU in respect of the Doha Development Agenda negotiations to prevent goods entering the UK that are produced by standards of hygiene and animal welfare lower than in the UK. [70338]

Mr. Morley: While we strongly support the removal of protectionist barriers to agricultural trade, we have made clear that liberalisation must not compromise EU standards of hygiene and animal welfare. Our concerns are fully reflected in the negotiating proposals that the European Commission has submitted in the Doha Development Agenda.

EU Committees (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Standing Committee on Seeds and Propagating Material for Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70570]

Mr. Morley: The next meeting of the EU Standing Committee on Seeds and Propagating Material for Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry is scheduled for September. The committee consists of representatives of the member states. UK representation depends upon the agenda for each meeting and can include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where they consider that there are items of sufficient interest.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Standing Committee on Agricultural Statistics is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70581]

Mr. Morley: Meetings of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Statistics usually coincide with Working Party meetings and the next will take place in November 2002 if necessary. Consultation with devolved Administrations always takes place beforehand. UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of sufficient interest.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Committee for Community protection of plant variety rights is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70573]

Mr. Morley: No meeting of the EU Committee for Community protection of plant variety rights has been scheduled. The Committee consists of representatives of the member states. UK representation depends upon the agenda for each meeting and can include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where they consider that there are items of sufficient interest.

Water Abstraction

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in what way catchment abstraction management strategies will include the water requirements of UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats in England and Wales. [70184]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats will be included as one of the environmental considerations when Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies are prepared.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many abstraction licence holders have voluntarily converted their licences of right to time limited licences since the publication of Taking Water Responsibly. [70183]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* None. There have, though, been a few instances where the Environment Agency has reached agreement with an applicant, in the context of an application to vary a permanent licence, that the whole licence be subject to a time limit.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of how catchment abstraction management strategies will contribute to the good status requirements of the EC water framework directive. [70186]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The control of abstractions is required by the EC water framework directive as part of the programme of measures that contribute to good status requirements. Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies will provide the Environment Agency with the tools to put the necessary controls in place.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of when the 80 per cent. of abstraction licences held as licences of right will be transferred to time limited status in accordance with Taking Water Responsibly; and what mechanisms her Department proposes to use to make this transition. [70185]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* "Taking Water Responsibly" tasked the Environment Agency with developing plans, as part of its Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies (CAMS) programme, to convert existing permanent licences to time limited status on a prioritised basis, and also to consider establishing incentives in its Charges Scheme to encourage this. The first round of the agency's CAMS programme will take another seven years to be completed for the whole of England and Wales. It is intended to address the conversion of licences to time limited status as part of this process. The agency will also be consulting later this year on proposed revisions to its Charges Scheme, which are likely to include financial incentives to encourage voluntary conversion. "Taking Water Responsibly" (paragraph 7.12) acknowledged that "the process of conversion of existing licences to time limited status may be quite protracted".

Common Agricultural Policy

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many payments of financial support under the CAP in England and Wales were *(a)* between £200,000 and £499,999, *(b)* between £500,000 and £999,999 and *(c)* in excess of £1 million, in the last year for which figures are available. [70044]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The table gives numbers of individual payments of financial support under the CAP to addresses in England and Wales in each category. Some businesses may have received more than one payment, or may have had trading interests outside the region of the address to which the payments were made.

	£200,000 to £499,999	*£500,000 to £999,999*	*Over £1 million*
Grants and subsidies			
England	158	11	3
Wales[1]	0	0	0
Market support			
England	523	125	33
Wales	82	42	33

[1] Figures relate to the 12 months ending June 2002, except for grants and subsidies for Wales which relates to the EAGGF budget year ending in 2000, the last year for which figures were readily available.

Small Farms

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been paid to small farmers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England in each of the last five years for set-aside. [70437]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* Small farmers, defined in the EU's Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS) as those claiming for an area producing not more than the equivalent of 92 tonnes of cereals, have only been eligible for set-aside payments since the year 2000. Approximate figures for payments since then are as follows.

		£000
	2000	*2001*
(a) Scotland	211	311
(b) Wales	15	61
(c) England	957	2,924

Honey Bees

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the work done by Bee Disease Insurance Limited to prevent the outbreak of harmful diseases among honey bees. [70451]

Mr. Morley: Insurance against the loss of colonies and equipment as a result of infection with notifiable bee diseases is a valuable tool in disease control. The Department welcomes the work of Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. which serves to encourage beekeepers in England to play their part in the identification of notifiable diseases, and to bring any suspected incidents of these to the attention of the Central Science Laboratory's National Bee Unit.

Central Science Laboratory

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets she has set the Central Science Laboratory for 2002–03. [71748]

Mr. Morley: I have set the Central Science Laboratory the following performance targets for 2002–03.

Quality of Service

1. To make satisfactory progress with the action plan resulting from the 2001–02 science audit.
2. To manage the Agency in an effective manner, including delivery of e-Government and commercial exploitation of research outputs.
3. To achieve a minimum of 85 per cent. of project milestones in commissioned projects which support the "Developing DEFRA" objectives.
4. To achieve a mean score of 4.0 on a scale of 0.5 for the assessment of customer satisfaction using the revised methodology.

Efficiency

5. To deliver the efficiency targets set out in the business plan.

Financial Performance

6. To recover from Government Departments, Agencies and external customers, the full economic costs of the Agency's services.

DEFENCE

Offset Obligations

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost and benefits of offset obligations incurred by United Kingdom defence companies as part of export defence agreements were in each year since 1992, broken down by nations and regions of the UK. [67308]

Dr. Moonie: Such offset obligations are normally commercial transactions entered into by United Kingdom companies and overseas authorities. Information on these transactions is not held centrally by the Ministry of Defence.

There is, however, one Government-to-Government arrangement. Under the Al Yamamah programme, Her Majesty's Government encourages commercial investment in Saudi Arabia as an offset to the programme costs to the Saudi Arabian Government. This arrangement, which is at no cost to the United Kingdom taxpayer, makes a valuable contribution to this important defence collaboration programme.

Royal Navy Submarines

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the testing of a new naval nuclear reactor core that will power Royal Navy submarines for their full operational life; and what problems have been experienced. [67708]

Dr. Moonie: The new naval nuclear reactor Core H that will power Royal Navy submarines for their full operational life is being tested at the Vulcan Naval Reactor Test Establishment located at Dounreay in Scotland. Full power trails started on 5 February 2002 and all initial test results were as predicted. No problems have been experienced with the new core during testing to date.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the testing of a new naval nuclear reactor core that will power Royal Navy submarines for their full operational life has remained within his Department's estimated budget. [69842]

Dr. Moonie: The fixed price contract to deliver testing of the Royal Navy's new submarine reactor core has remained within the Equipment Programme 2002 budget.

Procurement (Interoperability)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are in place to ensure *(a)* current and *(b)* future interoperability with (i) UK, (ii) NATO and (iii) US systems when making procurement decisions; and if he will make a statement. [68677]

Dr. Moonie: Interoperability is a broad subject and no single criterion determines the Ministry of Defence's requirements for interoperability. The issue includes interoperability between different equipment capabilities, between operational and business applications, as well as with allies and coalition partners. The ability to operate effectively alongside NATO partners, including the United States, in multinational operations is considered crucial. For each new equipment project, the Business Case through which the project is approved will consider explicit requirements for interoperability. This will also express, as a Key User Requirement, specific and affordable interoperability requirements for the system.

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will pay no-fault compensation to former members of the UK armed forces suffering from Gulf war syndrome, in accordance with the recent ruling of the Pension Appeals Tribunal in the case of Mr. Shaun Rusling; and if he will make a statement. [67638]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the armed forces explained in his answers on 2 July, *Official Report*, columns 226–27W and on 4 July, *Official Report*, column 520W, the Ministry of Defence does not recognise Gulf war syndrome as a medical condition. Furthermore, the recent Pension's Appeal Tribunal's decision is specific to that case and does not set a legal precedent. It would be wrong to interpret from the tribunal's finding that Gulf war syndrome does exist. However, the fact that there is, at present, no proper basis for recognising Gulf war syndrome as an appropriate diagnostic label does not prevent a Gulf veteran getting a war pension which is paid on a no-fault basis. Gulf veterans may also be eligible for no-fault pension benefits under the armed forces pension scheme.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy of providing compensation to invalided soldiers, medical auxiliaries and their families suffering from illness arising from serving in the Gulf War. [68259]

Dr. Moonie: No-fault compensation for United Kingdom service personnel disabled as a result of their service is provided through the War Pension Scheme (WPS). The WPS applies to all those who have served in the UK forces. Veterans may also be eligible for an Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) occupational pension and, if they have been medically discharged, this is supplemented by attributable benefits linked to the degree of disability or non-attributable benefits linked to length of service, whichever is the greater. Both the WPS and AFPS provide benefits to the dependants of veterans who have died.

The Ministry of Defence has about 2,000 active notices from Gulf veterans and members of their families of their intention to claim common law compensation in respect of illness allegedly arising from the Gulf conflict. However, we have still yet to receive any writs or claims of sufficient detail to allow these cases to be taken forward. When compensation claims are submitted against the MOD, they are considered on the basis of whether or not the Department has a legal liability to pay compensation. Where there is a legal liability to pay compensation we do so.

Military Exports

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a list of authorised exporters of military supplies based in *(a)* mainland UK, *(b)* the Channel Islands and *(c)* the Isle of Man. [68810]

Dr. Moonie: Such a list does not exist.

Nimrod MRA4

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the Nimrod MRA4 programme; and what problems have been experienced. [69841]

Dr. Moonie: Nimrod MRA4 is a highly complex, software intensive and sophisticated product. The degree of technical challenge has led to a delay in delivery, with the in-service date re-set in 1999 to March 2005. BAE Systems are driving hard for this target and the key interim deliverable of first flight, expected by the end of this year. The Ministry of Defence and the company are also ensuring that Day 1 and whole life support are in place as required. The capability to be provided will be a step change from that currently available. Nimrod will be the leading class product, evidenced by US interest in MRA4 as a contender for their Multi-Mission Aircraft programme.

Afghanistan

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many men have left the initiative to train a standing Afghan army. [69840]

Mr. Hoon: There have been some who have left the Afghan army training programme, but overall in the circumstances there appears to have been a reasonable retention rate, and we are pleased that this multi-ethnic force is beginning to take root.

Eurofighter

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the delays to the Eurofighter. [69843]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 478W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith).

HMS Albion

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 736W, when the review of the in-service date with BAES Marine is expected to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [70129]

Dr. Moonie: It is expected that the review with BAES Marine of HMS Albion's in-service date will be completed shortly. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House once the date has been confirmed.

Weapon Locating Radars

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many artillery hunting radars have been leased from Ericsson to fill the capability gap left by the delay in selecting a bidder; what the total cost was of leasing; and if he will make a statement. [70427]

Dr. Moonie: Four Arthur weapon locating radars were leased from Ericsson in April 2002 to satisfy an urgent operational requirement. The systems were deployed operationally by the end of April 2002. The cost of the lease is commercially sensitive and so I am withholding it under Exemption 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

A competition to satisfy the Army's requirement for a mobile artillery monitoring battlefield radar was launched in October 2001. Ericsson was selected as the preferred bidder and a contract was placed for four Arthur systems in June 2002. These are an upgraded version of those that have been leased and will offer an increase in capability when brought into service with the United Kingdom armed forces. There was no delay in selecting a preferred bidder, but work to confirm the requirement took longer than expected.

HMS Fearless

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the *(a)* Brazilian and *(b)* Argentinean Governments about a possible sale of HMS Fearless. [70163]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* I am withholding the information requested in accordance with Exemptions 1 and 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

A600M

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the re-tendering process for the engines for the A600M; what EU funding is available to *(a)* Pratt and Whitney and *(b)* Rolls Royce to assist with research and development of bids for the A600M engine project; and when he will announce the outcome of the re-tendering process for the A600M engines. [70162]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* I believe that the hon. Member is referring to the A400M aircraft. The A400M prime contractor, Airbus Military, is responsible for selecting the aircraft's engines. In December 2001 the company sought new tenders for the A400M engine after deciding not to proceed with its earlier choice of engine. The hon. Member will recall that the A400M contract is for the development and production of the complete aircraft, including its engines. Airbus Military is free, therefore, to select its suppliers on grounds of performance and cost, thereby ensuring that we obtain best value for money. No EU funding for research and development is available to either Pratt and Whitney or Rolls Royce in connection with the A400M engines. We understand that Airbus Military expect to announce their engine selection when the A400M prime contract becomes effective. Partner nations are working to bring the prime contract into effect at the earliest opportunity.

War Pensions

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he will take to inform ex-servicemen demobbed in 1952 of entitlement to war benefit; and if he will make a statement. [70560]

Dr. Moonie: The Veterans Agency already undertakes a significant amount of publicity to raise awareness about war pensions. It does not however target ex-servicemen demobbed in any particular year.

The Agency issues a range of information leaflets and posters to a number of different outlets such as post offices, regimental museums, GP surgeries and works closely with ex-service organisations. In addition the Veterans Agency website contains comprehensive information and the War Pensioners Welfare Service holds advice days and surgeries using a mobile advice unit to access more remote areas.

There are no time limits for claiming a war pension but the onus is and always has been on the individual to make a claim.

Future Offensive Air Strategy

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Government intend to build new aircraft to fulfil the manned aircraft element of the future offensive air strategy; and if he will make a statement. [70626]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The future offensive air system is currently in the concept phase with a planned in service date of around 2017. We are currently looking at a potential mix of platforms including long range cruise missiles, uninhabited air combat vehicles and manned aircraft. No final decisions have been taken on the solution.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the X-45 in order to fulfil the requirements of the unmanned element of the future offensive air strategy; and if he will make a statement. [70627]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* We are at the early stages of evaluating ways in which unmanned aircraft could contribute to our future offensive air system (FOAS) capability. As part of our continuing dialogue with United States colleagues, we have discussed the X-45 vehicle. But we have made no formal assessment of the X-45; and nor have we yet taken any decisions about developing or acquiring specific unmanned aircraft in relation to FOAS.

Predator

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Government intend to buy Predator; and if he will make a statement. [70669]

Dr. Moonie: Under the Watchkeeper programme we are considering how tactical unmanned aerial vehicles can enhance our reconnaissance and imagery intelligence capabilities. Four industry consortia have proposed a range of system solutions (both air vehicles and ground segment elements). The Predator air vehicle is a part of one of these solutions.

We intend later this year to select two potential solutions for more detailed assessment. Our aim is to select a single preferred solution by the end of 2003.

International Security Assistance Force

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his Turkish counterpart concerning the duration of the Turkish armed forces' lead of ISAF; and if he will make a statement. [71034]

Mr. Hoon: I have not had discussions on this subject with my Turkish counterpart, although I did discuss the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) with its Commander, Major General Zorlu of the Turkish Army, when I met him recently in Kabul. UN Security Council Resolution 1413 authorised ISAF to continue operations in Kabul for another six months from 20 June 2002 under Turkey's leadership. It is too early to say what might happen after that.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Israeli Government about their interest in the Joint Strike Fighter. [70165]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* There have been no discussions with the Israeli Government about the Joint Strike Fighter.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he plans to seek an in-flight vectoring capability from Joint Strike Fighters. [70166]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* No. We are not planning to seek an in-flight thrust vectoring capability for any variant of the Joint Strike Fighter.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Dance

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to improve community access to participation in dance; and if she will make a statement. [67678]

Dr. Howells: In order to provide a full answer, we have contacted the Arts Council of England to request the information required, and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts will write to my hon. Friend as soon as it is available, placing copies of her letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Communications Bill

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy in the forthcoming Communications Bill to extend Ofcom's proposed duty to promote equal employment opportunities for disabled people in the broadcasting industry to the *(a)* telecommunications and *(b)* internet industries, and work connected with these services. [68306]

Dr. Howells: The EC Directives limit the conditions which can be attached to the provision of electronic networks and services. The permitted categories would not provide a basis for imposing any such controls.

Arts Council

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the Arts Council of England and each Regional Arts Board have spent on *(a)* legal fees, *(b)* fees for consultants and change managers, *(c)* redundancy, retention and bonus payments and *(d)* other costs of stress reduction during the financial year 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [68345]

Dr. Howells: The following table outlines expenditure by the Arts Council of England and Regional Arts Boards on *(a)* legal fees, *(b)* fees for consultants and change managers and (d) other costs of stress reduction during the financial year 2001–02:

£

Expenditure 2001–02	*Arts Council of England*	*Regional Arts Board*
Legal fees	679,114	137,784
Fees for consultants and change managers	853,319	0
Redundancy, retention and bonus payments	0	0
Other costs of stress reduction	51,834	10,000

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Arts Council will produce a business plan that will display the costs and benefits of the change process for the three years 2001–04; and if she will make a statement. [68348]

Dr. Howells: The Arts Council of England has been asked to develop a plan to evaluate the costs and benefits emerging from the restructuring of the organisation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked for a progress report on the development of this plan by the autumn.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the work on branding the new Arts Council will be completed; how much will be paid to Wolff Olins for this work; and if she will make a statement. [68347]

Dr. Howells: This is a matter for the Arts Council of England. I understand it is working towards a completion date later in the year. £73,700 in fees and £7,674 in associated costs have been paid to Wolff Olins for work being carried out on the brand.

Public Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the length was of each public consultation undertaken by her Department since 8 June 2001. [68743]

Dr. Howells: The following table indicates the length of each public consultation carried out by the Department since 8 June 2001.

Document name	*Date started*	*Date finished*	*Total time*
Report of the Gambling Review Body	17 July 2001	31 October 2001	15 weeks
National Museum of Science and Industry Review: stage one consultation	1 August 2001	19 October 2001	11 weeks and 2 days
Geffrye Museum/Horniman Museum/Museum of London Review: stage one consultation	8 August 2001	12 October 2001	9 weeks and 2 days
Consultation on the draft Digital Television Action Plan	12 October 2001	2 January 2001	12 weeks
English Heritage Review: stage one consultation	16 October 2001	11 January 2002	12 weeks
National Maritime Museum Quinquennial Performance Review	22 November 2001	8 February 2002	11 weeks and 1 day
Consultation on Media Ownership Rules	26 November 2001	25 January 2002	9 weeks
Public Lending Right. Quinquennial Performance Review: Consultation Paper	13 November 2001	1 February 2002	11 weeks
Quinquennial Review on the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art	19 November 2001	8 February 2002	12 weeks
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester Quinquennial Performance Review	5 December 2001	28 February 2002	12 weeks
Spectrum Planning Consultation	11 December 2001	12 April 2002	Extended to 17 weeks
Council of Europe—Convention on the Protection of Audiovisual Heritage	20 December 2001	19 March 2002	12 weeks and 5 days
Review of Progress towards digital switchover	14 February 2002	8 May 2002	12 weeks
The Draft Communications Bill	7 May 2002	2 August 2002	12 weeks
Regent's Park Sports Facilities Consultation	18 March 2002	10 May 2002	8 weeks
Changes to Licensing Hours during All New Year's Eve.	24 April 2002	19 June 2002	8 weeks

Document name	*Date started*	*Date finished*	*Total time*
UK's Open General Export Licensing (OGEL) Limits	19 April 2002	14 June 2002	8 weeks
Prize Competitions	23 May 2002	31 August 2002	14 weeks
National Lottery Licensing and Regulations Consultation	27 June 2002	30 September 2002	13 weeks and 2 days.

Theatre Funding

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the results of the additional funds allocated as core funding to theatre in 2001 are built upon. [68667]

Dr. Howells: This is a matter for the Arts Council of England. Once the new funds announced last year are fully on stream in 2003–04 a full and proper assessment can be made of whether they have delivered the achievements envisaged in its Theatre Review.

Tourism

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent by tourists in each *(a)* Government Office region and *(b)* local authority in the latest year for which figures are available. [69959]

Dr. Howells: Statistics on expenditure by tourists are not available by Government Office region nor at local authority level. They are however produced according to regional Tourist Board areas. The latest data are shown in the table.

Expenditure by tourists in the UK in 2001

£ million

		Domestic		
Tourist board region/ country	*Inbound*[1]	*with overnight stay*	*day trips*	*Total*
Northumbria	170	630	n/a	800
Cumbria	40	740	n/a	780
North West	390	2,090	n/a	2,480
Yorkshire	250	1,450	n/a	1,700
Heart of England	650	2,830	n/a	3,480
East of England	500	1,800	n/a	2,300
South West	430	3,290	n/a	3,730
Southern	800	1,930	n/a	2,730
London	5,660	2,990	n/a	8,660
South East England	610	1,840	n/a	2,450
All England[2]	9,530	20,280	n/a	29,800
Wales	240	1,660	n/a	1,900
Scotland	680	3,410	n/a	4,090
Northern Ireland	100	n/a[3]	n/a	n/a[3]
UK[2]	10,700	26,100	33,400	70,160

[1] Inbound figures are provisional.

[2] Figures may not sum due to small proportions of spending that have not been attributable to regions/countries. Typically this arises when a person being interviewed is unable or unwilling to give complete information.

[3] Comparable data not available.

Source:

International Passenger Survey

UK Tourism Survey and Leisure Day Visit Survey

National Stadium

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received objecting to the term National Stadium being applied to the new Wembley site. [70242]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend has received one such representation. This was sent by the hon. Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins) on 20 June 2002.

Licensing Regulations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will place in the Library the studies of licensing regulations in European and US cities made by her Department and the Home Office, in the course of preparing the White Paper 'Time for Reform', and since. [69289]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* I will place a report on the studies carried out by officials in the Libraries of both Houses and will inform my right hon. Friend when I have done so. This material focuses on the licensing systems of countries rather than cities and on Europe rather than the United States. Published material on non-European countries was also considered in the development of the proposals set out in 'Time for Reform'.

Sports Coaching

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the contribution made by volunteers in the field of sports coaching. [70666]

Mr. Caborn: Sport, particularly at local club level, would be unable to flourish without 1.5 million volunteers, who include administrators, mentors and officials, as well as coaches. The Government's Plan for Sport recognised the critical importance of volunteers and the need to invest in maintaining numbers through training. The Step into Sport project aims to meet this need by investing £7 million over two years in training 60,000 young people and 8,000 adults to volunteer in sport, and by assisting the national governing bodies of sport to produce volunteer support strategies. A further initiative, Come into Coaching, will aim to attract volunteer coaches and administrators from March 2003.

Audiovisual Works

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the EU Committee for the Implementation of the Training Programme for Professionals in the European Audiovisual Programme Industry and of the Programme to Encourage the Development, Distribution and Promotion of European Audiovisual Works (MEDIA III) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70899]

Dr. Howells: The Management Committee for the Media Plus programme last met on 12 July and is next due to meet on 16 October. No members of the Scottish Executive have been or are members of the committee.

Television Without Frontiers Directive

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the EU Contact Committee for the implementation of the television without frontiers directive is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70900]

Dr. Howells: The Contact Committee established under Article 23a of the 1997 revision of the "television without frontiers" directive last met in Brussels on 11 and 12 July 2002. There is no fixed date for the next meeting of the committee which may be convened at the request of any of the delegations; this is likely to be in the autumn. No members of the Scottish Executive have been or are members of the committee.

Open Source Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in her Department. [69324]

Dr. Howells: My Department selects software on the basis of value for money and how well it meets our business needs. Open source software will be reviewed against the same criteria and in line with the forthcoming Government policy on open source software due for publication this summer. At present, my Department does not use any open source software, though such software has been used in the past.

SCOTLAND

External Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* her Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years. [38732]

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [38734]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date the following contracts have been awarded.

Company	*Contracts*
Serco	Cleaning services
Group 4	Security
Chestertons	Facilities management

The value of these contracts is commercially confidential.

Details of contracts awarded by the former Scottish Office before 1 July 1999 are not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with her Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with her Department in each of the past five years. [38733]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date no contracts have been awarded to organisations which previously held contracts with my Department.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in her Department. [41031]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office policy on payment of relocation expenses to staff follows the principles detailed in Section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code, which sets out the conditions under which Departments may reimburse relocation expenses to staff.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many special advisers were employed by her *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was in each of those years. [41247]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. There are currently two special advisers in the Department.

On costs, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the number and expected cost to her Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43271]

Mrs. Liddell: There are currently two special advisers in my Department.

On costs, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43677]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date the following contracts have been awarded:

Serco—(cleaning services)

Group 4—(security)

Chestertons—(facilities management).

The value of these contracts is commercially confidential.

Details of contracts awarded by the former Scottish Office before 1 July 1999 are not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and if the target was met. [49641]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department is responsible for the Boundary Commission for Scotland. The Commission has a statutory duty to keep under review the parliamentary constituencies in Scotland and, periodically, to conduct a general review. No specific efficiency savings targets have been set, but my Department monitors closely the Commission's expenditure plans and outturn.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61048]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department does not have a Public Service Agreement.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61637]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office Service Delivery Agreement sets out the Department's agreed strategy for delivering its key performance targets. Each year, details of performance against its targets are published in the departmental report.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many private finance initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50391]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has no private finance initiative projects.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of the services of her Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50323]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The Department does not deliver executive services to the public and none of its activities have been reviewed under the Better Quality Services initiative.

Liquid Petroleum Gas

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many LPG production sites and distribution sites there are; how many there were in 1990; and if she will make a statement on LPG use in Scotland. [53589]

Mrs. Liddell: Information provided by the LPG Association for the UK, including Scotland, indicates:

there are currently approximately 80 cylinder filling plants/bulk distribution depots;

there are currently 1,104 vehicle filling stations in the UK, an increase from 100 in 1998 (Scotland figures: 38 stations in 2000; 54 sites currently).

LPG offers benefits from reduced emissions and reduced fuel costs for motorists. Scotland Office Ministers have campaigned for increased use of LPG, not least because of the potential benefits to some of Scotland's most remote communities. I am therefore glad to see its availability increase across Scotland.

Regional Funding Mechanisms

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff within her office are allocated to consideration of regional funding mechanisms. [67929]

Mrs. Liddell: There are no members of staff within the Scotland Office allocated to consideration of regional funding mechanisms. The Scotland Office does, however, monitor academic research on these issues.

Departmental Property

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her answer of 25 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 799W, on departmental property, what the annual rent charged for her Department's office accommodation in *(a)* Edinburgh and *(b)* London was in the last year. [69290]

Mrs. Liddell: The annual rent charged last year for my Department's accommodation was £135,250 in Edinburgh and £10,500 in London.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her answer of 25 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 799W, on departmental property, from whom her Department leases office accommodation in *(a)* Edinburgh and *(b)* London. [69291]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department leases accommodation in Edinburgh from the Local Authorities Mutual Investment Trust (LAMIT) and from the Crown Estate in London.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61636]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61049]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Acquittals

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what action has been taken to reduce the number of *(a)* judge-ordered and *(b)* judge-directed acquittals since 1999. [60203]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* In 1999, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) introduced an adverse outcome analysis system. This provides CPS areas with a consistent means to identify reasons for adverse outcomes and also to allocate responsibility of any failure. This information is collated centrally.

For the last seven years, many areas of the CPS have had in place, with the police, a system of joint performance management that involves an appraisal of Crown court acquittals, including those ordered and directed by the judge. This process provides areas with information showing particular trends and a means by which improvements can be made.

The Crown Prosecution Service produces quarterly summaries of unsuccessful case outcomes from information drawn from its various case tracking systems. This year the CPS and the police have begun to develop a joint case outcome analysis which builds on these two processes and will focus on avoidable case failure. Under this system, the reasons for judge ordered and judge directed acquittals in individual cases will be jointly assessed for individual training needs and other joint strategies for performance improvement.

The process will be supported by more sophisticated management information following the introduction of the CPS' Compass Case Management System due to roll out between April and December 2003.

The figures in the table show a fall in judge directed acquittals from 1,777 in 1999 to 1,471 last year, a reduction of 17.2 per cent. Over the same period judge ordered acquittals rose from 9,616 to 11,825, an increase of 23 per cent. Much of this increase can be attributed to recent changes in procedures. Since January 2001, the prosecution, unlike before, have been able to discontinue cases in the Crown court. Although this is a prosecution decision, the current system records these as judge ordered acquittals.

Judge ordered and judge directed acquittals 1999–2002

	Number	Percentage of completed cases
1999–2000		
Judge ordered acquittals	9,616	11.1
Judge directed acquittals	1,777	2.0
2000–01		
Judge ordered acquittals	10,145	12.3
Judge directed acquittals	1,755	2.1
2001–02		
Judge ordered acquittals	11,825	14.0
Judge directed acquittals	1,471	1.7

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost was of publishing his Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70483]

Jane Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Office has published a separate annual report since 2000. The publishing costs (excluding staff time in preparation of data) were as follows:

	£
2000	2,683.62
2001	6,641.18

The costs for the 2002 report are not yet available.

Paramilitary Symbols

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many arrests have been made in the last five years against persons suspected of *(a)* erecting flags associated with proscribed organisations and *(b)* painting murals related to proscribed organisations; and if he will make a statement. [67220]

Jane Kennedy: There are no criminal offences specifically relating to the above.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criminal offences are committed when persons *(a)* erect flags associated with proscribed organisations and *(b)* paint murals related to proscribed organisations; and if he will make a statement. [67221]

Jane Kennedy: There are no criminal offences which relate specifically to the circumstances you describe. There are however a range of offences which might be employed, for example:

In relation to flags associated with proscribed organisations

1. Breach of the Peace (Common Law)
2. Provocative Conduct in Public Place or at Public Meetings or Procession (Article 19(1) Public Order (NI) Order 1987 which states "A person who in any public place or at or in relation to any public meeting or public procession:
   - (i) uses threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour; or
   - (ii) displays anything or does any act; or
   - (iii) being the owner or occupier of any land or premises, causes or permits anything to be displayed or any act to be done thereon,

   with intent to provoke a breach of the peace or by which a breach of the peace or public disorder is likely to be occasioned (whether immediately or at any time afterwards) shall be guilty of an offence"
3. Intimidation (Section 7, Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875) which states, "Every person who, with a view to compel any other person to abstain from doing or to do any act which such other person has a legal right to do or abstain from doing wrongfully and without legal authority—
   - (i) uses violence to or intimidates such other person or his wife or children, or injures his property; or
   - (ii) persistently follows such person about place to place; or
   - (iii) hides any tools, clothes or other property owned or used by such other person or deprives him or hinders him in the use of thereof; or
   - (iv) watches or besets the house or other place where such other person resides, or works or carries on business or happens to be, or the approach to such a place; or
   - (v) follows such person with two or more other persons in a disorderly manner in or through any street or road,

   shall be liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a time not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale or both".

In relation to the painting of murals related to proscribed organisations:

1. Breach of the Peace (Common Law)
2. Use of Words or Behaviour or Display of Written Material (Article) 9(1) Public Order (NI) Order 1987) which states, "A person who uses threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour or displays any written material which is threatening, abusive or insulting is guilty of an offence if—
   - (i) he intends thereby to stir up hatred or arouse fear; or
   - (ii) having regard to all the circumstances hatred is likely to be stirred up or fear is likely to be aroused thereby".
3. Criminal Damage (Article 3(1) Criminal Damage (NI) Order 1977) which states, "A person who without lawful excuse destroys or damages any property belonging to another intending to destroy or damage any such property or being reckless as to whether any such property would be destroyed or damaged shall be guilty of an offence".

It must be emphasised that contemplating any such prosecution of the above is strictly dependent on the individual circumstances of the case. For instance what may intimidate, provoke etc. a particular reaction at an interface, may not have the same effect in the middle of a Loyalist or Republican estate.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68727]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Fireworks

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he consulted the Northern Ireland Fireworks Association during the preparation of the Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002. [69341]

Jane Kennedy: Officials from my Department met with a delegation of representatives from the fireworks industry in Northern Ireland in February 2002. At that meeting the delegates indicated their intention to form the Northern Ireland Fireworks Association.

CCTV Cameras

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the operation of CCTV cameras in the Short Strand area of East Belfast; and if he will make a statement. [68928]

Jane Kennedy: CCTV cameras in the Short Strand area are the sole responsibility of PSNI. However, I believe there is a great deal of potential with CCTV and have been monitoring their use. The Police Service has advised that since 12 May, these cameras have identified some 22 people of being involved in street violence; leading to 11 arrests, with more pending.

On a disappointing note, there have been regrettable incidents involving individuals damaging the CCTV cameras, even though they have been installed to enhance the public safety of all. I would call on everyone with any influence to do all they can to bring these attacks to an end.

Water Cannon

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements have been made for the Police Service of Northern Ireland to purchase water cannons for use in Northern Ireland. [71749]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland, following discussion with the Northern Ireland Policing Board and ACPO, will shortly place an order for six new vehicle-mounted water cannon. It is hoped that the water cannon will be delivered before the summer of 2003.

This decision reflects the particular circumstances of North Ireland. It follows receipt of an interim statement, compiled by the independent DSAC Sub-Committee on the medical implications of less lethal weapons, on the medical implications of the use of vehicle-mounted water cannon in public order situations. The DSAC Committee is scheduled to complete the evaluation of vehicle-mounted water cannon before the systems enter service.

I have today placed a copy of the Sub-Committee's statement in the Library of the House.

Smuggling and Counterfeiting

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will introduce sanctions against those political parties whose paramilitary wings are found guilty of *(a)* smuggling and *(b)* counterfeiting goods in the United Kingdom. [70663]

Jane Kennedy: The Organised Crime Task Force, which I chair, recognises the lingering, significant influence of paramilitary groups in such organised crime activities and assesses that nearly half of the 76 organised crime groups identified in Northern Ireland are either controlled by, or linked with, republican or loyalist paramilitary organisations.

That said, it is very important that I confirm that the law enforcement agencies represented on the Task Force do not tackle organised criminals or crime groups on the basis of their paramilitary affiliations (or lack of them), but because of their involvement in criminal activities.

The Government believe that the most effective sanctions against those engaged in criminality is to disrupt the activity and bring those involved to justice.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree with me that his firm response by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, HM Customs and Excise and the other agencies represented on the Task Force, is the best response to those involved in smuggling, counterfeiting and, indeed, organised crime in all its forms.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to *(a)* identify and *(b)* prosecute those paramilitary and other individuals involved in the (i) smuggling and (ii) counterfeiting of goods in Northern Ireland. [70662]

Jane Kennedy: The Organised Crime Task Force, which I chair, has a clear strategy in place to tackle these two key areas of organised criminal activity, which are laid out in the "Confronting the Threat" threat assessment and strategy documents, published and laid in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament on 23 May 2002.

The threat assessment and strategy documents describe in detail the successes that the law enforcement agencies have had in tackling smuggling, counterfeiting and, indeed, other areas of organised criminality. In brief, the Task Force has identified 76 criminal networks involved in a range of organised criminality. It has been assessed that at 31 March 2002: 41 per cent. of the groups are involved in tobacco smuggling; 30 per cent. engaged in alcohol smuggling; 26 per cent. in hydrocarbon smuggling; and 34 per cent. of the group are involved in counterfeiting goods.

During the last financial year, 57 criminal networks were subject to detailed law enforcement investigation and 43 have had members arrested for a wider range of serious offences. As a direct result of such action, 42 organised crime networks have been disrupted or dismantled.

Drug Users

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of people arrested in Belfast between *(a)* July and December 2001 and *(b)* January and March 2002 were known or suspected users of illegal substances. [49902]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland does not have data on the illegal substance habits or suspected habits of arrested persons.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff have contributed to his Department's input to the Spending Review. [68688]

Jane Kennedy: The 2002 Spending Review involves a comprehensive assessment of the Department's performance, priorities and resource requirements and a range of staff make a contribution.

It is not possible to give a total number of staff involved, due to the wide range of contributions, needed from different divisions within the Department.

Full Time Reserve

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many full-time reserve police officers in Northern Ireland were *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured each year between 1972 and 1994. [68459]

Jane Kennedy: The statistics relating to reserve police officers killed and injured as a result of the security situation in Northern Ireland each year from 1972 to 1994 is set out as follows. These figures comprise both full-time and part-time reserve officers.

	Number of deaths	*Number of injuries*
1972	3	20
1973	3	34
1974	3	24
1975	4	64
1976	10	67
1977	6	39
1978	6	37
1979	5	26
1980	6	40
1981	8	56
1982	4	22
1983	9	30
1984	2	54
1985	9	80
1986	2	116
1987	7	48
1988	2	41
1989	2	35
1990	5	40
1991	1	29
1992	1	26
1993	3	23
1994	0	38
Total	101	989

Belfast Agreement

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what progress has been made by the Northern Ireland Office on political development in Northern Ireland; [67334]

(2) what progress has been made in the implementation of the Belfast Agreement during 2001–02. [67337]

Jane Kennedy: Very substantial advances were made in the implementation of the Belfast Agreement in recent times. Since last autumn, the devolved institutions have been operating fully effectively; substantial reforms to the policing and justice systems have been carried forward in the last year and there have been acts of decommissioning by the IRA. Continued implementation of the agreement is essential to the political future of Northern Ireland. It can only be achieved if there is full confidence that all involved have renounced violence for good.

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the staff of his Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66916]

Jane Kennedy: Information is not held in the format requested.

In July 2002, 60 per cent. of the staff in the Department are women.

In April 1997, 58.7 per cent. of the staff in the Department were women.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pension Tax Credit

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to implement the pensions tax credit. [68414]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Mr. Wright) on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 37W.

Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to receive the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority's sixth annual report. [71804]

Mr. McCartney: My right hon. Friend has received the sixth report of the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra) which documents how the organisation has carried out its regulatory duties concerned with occupational pensions schemes and new work involving personal and stakeholder pensions. Copies of the report have been laid before Parliament today.

Discretionary Social Fund

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what changes he will be making to the Discretionary Social Fund. [71805]

Malcolm Wicks: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be making a number of minor changes to the discretionary social fund, with effect from 18 August 2002. The improvements included in this amendment to directions and guidance have been identified during the course of routine monitoring and also include recommendations made by the Work and Pensions Select Committee and the Independent Review Service for the Social Fund.

Details of the changes have been placed in the Library.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 365W, on housing benefit, what conclusions he has reached in his investigations of how local authorities can receive tailored electronic access to other departmental benefit data; and if he will make a statement. [66580]

Malcolm Wicks: We are committed to improving the Housing Benefit scheme to make it easier for councils to administer and easier for the public to understand.

Providing access to a wider range of Departmental benefit data has long been a requirement for local authorities and we have identified a suitable technical solution to give authorities improved tailored access to this information. We have recently made available to all local authorities tailored access to the Departmental Central Index which enables them to access personal details where a National Insurance number is known, and where necessary trace National Insurance numbers.

Further enhancements are planned including access to details of State Retirement Pension, Incapacity Benefit and Bereavement Benefits. We anticipate that development work will be completed by April 2003 and further access will be made available to local authorities shortly thereafter.

Income Support

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many lone parents in receipt of income support have a youngest child below school age; and what proportion this represents of all lone parents on income support. [69739]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is as follows.

Lone parents receiving income support—February 2002

Number of lone parents receiving income support whose youngest child is under five years of age—420,000.

Percentage of all lone parents receiving income support whose youngest child is under five years of age—48.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100.

2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.

3. Lone parents are defined as single people with dependants and who are not receiving the disability or pensioner premium.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, February 2002.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants had their jobseeker's allowance reduced during 2001–02 for *(a)* two weeks and *(b)* four weeks for not attending or failing to complete (i) Jobplan workshops, (ii) Restart courses, (iii) Workwise and Worklink and (iv) non-prescribed Government programmes where referral was under a jobseeker's direction. [69744]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available.

Jobplan workshops, Restart courses, Workwise and Worklink were phased out when we introduced our New Deal programmes from April 1998. Information on sanctions applied as a result of a person not attending or failing to continue a programme where referral was under a Jobseeker's Direction is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

New Deal

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many persons in Scotland over the age of 45 years have been helped with the upgrade of maritime competence certificates through New Deal schemes; [59664]

(2) what financial help is available to those on New Deal schemes for upgrading of existing maritime competence certificates. [59673]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information on the number of New Deal participants undertaking specific training courses and qualifications is not available.

The Government offer financial assistance for merchant navy training through the Support for Maritime Training scheme (SMarT). The scheme, which is administered by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, offers substantial financial support to eligible training providers offering to provide approved training, which includes training for maritime competence certificates. In the financial year 2001–02 the overall budget for this support was £7.4 million. Funding is based on an average of course costs at the main maritime colleges. In broad terms this means that 50 per cent. of eligible costs are covered for each participant's course. If maritime competence training is identified as a need for a New Deal participant, their New Deal personal adviser can refer them to a training provider supported by SMarT if appropriate.

There is other provision available as well as the SMarT scheme. For example, if a New Deal participant identifies training that they wish to undertake which has not already been contracted for locally, the Jobcentre Plus district is able to buy in one-off provision (assuming that certain eligibility conditions are met and the participant's personal adviser believes that it is an appropriate type of provision for the participant to undertake).

In addition, the Adviser Discretion Fund gives New Deal personal advisers direct access to money to help people quickly into jobs. Advisers can spend up to £300 on anything that will help a jobseeker obtain a job or, if offered a job, to accept that offer. New Deal participants may be able to access this fund to upgrade their maritime competence certificates, with the agreement of their personal adviser.

Performance Targets

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* coverage is of each PPP/PFI for information systems and technology services now operating in his Department; on what date each agreement was made; and what the performance indicators are for each such contract in each year of operation. [62026]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department of Social Security and the Employment Service had both made their own contractual arrangements for Information Systems and Technology Services prior to merging to form the Department for Work and Pensions.

Department of Social Security

(a) Cost:

Information concerning the cost of each PPI/PFI for information systems and technology services is commercially confidential and is not provided in line with part 2 paragraph 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

(b) Coverage:

The Department has let four PPP/PFI business allocations for information systems and technology services to date under the ACCORD contract.

The Strategic Outsourcing Business Allocation (SOBA) conferred lead supplier status on EDS/Affinity and gave them responsibility for maintenance, development and operation of the Department's IT systems, together with a range of related IT services. This business allocation commenced in September 2000.

The Child Support Reforms business allocation was awarded to EDS/Affinity, to provide new IT systems in support of the Child Support Agency. This business allocation commenced in September 2000.

The Wide Area Network (WAN) services business allocation was awarded to BT Syntegra in November 2000, to deliver flexible and scaleable networking services to support the next generation of IT systems being delivered to support departmental business initiatives.

The Pensions Forecasting Service (PFS) was awarded to EDS/Affinity on 6 June 2002 for the provision of modernised IT to support the Department's requirement to issue increased numbers and types of state pension forecasts.

The information concerning the departmental key performance indicators are listed in the table:

Year of operation	*PPP/PFI business allocation*	*Key performance indicator*
From September 2000 to August 2010	SOBA and WAN	National availability of full, end-to-end service for key services of no less than 98.5 per cent. including service extensions and overtime (End of SOBA Year 1—target met (and exceeded) by EDS/Affinity. Latest performance report for quarter ending 21 April 2002 also demonstrates target met and exceeded). 95 per cent. of incidents resolved within agreed time scales (End of SOBA Year 1—target met (and exceeded) by EDS/Affinity. Latest performance report for quarter ending 21 April 2002 also demonstrates target met and exceeded)
From September 2000 to August 2005	SOBA	25 per cent. productivity gains in development of Legacy Systems over five years with a 2 per cent. improvement by August 2001; a 9 per cent. improvement by August 2002; a 17 per cent. improvement by August 2003; a 22 per cent. improvement by August 2004 and the 25 per cent. improvement by August 2005. (Performance delivered against target profile so far)
From September 2000 to August 2010	SOBA	Development productivity gains should not result in reduction in quality (Quality indicators demonstrate compliance)
From CSR Live. Implementation (not yet implemented) until August 2010	CSR	Service availability, service response times, data transfer, payments issued, bulk outputs issues. These are monthly indicators with specific targets and service payments will be reduced for failure to meet these
From 6 June 2002 to 2006	PFS	Service availability, service response times, accurate and timely combined pensions forecasts, accurate and timely individual pensions forecasts. Once the contract system is in operation these monthly indicators and specific targets will apply; service payments will be reduced for failure to meet these

Employment Service

(a) Costs

Information concerning the cost of each PPI/PFI for information systems and technology services is commercially confidential and is not provided in line with part 2 paragraph 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

(b) Coverage

The Employment Service has let two PPP/PFI business allocations for information systems and technology services to date.

On 1 August 1998 the Employment Service (ES) entered into a partnership agreement with EDS (Electronic Data Systems) for provision of all IT and telephony services. In October 2000 the contract was re-negotiated as part of the Modernising Employment Services (MES) programme.

On 3 February 1997 ES entered into a contract with Siemens Nixdorf Systems Ltd. for provision of the Employment Service Guidance and Communications Project (Escom). The contract expires 3 February 2003.

The information concerning the Employment Service key performance indicators is listed in the table.

Year of operation	*PPP/PFI Contract*	*Key performance indicator*
Life of contract	EDS (IT and telephony)	Service, availability, incident resolution. National availability of service on all major applications is 99.5 per cent. Some smaller applications have targets of 98 per cent. Performance reports over the previous 12 months have demonstrated that in the main, targets have been met or exceeded. There have been some small drops in the Labour Market Service (LMS) performance figures over the year as a result of major releases and changes to the system. Where this has been the case service credits have been applied accordingly. Incident resolution targets of 90 per cent. for priority 1–3 cases have been met and regularly exceeded
Life of contract	SNS (Escom)	Availability, access levels, volume of data storage. Targets are in line with the service from EDS (IT and telephony) ie 99.5 per cent. Performance over the last 12 months has been between 99.5 per cent. and 99.8 per cent. demonstrating targets met and exceeded

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many personal capability assessments were carried out by the Benefits Agency in *(a)* the last six months and *(b)* the last 12 months. [64331]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Personal Capability Assessment is used to determine ongoing entitlement to Incapacity Benefit. It is a functional test carried out by Medical Services' doctors that assesses a person's ability to perform a range of every-day activities. Personal Capability Assessments have been extended in areas covered by integrated Jobcentre plus offices and work-focused interview sites so that examining doctors can produce capability reports for Personal Advisers. These reports provide constructive information to help plan a person's return to work where appropriate.

The information is in the table.

Number of personal capability assessments carried out

	Number
December 2001—May 2002	258,338
June 2001—May 2002	504,420

Source:
IMPACT data.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people attending work-focused interviews at Jobcentre Plus offices since 22 October 2001, have *(a)* moved from incapacity benefit into employment; *(b)* transferred to other social security benefits and *(c)* remained in receipt of incapacity benefit at (i) the same level, (i) a higher level and (iii) a lower level; [64332]

(2) how many incapacity benefit claimants have been referred for a personal capability assessment as a result of a work-focused interview at a Jobcentre Plus office since 22 October 2001. [64333]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not available in the format requested.

Work-focused interviews provide people making new or repeat claims to Incapacity Benefit with a valuable opportunity to discuss their work options, as well as their benefit claim, and to find out from their personal adviser the practical and financial support that is available to help them move into work. These interviews are separate from the Personal Capability Assessment, which is a functional test that assesses a person's ability to perform a range of everyday activities, and which is used to determine ongoing entitlement to Incapacity Benefit after 28 weeks of sickness.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by his Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64640]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions has introduced 52 statutory instruments between 1 January and 30 June 2002. Thirty-six of these were amendment instruments; eight were commencement instruments; two were Regulatory Reform Orders; one was a revocation order. Many of the instruments concerned were of a routine nature, for example, updating benefit regulations.

Information relating to costs and savings associated with these instruments, and to repealed and amended regulations, is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is completed for each regulatory proposal which impacts on business, charities, or the voluntary sector, unless there are no or negligible costs. The Department for Work and Pensions has published four final RIAs in this period, three of which identified savings for business. These RIAs are available in the House Libraries and on the Department's website.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* individual cases the CSA has handled, *(b)* absent parents have refused to co-operate with the CSA and *(c)* deductions from earning orders have been issued in each year since 1997. [65531]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Alan Campbell, dated 17 July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask how many (a) individual cases the Child Support Agency has handled (b) absent parents have refused to co-operate with the Child Support Agency and (c) deductions from earning orders have been issued in each year since 1997.

We don't hold all the information you seek. However the table below sets out:

(a) the number of new applications received each year

(b) the percentage of cases in which the non-resident parent complies with the requirement to pay maintenance

(c) the number of cases in which a deduction from earnings order is applied.

Year to 31st March	*Applications*	*Compliance*	*Deduction from Earnings Orders applied*
1998	402,220	19,064	Data not available
1999	374,455	2,456	123,084
2000	369,226	13,578	Data not available
2001	303,797	5,360	133,444
2002	365,414	5,686	115,003

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many existing cases need to be transferred to and how many new cases have been assessed under the new Child Support scheme. [69531]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 17 July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You have asked the following questions:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many existing cases need to be transferred to and how many new cases have been assessed under the new Child Support scheme".

No cases have yet been assessed under the new Child Support scheme. We can only begin to assess cases under the new scheme when Ministers have decided to implement the new arrangements. When they do so they will have to lay a Commencement Order before Parliament. They will only do that when they are confident about when our new computer system, that is currently being tested, will be operational.

Based on current forecasts of the predicted Agency caseload, it is estimated that approximately one million existing cases would require to be transferred to the new child support scheme.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases have been referred by the CSA to their Special Payments Unit in each of the past five years, broken down by region; and of these, what percentage resulted in a compensatory payment being made. [66860]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the my hon. Friend.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Russell Brown, dated 17 July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

Your ask how many cases have been referred by the Child Support Agency to the special payments unit in each of the past five years broken down by region; and of these what percentage resulted in a compensatory payment being made.

We don't collect information in quite this format. The table below sets out, by reference to our business units, the number of cases each year in which the special payments team authorised payment.

	Year to 31 March				
Business Unit	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Eastern	1,156	2,010	2,210	2,379	1,209
Wales & North West	580	781	998	1,005	599
Midlands	851	1,475	1,528	1,576	768
Scotland & North East	724	1,226	1,225	1,405	716
South East	575	848	1,019	1,292	732
South West	580	882	1,067	1,962	1,006
Total	4,466	7,222	8,047	9,619	5,030

These figures represent for each year the following percentage of cases referred to the special payments team for consideration for redress of a consolatory payment:

1998	61%
1999	87%
2000	82%
2001	83%
2002	80%

0870 Telephone Numbers

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on using 0870 telephone numbers for inquiries by the public to the Department and its agencies. [66200]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Most existing services, and new services that are being set up, will generally be provided for the cost of a local call (0845 numbers) or, in some circumstances, free. Where different charges currently apply (e.g. 0870 numbers), services are expected to move to the local rate/free charging regime as opportunities arise to do so.

Pensions (Backdating)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason the maximum backdating allowed for the retirement pension is three months; and if he will make a statement. [66557]

Mr. McCartney: The absolute time limit of three months for claiming retirement pension was introduced in April 1997 as part of the rationalisation of time limits for all benefits undertaken at that time. Before this date there were a large number of different rules and time periods for the backdating of the claims for different benefits. It was a confusing picture and it was widely recognised that there was a need to simplify the rules. It was considered appropriate for people to have three months in which to make a claim for one of the contributory benefits. Retirement pension is one of those benefits.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effect of the reduction in the *(a)* number and *(b)* membership of final salary schemes on long-term pension savings. [70440]

Mr. McCartney: There has been a long-term decline in the number and membership of final salary pension schemes, for a combination of reasons.

The Government have announced that it will be taking a radical look at occupational and personal pension provision and coming forward with proposals in a Green Paper in the autumn.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of *(a)* 20 to 30, *(b)* 30 to 40, *(c)* 40 to 50 and *(d)* 50 to 60-year-olds belong to (i) personal pension schemes and (ii) occupational pension schemes. [70439]

Mr. McCartney: Information on the percentage of people who are members of pension schemes is not available. The information in the table shows estimates of percentages of people for whom contributions are being made by themselves or by their employer to pension schemes.

Age	*20–29*	*30–39*	*40–49*	*50–59*
Percentage of adults contributing to a personal pension scheme	7	17	17	15
Percentage of adults contributing to an occupational pension scheme	23	38	41	33

Notes:

1. The figures relate to the percentage of all adults (defined as all those aged 16 and over, except 16 to 18-year-olds in full time non-advanced education) whether in employment, self employed or economically inactive.

2. Adults contributing to both types of scheme will be contained in both sets of figures.

3. The figures will not include those who have previous pension rights in a scheme but who are not currently contributing.

4. The estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors that control for region, council tax band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 2000–01

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of *(a)* 20 to 30, *(b)* 30 to 40, *(c)* 40 to 50 and *(d)* 50 to 60-year-olds have opted out of SERPS in each of the last 10 years, broken down by (i) men and (ii) women. [70441]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available. Information on the percentage of people contracted out of SERPS covering the period 1992–93 to 1996–97 is in the table.

Per cent.

	Age group			
	20–29	*30–39*	*40–49*	*50–59*
1992–93				
Total	75.0	83.6	72.7	53.6
Men	78.1	94.5	89.7	61.7
Women	71.7	70.0	53.6	43.5
1993–94				
Total	72.4	85.3	73.0	53.2
Men	74.8	95.6	90.2	61.2
Women	69.9	72.5	54.2	43.5
1994–95				
Total	67.7	86.3	72.9	53.1
Men	69.5	96.2	89.4	60.7
Women	65.8	74.3	54.9	44.3
1995–96				
Total	63.8	88.5	75.0	54.9
Men	64.5	96.9	89.7	61.3
Women	63.1	78.3	59.1	47.5
1996–97				
Total	59.5	90.8	77.6	57.3
Men	59.8	98.5	92.5	64.6
Women	59.1	81.6	61.6	49.0

Notes:

1. Figures are taken from the Lifetime Labour Market Database (LLMDB), extracted from the National Insurance Recording System (NIRS).

2. Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample so may be subject to sampling variation.

3. The number of individuals who have opted out of SERPS was calculated by determining how many individuals were members of contracted-out occupational schemes or Appropriate Personal Pension (APP) schemes at some point during each year.

4. The percentages were derived from the number of individuals in each age group, in each year who were Class 1 National Insurance Contribution Contributors, i.e. those individuals who were in employment and could thus opt out of SERPS.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many occupational schemes are in operation in the UK; and how many employees have belonged to each scheme in each of the last 10 years. [70443]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the form requested. The available information is set out as follows.

Number of occupational schemes registered as 'live' (to nearest 1,000)—103,000.

Notes:

1. 'Live' schemes include:

schemes which are open to new members;

'closed' schemes which new members can not join;

schemes which have 'frozen' where no new benefits are being accrued; and

schemes that are in the process of winding up.

2. Figure is as at 2 July 2002.

Source:

Pension Schemes Registry.

Number of employees for which contributions are currently being made to occupational pension schemes

	Number of employees (million)
1996–97	10.3
1997–98	10.4
1998–99	10.7
1999–2000	10.6
2000–01	10.7

Notes:

1. Between 1998–99 and 1999–2000 there was a change in methodology on the Family Resources Survey—the estimates for the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are not comparable to those for previous years.

2. Figures include both employees who are contributing and/or for whom contributions are being made by the employer.

3. The estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors that control for region, council tax band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.

4. Estimates may differ from those provided in different surveys.

Source:

Family Resources Survey

Pensions

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to reform pension law to ensure that pensioners have direct representation on boards of trustees; [69997]

(2) what plans he has to reform pension law to require boards of trustees to include employers, employed members and pensioners on an equal basis. [69784]

Mr. McCartney: We have no such plans.

The role of a trustee is not to be a representative of a particular group or category of member. All trustees have the same responsibilities regardless of how they come to the role, and the most important thing is that they have the skills and knowledge to fulfil those responsibilities. It would be inappropriate to expect certain trustees to have responsibilities relating only to certain categories of member.

We do, however, recognise that having ordinary scheme members on trustee boards helps to provide a balance of skills and experience and helps promote member confidence, which is why we are working toward ensuring that every scheme has at least one third member-nominated trustees.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will amend the law relating to the management of actuarial surpluses of pension funds to ensure that pensioners are not marginalised. [69998]

Mr. McCartney: There are no plans to make changes in this area.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to clarify the law regarding ownership of pension funds to establish pension funds as the property of the pensioners. [69999]

Mr. McCartney: Scheme assets are owned by the scheme, and managed by the scheme trustees. Scheme members have no legal rights to the assets, but have a right to benefits as laid down by the trust deed. We have no plans to change the law.

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of the staff of his Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66911]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State (Mr. Alexander), Cabinet Office, on 5 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 622W.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the clawback of the state pension by occupational pension schemes. [67836]

Mr. McCartney: Occupational pension provision is voluntary, and it is for employers to decide the nature of the scheme and the benefits provided. The decision as to whether a scheme should continue to operate on an integrated basis, or if not, how and when integration should be abolished, is a matter for employers.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of the public service agreements of his Department set out in the document, "Public Services for the Future 1998", have been met; and if he will make a statement. [68715]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* Information relating to the Department's public service agreement targets can be found in the Department's departmental report 2002.

Benefits

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many suspensions of benefits were reversed following evidence of the medical condition of the applicant in the Portsmouth, South constituency in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [69066]

(2) if he will list the reasons for the suspension of benefits in the Portsmouth, South constituency in the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [69067]

(3) how many claimants, broken down by age group, have had their benefits suspended in the Portsmouth, South constituency for failing to keep an appointment at a jobcentre in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [69068]

(4) what the average time taken to reinstate benefits following suspension was in the Portsmouth, South constituency in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [69069]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: For information on the circumstances in which payment of benefit may be suspended, I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) on 8 July 2002, *Official Report,* columns 753–54W.

No information is collected centrally on benefit suspensions, at either national or constituency level.

Youth Unemployment

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many unemployed young people there are in *(a)* the Glasgow Pollok constituency, *(b)* Glasgow, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* the United Kingdom; what the figures were in each of the last five years; if he will list the steps that are being taken to focus help on those youngsters with the greatest difficulty in finding employment; and if he will make a statement. [69228]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

Number of unemployed young people, aged 18–24[1]

	Glasgow Pollok	*Glasgow*	*Scotland*	*UK*
May 1997	758	7,375	40,146	396,734
May 1998	765	6,570	35,777	331,974
May 1999	645	5,408	31,421	286,485
May 2000	503	4,528	27,452	251,578
May 2001	457	4,364	26,094	232,995
May 2002	475	4,272	25,845	233,433

[1] Seasonally unadjusted

Source:

Office for National Statistics

As these figures show, youth unemployment nationally has fallen by 40 per cent. since 1997, to around its lowest level since the mid- 1970s. Moreover, long term youth unemployment has been virtually eradicated.

The New Deal for Young People has played an important part in this success. By the end of March 2002 it had helped over 360,000 young people into jobs. This includes more than 700 young people in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Many of these young people faced significant barriers to employment. The New Deal has given them the skills and motivation to help them move into work. However, we recognise that some young people continue to face difficulties in the labour market. We are introducing a range of measures to provide even more help for these young people.

Action Teams for Jobs are already helping disadvantaged groups in the most employment deprived areas in the country into work. The nine teams operating in Scotland have already helped nearly 1,300 young people into work so far, more than 400 of them in Glasgow.

This spring we introduced progress2work, a £40 million initiative to give unemployed people who are recovering from a drug problem the extra help they need to get into work. The first progress2work projects have started in 27 pathfinder areas, including two in Glasgow and 3 in other parts in Scotland. Phase 2 of progress2work will start in October 2002 in a further 36 areas and the programme will be rolled out to all parts of the country from 2003. In the autumn, we will extend the progress2work model to help other groups facing disadvantage in the labour market, including ex-offenders.

In April 2002, we launched StepUP, a £40million initiative providing transitional jobs for people who have not been able to find work through New Deal. Six pilots are already up and running, including one in Scotland, and we are introducing a further 14 throughout the year.

We also introduced in April a new £15 million outreach initiative to engage more effectively with, and improve the job prospects for people from ethnic minorities. This will build on the success of the New Deals, which have already helped over 63,000 people from ethnic minorities into work.

Universal Bank

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment his Department has made of the number of benefit claimants without a bank account who may wish to transfer to the services of the Universal Bank; and whether the services offered will be restricted to those currently without a bank account. [70015]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We estimate that around 3.5 million adults in the UK do not currently have access to a bank account; the overwhelming majority of this group will be benefit recipients. Universal banking services will consist of two elements—access to the banks' basic bank accounts and the card account at the Post Office. Universal banking services will not be restricted to those currently without a bank account.

Employment Zone

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the evaluation of the Employment Zone project will be completed; and if he will recommend an extension of the scheme. [70022]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Employment Zone contracts are subject to qualitative and quantitative evaluation. The qualitative study of Zone operations between winter 2000 and summer 2001 was published on 17 July 2002 (Working Age Evaluation Series, Number 124). A copy has been placed in the Library. A cohort study comparing characteristics and outcomes of Zone participants with those of similar long-term unemployed people will be published in late spring 2003.

Our evaluation to date shows that Employment Zones are making a positive contribution in helping long-term unemployed people in deprived areas move off benefit and into work. The 15 Zones have already helped over 22,300 people into jobs. We have recently extended the current Zone contracts to March 2004 and, as the Chancellor announced on 15 July, we will also be testing the Employment Zone approach with other groups such as lone parents and people returning to the New Deals for a second time.

The qualitative evaluation report highlights some encouraging findings about the Zones, recognising, for example, that they have a genuinely innovative delivery system and underlining the importance of the flexibility afforded to Personal Advisers in helping people move into jobs. We will study the report's findings closely and consider what lessons can be learnt from the Employment Zone approach.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how the employment zone scheme interacts with the work of Jobcentre Plus. [70023]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus works with Employment Zone contractors to help long-term unemployed people in 15 deprived areas move off benefit and into work. By the end of February 2002, the zones had helped over 22,300 people into jobs.

People aged 25 and over, living in a zone area and claiming income-based jobseeker's allowance, become eligible for employment zone help after either 12 or 18 months' unemployment (depending on the employment zone area). Jobcentre Plus identifies and refers eligible people to the employment zone at the appropriate time. Eligible participants who fail to attend an employment zone are brought to the attention of Jobcentre Plus by their personal adviser and may have their benefit sanctioned if there is no good cause for their non-attendance.

Jobcentre Plus and employment zone contractors have developed a strong working relationship. One of the ways they have achieved this is through the secondment of Jobcentre Plus staff to employment zones. Employment zones also have access to Jobcentre Plus premises and labour market information systems. This strong partnership ensures that payments to clients are accurate, and the zones contribute to Jobcentre Plus' achievement of the best job outcomes for clients.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many members of his Department have been employed in its regulatory impact unit in the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [65978]

Mr. McCartney: From April 1997 to the present date, the Department for Work and Pensions has employed the following numbers of staff in its regulatory impact unit (RIU):

April 1997 to October 1997: Two full-time members of staff (combining RIU work with other work responsibilities)

October 1997 to April 1999: One full-time member of staff (combining RIU work with other work responsibilities)

April 1999 to the present: One full-time member of staff dedicated to the work of the Department's RIU.

It is the job of Department's regulatory impact unit to establish and promote in the Department the principles of good regulation, so that all officials within it may contribute effectively to the Government's regulatory reform initiative. The unit also works closely with the regulatory impact unit in the Cabinet Office, and with the small business service. A key element of the unit's work is to help minimise the impact on business, charities, and the voluntary sector, of those Departmental regulations which are necessary.

Note:

Data before April 2001 refer to the Department of Social Security.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many premises are used by the DPP; where these are located; and what the functions of each are. [39662]

Jane Kennedy: I have been asked to reply.

Seven premises are currently occupied by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland. Of these, five are located in Belfast, including the Royal Courts of Justice, and cover the Director's Office; Belfast/eastern circuit; northern/southern circuit; High Court and Appeal Office; Fraud and Departmental Office and the Criminal Justice Review Implementation Team.

The two remaining offices which are attached to the northern and southern circuit are in Omagh and Coleraine.

Contact Orders

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what investigations the Department is undertaking of the cases of 15 children killed while subject to contact arrangements in England and Wales; how many contact orders were involved in these cases; and in how many of these cases the resident parent was advised by court professionals to agree to informal contact arrangements. [6831[illegible]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department is working with the Home Office and Department of Health to identify cases brought to our attention where children may have been killed while the subject of contact orders. In some cases it appears contact orders were in place. We are now looking for court files to determine the basis on which contact was ordered. We have not yet established whether the former Court Welfare Service played a role (if any) in the above cases. Court staff do not give legal advice. The advice given to parents by their legal advisers is subject to professional confidentiality.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many contact centres offering supervised contact there are in *(a)* Bristol, *(b)* Birmingham, *(c)* Bournemouth, *(d)* Bradford, *(e)* Cardiff, *(f)* Coventry, *(g)* Leicestershire, *(h)* Liverpool, *(i)* Manchester, *(j)* Nottingham, *(k)* Northampton, *(l)* Oxford, *(m)* Swindon, *(n)* Southampton, *(o)* Stoke-on-Trent, *(p)* Swansea, *(q)* Taunton and *(r)* Worcester. [68211]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Child contact centres are run by the voluntary sector. No comprehensive data is kept on how many child contact centres offering supervised contact exist. We are aware that of the approximate 280 child contact centres in England and Wales currently affiliated to the National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC), 35 offer supervised contact. One of these is located in Manchester.

The Child Contact Centre Stakeholder Group, which includes NACCC, is currently working in partnership with the Lord Chancellor's Department to map the provision of child contact centres in England and Wales. This will assist in developing a national network of child contact centres that can provide safe and meaningful contact between children and their non-resident parent.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many contact centres offering supervised contact there are in Wales. [68210]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Child contact centres are run by the voluntary sector. No comprehensive data is kept on how many child contact centres offering supervised contact exist. We are aware that in Wales there are 11 centres currently affiliated to the National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC). Of these, one offers supervised contact and is located in Newport. The Child Contact Centre Stakeholder Group, which includes NACCC, is currently working in partnership with the Lord Chancellor's Department to map the provision of child contact centres in England and Wales. This will assist in developing a national network of child contact centres that can provide safe and meaningful contact between children and their non-resident parent.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68736]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All overseas travel by officials in my Department is undertaken in accordance with the principles set in Chapter 8 of the "Civil Service Management Code", and the detailed rules and guidance set out in LCDHQ and Associated Offices Staff Handbook. The detailed information requested about individual trips is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The total cost of overseas visits made by officials in the Department, including travel, accommodation and subsistence costs, for the years 1998–99 to 2001–02 is as follows:

£

	Total cost
1998–99	60,254.52
1999–2000	74,961.47
2000–01	94,146.45
2001–02	85,512.69

Prior to 1998–99 overseas and domestic travelling and subsistence costs were not separately identified.

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints his Department has received about its 2001 consultations in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70464]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department has received four complaints about public consultation papers it issued during 2001. No records have been kept about whether the complaints were received in electronic or printed form.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether his Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70466]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Yes. An assistant consultation co-ordinator has also been designated.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in what format his Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations. [70462]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Response Papers have not been issued for all of the public written consultation papers issued in 2001, but the table below lists the formats used for the Response papers issued so far:

Response paper title	*Published*	*Format*
Community Legal Service—Financial Conditions for funding by the LSC	July 2001	Online, hard copy
Pre-Action Protocol for Judicial Review	October 2001	Online, hard copy
E-conveyancing—A draft order under section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000	December 2001	Online, hard copy
Representative Claims—proposed new procedures	April 2002	Online, emailed on request
Distress for Rent	May 2002	Online, hard copy
Towards Effective Enforcement—a single piece of bailiff law and a regulatory structure	May 2002	Online, hard copy

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70461]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All public written consultation documents published by the Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form his Department has monitered and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70463]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All of the eleven public written consultation documents issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department in 2001 were available in both electronic and printed form. All of them were monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office's Code of Practice on Written Consultations. The findings were passed to the Cabinet Office as part of its role in monitoring the effectiveness of public written consultation exercises carried out under the terms of the Code.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how long her Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70460]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All public consultation documents issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department in 2001 were available in both electronic and printed form. The length of time allowed for consultation is the same for both electronic and printed versions. The length of each public written consultation undertaken by the Lord Chancellor's Department in 2001 was as follows:

Title	*Month*	*Length of consultation (weeks)*
Representative Claims: Proposed new procedures	February 2001	13
Community Legal Service: Financial conditions for funding by the Legal Services Commission	March 2001	7
Pre-Action Protocol for Judicial Review	March 2001	12
E-conveyancing: A draft order under section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000	March 2001	14
Distress for Rent	May 2001	12
Report of the Review Group on the Royal Peculiars	July 2001	11
Administrative Court: Proposed changes to primary legislation following Sir Jeffrey Bowman's "Review of the Crown Office List"	July 2001	12
Towards Effective Enforcement: A single piece of bailiff law and a regulatory structure	July 2001	12
Payments into court in satisfaction of a claim	August 2001	13
Report of the Review of Tribunals by Sir Andrew Leggatt	August 2001	15
General Preaction Protocol	October 2001	16

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, which consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [70465]

Ms Rosie Winterton: None.

Legal Services

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what proposals she has for reforming the regulation of legal services. [70244]

Ms Rosie Winterton: None. Neither I nor the Lord Chancellor have proposals for reforming the regulation of legal services at present.

Mentally Incapacitated People

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what plans she has to bring forward legislation following the consultation paper "Making decisions: helping people who have difficulty in deciding for themselves". [70172]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government remain committed to reforming this important area of the law. When parliamentary time allows, they will legislate to improve and clarify the decision-making process for those who are unable to make decisions for themselves or who cannot communicate their decisions. In advance of securing parliamentary time, the Government are taking forward a number of initiatives which will benefit people today and enable legislation to be quickly effective. One such initiative is the best practice guidance leaflets proposed in the consultation paper referred to by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department with reference to the consultation on 'Making Decisions: Helping People who have Difficulty in Deciding for Themselves', what discussions she plans to have with elected members on the issue of extending legal protection for those patients who are unable to communicate for themselves. [70170]

Ms Rosie Winterton: When parliamentary time allows, the Government will legislate to improve and clarify the decision-making process for those who are unable to make decisions for themselves or who cannot communicate their decisions. I have already met some hon. Members at their request to discuss issues arising from this consultation paper, and recently took part in a parliamentary seminar to discuss the legislation. I would be happy to meet other hon. Members.

Clinical Negligence

Tim Loughton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many claimants have successfully claimed legal aid costs in clinical negligence cases against the NHS in the last *(a)* five, *(b)* 10 and *(c)* 20 years. [71100]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is not available in the form requested.

The number of publicly funded clinical negligence cases—reported as having been concluded—in which the claimant was successful in obtaining damages and full payment of their solicitor's costs, leaving no deficit on the legal aid fund was as follows:

(a) in the last five years—1997–98 to 2001–02—10,881

(b) in the last 10 years—1992–93 to 2001–02—19,568.

As a result of the changes to the Legal Services Commission's computer systems, information is not available for the last 20 years.

The figures exclude cases which were settled without costs in full, or which went to trial (the latter being a very small number). This means that the figures underestimate the success rate of cases because they exclude settled cases where most costs are recovered, save a residual claim against the legal aid fund for part of the costs; and cases which succeeded with full costs at trial.

The figures given do not relate exclusively to cases brought against the NHS. It is not possible to separate cases which involve the NHS from those which do not.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Telephone Bills (Pensioners Concessions)

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to discuss with the regulator concessions for pensioners' telephone bills; and if he will make a statement. [69765]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

All telecoms customers, including pensioners, have benefited from price reductions of over 50 per cent. since 19984. In addition BT is required by Oftel to provide a Light User Scheme (LUS) targeted at low users, including pensioners. The LUS enables those on the scheme to obtain rebates on their total bill.

Children's Play Areas

Mark Tami: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance his Department gives to local authorities regarding the *(a)* provision and *(b)* size of children's play areas. [70399]

Mr. Caborn: I have been asked to reply.

In Wales, responsibility for Children's Play issues rests with the National Assembly for Wales, who are in the process of producing a play policy for Wales, and not with Whitehall Departments, who are only responsible for play matters in England.

In December 2000, DCMS produced a guidance document for English local authorities entitled "Creating Opportunities", which encourages local authorities to develop and implement Local Cultural Strategies. The guidance explicitly lists play as something to be within the scope of cultural strategies, encompassing: children's play, playgrounds and play activities, parks and open spaces.

DCMS also funded "Play as Culture", researched and published by Playlink, a document which provides detailed guidance about incorporating play in cultural strategies. It was co-sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the then Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and was publicised and disseminated via the Local Government Association (LGA), the Institute of Leisure and Management and Early Years Partnerships. There is also soon to be a weblink directly to the document on the Playlink website from the DCMS website and a second round of distribution is about to begin.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently revising "Planning Policy Guidance note 17: Sports, Recreation and Open Space" (PPG17) which will provide guidance on the provision of a full range of urban open spaces, including play space. The revision, along with associated good practice guidance, will provide guidance for improving local assessments of need for such spaces and for carrying out audits of existing spaces. While these will encourage the setting of local standards for provision of new spaces, they will not give any specific guidance on the size of play spaces.

Social Services

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what has been the change in expenditure from original budget allocations in London boroughs on *(a)* children's social services, *(b)* older people, *(c)* learning disabilities, *(d)* mental health and *(e)* services for physically disabled in the last five years; [69152]

(2) if he will list actual spend against original budget estimates for London boroughs' social services budgets *(a)* in cash and *(b)* as a percentage (i) for each borough and (ii) for London as a whole in each of the last five years. [69149]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average variation is from SSA for London local authority social services budgets *(a)* in cash and *(b)* as a percentage for (i) each borough and (ii) London as a whole in each of the last five years. [69146]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The tables compare personal social services standard spending assessment (SSA) with local authority social services budgets, which have been adjusted to make them comparable with SSA. The figures provided are for each local authority and for London as a whole, for each of the last five years.

Personal social services budgets for comparison with SSA

	PSS SSA 1997–98 (£ million)	*Budget 1997–98 (£ million)*	*Budget Over SSA (percentage)*	*PSS SSA 1998–99 (£ million)*	*Budget 1998–99 (£ million)*	*Budget Over SSA (percentage)*	*PSS SSA 1999–2000 (£ million)*	*Budget 1999–2000 (£ million)*	*Budget Over SSA (percentage)*
Inner London									
City of London	1.561	5.819	272.7	1.563	5.189	232.0	2.141	4.943	130.9
Camden	61.539	65.952	7.2	61.751	71.470	15.7	62.276	73.751	18.4
Greenwich	53.365	58.745	10.1	54.460	59.659	9.5	59.829	65.873	10.1
Hackney	75.700	79.263	4.7	74.325	79.206	6.6	70.924	84.831	19.6
Hammersmith and Fulham	46.983	52.350	11.4	47.201	55.307	17.2	47.450	58.851	24.0
Islington	61.641	69.031	12.0	62.989	69.844	10.9	63.842	69.087	8.2
Kensington and Chelsea	40.373	50.278	24.5	41.484	51.912	25.1	42.924	54.716	27.5
Lambeth	86.801	84.092	–3.1	88.775	87.513	–1.4	85.677	92.832	8.4
Lewisham	69.408	63.984	–7.8	71.877	70.511	–1.9	72.399	75.404	4.2
Southwark	73.657	81.467	10.6	74.806	83.921	12.2	81.220	89.609	10.3
Tower Hamlets	59.032	64.110	8.6	63.511	66.931	5.4	70.136	72.423	3.3
Wandsworth	66.987	73.887	10.3	68.153	76.027	11.6	70.929	74.311	4.8
Westminster	57.804	73.382	26.9	58.871	73.807	25.4	63.180	80.359	27.2
Outer London									
Barking and Dagenham	30.899	33.896	9.7	33.451	35.975	7.5	40.115	42.054	4.8
Barnet	51.638	57.948	12.2	56.293	63.754	13.3	57.160	67.591	18.2
Bexley	27.410	32.105	17.1	30.511	36.846	20.8	34.958	40.834	16.8
Brent	57.553	52.681	–8.5	62.388	52.592	–15.7	57.980	55.850	–3.7
Bromley	39.743	52.312	31.6	42.433	49.894	17.6	45.988	54.424	18.3
Croydon	51.948	60.794	17.0	55.453	62.182	12.1	57.303	68.308	19.2
Ealing	57.287	57.566	0.5	62.237	60.223	–3.3	62.472	63.983	2.4
Enfield	43.305	50.091	15.7	47.445	50.862	7.2	51.591	49.899	–3.3
Haringey	58.229	58.297	0.1	60.534	59.613	–1.5	56.376	62.098	10.1
Harrow	30.748	41.087	33.6	34.686	43.498	25.4	35.983	44.520	23.7
Havering	28.742	38.919	35.4	31.752	39.225	23.5	34.526	40.702	17.9
Hillingdon	35.322	40.595	14.9	37.911	46.972	23.9	40.156	49.835	24.1
Hounslow	38.979	43.126	10.6	40.673	44.576	9.6	42.113	47.545	12.9
Kingston upon Thames	19.135	25.907	35.4	20.269	26.542	30.9	21.483	28.146	31.0
Merton	28.333	31.030	9.5	30.422	31.483	3.5	33.010	31.976	–3.1
Newham	60.752	70.486	16.0	65.129	77.517	19.0	62.896	77.427	23.1
Redbridge	35.115	37.603	7.1	39.465	39.625	0.4	41.7[illegible]	45.078	8.0
Richmond upon Thames	25.255	29.541	17.0	26.442	30.466	15.2	27.7[illegible]	32.348	16.6
Sutton	25.415	30.134	18.6	27.193	31.788	16.9	29.319	33.586	14.6
Waltham Forest	48.411	53.592	10.7	51.887	56.382	8.7	54.901	58.609	8.5
Total London	1,549.071	1,720.070	11.0	1,626.361	1,791.312	10.1	1,679.830	1,891.803	12.6

	PSS SSA 2000–01 (£ million)	*Budget 2000–01 (£ million)*	*Budget Over SSA (percentage)*	*PSS SSA 2001–02 (£ million)*	*Budget 2001–02 (£ million)*	*Budget Over SSA (percentage)*
Inner London						
City of London	2.234	5.290	136.8	2.349	6.849	191.6
Camden	65.504	74.194	13.3	68.067	76.978	13.1
Greenwich	62.953	69.876	11.0	63.824	70.987	11.2
Hackney[1]	75.190	76.484	1.7	77.171	75.216	–2.5
Hammersmith and Fulham	49.832	58.180	16.8	51.577	58.726	13.9
Islington	67.969	69.409	2.1	67.954	73.402	8.0
Kensington and Chelsea	46.549	56.998	22.4	49.290	57.[illegible]	17.3
Lambeth	90.876	89.552	–1.5	92.374	94.685	2.5

	PSS SSA 2000–01 (£ million)	*Budget 2000–01 (£ million)*	*Budget Over SSA (percentage)*	*PSS SSA 2001–02 (£ million)*	*Budget 2001–02 (£ million)*	*Budget Over SSA (percentage)*
Lewisham	75.338	78.347	4.0	75.867	77.076	1.6
Southwark	85.596	89.724	4.8	87.510	95.564	9.2
Tower Hamlets	73.557	73.707	0.2	75.331	76.520	1.6
Wandsworth	73.659	75.775	2.9	74.746	76.681	2.6
Westminster	67.906	83.290	22.7	71.692	81.863	14.2
Outer London						
Barking and Dagenham	42.391	43.759	3.2	44.148	45.712	3.5[1]
Barnet	60.378	69.848	15.7	63.692	77.357	21.5
Bexley	36.583	42.551	16.3	38.251	43.702	14.2
Brent	60.324	58.112	–3.7	61.747	59.518	–3.6
Bromley	47.478	57.455	21.0	49.695	60.352	21.4
Croydon	59.888	69.750	16.5	61.631	71.902	16.7
Ealing	65.415	67.090	2.6	68.086	82.029	20.5
Enfield	54.113	51.974	–4.0	56.839	58.252	2.5
Haringey	59.406	45.300	–23.7	61.138	62.874	2.8
Harrow	37.664	45.235	20.1	39.300	47.716	21.4
Havering	36.336	41.308	13.7	38.514	41.869	8.7
Hillingdon	42.237	51.171	21.2	44.054	53.820	22.2
Hounslow	44.080	49.463	12.2	45.783	52.872	15.5
Kingston upon Thames	22.456	29.134	29.7	23.387	30.965	32.4
Merton	34.067	36.936	8.4	35.052	39.372	12.3
Newham	66.482	78.463	18.0	68.797	75.211	9.3
Redbridge	43.796	46.541	6.3	45.514	47.833	5.1
Richmond upon Thames	29.171	33.216	-13.9	30.779	33.545	9.0
Sutton	30.153	34.021	12.8	31.174	36.234	16.2
Waltham Forest	56.118	58.678	4.6	56.900	57.656	1.3
Total London	1,765.698	1,910.831	8.2	1,822.230	2,001.140	9.8

[1] Provisional 2000–02

Compulsory Purchase

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what conclusions he has reached following the consultation exercise on his proposals for reforming the system of compulsory purchase and compensation. [71684]

The Deputy Prime Minister: In my oral statement to the House today I referred to our proposals for planning reform. I announced that I am publishing today our response to the recent Planning Green Paper consultation, copies of which are in the House Library. I am also making public a more detailed statement entitled "Compulsory Purchase Powers, Procedures and Compensation; the way forward", copies of which are available in the House Library and on the ODPM website. This summarises our policy in the light of the responses to the December 2001 consultation paper.

The paper sets out our plans for making compulsory purchase and compensation simpler, fairer and quicker through a change to the compulsory purchase power for planning purposes, and through changes to procedures and compensation arrangements.

The Law Commission is continuing its work on consolidation, codification and modernisation of the current legislation, and will consult on its initial conclusions shortly.

Town Planning

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes he proposes to make to the arrangements for producing Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks, further to the Planning Green Paper. [71685]

The Deputy Prime Minister: In my oral statement to the House today I referred to our proposals for planning reform. I announced that I am publishing today our response to the recent Planning Green Paper consultation, copies of which are in the House Library. I am also publishing a more detailed paper entitled "Making the System Work Better—Planning at Regional and Local Levels" on our proposals for creating Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks. I am placing copies of that in the House Library and on the ODPM website.

Statistics

Mr Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the statistics that are collected by his Department by English parliamentary constituency; and if he will make a statement. [67093]

Mr Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Ruth Kelly) on 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, Hansard, (column 769W).

HEALTH

NHS Trusts

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on not-for-profit organisations contributing to the running of *(a)* hospital trusts and *(b)* primary care trusts. [67608]

Mr. Hutton: At present organisations outside of the national health service do not contribute to the management of any NHS trusts, including acute-hospital trusts and primary care trusts.

The Department is setting up a register of interest for organisations outside of the NHS which are interested in taking on the management franchise for poorly performing NHS trusts. The register may include not-for-profit organisations.

Rural Hospitals

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding will be made available to rural hospitals across the new strategic health authorities. [67617]

Mr. Hutton: We currently allocate funding to health authorities, and they allocate funding to primary care trusts, on the basis of the relative needs of their populations.

It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

In future the intention is that allocations will be made direct to primary care trusts. Primary care trusts will then purchase appropriate services to meet the needs of their local populations, which may include services from rural hospitals.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress the Government have made in eliminating single sex wards; what plans he has to eliminate them; and if he will make a statement. [68536]

Mr. Hutton: Guidance on maintaining privacy and dignity was first issued to the service in 1997 and since then the national health service has been working towards a clear target to provide single sex accommodation.

The target set is for three objectives to be achieved in 95 per cent. of trusts by December 2002.

The three objectives are:

Ensuring that appropriate organisational arrangements are in place to secure good standards of privacy and dignity for hospital patients;

Achieving fully the Patient's Charter standard for segregated washing and toilet facilities across the NHS;

Providing safe facilities for patients in hospital who are mentally ill which safeguard their privacy and dignity.

Trusts are required to re-assess and report their position annually. This information has been collected through health authorities. Separate validation programmes are undertaken to ensure that information provided is robust and reliable.

We are working with the NHS to provide professional and technical support to ensure progress towards meeting this target continues.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of mixed-sex wards in operation, broken down by region. [68529]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available in this format as compliance is measured on a trust by trust basis and not at individual ward level.

The reasons for measuring at trust level is because hospital wards generally care for both men and women. To provide the required levels of privacy and dignity for patients, wards are split into single sex bays, or single rooms, or otherwise configured to provide adequate segregation of gender. It is the responsibility of each national health service trust to determine the most appropriate configuration to meet their specific requirements.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many sexual harassment and sexual abuse cases there have been in *(a)* mixed-sex wards and *(b)* single sex wards, over the past five years. [68530]

Mr. Hutton: We do not collect this information centrally. Each national health service trust should ensure appropriate security arrangements are in place, covering staff as well as patients.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled in each medical professional competency in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [66079]

Mr. Hutton: Data are not collected on the number of cancelled operations broken down by medical professional competencies. Data on the number of operations cancelled by the hospital, for non-medical reasons, on, or after the day the patient was due to be admitted are available in the Library.

Violence Against NHS Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the findings of the NHS survey into violence against NHS staff. [71073]

Mr. Hutton: The results of the Department's survey of reported violent or abusive incidents, accidents involving staff and sickness absence in national health service trusts and health authorities in England in 2000–01 was published in June 2002. The survey found that there were 84,273 reported violent or abusive incidents against staff in 2000–01. A copy of the report has already been placed in the Library.

Hospital Nurseries

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospitals provide on-site nurseries; and what estimate his Department has made of the number of NHS hospitals that intend to provide on-site nurseries by *(a)* 31 December 2002 *(b)* 31 December 2003 and *(c)* 31 December 2004. [68285]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 July 2002]*: A national survey of national health service child care provision, undertaken early in 2001, found that 114 NHS trusts provided nursery facilities for their staff. Since April 2001, a further 94 schemes have had capital funding agreed as part of the NHS child care strategy, which is aiming to develop 150 new on-site nursery schemes by April 2004. In 2002–03 we expect at least 50 new nurseries, or extensions of existing nurseries to be opened providing an additional 2,500 places.

Nurses

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to protect patients from the risks posed by nurses who carry HIV. [69221]

Ms Blears: Existing guidelines place nurses and other health care workers, who are or may be HIV infected, under ethical and legal duties to protect the health and safety of their patients by seeking counselling and HIV testing if they believe they have been at risk of infection. If infected, they are required to seek and follow confidential occupational health advice about the need to modify or limit their working practices.

While the safety of patients is of paramount importance, it should be recognised that the procedures involved in most nursing duties do not pose a risk of HIV infection to patients, provided normal infection control precautions are observed. There have been no reported cases of HIV transmission from infected health care workers to patients in the UK.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what checks he makes on foreign nurses for HIV before they are employed in the United Kingdom. [69222]

Mr. Hutton: Nurses recruited into the national health service from abroad are subject to the same pre-appointment checks as those recruited within the United Kingdom. NHS employers are required to satisfy themselves of the immunisation status of applicants and only when an applicant does not pose a risk of infection to patients from infectious diseases should employment be recommended.

Being HIV positive is not a bar to NHS employment but does preclude certain invasive (exposure prone) procedures being performed such as surgery and midwifery.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 310W, on nurses, how many nurse consultant posts have been introduced; and of these how many are new nurses to have been recruited to these roles. [71069]

Mr. Hutton: Over 750 nurse, midwife and health visitor consultants posts have now been approved in 10 tranches, the first in January 2000 and the latest in June 2002.

Nurse, midwife and health visitor consultants appointees are senior, experienced practitioners with advanced education and qualifications relevant to the speciality to which they are appointed. Guidance issued to the national health service, Health Service Circular 1999/217, makes it clear that selection should be by fair and open competition.

Medical Devices Agency

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the 2001–02 annual report of the Medical Devices Agency. [71906]

Mr. Lammy: The report and accounts of the Medical Devices Agency have today been laid before the House of Commons pursuant to section 7 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000. Copies have also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Overseas Treatment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS patients treated elsewhere in Europe have subsequently required further referrals; [71083]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the quality of outcomes of NHS patients treated elsewhere in Europe. [71082]

Mr. Hutton: Information about follow-up care following inpatient treatment and associated referrals for further treatment is not collected centrally from the national health service. NHS organisations may collect and analyse this kind of information, among other indicators of quality, as part of their local clinical governance arrangements designed to assure and continuously improve the quality of care for all NHS patients. Primary care trusts and NHS trusts are responsible for ensuring that NHS patients receive high clinical standards of care wherever they are treated.

ME

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effects of holistic and complementary therapies in helping patients with myalgic encephalomyelitis. [63143]

Jacqui Smith: The recent report of the chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME) working group noted patients' comments to the effect that certain complementary therapies were helpful in alleviating some symptoms. It also noted a need for guidance in using such therapies.

Guidance is currently being prepared by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence on palliative care for cancer patients, including the use of complementary therapies. This may be of some help to CFS/ME sufferers.

Mental Health

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the rate of emergency psychiatric readmissions was in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2001–02. [69295]

Jacqui Smith: The rate of emergency psychiatric re-admissions for 1997–98 was 14.3 per cent.; 1999–2000 was 13 per cent. and 2001–02 was 12.7 per cent.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health crisis resolution teams have been established since the publication of the NHS Plan. [68277]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* As at autumn 2001 there were 52 mental health crisis resolution teams.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which region has the smallest percentage of assertive outreach services for mental health; and if he will make a statement as to the reasons. [68175]

Jacqui Smith: North-western region has the lowest proportion of assertive outreach services with 14 teams. This constitutes approximately 7.7 per cent. of all teams and reflects the lower demand of the local population: 9.4 cases per 100,000 individuals compared with the national average of 17.5 cases for the same number of people.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many staff work in mental health early intervention teams in England; [68136]

(2) what the total work force in community mental health teams was in each of the last five years. [68127]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answers 11 July 2002]:* The Department does not collect information covering all components of early intervention schemes and community mental health teams. However, the Centre for Public Mental Health at Durham University has been sponsored by the Department to develop mapping of the mental health work force. Further work is required to validate the returns but their latest information, available at www.dur.ac.uk/service mapping, provides the best information we have on the distribution of the mental health work force.

Community psychiatric nurses are a key element of both teams and community learning difficulties nurses are important for the delivery of community mental health services. Between 1997 and 2001 the numbers of nurses working in these specialties have increased by 25 per cent. and 28 per cent. respectively. Further information is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified nursing staff working in the community psychiatric and community learning disabilities areas of work in England as at 30 September each year

	Whole-time equivalents	*Headcount*
1997		
All qualified staff	11,940	12,960
of which:		
Community psychiatric	9,010	9,740
Community learning disabilities	2,930	3,230
1998		
All qualified staff	12,480	13,610
of which:		
Community psychiatric	9,460	10,230
Community learning disabilities	3,020	3,380
1999		
All qualified staff	12,930	14,110
of which:		
Community psychiatric	9,710	10,550
Community learning disabilities	3,210	3,560
2000		
All qualified staff	13,530	14,850
of which:		
Community psychiatric	10,190	11,080
Community learning disabilities	3,340	3,770
2001		
All qualified staff	14,690	16,380
of which:		
Community psychiatric	11,040	12,220
Community learning disabilities	3,650	3,160

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Figures exclude agency staff
3. Due to rounding, totals may not equal the sum of component parts

Source:

Department of Health non-medical workforce census

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the NHS budget was spent on mental health in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [68146]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The expenditure figures for 2000–01 will not be available until late August 2002. The expenditure figures for 2001–02 will not be available until late August 2003.

Mr. Kolathuv Unni

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the circumstances *(a)* in which Mr. Kolathuv Unni was allowed to practise psychiatry in the NHS, having previously been struck off by the General Medical Council and *(b)* the General Medical Council took into account when they reinstated him to the register. [68746]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* There is no bar on working in the national health service if an individual has been restored to the medical register following erasure. NHS employers must make informed decisions based on the information provided during the recruitment process.

Guidance on pre- and post-appointment checks for NHS staff has recently been strengthened. This includes a requirement for applicants for certain posts to make a declaration regarding any previous disqualifications from the practice of a profession by a regulatory body in the United Kingdom or in another country.

Decisions on whether or not to restore an individual to the register are a matter for the General Medical Council. However, the GMC has agreed to respond to the second part of this question upon receipt of a written request from the hon. Member.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations were made by UK authorities in New Zealand into the conduct of Mr. Kolathuv Unni *(a)* prior to his initial recruitment to the NHS and *(b)* at the time of his successful application to be re-admitted to the medical register. [68745]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* This is a matter for the General Medical Council, the independent statutory body responsible for the registration of doctors to practise medicine in the United Kingdom. They have agreed to provide this information direct on receipt of a written request from my hon. Friend.

Child Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Weston-Super-Mare (Brian Cotter) of 4 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 574W, on child care, how much remuneration an NHS child care co-ordinator receives. [71070]

Mr. Hutton: The remuneration of childcare co-ordinators is a matter for local determination. Guidance issued by the Department in 2001, recommended a starting salary in line with general Whitley Council pay scales for administrative and clerical staff grade 6/7, spring point 24–32. In 2002–03 this equates to £19,592-£27,887 per annum.

Carers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage an increased number of foster carers. [71071]

Jacqui Smith: Foster carer recruitment is a very important area, in which a lot of work is being taken forward. The Department is currently undertaking a major review ("Choice Protects") of the commissioning of placements, with a special emphasis on foster care services—so that choice and stability of placements may be improved for children in care. Within this, we will be examining:

Role and status of foster carers;

Recruitment and retention;

What support services are required;

Best ways to reward foster carers;

The training needs of foster carers.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many assessments of carer needs have been carried out, broken down by carer age groups, since the introduction of the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000. [71039]

Jacqui Smith: This information is currently being collated and will be published in late autumn as part of "Community Care Statistics 2001–02: Referrals, Assessments and Packages of Care, for Adults".

Climbié Inquiry

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will produce a timetable for the publication of findings from the Climbié Inquiry. [71092]

Jacqui Smith: Lord Laming continues to receive and to consider evidence, and intends to complete his report later this year. It will be published, following its receipt by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and the Home Department, and will be made widely available.

Social Workers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many extra social workers are in training as a result of the Government's campaign to increase the number of social workers. [71072]

Jacqui Smith: The main aim of the social care recruitment campaign is to raise the number of people applying for social work training by 5,000 by 2004. As the earliest that someone reacting to the campaign could join a course is autumn 2002, we do not yet have any information on numbers of extra social workers in training. These figures will be published in December 2002 by the social work admissions service.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the conclusions were of the review of milk tokens for pregnant women in asylum-seeking families; and what changes he plans to make. [42952]

Ms Blears: The review of the welfare food scheme did not look specifically at pregnant women in asylum seeking families. Pregnant women who receive certain social security benefits (income support or an income-based jobseeker's allowance) are entitled to receive milk tokens. Pregnant women who do not receive social security benefits are supported by the national asylum support service.

Careers Information

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average response time is between prospective NHS employees registering online for information on careers in the national health service and subsequently receiving information; and what guidelines he has issued. [71091]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service careers service was established in April 1999 by the Department to provide accurate and up-to-date information on careers throughout the NHS. It has a website www.nhs.uk/careers through which publications can be ordered.

It is not possible to give the average response time between ordering and receipt of publications as we do not know when the requested items are received.

The service level agreement for responding to online requests sets out that at least 95 per cent. of the requests must be sent out within 48 hours. The requested items are posted second class.

Premature Retirement

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS staff, broken down by employment type, are expected to take premature retirement during 2002–03. [56280]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* Premature retirement is one of the factors that make up overall wastage from the national health service work force. Wastage is taken into account in the Department's modelling but is not broken down into its component parts.

Regional Wage Differentials

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that regional wage differentials are reflected in the funding of the national health service. [68891]

Mr. Hutton: Allocations made to the national health service already take account of differential regional staffing costs. The weighted capitation formula used to calculate health authority target shares of revenue allocations includes a staff market forces factor. The aim of the staff market forces factor is to reflect the unavoidable geographical variation in staff costs that NHS employers incur.

In addition for 2002–03 a further £101 million was allocated to the high cost areas of London and the South of England to fund cost of living supplements for qualified nurses and some allied health professionals.

Future arrangements are being kept under review and will take account of the outcome of the negotiations on a new NHS pay system.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South of 15 May, reference number 56711, on financial assistance to nurses; and if he will make a statement. [65750]

Mr. Hutton: I replied to the hon. Member on 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 777W.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the holding reply dated 1 July to written question 291 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, when he intends to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member dated 23 May with regard to Mr. J. Greenhalgh. [70348]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

I will be replying, in light of the Chancellor's Spending Review statement, shortly.

HOME DEPARTMENT

External Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 1997 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department. [59494]

Beverley Hughes: The total expenditure incurred by the Home Department since 1997 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of the Department is as follows:

Year	*Expenditure (£)*
1997	0
1998	0
1999	81,299
2000	172,314
2001	352,881
2002	0

These costs include the modernisation of the Home Office Press Office to provide a better service to journalists, the launch of the Police Recruitment Campaign, the establishment of the Home Office website and the launch of the Child Protection on the internet campaign.

Public-private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total external spending by his Department was on public- private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [43187]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not available in the format requested. To provide the hon. Member with a full answer would incur disproportionate cost. I can, however, provide information detailing total spend on consultancy work on public- private partnerships (PPPs) in each of the last four years and also the number of consultancy firms used by the Home Office and its agencies on PPP projects over this period. This is as follows:

Total spend on PPP consultants:

1998: 103,563

1999: 89,473

2000: 2,926,936

2001: 7,298,967.

Number of consultancy firms used by the Home Department on PPP projects:

1998: 1

1999: 2

2000: 4

2001: 4.

The increase in expenditure is largely due to two projects, firstly the setting up of the Criminal Records Bureau and secondly various business change services relating to Immigration and Nationality Department's programme to enable the improvement of case management.

Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated *(a)* level and *(b)* cost of energy use in his Department and associated agencies was in each year since 1997; what proportion of energy was generated from renewable sources; and if he will make a statement. [65948]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend, the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth on 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 385W.

Identity Cards

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the projected costs of implementing the identity card proposals. [69754]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made a statement to the House on 3 July, announcing the publication of a consultation paper on Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud. The consultation period will last until 10 January 2003. The Government has made it clear that the introduction of an entitlement card would be a major step and that it would not proceed without consulting widely and considering all the views expressed very carefully.

The paper includes a number of estimates of what a scheme would cost, depending on the sophistication of the card. A reasonable estimate would be that a scheme would cost around £1.5 billion over a 13 year period covering the three years it would take to set up the necessary Information Technology systems and the 10 year period for which the first cards would be valid.

This would include much more stringent identity checks than currently apply for passports and driving licences in response to increased levels of fraudulent applications.

It would also include the costs of using biometric information (fingerprints or iris images) which would uniquely link the card holder with a card.

This estimate does not include any savings to Government through more efficient administration and reductions in fraud. The paper also sets out how the costs might be recovered through increases in fees for driving licences and passports and charging a fee for entitlement cards issued to those who did not qualify for or who did not want to apply for a card in the form of a photocard driving licence or passport card. It would not be the Government's intention to use funds allocated for investment in public services for a card scheme.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by his Department and how much reclaimed. [34445]

Beverley Hughes: The detailed information required is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The available information relating to expenditure on hospitality and entertainment by the department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies is shown in the table:

£

Financial years	*Expenditure*
1997–98	68,803
1998–99	84,468
1999–2000	91,509
2000–01	74,655

Expenditure by Ministers on hospitality and entertainment averages four per cent. of the Departmental total each year.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68725]

Beverley Hughes: The following table lists the total cost, to the Home Office and its agencies, of official duty visits abroad in each of the past five years.

The other information is not collected in the format the hon. Member requires and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

£

	Core Home Office	*Forensic Science Service*	*Passport Agency*	*Prison Service*
2001–02	3,907,148	264,490	10,705	32,946
2000–01	2,416,802	221,425	26,420	97,681
1999–2000	2,295,825	220,843	58,816	124,441
1998–99	1,731,182	149,176	18,435	56,157
1997–98	2,724,330	142,219	5,223	48,827

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff have contributed to his Department's input to the Spending Review. [68697]

Beverley Hughes: Staff from the different business areas of the Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) have contributed to the Home Office input to the Spending Review but it is not possible to quantify the amount of their time spent on this work. No central record has been kept.

Building Values

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the buildings owned by his Department and estimate the market value of each of them. [66940]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 340W.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61071]

Beverley Hughes: The Department recognises that the development of the skills, knowledge and experience of our staff is crucial to the delivery of business objectives and to helping staff achieve their career aspirations. The Department is, therefore, committed to ensuring that effective and affordable learning opportunities are available to staff. We have achieved the Investors in People Standard and are committed to ensuring that training and development are effectively focused on achieving our aims.

The following information is an estimate of the total amount spent on training and development in the Home Office and its executive agencies; it does not include the cost of many informal learning activities since such costs often go unrecorded:

1997–98: £22 million

1998–99: £25.1 million

1999–2000: £27.3 million

2000–01: £28.1 million

2001–02: £35.2 million.

Castle Award

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has applied for a Castle award for equal pay. [65222]

Beverley Hughes: Since the inception of the Castle awards on 8 March 2002, the Home Office and its related agencies have not applied for such an award. The Department is in the process of conducting Equal Pay audits and when these have been completed, it is possible they may apply.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many claims for work-related illness were settled by his Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost in compensation was. [56060]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Information on claims for work-related illness and compensation payments are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Department is aware of its obligations to provide a safe working environment and takes steps to ensure that it meets the requirements of health and safety legislation.

The Revitalising Health and Safety Strategy Statement published in June 2000 set targets for all stakeholders aimed at reducing inter alia

the number of working days lost from work-related injury and ill health by 30 per cent. by 2010;

the incidence rate of cases of work-related ill health by 20 per cent. by 2010; and

achieving half the improvement under each target by 2004.

Green Minister

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who his Department's Green Minister is; when they *(a)* have attended and *(b)* plan to attend meetings of the Green Ministers' Committee; what the outcomes of meetings were for his Department's activities; and if he will make a statement. [65982]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office Green Minister is my noble Friend Lord Filkin who was appointed to the ENV(G) Committee in June 2002. Having only recently been appointed he has yet to attend any of the Committee's meetings but intends to do so in the future.

It is established practice under exemption two of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

Immigration

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a buddy system for immigrants similar to the one practised in Canada. [69006]

Beverley Hughes: The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill presently before Parliament contains provision for language and citizenship education for people seeking naturalisation. A group of experts is to be formed to advise my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, on how these proposals might be implemented in practice. Among other things, the group will be asked to advise on the practicality of a national voluntary scheme for mentors to assist naturalisation applicants in making contacts in their local community.

Membership of the advisory group will be announced shortly.

In addition, a European refugee fund grant has been secured in respect of a mentoring project for refugees in London, Birmingham and Glasgow. The project, "Time to Belong", is organised by TimeBank, a registered charity, and aims to provide mentors and coaches for 150 refugees.

People Trafficking

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there is a specific offence in United Kingdom law on the trafficking of human beings; and if he will make a statement. [70121]

Beverley Hughes: The Government are committed to ensuring that stronger measures are in place to penalise people who traffic in human beings. We have signed the protocol on trafficking to the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organised Crime and have negotiated an European Union Framework Decision, which commits the United Kingdom to introducing offences of trafficking for the purposes of labour or sexual exploitation within two years of its adoption.

We have acted quickly to deal with the worst forms of exploitation by creating a new offence of trafficking for the purposes of controlling someone in prostitution within the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill currently before Parliament. It will carry a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment, as for drug trafficking offences. This is a stop gap offence pending more wide-ranging offences of trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation when parliamentary time permits, which will implement our international obligations.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the mechanism by which the holder of an asylum seeker's identification card can obtain access to the information contained on the card. [67763]

Beverley Hughes: The personal information contained on the card is that provided by the holder when the card is created. The holder is shown a copy of the information when the card is created. The card can only be updated at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) offices on the authorised system equipment. This would necessitate the holder's attendance and therefore their knowledge that the data held on the card had been updated.

The information held on the card is available on application to the Subject Access Bureau on payment of a fee of £10 payable to the Home Office Accounting Officer.

The address of the bureau for Immigration and Nationality Department inquiries is:

Subject Access Bureau
Home Office
Lunar House, 40 Wellesley Road
Croydon
CR9 2BY.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers in London were *(a)* supported by the London boroughs, *(b)* supported by the National Asylum Support Service through the provision of emergency accommodation, *(c)* supported by the London boroughs and National Asylum Support Service through the scheme for disbenefited asylum seekers and *(d)* received assistance in the form of vouchers or cash only provided by the National Asylum Support Service in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [69958]

Beverley Hughes: Information is not available in the exact form requested.

The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) took on responsibility for supporting asylum seekers from April 2000 when it began operation. Before that time asylum seekers were supported by local authorities or the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). NASS is responsible for supporting disbenefited asylum seekers who initially applied for asylum at a United Kingdom port of entry before 3 April 2000, were receiving support from DWP, had a negative decision recorded on their claim on or after 25 September 2000 which ended their entitlement to benefits, but who have subsequently appealed against that decision.

The only available figures for the number of asylum seekers supported by the London boroughs come from local authority grant claims sent to the Home Office as at September 2001. These show that local authorities in the London boroughs were supporting 14,420[1] singles and 11,060[1] families. Figures including dependants are not available. Figures for cases supported by NASS are not available by London borough.

The number of asylum seekers (including dependants) supported by NASS in emergency accommodation in London was 5,900[2] as at the end of December 2000, and 3,200[2] as at the end of December 2001.

As at the end of December 2001 NASS was supporting 820[1] asylum seekers (including dependants) in London through the scheme for disbenefited asylum seekers. There were no asylum seekers being supported by NASS in London through this scheme as at the end of December 2000.

NASS did not support asylum seekers before April 2000. The number of asylum seekers (including dependants) receiving subsistence only support from NASS and staying in the London region was 6,210[1] as at the end of December 2000, and 17,910[1] as at the end of December 2001.

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Figures rounded to the nearest 100.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unaccompanied asylum-seeker children were supported by each of the London boroughs in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; and how much funding was (i) applied for by and (ii) allocated to each local authority in London to meet the cost of essential social support services for such children. [69957]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office assumed responsibility for reimbursing local authorities for supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) as of 1 April 2000 and does not have records for 1999–2000. Local authorities under either section 20 or section 17 of the Children Act 1989 for support provide these amounts.

The table shows the numbers supported by each of the London boroughs from the grant claims submitted and also the amounts claimed and paid.

Local authority	*Applied and allocated 2000–01 (£)*	*Number supported 26 January 2001*	*Applied and allocated 2001–02 (£)*	*Number supported 25 January 2002*
Barking and Dagenham	2,564,594	241	4,505,858	262
Barnet	759,200	62	932,001	60
Bexley	693,500	73	567,037	46
Brent	1,288,108	58	2,494,028	158
Bromley	381,600	34	385,400	32
Camden	1,089,600	89	1,602,600	102
Corporation of London	114,400	14	171,600	15
Croydon	3,317,637	177	7,045,280	373
Ealing	2,263,765	130	1,835,648	114
Enfield	674,145	76	1,368,328	144
Greenwich	660,926	109	2,231,482	185
Hackney	744,545	64	769,344	92
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,131,375	166	4,154,800	144
Haringey	4,972,861	399	4,609,375	324
Harrow	605,200	46	726,971	43
Havering	875,095	67	548,600	29
Hillingdon	7,308,233	358	9,516,020	550
Hounslow	568,800	47	718,000	64
Islington	4,988,216	347	6,245,750	336
Kensington and Chelsea	2,097,325	109	2,068,675	100
Kingston Upon Thames	225,200	25	352,800	40
Lambeth	3,732,825	215	6,019,900	281
Lewisham	1,863,502	116	2,117,825	114
Merton	763,074	58	724,584	47
Newham	899,600	100	2,204,507	141
Redbridge	1,632,813	207	1,445,177	124
Richmond Upon Thames	2,069,883	166	1,132,800	79
Southwark	3,598,075	186	3,843,275	185
Sutton	355,200	20	121,800	12
Tower Hamlets	376,400	16	290,600	22

Local authority	*Applied and allocated 2000–01 (£)*	*Number supported 26 January 2001*	*Applied and allocated 2001–02 (£)*	*Number supported 25 January 2002*
Waltham Forest	2,130,632	171	2,952,765	173
Wandsworth	470,400	42	394,954	11
Westminster	2,292,550	116	2,179,977	145

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers from Zimbabwe have *(a)* been detained and *(b)* had their cases certified since his announcement to suspend removals to that country on 15 January; and if he will make a statement. [37678]

Beverley Hughes: The latest available information on the number of persons detained solely under Immigration Act powers relates to 30 March 2002. As at that date, 30 Zimbabweans (to the nearest five) were being detained who are recorded as having claimed asylum at some stage, which excludes persons detained in police cells. Provisionally, 55 certified refusals were made on asylum applications lodged by nationals of Zimbabwe in January 2002, 35 in February and 45 in March.

I regret that information on the number of asylum seekers from Zimbabwe who have been detained since 15 January is not available.

The suspension of removals of asylum seekers to Zimbabwe is a temporary measure. We are monitoring events in the aftermath of the Zimbabwe presidential election in close liaison with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). There is no set time scale, but it would be unrealistic to be able to make any decision on a resumption of removals until the immediate post-election situation has calmed down and we have had time to assess properly the risks to returnees and gather and consider the views of FCO and others. Zimbabwean asylum seekers have continued, where appropriate, to be detained at Oakington Reception Centre as part of the fast-track asylum process. Aside from such individuals, there will be a very small number of people who are detained at present pending removal while outstanding applications, appeals and other matters are resolved. Once such issues have been resolved, the persons concerned will normally be granted bail or temporary admission as appropriate while the suspension of removals remains in place.

Information on Immigration Act detainees as at 29 June and refusals in the second quarter (April to June) of 2002 will be published on 30 August on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the initial sites for possible asylum accommodation centres were identified; which outside consultants were involved in the process; and how much they were paid. [42654]

Beverley Hughes: The initial sites for accommodation centres were identified through a programme of searches involving major landowners, including other Government Departments, for properties that met a set of criteria. This included looking for sites with the capacity to cater for several hundred residents plus facilities either as new-build or conversion, a non-urban location and a reasonable geographical spread beyond the south east of England. This work was supported by property consultants Lambert Smith Hampton and planning consultants CgMs Consulting.

The information relating to fees paid to external consultants cannot be divulged as this is subject to commercial confidentiality.

Civil Penalty Charges

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil penalty charges, established under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, have been issued; and how many clandestine entrants have been found in lorries, since 22 February. [69694]

Beverley Hughes: Since the implementation of penalty provisions for road vehicles on 3 April 2000 and as at 31 March 2002, a total of 1,429 penalties have been imposed in respect of 7,516 clandestine entrants.

Between 22 February 2002 and up to 31 March 2002 for which the latest information is available, a total of 267 clandestine entrants have been found concealed in road vehicles arriving at Dover.

Right of Entry

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account is taken of whether a child was conceived within a lawful marriage overseas in determining right of entry to the United Kingdom to join a parent who is a British national. [69733]

Beverley Hughes: Under the Immigration Rules, a child aged 18 or under can be granted entry to join one parent in the United Kingdom, provided that the other parent is dead or that the parent here had had sole responsibility for their upbringing. A parent is defined as the father as well as the mother of an illegitimate child (where he is proved to be the father).

Illegitimate birth overseas to a British citizen father and non-British citizen mother would usually mean that the child was not a British citizen. However, discretion within the British Nationality Act 1981 can be used to register as a British citizen the illegitimate child of a British citizen father. Also, if the parents of an illegitimate child subsequently marry, and the law of the country in which the father is domiciled legitimises a child of the relationship upon the parents' marriage, the child will be treated as having been born legitimate. The child would then be regarded as a British citizen from birth and would be entitled to enter and remain freely in this country.

Asylum Applications

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many duplicate applications for asylum have been detected through matching fingerprints since 1993. [69308]

Beverley Hughes: Some 6,700 individuals have been detected as having made two or more applications through the matching of fingerprints since 1993.

Passport Service

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the UK Passport Service will publish its annual report and accounts for 2001–02. [71806]

Beverley Hughes: The United Kingdom passport service annual report and accounts 2001–02 has been published today and I am pleased to say that copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Israeli Embassy and Balfour House Bombings

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusions the British scientists investigating the 1994 Israeli Embassy and Balfour House bombings reached on *(a)* the type and amount of explosive and mechanism used in the bombings, *(b)* where the explosives were made up, *(c)* where the car bombs were assembled, *(d)* who wrote the letters claiming responsibility and *(e)* who drove the cars; and what reports were received from Israeli scientists following removal of samples from the sites. [67862]

Mr. Blunkett: An appeal to the House of Lords is pending in relation to these events. Since the matter is therefore sub judice it would not be right for me to comment.

Terrorist Organisations

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those terrorist organisations that make use of anti-coagulant as part of their armoury; and if he has undertaken liaison work with the Department of Health on this issue. [68334]

Mr. Blunkett: We do not disclose information on the weaponry or capability of any terrorist organisation, but we monitor the terrorist threat to the United Kingdom closely and remain vigilant, taking all necessary precautions. I liaise closely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on these matters.

In addition, Home Office officials are in regular contact with officials from the Department of Health and other Government Departments on all aspects of counter-terrorist contingency planning.

Terrorism

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made as a result of the initiatives undertaken since September in the fight against terrorism; how much expenditure his Department has incurred in pursuing the fight against terrorism in the financial year 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [69188]

Mr. Blunkett: By 11 July, 137 people had been arrested since 11 September 2001 under the Terrorism Act 2000. In addition, 11 people have been detained under Part 4 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. Two of those have since left the United Kingdom voluntarily. It would not be appropriate, for security reasons, to publish details of Home Office expenditure on counter-terrorism.

International Sikh Youth Federation

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received concerning the banning of the International Sikh Youth Federation. [68016]

Mr. Blunkett: The organisation itself has made representations to the proscribed organisations appeal commission. In addition, I have received a small number of letters from members of this House, and from the public.

Parliament Square Demonstrations

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contingency plans *(a)* there are and *(b)* are being developed to prevent demonstrations on Parliament Square from disrupting traffic and endangering pedestrians. [62169]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Demonstrations in the area of the Palace of Westminster are subject to the Sessional Order, and policing arrangements for any demonstration always take into account the need to maintain the safety of the public. The policing is the operational responsibility of the Commissioner.

England Fans

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many England fans were banned and prevented from visiting Japan and Korea for the 2002 World Cup; how many such fans were found to have travelled to Japan or Korea; how many England fans were deported from Japan or Korea, and for what offences they were deported; and if he will make a statement. [69946]

Mr. Denham: 1,053 people were prevented from travelling to the World Cup by the conditions of their football banning orders. One individual subject to a banning order attempted to enter Japan but was intercepted by the Japanese immigration authorities and returned to England. No England fans were deported from Japan and Korea for misbehaviour but two individuals were deported by the Japanese Immigration Bureau following revocation of their landing permission. In accordance with commitments given during passage of the Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Act 2002, a detailed report on the World Cup security operation, including the impact of football-related legislation, will be submitted to Parliament on receipt of closing information from the Japanese authorities.

Criminal Records Bureau

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Criminal Records Bureau will publish its annual report and accounts for 2001–02. [71807]

Hilary Benn: The criminal records bureau annual report and accounts for 2001–02 have been published today, and I am pleased to say that copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received from *(a)* potential umbrella registered bodies and *(b)* others concerning the financial implications of operating as such a body with the Criminal Records Bureau; and if he will make a statement; [30530]

(2) if he will provide funding to assist umbrella registered bodies with additional costs incurred in setting up an office and processing applications from volunteers to the Criminal Records Bureau; [30529]

(3) how many organisations have registered as umbrella registered bodies with the Criminal Records Bureau; and what the Bureau's original estimate was. [30528]

Mr. Denham: We have been determined that employers and organisations wishing to use the Criminal Records Bureau's service will have a ready means of access. To meet the needs of those employers and organisations which do not wish to register with the Bureau in their own right, we have encouraged others to consider acting on their behalf, as umbrella bodies. It would have been inappropriate to plan on the basis of a pre-determined target number of umbrella bodies. As at close of play on 2 July, some 852 organisations had been registered as umbrella bodies.

Higher-level disclosures will be issued free of charge to volunteers. A number of representations have been made by potential umbrella registered bodies and others. We are not persuaded that it would be appropriate for additional Government funding to be made available for the purpose of establishing umbrella bodies.

Mobile Phone Thefts

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of reported mobile phone thefts which were insurance fraud in the last 12 months. [42791]

Mr. Denham: The requested information is not routinely collected centrally.

Women's Organisations

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which women's organisations have been consulted on proposed legislation by his Department during 2000–01 and 2001–02 sessions; and if their responses have been published. [66524]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* This information is not held centrally within the Home Office and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Transsexuals

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if transsexual people will be able to have their transsexual name and gender recorded on an identity card system introduced by the Government. [70007]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made a statement to the House on 3 July, announcing the publication of a consultation paper on Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud. The consultation period will last until 10 January 2003. The Government has made it clear that the introduction of an entitlement card would be a major step and that it would not proceed without consulting widely and considering all the views expressed very carefully. The consultation paper outlines how a scheme might be delivered by building on the existing driving licence and passport systems.

In the consultation paper the Government states that it is not proposing any changes to the law on transsexual people in the consultation exercise and that the existing procedures for issuing passports and driving licences in these cases would apply for any entitlement card scheme.

The Government announced on 21 June that it was reconvening the Working Group on transsexual people whose report has been under active consideration since it was presented to Parliament in July 2000. The Group will look further into the implications of the possible changes in policy identified in the report, and of the judgments of the European Court on Human Rights in the cases of Goodwin v. The United Kingdom and I v. The United Kingdom which were delivered on 11 July. The Group will report to Ministers later this year but no commitment can yet be given on any likely recommendations or the timing of their implementation. Any recommendations will be taken into account in the design of an entitlement card scheme should the Government decide to proceed after the consultation exercise.

Gender Impact Assessment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the subject of each gender impact assessment drawn up by his Department since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [66607]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* Details regarding gender impact assessments are not centrally held and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Data Series

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new data series separated by gender, race, disability and age have been commissioned by his Department since August 1997. [66608]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* Since August 1997 the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office have commissioned the following data series (including further exercises of regular on-going surveys):

(i) The 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey collects information on sex, race, disability and age. Reports on the Citizenship Survey planned for 2002 will analyse the data by sex, race and ethnicity.

(ii) The 2000 sweeps of the British Crime Survey (BCS) incorporated ethnic "booster samples". This has allowed the experience of ethnic minorities with respect to both crime victimisation risk and other experience and views regarding the police and other parts of the Criminal Justice System (CJS). From January 2001 the BCS has moved to an annual cycle with a permanent ethnic boost.

(iii) From 1 April 1999 the information collected by the Home Office on police arrests was extended to provide information for persons arrested for notifiable offences by ethnic appearance of suspect, gender, age group and offence group.

(iv) From 1 April 2001 police forces have been asked to provide returns on the number of racist crimes recorded by ethnic appearance of victim, offence group, age group and gender of victim and detection rate. Currently this return is voluntary and it is currently proposed that it will become mandatory from 1 April 2003.

In addition to new data series the Department has commissioned, conducted itself a number of one-off or time-limited exercises, yielding information including one or more of these dimensions.

Antisocial Behaviour

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further measures he is taking to tackle anti-social behaviour. [42898]

Mr. Denham: Tackling anti-social behaviour is a priority for the Government. We have included legislative changes in the Police Reform Bill that will improve the effectiveness of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). We will be issuing revised guidance to all agencies involved in the process of obtaining ASBOs in order that they can make maximum use of this valuable sanction measure.

The Bill also includes measures that will enable the police to enlist the assistance of their own civilian staff as well as the staff of other agencies in the community in tackling anti-social behaviour. Chief officers will be able to appoint support staff from their civilian ranks to provide a visible presence in the community and exercise limited powers to deal with a range of crime, including those which constitute anti-social behaviour. A similar role is also proposed for some of those staff from other agencies who are already working with the police in the community, such as street wardens, and environmental health officers.

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships throughout the country are appointing co-ordinators for action against anti-social behaviour. They will be responsible for ensuring that robust local strategies, based on the needs of their communities, are in place.

Finally, under the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 we introduced fixed penalty fines for a number of disorder offences including disorderly behaviour while drunk in a public place and the throwing of fireworks in a throughfare. This provision will be piloted within five police areas this summer.

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many ASBOs have been issued by South Yorkshire police in each of the last two years; [68866]

(2) how many Acceptable Behaviour Contracts have been issued in South Yorkshire in the last 12 months. [68865]

Mr. Denham: Data on the number of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts are not collected centrally.

Anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) were introduced from 1 April 1999 and up to 31 May 2000 data were collected on the total number of ASBOs issued by police force area only. These data do not include information on the applicant. The table shows the number of ASBOs reported to the Home Office from 1 June 2000 to 31 December 2001.

Number of anti-social behaviour orders reported to the Home Office and issued within South Yorkshire from 1 June 2000 to 31 December 2001

Year	*Number where applicant was the police*	*Total number issued*
June to December 2000	1	1
January to December 2001	4	7

We are currently considering whether any further checks are needed to ensure the accuracy of the number of ASBOs reported.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been issued in Hampshire; and if he will make a statement. [46442]

Mr. Denham: Anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) were introduced from 1 April 1999. The latest available data covering the period up to the end of December 2001, show that seven ASBOs have been issued within Hampshire (including the Isle of Wight).

We are currently considering whether any further checks are needed to ensure the accuracy of the number of ASBOs reported.

Youth Crime

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on Government plans to tackle youth crime in Lancashire; [50635]

(2) if he will make a statement on Government plans to tackle youth crime in Wales. [50634]

Mr. Denham: The Government is supporting a wide programme to tackle youth offending in all areas, which includes action to prevent children being drawn into crime in the first place. This includes work with families, in neighbourhoods to tackle deprivation, with education services to reduce exclusions and improve attendance, and implementation of the 10 year anti-drugs strategy.

We also support a number of preventative programmes to steer young people, including those most at risk, away from crime. These include Youth Inclusion Programmes: of which there are at present two in Lancashire and three in Wales; Splash Schemes: in 15 localities in Lancashire and seven localities in Wales; and the Positive Futures programme: one project in Lancashire and two in Wales.

In addition, improvements to the youth justice system, reduced delays, new sentences and programmes, and expanded powers available to the police and courts all help to ensure that we are tackling youth criminality head on.

Alcohol

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has held on the impact of the withdrawal of authority from police to remove unopened containers of alcohol from underage youths in public areas in 2001; and if he will make a statement. [61094]

Mr. Denham: The existing police powers to confiscate alcohol from under-age drinkers in public places, provided by the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997, were amended by section 29 of the Criminal

Justice and Police Act 2001. This makes it clear that the police can now confiscate alcohol in containers that have been opened, but not alcohol in sealed containers. This adjustment was made to ensure consistency with new police powers to confiscate alcohol from persons in designated public places, provided by section 12 of the 2001 Act.

We have discussed the effect of this change with the Association of Chief Police Officers and we have received correspondence about it from representatives of the Police Superintendents' Association, police forces and Members of Parliament.

In the light of these representations, we have asked the Association of Chief Police Officers for advice on whether a further change in the law would be helpful to clarify or strengthen police powers to confiscate alcohol from under-age drinkers.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of people aged under 25 was estimated to be using illegal drugs in each year since 1997, and if he will make a statement. [66288]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* Results from the 1998 and 2000 British Crime Surveys estimate that 29 per cent. of adults aged between 16 and 24 reported to have used an illegal drug in the previous year.

Results from the 2001 survey on "Drug use, smoking and drinking among young people in England" (published in a Statistical Press Notice by the Department of Health on 15 March 2002) estimates that 20 per cent. of school children aged between 11 and 15 reported to have used an illegal drug in the previous year. A revised and more detailed method for measuring the prevalence of drug use was introduced in 2001. The questions used in 2001 provide new estimates on drug use and are not comparable with results from previous sweeps. Estimates from previous years were 12 per cent. in 1999, 14 per cent. in 2000 and 20 per cent. in 2001.

Police Training

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the training period is for *(a)* police officers and *(b)* special constables; and if he will make a statement. [59303]

Mr. Denham: The initial training period for new police officer recruits is two years, and the bulk of this training is provided locally within individual forces.

Training periods vary from force to force and this data is not held centrally for specials. A new special constabulary foundation-training package is currently being developed.

The National Competency Framework which is being introduced into police training, will ensure support police officers, special constables, support staff and others including community support officers are trained to the appropriate level of competence.

Hampshire Police Authority

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the regularity and subject matter of communications between his Department and Hampshire police authority in June. [69256]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* The Home Office does not have a regular cycle of correspondence with police authorities on a monthly basis. A trawl of the Department and inquiries of Hampshire police authority has identified 14 items of correspondence sent from the Home Office and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary to the police authority between 1 and 30 June 2002. These covered a range of issues including police reform, police performance and funding arrangements.

Leicestershire Police Authority

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names of members of the Leicestershire Police Authority, their occupations and remuneration. [54498]

Mr. Denham: This information is not held centrally. Under the Police Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2001, a police authority must maintain a register of financial and other interests, including details of employment. There is no obligation on members to register their personal income. Under paragraph 25A of Schedule 2 of the Police Act 1996 (inserted by section 107 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001), police authorities must publish arrangements for the payment of allowances to their members. Members of Leicestershire police authority must have registered their interests by 28 May 2002. The hon. Member may wish to contact the Clerk of Leicestershire police authority for publicly available information on authority members.

Police

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police authorities have been provided with PFI credits for new buildings and major refurbishments; what the capital value of each investment is; how many new buildings are proposed within each project; and at what stage they are in the PFI procurement process. [59839]

Mr. Denham: Details on the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects for police authorities where contracts have been signed are set out in table 1. Credit approval has been given for all these schemes.

A number of forces have been given provisional approval for schemes which are in the earlier stages of procurement. These are listed in table 2.

Table 1: Police PFI schemes for which contracts have been signed

Police force	*Project*	*Number of new buildings*	*Estimated capital value (£ million)*	*Procurement stage*
Cleveland/Durham	Firearms Facility	1	9.0	Operational
Cumbria	Workington Police Station	1	5.2	Operational
Derbyshire	Ilkeston Police Station	1	5.2	Operational
Derbyshire	Divisional HQ and City Police Station	2	16.0	Operational
Dorset	Divisional HQ and three new Police Stations	4	15.0	Operational

Table 1: Police PFI schemes for which contracts have been signed

Police force	*Project*	*Number of new buildings*	*Estimated capital value (£ million)*	*Procurement stage*
Dyfed-Powys	Ammanford Police Station	1	6.0	Operational
Norfolk	HQ, Operations and Communications Centre	1	23.0	Operational
Northumbria	Mounted Police Section Facilities, stables and staff accommodation	1	1.0	Operational
Nottinghamshire	Traffic Wing and Vehicle Services	1	40.0	Operational
Thames Valley	Abingdon Area Divisional Headquarters	1	7.0	Operational
Wiltshire	Air Support—Helicopter Services	–	3.0	Operational
Cheshire	Force Headquarters	1	36.0	In development
Sussex	Centralised Custody Suites	3	30.0	In development
Total			196.4	

Table 2: Police PFI schemes in negotiation

Police force	*Project*	*Number of new buildings*	*Estimated capital value (£ million)*	*Procurement stage*
Dorset[1]	2 Joint Fire/Ambulance Stations and 1 Police Divisional Headquarters	3	15.0	OBC
Cheshire	Centralised Custody Suites	3	15.0	Bidders assessed
Gloucestershire	Force Headquarters	1	17.0	Bidders assessed
Kent	Divisional Headquarters, Medway	1	19.0	ITN
Wiltshire	Divisional Headquarters and satellite facilities	5	15.0	ITN
Cleveland	Centralised Custody Suites	3	12.0	Preferred bidder identified
Greater Manchester	Property Review—Divisional/Sub Divisional Headquarters and Police Stations	16	60.0	FBC
Gwent	Ystrad Mynach Police Station	1	5.2	FBC
North Wales	Divisional Headquarters and Major Incident Unit	1	20.0	FBC
Total			178.2	

[1] denotes joint project with the fire service

Note:

OBC—Outline Business Case endorsed in principle for credit support.

Bidders Identified—Initial bidders assessed following publication of Notice in Official Journal of the European Communities.

ITN—Invitation to Negotiate issued to a selected number of contractors.

FBC—Final Business Case: preparation or conclusion of the full and final business case for the proposed development in light of final bids.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Police Reform and Bill Unit was established; how much it cost in 2001; how many staff it employs; and what its remit is. [62348]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The Police Reform Bill and Implementation Unit—as it is now known—was established in June 2001 to co-ordinate the implementation of the police reform programme, as set out in the White Paper "Policing A New Century: A Blueprint for Reform", and to manage the Police Reform Bill.

The unit currently employs 11 staff. Total costs for the last financial year were approximately £525,000.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police stations there were by region in England and Wales, in each of the last 10 years. [62164]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Information on the number of police stations by region in each of the last 10 years is given in the table.

Comprehensive information is available from all 43 forces for the three years to March 2000, March 2001 and March 2002, but some forces were unable to provide data for earlier years. This is reflected in the table.

Police station numbers by region March 1992—March 2002[1]

Region	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
North East	57	57	58	62	64	64	63	62	98	98	96
North West	322	323	329	318	318	315	305	288	279	277	277
Yorkshire and the Humber	126	127	127	123	122	119	122	116	188	185	182
East Midlands	145	146	146	146	147	147	124	124	153	157	155
West Midlands	213	202	197	194	184	179	176	175	174	174	175
Eastern[2]	250	226	225	194	193	193	193	190	199	186	186
London[2]	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	158	146	150
South East[2]	285	274	270	263	256	253	243	242	237	234	236
South West	311	305	277	262	242	223	220	216	201	197	195
Wales	208	203	202	200	200	182	241	236	283	271	267
Totals[1]	1,919	1,865	1,833	1,764	1,728	1,677	1,689	1,651	1,970	1,925	1,919

[1] Totals given for 1992–97 cover 34 forces only. The remaining nine forces were unable to supply the relevant data. The total figures for 1998 and 1999 cover 35 forces only. For 2000, 2001 and 2002 all forces provided data.

[2] As a result of boundary changes in April 2000, 12 police stations were transferred from the Metropolitan Police Service to Essex (2), Herts (4) and Surrey (6).

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in Portsmouth have less than two years' experience; and if he will make a statement. [58561]

Mr. Denham: The information requested has been provided by the Chief Constable of Hampshire Constabulary (Mr. P. R. Kernaghan Esq. QPM).

In the Portsmouth Division of the Hampshire Constabulary there were 72 officers with less than two years' experience as at 30 April 2002. This is 17.4 per cent. of the total strength of the Division, which was 413 at the same date.

Police force performance does not depend solely upon the number or experience of officers available. The proposals in the White Paper "Policing a New Century: A blueprint for Reform" set out a radical and ambitious programme of reform, with the overall aim of reducing crime and the fear of crime and to tackle antisocial behaviour. The test of success will be whether the measures being put in place will make a real difference to the quality of life of individuals and communities up and down the country.

The public have a right to expect the same high standards of service wherever they live and the Government propose to put a framework in place to ensure that all police forces come up to the standard of the best.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are employed by the Devon and Cornwall Police Force; and if he will make a statement. [59366]

Mr. Denham: Figures supplied by the Chief Constable (Sir John Evans QPM) show that on 31 January 2002 Devon and Cornwall constabulary had 3,030 officers. This figure is for full-time equivalent officers, was an increase of 166 over force strength at 31 March 1997 and was a record strength for the force.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what point in their recruitment and training a new recruit to the police force counts for the purposes of his figures on police strength. [52336]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* New recruits to the police service count toward the statistics for police strength from the date of their appointment to a police force.

Training takes place after appointment. Recruits normally begin accompanied patrol about 19 weeks after recruitment and usually qualify to undertake independent patrol after about 31 weeks.

Police strength is at record levels, but it is not only the number of officers which matters. The Government are committed to ensuring that forces are making best use of existing resources and that patrol officers are spending as much time as possible on the front line, carrying out their core functions.

The public have a right to expect the same high standards of service wherever they live and the Government propose to put a framework in place to ensure that all police forces come up to the standard of the best.

Police Checks

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that adults working with vulnerable adults are police checked prior to commencing employment in this sector; and if he will make a statement. [49926]

Mr. Denham: Once part VII of the Care Standards Act 2000 is implemented, anyone being considered for a care position, within the terms of that Act, working with vulnerable adults will have to be the subject of a higher-level check via the Criminal Records Bureau. This will include both police records and the new list provided for under the Act of persons considered unsuitable to work with vulnerable adults.

Prison Service

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress the Prison Service has made in the last year towards improving its environmental performance; and if he will make a statement. [71808]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service continues to make progress in this area. During the last year there have been a number of achievements as regards biodiversity, energy efficiency, procurement, transport and waste management. These are described in the service's second annual environmental report published today, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

In introducing a formal greening operations policy in March 2000, the Director General of the Prison Service made clear his own personal commitment to improving the environmental performance of the service. A challenging programme of work in line with that commitment, and detailed in the report, has been set for the current year.

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the performance of Her Majesty's Prison Service in 2001–02. [71809]

Hilary Benn: I am pleased to report that the Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts have today been published. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Passport Agency will respond to the letter of 27 February from the hon. Member for Christchurch, concerning the case of Mr. Bevis and Miss Biddiscombe. [70351]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The United Kingdom Passport Service replied to the hon. Member on 12 July and have apologised for the delay in sending their response.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Chief Executive of the Integrated Casework Directorate (Nationality) will respond to the letter of the hon. Member for Christchurch sent on 17 June. [70350]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* A senior official from the Nationality Group wrote to the hon. Member on 16 July 2002 in response to his earlier correspondence.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on preventive measures to fight violence against children, young persons and women (Daphne) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58456]

Mr. Denham: The Daphne Committee assists the European Commission in the management and implementation of a programme which co-funds projects to promote the protection of children, young persons and women from violence and abuse. It normally meets twice a year, initially to agree the annual work programme and criteria for evaluating the selecting bids for funding and subsequently to discuss the bids which have been received and to agree the allocation of funds to successful projects.

The United Kingdom is represented on the Committee by a Home Office official (for issues concerning domestic violence and violence against women), an official from the Department of Health (for child protection issues) and an official from the United Kingdom Permanent Representation in Brussels.

The Daphne programme is funded by the European Community budget and travel costs to attend Committee meetings are met by the European Commission. The Home Office pays a subsistence allowance to cover attendance at a Committee meeting.

The Commission is required to prepare reports on the implementation of the programme in its second and final years which will be submitted to the Council and European Parliament. The reports will also be published in the EUROPA internet website. I do not see a need for further measures to increase the Committee's accountability and transparency.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by his Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64611]

Beverley Hughes: 57 statutory instruments have been made by Home Office Ministers since 1 January 2002. Three have been revoked. Information is not available about the costs and savings of implementation and repeal and could not be made available other than at disproportionate cost.

Information Database

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 882W, if he will place in the Library a full description of the network information database. [70070]

Beverley Hughes: I presume that the right hon. Member is referring to the Case Information Database (CID), which was developed and implemented during 2001–02 as the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND's) main database system.

It is not intended to place a description of the database in the Library.

The functionality and data management is subject to continual revision. In that connection, a significant enhancement programme is currently under way to enable the implementation of many IND policy initiatives and process improvements planned for the next two years. It is considered that the work required in maintaining a "full description" of the database would prove disproportionate.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 882W, if he will place in the Library an explanation of how the database will be used to monitor the Department's performance; [70072]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 882W, when the casework information database will be fully operational. [70071]

Beverley Hughes: The Case Information Database (CID) was successfully developed and implemented during 2001–02 as the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND's) main database system.

It is not intended to place in the Library an explanation specifically of how CID is used to monitor performance. The means by which IND monitors its business and it's approach to performance management generally are described within documents such as IND's Business Plan and the plans of individual units within IND.

Home Office Traffic Reporting

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the procedure is relating to the production of documents at a police station within seven days of being stopped in a motor vehicle; and whether a receipt or NCR copy should be provided on production of an HORT2 form. [59449]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Police officers are entitled under the Road Traffic Act 1988 to require motorists to produce a range of driver and vehicle related documents for inspection. A motorist failing to produce such documents on request is guilty of an offence, unless he produces them at a police station of his nomination within seven days.

If any of the required documents cannot be made available at the time of the police request, the motorist is issued with a form HORT 1. This formally notifies him that within the specified time he must present the documents at a police station of his choice, which is recorded on the form.

The HORT 1 is in two parts. The top copy is issued to the driver, the bottom is retained within the issuing force to monitor and control the subsequent presentation of the documents. Upon their presentation, staff at the nominated police station inspect them and record the necessary details on a two part document known as the HORT 2. One part of the HORT 2 is then retained by the nominated police station and the second part sent to the originating police force so that they can verify compliance with the original request.

The HORT system has no statutory basis. It is operated by the police for administrative convenience without any direct Government involvement. In 1996 an Association of Chief Police Officers Working Group considered whether the system should include the issue of a receipt for documents produced. The Group unanimously concluded that the costs incurred would far exceed any benefit.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 19 July 2002

PRIME MINISTER

Advisory Committee on Business Appointments

Albert Owen: To ask the Prime Minister if he has received the Fifth report of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments; who the members of the Committee are; and if he will make a statement. [72102]

The Prime Minister: The Advisory Committee on Business Appointments has submitted its fifth report to me and I have today placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses. The report gives an account of its work from 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002.

The Committee is an independent body which advises me on business appointment applications from the most senior civil servants and members of the Armed Forces. Where the applicant is a senior diplomat, it advises the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under the similar rules which apply in the Diplomatic Service. The Committee also gives advice, under published guidelines, to former Ministers about any outside appointments they wish to take up after leaving office. It includes members with extensive experience of public life in England, Scotland and Wales, and, in this respect, it acts as a joint body although it provides its advice directly to those who seek it in accordance with the provisions of their Ministerial Code.

The current members of the Committee are:

The Right Hon. Lord Mayhew of Twysden QC DL (Chairman)
Sir John Blelloch KCB (Vice-chairman)
The Right Hon. Lord Morris of Aberavon QC
The Right Hon. Lord Maclennan of Rogart
The Lord Wilson of Tillyorn KT GCMG
Admiral Sir Kenneth Eaton GBE KCB FEng FIEE
Sir Bryan Nicholson

The Committee has an important role, and I am very grateful to all the members for giving their time so freely to it.

TRANSPORT

Rail Regulator

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply of 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 982W, on the Strategic Rail Authority and Rail Regulator, if he will list the type or nature of the occasions on which it is deemed approporiate for him and other departmental ministers to meet the *(a)* Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority and *(b)* Rail Regulator. [70639]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and other departmental Ministers would expect to meet the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority and the Rail Regulator to discuss matters of common interest, and at wider industry meetings and events.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the responsibilities of *(a)* the office of the Rail Regulator and *(b)* the office of the international rail regulator; and if he will make a statement. [70661]

Mr. Jamieson: The functions and duties of the Rail Regulator are set out in Part I of the Railways Act 1993 as amended by the Transport Act 2000; and those of the International Rail Regulator in the Railway Regulations 1998 (SI 1998/1340).

Strategic Rail Authority

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Strategic Rail Authority will consult on its review of rail fares policy. [72100]

Mr. Darling: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has today published its consultation paper on fares policy. Copies have been placed in the House libraries and the document can also be viewed on the SRA website (www.sra.gov.uk). The consultation period will end on 11 October 2002. This process is part of the SRA's review of fares policy announced in the Authority's Strategic Plan, published in January this year.

Network Rail

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his statement of 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 971–73, on Network Rail, if he will make a statement on the Government's proposal to incur the contingent liabilities set out in the associated minutes he laid before Parliament. [72012]

Mr. Darling: In my statement on 27 June on Network Rail, I informed Members of two minutes I had laid in the House that day, setting out the contingent liabilities I proposed to incur on behalf of the Government to enable Railtrack plc to be acquired by Network Rail.

This classification of Network Rail was a decision taken, not by the Government, but by the Office for National Statistics. The ONS takes independent decisions in matters concerning the classification, preparation and publication of statistics. It was their view that Network Rail would be classified as a private sector corporation — once its board has been ratified by its membership — and that the company's borrowing could be classified as private sector borrowing in the national accounts. In reaching this conclusion the ONS has, I understand, based their considerations upon the European System of Accounts 1995 (ESA95).

As I explained to the House in my statement of 27 June the SRA is providing Network Rail with standby credit facilities. It is the commercial debt markets that will provide the required borrowing for Network Rail, with the credit facilities called upon in identified, though unlikely, circumstances. On this basis the SRA's standby credit facilities are considered to be contingent liabilities and would only score as public expenditure in the extremely unlikely event of them being called upon.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of the National Audit Office has, in his capacity as auditor of the SRA, concluded that Network Rail should be accounted for as a subsidiary of the SRA. This judgement is based on the application of UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (UK-GAAP). As such the expenditure and liabilities of Network Rail will be accounted for in an open and transparent way—a very welcome step.

The provision of any funds necessary to meet the SRA's financial obligations could be made by way of grant under paragraph 7 of schedule 14 of the Transport Act 2000 or by permitting the SRA to borrow in accordance with paragraph 8 of that schedule. Whether the SRA's financial obligations (subject to normal supply procedures) would be met by a grant, by allowing it to borrow, or a mixture of both would be determined if the need arose.

It therefore remains my intention to proceed as proposed and incur the liabilities set out in the minutes.

The Government judges that the contingent liabilities set out in the minutes I laid before the House on 27 June provide robust means of quickly setting up a strong and well-managed company to take over the responsibilities of Railtrack as network operator. And to do so by uniting the rail industry to work together under the strategic guidance of the SRA with Government with the overall aim of delivering the efficient, safe and reliable railway network that customers want.

Rail Services (Plymouth)

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement with respect to *(a)* achieving and *(b)* building on the three hour target for rail journeys to Plymouth. [67600]

Mr. Spellar: I understand that the winter timetable will include a 3 hour service between London and Plymouth. The SRA has recently concluded a consultation on the potential combination of the Great Western and Thames franchises in 2006, which would provide an opportunity to review service patterns with a view to improving journey times between London and Plymouth, and other destinations in the South West. Decisions will be announced in due course.

Commuter Lines

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which lines are to be considered as commuter lines with regard to the intended output for more frequent services on commuter lines as given in his 10-year plan at paragraph 6.22, page 49; and if he will make a statement. [71158]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Those on which a substantial proportion of passenger journeys and/or passenger kilometres involve travel to, or from, work. There is no standard definition, but traffic on such lines is generally heaviest in the morning and evening peaks.

Passenger Rail Demand

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the methodology behind his Department's estimate, on page 20, paragraph 49 of the 10-year plan background analysis, that just under two thirds of the increased passenger rail demand due to fare reductions and service quality improvements will be from car users switching to rail; what percentage of the total estimated increase in passenger kilometres, resulting from the 10-year plan, this will represent; and what estimate has been made as to the number of car users switching to rail as a result of *(a)* economic growth and (c) car traffic growth. [71055]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The estimate of the proportion of rail demand that would be a result of car users switching to rail came from evidence available at the time, collated by consultants to the Department, with the methodology reported in "Modelling using the National Road Traffic Forecasting framework for *Tackling Congestion and Pollution* and *Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan—Technical Report*" (DETR, December 2002).

This proportion represents about 15 per cent points of the growth in passenger demand over 2000 levels (from the total 50 per cent increase), as the two thirds factor was only applicable for patronage growth resulting from plan policies.

No separate estimates were made of the impacts of economic growth and car traffic growth respectively. It is intended that the multi-modal National Transport Model we are developing will be able to address such questions in the future.

Rail Freight

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many tonnes of freight were moved by *(a)* rail and *(b)* road in each of the last five years. [71058]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The figures for Great Britain are set out below:

	Road billion tonne kms	*Rail billion tonne kms*
1997–98	152.4	16.9
1998–99	150.5	17.3
1999–2000	149.4	18.2
2000–01	149.5	18.1
2001–02	not available	19.7

Rail Investment

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* proportion and *(b)* total value is of the required passenger infrastructure and rolling stock investment, as outlined in the SRA plan, that is expected to be funded from increases in fare revenues. [71056]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan assumed no change to existing policies on fares regulation.

Safer Stations

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply of 2 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 208W, on safer stations if he will list those train operating companies which are committed to seeking accreditation to which he refers; what steps have been taken; and when full accreditation is likely to be granted. [70642]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is working with the Train Operating Companies, as part of the franchise renewal and extension process, to agree commitments to both the Secure Stations Scheme and the Secured Car Park Scheme. As a number of these franchise negotiations are currently taking place, it would not be appropriate to disclose which Train Operating Companies are seeking Secure Stations accreditation for all their stations.

Nuclear Waste Shipments

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contingency plans have been put in place against the event of a shipwreck involving a ship carrying nuclear waste to Sellafield off the coast of the UK. [70372]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) response to an incident involving a ship carrying radioactive materials will follow the procedures laid down in the National Contingency Plan (NCP) for Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations. The MCA would lead and co-ordinate a multi-agency response bringing in key organisations to provide advice and support as required.

British Nuclear Fuels plc (BNFL) and its subsidiary Pacific Nuclear Transport Limited (PNTL) have produced emergency response procedures that are compatible with the NCP for their fleet of seven vessels which are specifically designed for the carriage of radioactive materials. Each ship of the fleet has a Shipboard Marine Emergency Plan which follows the guidelines prepared by the Marine Environment Protection Committee of the International Maritime Organization. BNFL and other nuclear operators are technically competent in responding to incidents involving radioactive material and would provide radiological advice to the MCA as required.

National Air Traffic Services

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the appropriate level of insurance cover for NATS; [71117]

(2) what level of insurance he is requiring from NATS; [71118]

(3) what discussions he has held with NATS over their insurance cover. [71116]

Mr. Jamieson: With effect from 1 July NATS has obtained aviation third party liability insurance to a level comparable with that secured by other major aviation interests post the events of 11 September.

NATS is continuing to investigate alternative markets that it has been advised may facilitate further cover. NATS and its lenders will take a view of this matter once quotes have been obtained for this additional layer of insurance.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many air traffic controllers were *(a)* employed and *(b)* in training in each year since 1990; [71121]

(2) what steps *(a)* have been taken and *(b)* are planned to increase the number of trained national air traffic controllers; and if he will make a statement; [71160]

(3) how many air traffic controllers were *(a)* employed and *(b)* in training in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement; [71162]

(4) what steps he has taken to increase the number of air traffic controllers; [71119]

(5) what the target staff complement is of National Air Traffic Services; how many vacancies and at what levels are unfilled; how many individuals have *(a)* left, *(b)* retired from and *(c)* joined NATS in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [71163]

Mr. Jamieson: These are operational matters for National Air Traffic Services (NATS).

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what discussions he has had with NATS, the unions, the CAA and other air traffic control providers about increasing the number of air traffic controllers; and what representations he has had from these bodies on this subject; [71120]

(2) what recent *(a)* representations he and his Department has received and *(b)* discussions he and his Department has had with (i) NATS and (ii) the CAA regarding the number of trained national air traffic controllers; and if he will make a statement. [71161]

Mr. Jamieson: Ensuring that there is an adequate number of air traffic controllers, is an operational matter for NATS.

However, the Department, in its capacity as a responsible shareholder, has regular meetings with NATS. It is understood that unions and management are working together to find an effective and acceptable solution, that accords with the requirements of the air traffic control approval granted by the CAA.

Railway Statistics

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the methodology used by the SRA in order to seasonally adjust passenger kilometres. [71063]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Passenger Kilometres data are collected in four-weekly periods and are susceptible to seasonal effects. The SRA seasonally adjusts the four weekly data using a variant of the "X11 Arima" package, developed by Statistics Canada and used (and recommended) by the Office for National Statistics.

The SRA publishes both seasonally adjusted and unadjusted figures.

Vehicle Charging

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he will publish guidelines related to *(a)* workplace parking and *(b)* road use charging; whether the guidance will be retrospective; and if he will make a statement; [70814]

(2) when he will publish guidelines related to *(a)* work place parking and *(b)* road user charging; and if this guidance will be retrospective. [71051]

Mr. Jamieson: I am considering the nature and scope of guidance on the workplace parking levy and on road user charging.

Congestion

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the level of congestion in large urban areas in England was in 2000; and what criteria are used to define such areas. [71625]

Mr. Jamieson: We plan to publish congestion data relating to 2000 in the autumn. These data will form a baseline against which future congestion data will be compared. For the PSA congestion target, large urban areas are defined as all those urban areas with a population of above 250,000: Greater London; the former metropolitan counties centred on the cities of Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield; and the urban areas of Blackpool, Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol, Hull, Leicester, Middlesbrough, Nottingham, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southampton and Stoke. These urban areas may include parts of neighbouring local authority areas to give consistency with the area definitions in the Department's National Transport Model.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the level of congestion was on the inter-urban trunk road network in 2000; and what criteria are to be used to measure changes in congestion each year. [71626]

Mr. Jamieson: We plan to publish congestion data relating to 2000 in the autumn. These data will form a baseline against which future congestion data will be compared.

Multi-Modal Studies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans there are for *(a)* guidance and *(b)* legislation relating to the implementation of multi-modal studies; and if he will make a statement. [70742]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no plans for (a) guidance or (b) legislation relating to the implementation of Multi-Modal Studies. Implementation of agreed recommendations from the Studies will be the responsibility of the relevant delivery agencies. Government Offices will have a co-ordinating role.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the new trunk road and bypass schemes which *(a)* have been given approval and *(b)* are awaiting approval after being part of a multi-modal study. [70618]

Mr. Jamieson: We have made announcements on three Multi-Modal Studies and have asked the Highways Agency and relevant local authorities to take forward work on the trunk road and bypass schemes listed below. Final decisions on schemes will be taken following completion of the normal statutory processes.

Access to Hastings
    MMS — A21 Tonbridge to Pembury
        A21 South of Pembury
Cambridge to Huntingdon
    MMS — Widening and partial realignment of the A14 in the Cambridge to Huntingdon corridor
South East Manchester
    MMS — M60/M67/A57 Denton Interchange.
        A6 Stockport N/S Bypass
        A523/A555 Poynton Bypass
        A555 Manchester Airport Link Road West
        A34 Alderley Edge Bypass

A number of other Multi-Modal Studies have submitted Final Reports to Regional Planning Bodies. Study recommendations including those relating to trunk roads and bypasses will be considered in the light of Regional Planning Body advice.

Postal Voting

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to *(a)* safeguard the secrecy of the ballot, *(b)* protect voters from intimidation and *(c)* ensure that postal votes are completed by the voter to whom they belong, in postal ballots. [59174]

Ms Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply. We recognise that it is essential to make sure that new methods of voting do not undermine the integrity and security of the election process. Safeguards in relation to the postal voting have been in place for many years, and we have no reason to believe that they do not operate satisfactorily in all postal ballots. The Electoral Commission is evaluating the local authority pilot schemes that ran all postal ballots in the May 2002 local and mayoral elections, including issues such as security and privacy. The Commission will publish its report on 1 August 2002.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CDC Capital Partners

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list (a) those to whom CDC Capital Partners' sold its enterprise investments in the last three years and (b) the enterprise investments sold to them. [67390]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* In the last three years, CDC has sold the following significant equity investments to the following companies:

2000:

Investment	*Buyer*
Tip Top (Nicaragua)	Sun Valley Foods (Cargill Inc)
Usutu Pulp (Swaziland)	Sappi
Industrial Credit Company (Zambia)	Loita Capital Partners
Nanga Farms (Zambia)	Incumbent management team
PT Semen Andalas, (Indonesia)	Lafarge

2001:

Investment	*Buyer*
Housing Development Finance Corp (India)	Swiss Re Insurance Group
Pan Africa Cement	Lafarge
Zambia Sugar Corporation	Illovo Sugar
Eutco, Kawalazi, Sable (Tanzania and Malawi)	Global
Rwenzori Highlands Tea, Uganda	James Finlay
CG Glass, (India)	Koninklijke Philips Electronics

There have been no outright disposals so far in 2002.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will break down by (a) region and (b) sector the representations her Department has received regarding the environmental impact of CDC Capital Partners' investments since 1997. [67367]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* In 1999 my Department received a representation concerning orange peel waste deposit by CDC in the Area de Conservacion Guanacaste, Costa Rica, under a local agreement. This was part of an experiment to recycle organic material to rehabilitate an area of degraded cattle pasture. In 2000 and 2001 representations were received concerning deforestation issues relating to oil palm plantations respectively in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. The latter included concerns about protection of the habitat of the Queen Alexandra's Birdwing Butterly.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list the debts to the Treasury by CDC Capital Partners. [67388]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* CDC owes Government £755m in respect of loans made to CDC by my Department in the past. These were in the form of exchequer advances funded from the development assistance programme. CDC does not owe any debt to HM Treasury.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what criteria are used in determining annual performance-related bonuses to CDC Capital Group executives [67371]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The annual bonus pool, from which individual bonuses are paid, is determined by the Board from a set of objectives which is agreed each year. These objectives cover the areas of financial performance, portfolio management and non-financial factors, and are weighted appropriately:

Financial — accounting for 60 per cent of the pool

Portfolio management — accounting for 20 per cent of the pool

Non-financial — accounting for 20 per cent of the pool

Individual bonuses also depend on a number of factors including a 360-degree performance review and the individual's performance against personal targets.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list the sub-Saharan agri-businesses advertised for sale in 2001 by CDC Capital Partners; and what proportion those businesses represented in 2001 in CDC Capital Partners' sub-Sahran agri-businesses. [67381]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The agribusinesses advertised for sale in 2001 are listed below. The figures in brackets represent their approximate proportionate value of the 2001 sub Saharan agribusiness portfolio.

Rwenzori Highlands Tea (10 per cent)

Shiselweni Forestry (2 per cent)

Sulmac (3 per cent)

York Farms (2 per cent)

Mpongwe Farm (15 per cent)

Kilombero Valley Teak (5 per cent)

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how many Commonwealth nationals employed by CDC Capital Partners have been made redundant since 1997. [67413]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Since 1997 a total of 217 Commonwealth nationals (including UK employees) have been made redundant.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what *(a)* current and *(b)* proposed (i) annual performance related bonus programmes and (ii) long term incentive plans exist for CDC Capital Partners' mid-level executives. [67373]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:*

(i)*(a)* A current annual bonus programme exists which allows the Remuneration Committee to approve cash awards up to 50 per cent of an individual's base salary.

(b) No additional or new bonus plan is proposed.

(ii)*(a)* A long term incentive plan linked to NAV growth over a three-year period is in place.

(b) No new long-term plan has been proposed.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what the proportional growth of CDC Capital Partners' *(a)* retail and *(b)* healthcare investments has been since 1997. [67393]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:) (a)* retail — in 1997, retail represented 0.86 per cent of CDC's portfolio; today, retail represents 4.61 per cent of CDC's portfolio

(b) healthcare — in 1997, healthcare represented 0.16 per cent of CDC's portfolio; today, healthcare represents 3.25 per cent of CDC's portfolio

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list the countries where CDC Capital Partners *(a)* has received and *(b)* receives exemptions on environmental regulations on its investments. [67377]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* CDC Capital Partners does not ask for or receive exemptions on environmental regulations on any of its investments. CDC makes investments on the basis that any shortfall in the standards of social and environmental performance of the company, not only against local legislation but also against international good practice, will be addressed. Where substantial environmental improvements are required, it is possible that the investee company will request exemption from local environmental regulation in the short term, but this is only acceptable to CDC in the context of long-term improvement.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list CDC Capital Partners' agricultural investments in sub-Saharan Africa by country since 1997; describing the commercial activities in each case. [67361]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* CDC Capital Partners' new investments in agribusiness:

Year	*Country*	*Company name*	*Commercial activity*
2002	Tanzania	Tatepa	Tea blending and packaging business
1999	Tanzania	South Highlands Tea	Privatisation of smallholder tea factories
1998	Zimbabwe	Ariston	Diversified agribusiness holding co
1998	Kenya	Sulmac	Modernise floriculture and develop vegetable enterprise for export
1997	South Africa	New Farmers	Agricultural Investment Fund
1997	Mozambique	AGRIMO	Cotton production and ginning

Including the investments listed above, CDC has 37 agribusiness equity holdings as at end 2001.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list the countries where CDC Capital Partners *(a)* has received and *(b)* receives tax breaks on its investments. [67369]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* There are 44 countries in which CDC has a tax exemption not always available to other companies. Until recently CDC also received tax exemption in Costa Rica under an Operating Conditions Agreement (OCA) which CDC voluntarily gave up due to special circumstances in 2000.

A list of the 44 countries where CDC currently receives a tax exemption is below:

Country

1 Anguilla
2 Bangladesh
3 Barbados
4 Belize
5 Bolivia
6 Botswana
7 Cameroon
8 Cote d'Ivoire
9 Cuba
10 Dominica
11 Dominican Republic
12 Ecuador
13 Egypt
14 Ghana
15 Guatemala
16 Guyana
17 Honduras
18 Indonesia
19 Jamaica
20 Kenya
21 Laos
22 Malaysia
23 Mauritius
24 Montserrat
25 Mozambique
26 Namibia
27 Nicaragua
28 Nigeria
29 Pakistan
30 Philippines
31 Sierra Leone
32 Solomon Islands
33 South Africa
34 Sri Lanka
35 St Kitts & Nevis
36 Sudan
37 Tanzania
38 Thailand
39 Trinidad & Tobago
40 Uganda
41 Vietnam
42 Zambia

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will list the unsuccessful formal investments and sale tenders in which CDC Capital Partners has participated, by sector, since 1997; [67398]

(2) if she will list the unsuccessful formal investments and sale tenders in which CDC Capital Partners has participated, by country, since 1997. [67341]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* This information is not kept by CDC.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list CDC Capital Partners' disposal of investments by *(a)* sector, *(b)* size and *(c)* country since 1997. [67342]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Full details are not available without disproportionate cost. However for a list of significant disposals, I would refer the hon. Member to my reply to his question. [67390]

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list by *(a)* country and *(b)* sector the environmental impact studies (i) performed and (ii) contracted by CDC Capital Partners since 1997. [67378]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* An environmental impact study is carried out by CDC on every investment where the environmental risk is high, and where thorough mitigation, management and monitoring is therefore required. Where the risk is perceived to be medium or low, a detailed study and management plan is not required but a basic assessment of environmental issues will be undertaken by the Investment Manager, with advice from CDC's Business Principles Unit.

CDC does not hold records of environmental impact studies going back to 1997, but the following investments made in each of the years 1997 to 2002 were subject to a detailed environmental review.

Year	*Country*	*Sector*	*Client Company*
1997	Ghana	Minerals Oil & Gas	Abosso Goldfields Limited
1997	Kenya	Other Sectors	Nairobi Business Park Ltd
1997	Tanzania	Minerals Oil & Gas	East Africa Gold Mines Ltd
1997	Tanzania	Property	International House Property Ltd
1997	Uganda	Property	Rwenzori Courts Limited
1997	Zimbabwe	Agribusiness	Lake Harvest Aquaculture (Pvt) Ltd
1997	Indonesia	Agribusiness	PT Harapan Sawit Lestari
1997	Philippines	Cement	Alsons Cement Corporation
1997	Philippines	Power	Mirant Sual Corporation
1997	Solomon Islands	Minerals Oil & Gas	Gold Ridge Mining Ltd
1997	Bolivia	Other Sectors	Sociedad Boliviana de Cemento, SA
1997	Nicaragua	Agribusiness	Tip Top Industrial SA
1997	Sri Lanka	Power	Asia Power (Pvt) Ltd
1998	Ghana	Minerals Oil & Gas	Satellite Goldfields Ltd
1998	Mozambique	Minerals Oil & Gas	Mozal SARL
1998	South Africa	Minerals Oil & Gas	Kuyasa Mining (Pty) Ltd
1998	Papua New Guinea	Minerals Oil & Gas	Morobe Consolidated Goldfields Ltd
1998	Costa Rica	Property	Torre Mercedes SA
1998	India	Power	Lanco Kondapalli Power Ltd
1999	Cote d'Ivoire	Power	Azito Energie SA
1999	Indonesia	Agribusiness	PT Agro Indomas
1999	Indonesia	Agribusiness	PT Harapan Sawit Lestari
1999	Guatemala	Power	Orzunil 1 SA
1999	Guyana	Power	Americas and Caribbean Power Ltd
1999	Nicaragua	Power	Empresa Energetica Corinto Ltd
2000	Kenya	Other Sectors	The Junction Ltd
2000	Kenya	Power	Tsavo Power Co Ltd
2000	South Africa	Infrastructure	Comazar (Pty) Ltd
2000	Zambia	Minerals Oil & Gas	Konkola Copper Mines Ltd
2000	Indonesia	Agribusiness	PT Asiatic Persada
2000	Bolivia	Minerals Oil & Gas	Compania Minera Colquiri S.A.
2000	Dominican Republic	Power	Hart Energy Haina Ltd
2000	Dominican Republic	Power	La Compania de Electricidad de San Pedro de Macoris
2000	Guatemala	Power	Puerto Quetzal Power Ltd Liability Company
2000	Sri Lanka	Infrastructure	South Asia Gateway Terminals (Pvt) Ltd
2001	South Africa	Minerals Oil & Gas	Aquarius Platinum Ltd
2001	Tanzania	Power	Songas Company Ltd
2001	Nicaragua	Power	Empresa Energetica Corinto Ltd
2001	Sri Lanka	Power	Ace Power Generation Anuradhapura (Pvt) Ltd
2001	Sri Lanka	Power	Ace Power Generation Matara (Pvt) Ltd

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list the investments visited by CDC Capital Partners for monitoring purposes; and how many times each has been visited since 1997. [67362]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* It is not possible to answer this question without disproportionate cost.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list, by country, the publicly guaranteed debt owed to CDC Capital Partners. [67386]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* As part of CDC's restructuring efforts, all outstanding public sector loans, guaranteed by host governments, were transferred to the Department for International Development in 2000. Therefore, there is no publicly guaranteed debt owed to CDC Capital Partners.

The Government does not stand as guarantor for any debt owed to CDC.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list the funds containing private capital *(a)* managed and *(b)* joint-managed by CDC Capital Partners; and how much capital has been in each fund since 1997. [67364]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Between 1997 and 2000, CDC Capital Partners did not jointly manage any private equity funds. In 2001 CDC formed a joint venture fund management company with Norfund under the name Aureos Capital. A series of country funds which hitherto had been solely managed by CDC were rolled up as part of Aureos Capital and are now jointly managed.

Funds containing private capital managed and joint-managed by CDC Capital Partners since 1997

	Country/ region	*Launch date*	*Size of fund (US$m)*
Managed regional funds			
South Asia Regional Fund	South Asia	1998	108
Comafin	Sub-Saharan Africa	1996	60
Managed country funds			
Enterprise Capital Fund	South Africa	1995	20
Managed and transferred to Aureos in 2001 (2001 onwards—joint management with Norfund)			
Central America Investment Facility	Costa Rica	1996	26.4
Ghana Venture Capital Fund	Ghana	1992	5.8
Acacia Fund	Kenya	1996	19.7
Indian Ocean Regional Fund	Mauritius	1999	18.0
Mauritius Venture Capital Fund	Mauritius	1995	7.5
Mozambique Investment Company	Mozambique	1998	14.0
Kula Fund	Pacific Islands	1997	16.9
NDBVI (Sri Lanka) "B" and Ayojana Fund	Sri Lanka	1993	16.7
Tanzania Venture Capital Fund	Tanzania	1993	7.6
Fedha Fund	Tanzania	1998	13.0
Zambia Venture Capital Fund	Zambia	1996	12.5
Takura Fund	Zimbabwe	1996	6.3
Aureos Capital Fund		2002	33
Jointly managed with CGU in China			
CGU-CDC China Investment Company	China	2000	100

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what discussions she has had with CDC Capital Group board members regarding annual performance-related bonuses to CDC Capital Group executives. [67372]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* There have been periodic discussions over the last two years between my Department, the Treasury and senior CDC management about the Long Term Incentive Plan (LTIP), which has been approved on an annual basis. Otherwise annual performance bonuses to CDC staff are the responsibility of the Board of CDC and its Remuneration Committee.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what proportion of CDC Capital Partners' *(a)* retail and *(b)* healthcare investments are in (i) low-income and (ii) least-developed nations. [67392]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* CDC has no retail or healthcare investments in low-income or least-developed countries.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list CDC Capital Partners' investment partners by *(a)* sector, *(b)* country and *(c)* size since 1997. [67344]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* It is not possible to answer this question without disproportionate cost.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when her Department's review period for the financial advice service provider in relation CDC Capital Partners *(a)* began and *(b)* ends. [69056]

Clare Short: An advertisement was submitted to the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC) on 5 June inviting expressions of interest. The new contract is due to be awarded from 1 August 2002.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will renew the contract of CDC Capital Partners' chief executive. [69052]

Clare Short: The Chief Executive's contract is with CDC, not with my Department. The contract is automatically renewed unless either side (the employer or the employee) serves notice.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development who *(a)* has participated and *(b)* will participate in selecting a financial advice service provider in relation to CDC Capital Partners. [69044]

Clare Short: An advertisement was submitted to the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC) on 5 June, in accordance with EU procurement rules, inviting expressions of interest. Formal bids have yet to be considered. The independent member on the evaluation panel has yet to be decided.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Treasury regarding her Department's solicitation of financial advice service providers in relation to CDC Capital Partners. [69060]

Clare Short: No discussions have been held with the Treasury about the re-tendering of the financial advice consultancy to DFID for work on CDC. The Treasury has been kept informed about the exercise.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the status is of CDC Capital Partners' *(a)* chief executive and *(b)* chairman. [69050]

Clare Short: Information about the Chairman and the Chief Executive is contained in the annual review for 2001. Copies of this are available in the Library of the House.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what tenders criteria her Department uses in selecting financial advice service providers in relation to CDC Capital Partners; [69042]

(2) what criteria were used in selecting a financial advice service provider in relation to CDC Capital Partners. [69043]

Clare Short: Formal bids will be assessed according the following criteria:

a. Demonstrated experience and knowledge of personnel and firm in *(a)* corporate finance, *(b)* private equity investment management *(c)* private equity and other funding instruments, *(d)* fund management contracts, *(e)* fund performance assessment, *(f)* incentivisation arrangement for fund managers and other personnel, *(g)* negotiation of transactions in these and related fields, and *(h)* access to current information on markets parameters and trends. (15 per cent).

b. Demonstrated experience and knowledge in capital markets and investment conditions in the poorer developing countries. (10 per cent)

c. Demonstrated capability to access potential UK and international investors and partners for CDC, including institutional investors, development finance institutions, and corporate investors. (5 per cent)

d. Demonstrated recent experience and understanding of UK Government PPPs and privatisations. (20 per cent)

e. Demonstrated appreciation of DFID's approach to pro-poor private sector development and the role of CDC in this context. (10 per cent)

f. Methodology of work proposed. (5 per cent)

g. Total cost, fees, average daily rates, number of days offered, special contractual conditions. (35 per cent)

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which financial advice service providers followed up on their expressions of interest regarding providing financial advice in relation to CDC Capital Partners; and when the follow-ups took place. [69058]

Clare Short: One firm of consultants, following its expression of interest, approached the department with a query about the form in which its proposal should be submitted. It would not be appropriate to identify the firm, and the query was answered promptly. A further firm, which was not invited to make a formal bid, has also now approached the Department to ask why it was not short-listed. The closing date for receiving bids was 18 July.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when her Department expects to complete the tender for providing financial advice in relation to CDC Capital Partners. [69054]

Clare Short: It is currently envisaged that the contract will be awarded on 25 July, with the new contract taking effect from 1 August 2002.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of CDC Capital

Partners in improving the export competitiveness of lesser developed countries; and if she will make a statement. [69172]

Clare Short: None.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the background investigations performed on service providers tendering expressions of interest in providing financial advice in relation to CDC Capital Partners. [69046]

Clare Short: None. No background investigations have been performed.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has received regarding private investors' expressions of investment interest in CDC Capital Partners since 1999; and which private investors expressed investment interest and when. [69049]

Clare Short: No direct representations have been received.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what responses she has received, and when, to her Department's notice seeking expressions of interest from financial advice service providers in providing her Department with financial advice in relation CDC Capital Partners. [69057]

Clare Short: As the re-tendering exercise is currently in progress, it would not be appropriate to divulge this information.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the current performance of CDC Capital Partners' chief executive would trigger a bonus payment. [69053]

Clare Short: Yes. The Chief Executive is eligible for a bonus along with all other CDC employees. Criteria are set each year in line with CDC's business plan. The amount is determined by the Remuneration Committee and, in the case of the Chief Executive, may be discussed with the Department.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the real terms expenditure of CDC Capital Partners was on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* advertising and *(c)* press and public relations in each of the financial years since 1997; and what the figures are for the present year. [69171]

Clare Short: An exact breakdown is not available except at disproportionate cost. CDC retained a UK public relations agency in 1997 and 1998, but stopped their services in mid 1999.

CDC uses consultancies on a project basis, as and when required. CDC has no advertising/sponsorship campaign in place.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how long the contract is for the financial advice service provider in relation to CDC Capital Partners. [69045]

Clare Short: It is currently intended that the contract will be for 24 months, with the possibility of an extension for up to twelve months.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with CDC Capital Partners' senior executives regarding her Department's tender for financial advisers in relation to CDC Capital Partners. [69061]

Clare Short: None.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the contract of CDC Capital Partners' chief executive expires. [69051]

Clare Short: The contract of the Chief Executive would normally expire on his 60th birthday unless terminated earlier.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the financial advice service providers with whom her Department is negotiating to provide financial advice in relation to CDC Capital Partners. [69059]

Clare Short: It would not be appropriate to divulge which firms have been invited to tender for the financial advice consultancy.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the external consultants and advisors retained and used by her Department in respect of its plans to tender for financial advice in relation to CDC Capital Partners. [69055]

Clare Short: None.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her assessment is of the implementation CDC Capital Partners privatisation plan. [69047]

Clare Short: In the current market conditions, the Government does not believe that it will be possible to sell a majority of CDC's shares in the near future at a price that represents good value for the development assistance programme. We are therefore exploring alternative ways to achieve the objective of the Public Private Partnership, to mobilise increased investment for the benefit of poorer developing countries.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's criteria are for private investors in CDC Capital Partners. [69048]

Clare Short: The willingness of private investors to invest in CDC or to work with CDC in joint ventures or at project level is entirely a commercial matter. Investors will, at the outset, be aware of the distinctive nature of CDC, and its commitment to investing for the benefit of developing countries and to ethical business principles.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information she has collated in respect of the humanitarian situation in the Sud Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and if she will make a statement. [70329]

Clare Short: We are trying to monitor recent developments in Sud Kivu, particularly the renewed fighting in the Hauts Plateaux region, although the current insecurity and problems of access have made it difficult for the international community to obtain a full picture of what is happening. We are aware of the distressing humanitarian situation for the many people who appear to have been displaced by the recent fighting there. Together with the wider international community and the UN we are pressing for the cessation of all fighting in the eastern DRC, the full implementation of the Lusaka peace accords and for the armed groups to allow full humanitarian access to the areas affected.

We are helping to fund a range of humanitarian support in the Kivus through the UN and international NGOs. My officials are presently visiting this region to monitor progress on current projects, and for discussions with local and international NGOs on the scope for further DFID support for peace and reconciliation-related activities in the area.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the ~~importance of~~ economic factors in respect of the continuing violence in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [70330]

Clare Short: The primary factor in the continuing violence in eastern DRC is the absence of a political settlement between the main parties to the conflict and the attempt by forces that supported the genocide in Rwanda to invade the country. The final report of the UN Panel on resource exploitation in the DRC is due in the autumn. We shall study the report carefully and participate fully in the Security Council's deliberations on its recommendations. We are very conscious that the sad history of the Congo has meant that these resources have never been used for the benefit of the people of the Congo. We continue to believe that the surest way of converting resource exploitation into legitimate trade to benefit the Congolese people is to achieve an end to the conflict and restore peace in the region.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has made to *(a)* the Government of Rwanda and *(b)* the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie—Goma on the importance of maintaining peace and security in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [70331]

Clare Short: My Department maintains regular dialogue with all parties to the conflict in the DRC, including the Government of Rwanda and RCD-Goma. We strongly support the full implementation of the Lusaka accords in order to achieve a lasting peace for the DRC and the wider Great Lakes region.

Angola

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the recent warning by the United Nations on the number of people in Angola facing starvation. [70236]

Clare Short: According to the United Nations, half a million people are facing starvation in Angola and more than a million others are completely dependent on food aid for their survival. The end of the long running civil war has increased the number of people within the reach of the humanitarian agencies by between two million and three million in a matter of months. The needy are widely scattered, with a greater range of needs than ever before.

We are trying to respond as quickly and flexibly as possible. We have so far contributed £1.7 million to the 2002 United Nations appeals for Angola to ensure that critical humanitarian needs are met and to assist in the reception areas for ex UNITA fighters and their families. We await a further UN appeal, which is due later this month. We have also committed over £2 million to the ICRC and MSF, who are at the forefront of the humanitarian response

Zimbabwe

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what reports she has received that refugees in the Tongogara camp have been sexually abused by relief workers affiliated to non-Governmental organisations. [71127]

Clare Short: We understand that the allegations in this case, which relate to a camp in Zimbabwe, have been investigated and that two members of staff of the organisation involved have been dismissed.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) which non-Governmental organisations the Government are assisting to help small scale farmers revive maize production in Zimbabwe; and if she will make a statement on these projects; [70889]

(2) which non-Governmental organisations the Government are assisting to help poor farmers in the communal areas to increase food production in Zimbabwe; and if she will make a statement on these projects. [70894]

Clare Short: The next season for dryland maize planting, which is mostly carried out by small scale farmers in the rural areas, starts in October. We are discussing with a number of NGOs proposals for inputs for planting, and will make allocations shortly.

Burundi

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department has taken to aid the economy of Burundi; and if she will make a statement. [70264]

Clare Short: The UK does not have extensive developmental links with Burundi. We are supporting international efforts to promote an end to conflict and achieve a secure and lasting peace, which we believe is a necessary prerequisite for sustained economic development. We are at the same time supporting humanitarian programmes through non-governmental channels.

The UK has pledged a contribution of just over $1 million towards the Burundi Multilateral Donor Trust Fund (MDTF). This has recently been established with the objective of providing transitional debt relief to Burundi during the period leading to its access to the Enhanced Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and to increased inflows of donor assistance. The MDTF will help enable the country's debt to international financial institutions to be serviced in a timely manner. This is supplementary to the £3 million we are planning to spend in bilateral assistance and our contributions to the EU in this financial year. We will also be posting a DFID representative to Burundi to help in the process of donor re-engagement there.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information her Department has collated in respect of the recent numbers of extra-judicial killings by the Burundian army; and if she will make a statement. [70327]

Clare Short: I am not aware of any recent extra-judicial killings by the Burundian army.

We are however aware of continuing fighting between the Burundian army and Burundian rebel groups and that there has been a recent escalation both around the capital in Bujumbura Rural province, and in the southeast of the country. We welcome the prospect of all the Burundian parties meeting later this month in Tanzania under the auspices of the Arusha Process facilitators to address outstanding issues delaying a full peace agreement.

Food Shortages (Africa)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the barriers preventing the transportation of the surplus in cereal production in northern Mozambique to areas of the country facing food shortages; what steps her Department is taking to overcome these barriers; and if she will make a statement. [70872]

Clare Short: Along with relevant Government Departments, other donors and NGO's, DFID supported a recent FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission in Mozambique. The mission confirmed the forecast export surplus of about 100,000 tonnes of maize, available following increased cereal production in the northern region.

Logistics and traditional trading patterns will result in most of Mozambique's surplus being exported to Malawi and other neighbouring countries — the worst affected countries in the region.

Compared with imported South African grain, high internal transport costs make it uncompetitive to move the maize surplus from the north to deficit areas in the south and parts of the central region. The shortfall in these areas is expected to be covered mainly by food aid and commercial imports. This strategy takes into account the regional context as well as consideration of the options for alleviation within Mozambique.

DFID is commissioning a short consultancy to advise on the most effective contribution we can make to alleviation and future prevention of the Mozambique food security crisis.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with her counterparts in European Union countries on the World Health Organisation appeal for additional resources to help combat starvation in southern Africa. [70494]

Clare Short: We expect the health elements of the crisis to be covered in the country appeals due to be presented this week, and will then consult with other donors on our response.

Northern Africa

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the potential for political conflict arising from a shortage of water in northern Africa; and if she will make a statement. [70492]

Clare Short: My Department is supporting international partnerships advocating integrated water resource management, and is sponsoring research projects looking at ways in which management of transboundary waters can lead to reduced tensions.

The ten countries in the Nile basin recognise the need to work together to manage Nile waters for poverty alleviation, resource protection, and mutually beneficial gains. Working with the World Bank, they have set up the Nile Basin Initiative to pursue the sustainable development and management of the Nile waters. The UK fully supports these efforts.

DFID is providing some funds for the Eastern Nile Technical Regional Office (ENTRO) in Addis Ababa, and plans to support two projects in the Shared Vision Programme, designed to build confidence and the capacity of Nile countries to work effectively together on Nile management.

Uganda

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid is being given to the people of Northern Uganda affected by the civil war between the Ugandan Government and the Lord's Resistance Army. [71369]

Clare Short: Since 2000, DFID has committed almost £2m for conflict resolution programmes in the area. In addition, as an initial short-term response to the recent escalation in insecurity, DFID are providing humanitarian supplies for displaced persons through UNICEF, and supporting a programme for child welfare.

Malawi

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the total monetary value of the aid given by the British Government to Malawi in the last financial year; and if she will list the three most important items of this aid. [70763]

Clare Short: Provisional figures indicate that the government provided £48 million to Malawi in the financial year 2001–02. This included £12.5 million in direct budget support. The three most important expenditures by value are in health, education and rural livelihoods sectors.

Environmental Know How Fund

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), of 10 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 959W, what recommendations were published for, and what assessment she has made of, her Department's involvement in the Environment Poverty Workshop in Albania during 2001–02. [71250]

Clare Short: The purpose of the Government of Albania, DFID and World Bank Poverty and Environment Workshop was to sensitise and raise awareness among a broad stakeholder group of the issues and links surrounding effective environmental management, poverty reduction and economic growth in Albania. This was done in the context of Albania's preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy paper. The group agreed several recommendations which have not been published but which were taken into account in the preparation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. A copy is in the Libraries of the House.

As a result of my Department's involvement in the Workshop, a technical assistance programme has been developed with the Government of Albania, focused on institutionally developing and reforming the Ministry of Environment *(formerly the National Environment Agency).*

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), of 10 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 959W, which United Kingdom companies were involved with her Department's work in the Strengthening Partnerships for Municipal Sustainable Development project in Romania during 2001–02. [71249]

Clare Short: WS Aktkins International Limited.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), of 10 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 959W, if she will outline the *(a)* aims, *(b)* methodology and *(c)* outcomes of the Rural Livelihood Project. [71251]

Clare Short: 1. The main aim of the Rural Partnerships Programme in the Baltics is to enhance the capacity of local communities to improve rural livelihoods on a sustainable basis.

2. The methodology adopted by the project is centred on the use of participatory approaches for communities to assess their problems and needs, and plan and implement solutions and mechanisms for fuller representation through all levels of government. The project provides a range of experts and practitioners of community development and participatory processes, local government, regional development and EU who are transferring knowledge and skills through a number of different ways eg workshops, training, study tours, focus groups and mentoring.

3. The project is working towards achieving six outcomes:

(i) Area based strategies for tackling rural poverty and social exclusion.

(ii) Increased capacity within municipalities in applying participatory approaches and in accessing EU funds.

(iii) Community based projects developed and implemented through partnerships between community groups, NGOs, municipalities and the private sector.

(iv) Enhanced local skill base to manage and influence the rural development agenda.

(v) Improved capacity of rural business support/employment services as effective partners in the local development process.

(vi) National and Regional policy agenda and framework embrace inclusive area based partnership approaches to rural development.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), of 10 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 959W, which United Kingdom companies have been involved with her Department's work in the Capacity Building on the Public Private Partnership project in Romania during 2001–02. [71248]

Clare Short: Mott MacDonald Limited.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), of 10 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 959W, *(a)* what assessment she has made and *(b)* what recommendations her Department has made of the Rural Livelihood Project in (i) the Baltic states and (ii) Central and Eastern Europe in 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [71246]

Clare Short: The Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme was formally reviewed in October 2001 and has been monitored on a regular basis since then. It is an institutional building project focused at local and national levels with communities, government, NGOs and Civil Society to enhance the capacity of local communities to improve rural livelihoods. The project is assisting the authorities in the three Baltic countries to change the way regional planning is implemented in line with good EU practice by the introduction of a more participative and bottom-up approach to decision making processes.

DFID assessments have shown that the project is providing value for money in terms of its impact on (i) the progress being made in building local capacity and networks and (ii) links being made into the national policy debate to inform regional policy in preparation for accession to the EU and future effective use of structural funds. Recommendations to the Baltic authorities are made through on-going dialogue between the relevant authorities and institutions in the Baltics and project managers.

The regional Central and Eastern Europe project consisted of a study on the appropriateness of the rural livelihoods approach in transition economies. I will place a copy in the Libraries of the House.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department provides to internally displaced people in Afghanistan. [71141]

Clare Short: Internally Displaced People (IDPs), are targeted by UN agencies, the Red Cross Movement and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance. The Afghan Transitional Administration and the international community are working to ensure the reintegration of uprooted Afghans — both IDPs and refugees — who wish to return home. Programmes coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) are underway to facilitate return, build the capacity of communities to absorb returning families, and integrate short-term programmes with longer-term strategies to ensure sustainable reintegration of returnees. Since

September 2001, my Department has contributed £5 million to UNHCR and £4.6 million to IOM for their programmes in the region.

Pacific Rim Plantation

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has received regarding *(a)* erosion and *(b)* soil degradation resulting from the Pacific Rim Plantation. [69040]

Clare Short: In 2000 my Department received representations from Down to Earth and a number of Indonesian NGOs about possible deforestation/land issues at two palm oil plantations in which CDC had invested in Indonesia. In 2001 representations were received from Friends of the Earth concerning deforestation issues in Papua New Guinea. I am content that CDC looked into the allegations fully.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has received regarding the Pacific Rim Plantations environmental effect on Queen Alexandra's Birdwing butterfly habitat. [69039]

Clare Short: In 2001 my Department received representations by Friends of the Earth in relation to conservation of the Queen Alexandra's Birdwing Butterfly. The butterfly's habitat is in a province of Papua New Guinea where CDC has invested in the establishment of new oil palm plantations.

Great Lakes Region

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the *(a)* World Bank and *(b)* IMF policy towards states in the Great Lakes region. [70328]

Clare Short: The World Bank and IMF both have key roles to play in the Great Lakes region in supporting programmes for the demobilisation and reintegration of armed groups, post-conflict reconstruction and longer term economic development, and I believe the two institutions are approaching these tasks constructively. However the primary requirement remains to achieve a settlement of the Great Lakes conflict, without which no regeneration programmes can be successful. We continue to believe that full re-engagement by the Bank and IMF in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should be contingent upon achievement of an inclusive political settlement as provided for under the Lusaka peace accords.

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how long her Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form; [70467]

(2) whether consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations; [70468]

(3) in what format her Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations; [70469]

(4) how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form her Department has monitered and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations; [70470]

(5) how many complaints her Department has received about its 2001 consultations in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form; [70471]

(6) which consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies; [70472]

(7) whether her Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70473]

Clare Short: We attach considerable importance to engaging with a wide range of groups across society on our international development work, for example through our Development Policy Forums, publications and briefing notes on major international meetings. However, the nature of the issues for which my department is responsible mean that formal consultation processes are likely to be of interest only to a limited range of people. So while we take account of the principles set out in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations, and have appointed a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Code, we do not regard our consultation activities as generally falling within the full provisions of the Code.

In 2001 we carried out limited consultations on one DFID Target Strategy Paper:

(a) "Meeting the Challenge of Urban Poverty" which was made available for public consultation from November 2000 until 12 January 2001. The final document was published in April 2001.

The consultation document was made available in print, and in electronic form via the DFID website. It is DFID practice to make consultation documents available in print and on line until the publication of the finished document. No complaints were received in 2001 regarding this document. At the close of the consultation period the results were published as a final DFID Target Strategy Paper.

HIV/AIDS

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money the Government have spent on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programmes in developing countries in each year since 1997. [70493]

Clare Short: Under my department's bilateral programmes we have spent the following amounts on HIV/AIDS related work in developing countries;

	£ million
1997–98	38
1998–99	45
1999–2000	75
2000–01	125
2001–02	200 (provisional)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer of 11 July, ref 68323, on HIV/AIDS, on what occasions HIV/AIDS related projects funded by her Department have been changed following impact assessments. [71136]

Clare Short: Examples of changes made to our HIV/AIDS programmes following impact assessments include:

1. Zambia — a project to inform adolescents about HIV/AIDS was not reaching its intended audience. We have since co-funded a follow-on project which is better designed to reach young adults through their peers.

2. Cambodia — a brand of condom targeted at young people was found to be too closely associated with commercial sex. Consideration is being given to how the brand of condom can be repositioned.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer of 11 July, 2002, ref. 68323, on HIV/AIDS, what action her Department is taking to ensure information of good practice in high impact projects is shared for the benefit of other projects seeking to tackle the HIV/AIDS virus. [71135]

Clare Short: Regular contact between sectoral and geographical departments, including through our HIV/AIDS multi-sectoral task force, helps ensure that lesson learnt about the epidemic are disseminated widely, both internally and externally to DFID. Our communications systems have also been improved significantly and provide ready access to up to date technical guidance (including UNAIDS' best practice) and lessons learned from programmes. We are also working closely with other government departments to ensure a consistent government approach to the epidemic.

Medicines

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what records her Department keeps of the *(a)* quantity and *(b)* type of medicines donated by UK drugs companies to developing countries. [70499]

Clare Short: The Government does not keep records of the quantity or type of medicines donated by UK drugs companies to developing countries.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what steps she is taking to prevent the donation of expired and nearly expired medicines to developing countries; [70496]

(2) what guidelines exist to ensure that medicines donated by UK drugs companies to developing countries are suitable for the needs of the recipient country; [70507]

(3) what steps she is taking to ensure medicines donated to developing countries are *(a)* properly labelled and *(b)* written in the language of the recipient country. [70497]

Clare Short: My Department worked closely with the World Health Organisation (WHO) to produce their "Guidelines for Drug Donations".

The WHO guidelines clearly set out inter alia that drug donations should: constitute a sustainable contribution to government health strategies in developing countries; be based on need and relevant to the disease pattern of recipient countries; have at least 1 year remaining shelf life; be of a quality which complies with the standards of donor and recipient countries; be properly labelled and written in the language of the recipient country; and only provided after consultation and at the request of the recipient.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact the donation of free medicines from drug companies has had on local drugs markets in developing countries. [70498]

Clare Short: The Government worked closely with the World Health Organisation (WHO) to produce their guidelines on drug donations. These guidelines clearly set out that drug donations should only be provided after consultation and at the request of the recipient.

WHO is responsible for monitoring the impact of drug donations on developing countries. In discussions with them, we have received no evidence that UK donations have undermined local drug markets.

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the cost was of publishing her Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70480]

Clare Short: The cost of publishing my Department's Annual Report for each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	*£'000*
1998	34
1999	65
2000	98
2001	107
2002	82

WORK AND PENSIONS

Housing Benefit

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average processing time was for housing benefit in each local authority area in Scotland for each of the last six years; and if he will make a statement. [69491]

Malcolm Wicks: Prior to the introduction of Best Value performance indicators in April 2000, information was not collected from local authorities on the length of time taken to process Housing Benefit claims.

Performance indicators for Scotland are the responsibility of the Accounts Commission for Scotland. Information on the average time taken by each local authority in Scotland to process new Housing Benefit claims for 2000–01 is in the Accounts Commission publication "Performance Indicators 2000–01: Benefits, Finance and Corporate Issues", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of housing benefit claimants received their payment within the Government's 14-day target in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [65861]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is not available in the format requested.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when findings from the housing benefit review will be published. [61384]

Malcolm Wicks: The first publication of findings from the housing benefit review is expected in Autumn 2003.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many prosecutions for fraud were undertaken by staff employed by his Department and its agencies in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; and how many of these were successful. [69858]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* In each year since 1997, over 98 per cent of prosecutions carried out by the Department and its agencies have resulted in convictions. Information on the number of prosecutions is in the table.

Department for Work and Pensions investigations

Year	*Prosecutions*	*Cautions and penalties as an alternative to prosecution*	*Total*
1997–98	11,700	—	11,700
1998–99	10,238	2,835	13,073
1999–2000	9,124	11,029	20,153
2000–01	11,403	15,555	26,958

Source:

Benefit Fraud Investigation Service and Benefits Agency Security Investigation Service

Notes:

(1) The data on cautions and penalties for 1998–99 is derived from the database preceding the current database and there may be some overlap with 1999–2000.

(2) Administrative penalties, as an alternative to prosecution, were introduced by the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act (1997) with effect from December 1998.

(3) From 1 April 2002, the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service became the Counter Fraud Investigation Service and the Benefits Agency Security Investigation Service became the Counter Fraud Investigation Division Operations.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases of benefit fraud were established as a result of investigations carried out by the Benefits Agency in each year since 1997; and how many of these resulted in prosecutions. [45329]

Malcolm Wicks: For the number of cases of benefit fraud established as a result of investigations carried out by the Benefits Agency in each year since 1997 I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Nick Gibb) on 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 88W.

For the number of prosecutions, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Nick Gibb) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 923W.

Benefits Take-up

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of *(a)* the numbers of persons eligible for benefit who have not taken up their entitlement and *(b)* the total value of unclaimed benefits. [69734]

Malcolm Wicks: The latest available information is published in "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take-Up 1999–2000", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Alignment Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list all of the circumstances in which *(a)* interim payments and *(b)* alignment payments are made. [67859]

Malcolm Wicks: Interim payments are discretionary payments on account of benefit which can be made to avoid hardship where the Decision Maker is satisfied that the basic conditions of entitlement for the benefit are met. Interim payments can be made in a number of circumstances:

where a benefit claim has been made but cannot immediately be determined and the delay is not the fault of the customer;

in an emergency. This covers a variety of different situations from civil emergencies to industrial action;

where a claim has not been made in the correct manner but it is not the fault of the customer, for example because the claim form has been completed incorrectly by a visiting officer;

while an appeal is ongoing but the customer clearly has some residual entitlement to benefit;

Interim payments follow the same payment cycles and periods as the main benefit being claimed and are not made before the person's first benefit pay day. The amount of any payment is recoverable from the main benefit when it is awarded.

"Alignment payment" is an administrative term used to describe Social Fund crisis loans made to help with day to day living expenses to people awaiting a first payment of benefit which is paid in arrears. Any crisis loans made under these circumstances will cover the recipients' needs until their first benefit pay day, following which full or interim payments of benefit can be made. Alignment payments can also be made to people moving from benefit into work who need financial help until they receive their first wage.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column 95W, on alignment payments, over what time alignment payments have to be repaid. [67861]

Malcolm Wicks: As with all Social Fund loans, the period over which crisis loan alignment payments are repaid varies depending upon the size of the loan and the weekly repayment rate. Repayment rates are flexible and take account of each individual's financial position.

New Deal

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of those going through the new deal for *(a)* long-term 25-plus, *(b)* 50-plus, *(c)* lone parents and *(d)* new deal 18–24 left for (i) unsubsidised employment, (ii) transferred to another benefit, (iii) left for an unknown reason and (iv) left for an unknown destination in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [66822]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information on the destination of people leaving New Deal 50 plus is not available. The only measure of participation in the programme is the number of people who move into work and claim the programme's in-work financial support, the Employment Credit. Up to April 2002, nearly 70,000 people had been helped into work through New Deal 50plus.

The information on the other New Deals is in the table. In addition to those leaving for unsubsidised employment, independent surveys have shown that a significant proportion of leavers to unknown destinations also find work. For example, over 50 per cent of people leaving New Deal for Young People for unknown destinations move into work.

Destination of participants leaving New Deal programmes (April 2001–March 2002)

Programme	*Total Leavers*	*per cent of leavers moving into unsubsidised employment*	*per cent of leavers moving on to other benefits*	*per cent of leavers moving for other known reason*[1]	*per cent of leavers moving to unknown destinations*[2]
New Deal for Young People	178,500	37.2	11.6	19.7	31.5
New Deal 25 plus	63,600	29.7	21.2	29.7	19.4
New Deal for Lone Parents	90,720	57.4	1.1	34.0	7.5

Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database.

Notes:

[1] Other known reasons include moving into education or training or moving abroad.

[2] Includes participants leaving the New Deal programmes for an unknown reason.

Universal Bank

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest assessment is of the implementation costs of the Universal Bank. [70017]

Malcolm Wicks: Contracts are in place between the Government and Post Office Ltd for the provision of the new card account at the Post Office. Elements of the set-up costs are included in the contract, but information on detailed implementation costs is a commercial matter for Post Office Ltd.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on the progress of the Universal Bank towards meeting its April 2003 deadline for the provision of banking services to benefit claimants; [70014]

(2) what progress is being made with the Universal Bank; and if he will make a statement; [70018]

(3) what his assessment is of the viability of the April 2003 implementation date for the Universal Bank; [70019]

(4) what contingency plans are in place should the April 2003 deadline for the payment of all benefits via automated credit transfer not be met. [70020]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Answer given to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on Friday 5 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 630W.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of benefit recipients received their benefit payments via automated credit transfer in each year since the introduction of ACT. [70013]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Brian Cotter) on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1263W.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people receive benefits by *(a)* automated credit transfer and *(b)* other methods, broken down in each case into recipients of each of the main benefits. [68485]

Malcolm Wicks: Statistical information, by benefit, is collected quarterly on the number of customers currently receiving benefit by ACT and other methods.

The table below is based on information available at March 2002 and shows the number of people that receive their benefits by ACT and other methods of payment, broken down into each of the main benefits.

For ease of reference, the figures have been rounded to the nearest 5,000 and the numbers paid by other methods are mainly by order book and girocheques with a small number of payable orders.

Benefit	*Customers*	*Number Paid by ACT*	*Number Paid by Other Methods*
Attendance Allowance	430,000	280,000	150,000
Child Benefit	7,005,000	3,145,000	3,860,000
Disability Living Allowance	1,925,000	795,000	1,130,000
Incapacity Benefit	1,465,000	485,000	980,000
Income Support	3,950,000	695,000	3,255,000
Invalid Care Allowance	400,000	75,000	325,000
Jobseeker's Allowance	800,000	208,000	590,000
Retirement Pension, Widows Benefit & Bereavement Benefit	10,250,000	5,175,000	5,075,000
Veterans Agency (War Pension)	270,000	155,000	115,000

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many, and what proportion of, benefit claimants have had bank accounts that are compatible with automated credit transfer in each year since 1997. [68484]

Malcolm Wicks: The table below sets out the number and percentage of benefit customers with access to ACT compatible bank accounts. These are estimated figures, taken from the annual Family Resources Survey. Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

	Customers with ACT Compatible Accounts	
Year	*Number*	*Percentage*
1997–98	17,830,000	83
1998–99	17,920,000	84
1999–2000	17,830,000	84
2000–01	17,590,000	83

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made in discussions with the European Commission about winter fuel payments being available to people in EEA countries. [72209]

Mr. McCartney: We have now concluded our discussions with the European Commission with regard to the extent of the UK Government's responsibilities under European law. As a result, generally EEA nationals who first qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment in the UK and currently reside in another EEA country may now be entitled to Winter Fuel payments. We will publicise the change, and give details of the claims procedure.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to introduce further measures to give the Child Support Agency power to take action against parents not paying their rightful alimony; [67043]

(2) what action he will take to provide further support to single parents whose former partners are avoiding paying their rightful contribution to their child's upbringing. [67044]

Malcolm Wicks: The purpose of the child support reforms is to ensure that more children receive the maintenance that is their right.

To achieve this, the Government has legislated, in the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000, for a new child support scheme. This is simpler than the current scheme. This reduction in complexity will translate into fewer resources being required for initial and further assessment of cases, enabling more resources to be put into ensuring that liabilities are enforced.

To support the Child Support Agency in its administration of the new scheme, a new IT system is being built. The new scheme will only be introduced when the technical backup necessary to make a success of the scheme is in place. The combination of modern technology, informing the staff of the Child Support Agency of a failure to pay maintenance, and the Agency having more resources to act on that information, should ensure that maintenance due to children is paid.

In further support of the new scheme, to deter those seeking to avoid their responsibilities, section 13 of the Act created two new criminal offences, of failing to give information and of knowingly giving false information. Conviction for either of these offences carries fines of up to £1,000. The provision has been in force since last year.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to introduce the changes to the CSA; and if he will make a statement. [70799]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made to the House on 20 March 2002 by my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State (Mr. Darling), *Official Report,* columns 315–324W.

Decision Making

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish his report into the standards of decision making in the Benefits Agency, Child Support Agency and Employment Service for 2000–01. [72210]

Maria Eagle: The report has been laid before Parliament today (HC 1017).

This is the first report under the new decision making and appeals system introduced by the Social Security Act 1998. It covers the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, the first full year of operation of the new regime. The report shows variable standards in performance. As the report explains, steps have been taken to improve performance in all areas.

Post Office (Cash Payments)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what actions his Department is taking to promote the use by benefit and pension recipients of cash payments from post offices from 2003 onwards. [70847]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Brian Cotter) on 11 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 874W.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the percentage of benefit and pension recipients who will wish to collect their benefit moneys *(a)* in cash from a post office and *(b)* by ACT payments in (i) 2003, (ii) 2004, (iii) 2005, (iv) 2006 and (v) 2007. [70848]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Between 2003 and 2005 we will move to paying all benefits and pensions direct into bank accounts ("automated credit transfer" or ACT). Already over 40 per cent of customers are paid this way.

Even where a customer is paid directly into an account, they can still collect their cash at the post office, either through existing Network Banking arrangements between Post Office Ltd and several banks or, from 2003, through universal banking services at post offices. We have not estimated how many customers will choose to access their accounts at post offices, but research suggests that many will do so.

Pension Inquiry

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the recently started pension inquiry will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the methodology of this inquiry. [68993]

Ruth Kelly: I been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Bill Wiggin dated 9 July 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question on the pension inquiry. I am replying in his absence. (68993)

The National Statistician announced the review of pension contribution statistics in a statement on 2 July. The terms of reference, which have been placed in the House of Commons Library, state that the review should be completed by the end of September 2002.

The objectives of the review are:

To establish what information is needed, in terms of frequency, scope and quality, and to advise on the best available data.

To comment specifically on the quality, coverage and methodology of the range of sources of private pension contribution statistics available.

To advise on how this data should be presented.

To recommend appropriate action.

The panel will include representatives from ONS, industry, academic experts, the Department for Work and Pensions, Inland Revenue, HM Treasury and the Government Actuary's Department.

Pensions Schemes

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to support defined benefit occupational pension schemes with taxation breaks. [69996]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The Government keeps all taxes under review as part of the normal Budget process.

The Government already provides very generous tax relief to encourage saving in pensions for retirement, including upfront income tax relief and tax-free lump sums on retirement, at a cost to the Exchequer of over £14 billion a year.

Council Tax

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to adjust arrangements for council tax benefit restriction *(a)* thresholds and *(b)* caps in 2003–04. [68889]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 383W.

Consultation Documents

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the public consulations undertaken by his Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69802]

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how long the Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70083]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government's code of practice applies to written consultations which have a national impact on policy and services from January 2001. The Department for Work and Pensions came into being in June 2001. All copies of consultation documents are published online on both the Department for Work and Pensions and UK Online websites. Paper copies are also available.

The Department for Work and Pensions follows the Cabinet Office's guidance on written consultation that sets 12 weeks as the standard minimum period for a consultation. The table lists the consultations the Department has begun, or completed since 8 June 2001. There were two occasions where shorter consultations have been conducted, and the reasons for this are included in the table. All the Department's consultations are published electronically with paper copies available.

Title of consultation	*Start date*	*End Date*	*Period in weeks*	*Reason for shorter consultation*
Changes to Invalid Care Allowance	July 2001	July 2001	12	
Amending the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979	July 2001	July 2001	12	

Title of consultation	*Start date*	*End Date*	*Period in weeks*	*Reason for shorter consultation*
The Minimum Funding Requirement: The next stage of reform. Consultation on the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Minimum Funding Requirement and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2001 (Occupational Pensions Minimum funding requirements)	September 2001	September 2001	12	
Occupational Pension Scheme Winding up Notices and Reports (etc) Regulations 2001	August 2001	October 2001	12	
Occupational and Personal Pension schemes (Disclosure of Information) Amendment Regulations 2001	August 2001	November 2001	12	
Private Pensions Simplification	October 2001	January 2002	14	
Bulk transfer of accrued pensions rights without member consent	December 2001	March 2002	13	
Revised code of practice on for gathering of information as required in Social Security Fraud Act 2001	April 2002	April 2002	2 weeks	This was a follow-up to a previous exercise to which minor technical changes were introduced.
Consultation on Three Recommendations in the Myners' report—"Institutional Investment in the UK—a review."	February 2002	May 2002	12	
Member nominated trustees and directors	February 2002	March 2002	4 weeks	The shorter period was needed to fit into a regulatory timetable.
Measuring Child Poverty	April 2002	July 2002	12	
Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (OPRA) quinquennial review	May 2002	August 2002	12	
The future of the Residential Allowance component of Income Support, Minimum Income Guarantee and Jobseeker's Allowance	May 2002	August 2002	14	
Equality, opportunity, and independence for all [RRAA]	May 2002	September 2002	17	

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form his Department has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [69845]

Malcolm Wicks: In accordance with the Government's guidance on written consultation the Department for Work and Pensions evaluates all written consultation documents.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints his Department has received about its 2001 consultations by *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed means. [69829]

Malcolm Wicks: Of the consultations published by the Department of Work and Pensions since its inception, we have received one complaint on one document. This concerned the clarity of the wording of a specific proposal. Officials ensured that the point was clarified and gave additional time for a response, resolving the issue to the satisfaction of all parties.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the EU Advisory Committee on incentives in the field of employment is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67738]

Malcolm Wicks: The Committee on Community measures in the field of employment is due to meet next on 12 November 2002. Each Member State can only have one representative and for the UK the representative is drawn from the Department for Work and Pensions. That is because the business of the Committee is largely about the European Employment Strategy and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has lead responsibility for the Strategy. However, my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the Scottish Executive Ministers, Secretaries of the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Executive Ministers also have an interest. There is close contact between relevant officials to ensure that Ministerial responsibility is properly represented.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the EU Committee of the European Social Fund is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67741]

Malcolm Wicks: The Committee of the European Social Fund (ESF) is next due to meet on 27 September 2002. Representatives from the Scottish Executive have attended the Committee but are not members.

Funeral Grant

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the cost of an average funeral; what the value is of the funeral grant; what items it covers; and he will make a statement. [67596]

Malcolm Wicks: We are committed to providing a payment for a respectful funeral to people receiving income-related benefits or tax credits who have good reason for organising the funeral. Social Fund Funeral Payments provide help with necessary funeral charges; the items covered are set out in regulation 7 of the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Regulations 1987, as amended, which are available in the Library.

In addition, up to £600 is allowed for other funeral expenses. This gives the person arranging the funeral the freedom to select the items or services they consider appropriate.

Funeral arrangements vary widely in expense and type across the country and it is not possible to price an average funeral. However, the average Funeral Payment award in 2000–2001 was £892. We keep the level of support provided to people with funeral costs under review.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52836]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Details of subscriptions taken by the Department's library and legal library have been placed in the Library. Subscriptions may also be taken at local level and information about these is not collected centrally.

Buildings Value

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the buildings owned by his Department and estimate the market value of each of them. [66942]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary (Paul Boateng) on 3 July, *Official Report*, column 339W.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Domestic Violence

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many hours of training are provided for judges and magistrates in relation to domestic violence. [68318]

Yvette Cooper: Judicial Training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB) which is an independent non-departmental public body. It is chaired by Lord Justice Waller.

All newly appointed part-time judges, and all judges who are authorised to hear family cases, are required to attend a residential Induction course in the relevant jurisdiction. Thereafter, both full- and part-time judges attend residential continuation seminars every 3 years in each jurisdiction they exercise. The amount of training time provided on Domestic Violence in JSB courses and seminars is shown in the annexed table. Many judges also attend locally organised conferences.

In addition all full and part-time judges sitting in the Crown Court attend an annual one-day Circuit Seminar on sentencing issues, for which the theme last year was Domestic Violence. This provided, on average, up to 5 hours of additional training on this subject in 2000–2001

Although the overall framework for the training of magistrates is set by the JSB, statutory responsibility for delivery of training lies with individual Magistrates' Courts Committees. Information on the number of hours training on domestic Information on the number of hours training on domestic violence provided to magistrates in each committee area could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Time provided on Training for Judges in relation to Domestic Violence

Course/Seminar	*Lecture*	*Group Discussion*
Criminal Induction		Sentencing exercise (15 mins)
Criminal Continuation		Sentencing exercise (15 mins)
Civil Induction	Domestic Violence 15 mins	
Civil Induction	Committals 15 mins	
Civil Continuation	Judicial Responses to Violence in the Home. 45 mins	Syndicate Exercises (45 mins)
Induction Course for District Judges Authorised under Section 8 Children Act 1989	Emergency Applications (45 mins)	Syndicate Exercises (45 mins)
	Current Issues in Contact and Making Contact Work (20 mins)	
Seminar for Potential Care Judges	Proof of Fact in Physical/Sexual Abuse (15 mins)	
Induction (Private Family Law)	Proof of Fact in Physical/Sexual Abuse Cases (15mins) Applications for Contact (4 hours) This comprises a talk by a circuit Judge with particular reference to the decision by the Court of Appeal in the case of Re LVMH, this report by Drs Sturge and Glaser and the Guidelines produced by the Advisory Board on Family Law. A talk by a Child psychiatrist and a plenary discussion Exclusion Orders and Non Molestation Orders (40 mins)	Syndicate discussion (1 hour 30 mins)

Time provided on Training for Judges in relation to Domestic Violence

Course/Seminar	*Lecture*	*Group Discussion*
Continuation (Private Family Law)	Split Trials in Domestic Violence Cases (15 mins) Psychiatric Perspective of Children with a Violent Parent (45 mins) Injunctions and Committals (1 hour)	Syndicate discussion (1 hour 30 mins)

Open Source Software

Brian White: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69321]

Yvette Cooper: The Lord Chancellor's Department ICT Strategy (www.courtservice.gov.uk/info/reps/ict_strategy.pdf) is committed to the use of open standards and the Department will follow the Government policy on the use of Open Source Software which is due to be published later in the summer. The draft policy on this subject is currently available at http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/rfc/rfc_document.asp?docnum=429.

No percentage figures are available for usage within the Department, however the current deployment of Open Source Software is limited to a small number of specialist applications.

County Court Judgments

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans there are to take payment of fines, pursuant to County Court judgments by switch and debit cards. [69975]

Yvette Cooper: County Court judgments are principally paid directly to the person who is owed the money. Court leaflets advise the defendant to liaise with the claimant on which method of payment is most suitable, but suggest using a method which provides proof of payment. The only circumstance where payment of a judgment debt will be accepted by a court is where enforcement has been initiated, for example through a bailiff's warrant. In 2000 the Court Service piloted a system which gave the defendant the option of paying his/her judgment debt by debit card. The take up rate of this service was very low so it was decided not to implement this system across the courts at that time. We will keep this issue under review.

At present fines issued by county court judges for contempt of court can only be paid by cash or cheque. The Court Service is considering ways of providing court users with more choices in a number of areas, including payment methods. For instance, users can already issue a claim on line via the internet and pay the fee for that claim using a debit or credit card.

European Parliamentary Elections

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what consultations were entered into with hon. Members prior to the second reading of the European Parliamentary Elections Bill *[Lords]*; [71262]

(2) what research his Department has undertaken on open lists, with specific reference to the European Parliamentary Elections Bill *[Lords]*. [71263]

Yvette Cooper: The European Parliamentary Elections Bill is a consolidation Bill, which re-states in a single Bill the law currently contained in a number of Acts, without any change to its substance. It was considered by the Joint Committee on Consolidation Bills, a committee of both Houses, in the usual way.

Fines

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what proportion of fine-defaulters were in full time employment since 1990. [65123]

Yvette Cooper *[pursuant to her reply, 9 July]:* This information is currently not collected centrally. In 1994–1995, the Home Office conducted a survey of 2,000 offenders who appeared in means courts. It found that only 20 per cent of male and 11 per cent of female offenders in the sample had any sort of job. We are considering ways to collect more information on the means of offenders.

Ambulance Staff (Attacks)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many offenders have been prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service in 2002 for attacks against ambulance service staff. [71101]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply. The Crown Prosecution Service do not hold this information centrally and could only provide it at a disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Temporary Staff

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost to his Department was of employing staff in *(a)* London and *(b)* south-east from employment agencies in each year since 1997. [56514]

Mr. MacShane: *[holding answer of 16 May]:* The cost to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from employing staff in London and the south east from employment agencies in each financial year since 1997 is as follows:

Financial Year	*£*
1997–98	445,944
1998–99	804,788
1999–2000	971,657
2000–01	1,255,817
2001–02	1,933,841

Western Sahara

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by UK representatives to the UN Security Council concerning the General Secretary's special report on Western Sahara to be discussed on 31 July; and if he will make a statement. [70942]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UN Secretary General asked Security Council members to choose a suitable direction for his special envoy James Baker to pursue in helping the parties find a solution to the dispute in Western Sahara.

We have been working with all Security Council members in New York and in their capitals, and have consulted the parties and interested observers in an effort to reach a consensus direction before 31 July.

HMG continues to support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary General in trying to find a just and durable resolution to the dispute.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what visits to the Western Sahara have been made by UK diplomatic staff in the past year; which *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations they met; and if he will make a statement. [70943]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Five members of UK diplomatic staff from our Embassies in Rabat and New York have visited Western Sahara in the last year.

The primary purpose of these was to visit MINURSO. Where time and schedules allowed they met as wide a range of Moroccan and Saharawi interests groups as possible. They also met UNHCR and OAU representatives.

Sudan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Sudanese Government regarding its willingness to ratify the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment. [71371]

Mr. MacShane: The Sudanese government has signed the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Embassy in Khartoum has regularly lobbied the Government of Sudan to ratify the Convention. The Head of the joint FCO/DFID Sudan Unit also lobbied the Government of Sudan last month. We expect the Sudanese Government to present a Bill to Parliament in the near future.

Indonesia

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent violence in the Moluccas Islands directed towards Christians and other minorities by the Liskar Jihad movement, and the breakdown of the Malino Peace Agreement between the Christian and Muslim communities. [70773]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Tensions remain high in the Moluccas with Christian and Muslim extremists trying to undermine the Malino Agreement. HMG deplores the continuing violence. The Indonesian Government is taking steps to improve coordination between the army, police and the civilian governor, including the appointment of a new regional military commander. A National Investigation Team has been appointed by the President to assess the progress of the Malino Agreement and to draw attention to areas of concern. We have offered to share with police officers in the Moluccas the UK experience of policing inter-communal conflict.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the UK Government are taking to encourage the Indonesian Government to promote inter-faith dialogue between the groups and to prosecute persons responsible for inciting violence between religious communities. [70774]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The FCO is sponsoring a visit to Indonesia by a mixed-faith delegation of Westminster Parliamentarians from 28 July to 2 August. The visit aims, amongst other things, to discuss inter-faith initiatives in Indonesia. The UK Government supports the Malino Agreement for the Moluccas and encourages the Indonesian Government to pursue inter-faith solutions to communal conflict.

Indonesian authorities have arrested Laskar Jihad leader Ja'far Umar Thalib and Maluku Sovereignty Front leader Alex Manuputty, and are pursuing prosecutions against them. They have also sent additional judges and prosecuters to the Moluccas to tackle a back-log of criminal cases.

Nepal

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Nepal regarding reports of unlawful killings by Government security forces; and if he will make a statement. [71479]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have consistently made clear to the Nepalese government the need for Nepal to fulfill its international obligations in the field of human rights, and to investigate in a fair and transparent way any allegations of abuses of human rights. We have raised this issue with the Nepalese government at all levels and on numerous occasions. We have also lobbied in conjunction with other EU Member States to ensure the investigation of recent allegations of abuses by security forces in the Chitwan district—an investigation which led to disciplinary action being taken by the Army. We also lobbied for the investigation of recent allegations concerning the fate of the journalist Krishna Sen. We have made clear that continued international support for Nepal is dependent on firm action being taken to maintain human rights and investigate allegations of human rights abuses.

China

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had during his visit to China about trade. [69698]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had a substantive discussion with Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, during which our commercial interests in the oil and gas, ports and aerospace sectors were raised. In addition, the state of our bilateral commercial relationship was discussed more generally during talks with President Jiang Zemin.

Macedonia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to send observers to the parliamentary elections in Macedonia on 15 September. [69778]

Mr. MacShane: The UK attaches great importance to the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Macedonia. Holding these elections successfully and peacefully will be an important step in Macedonia's progress towards integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. To support this process, the UK will be sending seventy-five short-term observers (deployed for a week), two medium-term observers (for three weeks) and three long-term observers who will be on the ground for six weeks. This is, as is normal, 10 per cent of the OSCE total.

European Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place a copy of the Ankara Document laying out the participation of non-EU NATO member countries in the ESDP in the Library. [71564]

Mr. Straw: No. The arrangement for the participation of non-EU NATO member countries in ESDP are still under negotiation between the EU and NATO, and it would not assist the process of negotiation for the document to be made public.

Export Controls

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the annual report on strategic export controls will be published. [72211]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The 2001 annual report on Strategic Export Controls is being published today. It covers arms export licensing decisions and exports in 2001, as well as domestic and international policy developments. Since 1997, the reports have established themselves as among the most transparent produced by any arms exporting country, giving Parliament and public the ability to scrutinise our export licensing policy as never before. This year's Report will be a clear restatement of that commitment to accountability and transparency in Strategic Export controls. The report will be available on the FCO website (www.fco.gov.uk) and through the Stationery Office.

Gibraltar

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates of meetings that have taken place between British and Spanish ministers under the Brussels Process since it was set in place. [70625]

Peter Hain: On 10 April 1980 Lord Carrington and the Spanish Foreign Minister (Sr Oreja) agreed a joint statement (the Lisbon Declaration) "to start negotiations aimed at overcoming all the differences between them on Gibraltar". On 27 November 1984, Sir Geoffrey Howe and the Spanish Foreign Minister (Sr Moran) agreed the Brussels Communique which established a formal negotiating process under the Lisbon Declaration. The Brussels Communique stated that "Both sides accept that the issues of sovereignty will be discussed in that process". Between November 1984 and February 1999 more than 60 meetings (including 16 at ministerial level) were held under the Brussels Process. Since the relaunch of the Brussels Process in July 2001, three ministerial meetings have been held (on 26 July 2001, 20 November 2001 and 4 February 2002).

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will construct the wording for any referendum in Gibraltar concerning its future status. [70722]

Peter Hain: No decisions have been made on the timing or modalities of any referendum because there is no Agreement to have a referendum about.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Docman IT project for the Serious Fraud Office by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49668]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The original contract, which covered the Docman project as well as the provision of internal IT services was signed in January 1998.

The reasons for taking the PFI route were:

The size of the task was too great for the SFO to manage in house;

The main task was the creation of an on-line document management system and this represented a major item of software which was to be written by suppliers;

The contract transferred the majority of the project risk to the suppliers;

The contract included a significant element of service, which permitted the suppliers to be paid in terms of the number of cases using the completed system.

The whole project represented value for money. It is not practical to quantify the savings, which would have been made from adopting the PFI route as opposed to a non PFI route as the Docman project did not proceed on the lines planned. The contract was amended in September 2000 to exclude the Docman project. This is now being carried forward separately on a non-PFI basis. The first case went live on the Docman system in June 2002.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many staff have contributed to her Department's input to the Spending Review. [68683]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* The Spending Review involves a comprehensive assessment of the performance priorities and resource requirements of all the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible and a range of staff make a contribution.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the performance targets that her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if she will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60460]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* There are many performance targets contained in public service agreements or service delivery agreements that affect the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible. Government targets set and monitored centrally cover a range of initiatives and projects. The information provided below is based on additional performance targets:

Crown Prosecution Service

Apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999–2002 and 2001 to 2004, the CPS Business Plan for 2002–03 requires the following targets to be met:

Serving committal papers to the defence within agreed timescales in 80 per cent of cases.

Submitting briefs to counsel within agreed timescales in 83.5 per cent of cases.

Reducing to 6 per 100,000 the number of cases dismissed on a submission of no case to answer in the magistrates' courts which are attributable to failures in the review process.

Reducing to 5 cases per 1,000 the number of nonjury acquittals in the Crown Court which are attributable to failures in the review process.

Increasing to 86 per cent the proportion of relevant cases where the prosecution comply with statutory duties of primary disclosure.

Increasing to 83 per cent the proportion of relevant cases where the prosecution comply with statutory duties of secondary disclosure.

Increasing to 7 per cent the proportion of advocates whose performance is significantly above normal requirements.

Targets are set by the CPS Board and achievement against targets is monitored quarterly by the CPS Resources and Performance Group, who report to the CPS Board.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has one published target whish is not incorporated in the current Public Service Agreements. This relates to ill-health retirements. The Treasury Solicitor's Department will be seeking to achieve a level of ill health retirements consistent with or better than the best quartile of 3.72 retirements per 1,000 employees by 2005. The target is st by the Attorney General and achievement is monitored by the Treasury Solicitor.

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

The purpose of the Inspectorate is to promote continuous improvement in the efficiency, effectiveness and fairness of the prosecution services within a joined-up criminal justice system through a process of inspection and evaluation, the provision of advice and the identification of good practice.

The Inspectorate strives to achieve excellence in all aspects of its activities and in particular to provide customers and stakeholders with consistent and professional inspection and evaluation processes together with advice and guidance, all measured against recognised quality standards and defined performance levels.

In the year 2002–03 the Inspectorate is committed to:

completing the first cycle of inspections of CPS Areas and Headquarters Directorates;

consulting with CPS Headquarters and Areas on its approach to, and the planning and organisation of, the second cycle;

commencing the second cycle of CPS inspection activity;

undertaking the pilot inspection of Manchester Customs and Excise prosecution function;

conducting a joint inspection of West Midlands with HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and HM Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate;

continuing with thematic and joint inspection activity.

The Inspectorate's strategic plan for 2002–05 contains four strategic objectives and its Business Plan for 2002–03 contains 28 objectives which, taken together, provide the targets against which current Inspectorate performance will be judged.

These objectives are systematically measured against criteria set out in the annual Business Plan which also contains a series of challenging deadlines for the achievement of each objective.

The Inspectorate's Strategic and Business Plans are agreed by its management team in consultation with the Attorney General's Advisory Board. Progress against the Business Plan objectives is monitored monthly by the management team on the basis of information collected and supplied by the Inspectorate's Corporate Services Manager. At each of its meetings, the Advisory Board receives a report detailing the action which the Inspectorate has taken towards the achievement of its objectives.

Further monitoring is provided by the quarterly and annual reports which the Chief Inspector provides for the Attorney General.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas party; and how many people attended. [61649]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Any Christmas parties for staff in any of the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible will have been financed by the staff themselves.

Information on their cost or numbers of attendees is not held.

Serious Fraud Office Annual Report

Helen Jones: To ask the Solicitor-General when the Director of the Serious Fraud Office will publish her Annual report. [72131]

The Solicitor-General: I have today placed copies of the Annual Report in the libraries of the House.

Review of the Year

Helen Jones: To ask the Solicitor-General when the law officers will publish their "Review of the Year". [72130]

The Solicitor-General: I have today placed copies of the Law Officers' "Review of the Year" in the libraries of the House.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in her Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68735]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* All overseas travel by officials in the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible is undertaken in accordance with the principles set out in Chapter 8 of the Civil Service Management Code. The detailed information requested about individual trips is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the annual cost was of Ministerial salaries in her Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [61037]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The following information relates to the financial year and the figures comprise of the salaries paid to the individuals together with Employer's Related National Insurance Contributions.

6 April 1997–5 April 1998

£141,044.89

6 April 2001–5 April 2002

£179,231.82

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61051]

The Solicitor-General *[holding reply 17 June 2002]:* The amount spent by each of the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible in each of the last five years is set out below.

Crown Prosecution Service

	£
1997–98	1,234,217
1998–99	1,339,271
1999–2000	2,069,216
2000–01	2,700,903
2001–02	5,620,922

Serious Fraud Office

	£
1996–97	127,051
1997–98	134,962
1998–99	124,949
1999–2000	180,936
2000–01	237,996

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Figures for the last four years are:

	£
1998–99	213,460
1999–2000	230,690
2000–01	337,900
2001–02	402,080

Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers

	£
1998–99	13,820
1999–2000	8,800
2000–01	11,750
2001–02	10,500

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

Information is only available for the year 2001–02 as before 1st April 2001 the Inspectorate was part of the Crown Prosecution Service and training costs form part of the figures provided by the CPS. The sum expended on training in 2001–02 was £26,600.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60919]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 13 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 1402W.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in her Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50422]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Figures are only available for the year 2001–02.

The figures for the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

£12.7 million

Serious Fraud Office

£303,000

Treasury Solicitor's Department (which includes Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers and HM cps Inspectorate)

£1,065,000

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61023]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Figures for the year 2001–02 are not yet available.

The departmental expenditure limit for the Treasury Solicitor's Department, which also includes expenditure by the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, is set in net terms and takes account of receipts from charges to client Departments for legal services provided to them. It would be misleading, therefore, to show staff costs as a percentage of that figure. However, after allowing for receipts, £24,773,000 (60 per cent.) of Treasury Solicitor's Department's gross administrative costs were accounted for by staff costs in 2001–02.

The departmental expenditure limit for the Serious Fraud Office for 2001–02 was £21,850,000, of which staff costs amounted to £7,785,000 (35.6 per cent.).

The departmental expenditure limit for the Crown Prosecution Service for 2001–02 was £402,200,000, of which staff costs amounted to £196,600,000 (49 per cent.).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61013]

The Solicitor-General *[holding reply 17 June 2002]:* Reliable estimates for 2002–03 spending to 31 May are not available. Estimated outturn spending figures for 2001–02 can be found in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2002–03 published in May 2002 as Command Paper 5401.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General which categories of important cases require the CPS to communicate directly with complainants; and what the purpose and outcome is of these communications. [60221]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Under the current Victim's Charter the CPS must, on request, meet families bereaved as a result of crime in order to explain the decision on prosecution.

In addition, in April 2001 the CPS commenced a phased programme of implementation of the Direct Communication with Victims initiative. This follows recommendations made by Sir William MacPherson and Sir Ian Glidewell. All Areas who have implemented this initiative now:

provide all identifiable victims with a written explanation when the prosecution decide to discontinue their case, or alter charges substantially; and

in cases involving child abuse, sexual offences or racially aggravated offences, offer to meet victims to explain the basis of the decision if a further explanation is required.

Full national implementation will be completed by October 2002.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the *(a)* reasons for and *(b)* impact of significant staff turnover within the (i) Derbyshire, (ii) Hertfordshire, (iii) Humberside and (iv) North Wales CPS regions, with reference to the training budget as a proportion of turnover on 1 January. [59657]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 June 2002]* As with any large organisation, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has turnover of staff. Table 1 (attached) shows that, there has not been a significant staff turnover in Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Humberside or North Wales CPS, over the last twelve months, as compared to the national average for the CPS. The main reason for the loss of staff has been resignations.

In recent months Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Humberside have seen an increase in the number of staff employed.

Loss of staff, particularly if they are experienced, impacts on the working of any organisation. New staff requires induction and training, which may vary from going on appropriate courses to "on the job" training. Inevitably this affects the training budget. It also means new staff members take some time before they are fully effective. However, the introduction of new staff, especially where they represent an addition to the existing numbers, is to be welcomed.

Table 2 (attached) shows the proportion of each local Area budget spent on training against their total running costs.

Table 1

2000

Area	*Staff In Post (SIP) 1.1.00*	*Resignations**	*Transfers to other Govt Depts.*	*per cent Turnover*	*SIP 31.12.00*	*Difference*
Derbyshire	76.03	10		13.5	71.09	–4.13
Hertfordshire	62.95	15		24.9	57.26	–5.69
Humberside	76.38	7		9	78.76	2.38
North Wales	62.3	6		9.9	58.25	–4.05

* All leavers during the year 1.1.00–31.12.00 as a Head Count.

2001

Area	*SIP 1.1.01*	*Resignations*	*Transfers to other Govt Depts.*	*per cent Turnover*	*SIP 31.12.01*	*Difference*
Derbyshire	71.09	8		10.2	85.53	14.44
Hertfordshire	57.26	1.97		3	73.25	15.99
Humberside	78.76	5		6.4	76.21	–2.55
North Wales	58.25	1.49	1	4.1	60.91	2.66
National (42 Areas)				5.9		

2002

Area	*SIP 1.1.02*	*Resignations*	*Transfers to other Govt Depts.*	*per cent Turnover*	*SIP 31.05.02*	*Difference*
Derbyshire	85.53	3		3.3	92.11	6.58
Hertfordshire	73.25	1		1.3	76.57	3.32
Humberside	76.21	1		1.2	83.5	7.29
North Wales	60.91	0.51		0.8	59.93	–0.98
National (42 Areas)		Jan, Feb & March		1.9		

Table 2

Table Showing Proportion of Area Budget Spent on Training 1.4.01–31.3.02 Against Total Running Costs Allocation.

Area	*Running Costs*	*Training Costs*	*per cent*
Derbyshire	3,136,018	26,800	0.85
Hertfordshire	2,731,565	6,700	0.25
Humberside	2,808,450	12,716	0.45
North Wales	2,361,101	5,560	0.24

Mr. Laws: To ask the Solicitor-General what proportion of advocacy by the Crown Prosecution Service met the CPS's advocacy standards in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [69107]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Advocacy standards form a part of the annual performance appraisal of all Crown Prosecutors and performance assessment markings are awarded to reflect the individual's overall performance throughout the whole reporting period. In each of the years since 1997, more than 99 per cent of Crown Prosecutors received a performance assessment marking of Box 3 (Performance fully meets the standard required) or better in advocacy standards.

HMCPSI include advocacy standards as part of their inspections of each CPS Area. These are reported in their individual inspection reports but there is no aggregation of data in relation to any specific aspect of an Area's performance.

Under the Department's training of Higher Court Advocates, candidates must additionally pass an assessment managed by the Nottingham Law School before they can be considered for deployment as advocates in the Crown Courts.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Animal Health and Welfare

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on animal health and welfare expenditure trends shown in the Departmental report for 2002. [72082]

Mr. Morley: Tables 5.1 to 5.5 in the Departmental Report for 2002 contain a number of errors. These arose from differences in the way information is loaded on central data bases, complications with compiling historical information following the recent Machinery of Government changes, and the re-structuring of DEFRA with the revised objectives that followed. Unfortunately, the tight timetable for producing these tables interfered with the quality assurance procedures that would normally have applied.

The Department's quality assurance procedures are being revised to prevent similar errors in future. Meanwhile, work is in hand to re-issue corrected tables. This is a significant task involving the re-loading of central data bases which are subject to a number of timetable constraints. The intention is to provide revised figures by the Autumn.

Meanwhile, it is possible to clarify that underlying provision for resources available to control animal disease have risen in real terms over the period as follows:

£ million

1999–2000 Cash Outturn	*2000–01* Cash Outturn	*2001–02* Provisional Resource Outturn	*2002–03* Resource Budget
152	183	159	206

These figures exclude expenditure incurred on foot and mouth disease, given this was funded centrally out of the Reserve. The drop seen in 2001–02 can be explained by the diversion of state veterinary staff to tackling foot and mouth disease.

Veterinary Laboratories Agency

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets she has set the Veterinary Laboratories Agency for 2002–03. [72214]

Mr. Morley: I have set the Veterinary Laboratories Agency the following performance targets for 2002–03.

Quality of Service

1. To maintain current third party accreditations.

2. To achieve ISO9000 accreditation for the TSE Archive.

Service Delivery

3. To achieve a minimum of 85 per cent of ROAME project milestones.

4. To meet 95 per cent of published turnaround time for export tests.

5. To set a baseline for the customer satisfaction survey.

Efficiency

6. To achieve £500k savings on procurement spending.

7. To achieve a 3 per cent improvement of overheads against turnover using the baseline established in 2001–02.

Financial Performance

8. To recover from Government Departments, Agencies and external customers, the full economic costs of the Agency's services.

Fisheries

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether Spain's Northern quota entitlements expire at the end of 2002 unless renewed, reduced or extended by agreement at the EC level prior to that date; and whether the same position will apply to Portugal. [67317]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* Yes. Our interpretation is that the special northern quota entitlements outlined in the Spanish Treaty of Accession will expire at the end of 2002, but that they will stand to be taken into account when determining future quota allocations in accordance with relative stability.

Small Farms

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been paid to small family farms in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England in each of the last five years for environmental schemes. [70438]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* Average environmental scheme payments to small full-time farms in England as recorded by the Farm Business Survey are given in the table. Requests for information on payments in Scotland should be referred to the Scottish parliament. Requests for information on payments in Wales should be referred to the National Assembly for Wales.

Average environmental scheme payments to full-time small farms in England (£ per farm)*

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
England	350	450	630	990	980

*Includes Environmentally sensitive area, organic farming, organic aid, countryside stewardship, woodland grant, farm woodland premium, nitrate sensitive area, moorland, habitat, countryside access and SSSI schemes

Biodiversity

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the *(a)* loss and *(b)* creation of UK biodiversity action plan habitat since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit as a result of (i) inland flood defence schemes and (ii) coastal flood defence schemes. [68099]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* In 1999, under High Level Target 9, DEFRA put in place a mechanism for operating authorities to report losses and gains of Biodiversity Action Plan habitats as a result of flood management works. The first annual report was produced for DEFRA in July 2001. This report indicates an overall gain in BAP habitats during the reporting year of 53.37 Ha of fresh water habitats (plus 200 metres of chalk river) and 112.84 Ha of coastal or intertidal habitat. Copies of the 2000–01 report are available from Flood Management Division of DEFRA and annual reports will be available in subsequent years.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money her Department has successfully reclaimed from *(a)* the Duke of Richmond and *(b)* the Earl of March in respect of overpayments relating to the ESA scheme; and if she will make a statement. [69403]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* The Goodwood Estates Company Limited entered into an Environmentally Sensitive Areas agreement in 1992. The area involved covered some 400 hectares. Some of the land, comprising less than 10 per cent of this area, was subsequently used for other purposes. The department reclaimed the relevant proportion of ESA support from the company, plus interest.

Environment Agency

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to issue a revised management statement to the Environment Agency. [72083]

Mr. Meacher: I am please to inform the House that the Management Statement has been issued to the Environment Agency today. The statement sets out: the relationships between the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Welsh Assembly Government, exercising powers delegated by the National Assembly for Wales, and the Environment Agency; the framework within which the Agency will operate; and other guidance relevant to its functions. The Management Statement has been drawn up in consultation with the Agency and is being issued jointly with the Welsh Assembly Government.

A copy of the Statement has today been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many calls have been received by *(a)* Eaga Partnership and *(b)* TXU Warm Front Ltd. call centres in each (i) local authority area and (ii) Government office region about delays in installations under the home energy efficiency scheme in each quarter for which information is available; [43569]

(2) what proportion of heating installations have been completed by *(a)* Eaga Partnership and *(b)* TXU Warm Front Ltd. in each (i) local authority and (ii) Government office region in (A) less than a month, (B) one to two months, (C) two to three months, (D) three to four months, (E) four to five months, (F) five to six months, (G) six to seven months and (H) over seven months. [43570]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme has an overall target of improving 800,000 properties in the period 2000–04. Between June 2000 and March 2002, in excess of 113,000 heating measures were installed.

The remaining information requested is not available without incurring disproportionate costs. But I have previously written to the hon. Member with information regarding measures installed under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. A copy of the letter and the data has been placed in the library of the House.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* types and *(b)* numbers of energy efficiency and conservation measures installed by (i) Eaga Partnership and (ii) TXU Warm Front Ltd in each (A) local authority and (B) Government office region in each of the last four quarters for which information is available. [43572]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme has an overall target of improving 800,000 properties in the period 2000–04. Between June 2000 and March 2002 almost 998,000 measures were installed under the scheme.

To provide the data in the form requested would incur disproportionate costs. But I have previously written to the hon. Member with information regarding measures installed under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. A copy of the letter and the data has been placed in the library of the House.

Water Level Management

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the water level management plans being implemented; and what percentage of the total number of water level management plans this represents. [69628]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* According to our records, there are 90 Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs) currently being implemented on the following sites:

Gordano Valley
Puxton Moor PSSSI
Yanal Bog
Fancott Woods & Meadows
Tebworth Marsh
Alderford Common
Delph Bridge Drain
Holme Fen
Shippea Hill (Geol)
Soham Wet Horse Fen
Stow Cum Quy Fen
Pevensey Levels
Ashleworth Ham
Chaceley Meadow
Upper Severn Estuary
Walmore Common
Burley Dene Meadows
Moseley Common
Barton and Barrow Clay Pits
Haxey Grange Fen
North Killingholme Pits PSSSI
South Cliffe, Hotham Carr & North Cliffe
Holborough-Burham Marshes
Preston Marshes
Sandwich Bay & Hacklinge Marshes
Stodmarsh
Bratoft Meadows
Horbling Fen
Tattershall Old Gravel Pits
Petney Blow Wells
Ant Broads & Marshes
Aslacton Parish Land
Badley Moor
Beetley & Hoe Meadows
Booton Common
Broad Fen Ditham
Bryants Heath, Felmingham
Burgh Common & Muckfleet Marshes
Buxton Heath
Calthorpe Broad
Damgate Marshes, Acle
Decoy Carr, Acle
Dersingham Bog
East Ruston Common
Flordon Common
Halvergate Marshes
Ludham-Potter Heigham Marsh
Potter & Scarning Fens
Priory Meadows
Roydon Common Sea Mere
Hingham
Shallam Dyke Marshes
Smallburgh Fen
Swannington Upgate Common
Upper Thurne Broads & Marshes
Upton Broads & Marshes
Whitewell Common
Winterton to Horsey Dunes
Yare Broads & Marshes
Aubert Ings (River Midd)
Bishop Monkton Ings
Burr Closes'
Farnham Mires
Forlorn Hope Meadow
Hay-A-Park SSSI
Heslington Tillmire
Kirkby Wharfe
Skipworth Common
Mission Line Bank
Mission Training Area
Moorlinch
Tealham & Tadham Moors

Shirley Pool
Went Ings Meadows
Baswich Meadows
Doxey & Tillington Marshes
Rawbones Meadow
Fox Fritillary Meadow, Framsden
Lakenheath Poors Fen
Minsmere/Walberswick: Tinker's Marsh
Minsmere/Walberswick: Southwold Town Marshes
Minsmere/Walberswick: Minsmere
Minsmere/Walberswick: West Wood and Dingle Marshes
Minsmere/Walberswick: Home Covert Marshes
North Warren and Thorpeness
Meare
Pashford Poors Fen (Lakenheath)
Sizewell Marshes
Wilde Street Meadow
Amberley Wild Brooks
Pagham Harbour
Waltham Brooks

This represents 18 per cent of the total number of WLMPs. However this list does not include sites where the WLMP did not identify any changes to be implemented, or sites where the plan identified a need for further monitoring before effecting any changes. The implementation of a number of other plans was delayed by and access restrictions during the foot and mouth outbreak.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department are taking to ensure that water level management plans comply with the EC Water Framework Directive; how many completed water level management plans comply with the EC Habitats and Birds Directives; and what steps she is taking to ensure that water level management plans deliver conservation benefits. [68169]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* When the EC Water Framework Directive is transposed into English and Welsh law, it will require consideration of all aspects of the water cycle with an emphasis on ecological water quality. In implementing the Water Framework Directive, it will be important to ensure effective integration between the Directive requirements and Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs). WLMPs are designed to be reviewed at regular intervals and should incorporate any guidance which arises as a result of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

The operating authorities (Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards or Local Authorities) are the competent authorities in respect of ensuring that WLMPs comply with the Habitats and Birds Directives. They have a duty to ensure that their activities, including those relevant to water level management, comply with the Directives, as implemented in the UK by the Habitats Regulations. Under these Regulations they are required to assess whether any schemes which are not necessary for site management for nature conservation are likely to have a significant effect on the site. If so, an Appropriate Assessment must be undertaken before any works can be carried out. We are not aware of any Appropriate Assessments completed to date in relation WLMPs. English Nature and the operating authorities are working with DEFRA on guidelines to provide advice to operating authorities in undertaking such an Appropriate Assessment.

Operating Authorities draw up WLMPs in consultation with English Nature, who propose conservation objectives for each plan. All WLMPs must be agreed with English Nature before implementation.

In 1999, MAFF issued guidance to flood and coastal defence operating authorities on conservation benefits and WLMPs. This guidance was agreed with English Nature and the RSPB, as well as the operating authorities.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on whether internationally designated sites have *(a)* water level management plans for individual hydrological units and *(b)* a single water level management plan for numerous hydrological units. [69178]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The decision as to whether a Water Level Management Plan (WLMP) is based on individual hydrological units or numerous units will depend on technical, environmental and economic factors which vary significantly between sites. As a result, all Water Level Management Plans are designed and implemented on a case-by-case basis and there is no policy on a preferred approach. In many cases, particularly for relatively small, discrete sites, operating authorities have prepared a single plan to cover all the hydrological units within an international site. However, for larger sites with separate hydrological units that have different operating authorities (e.g. the Somerset Levels), separate WLMPs have been prepared, for example, for each constituent Site of Special Scientific Interest.

DEFRA is currently working with English Nature and the operating authorities to prepare guidance on the effects of the Habitats Regulations on Water Level Management Plans. Amongst other things, this will advise operating authorities on the geographical scale at which the implications for the Habitats Regulations should be considered.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much *(a)* the Environment Agency, *(b)* the Internal Drainage Boards and *(c)* local authorities have spent on consultants to prepare water level management plans in each of the last five years. [69180]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* I regret that DEFRA does not hold this information as preparation of Water Level Management Plans is the responsibility of the operating authorities. The information cannot therefore be obtained in the form requested except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department has spent on the preparation and production of water level management plans in each of the last five years. [69179]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The flood and coastal defence operating authorities (Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards and Local Authorities) have funded the preparation of Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs) from their own budgets. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does not fund preparation and production of WLMPs. We do, however, provide grant aid for flood management works required to implement WLMPs.

Departmental Spending Plans

Ms Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the spending plans for her Department and for the Forestry Commission are for the next three years following the 2002 Spending Review; and if she will make a statement. [72215]

Mrs Beckett: The results of the Spending Review for DEFRA and the Forestry Commission are summarised in Chapter 16 of the White Paper on "2002 Spending Review" (Cm 5570). The key figures are as follows:

£ million	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs				
Resource Budget	2,443	2,765	2,742	2,792
Capital Budget	241	316	344	354
Total Departmental Expenditure Limit[1]	2,523	2,902	2,890	2,944
Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs[1]	2,426	2,808	2,796	2,850
Forestry Commission[1]	97	94	94	94
Near-cash spending in DEFRA DEL[2]	2,341	2,727	2,710	2,757

[1] Full resource budgeting basis, net of depreciation.

[2] Consistent with previous control basis.

When DEFRA was created, the objective was have a step change in the way environment, agriculture and rural issues were treated in Government. The aim was to create a department with sustainable development at its heart—and with responsibility for supporting sustainable development across Government. For DEFRA this means working to achieve a better environment at home and internationally. It also means a food and farming industry working within a prosperous countryside, producing the food that consumers want in harmony with the environment.

For the Government as a whole, sustainable development goes much further. The vital importance of sustainable development for Government as a whole underlay the decision to make it a central theme of the Spending Review. As custodian of the Government's sustainable development strategy, I particularly welcome the elements of the Settlement, for my own Department and for others, which will deliver significant improvements in key policy areas. These include:

Climate change—where we will invest in innovation to meet our Climate Change objectives, building on existing funding for renewable energy sources with an additional £38 million in 2005–06 compared with 2002–03, and make further progress towards our greenhouse gas emissions targets

Health—where we have announced the biggest ever sustained spending growth in the history of the NHS, to improve health outcomes and the quality of care for patients;

Education—where increased spending and further reforms are aimed at getting and helping 16–19 year olds into further education;

And Crime—where extra funding for the police will help them target reductions in vehicle crime, domestic burglaries and robbery, and reduce the gap between the highest crime local areas and the best comparable areas

In addition, new spending on transport and regeneration will improve the quality of our local environments. For example, capital expenditure on capital transport plans—which includes expenditure on home zones, cycling, walking and local safety schemes—is doubling in real terms from 2001–2011 as part of the Ten Year Transport plan. The Neighbourhood Renewal fund is being increased from £400 million in 2003–04 to £525 million in 2005–06, in part reflecting an increased commitment to safer and cleaner communities.

Let me now explain how the Spending Review settlement will impact on DEFRA's programmes over the next three years and will assist the Department in pursuing its aims and objectives.

Departmental Spending Plans

Sustainable Farming and Food

When DEFRA was created, the farming industry was in crisis. Foot and mouth disease, coupled with the lowest farm incomes in many years—had destroyed farmers' confidence, and in some cases, their livelihoods. The Review provides DEFRA with the resources to make progress—working together with the industry—towards a more sustainable future for the farming and food industries. Investment totalling over £500 million over three years will be available to support the key recommendations of the Policy Commission chaired by Sir Don Curry, and to improve animal health and welfare:

Action through the England Rural Development Programme, including:

A new broad and shallow agri-environment scheme which will reward farmers for delivering environmentally friendly outcomes to be piloted over the next 2 years and then rolled out in full in 2005–06;

An expansion of schemes such as the Rural Enterprise Scheme, the Processing and Marketing Grants Scheme, and the Vocational Training Scheme, to assist people in rural areas retrain, diversify and extend their businesses;
A more efficient food chain;
Enhanced farm advice;
Further measures to improve animal health and welfare, including livestock identification and tracing systems, enhanced testing for TSE-type disease (such as BSE); and further action to prevent illegal meat imports.

The additional funding will rise to £200 million in 2005–06 of which £75 million has been specifically allocated to fund, alongside equivalent EU funding, the full roll-out of the new agri-environment scheme in England. Additional funding will also be made available to the Devolved Administrations to allow them to increase expenditure on their Rural Development Programmes. In return for the investment in their industry, farmers will be expected to play their part in making the industry sustainable, for example by acting to reduce the risks of animal diseases. I know they will co-operate with us fully in achieving these joint goals.

The Government will continue to press for radical reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) in the negotiations on the Mid-Term Review of Agenda 2000 which began earlier this week. But the resources allocated in the Spending Review allow DEFRA to press ahead with reform and modernisation of the farming industry now. The Department will publish its strategy for sustainable farming and food in the autumn. I am very pleased that Sir Don Curry has agreed to chair a Group which will act as a driver and overseer of change in the farming and food sectors through the implementation of the farming and food strategy, to ensure that we move rapidly towards a more sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food industry which contributes to a thriving rural economy. The Group will report to me.

The Settlement recognises the need to prevent, control and manage the risk of animal disease, where we are driven by the memory of last year's outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease as well as the legacy of BSE. The additional resources provided will allow funding of a wide range of work on animal health issues These measures will be set in the context of a comprehensive animal health and welfare strategy, as recommended by the Policy Commission. This will address ways in which the industry should bear its share of the costs of animal health controls and services. I am also please to be able to announce that we have secured additional funds to deal with Bovine TB this year. These will be used to pay for the extra staff and resources already committed to work on the TB testing backlog and control measures, and additional casual staff who will be recruited to supplement this work. Testing is being carried out on the basis of a veterinary risk assessment, with those posing the greatest risk being tested first.

A countryside for all to enjoy

In addition to the new agri-environment scheme, which will play an important role in making the countryside more attractive and in helping to preserve biodiversity, the Spending Review has allocated an additional £5 million in 2004–05 and £10 million in 2005–06 for work in bringing our major wildlife sites into favourable condition. In addition, the extra funding of £5 million in 2003–04 and £10 million in the two following years to implement the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act will increase public access and enjoyment of our beautiful countryside landscapes.

Thriving rural economies and communities

The investment in sustainable food and farming, in improving the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and in opening up access to the countryside will benefit the wider rural economy. However, DEFRA's leadership role on rural affairs goes beyond this and our new rural PSA target reflects this. It commits us to reducing the gap in productivity between the least well performing rural areas and the English average and making services more accessible for rural people. DEFRA will work with other Government Departments and agencies to deliver this and to ensure that the rural-proofing of their policies and programmes helps to deliver real improvements in prosperity and access to public services. The Spending Review White Paper sets out a range of commitments from other Departments to deliver key services in rural areas, and ensure that rural people benefit from the extra resources delivered through the review. The extra £25 million allocated in the Settlement over three years, will further increase the additional funds announced in the Rural White Paper to help regenerate in market towns and improve the ability of rural communities and the rural voluntary sector to deliver services in support of the socially excluded and progress towards solutions to key rural concerns in each region.

Protecting our communities from flooding

Government investment in flood defence has increased significantly in real terms since 1997. Additional funding of £15 million a year was made available in the wake of the autumn 2000 floods. The new funds over and above this which have been allocated in the Spending Review will ensure that this growth will now accelerate to reach 8.6 per cent a year in real terms over the SR2002 period. The further allocation to the Department of £15 million in 2004–05 and £40 million in 2005–06, together with the amounts available for grants to local authorities and the revenues we expect to be able to raise from new funding mechanisms, will deliver an increase of £150 million in the third year of the Review. This level of resources, together with simplification of the administration of flood defences and effective partnership working with homeowners, local government, the Environment Agency, scientists and the insurance industry will allow us to reduce the risk of threats to life and damage to property from flooding.

Sustainable use of resources: the challenge from waste

The Spending Review Settlement takes into account the pressures on local government and provides for spending on environmental, protective and cultural services, including waste management, to rise by £671 million by 2005–06. The funds will also enable them to deal with the short-term problems of fridge disposal and changes to the legislation on hazardous waste. Final decisions on additional resources for addressing the challenge of growth in municipal waste and moving away from landfill disposal and on other policy measures will be made available when the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) publishes its report into sustainable waste management in the autumn. These decisions and those on landfill tax and the future of the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme (LTCS) will deliver a step change in performance. DEFRA's PSA target of 25 per cent recycling and composting of household waste by 2005–6 demonstrates the government's commitment to radical reform of municipal waste management.

Science

Evidence-based policy work is central to DEFRA's approach. I want, at the very least, to maintain the Department's expenditure on research in real terms over the Spending Review period. This is consistent with our commitment to the development of a strong and high quality science base. It will ensure that DEFRA's policy making continues to be based in the latest evidence and scientific and economic analysis. We will aim to increase science spending in our identified priority areas. These include: environmental horizon-scanning, climate change and extreme weather, a supercomputer to strengthen the UK climate change research capability, non-food crops, organic food production, and animal disease. We will also examine the findings of the Foot and Mouth Disease inquiries closely and determine if any additional funding for research is required in these areas.

Investment in the Department

A theme of the Spending Review across all Departments has been ensuring that they have the necessary capacity to deliver. That has been a primary focus of the Developing DEFRA change programme that was set up after the Department was created last year. Additional funding of £140 million over the Spending Review period for investment in the Department will enable it to take forward the next phase of the change programme flowing from the recent Joint Strategic Review carried out with the Office for Public Service Reform (OPSR). The investment will give staff the tools they need to change their ways of working, focus on customers and deliver the high quality services that will build DEFRA's reputation as a respected, high performing, and efficient Department.

Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission is funded on a net basis after taking account of the income it received, mainly from sales of timber from the public forests. Its timber income has fallen significantly in recent years due to a worldwide slump in timber prices. The Spending Review Settlement provides additional funding of £5 million a year on top of the 2003–04 baseline to enable the Commission to continue to drive forward the Government's England Forestry Strategy despite the reduction in timber income. This new money underlines forestry's important place in England's rural affairs and will allow the Commission to extend sustainable forests management, restore more native woodlands, increase community forests and the role of forests in tackling industrial dereliction. In addition to the funding shown in the White Paper, the Commission is also benefiting from special funding from the Capital Modernisation Fund and the Invest to Save Budget amounting to almost £11 million in the next 2 years.

Conclusion

Spending by the Department in 2005–06 will be more than £400 million higher than in 2002–03, supporting a programme of reform. It fulfils the Government's pledge to introduce a significant programme of measures to move the food and farming industries to a long-term sustainable basis, to create thriving and prosperous rural economies and communities and to improve the environment. And it takes full account of the Department's lead role in promoting sustainable development across Government for the good of our citizens, both now and in the future.

Correspondence

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the letter of the hon. Member for Hexham of 2 April on the stay warm scheme. [65644]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* The Department for Trade and Industry have responsibility for the Warm Stay Scheme. The hon. Member's letter has therefore been transferred to that Department.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Advisory Committee on the protection of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70575]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

Article 22 (3) of European Directive 86/609/EEC (on the approximation of laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States regarding the protection of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes) provides for the Commission to establish "a permanent consultative committee within which the Member States would be represented, which will assist the Commission in organising the exchange of appropriate information, while respecting the requirements of confidentiality, and which will also assist the Commission in the other questions raised by the application of this Directive". The Commission made a decision on 9 February 1990 (90/67/EEC) for setting up the Advisory Committee on the Protection of Animals for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes under Article 22 of the Directive, including provision for representation and working methods. However, the Committee has never been established. The Commission has recently made a recommendation for the Directive to be revised. In its initial comments on what amendments might be considered, the United Kingdom has suggested that the Commission should consider either dispensing with or establishing the Advisory Committee.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress and for the Implementation of the Directive on Contained Use of Genetically Modified Micro-organisms is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68552]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

No date has yet been fixed for the next meeting of this Committee. Officials from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) represent the UK on the Committee. The Scottish Ministers and HSE comprise the Competent Authority for implementation of the Directive on the contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms in Scotland. HSE officials consult the Scottish Executive on agenda items in which it might have an interest in accordance with our Concordat with the Devolved Administrations.

Job Creation

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what extra financing has been secured for regional development agencies to create positive job creation in the manufacturing sector. [69076]

Alan Johnson: RDA funding will increase from £1.24 billion in 2000–01 to £1.80 billion in 2003–04. Alongside this, the Government has given the RDAs financial flexibility to pursue their regional priorities. From 1 April this year, the RDAs are getting their funding from Government as a single funding stream which they can use as they judge best in order to meet a set of agreed targets. Under this general framework there is also a modest component of extra funding specifically designated for manufacturing to match fund RDAs' Regional Centres for Manufacturing Excellence (delivering the Manufacturing Advisory Service) but their role is not specifically one of job creation. However, one of the underpinning objectives of the single pot is to increase competitiveness and therefore employment, including in the manufacturing sector. The RDAs are working closely with Government to put in place strategies at the national and regional levels which will encourage the development of a strong and forward-looking manufacturing sector.

Construction Products

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Standing Committee on the approximation of the laws relating to construction products is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66423]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The Standing Committee is due to meet on 10 and 11 September 2002. The United Kingdom delegation consists of officials of the Office of The Deputy Prime Minister and a representative from the construction industry. International negotiation is a reserved matter, and the Scottish Executive is not, and has not been, represented on the Standing Committee. However, officials consult regularly with their opposite numbers in the devolved administrations on relevant issues prior to such negotiation.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Cultural Co-operation

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the EU Committee for the implementation of the programme establishing a single financing and programming instrument for cultural co-operation (Culture 2000) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70898]

Dr. Howells: The Culture 2000 Management Committee last met in Brussels on 31 May 2002. There is no fixed date for the next meeting of the Committee, although this is likely to be in the autumn. No members of the Scottish Executive have been or are members of the Committee.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the EU Committee on the export of cultural goods is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70915]

Dr. Howells: The exact date of the next meeting of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Goods is unknown. However, there are normally two meetings each year; and since the last meeting took place on 4 July, it is anticipated that the next meeting will be at the beginning of 2003. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not attended meetings of the committee. The Scottish Executive is not a member since the committee is responsible for advising the European Commission about a non-devolved matter. A representative of the Scottish Executive is, however, welcome to attend as an observer.

TREASURY

Light Dues

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the total income from light dues has been in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement; [70052]

(2) what the total income from light dues, broken down by port, has been in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [70053]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply

The total income from light dues in each of the last 10 years is listed on the attached sheet.

We do not hold information on income, broken down by port but have provided information on income broken down by region, in the last 5 years. The information is not held beyond that period. The income listed to Trinity House is light dues payments made directly to Trinity House Lighthouse Service.

Light Dues Income - Past 10 Years

Year	*Income(m)*
2001–2002	75.204 (Subject to Annual Audit)
2000–2001	71.445
1999–2000	69.261
1998–1999	67.452
1997–1998	62.141
1996–1997	65.550
1995–1996	64.344
1994–1995	64.785
1993–1994	64.307
1992–1993	59.859

Source:

The above figures are taken from the GLF Consolidated Accounts and are for Total Income. (Excluding Irish Government Contribution)

Light Dues Income—By Region

		2001–2002	*2000–2001*	*1999–2000*	*1998–1999*	*1997–1998*
Region	North East	5,583,008.09	4,971,195.86	5,471,943.10	5,209,028.28	5,228,123.75
Region	Humber	5,877,628.05	6,066,300.48	5,585,431.42	5,693,124.44	5,696,374.21
Region	Anglia	21,280,321.03	19,534,780.26	19,238,794.01	19,769,960.81	16,835,640.12
Region	South East	18,862,406.94	16,659,886.03	14,878,951.56	13,908,980.07	13,092,694.40
Region	South West	6,661,857.53	6,620,724.19	6,406,661.67	6,141,404.97	6,534,428.11
Region	North West	3,604,506.58	3,485,748.43	3,422,853.70	3,869,373.05	3,617,378.13
Region	Ulster	662,195.49	599,414.51	662,503.18	617,011.16	706,507.01
Region	Scotland	8,536,210.39	9,110,457.12	8,929,663.47	8,034,124.92	6,628,360.51
	Isle of Man	19,400.57	19,012.13	20,635.93	44,424.38	37,729.06
	Trinity House	620,054.57	584,976.03	751,370.04	350,439.58	536,236.96
Region	Ireland (C & E)	3,077,673.30	3,416,674.55	3,464,779.82	3,131,480.85	2,816,419.48
	Total	74,785,262.54	71,069,169.59	68,833,587.90	66,769,352.51	61,729,891.74

Source:

The figures by Region are for General Light Dues only and does not include income from UK Fishing Vessels and Tugs.

The figures do not include any Light Dues refunds that were made.

The figures for Ireland are shown in £ sterling after conversion.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of an abolition of light dues on *(a)* shipping, *(b)* port business and *(c)* tourism; and if he will make a statement. [70051]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

We do not intend to abolish light dues but are considering how the present system could be improved. We have issued a consultation document entitled "Light Dues Review: Meeting the Costs of Marine Aids to Navigation" seeking the views of the maritime industry on the structure of UK light dues. The consultation will consider whether charging can be extended to other users or redistributed among existing payers. We have asked consultees to identify the impact of light dues charges on their business operations.

The consultation period ends on 31 July. In the light of responses received, we shall consider where improvements can be made to the present system and determine the strength of support for change within the industry.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average payment made to Treasury was per ship entering British ports, in light dues for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [70064]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not held in the form requested.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the level of light dues; and if he will make a statement. [70050]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans at present to change the current level of light dues. The rates are reviewed annually and set at a level to meet the expenditure requirements of the General Lighthouse Authorities.

The consultation exercise on the Light Dues Review will determine whether improvements are made to the present system and if this will require changes to the regulations and current rates.

Equitable Life

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he expects the Penrose Inquiry into Equitable Life to be published in 2002; and if he will make a statement. [71613]

Ruth Kelly: Arrangements for publication will be considered once the report of the Penrose Inquiry has been received. No firm date has been specified for the completion of the Inquiry, though Lord Penrose is keen to ensure that the Inquiry proceeds as quickly as possible consistent with producing a thorough and authoritative account.

UK Citizens

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of UK citizens were born abroad; and what the corresponding figure was in each of the past 30 years. [71132]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 19 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning what percentage of UK citizens were from abroad; and what the corresponding figure was in each of the past 30 years. (71132)

The information you have requested is not available. Information on the citizenship of residents in the UK is derived from the Labour Force Survey. This identifies the number of British citizens resident in the UK, however, it is not possible to separately identify how many of these UK citizens arrived in the UK from abroad.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the EU Contact Committee on certain schemes for collective investment in securities is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70902]

Ruth Kelly: The EU Contact Committee on certain schemes for collective investment in transferable securities is next due to meet in autumn 2002. A precise date has not yet been fixed.

The UK is represented on the Committee by officials from HM Treasury and the Financial Services Authority. Financial regulation is not a devolved matter. Representatives of the Scottish Executive do not attend the Committee.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Challen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were *(a)* in employment and *(b)* in unemployment expressed as a percentage of the total population in (i) Leeds, (ii) Yorkshire and the Humber and (iii) London in each of the past 10 years. [69939]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Colin Challen, dated 19 July 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about employment and unemployment in Leeds, Yorkshire and the Humber, and London. (69939)

The table overleaf gives estimates of the employment and unemployment rates in spring (March to May) of each year from 1992 to 2001. These estimates are from the Labour Force Survey.

Employment rates[1] by area of residence; all persons of working age[2]; 1993 to 2002

	Per cent			
	United Kingdom[3]	*Leeds*[4]	*Yorkshire & the Humber*[3]	*London*[3]
1993	70.4	73.2	71.0	67.6
1994	70.8	73.0	70.2	66.3
1995	71.3	72.2	71.7	67.5
1996	71.9	75.4	71.8	68.2
1997	72.9	74.3	70.9	70.5
1998	73.4	75.9	72.4	69.9
1999	73.9	74.7	72.9	71.7
2000	74.6	77.3	73.9	71.5
2001	74.9	80.2	73.8	71.3
2002	74.7	76.9	73.4	71.0

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

[1] People in employment as a percentage of the relevant population

[2] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

[3] Seasonally adjusted data for March to May

[4] Not seasonally adjusted data; 4 quarter average ending May

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Offshore Fire-fighters

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the level of risk to which staff fire-fighting on offshore facilities are exposed. [67329]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) has not commissioned any research into these matters However, duty holders of offshore installations are required to demonstrate to HSE they have evaluated the risks to which their personnel could be exposed during fire-fighting activities and that those risks are effectively controlled.

Empty Homes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Government Departments and agencies have *(a)* adopted and *(b)* not adopted the revised guidance on securing the better use of empty homes published by the DETR in 1999; and if he will make a statement. [70261]

Mr. McNulty: This information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Unfit Dwellings

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* houses, *(b)* houses in multiple occupation and *(c)* other dwellings were declared unfit for human habitation, broken down by (i) failure of gas appliance, (ii) failure of kitchen amenities, (iii) failure of bathroom and drainage facilities, (iv) structural failure and (v) other failures, in each of the last five years. [66676]

Mr. McNulty: The most recent information available is for private sector dwellings and houses in multiple occupation in 1997–98. This is shown in the table below.

Private sector dwellings and houses in multiple occupation declared unfit: in 1997–98

Total of which those declared unfit under Section 604 of the Housing Act 1985 (1)										
	Serious disrepair	*Structural stability*	*Dampness*	*Ventilation*	*Heating*	*Lighting*	*Water supply*	*Prep./ Cooking Food*	*Bath/Shower Hand basin H&C/WC*	*Drainage*
48.0	22.2	3.8	11.2	3.0	3.5	2.3	2.1	5.4	3.7	1.8

Houses in multiple occupation declared unfit under sections 352 and 604 of the Housing Act 1985 in 1997–98

Total						*Thousands*
Declared unfit under			*Reasons for unfitness under section 352(2)*			
Section 604	Section 352	Total	Storage/Prep. Cooking Food	WC	Baths/Basins showers HC	Escape nfrom fire/fire precautions
2.0	8.0	8.9	1.0	0.4	1.0	6.1

(1) The number of reasons is greater than the numbers of dwellings identified because a dwelling or HMO can be unfit for more than one reason

(2) A HMO can be unfit under both sections 352 and 604, therefore the total is less than the sum of the components

Housing Improvement Grants

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what funding he is providing to local councils for housing improvement grants in *(a)* England and *(b)* Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement. [64443]

Mr. McNulty: The Government no longer allocates specific funding to local authorities for housing improvement grants. Each housing authority must decide how much it will allocate towards this purpose from the total capital funding provided to it by the Government each year.

Total capital resources made available for housing purposes for all authorities in England for 2002–03 is £2.5 billion. For Gloucestershire the figure for 2002–03 is £16.6 million, an increase of 85 per cent on 1997–98.

Planning Decisions

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent steps have been taken to speed up planning decisions. [71022]

Mr. McNulty: The comprehensive package of planning reforms announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 18 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 438–442W includes measures to speed up planning decisions. These include extra resources for central and local government, tough targets for delivery of plans and development control decisions, and proposals to improve the efficiency of the planning system and raise the quality of outputs.

Urban Renewal

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much private investment there has been in urban renewal in each of the last five years. [69380]

Mr. McNulty: Information on all the private investment that contributes to urban renewal is not collected by Government.

Traveller Encampments

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans to revise regulations regarding traveller encampments. [71096]

Mr. McNulty: On 5 July, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in conjunction with the Home Office, issued a joint news release outlining the Government's new approach to tackling unauthorised Traveller camps.

The new procedures include stricter powers for the police to move on unauthorised Traveller encampments, provided the local authority have made adequate provision for sites in the area; producing new guidance on managing unauthorised camping and improved local Gypsy site provision.

A copy of the news release has been placed in the Library of the House.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will obtain a reply for the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton to the letter with regard to Mr. Pat McGuinness that he sent on 13 March to the then Secretary of State for Transport, Local government and the Regions and to which that Department sent a holding reply dated 25 April saying that the letter had been transferred to the Planning Inspectorate. [68659]

Mr. McNulty: I refer my right hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions on 2 May, *Official Report*, column 902W.

Departmental Property

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library his Department's departmental-owned residential property record. [70768]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not directly own residential property.

London City Racecourse

Linda Perham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will make a decision on the planning application for the London city racecourse. [70750]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister expects that a decision on the London City Racecourse will be issued by the end of July.

E-mail Press Release Service

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when his Department intends to establish an e-mail press release service similar to that previously provided by the former Department of Transport, Local government and the Regions. [70656]

Mr. Leslie: We expect that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will establish a similar service by Autumn 2002.

Delayed Discharge

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the Government's strategy to tackle delayed discharge in London; and what resources will be needed to meet the level of demand. [69147]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

In September 2001 there were 1126 people who experienced a delayed transfer of care from an acute hospital bed in London. By March 2002, the target reduction to 901 beds had been met. London Boroughs received their share of the £300 million made available through the Building Care Capacity Grant to end unnecessary delayed discharges from hospital. Their total allocation was £42,560,387 over the two years 2001–02 and 2002–03.

London Boroughs have agreed challenging targets for further reductions, averaging between 20 per cent and 25 per cent by March 2003. The targets were set as part of the conditions for receiving the grant. For Personal Social Services, we have already announced annual average growth in real terms of 6 per cent from 2003–04 to 2005–06.

CABINET OFFICE

Recycling

Sue Doughty: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of *(a)* paper and *(b)* other goods purchased by his Department was recycled paper in each year since 1997; what the annual total cost of these purchases was; what plans there are to increase these proportions; and if he will make a statement. [65773]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office purchases all its standard photocopier/printer paper from "sustainably managed" sources. A small amount of high quality premium paper, which does not come from the same sources, is purchased and used for specific jobs. We are seeking a more "environmentally friendly" alternative to this product.

We have successfully tested re-cycled paper for use in our office machinery and are now working in partnership with a number of other departments to establish a contract for the purchase of recycled paper.

Information on other goods derived from recycled paper purchased by the Cabinet Office could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

Strategy Unit

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what additional projects are planned for the Strategy Unit; and if he will make a statement. [72101]

Mr. Alexander: The Prime Minister has asked the Strategy Unit to carry out a project looking at how to tackle the problems associated with alcohol misuse.

The large majority of people who drink do so without causing themselves or others harm. The focus of the project will be the harm that can be caused by excessive drinking. It will pay particular attention to issues such as alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour, problems faced by vulnerable groups such as children and what works best in tackling the problems of alcohol misuse.

My hon. Friend the Under Secretary of State for Public Health, will be Sponsor Minister for the project.

The scoping note for the project is available on the SU website (www.strategy.gov.uk). There will be a wide-ranging consultation on the issues, commencing from this announcement, during which all interested parties are encouraged to contribute their views. The Strategy Unit aims to complete its study by Spring 2003.

Monthly Audits

Brian Cotter: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many monthly audits of regulation have taken place since 1997 relating to *(a)* the number of new regulations introduced and *(b)* the number of regulations repealed. [71266]

Mr. Alexander: Regulatory Impact Assessments are produced for regulations that have an impact on business, charities and the voluntary sector. These can be found in the House libraries. They are also reported monthly to the Cabinet Office. Since 1997 (inclusive), 27 Deregulation Orders have been made under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act; a chronological list is available on the Cabinet Office's website. In February 2002 the government published the Regulatory Reform Action Plan, setting 63 proposals for Regulatory Reform Orders (RROs). RROs enable government to repeal more easily unnecessary regulation.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Student Loan Company

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was to the Student Loan Company to issue cheques to each student in higher education every term in each of the last five years. [70155]

Margaret Hodge: Only the first loan instalment is paid by cheque each Academic Year. Subsequent instalments are paid by BACS. I have asked the Chief Executive of the Student Loans Company to write to my hon. Friend with further information, and to place a copy of the letter in the House library.

Further Education

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact of the pay gap between schools and the further education sector on recruiting *(a)* music, *(b)* maths, *(c)* IT and *(d)* construction and engineering lecturers to further education colleges. [65078]

Margaret Hodge: We have not carried out an assessment of this type. As independent organisations it is for each college to recruit their own staff and to agree pay within the context of the overall resources available to them. We know that there are differences between salaries in general further education colleges and schools and this issue is being considered as part of the current Spending Review settlement.

An additional £314 million is available for FE this year compared with 2001–02; by 2003–04 total funding for FE will be up by 26 per cent in real terms since 1997 and total funding per full-time equivalent student will be up by 16 per cent over the same period. In 2002–03, the Learning and Skills Council has increased colleges' participation funding rates by 2.5 per cent in cash terms, compared to a 1.5 per cent increase in 2001–02.

As part of the overall funding allocation, we are investing more than £300 million in the Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI). TPI is an important initiative designed to help modernise further education (FE) pay arrangements and to recruit, reward and retain teachers and lecturers as part of the drive to improve teaching and learning. Alongside TPI, we are introducing Training Bursaries, Golden Hellos and, subject to the approval of Parliament, a scheme to pay-off over time the student loans of new teachers in FE shortage subject areas. All of these initiatives offer significant financial rewards both to students training to be FE lecturers as well as those taking up teaching posts in FE shortage subject areas.

Marketing (Universities)

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she collates on expenditure by individual universities on marketing. [70024]

Margaret Hodge: This information is not collated centrally. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects data annually which show the expenditure of each higher education institution broken down by various categories, but expenditure on marketing is not identified separately.

City Academies

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what flexibility there is for city academies to choose *(a)* their catchment area for admissions and *(b)* the feeder schools they will work with. [69724]

Mr. Miliband: It is a condition of the Funding Agreement between the Academy and the Secretary of State that each Academy's admissions arrangements are consistent with the law on admissions and the Statutory Codes of Practice as they apply to maintained schools. Within these requirements Academies have the right to determine their own admissions policies and admission arrangements, including oversubscription criteria. Acceptable criteria can include catchment areas and transfer from named feeder primary schools, in addition to others such as sibling links and distance from school. Academies will not operate in isolation but are required, as part of the Funding Agreement, to share their facilities with other schools and the wider community.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the specialist schools for which progress reports were submitted in September *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001, broken down by (i) local education authority, (ii) specialism, (iii) status of the school, (iv) the total number of applications for places, (v) the number and percentage of pupils selected by aptitude, (vi) the number and percentage of pupils with statements and (vii) the number and percentage of pupils receiving free school meals. [68173]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

School Statistics

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils in secondary education in England there were and; how many and what percentage of pupils were in fee paying *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools, broken down by sex, in each of the last three years. [68171]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The available information is shown in the table below:

Pupils in Independent Schools: Numbers and as a Proportion of Total Pupil Numbers

England

	Independent Schools			*All Schools (1)*			*Percentage of pupils in independent schools (2)*		
	Total boys	*Total girls*	*Total all pupils*	*Total boys*	*Total girls*	*Total all pupils*	*Total boys*	*Total girls*	*Total all pupils*
January 2000									
Pupils aged: Under 5	33,861	34,030	67,891	501,506	478,851	980,357	6.8	7.1	6.9
5 to 10	104,072	99,044	203,116	1,980,145	1,886,362	3,866,507	5.3	5.3	5.3
Total Under 11	*137,933*	*133,074*	*271,007*	*2,481,651*	*2,365,213*	*4,846,864*	*5.6*	*5.6*	*5.6*
11 to 15	110,253	103,014	213,267	1,583,332	1,513,934	3,097,266	7.0	6.8	6.9
16+ (3)	40,568	35,718	76,286	196,339	205,346	401,685	20.7	17.4	19.0
Total Over 11	*150,821*	*138,732*	*289,553*	*1,779,671*	*1,719,280*	*3,498,951*	*8.5*	*8.1*	*8.3*
Total	288,754	271,806	560,560	4,261,322	4,084,493	8,345,815	6.8	6.7	6.7
January 2001									
Pupils aged: Under 5	34,848	34,918	69,766	498,930	475,563	974,493	7.0	7.3	7.2
5 to 10	105,215	100,379	205,594	1,968,070	1,873,140	3,841,210	5.3	5.4	5.4
Total Under 11	*140,063*	*135,297*	*275,360*	*2,467,000*	*2,348,703*	*4,815,703*	*5.7*	*5.8*	*5.7*
11 to 15	112,274	105,348	217,622	1,611,433	1,540,200	3,151,633	7.0	6.8	6.9
16+ (3)	40,589	35,682	76,271	199,850	206,933	406,783	20.3	17.2	18.7
Total Over11	*152,863*	*141,030*	*293,893*	*1,811,283*	*1,747,133*	*3,558,416*	*8.4*	*8.1*	*8.3*
Total	292,926	276,327	569,253	4,278,283	4,095,836	8,374,119	6.8	6.7	6.8
January 2002 (Provisional)									
Pupils aged:									
Under 5	35,322	35,930	71,252	497,442	476,675	974,117	7.1	7.5	7.3
5 to 10	105,677	101,394	207,071	1,944,804	1,851,210	3,796,014	5.4	5.5	5.5
Total Under11	*140,999*	*137,324*	*278,323*	*2,442,246*	*2,327,885*	*4,770,131*	*5.8*	*5.9*	*5.8*
11 to 15	114,729	108,094	222,823	1,630,271	1,558,345	3,188,616	7.0	6.9	7.0
16+ (3)	40,881	37,711	78,592	201,018	209,860	410,878	20.3	18.0	19.1
Total Over 11	*155,610*	*145,805*	*301,415*	*1,831,289*	*1,768,205*	*3,599,494*	*8.5*	*8.2*	*8.4*
Total	296,609	283,129	579,738	4,273,535	4,096,090	8,369,625	6.9	6.9	6.9

(1) Includes all pupils in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools, maintained and non-maintained special schools, pupil referral units, city technology colleges, direct grant nurseries and independent schools.

(2) Expressed as a percentage of the total number of pupils in all schools.

(3) Excludes pupils in sixth form colleges and further education colleges.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census.

Foreign Teachers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assistance her Department gives to schools seeking to recruit teachers from abroad. [70181]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The Department does not give any special assistance to schools for overseas recruitment. But more broadly, my right hon. Friend has allocated £44 million from the recruitment and retention fund for 2002–03 to schools in areas where the cost of living can make it harder to attract and keep the best teachers, following the £33 million allocated last year. A new Recruitment and Retention Unit in the Government Office for London will also support London LEAs in, amongst other things, overseas recruitment.

School Expulsions

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children were expelled from school in Somerset over the last two years. [69398]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of Permanent Exclusions from schools (1) in Somerset Local Education Authority

	1998–99		*1999–2000*	
	Number of permanent exclusions	*Percentage of the school population (2)*	*Number of permanent exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population (2)*
Somerset	63	0.09	62	0.09

(1) Maintained primary and secondary schools and maintained and non-maintained special schools

(2) The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the headcount of pupils in maintained primary and secondary schools and special schools.

Source:

Annual Schools Census

Further Education

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the reasons for the delays in notifying colleges of their funding allocations for 2002–03; and what instructions she has given the Learning and Skills Council to ensure that colleges, have adequate time to fulfil its requirement that corporations must approve a budget before the beginning of its funding year on 1 August. [68514]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* It is hard to compare progress on final allocations in 2002–03 with earlier years since the process is now different. In the past, the allocation of funding to colleges did not take into account colleges' previous performance. The old system of funding led to some colleges bidding and receiving funding for unachievable growth targets, retaining funds which their performance did not justify (last year estimated at over £150 millions) which could more usefully have been allocated elsewhere, and ultimately having to pay the money back.

This year, as part of our drive to improve standards, performance and efficiency, and target funding where it can have the most impact, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has used its budgetary discretion so that money is allocated more effectively. It has introduced new arrangements which will stimulate growth, particularly for 16–18 year olds and basic skills, by putting in place a more robust allocations process and challenging those providers who have consistently been unable to achieve their projected performance levels in the past. This process has led to detailed and at times protracted negotiations with some providers. However it has ensured that we no longer have millions of pounds sitting in college bank accounts not working effectively towards our priorities.

Despite this change which might have been expected to cause delays, by 5 July the LSC had made 313 (48 per cent) final allocations to colleges. This is well ahead of last year when only 16 per cent of institutions had received final allocations by the first week in July. We recognise however that there is still considerable scope for improvement and the LSC is looking at ways of doing better in the future so that final allocations can be made even earlier.

Dyslexia

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what training is required for teachers to deal with pupils diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia. [70156]

Stephen Twigg: It is important that all teachers are properly prepared for the range of special educational needs (SEN) they will encounter in schools. That is why, as part of their initial teacher training, all student teachers must show that they understand their responsibilities under the SEN Code of Practice, and know how to seek advice where necessary. These skills are reinforced and developed during their induction period, when teachers have to demonstrate that they can plan effectively to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.

There are no specific training requirements placed on teachers in relation to dealing with pupils diagnosed with either Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. However, opportunities for in-service training and continuing professional development for teachers in post are supported under the training component of the SEN category of the Department's Standards Fund, through which £91 million of locally supported expenditure is available for SEN in 2002–03. Under the Standards Fund, LEAs and schools can draw on grant aid to address the training and development needs of teachers, and other staff, in relation to particular SEN conditions, including ADHD and dyslexia. The support on offer covers activity ranging from awareness raising events to more specialised in-depth training. It is, however, for individual local education authorities and schools to determine and prioritise the training and development needs of their staff, in the light of local circumstances. We have also introduced in 2002–03 two new £1 million funding streams, under the SEN Small Programme Fund and the SEN Training and Development Fund, to support the creation of new or extended training opportunities and resources for teachers and other staff. Under these initiatives, competitive bids were invited from voluntary organisations and higher education institutions. Included amongst the successful bids were a number of ADHD and dyslexia projects.

Safe Routes to Schools

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the Safe Routes to Schools initiative. [69485]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We continue to work with the Department for Transport, and other partners on the School Travel Advisory Group, to make the journey to school safer. This Department has also produced guidance for schools, governors and local education authorities to help them put in place initiatives to promote healthier, safer and more sustainable school travel.

Morley and Rothwell

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many mature students in Morley and Rothwell have applied for a child care grant. [69362]

Margaret Hodge: Information on mature students who apply for a childcare grant is not available centrally.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people in Morley and Rothwell received help from the Community Champions Fund. [69363]

Margaret Hodge: The Scarman Trust, who administer the Community Champions fund in the West Yorkshire region, have received five applications from people in the Morley and Rothwell area. Unfortunately, none of these applications were successful, either because they were from large, established community groups, or because they did not meet the criteria for Community Champions funding.

However, we would welcome further applications from individuals and small groups in Morley and Rothwell who want to increase their skills to participate in the regeneration of their communities. In the first instance, they should contact the Government Office for Yorkshire and The Humber at the address below.

Natalie Bain

GOYH

PO Box 213

Room 1252

City House

New Station Street

Leeds

LS1 4US

Tel: 0113 2835884

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people in Morley and Rothwell have *(a)* taken up modern apprenticeships, *(b)* started a foundation degree course and *(c)* received help from Individual Learning Accounts. [69365]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is as follows:

(a) started modern apprenticeships.

1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
190	248	296	300	358

(a) started a foundation degree course.

Provisional figures for autumn 2001 show that there were 6 students on Foundation degrees.

(b) received help from individual learning accounts.

A total of 1,202 people have received help from the Individual Learning Account programme that was in operation from September 2000 to November 2001.

Agricultural Colleges

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what help will be given to agricultural colleges to cope with the change in the rural economy resulting from the foot and mouth epidemic. [65145]

Margaret Hodge: Funding and planning of provision by agricultural colleges in the further education sector is the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to the hon. Member providing the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library. Agricultural colleges in the higher education sector are responsible for their own management and development, in discussion with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

Training Organisations

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 26 June 2002 to my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), *Official Report*, column 910W, on training organisations, what payments were made to each NTO in each financial year since April 1997; and what the sector coverage was of each NTO in March. [70295]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The first NTO recognitions were in 1997. NTO recognition was withdrawn as of 31 March 2002. The totality of payments recorded for each financial year since April 1997 made by the Department in respect of work contracted by each NTO and sector coverage is as attached in Annex 1.

Unfortunately in our response of the 26 June, one organisation's total was included twice. This explains the difference in the 2001–2002 figures.

Annex 1

NTO	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*NTO Total*
Accountancy NTO	0.00	0.00	0.00	74,494.00	85,000.00	159,494.00
Animal Care and Equine NTO	0.00	0.00	10,455.00	0.00	0.00	10,455.00
Association for Ceramic Training and Development	0.00	41,455.00	129,950.00	108,813.00	117,951.00	398,169.00
Bakery Training Council	0.00	25,000.00	70,020.00	195,770.00	137,229.30	428,019.30
Banks and Building Societies NTO	0.00	115,000.00	123,000.00	119,000.00	0.00	357,000.00
Board for Education and Training in the Water Industry	90,590.66	0.00	31,950.00	0.00	0.00	122,540.66

Annex I

NTO	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*NTO Total*
British Plumbing Employers Council	206,420.30	58,451.00	116,853.30	76,000.38	85,000.00	542,724.98
British Ports Industry Training Ltd	0.00	148,483.00	122,783.00	155,000.00	139,300.00	565,566.00
CAPITB (Clothing, Apparel, Leather Prod)	177,427.70	64,300.00	15,732.00	80,000.00	75,000.00	412,459.70
Central Government National Training Organisation	0.00	36,552.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	36,552.00
Chemical Manufacturing and Processing NTO	65,200.00	45,750.00	74,245.00	82,334.00	80,000.00	347,529.00
Cleaning and Support Services NTO	9,105.50	78,050.00	46,435.00	72,464.00	53,691.95	259,746.45
OPITO (Oil & Gas Extraction)	0.00	0.00	48,331.00	76,561.00	43,747.16	168,639.16
Community Justice NTO	0.00	66,777.67	163,620.00	168,263.80	170,000.00	568,661.47
Construction Industry Training Board	198,002.80	370,762.20	1,033,125.00	241,500.00	240,907.00	2,084,297.00
Council for Administration	266,423.90	212,400.00	242,575.00	334,089.00	248,941.00	1,304,428.90
Cultural Heritage NTO	0.00	37,773.00	191,773.00	71,000.00	140,506.60	441,052.60
Custodial Care NTO	0.00	0.00	74,911.03	99,733.98	95,000.00	269,645.01
Dairy Training and Development Council	10,500.00	17,000.00	26,721.75	68,134.50	137,722.40	260,078.65
Distributive NTO	0.00	15,001.00	187,646.00	255,132.80	127,549.50	585,329.30
Electricity Training Association	23,368.60	14,390.00	59,450.00	71,911.24	58,000.00	227,119.84
Employment NTO	0.00	218,038.00	373,528.00	293,922.60	407,968.30	1,293,456.90
EMTA (Engineering)	237,212.90	280,300.00	832,142.60	179,748.60	157,500.00	1,686,904.10
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board	105,957.20	19,213.55	19,447.50	45,859.11	30,505.16	220,982.52
Engineering Services Training Trust Ltd	0.00	22,854.00	166,362.00	85,065.86	90,010.73	364,292.59
EPIC (Extractives and Mineral Processing Industries NTO)	0.00	104,000.00	87,519.00	136,750.00	85,000.00	413,269.00
e-skills NTO (formerly ITNTO)	0.00	521,737.20	1,487,618.10	981,595.96	834,000.94	3,824,952.20
Financial Services NTO	0.00	0.00	0.00	30,000.00	253,750.00	283,750.00
Food & Drink	133,030.20	72,107.25	175,483.00	135,944.80	115,000.00	631,565.25
Footwear and Leather NTO	0.00	0.00	56,282.00	130,000.00	66,000.00	252,282.00
Furniture, Furnishings and Interiors NTO	0.00	0.00	0.00	69,551.25	65,000.00	134,551.25
Further Education NTO	0.00	0.00	278,300.00	903,700.00	1,016,646.00	2,198,646.00
Gas Industry NTO	0.00	22,000.00	130,524.10	129,121.00	105,931.00	387,576.10
Glass NTO	144,350.00	57,424.64	113,020.00	331,201.00	75,000.00	720,995.64
Hairdressing and Beauty Industry Authority	217,582.90	52,961.00	88,490.35	79,797.00	126,998.10	565,829.35
Healthwork UK (Healthcare)	0.00	81,200.00	263,630.00	237,636.00	147,000.00	729,466.00
Higher Education Staff Development Association	0.00	67,555.54	193,565.00	239,200.00	185,000.00	685,320.54
Hospitality Training Foundation	319,460.50	303,060.00	367,731.00	335,120.00	315,000.00	1,640,371.50
Housing Potential UK	0.00	59,772.38	126,858.00	60,000.00	57,675.00	304,305.38
Information Services NTO	0.00	0.00	0.00	66,290.00	74,767.05	141,057.05
Institute of Customer Service	0.00	0.00	61,066.00	108,614.00	104,999.90	274,679.90
Insurance and Related Financial Services NTO	100,200.00	105,000.00	93,901.25	118,000.00	0.00	417,101.25
Languages NTO	0.00	259,988.00	236,765.00	225,344.00	211,092.70	933,189.70
Lantra Trust (Landbased Industries)	0.00	403,287.00	751,900.00	792,352.50	600,000.00	2,547,539.50
Local Government NTO	5,000.00	1,025,127.00	245,995.10	219,508.10	205,329.50	1,700,959.70
Meat Training Council	152,329.00	56,131.00	0.00	46,295.58	83,344.33	338,099.91
Merchant Navy Training Board	0.00	0.00	47,486.00	96,478.00	78,000.00	221,964.00
Metals Industry Skills & Performance Ltd	98,420.00	70,530.00	191,397.00	197,800.10	144,318.00	702,465.10
METIER (Arts & Entertainment)	6,862.50	234,976.00	221,063.00	234,486.30	205,673.40	903,061.20
Motor Industry Training Council	35,037.54	36,432.01	133,369.00	186,631.00	128,897.60	520,367.15
National Electrotechnical Training — NTO	136,450.00	135,400.00	207,640.00	230,700.00	67,300.00	777,490.00
National Textile Training Organisation	0.00	0.00	56,500.00	58,550.00	93,252.00	208,302.00
NTO for Early Years	0.00	241,854.38	224,800.00	147,000.00	159,000.00	772,654.38
nto tele.com	0.00	140,000.00	834,202.00	109,948.00	0.00	1,084,150.00
Paper Education and Training Council	0.00	34,275.00	68,175.00	36,568.00	45,000.00	184,018.00
PAULO NTO (Community based L & D)	0.00	0.00	0.00	51,830.00	128,860.00	180,690.00
Petroleum Industry NTO	0.00	0.00	64,596.50	47,763.22	56,988.75	169,348.47
Pharmaceutical Industry NTO	0.00	8,000.00	25,500.85	58,500.00	60,000.00	152,000.85
Photo Imaging NTO	0.00	0.00	50,000.00	45,000.00	31,500.00	126,500.00
Police Skills and Standards Organisation	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	110,000.00	110,000.00
Polymer and Associated Industries NTO	0.00	30,190.00	66,310.00	122,890.00	62,600.00	281,990.00
Print and Graphic Communication NTO	0.00	28,064.32	61,033.00	180,914.80	114,516.00	384,528.12
Publishing NTO	0.00	0.00	0.00	148,093.00	128,111.30	276,204.30
Rail Industry Training Council	0.00	105,675.00	157,275.00	115,315.00	115,000.00	493,265.00

Annex 1

NTO	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*NTO Total*
Refractories and Building Products Training Council	0.00	25,416.00	63,477.00	85,000.00	70,000.00	243,893.00
Road Haulage and Distribution Training Council	163,899.40	88,820.97	221,095.90	183,900.00	180,000.00	837,716.27
Science, Technology and Mathematics Council	379,758.20	358,732.00	322,351.00	292,753.00	188,150.80	1,541,745.00
Seafish Training	114,480.10	53,649.00	93,022.00	90,663.00	90,000.00	441,814.10
Security Industry Training Organisation	271,207.50	224,159.00	202,615.00	41,308.00	138,842.50	878,132.00
SKILLSET (Broadcasting, Film etc)	0.00	198,090.00	671,391.10	247,719.00	145,000.00	1,262,200.10
Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative / METO	0.00	610,213.80	784,692.73	611,961.70	401,465.90	2,408,334.13
SPRITO — NTO for Sport, Recreation and Allied Occupations	261,116.20	263,400.00	457,609.00	400,000.00	332,371.00	1,714,496.20
The Property Services NTO	0.00	0.00	0.00	131,529.70	65,000.00	196,529.70
Training Alliance for Surface Coatings	0.00	0.00	22,800.00	11,385.00	15,000.00	49,185.00
Training Organisation for Personal Social Services	0.00	5,801.00	113,612.50	177,238.00	205,000.00	501,651.50
TRANSFED (Passenger Transport)	228,552.00	13,109.33	260,133.70	228,125.00	220,000.00	949,920.03
Ttento Ltd (Travel)	0.00	0.00	51,170.00	82,780.00	92,691.00	226,641.00
Voluntary Sector NTO	0.00	150,719.00	414,953.00	230,000.00	225,000.00	1,020,672.00
	4,157,945.60 4.158	8,136,408.24 8.136	15,007,974.36 15.008	13,213,648.88 13.214	11,546,602.87 11.547	52,062,579.95 52.063

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of the public service agreements of her Department set out in the document Public Services for the Future 1998 have been met; and if she will make a statement. [68716]

Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* Information relating to the Department's Public Service Agreement targets can be found in the Department for Education and Skills Departmental Report 2002.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff have contributed to her Department's input to the Spending Review. [68681]

Estelle Morris: The spending review involves a comprehensive assessment of the department's performance, priorities and resource requirements and a range of staff have made and will make contributions.

Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in her Department. [69323]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Currently there is very little use of Open Source Software in the Department.

Our future use of Open Source Software will follow the Government policy which is expected to be published in summer 2002.

The draft policy document is available for viewing at http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/rfc/rfc_document.asp?docnum=429.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance her Department has issued to primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, universities and education authorities relating to the purchasing of computer software; and how much she estimates was spent by these bodies on computer software over the last five years. [70004]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not currently provide direct guidance to schools, colleges, universities and education authorities about which software products to purchase. There are however a number of sources of advice, such as the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta), to help institutions make purchasing decisions.

Guidance supporting the National Grid for Learning Standards Fund Grant for ICT encourages schools to spend at least 15 per cent of this grant on the procurement and development of educational and operational software.

The Department does not routinely collect data on total spend on software however the 2001 ICT in Schools Survey did report that in 1999–2000 schools in England spent an average of £800 per primary school and £5,230 per secondary on Software and Online Content.

Pressure-treated Wood

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health regarding the safety of CCA pressure-treated wood. [69627]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department has discussed the safety of CCA pressure-treated wood with officials from the Department of Health. We have also discussed the issue with DTI who represent the views of the Construction Industry; and with HSE who carried out a risk assessment of CCA products used to treat wood, under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.

In the UK wood preservatives are covered by the Control of Pesticide Regulations, and the Health and Safety Executive lead on such non-agricultural pesticides. CCA is approved for the pre-treatment of timber by pressure impregnation at industrial sites. This follows the advice to Ministers from the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) that such products do not present any risk to human health or the environment.

Recently the EU Scientific Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment advised that there was a small risk to children from the use of CCA treated wood in playground equipment. Applying the precautionary principle, the Commission have subsequently drawn up proposals under the Marketing and Use Directive, which would prevent the use of CCA treated wood, with some exceptions such as for railway sleepers and electricity and telephone poles. This would prevent its use in playground equipment.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations her Department has received regarding the number of playgrounds using CCA pressure-treated wood. [69626]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The Department has not received any representations regarding the number of playgrounds using CCA pressure-treated wood. However Copper Chrome Arsenic (CCA) pressure-treated wood preservative is the most common wood preservative for softwoods which are often used externally and have been used extensively in playgrounds. There are alternative materials which can be used in place of CCA treated wood in playground equipment.

HEALTH

Social Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* the average fee paid per person per week in each social services authority in England on purchasing places in the private and voluntary sector by social services, *(b)* the percentage increase in each social services authority in England, *(c)* the retail price index change and *(d)* the average wage level change was in each year since 1993–94. [69715]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the average fee paid per person per week on purchasing places in the private and voluntary sector by local authority social services is not available centrally.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was allocated to each London borough through *(a)* personal social services standard spending assessment and *(b)* special grants in 2001–02. [69964]

Jacqui Smith: The tables show how much was allocated to each London Borough through (a) personal social services standard spending assessment and (b) special grants in 2001–02.

In addition, the City of London was allocated £1,280,000 from the drugs and alcohol specific grant and was responsible for pan-London services for all London Boroughs.

2001–02 Allocations	*Standard Spending Assessment*	*Mental Health Grant*	*Training Support Programme*	*Children's Services Grant*	*Promoting Independence Grant*
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Inner London					
City of London	2,349	29	15	83	70
Camden	68,067	1,218	201	3,372	1,859
Greenwich	63,824	1,067	315	3,032	1,762
Hackney	77,171	1,501	198	4,526	1,914
Hammersmith & Fulham	51,577	1,056	264	2,878	1,331
Islington	67,954	1,039	229	4,011	1,700
Kensington & Chelsea	49,290	891	195	2,390	1,324
Lambeth	92,374	1,563	285	6,034	2,160
Lewisham	75,867	1,551	244	4,216	1,971
Southwark	87,510	1,644	345	5,095	2,116
Tower Hamlets	75,331	1,337	273	3,956	1,875
Wandsworth	74,746	1,216	312	3,370	2,117
Westminster	71,692	1,088	355	3,216	1,979
Outer London					
Barking & Dagenham	44,148	622	151	1,640	1,315
Barnet	63,692	885	283	2,067	2,060
Bexley	38,251	599	195	1,203	1,246
Brent	61,747	1,068	228	3,448	1,612
Bromley	49,695	706	184	1,477	1,687
Croydon	61,631	1,030	238	2,780	1,764
Ealing	68,086	1,131	251	3,231	1,886
Enfield	56,839	863	189	2,097	1,757
Haringey	61,138	1071	247	3,723	1,534
Harrow	39,300	597	274	1,162	1,298
Havering	38,514	584	210	1,013	1,328
Hillingdon	44,054	783	296	1,616	1,409
Hounslow	45,783	725	210	1,953	1,333
Kingston upon Thames	23,387	515	214	767	772
Merton	35,052	868	201	1,300	1,064
Newham	68,797	1,561	257	3,951	1,717
Redbridge	45,514	638	180	1,434	1,472
Richmond upon Thames	30,779	482	200	804	1,061
Sutton	31,174	466	176	983	1,015
Waltham Forest	56,900	918	305	2,561	1,623

2001–02 Allocations	*Carers' Grant*	*Deferred Payments Grant*	*Improving Information Management Grant*	*Young People's Substance Misuse Planning Grant*	*Aids Support grant*	*Building Care Capacity Grant*
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Inner London						
City of London	17	1	17	2	28	17
Camden	519	28	17	51	803	422
Greenwich	481	51	17	48	144	430
Hackney	572	16	17	66	442	421
Hammersmith & Fulham	395	24	92	42	592	289
Islington	509	16	17	59	512	390
Kensington & Chelsea	393	26	17	37	592	265
Lambeth	714	37	17	88	1,000	460
Lewisham	576	54	17	63	400	464
Southwark	665	26	17	80	640	475
Tower Hamlets	563	13	17	64	400	421
Wandsworth	579	57	17	52	534	481
Westminster	554	32	17	51	547	422
Outer London						
Barking & Dagenham	315	39	17	29	60	480
Barnet	496	112	17	32	240	680
Bexley	294	82	17	20	41	315
Brent	468	65	17	48	329	359
Bromley	407	126	17	24	124	827
Croydon	493	101	17	44	329	403
Ealing	522	78	17	48	310	424
Enfield	432	94	17	34	179	743
Haringey	467	39	17	52	518	409
Harrow	297	79	17	18	96	324
Havering	302	92	17	17	25	555
Hillingdon	342	81	57	23	121	566
Hounslow	352	53	17	30	25	312
Kingston upon Thames	190	53	17	11	121	179
Merton	275	60	17	21	156	248
Newham	505	37	96	59	451	398
Redbridge	343	92	17	23	147	369
Richmond upon Thames	253	59	17	13	92	411
Sutton	249	63	17	17	60	289
Waltham Forest	422	57	17	40	285	560

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what vacancies there were for social workers and social care staff in London social services; what the average age was of social workers and social care staff employed by the London boroughs; and how many people took early retirement from social work and social care employment by the London boroughs in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [69963]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not available centrally.

Mutual Organisations

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with mutual organisations which are delivering health and social care. [65013]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 27 June 2002]:* I hosted a seminar in June with experts and practitioners in the field of social enterprise to explore thinking around social enterprise activities, and their potential contribution in partnership with public services.

Speech and Language Therapy

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when Morecambe Bay NHS Primary Care Trust will lift its temporary recruitment freeze on speech and language therapists. [68938]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* Morecambe Bay Primary Care Trust has not implemented a freeze on any posts, and this includes posts in the speech and language therapy service. Lancashire Education Authority recently provided additional funding of 0.4 whole time equivalent to provide speech and language therapy input to the paediatric services. The recruitment process is currently underway.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve paediatric *(a)* occupational, *(b)* physiotherapy and *(c)* speech and language therapy services in Morecambe and Lunesdale. [68939]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* Children's and adolescent services are one of the priorities for the Morecambe Bay health community modernisation programme. As part of this process, the group will be reviewing the needs of children with disabilities and the therapy resources which are available to support them.

Medical School

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to encourage more men to attend medical school; and if he will make a statement. [70054]

Mr. Hutton: The overall number of medical school places is being increased by 2,150 places over 1997 levels. The increase will have been delivered by autumn 2005. As part of this increase 10 medical schools will be offering shortened graduate entry 4 year courses to students with appropriate qualifications. This is intended to broaden the base of medical school intake.

Since 1997 the number of male entrants to medical school increased by over 250. We expect that trend to continue as the remaining new places come on stream.

Both the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills are committed to ensuring that there is a balanced and diverse medical student population of the requisite quality to meet the demand for doctors. This is a matter for ongoing discussion with the universities and medical schools. The Department and Higher Education Funding Council for England joint medical expansion group will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Universities are autonomous bodies who are responsible for operating their own application systems but they collectively adhere to the "Guiding Principles for the Admission of Medical Students" issued by the Council of Heads of Medical Schools in February 1999. This guidance follows principles of fairness, diversity and equity in access.

UK Plasma Products

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the safety of UK plasma products; and if he will make a statement. [68142]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Since 1998 United Kingdom plasma has not been used in the manufacture of plasma derived products, including clotting factors, supplied to the National Health Service. This step was taken to reduce the unknown risks of transmission of vCJD.

Plasma products are tightly regulated by European and United States authorities to minimise the risk of viral transmission. This is achieved by the screening of donor blood and the anti-viral measures taken during manufacture. However no medicinal product can ever be completely free of risk.

Live Kidney Donations

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of live kidney donations. [69161]

Mr. Lammy: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State announced plans to increase organ donation and transplantation, including living kidney donation, at a transplant summit in February 2001. UK transplant, a special health authority established to carry out a range of functions to support transplantation, has been given increased funding to help more renal transplant units to set up live donor transplant programmes.

Live Donors

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for primary care trusts to contribute to a permanent fund for live donors. [69162]

Mr. Lammy: National Health Service commissioners are expected to provide for the cost of a live donor operation and to reimburse any reasonable expenses incurred by a live donor.

Shipman Inquiry

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the first report on the Shipman inquiry. [72081]

Mr. Milburn: Dame Janet Smith, chairman of the Shipman inquiry published her first report today. I am grateful to her for the work she has so far carried out. Copies of the inquiry's report have been placed in the Library.

Forced Marriages

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will amend Schedule 2, Part I, of the Children Act 1989, to require local authorities to have regard to the services provided to the victims and potential victims of forced marriages. [70074]

Jacqui Smith: Children who are the victims or potential victims of forced marriages fall within the scope of section 17 of the Children Act 1989, which places a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need. That duty would not be strengthened by amending the wording of Part 1 to Schedule 2 of the Act.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the EU directives and regulations that have been implemented through his Department in 2002; and what was the cost of each to public funds. [64971]

Mr. Lammy: The following European Union Directives and regulations have been implemented through the Department in 2002:

European Parliament and Council Directive 2001/83/EC on the Community Code Relating to Medicinal Products for Human Use, which incorporated Commission Directive 2000/38/EC on administrative action relating to medicinal products (pharmacovigilance), was implemented by SI 2002/236. There was no cost to public funds associated with implementing this directive.

Directive (2000/70/EC) and Directive (2001/104/EC) was transposed by Medical Devices Regulations 2002 (SI 2002 No. 618). No information is held on costs to public funds for this regulation but a regulatory impact assessment has been produced and placed in the House libraries.

My Ministerial team is also responsible for making legislation in policy areas covered by the Food Standards Agency. Listed below are the relevant EU Directives and regulations that have been implemented in 2002.

Directive 92/116/EEC and Directive 91/495/EEC were transposed by The Poultry Meat, Farmed Game Bird Meat and Rabbit Meat (Hygiene and inspection) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2001 (SI 2002/3399)

Directive 2001/50 EC was transposed by The Colours in Food (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2001 (SI 2002/3442)

Directive 2001/30/EC was transposed by The Miscellaneous Food Additives (England) (No. 2) Regulations 2001 (SI 2002/3775)

Article 9 of Directive 89/398/EC was transposed by The Notification of Marketing of Food for Particular Nutritional Uses (England and Wales) Regulations 2002 (SI 2002/333)

Directive 2001/52 was transposed by The Sweeteners in food (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2002 (SI2002/379)

Regulation 2001/466 and Directive 2001/22 was transposed by The Contaminants in Food (England) Regulations 2002 (SI 20/02/890)

The cost to public funds of this EU legislation is not recorded centrally and could only be assembled at disproportionate cost.

Prescription Charging

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the system of prescription charging, with specific reference to patients in *(a)* day wards and *(b)* in-patient centres. [70003]

Mr. Lammy: There is no charge for medication administered on hospital premises whether the patient is an in-patient, out-patient or day surgery case. Out-patients and day case patients are required to pay a prescription charge for any medication they are given to take at home, unless they qualify for free prescriptions under the extensive charge exemptions and remission arrangements or hold a pre-payment certificate. In-patients get their discharge medication free of charge. We have no plans to change the current charging arrangements.

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by NHS hospital trust in England and Wales what has been spent on improving accident and emergency services and minor injuries services in each year since 1995. [69775]

Mr. Lammy: The Department does not have this information by National Health Service hospital trust.

A total of £150 million has been invested in accident and emergency departments through the accident and emergency (A&E) modernisation programme. It is the biggest investment in A&E services since the start of the NHS.

The A&E modernisation programme enabled 180 A&E departments to be modernised. Work at 173 of these has been completed and the programme is currently 96 per cent complete.

Delayed Discharges

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* progress of the London boroughs in meeting his targets for the reduction of delayed discharge from hospital between September 2001 and April 2002 and *(b)* outstanding challenges facing the London boroughs. [69965]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply. In September 2001 there were 1126 people who experienced a delayed transfer of care from an acute hospital bed in London. By March 2002, the target reduction to 901 beds had been met. London Boroughs received their share of the £300 million made available through the Building Care Capacity Grant to end unnecessary delayed discharges from hospital. Their total allocation was £42,560,387 over the two years 2001–02 and 2002–03.

London Boroughs have agreed challenging targets for further reductions, averaging between 20 per cent and 25 per cent by March 2003. The targets were set as part of the conditions for receiving the grant. For Personal Social Services, we have already announced annual average growth in real terms of 6 per cent from 2003–04 to 2005–06.

Solihull Hospital

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish and make locally available a document setting out which services and specialties are *(a)* now and *(b)* prospectively available to patients of Solihull hospital, and in particular details of accident and emergency services at that hospital. [67614]

Mr. Lammy: A wide range of information is available to local residents about emergency and other services provided at Solihull Hospital by the Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull National Health Service Trust. Any changes to the services provided will be published as part of the annual patient prospectus.

Mental Health

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many admissions there were of residents and former residents of each Government office region to *(a)* NHS and *(b)* private hospitals under the Mental Health Act 1983 in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [68905]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows numbers of admissions to National Health Service and private facilities, estimated by Government office region area, of patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 in England, for 1999–2000 to 2000–01. Figures for 2001–02 will be available later this year.

Admissions to NHS and private facilities, within Government Office Region areas, of patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 and other legislation, England, 1999–2000 and 2000–01

	1999–2000	*2000–01*
NHS Facilities		
England	25,200	25,220
North East	1,070	1,050
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,950	1,920
East Midlands	1,480	1,930
West Midlands	2,290	2,410
South West	2,130	2,310
East of England	2,130	2,050
London	7,540	6,900
South East	3,390	3,400
South West	3,220	3,250
Private Facilities		
England	1,410	1,410
North East	10	10
Yorkshire and the Humber	40	40
East Midlands	110	40
West Midlands	30	30
South West	50	40
East of England	70	150
London	770	740
South East	230	250
South West	110	100

Source: KP90

Figures have been rounded to the nearest ten.

Figures may not add up due to rounding.

NHS facilities exclude high security psychiatric hospitals.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he received concerning the new draft Mental Health Bill prior to its publication; and if he will place them in the Library. [67961]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The proposals in the Draft Mental Health Bill have been the subject of a long process of consultation by the Government, starting with the Green Paper *Reform of the Mental Health Act 1983* published in November 1999. Responses to that document (where the respondent gave permission) were placed in the Libraries of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Since then there have been informal discussions with key stakeholders and letters have been received, for example following the publication of the White Paper *Reforming the Mental Health Act* published in December 2000. None of these, however, were part of a formal consultation process and there was no expectation by those making representations that the comments would be made public.

Correspondence

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter to the Minister of State, Dept of Health from the hon. Member for Salisbury dated 29 April about mental health services in South Wiltshire. [68930]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* A reply was sent on 17 July.

Fostering

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many placements of foster children have taken place in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [61358]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The data available is shown in the table.

Estimated number of placements in foster care starting during the years ending 31 March 1997 to 2001

England	*Number*
Year	*Number of foster placements*
1997	59,400
1998	60,000
1999	57,500
2000	56,900
2001	49,000

Notes:

The above table excludes children looked after under a series of short term placements

It will also be noted that the fall in the number of foster placements starting in any one year is mirrored by the increase in their duration. That is, in any one year, whilst there are fewer placements, they last longer.

Dentistry

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the impact dental charges are having on the provision of dental health care for people from low income backgrounds; [68825]

(2) what steps the Government are taking to ensure necessary dental health care is provided to those who are working on low incomes and not receiving benefit. [68824]

Mr. Lammy: Working people who are receiving Working Families' Tax Credit or Disabled Person's Tax Credit at the full rate or maximum credit reduced by £72.20 or less per week do not have to pay National Health Service dental charges. Others on a low income may be entitled to free treatment via the NHS low income scheme and those not entitled to full remission of charges may get partial help under this scheme.

The table below shows the number of exempt adult courses of treatment in England for the years 1996–97 to 2000–01. It is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the impact of dental charges from these figures, but the most likely explanation is that they reflect an improvement in economic circumstances. Research has indicated that increases in charges do not have any significant long-term effect on attendance. There are many factors that influence attendance patterns, the primary ones being attitude and habit.

General Dental Service: Number of exempt adult courses of treatment for the years 1996–67 to 2001–02 England

	Number of adult item of service claims			*Yearly change (exempt patients)*	
Year	*Exempt*	*Total claims*	*per cent of exempt patients*	*Number*	*per cent*
1996–97	6,563,219	24,720,185	27	..	..
1997–98	6,648,036	25,434,402	26	84,817	1
1998–99	6,694,274	26,316,085	25	46,238	1
1999–2000	6,493,808	26,058,380	25	–200,466	–3
2000–01	6,449,067	26,481,669	24	–44,741	–1
2001–02	6,297,940	26,390,667	24	–151,127	–2

Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated *(a)* level and *(b)* cost of energy use in his Department and associated agencies was in each year since 1997; what proportion of energy was generated from renewable sources; and if he will make a statement. [65954]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the reply provided by my right hon. Friend the Minister for State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Alun Michael) on 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 384–85W.

The information provided does not reflect the current Department of Health position with regard to the procurement of Renewable Energy.

The Department's main electricity supply contract was re-tendered in November 2001 and the approved supplier, London Electricity, provides 92.1 per cent. of our electricity requirement with renewable energy which is not subject to the climate change levy.

Empty Properties

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the empty residential properties in each London borough in the ownership of his Department and its agencies, giving *(a)* the type of accommodation, *(b)* how long each property has been vacant and *(c)* what the intended future use is of the property. [69495]

Mr. Lammy: The Department and its agencies has no empty residential properties in any London borough.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department further to his answer to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 48W, on antisocial behaviour orders, how many of the antisocial behaviour orders given in each police/magistrates' court committee area between 1 April 1999 and 30 September 2001 have been breached; and how many of these breaches have resulted in a sentence of imprisonment. [46608]

Mr. Denham: The information is currently being collated, and I will write to the hon. Member when the results are known.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been applied by UK local authorities in the last year. [70404]

Mr. Denham: An anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) is a civil order made by a court which currently can be applied for by a local authority or the police or both combined. The table shows the number of notifications received by the Home Office of ASBOs issued in England and Wales for 2001 (latest available). There were 11 ASBO applications during this period which were refused. Where an ASBO is refused we do not hold information on the applicant.

Number of anti-social behaviour orders reported to the Home Office for 2001

Applicant	*Total number issued*
Local Authority	173
Police	94
Joint application	9
Not known	7
Total	283

We are currently considering whether any further checks are needed to ensure the accuracy of the number of ASBOs reported.

Matters relating to local authorities in Scotland and Northern Ireland are for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland (Helen Liddell) and Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid).

Young Offenders

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people aged 18 to 20 years have a criminal record by region expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* total number, ranked in descending order according to percentages for the latest date for which figures are available. [30593]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The latest available information relates to an analysis of a cohort of people born in 1978. Of the 307,000 males and 289,000 females born in 1978 it is estimated that 14.8 per cent of males and 3.0 per cent of females had a conviction for a standard list offence by the age of 20. No information is available on the number of persons with cautions, reprimands or final warnings.

Information is not held centrally on the address of an offender. However the police force area in which an offender received his or her most recent conviction can be used as a proxy. The police force areas have been combined to show numbers and percentages convicted by Government Office region.

Persons born in 1978 with a conviction for one or more standard list offences whilst aged 20 or under, by region and gender (1).

	Males aged 20 or under with a conviction: percentage with most recent conviction in region	*Females aged 20 or under with a conviction: percentage with most recent conviction in region*	*Number of males aged 20 or under with a conviction, by region of most recent conviction*	*Number of females aged 20 or under with a conviction, by region of most recent conviction*
All Regions	100.0 per cent	100.0 per cent	45,300	8,030
North West	16.9 per cent	13.3 per cent	7,600	1,070
London	13.4 per cent	16.2 per cent	6,100	1,300
South East	12.5 per cent	10.2 per cent	5,700	820

Persons born in 1978 with a conviction for one or more standard list offences whilst aged 20 or under, by region and gender [1]

	Males aged 20 or under with a conviction: percentage with most recent conviction in region	*Females aged 20 or under with a conviction: percentage with most recent conviction in region*	*Number of males aged 20 or under with a conviction, by region of most recent conviction*	*Number of females aged 20 or under with a conviction, by region of most recent conviction*
West Midlands	10.9 per cent	7.9 per cent	4,900	640
Yorkshire and the Humber	10.1 per cent	10.8 per cent	4,600	870
Eastern	8.9 per cent	7.1 per cent	4,000	570
East Midlands	7.9 per cent	11.5 per cent	3,600	920
South West	7.4 per cent	10.2 per cent	3,300	820
Wales	6.6 per cent	5.0 per cent	3,000	400
North East	5.6 per cent	7.8 per cent	2,500	620

[1] The number of persons in the table is obtained by examining the criminal histories of all persons born during four weeks of 1978; the distribution of offences and geographic location is representative of all persons born during 1978; the numbers are scaled to represent all 1978 births. The region shown covers the police force area in which the individual received his or her most recent conviction; any previous convictions could have been recorded in other regions.

Race Riots

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total public cost of the 2001 race riots was, broken down by local authority concerned. [25036]

Mr. Denham: The cost of the disturbances in the summer 2001; as broken down by local authority areas are as follows:

Oldham (26–29 May 2001)	£165,451	cost to local authority;
	£2,244,354	additional costs to Greater Manchester Police: at event;
	£32,097	subsequent high visibility patrols;
	£218,077	cost of repair and replacement of vehicles to Greater Manchester Police;
Burnley (24–26 July 2001)	£110,000	cost to local authority;
	£1,266,851	additional costs to Lancashire Constabulary;
Bradford (7–10 July 2001)	£121,347.03	cost to local authority;
	£3,453,000	additional costs to West Yorkshire Police;
Stoke-on-Trent	£870,000	additional costs to Staffordshire Police.

Greater Manchester, Lancashire and West Yorkshire Police Authorities have also received claims for compensation under the Riot (Damages) Act (1886). I understand that the settlement process is still continuing.

On 30 January I announced to the House, *Official Report*, column 302W that the Home Secretary had agreed to meet around two-thirds of extra cost of policing the disturbances, and had agreed grants as follows: West Yorkshire Police Authority £2.22 million; Greater Manchester Police Authority £1.44 million; Lancashire Police Authority £0.82 million; Staffordshire Police Authority £0.56 million. The sums paid are higher than would normally be provided under arrangements for special grant.

Drug Crime

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the most recent figures are for the proportion of crime that is drug related in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the North West of England and *(c)* Wales. [70321]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Recorded crime figures include statistics on drugs offences; such as possession, and on acquisitive crimes, such as burglary, but do not record whether the latter are related to an offender's drug habits.

The New English and Welsh Arrestees Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) research programme of interviewing and drug testing those arrested by the police sheds some light on the links between drugs and crime, although the conclusions do not relate specifically to the North West region or to Wales. As a guide to the proportion of crime that is drug-related, research based on eight locations (1999–2000) indicates that more than three-fifths (by value) of acquisitive crime, is committed by users of both heroin and cocaine/crack.

The numbers of acquisitive crimes recorded by the police in each of the three areas in 2001–02 are set out in Table 1. Acquisitive crimes are burglary, theft and robbery.

Table 1: Acquisitive crimes recorded by the police, 2001–02

	Acquisitive crimes
Lancashire	98,559
North West	598,665
Wales	165,953

Source:
"Crime in England and Wales 2001–2002": Home Office Statistical Bulletin 07/02.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* arrested and *(b)* convicted of drug dealing in (i) Lancashire, (ii) the North West of England and (iii) Wales in the last year for which figures are available. [70323]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Arrest data are not available centrally to the level of detail required. The following table presents information for each area requested on the number of *(a)* drug dealing offences referred to court and *(b)* drug dealing convictions in 2000.

Number of drug dealing offences in 2000

Area	*Referred to court*	*Convicted*
Lancashire (police force area)	369	249
North West	2,390	1,706
Wales	1,078	734

(1) Police forces included in the total for the North West (Government Office Region) are as follows: Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside. Police forces included in the total for Wales are: Dyfed Powys, Gwent, North Wales and South Wales.

(2) The term "dealing" is taken to cover the following drug offences: possession with intent to supply unlawfully, unlawful supply, and unlawful import/export.

Source:
Drug and Alcohol Research Unit.

Drugs

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what he estimates to be the social and economic costs in the most recent year for which figures are available of illegal drugs in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Lancashire. [70322]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The University of York, Centre for Criminal Justice Economics & Psychology (Culyer A., Eaton G., Godfrey C. *et al.*, 2002) has recently completed a research report for the Home Office entitled "The Economic and Social Costs of Class A Drugs Misuse in England and Wales, 2000". The report will be published as a Home Office Research Study (HORS) Autumn 2002, but does not include any country or regional breakdown of costs.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has collated of links between *(a)* acquisitive and *(b)* violent crime and the use of (i) cannabis, (ii) amphetamines, (iii) LSD, (iv) cocaine, (v) ecstasy, (vi) heroin and (vii) crack. [66664]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: No statistical data are collected on offences that may have been committed due to specific drug taking. However, the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) research published between 1998 and 2001 sheds some light on the links between drugs and acquisitive crime. The research is insufficiently advanced to reveal the precise links between drugs and violent crime.

What the most recently published research does indicate is that users of both heroin and cocaine/crack (just under a quarter of the arrestees interviewed) are responsible for more than 60 per cent of the illegal income reported. Furthermore, 53 per cent of the arrestees reported having committed one or more acquisitive crimes in the last year. This increased to 62 per cent of those who had used any drug in the past 12 months, and 75 per cent of those who had used heroin and/or cocaine/crack in the last year. The latter group reported an average of 432 acquisitive crimes in the year—nearly 10 times the rate for non-drug-users. Therefore, drug use in general, and especially use of heroin and/or cocaine/crack, is associated with higher levels of crime.

There is little evidence of any strong links between acquisitive or violent crime and cannabis, amphetamine, ecstasy or LSD use.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were convicted of *(a)* class A and *(b)* class B drug offences in (i) Leeds and (ii) each of the English regions in the past 10 years. [69953]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information requested, relating to persons convicted for *(a)* Class A and *(b)* Class B drug offences in Leeds and the English regions for the years 1993 to 2000 is shown in the table.

A breakdown between the different classes of drug was not collected centrally prior to 1993. Statistics for 2001 will be available in the Autumn.

Numbers of persons convicted of Class A and Class B drug offences in England 1993–2000, by region, showing Leeds separately

Region	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Persons convicted of offences involving(1) Class A(2) drugs								
East	234	233	363	513	620	790	892	945
East Midlands	189	203	254	316	479	615	821	1,034
London	1,598	1,963	2,076	2,125	2,184	3,043	3,651	3,435
North East	174	152	167	238	328	421	538	853
North West	867	1,021	1,319	1,636	1,902	2,003	2,071	2,125
South East	374	445	622	675	857	1,199	1,508	1,702
South West	296	345	603	659	814	845	1,070	1,192
West Midlands(3)	270	281	404	552	827	992	1,177	1,537
Yorkshire and the Humber	472	528	778	1,226	1,755	1,983	2,209	2,214
Of which:								
Leeds Petty Sessional Area(4)	*81*	*72*	*169*	*220*	*341*	*431*	*486*	*416*
Total England	4,474	5,171	6,586	7,940	9,766	11,891	13,937	15,037
Persons convicted of offences involving(1) Class B(2) drugs								
East	1,231	1,643	2,037	2,142	2,593	2,778	2,669	2,084
East Midlands	954	1,247	1,862	1,574	1,937	2,163	1,832	1,546
London	3,267	4,922	4,345	4,267	5,137	6,673	6,279	5,366
North East	648	721	814	1,019	1,132	1,703	1,924	1,872
North West	2,850	3,356	3,886	3,905	4,558	5,493	5,046	4,235
South East	1,836	2,600	3,095	3,119	3,533	4,680	4,379	3,571
South West(5)	1,081	1,389	1,674	1,671	1,854	2,348	2,333	2,038
West Midlands	1,082	1,365	1,626	1,707	2,335	2,876	2,620	2,457

Numbers of persons convicted of Class A and Class B drug offences in England 1993–2000, by region, showing Leeds separately

Region	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,629	1,922	2,326	2,476	3,003	3,654	3,318	2,637
Of which:								
Leeds Petty Sessional Area(4)	*326*	*349*	*514*	*463*	*570*	*684*	*481*	*396*
Total England	14,578	19,165	21,265	21,880	26,082	32,368	30,400	25,806

(1) Trafficking, production, supply, possession etc.

(2) Excludes a small number of offences where the type of drug is unknown.

(3) Staffordshire Police were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates' courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Estimates based on this sample are included in the figures, as they are considered sufficiently robust at this high level of analysis.

(4) Also includes convictions at the Crown Court where Leeds was the committing Magistrates' court

Cannabis

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much cannabis a person would have to possess to be able to arrest them for dealing in the drug; [70137]

(2) how many cautions a person will be allowed to receive for possession of cannabis; [70138]

(3) what measures are in place to ensure that cannabis is not *(a)* used and *(b)* dealt near schools and other places where children are present; [70140]

(4) which class A and B drugs are to have sentences for dealing and possession increased; and what the new sentences will be. [70139]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There are no plans to increase sentences for supply and possession of any Class A or B drug. The table sets out the current maximum penalties.

Misuse of drugs offences—current maximum penalties

Offence	*Class A*	*Class B*
Supply of a controlled drug	Life or a fine or both	14 years or a fine or both
Possession of a controlled drug	7 years or a fine or both	5 years or a fine or both

The police can arrest someone who is in possession of cannabis, as a dealer, if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the person has committed an offence of possession with intent to supply. The Home Affairs Committee, however, was not persuaded that an intent to supply should be presumed on the basis of the amount of a drug found and the Government has accepted this view. There would be considerable practical difficulty in setting a figure for the amount of cannabis possessed to constitute a criminal offence of possession with intent to supply. Dealers would exploit this by ensuring that the amount of the drug held by them remained below such a figure. The amount of the drug found in possession is an important factor, but not the only one, to consider in deciding on intent to supply. Other factors, such as other items in the person's possession or intelligence information gathered, might also be relevant.

The Association of Chief Police Officers is currently developing a model for enforcing cannabis possession offences which they expect to issue this Autumn, following consultation. It is expected that the majority of first offences of cannabis possession by an adult will be dealt with by way of a formal warning from the police, together with confiscation of the drug. Further offending, or offending where there are aggravating factors, such as that involving a flagrant disregard for the law or which threatens public order, could result in arrest, followed by a caution or prosecution.

Youth offenders will be dealt with in the same manner as they are for all other offences, as detailed in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Final Warning Scheme. Under that scheme, they should be reported for the offence and a decision should be made on their case disposal from the options of a reprimand, final warning or charge. A young person with no previous offending history should receive a reprimand. A second offence will lead to a warning or charge, depending on its seriousness. Any further offending following a warning will normally result in a charge being brought.

Frequent use is an indication of vulnerability and this needs to be taken seriously. Hence, after a final warning, a youth offender must be referred to the Youth Offending Team to arrange a rehabilitation programme to prevent reoffending.

We are currently launching local Safer Schools Partnerships with an initial 100 police officers in schools by September, which will help to make the communities around schools safer places to be. The Department for Education and Skills encourages all schools to have a drug incident management policy agreed by the governors, staff and parents in consultation with the local police. Schools are also encouraged to involve pupils in this process.

We are considering the introduction of a separate criminal offence of supplying drugs to young people which would attract higher maximum sentences than are currently available. Those who deal near schools would be sentenced severely.

Law Enforcement Priorities

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to individual police forces regarding priorities in law enforcement. [70410]

Mr. Denham: Under the Police Act 1996 the Home Secretary sets strategic objectives for the police. These are commonly known as the Ministerial Priorities. For the current year, 2002–03, these are:

To help create safe communities by reducing crime, anti-social behaviour and disorder through effective partnership working, including reducing the availability and use of Class A drugs.

To reduce the fear of crime in all sections of the community and in particular to increase the trust and confidence in policing amongst minority ethnic communities.

To increase the number of offences for which offenders, and particularly persistent offenders, are caught and brought to justice, in partnership with other criminal justice agencies.

Guidance on how best to achieve these priorities is not issued by the Home Office. It is for each Chief Officer, in consultation with their police authority, to determine the allocation of resources in a way which ensures that the Ministerial Priorities are complied with.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many frontline Metropolitan police officers have less than two years' experience, broken down by Greater London borough; and if he will make statement. [67007]

Mr. Denham: The information in the table has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. Newly appointed Police Officers serve a period of probation which normally lasts for two years. The table shows the number of probationer officers by borough. They all perform frontline duties.

Greater London Borough	*Probationer Strength as at 31 May 2002*
Kensington & Chelsea	79
Westminster	216
Camden	101
Hammersmith & Fulham	70
Hackney	93
Tower Hamlets	92
Waltham Forest	61
Redbridge	54
Havering	52
Newham	90
Barking & Dagenham	29
Lambeth	118
Southwark	86
Islington	85
Lewisham	92
Bromley	58
Harrow	48
Brent	85
Greenwich	87
Bexley	51
Barnet	78
Richmond upon Thames	32
Hounslow	51
Kingston upon Thames	36
Merton	34
Wandsworth	98
Ealing	90
Hillingdon	45
Enfield	72
Haringey	85
Croydon	85
Sutton	36
Borough Total	2,389

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the Metropolitan Police accommodation used to house police officers undergoing their intial training is owned by the Metropolitan Police Force; who owns the properties being used by the Metropolitan Police for accommodation which are not owned by the Metropolitan Police; and if he will make a statement. [66817]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the Metropolitan Police Authority owns or leases all the accommodation used to house police officers undergoing their initial training. Currently, 18 per cent of available bed spaces for recruits are leased from the Ministry of Defence at Mill Hill Barracks.

Special Constables

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average gap between recruitment and enlistment of special constables was in the Metropolitan Police in the last 12 months. [65497]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the average processing time for applicants to the Metropolitan Special Constabulary in the past 12 months was 12 weeks (from date of receipt of application to attestation).

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables there were in Buckinghamshire in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [68523]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The Home Office records the number of special constables by police force, not by county. The number of special constables in Thames Valley Constabulary at 30 September between 1997–2001 is as follows:

1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
694	587	472	463	377

Figures supplied by Thames Valley Police.

Special constables are a key element of our police reform agenda. We are working on a package of measures to help reverse the decline in the number of special constables by improving the way they are recruited, managed and deployed. We are publishing guidance on good practice by the end of the year. We are also keen to improve liaison with employers and to encourage recognition of the wealth of skills and experience that specials bring to the workplace. We have also set aside £300,000 to help "specials champions" drive forward initiatives to improve recruitment and retention.

Police Stations

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police stations *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened in each police authority area in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [66615]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* Data are only available from 1990–91. Copies of the table detailing the number of police stations closed and opened, and the total numbers of police stations for each police authority since 1990–91 will be placed in the Library.

Information is available from all 43 forces for the total number of police stations for the three years to March 2000, March 2001 and March 2002. A number of forces were unable to provide data on total police stations or on numbers opened or closed for earlier years and this is reflected in the table.

Number of Police Stations Opened and Closed since 1990–1996

	Mar 90	Mar 91		Mar 92			Mar 93			Mar 94			Mar 95			Mar 96		
	No of Police Stations	Opd	Clsd	Total	Opd	Clsd	Total	Opd	Clsd	Total	Opd	Clsd	Total	Opd	Clsd	Total	Opd	Clsd	Total
Avon & Somerset	82	0	0	82	0	0	82	0	−1	81	0	−13	68	0	−6	62	0	−14	48
Bedfordshire (1)																			
Cambridgeshire	35	0	−2	33	0	−2	31	0	−1	30	0	0	30	0	0	30	0	−1	29
Cheshire	39	0	0	39	0	0	39	0	0	39	0	0	39	0	0	39	0	0	39
City of London	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2
Cleveland	17	0	0	17	0	0	17	0	0	17	1	0	18	2	0	20	2	0	22
Cumbria	24	0	0	24	0	0	24	0	0	24	10	0	34	0	0	34	0	0	34
Derbyshire																			
Devon & Cornwall	98	1	−5	94	0	−2	92	0	−3	89	2	−7	84	1	−7	78	4	−8	74
Dorset	27	0	0	27	0	0	27	0	0	27	0	0	27	1	−1	27	0	0	27
Durham	41	0	−1	40	0	0	40	0	0	40	0	0	40	3	−1	42	0	0	42
Dyfed-Powys	45	0	0	45	0	0	45	0	0	45	0	0	45	0	0	45	2	0	47
Essex (2) (3)	(2) N/A	N/A	N/A	114	1	−1	114	1	−1	114	1	−2	113	2	−1	114	0	0	114
Gloucestershire	71	0	0	71	0	−3	68	0	−2	66	0	−3	63	0	0	63	0	0	63
Gtr Manchester	96	0	0	96	0	0	96	0	0	96	0	−3	93	0	−11	82	0	0	82
Gwent (5)																			
Hampshire	126	0	−2	124	0	−1	123	0	−6	117	0	−4	113	1	−2	112	0	−4	108
Hertfordshire (3)	55	1	−1	55	0	0	55	0	0	55	0	0	55	0	−32	23	0	0	23
Humberside	38	0	0	38	0	0	38	0	0	38	0	0	38	1	−2	37	0	−2	35
Kent	46	0	0	46	0	0	46	0	−7	39	2	−2	39	0	−4	35	1	−4	32
Lancashire	111	0	−1	110	0	0	110	1	0	111	1	−1	111	0	0	111	2	−2	111
Leicestershire	26	1	−1	26	0	0	26	0	0	26	0	0	26	0	0	26	0	−1	25
Lincolnshire	45	1	0	46	1	−1	46	3	−1	48	3	−3	48	2	−2	48	0	0	48
Metropolitan (3)																			
Merseyside	53	0	0	53	0	0	53	1	−1	53	0	−1	52	0	0	52	0	0	52
Norfolk																			
Northamptonshire	11	0	0	11	0	0	11	0	0	11	0	0	11	0	0	11	0	0	11
Northumbria																			
North Wales (1)																			
North Yorkshire																			
Nottinghamshire	63	0	−1	62	0	0	62	0	−1	61	0	0	61	1	−1	61	3	−1	63
South Wales (4)	150	26	−2	174	2	−13	163	4	−9	158	1	−2	157	2	−4	155	3	−5	153
South Yorkshire	89	0	0	89	0	−1	88	1	0	89	0	0	89	0	−3	86	1	0	87
Staffordshire	39	0	0	39	0	0	39	0	0	39	0	0	39	0	0	39	0	0	39
Suffolk	51	0	0	51	0	−1	50	0	−23	27	0	0	27	0	0	27	0	0	27
Surrey (3)	33	0	−1	32	0	0	32	0	0	32	0	0	32	0	−2	30	0	0	
Sussex	34	0	0	34	0	0	34	0	0	34	0	0	34	0	0	34	0	0	34
Thames Valley	49	0	0	49	1	0	50	2	0	52	0	0	52	1	−1	52	1	−1	52
Warwickshire	18	1	−1	18	0	−1	17	0	0	17	0	0	17	0	0	17	0	−2	15
West Mercia	110	0	−22	88	1	−8	81	0	−11	70	0	−4	66	0	−4	62	0	−7	55
West Midlands	77	0	0	77	1	−2	76	0	0	76	0	−1	75	1	0	76	0	−1	75
West Yorkshire																			
Wiltshire	42	0	0	42	0	0	42	0	0	42	0	−7	35	1	−4	32	0	−2	30
TOTALS (6)	1843	31	−40	1948	7	−36	1919	13	−67	1865	21	−53	1833	19	−88	1764	19	−55	1728

Number of Police Stations Opened and Closed since 1997–2002

	Mar 97		Mar 98			Mar 99						Mar 00			Mar 01	Mar 02
	Opd	Clsd	Total	Opd	Clsd	Total	Opd	Clsd	Total	Opd	Clsd	Total	Opd	Clsd	Total	Opd
Avon & Somerset	0	−13	35	2	−1	36	3	0	39	0	0	39	2	0	41	1
Bedfordshire (1)										2	(1)N/A	11	0	−1	10	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0	29	0	−1	28	1	−4	25	0	0	25	0	−1	24	0
Cheshire	0	−1	38	0	0	38	0	−2	36	0	−3	33	2	0	35	0
City of London	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0
Cleveland	2	0	24	0	−1	23	1	−2	22	0	0	22	0	0	22	0
Cumbria	1	−1	34	0	0	34	0	−10	24	0	0	24	0	0	24	1
Derbyshire									25	2	0	27	1			
Devon & Cornwall	2	−5	71	1	−4	68	3	−3	68	1	−4	65	1	−1	65	0
Dorset	0	0	27	0	0	27	0	−1	26	1	−1	26	0	−1	25	3
Durham	2	−4	40	1	−1	40	0	0	40	0	0	40	3	−3	40	0
Dyfed-Powys	0	−3	44	4	−1	47	1	0	48	0	0	48	0	0	48	0
Essex (2) (3)	1	−1	114	0	0	114	1	−1	114	1	−43	72	4	−19	57	1
Gloucestershire	0	−1	62	1	0	63	0	−4	59	0	−12	47	1	−6	42	2
Gtr Manchester	0	0	82	1	−9	74	0	−4	70	0	0	70	0	−2	68	0
Gwent (5)						57	(5)N/A	−5	52	4	(5)N/A	56	0	−7	49	0
Hampshire	5	−9	104	1	−3	102	0	−8	94	0	−2	92	1	−4	89	0
Hertfordshire (3)	0	0	23	1	−1	23	0	0	23	0	−2	21	4	0	25	0
Humberside	0	0	35	1	0	36	0	−2	34	1	−2	33	2	−2	33	0
Kent	1	−1	32	3	−3	32	1	−1	32	0	0	32	0	−2	30	0
Lancashire	0	−2	109	0	−1	108	1	−1	108	0	0	108	0	−1	107	1
Leicestershire	3	0	28	2	−2	28	3	−3	28	2	0	30	0	0	30	1
Lincolnshire	1	−6	43	0	−1	42	1	−1	42	0	0	42	0	0	42	0
Metropolitan (3)												156	0	−12	144	4
Merseyside	0	0	52	0	−1	51	0	−1	50	0	−6	44	0	−1	43	0
Norfolk												42	0	0	42	5
Northamptonshire	1	0	12	0	0	12	0	0	12	0	0	12	0	0	12	0
Northumbria												36	0	0	36	0
North Wales (1)										(1)N/A	−5	54	0	−2	52	0
North Yorkshire												35	0	0	35	0
Nottinghamshire	1	0	64	0	−22	42	1	−1	42	2	0	44	2	0	46	1
South Wales (4)	4	−19	138	1	−2	137	4	−5	136	1	−12	125	1	−4	122	1
South Yorkshire	0	−3	84	2	0	86	0	−4	82	0	−2	80	3	−6	77	6
Staffordshire	0	0	39	1	−2	38	1	−1	38	1	−1	38	0	0	38	2
Suffolk	0	0	27	1	0	28	0	0	28	0	0	28	0	0	28	0
Surrey (3)	0	0	30	0	−2	28	0	−2	26	0	−4	22	6	0	28	1
Sussex	0	0	34	0	0	34	1	0	35	1	0	36	0	0	36	0
Thames Valley	1	0	53	1	−7	47	9	−1	55	2	−2	55	0	−4	51	2

Number of Police Stations Opened and Closed since 1997–2002

	Mar 97			*Mar 98*			*Mar 99*					*Mar 00*			*Mar 01*	*Mar 02*
	Opd	*Clsd*	*Total*	*Opd*	*Clsd*	*Total*	*Opd*	*Clsd*	*Total*	*Opd*	*Clsd*	*Total*	*Opd*	*Clsd*	*Total*	*Opd*
Warwickshire	0	0	15	0	0	15	0	0	15	0	0	15	0	0	15	0
West Mercia	0	–2	53	0	0	53	4	–4	53	1	–1	53	1	–1	53	1
West Midlands	0	–3	72	0	–2	70	0	–1	69	0	–1	68	0	0	68	1
West Yorkshire												40	0	0	40	0
Wiltshire	0	–2	28	0	–2	26	0	–2	24	0	0	24	0	0	24	1
TOTALS (6)	25	–76	1677	24	–69	1689	36	–74	1651	20	–103	1970	35	–80	1925	36

(1) Comprehensive data for openings/closures for Bedfordshire and North Wales for 1999–2000 are not available. First "Total" numbers available are for March 2000.

(2) Data not available for the total number of police stations in Essex at March 1990, or the number of openings/closures during 1990–91. The first "Total" figure available is for March 1991.

(3) 12 police stations were transferred by the Metropolitan Police Authority to boundary forces in April 2000; Essex (2), Herts (4) and Surrey (6).

(4) In 1996–97 South Wales Police transferred nine police stations to Gwent.

(5) Figures for Gwent opening/closures in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are net openings/closures.

(6) The totals given for 1990 cover data from 33 forces only. Data was not available from the remaining 10 forces. The totals given for 1991–97 cover data from 34 forces. The total figures for the number of police stations for 1998 and 1999 cover data from 35 forces. Although the figures for the total number of police stations for March 2000 covers data from all 43 forces, data on the number of openings/closures in 1999–2000 are only available from 37 forces.

Police (National Insurance)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by how much he estimates he would have to increase his Department's grant to the West Mercia Constabulary from April 2003 to meet the costs of the increased national insurance employers' contributions due from that month. [61281]

Mr. Denham: In common with other public sector employers, police authorities will be expected to meet any additional National Insurance employer's contributions within funding available to them from 2003–04.

Speed Enforcement

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of each police force was employed in speed enforcement on roads in the last five years. [70409]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information in the form requested is not collected. Data is however collected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) for the number of officers who are deployed to all traffic duties. The table shows the number of police officers, as at 31 March, for each year from 1998 to 2001 who were deployed to traffic duties in each force in England and Wales and what proportion this was of the strength of each force. Figures for 2002 are not yet available.

The basis on which HMIC classify police service staff changed in the year 1999–2000 so the figures for 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 are not directly comparable with those for earlier years. Some officers counted as deployed to traffic duties in earlier years may, from 1999–2000 onward, have been recorded as deployed to duties relating to traffic wardens.

Traffic Officers 1997/98 to 2000–01

	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*	
FORCES	*Traffic*	*per cent of strength*	*Traffic*	*per cent of strength*	*Traffic*	*per cent of strength*	*Traffic*	*per cent of total strength*
England and Wales	7,951	6.40	7,806	6.30	7,522	6.20	7,238	5.90
Avon and Somerset	211	7.10	207	6.90	200	6.80	211	7.10
Bedfordshire	89	8.20	79	7.60	73	7.10	69	6.70
Cambridgeshire	91	7.00	96	7.50	93	7.50	86	6.60
Cheshire	204	10.00	205	9.90	196	9.70	187	9.30
City of London	32	3.40	24	3.10	22	3.00	24	3.40
Cleveland	82	5.50	67	4.70	68	4.80	63	4.50
Cumbria	117	10.00	117	10.40	119	11.00	111	10.60
Derbyshire	139	7.80	147	8.40	139	7.80	136	7.50
Devon and Cornwall	215	7.30	212	7.30	215	7.60	202	6.90
Dorset	93	7.10	77	6.00	83	6.30	86	6.40
Durham	115	7.60	117	7.50	116	7.40	113	7.10
Dyfed-Powys	89	8.90	97	9.50	93	8.90	83	7.90
Essex	268	9.20	259	9.00	245	8.70	249	8.60
Gloucestershire	83	7.50	82	7.40	68	6.10	69	5.90
Greater Manchester	429	6.20	434	6.40	433	6.40	423	6.10
Gwent	93	7.50	88	7.10	90	7.10	89	7.00
Hampshire	261	7.50	278	8.00	251	7.30	240	7.00
Hertfordshire	157	9.00	158	9.20	155	8.80	168	8.70
Humberside	165	8.20	149	7.50	155	8.00	145	7.60
Kent	149	4.60	119	3.70	103	3.20	104	3.10
Lancashire	422	13.00	225	6.90	220	6.90	217	6.70
Leicestershire	85	4.30	86	4.30	87	4.40	95	4.70
Lincolnshire	95	8.00	95	8.30	93	8.30	88	7.30

Traffic Officers 1997/98 to 2000–01

	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*	
FORCES	*Traffic*	*per cent of strength*	*Traffic*	*per cent of strength*	*Traffic*	*per cent of strength*	*Traffic*	*per cent of total strength*
Merseyside	197	4.70	200	4.70	185	4.50	130	3.20
Metropolitan Police	823	3.20	782	3.00	824	3.20	686	2.80
Norfolk	111	7.80	107	7.70	109	7.90	113	8.00
North Wales	143	10.20	236	17.00	134	9.60	146	10.10
North Yorkshire	127	9.30	128	9.60	96	7.50	129	9.90
Northamptonshire	97	8.30	87	7.60	52	4.70	52	4.50
Northumbria	164	4.40	162	4.20	158	4.20	158	4.10
Nottinghamshire	177	7.60	182	8.20	167	7.60	175	7.90
South Wales	155	5.20	220	7.40	224	7.70	238	7.70
South Yorkshire	197	6.20	197	6.20	196	6.20	206	6.40
Staffordshire	204	8.90	208	9.30	188	8.70	35	1.60
Suffolk	68	5.70	74	6.20	70	6.10	63	5.60
Surrey	176	10.90	177	10.60	173	9.70	197	9.50
Sussex	206	6.90	197	6.90	191	6.80	190	6.60
Thames Valley	272	7.20	265	7.10	251	6.70	251	6.80
Warwickshire	102	11.00	106	11.70	102	11.30	96	10.40
West Mercia	239	11.90	238	11.70	278	14.70	322	16.50
West Midlands	412	5.80	405	5.50	394	5.50	380	5.10
West Yorkshire	307	6.00	331	6.60	323	6.70	326	6.80
Wiltshire	96	8.30	90	7.80	93	8.30	91	8.10

Deaths in Custody

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* deaths in custody have occurred, *(b)* public inquiries into deaths in custody have taken place and *(c)* convictions of police officers secured as a result of cases arising out of deaths in custody, in each year since 1990; [69838]

(2) what procedures the police are required to follow when investigating a death in custody; and if he will place a copy of his guidance in the Library; [69839]

(3) how many independent inquiries into deaths in custody his Department has participated in each year since 1990. [70092]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office publishes annual statistics of deaths in police custody or otherwise following contact with the police. The figures for each year since 1990 are shown in the table. Statistics for 2001–02 are currently being finalised.

Year	*Total number of deaths*
1990	61
1991	60
1992	48
1993	31
1994	39
1995–96*	50
1996–97	57
1997–98	69
1998–99	67
1999–2000	70
2000–01	53

There have been no public inquiries into deaths in police custody in any year since 1990. Statistics on the number of police officers who have been convicted as a result of cases arising out of deaths in police custody are not collected centrally.

The Home Office have not participated in any independent inquiries into deaths in police custody in any year since 1990.

The procedures relating to the investigation of a death in police custody are contained in sections 70–76 of the Police Act 1996. Where such a death occurs the police are required to refer the investigation to the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) for supervision. It is the responsibility of the PCA supervising Member to approve the appointment of the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO), either from the force where the death occurred or from another force, and to agree the terms of reference for the SIO covering the parameters of the investigation. The PCA recently published their supervision manual which sets out the Authority's approach to supervision and the standards its supervising members will apply.

Investigatory Branch CIB 3

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many allegations of perjury at hearings of bail applications have been made against officers from CIB 3 during the last four years. [69325]

Mr. John Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the Metropolitan Police Service complaints and discipline system indicates that there have been seven allegations in respect of perjury and irregularities in evidence against officers from the Anti-Corruption Unit of the Metropolitan Police Service's Directorate of Professional Standards (formerly CIB3) in all types of courts during the last four years.

Detective Chief Superintendent John Yates

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations have been carried out into a complaint of perjury by Detective Chief Superintendent John Yates at Horseferry Road Magistrates' Court on 18 January 1999. [69330]

Mr. Denham: I am informed by the Commissioner of the Metropolis that no investigations were carried out into complaints of perjury by Detective Chief Superintendent John Yates at Horseferry Road Magistrates' Court on 19 (not 18) January 1999. Two complaints were made by a convicted police officer and his father. After considering the complaints under the Police Act 1996, the Police (Discipline) Regulations 1985 and as a criminal allegation, the Metropolitan Police Service decided that there were insufficient grounds to appoint an investigating officer.

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost to his Department of litigation was in each year. [41111]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon Member to the reply I gave him on 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1198W.

Credit Card Fraud

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department has taken with credit card companies in 2002 to help combat credit card fraud. [71098]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Home Office in association with the trade association for credit card companies has set up a two-year pilot of a unique policing unit, the Dedicated Cheque and Plastic Crime Unit. The unit, based in London, was launched in April 2002, with the Home Office providing 25 per cent of the funding requirement.

The Home Office is also actively supporting the credit card companies in their work towards implementation of Chip and personal identification number (PIN) by April 2005. Under this initiative, microchips will be introduced into payment cards to help authentication. This will be combined with the introduction of PIN as a more secure method of authentication than signature.

Officials are in frequent contact with the Association for Payment Clearing Services (APACS) to discuss and encourage implementation of other credit card fraud reduction initiatives such as verification of Internet transactions.

Crime and Disorder Partnerships

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 102W, on crime and disorder partnerships, what action he intends to take to ensure that police authorities obtain the views of people on the changes to policing. [68045]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 89W.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the number of offences committed in each police authority area in England in each reporting period since 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [56237]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The requested information is given in the table.

The period requested covers the change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, and the boundary change involving the Metropolitan Police on 1 April 2000. Some forces adopted the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard in advance of its national implementation on 1 April 2002. This may inflate the number of crimes those forces recorded.

Total recorded crime by police force area England and Wales 1995–2000/01

Police force area	*Number of offences*									
	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1997–98(1)*	*1998–99(1)*	*1998–99(2)*	*1999–2000*	*1999–2000(3) New boundaries*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Avon and Somerset*	152,886	156,557	143,128	144,556	131,955	150,089	147,104		149,254	178,991
Bedfordshire	51,104	52,004	47,426	45,250	43,947	49,076	53,607		49,627	52,239
Cambridgeshire	67,652	69,513	60,050	58,864	59,678	67,256	68,722		64,343	69,559
Cheshire	73,202	66,214	60,363	60,716	59,414	65,119	64,528		63,288	70,990
Cleveland	79,719	78,608	64,445	63,634	63,726	67,030	65,185		64,357	72,003
Cumbria*	41,230	39,739	35,810	35,777	35,171	40,202	37,729		32,873	37,324
Derbyshire	82,380	78,896	73,792	74,436	74,047	84,459	85,650		81,668	89,841
Devon and Cornwall	102,193	103,121	94,828	92,800	88,484	110,644	110,361		102,853	101,425
Dorset	54,582	49,731	44,104	43,536	43,903	52,755	52,332		50,320	54,951
Durham*	57,817	51,849	47,976	47,311	44,178	50,413	48,796		44,702	50,175
Essex	98,097	100,758	90,158	89,380	87,147	95,797	102,777	108,305	106,768	113,150
Gloucestershire	55,448	53,675	47,533	46,044	44,000	48,206	50,993		49,871	50,467
Greater Manchester*	327,994	327,976	307,403	315,000	336,172	362,450	377,086		363,454	380,801
Hampshire	134,319	135,915	124,306	121,042	115,008	128,253	135,174		133,553	135,961
Hertfordshire	55,891	54,441	50,050	49,426	46,255	49,309	52,741	65,015	64,215	67,437
Humberside	128,393	126,931	121,330	123,722	119,290	130,691	121,442		110,312	117,463
Kent*	155,251	147,980	122,955	118,892	110,244	129,340	124,918		128,382	120,155
Lancashire*	124,921	122,487	119,755	116,947	105,161	118,085	108,866		117,633	137,760
Leicestershire	93,607	94,124	81,259	81,183	81,714	93,397	94,577		86,422	88,535
Lincolnshire*	48,015	47,069	43,381	41,792	39,718	46,670	46,170		44,884	49,797
London, City of	5,727	4,831	5,130	5,137	6,035	7,144	7,775		8,255	10,098
Merseyside	153,385	145,956	125,979	125,312	130,606	140,874	148,172		142,807	150,934
Metropolitan Police	817,082	841,784	791,732	778,279	767,880	934,254	1,052,047	1,016,742	994,233	1,057,360
Norfolk	51,716	55,314	53,332	52,580	51,167	57,129	59,387		57,259	58,954
Northamptonshire	56,524	57,378	54,047	53,645	55,842	65,466	61,240		56,731	60,485
Northumbria	194,141	169,656	140,166	134,457	132,588	151,298	142,279		134,777	139,130

Total recorded crime by police force area England and Wales 1995–2000/01

Police force area	*Number of offences*									
	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1997–98(1)*	*1998–99(1)*	*1998–99(2)*	*1999–2000*	*1999–2000(3) New boundaries*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
North Yorkshire*	63,539	56,919	50,252	50,297	48,372	55,309	53,554		51,551	59,149
Nottinghamshire	151,371	144,060	128,015	125,097	123,680	135,255	136,875		139,903	159,240
South Yorkshire	154,293	151,577	130,960	125,907	124,427	133,059	131,700		125,179	134,764
Staffordshire*	91,495	92,155	89,957	89,820	84,495	91,919	98,852		104,705	117,274
Suffolk*	38,233	37,095	35,639	35,262	34,280	39,908	43,355		44,317	50,492
Surrey	44,313	42,014	38,440	38,015	36,376	42,467	46,288	63,791	63,321	61,970
Sussex	110,300	118,086	111,624	110,320	111,468	130,402	136,566		136,920	135,110
Thames Valley	178,702	172,194	157,423	154,014	161,646	176,477	191,875		187,989	196,980
Warwickshire	38,906	38,926	35,725	35,604	35,659	38,485	38,593		36,963	42,211
West Mercia*	80,013	82,254	76,762	75,330	69,451	81,782	84,797		78,363	102,149
West Midlands*	318,087	317,892	278,975	277,970	276,512	314,628	364,888		364,879	372,257
West Yorkshire	283,938	268,716	244,142	242,646	246,438	273,809	260,238		258,908	298,847
Wiltshire	36,428	35,911	33,039	32,831	32,984	38,189	38,461		36,555	38,889
England	4,852,894	4,790,306	4,361,391	4,312,831	4,259,118	4,847,095	5,045,700		4,932,394	5,285,317

* Adopted the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard prior to 1 April 2002.

(1) The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the coverage and rules in use until 31 March 1998.

(2) The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the expanded offence coverage and revised counting rules which came into effect on 1 April 1998.

(3) New boundaries for the police force areas of Hertfordshire, Essex, Metropolitan Police and Surrey came into effect on 1.4.2000. These figures are the totals for the new areas in the previous year.

Elderly Crime Victims

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many victims of crime there were aged 65 and over in each year since 1997 in each constabulary. [56569]

Mr. Denham: Recorded crime statistics collected centrally do not identify the age of the victim, and therefore the requested information is not available for individual police forces. Information on the age of victim is only available from the 2000 sweep of the British Crime Survey (BCS). The BCS estimates that in 1999 there were 273,000 personal crimes in England and Wales committed against those aged 65 and over. Those aged 65 and over represent 20 per cent of the population for England and Wales, but only experience 4.9 per cent of all personal crimes. The BCS also estimates that there were a further 1,090,000 household crimes against households headed by persons aged 65 or over. These BCS figures cannot be reliably broken down to constabulary level.

Personal offences here covers assault, robbery, theft from the person, other personal theft. Household offences here covers bicycle theft, burglary, theft in a dwelling, other household theft, theft of and from vehicles and vandalism to household property and vehicles. The BCS does not cover crime against those not living in private households, for example in care homes.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government are taking to reduce crime against pensioners. [58365]

Mr. Denham: British Crime Surveys show that elderly people are far less likely to suffer crime than younger people. But we recognise the impact that crime can have on elderly people. In addition to the work we are pursing to reduce crime generally, we have funded several schemes specifically to tackle crime against the elderly.

We have set up a Distraction Burglary Task Force, with £1 million Home Office funding, to gather data, publicise good practice, raise awareness and provide guidance for victims of this type of burglary, which is committed predominantly against the elderly.

We have allocated over £1 million, under the Crime Reduction Programme, to three distraction burglary projects in Leeds, Sheffield and a consortium of forces led by Derbyshire.

We have funded a two-year programme to provide home security upgrades for low income pensioners in areas with burglary rates above the national average. This scheme runs in conjunction with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA's) Warm Front scheme, which provides heating and insulation improvements. By the end of May, some 114,000 eligible homes had been surveyed, of which over 58,000 are receiving additional locks or bolts.

We know that people over the age of 65 are among the most likely to fear crime despite being the group least likely to become a victim of crime. Research suggests this may in part be because the impact of crime can be far more traumatic for the elderly and vulnerable than for those of a younger age.

We are working closely with Age Concern and Help the Aged to identify ways to tackle misperceptions about the risk of victimisation and also to educate the elderly as to the sensible precautions they can take to protect themselves. The Home Office are seeking to run a workshop at the Help the Aged annual conference in October during which these issues will be addressed; solutions identified will be incorporated into the Home Office strategy for reducing the fear of crime.

Retail Crime

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what study he has made of the link between alcohol consumption and drug-related violent crime against retail staff. [69812]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: No study has been undertaken to look specifically at the link between alcohol consumption and drug-related violent crime against retail staff. However, we are aware from the British Retail Consortium (BRC) ninth annual survey published this year of their concerns about the level of crime affecting retailers and the concerns they have that this is being driven by theft by drug and alcohol abusers. We are carrying out a commercial crime victimisation study of retail and manufacturing sectors later this year (the first for 10 years). This will give a firm basis for identifying the main crime problems affecting business and give valuable indicators of the best ways to tackle these issues.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to address violence against shop staff. [69809]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office is working with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to raise awareness of the need to tackle work related violence as part of the Health and Safety Commission's three-year programme of work (2000–03) to help reduce the incidence of work-related violence. The HSE published "Work-related violence: managing the risk in smaller businesses" on 9 July 2002. The publication includes 10 case studies on reducing risk of violence to staff. The HSE has also published specific guidance for the retail sector "Preventing Violence to Retail Staff". "Don't Discount Crime", a new user-friendly crime reduction guide for retailers became available in May 2002. This is being circulated among their members by retail trade organisations (including the British Retail Consortium), who were actively involved in deciding its content and design. It is of particular relevance to small retailers and includes basic guidance on what steps to take to reduce crime as well as what to do in crime situations.

Karl Bluestone

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action was taken by the police authority in respect of *(a)* domestic violence perpetrated against his first wife and *(b)* subsequent incidents of domestic violence in the Bluestone murder case; [35655]

(2) how many incidents of domestic violence perpetrated by Mr. Bluestone were *(a)* recorded and *(b)* subject to disciplinary action. [35656]

Mr. Denham: Four incidents of domestic violence perpetrated by Karl Bluestone were brought to the attention of Kent County Constabulary, and all were recorded. The alleged victim in each of these incidents was Jill Bluestone. The Police were not aware of the incidents perpetrated against Mr. Bluestone's first wife.

In two of the incidents described above, reference was made to the Crown Prosecution Service who decided to take no further action. No disciplinary action was undertaken in relation to any of the incidents.

Following the murders perpetrated by Karl Bluestone, a number of reviews have been convened to examine the behaviour of the different agencies that had contact with the family. Reports already received have made a number of recommendations for the police and other agencies in order to minimise the risk of further tragedies and highlighted the lessons to be learnt from this particular case. The Home Office has been working closely with Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to take forward those recommendations. Once the new ACPO lead officer takes up his duties in September, we shall set a target date for issuing guidance to forces on how to deal effectively with perpetrators of this crime who work within their ranks.

Entry Refusal (Sexual Exploitation)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been refused entry to the United Kingdom because of concerns that they would be sexually exploited in each of the last five years. [70282]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the reasons for which people were refused is not collated centrally and is therefore not available.

Yarl's Wood Fire

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the cost *(a)* to date and *(b)* in the next year to the Bedfordshire police, arising from the Yarl's Wood fire. [68623]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* The Chief Constable of Bedfordshire has informed me that the cost of the operation to date is approximately £2.9 million and that it is not possible to estimate future costs. The criminal investigation into the circumstances of the incident, and the forensic search of the material removed from the site is continuing.

English Language Teaching

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of people from *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan who are permanently settled in the UK and do not have a working knowledge of English. [68880]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have been asked to reply.

There is currently no information on the number of people from India and Pakistan who are permanently settled in the UK and do not have a working knowledge of English. However, the DfES has recently commissioned a large survey of adult basic skills needs, which should give us an indication of English language ability by ethnic group.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent on English language teaching for *(a)* those from India and Pakistan settled permanently in the UK and *(b)* new arrivals with an inadequate grasp of English in each of the past five years broken down by constituency; and if he will make a statement. [68881]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Comprehensive data on the cost of providing English language training to these groups is not available.

People Trafficking

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been of people living in the United Kingdom for offences connected with the trafficking of women in each of the last five years; and of these, how many have been *(a)* convicted, *(b)* sentenced to imprisonment and *(c)* fined or deported. [70120]

Beverley Hughes: As there is at present no specific offence of trafficking, the police and other law enforcement agencies are not able to say how many people connected with the trafficking of women have been prosecuted, convicted, sentenced, fined or deported in the last five years.

The Government is creating a new offence of trafficking for the purposes of controlling someone in prostitution within the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill currently before Parliament. It will carry a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment. This is a stopgap offence pending more wide-ranging offences of trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation when Parliamentary time permits.

In May 2000, we set up Reflex, a multi-agency taskforce on organised immigration crime, including people trafficking. Led by the National Crime Squad (NCS), Reflex brings together all the key agencies from law enforcement, Government and the intelligence community, including the Immigration Service, the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) and police forces such as the Metropolitan Police, Kent Constabulary and the British Transport Police.

Under Reflex, we have set up a joint operational unit comprising NCS and Immigration Service officers with sites at Gatwick and Heathrow. This will provide a significant new capability to respond to allegations of trafficking in women.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the policy is of the Metropolitan Police in combatting the trafficking of people into the London area for work in the sex industry. [70285]

Beverley Hughes: The Metropolitan Police Service is a member of Reflex, a multi-agency taskforce on organised immigration crime, including people trafficking. Reflex targets the organised criminals involved in the trafficking and smuggling of people.

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the policy of the Metropolitan Police Service is to work with other agencies in detecting, prosecuting and, where appropriate, rescuing prostitutes, some of whom may have been trafficked, working both on and off the street. In order to tackle associated issues, kerb crawlers and those who affix prostitute cards are also prosecuted. Where there is evidence of trafficking for the purposes of prostitution, this is passed on to Reflex.

Immigration Officers (Prague Airport)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British immigration officers are based at Prague airport; and what plans he has to increase this number. [71102]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* There are no British Immigration Officers based permanently at Prague airport.

A bilateral agreement reached with the Czech government in February 2001 allows passengers travelling from the Czech Republic to the United Kingdom to be precleared before their arrival in the United Kingdom.

Under the terms of the agreement a team of 12 British immigration officers, attached to our Embassy in Prague as consular officials, operate a pre-clearance control at Prague airport.

Pre-clearance operations in Prague are intended to be a short term and flexibly applied response, dependant on the number of inadmissible passengers arriving in the United Kingdom and are therefore re-introduced when operational pressures necessitate. The operation has been implemented on 12 occasions in total.

There are no plans at present to increase the size of the team.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of ordinary written Questions for his Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58976]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is given in the following table:

Ordinary Written (OW) Cases answered within 7 days of tabling between 1 June 2001 and 25 June 2002

Type	*Month*	*Total*	*Within 7 Days*	*Percentage*
OW	June 2001	56	37	66.07
	July 2001	302	173	57.28
	October 2001	314	172	54.78
	November 2001	399	165	41.35
	December 2001	244	100	40.98
	January 2002	464	154	33.19
	February 2002	409	145	35.45
	March 2002	351	13	3.70
	April 2002	492	43	8.74
	May 2002	391	121	30.95
	June 2002	270	56	20.74
Total		3,692	1,179	31.93

Named Day (ND) Cases answered on nominated day between 1 June 2001 and 30 June 2002

Type	*Month*	*Total*	*Within 7 Days*	*Percentage*
ND	June 2001	80	57	72.25
	July 2001	192	103	53.65
	October 2001	114	45	39.47
	November 2001	222	93	41.89
	December 2001	99	15	15.15
	January 2002	197	38	19.29
	February 2002	146	22	15.07
	March 2002	160	14	8.75
	April 2002	213	16	7.51
	May 2002	132	7	5.30
	June 2002	109	4	3.67
Total		1,664	414	24.88

The Department recognises that our performance in answering PQs is not as good as it needs to be and we have implemented an action plan to improve the timeliness of our responses to PQs.

Imams

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of imams in the United Kingdom who received their religious education and training outside the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [69788]

Beverley Hughes: We do not collect this information.

Our recent White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven—Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain" contains a proposal to allow those present in the United Kingdom (UK) in some other capacity to fill local vacancies as ministers of religion. It is envisaged that it is more likely that those who have already spent some time in the UK will have absorbed something of our culture and be better able therefore to relate their particular faith to the context of the UK. In addition, someone who has been in the UK is more likely to be able to speak English, which will enable him or her to play their part effectively as a religious leader and aid community relations. It will also be easier to verify the religious training or studies that have been undertaken by individuals whilst in the UK.

Nuisance Neighbours

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legislation applies to nuisance neighbours in sheltered housing schemes; and if he will make a statement. [45621]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* There are a number of legislative measures that apply to nuisance neighbours. These include:

The Housing Act 1996, which makes provision for eviction and injunctions.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990, under which local authorities can deal with nuisance problems such as noise, smoke, fumes or gases emitted from premises.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which introduced Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) which can be used to prohibit individuals from acting in a manner liable to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more people in another household.

The Protection from Harassment Act 1997, which makes it a criminal offence to cause another to fear that violence will be used against him or her.

The Government's consultation exercise on "Tackling Anti-Social Tenants" ended on 12 July. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will now be considering the responses and taking this work forward.

Speed Cameras

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many convictions relating to the use of mobile speed cameras there were for each police force in the last five years; [70408]

(2) how many convictions relating to the use of fixed-site speed cameras there were for each police force in the last five years. [70407]

Mr. John Denham: Data on convictions for speeding as the result of the use of cameras in England and Wales are not available centrally. Court records reported do not separately identify proceedings where cameras have been used.

Road Traffic Offences

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the Government's response to the consultation on road traffic penalties; what plans he has to introduce an offence of negligent driving; what will constitute negligent driving for the purposes of the offence; and if he will make a statement. [69785]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We aim to publish the Government's response to the consultation exercise on road traffic penalties before the summer recess.

There are no plans to introduce a negligent driving charge. However, one of the recommendations in the research report "Dangerous Driving and the Law" (Road Safety Research Report No. 26) commissioned by the Department for Transport, is that the Government should consult on the creation of an intermediate offence to deal with driving behaviour not amounting to Dangerous Driving but significantly more serious than Careless Driving, with more severe penalties than the lesser offence, including imprisonment.

We are currently considering this recommendation and whether changes in the law or its administration are needed.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers police forces have in respect of road traffic offences carried out on unadopted roads. [70400]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Road traffic legislation applies to all roads, defined as any highway or other road to which the public has access. It would be for the courts to decide whether any particular unadopted road was one to which the public had access. Where the public does have access to such a road, the police are able to use their full range of powers to enforce road traffic legislation.

Security Industry Authority

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Security Industry Authority will begin to operate a national register of those licensed to work within the security industry. [58171]

Mr. Denham: The Security Industry Authority (SIA) will begin to compile registers of licence holders as soon as personal licensing begins. The SIA will come into existence on 1 April 2003 and we anticipate personal licensing will begin later that year.

Medical Confidentiality

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the extent to which the system of medical confidentiality allows for full access to a child's medical records, with specific reference to those held by general practitioners. [69759]

Mr. Lammy: I have been asked to reply.

Access to the confidential medical records of children, held by general practitioners or other parts of the health service, must be in accordance with the law. This would normally require the consent of a competent child or of someone with parental responsibility for the child. Where there is no one able to provide this consent, the best interests of the child might justify access. Where consent is withheld or it is not appropriate to seek consent, access would be possible where there is a statutory basis for permitting it or where the holder of the record feels that matters of public concern outweigh obligations of confidentiality.

Passports

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent improvements have been made to speed up the process of application for passports and renewing passports. [70134]

Beverley Hughes: On 14 January 2002, the United Kingdom Passport Service (UKPS) introduced two new guaranteed services at its counters: a premium same day service for renewals and a fast-track one week service for all applications. The standard service, available by post or through the UKPS High Street partners (i.e. selected branches of the Post Office and Worldchoice travel agents) is two weeks. This is not guaranteed but is currently being met in 99.5 per cent of applications. A pilot exercise to test the possibility of extending the fast track service to the High Street partners is currently taking place. Applications for passports can also be completed by telephone or on the Internet; the completed form is posted to the applicant for signature. Improvements to the electronic application channel are being developed on which the UKPS has sought the views of the Consultative Panel of Passport users. It would be technically possible for the improved electronic application channel to be available through private sector partnerships but there are no specific proposals at present.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 22 July 2002

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Digital Licences

2. **Mr. Mole:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the awarding of digital licences by the Independent Television Commission. [68958]

Tessa Jowell: The Independent Television Commission are solely responsible for the award of licences under the Broadcasting Acts. They considered that the BBC/Crown Castle joint proposal was best suited to ensure the long-term future of digital terrestrial television, subject to conditions mainly designed to prevent any competition issues. This will give a fresh start to the platform, offering free-to-view digital TV and enabling many consumers to enjoy the benefits of digital television.

School Sport

12. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last discussed the subject of sport and physical education in schools with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. [68969]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regular discussions on this subject with her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and their last formal meeting was on 2 July.

25. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding is available to local councils for sports facilities for schools. [68983]

Mr. Caborn: Funding for the development and improvement of sports facilities at schools is available to local education authorities through the New Opportunities Fund PE and Sport Programme which is providing £581 million in England, the Space for Sport and Arts Programme which is providing £130 million in England and Sport England's Lottery funded School and Community Sports Initiative. All facilities provided under these programmes are available to the local community.

Theatres (Barnsley)

13. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received regarding theatre provision in Barnsley. [68970]

Dr. Howells: I have received no representations regarding this subject.

Sydonia Swimming Pool

14. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will take steps to promote the reopening of Leominster's Sydonia swimming pool. [68972]

Mr. Caborn: Local authorities are key providers of sport and recreation facilities and play a central role in the delivery of sport in the community. The provision of swimming facilities is a matter for local authorities to consider in the light of local needs and the appropriate mixture of pubic and private provision. The Government support the provision of sport and leisure facilities through various means including funding from the Sports Lottery Fund, and I understand that Leominster city council has applied to Sport England for such funding.

Arts (North-East)

15. **Mr. Kevan Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on Government support for the arts in the north-east. [68973]

Tessa Jowell: In 2003–04 Northern Arts will distribute almost £14 million in grant in aid in the north-east.

A further £4 million has been earmarked for Creative Partnerships to invest in the Tees Valley, Durham and Sunderland. Since 1995, almost £132 million of Lottery funding has been awarded to the north-east region by the Arts Council of England.

These awards have funded 956 projects including the BALTIC and Music Centre, Gateshead.

Arts Board

16. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the changes proposed to the regional structure of the Arts Board. [68974]

Tessa Jowell: On 1 April 2002 North West Arts Board joined with other Regional Arts Boards and the Arts Council of England to create a new single arts funding and development organisation for England. The Arts Council will be producing a progress report on the development of the new organisation which I will consider in due course.

Sport (Young People)

17. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with Sport England and other sports councils in the UK to discuss provision made to nurture sporting talent to compete successfully on the world stage. [68975]

Mr. Caborn: Officials from my Department hold regular meetings with members of Sport England to discuss the programmes in place to nurture sporting talent. My Department also maintains contact with the devolved Administrations concerning their programmes to support talented young athletes as well as fund athletes with the potential to win medals in significant future international competitions through Lottery funds.

Lord Nelson

18. **Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will take steps to *(a)* purchase and *(b)* put on public display the collection of Lord Nelson's personal artefacts to be auctioned in the autumn. [68976]

Tessa Jowell: My Department does not acquire historical artefacts for public display and has no locus to intervene in the sale of private property. The purchase and subsequent display to members of the public of any of Lord Nelson's personal artefacts to be auctioned in the autumn is a matter for the Trustees or governing bodies of museums with an interest in such material.

Tourism

19. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the tourism industry's recovery since the foot and mouth outbreak and 11 September last year. [68977]

Dr. Howells: According to the latest International Passenger Survey, in the three months to May this year, inbound visits and expenditure by overseas visitors were both 2 per cent. up on the same period in 2001.

Domestic tourism has also performed well. Data from the UK Tourism Survey show that, in the first quarter of 2002, trips were up 13 per cent. on 2001, while tourist spending was up by 18 per cent.

22. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to support tourism in Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds; and if she will make a statement. [68980]

Dr. Howells: The Southern Tourist Board has produced a tourism strategy setting out the potential role for tourism in Oxfordshire and has distributed promotional literature to both domestic and overseas markets. The Regional Development Agency is also working with South West Tourism on a 10-year plan for tourism which directly involves representatives from around the Cotswolds.

The Government have also put £20 million into their biggest ever campaign for attracting visitors from abroad to the United Kingdom—the Million Visitors Campaign, whose aim is to attract that additional number to Britain, benefiting the whole country, including Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds. On 13 May, we announced proposals for the modernisation and reform of tourism in England. Our intention is for more resources to be devoted to marketing all of the English regions.

Music

20. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures she will take to promote music as a cultural and economic activity. [68978]

Tessa Jowell: I recognise the central role played by music in our economic and cultural life. My Department works closely with all sections of the music industry and other Government Departments to identify and take forward a wide ranging work programme to ensure the continued success of the UK industry and our artists, at home and abroad.

Summer Play Schemes

21. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support her Department is giving for summer play schemes involving sport. [68979]

Tessa Jowell: We are today, jointly with the Youth Justice Board, launching a comprehensive programme of summer activities aimed at children and young people at risk of offending. The programme—Splash Extra—builds on the board's excellent Summer Splash programme.

Resourced through the New Opportunities Fund, Splash Extra is aimed at children and young people aged nine to 17 identified as at risk of offending and living in 300 estates in and around the street crime 'hotspot' areas.

It will provide a varied programme of quality sports, arts and other cultural activities, as well as personal development and education. We expect to reach at least 48,000 children and young people and possibly many more.

Splash Extra will be supported by key workers from Youth Offending Teams, the Connexions Service and the Children's Fund. As well as providing something to do over the summer for those at risk of offending, the programme will also support them back into education and training once it finishes.

Sport England is also supporting a range of activities mainly through work in Sport Action Zones including in West Cumbria, Luton, Bradford, Liverpool and East Manchester.

BBC Charter

23. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she plans to announce the timetable for the review of the BBC Charter. [68981]

Tessa Jowell: I have already made clear that I expect the process of BBC Charter review to start in 2004.

Crime Initiative

24. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her Department is doing to support the Government's street crime and robbery initiative. [68982]

Tessa Jowell: My Department is playing a full part in the Government's drive to tackle street crime. We are today, jointly with the Youth Justice Board, launching a comprehensive programme of summer activities aimed at children and young people at risk of offending in the street crime areas. The programme—Splash Extra—builds on the Board's excellent Summer Splash programme.

Resourced through the New Opportunities Fund, Splash Extra is aimed at children and young people aged 9 to 17 identified as at risk of offending and living in 300 estates in and around the street crime 'hotspot' areas.

It will provide a varied programme of quality sports, arts and other cultural activities, as well as personal development and education. We expect to reach at least 48,000 children and young people and possibly many more.

Supported by key workers from Youth Offending Teams, the Connexions Service and the Children's Fund, Splash Extra will not only provide something for those at risk of offending to do over the summer. It will also ensure that they are supported back into education and training once the programme finishes.

Euro

26. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether she has recently met the English Tourism Council to discuss the acceptance of euro notes and coins. [68984]

Dr. Howells: No I have not. The British Tourist Authority have, in consultation with the tourism industry and HM Treasury, issued guidance entitled "The Euro—A guide for small tourism businesses" to assist tourism firms. Copies were placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 25 March.

Tennis

27. **Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the Lawn Tennis Association and the All England Lawn Tennis Club on developing access to tennis coaching for children from poorer neighbourhoods. [68985]

Mr. Caborn: I met the chief executive and representatives from the LTA on 5 September 2001 to discuss the City Tennis Scheme which encourages children from inner city areas into the sport. I discussed the scheme further while attending the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships on 6 July.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not met either the Lawn Tennis Association or the All England Lawn Tennis Club specifically to discuss this subject.

Historic Buildings (Public Access)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 314W, how many of the properties *(a)* grant aided through the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Local Government Act 1985 and *(b)* aided by the Heritage Lottery fund allow some public access. [68299]

Dr. Howells: 129 properties in London have received grants administered under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Local Government Act 1985. There is no power under this legislation to require public access as a condition of the grant. These grants are for external repairs and improvements which can be viewed by the public from the street. Some buildings do allow an element of public access by virtue of their function, such as places of worship and shops.

As part of the condition of grant, the Heritage Lottery Fund requires that grantees ensure that the general public has appropriate access to properties and that no one is unreasonably denied access.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 315, for what reason there is no automatic access requirement when properties are grant-aided under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Local Government Act 1985. [68300]

Dr. Howells: The grants English Heritage is empowered to give under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Local Government Act 1985 are wide in scope. They are a transfer of responsibility from the former Greater London Council to English Heritage, along with the special statutory powers that the former Greater London Council held. There is no power under this legislation to require public access conditions. The grants are normally given for listed buildings at risk where they make a contribution to the appearance of a conservation area and where the works can be seen by the public from the exterior.

Historic Buildings (Grant)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what requirements are placed on the owners of buildings of historical interest who are grant-aided by English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund to refund the grant or part of the grant, if the property is sold. [68302]

Dr. Howells: For grant aid administered by English Heritage under Section 3A of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Act 1953, the whole grant is usually recoverable if the property is disposed of within 10 years of the original offer. Recovery conditions may be omitted where it is considered unnecessary or unenforceable.

Grant aid administered by English Heritage under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 includes the following condition:

> "The grant or any such part of it as the Council sees fit, may be recovered from the grant recipient under Sections 58 and 80(7) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 if:
>
> (b) during the period of 3 years beginning with the day on which the grant is made, the recipient disposes of the interest held in the property on that day (the relevant interest), or any part of that interest, by way of a sale exchange or lease for a term of not less than 21 years."

When an applicant is awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant a contract is issued containing conditions of grant relating to the project. These include the following condition:

> "If you [the applicant] sell or dispose of a property we [the Heritage Lottery Fund] have funded within the period specified in our contract, we may ask you to repay our grant."

These conditions of grant are detailed on pages 8 and 9 of the Heritage Grant application pack, which is available on-line at www.hlf.org.uk.

Drugs (Sport)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to create an independent body responsible for drug-testing in sport. [69726]

Mr. Caborn: UK Sport currently has responsibility for the anti-doping programme in the UK. UK Sport is subject to scrutiny by the British Standards Institute, the World Anti-Doping Agency, the International Standards Organisation and the National Audit Office. Its achievement of certification by these bodies provides an independent assessment of the validity and effectiveness of its anti-doping programme and procedures. UK Sport's anti-doping programme, as it currently stands, provides appropriate levels of independent scrutiny and is well respected throughout the rest of the world.

South Bank Centre

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the South Bank centre has spent on *(a)* accountants, *(b)* legal advisers, *(c)* planning consultants and *(d)* other professionals, to work on the Rick Mather master plan to develop the south bank. [70997]

Dr. Howells: Between April 1998 and March 2002 the South Bank centre has spent £1.493 million, of which £300,000 has come from private donations, on the development of the master plan for the redevelopment of its three arts buildings, the British Film Institute Film Centre and the 27-acre riverside estate.

Of this sum, £399,000 was architectural costs, £160,000 was for planning advice, £224,000 legal costs, £149,000 was for other professional advice and £217,000 for public consultations. Other costs relate to technical studies, an economic option appraisal and the cost of international architectural competitions.

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [70977]

Dr. Howells: A number of the consultation documents published in 2001 referred to the consultation criteria although none reproduced them in full.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many consultation documents published in *(a)* electronic or *(b)* printed form in 2001 her Department has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [70979]

Dr. Howells: The Department regularly monitored and evaluated consultations in 2001.

Pride of Place

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 13 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 414W, how many copies of "Pride of Place" have been sold. [70869]

Dr. Howells: This figure will not be available until the end of August. I have asked the Arts Council to write to the hon. Member directly once they have it and also to confirm how many projects have taken up their offer of complimentary copies.

Spectrum Scarcity

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on spectrum scarcity in the digital environment; and what implications her policy has for the continuation of a statutory ban on religious organisations holding a wide range of broadcasting licences. [71712]

Dr. Howells: Although digital broadcasting has relieved some pressure on spectrum, scarcity remains an issue. The Government's aim is to ensure that limited spectrum is distributed so as to satisfy as many viewers/listeners as possible, and in terms of religious broadcasting, to avoid giving one religion an unfair advantage over another, so that everyone's beliefs are equally respected. The Government's position is set out in the document "The draft Communications Bill—The Policy" which states that, where there is sufficient spectrum availability, restrictions on religious bodies holding licences will be removed (paragraph 9.3.3).

The Radio Authority, which licences all independent radio services in the UK, is currently given discretion under the Broadcasting Act 1990 to award local analogue, satellite and cable licences to religious bodies, subject to compliance with the Authority's codes, and the ITC can also award cable and satellite TV licences to religious organisations.

The draft Bill increases the number of types of licences which religious bodies can hold by giving OFCOM discretion to award local digital sound programme service licences, digital additional service licences, digital programme service licences and TV restricted service licences.

S4C

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the cost of the 10 hours of programmes provided by the BBC for S4C each week in each of the last five years. [71757]

Dr. Howells: The cost to the BBC of providing programmes to S4C in accordance with section 58 of the Broadcasting Act 1990, in each of the last five years, was:

	£ million
1997–98	16.7
1998–99	16.3
1999–2000	16.9
2000–01	16.0
2001–02	16.4

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if she will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if she will make a statement. [70203]

Dr. Howells: The Department's spending on information literature in 2001–02 was £300,591.

No advertising or campaign material was produced during this period.

Creative Partnerships Programme

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the progress of the Creative Partnerships Programme. [68957]

Tessa Jowell: We have established Creative Partnerships in 16 of the most deprived areas of the country. Each partnership will offer children and young people the opportunity for unprecedented access to creative learning, through bringing cultural and educational institutions and practitioners together. The first projects will begin with the new school year in September.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Totnes dated 28 June about the number of road and carriageway closures in Royal Parks; and if she will make a statement on the delay in responding. [71191]

Tessa Jowell: I received the hon. Gentleman's letter on 1 July 2002. As the subject of his letter is an operational matter for the Chief Executive of the Royal Parks Agency, I asked him to respond on my behalf and I understand that he did so on 17 July 2002.

My Department aims to reply to Members' correspondence within 18 working days of receipt. In this case a reply was issued to the hon. Gentleman in 13 working days.

Sport (Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her plans to develop sport in the Chorley constituency. [68962]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are committed to increasing opportunities for participation in sport for all people, particularly youngsters, in all parts of the country. My Department is working closely with the Department for Education and Skills to improve access to and quality of PE and school sport in all parts of the country. I am aware that Chorley Council is working with a number of organisations including Lancashire Sport, the Chorley and District Sports Forum and Sport England to improve sporting provision in the Borough.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

European Parliament Elections

36. **Norman Baker:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what consideration is being given by the Commission to the merits of the method of election used for elections to the European Parliament. [68950]

Mr. Beith: I understand that no such consideration is being given by the Commission. However, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, the Commission will conduct a review of the next scheduled elections to the European Parliament in June 2004.

Local Government Elections (Wales)

37. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what work the Electoral Commission plans to undertake on electoral arrangements for local government in Wales. [68951]

Mr. Beith: I understand from the Chairman that the Commission has no plans at present for work on local government electoral arrangements in Wales.

40. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what consultations he has had with the Electoral Commission on recommendations relating to local government elections in Wales. [68954]

Mr. Beith: The Speaker's Committee has not had any consultations with the Electoral Commission on this subject.

All-Postal Voting

39. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, if the Committee will ask the Electoral Commission to undertake research on the impact of all-postal voting pilots on the secrecy of the ballot. [68953]

Mr. Beith: The Electoral Commission is currently preparing its evaluation of the all-postal voting and other pilot schemes that took place in May 2002. The evaluation, which will be published on 1 August, will consider the impact of the pilot schemes on the secrecy of the ballot. The Commission is also undertaking a wider review of the law and practice in relation to absent voting, which includes consideration of secrecy and security of the ballot and related issues.

Franchise

41. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, whom he will be consulting on the question of reducing the voting age to 16. [68955]

Mr. Beith: I understand the Commission intends to start work on its formal review of the minimum age for voting in UK elections in January 2003. The Commission intends to include in its review a significant period of open public consultation, giving interested individuals and organisations the opportunity to make their views known.

The Commission will also be approaching a number of groups directly, including young people's representative forums and agencies, Members of Parliament, and the devolved bodies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

GM Crops

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what separation distances she recommends should be imposed between GM and non-GM or organic crops of *(a)* sugar or fodder beet, *(b)* maize and *(c)* oilseed rape, to avoid contamination of the non-GM or organic crop above 0.01 per cent. [46621]

Mr. Meacher: There are insufficient data to determine separation distances between crops that would achieve a cross-pollination threshold of 0.01 per cent. Furthermore, 0.01 per cent. is below the level at which an incidental GM presence can reliably be quantified with current analytical methods.

In 2000 the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) reported on the separation distances required to ensure that cross-pollination is below specified limits. These distances for oilseed rape and maize are shown in Table 1. NIAB did not recommend a distance for beet crops because beet is biennial and generally does not flower in the year of harvest, and any "bolters" can and should be removed before flowering. In addition, incoming pollen would not affect the vegetative parts of the plant (beet root and foliage). In 2001 the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment augmented the NIAB advice in respect of maize (Table 2). The NIAB study took account of work undertaken for the Soil Association by the National Pollen Research Unit (NPRU) which recommended separation distances to achieve an incidental GM presence which was not quantified but described as "very low risk". These distances are shown in Table 3. The NIAB study also reviewed work from a variety of researchers, such as Jones and Brooks—"Effectiveness of distance and border rows in preventing outcrossing in corn"; Oklahoma Agricultural Experimental Station, Technical Bulletin No. T-38, 1950.

Table 1: Summary of separation distances (m) required to maintain cross-pollination of the whole fields at below specified levels for fields of 2ha or more

metres

Crop	*Threshold levels of cross-pollination* 1%	0.5%	0.1%
Oilseed rape (B. napus and rapa)			
Conventional varieties and restored hybrids	1.5	10	100
Varietal associations and partially restored hybrids	100	[1]—	[1]—
Maize/sweetcorn			
For grain	200	300	[1]—
For silage	130	200	420

[1] Insufficient information to produce a recommendation (see report for more detail).

Source:

NIAB report "Review of the use of separation distances between genetically modified and other crops", August 2000.

Table 2: Summary of ACRE's advice on cross-pollination in relation to Farm Scale Evaluations of Genetically Modified Maize, 1 May 2001

metres

	Separation distances from GM maize[1]		
Neighbouring crop (organic and non-organic)	*Adventitious GM presence in the grain or silage (upper limit)* 1%	0.5%	0.1%
Maize grown for grain (sweetcorn, seed crops)	130	200	420
Maize grown for silage (forage maize)	80	130	290

[1] The table refers to varieties of GM maize, such as that used in the farm scale evaluations, which are heterozygous for the GM trait. For any homozygous varieties the amount of GM presence will be approximately double the above figures at the same separation distances.

NPRU's recommended "very low risk distances", January 2000

metres

Crop	*Very low risk distance*
Maize	3,000
Sugar beet	[1]1,000
Oil seed rape	6,000

[1] 3,000 metres were recommended between GM beet and organic seed production.

GMOs

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish her detailed response to the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission report; and if she will launch the public debate on genetic modification. [65519]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are considering the details of the advice from the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission on a public debate on GM issues and will respond as soon as possible. Our intention is that the public debate will start as quickly as possible once the detailed arrangements have been finalised.

Committee LIFE

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee on the Financial Instrument for the Environment (LIFE) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56724]

Mr. Meacher: Council Regulation EC 1655/2000 establishes the Financial Instrument for the Environment (LIFE). The LIFE Committee is a regulatory Committee provided for under Article 11 of the LIFE Regulation. The mandate of the Committee is to assist the Commission with the establishment of guidelines for the type of projects to be funded, and to approve the lists of projects selected for funding.

The Committee has met twice in the last 12 months. Two representatives are permitted from each member state. The Commission pays for one representative to attend from each member state. Additional representatives from the UK cost around £400 per meeting. The cost of attending this Committee over the last 12 months was approximately £800.

The main issues being considered by the Committee are the guidelines and application process for the Instrument, communication and lists of projects to be funded under both LIFE Environment and LIFE Third Countries.

Swillfeeding

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on British businesses of the ban on swillfeeding. [68492]

Margaret Beckett: The change in national legislation was based on the advice of the Chief Veterinary Officer in the context of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease and is consistent with the requirements of forthcoming EU legislation on Classical Swine Fever and animal by-products. The index case of the FMD outbreak was at premises where the producer has been subsequently prosecuted for feeding unprocessed catering waste.

The proposal to ban swillfeeding was the subject of a full public consultation and a Regulatory Impact Assessment. The majority of respondents were in favour of a ban on the feeding of catering waste containing meat or meat products as swill to livestock. The final RIA was published with the Animal By-Products (Amendment) (England) Order 2001 and a copy is available from the Library of the House.

Animal Feed

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the risk to animal health from the use of waste cooking oil as an additive in animal feed. [68488]

Margaret Beckett: Used cooking oils are almost solely of vegetable origin in the UK and are not in themselves unsafe, although there is a risk that they may become contaminated. That risk can be removed if an effective control and traceability system is in place.

TB

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the scope, progress, timetable and conclusions of her Department's research projects on TB in wildlife other than badgers. [68505]

Margaret Beckett: There are currently two research projects under way which focus on TB in wildlife other than badgers. Summary details are given in the table:

Title of research project	*Start date*	*End date*
The risk to cattle from *Mycobacterium bovis* in wildlife species other than badgers	1 May 1999	30 April 2004
The risk to cattle from wildlife species other than badgers in areas of high herd breakdown risk	1 January 2000	31 November 2003

The research projects are proceeding according to plan. Following completion the findings of each project will be published.

Water Level Management

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many water level management plans have received grant aid for implementation from her Department in each of the last five years; and what assessment she has made of the adequacy of this level of expenditure. [68192]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA provides grant towards the cost of approved capital works undertaken by the Environment Agency, local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), inter alia, to implement water level management plans (WLMPs). The numbers of works in relation to WLMPs approved for grant in each of the last five years is:

	Number
1997	2
1998	2
1999	3
2000	2
2001	3
2002 (to date)	1

The Department is committed to its WLMP initiative. In February 2001 in order to encourage implementation of plans I announced an increase in grant rates for IDBs to 80 per cent. for sites of international importance, and 50 per cent. for sites of national importance.

The operating authorities have a High Level Target in relation to completion and implementation of WLMPs. Part B of this target is to have in place a detailed programme for implementing and reviewing WLMPs:

For European and Ramsar sites (by April 2002)

For other SSSIs (by April 2003).

The Environment Agency is also required to report to DEFRA on operating authorities progress in implementing and reviewing WLMPs against their published programme. We will be reviewing the information received from this reporting process to see whether expenditure is adequate.

Floods

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many feasibility studies have been *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* completed by the Environment Agency following the flooding of autumn 2000; what (i) flood alleviation measures have resulted and (ii) expenditure has been incurred up to April of this year; and if she will make a statement. [69191]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency has developed a database to monitor progress at all the flood locations identified in their Lessons Learned Report on the autumn 2000 floods. The database covers locations for which local authorities are considering flood management options as well as those for which the Agency is taking the lead, and is reviewed every six months. A current review is nearing completion and I understand that the results will be available in early August. I have asked the Agency to provide you with the information requested as soon as it is available. Since the floods of autumn 2000, DEFRA has approved for grant aid a total of 274 new flood and coastal schemes and studies at an estimated cost of £386 million, although of course not all relate to locations flooded that year.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent on flood defences in England broken down by *(a)* constituency and *(b)* Government regional development agency in the past five years; and if she will make a statement. [70606]

Mr. Morley: Expenditure on flood defences in England is incurred primarily by the Environment Agency, local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards. The Agency does not keep financial records on the basis of constituency or government regional development agency. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Common Fisheries Policy

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) who will be responsible for the policing of the baseline/12 mile limit zones under the proposals for post 2002 in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; [69389]

(2) whether *(a)* the baseline/six mile limit zone and *(b)* the six to 12 miles limit zone are to be merged to form one zone of baseline/12 mile limit zone within the proposals for the post 2002 CFP; [69387]

(3) to whom the management of the baseline/12 mile limit zone would be accountable under the proposals for the post 2002 CFP; [69391]

(4) whether the competency for the baseline/12 mile limit will be returned to member states within the proposals for the reformed Common Fisheries Policy post 2002; [69386]

(5) whether the establishment of a permanent baseline/ 12 mile limit fishing zone to the member state concerned would require a treaty change; [69390]

(6) whether the consultation of management will include all those member states who have fishing rights within the six to 12 mile limit zone within the present proposals for the CFP post 2002. [69388]

Mr. Morley: The Communication from the Commission on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy ("Roadmap") (Com(02) 181) makes it clear that the Commission proposes to continue the current regime applicable to the six to 12 mile zones.

Bushmeat Trade

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department has approached Governments in countries in Central and West Africa to establish mechanisms to control the illegal international trade in bushmeat. [70305]

Mr. Meacher: As a result of my Department's representations at the eleventh Conference of CITES Parties in April 2000, the CITES Bushmeat Working Group was established. We have contributed £55,000 to the Group, which aims to help Central and West African range states develop and implement their own solutions, including the revision and harmonisation of their wildlife policies and legislation. We have also funded research analysing existing knowledge and expertise on the bushmeat trade, highlighting gaps in data and understanding, and making recommendations on further action. The results of this research have been made available to the CITES Working Group and we expect them to be discussed at the Group's next meeting, due to take place in Brazzaville later this month. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) hopes to represent the UK at this meeting.

Through the FCO, we have also been using the UK diplomatic missions in Harare, Accra, Abuja, Cairo, Pretoria, Kampala, Abidjan, Maseru, Dakar, Luanda, Nairobi, Kigali, Mbabane and Tunis to raise awareness of the restrictions on importing meat into the UK.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to raise the issue of the unsustainable bushmeat trade at the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species. [70301]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretariat to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) has prepared a progress report on the work of the CITES Bushmeat Working Group, and a draft Decision extending the life of the Working Group, for consideration by the forthcoming Conference of CITES Parties in November. We shall support the draft Decision and continue to encourage and support the work of the Working Group.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the Department for International Development to establish a joint approach to tackling the unsustainable bushmeat trade. [70303]

Mr. Meacher: The Department and the Department for International Development (DfID) already takes a joint approach to tackling unsustainable trade in bushmeat, and are in regular contact on this issue. For example, officials participate in the UK Tropical Forest Forum's Bushmeat Working Group; DEFRA and FCO are represented on the Steering Group for DfID's Wildlife and Poverty research study; DfID represented UK (including DEFRA) interests at the IUCN's Bushmeat Seminar in Yaounde in September 2001, and officials from DfID and the Overseas Development Institute produced DEFRA's bushmeat paper for the last CITES Conference in April 2000.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department plans to support Type 2 Initiatives arising from the World Summit on Sustainable Development. [70310]

Mr. Meacher: The UK is enthusiastic about the inclusion of partnerships (the so called "Type 2" Initiatives) within the outcomes of the World Summit since Governments alone cannot implement sustainable development. My Department is supporting the development of a range of partnerships in the run up to the summit, as are others, and we hope that a number of these will be registered as Type 2 initiatives. These include the EU initiative on water, several energy partnerships including the Global Village Energy Partnership, the EU Energy for Sustainable Development Initiative and the Global Network on Energy for Sustainable Development, the UK-led Partners for Water Supply and Sanitation and Sustainable Tourism initiatives, the London Principles on Sustainable Finance and the US-led Caribbean Partnership on improved marine management. Final decisions on the level of UK support for these and other partnerships will be made nearer the time.

Plastic Waste

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what waste products are produced when plastic products are disposed of by *(a)* incineration and *(b)* burial in landfill sites. [70258]

Mr. Meacher: Plastics products comprise a wide range of polymerised organic compounds mixed with additives to enhance particular properties. By-products produced on disposal will depend on the type of plastic. When incinerated, plastics will mostly form carbon dioxide and water. Chlorinated plastics, such as PVC, will produce hydrochloric acid. In general they will not degrade to any great extent in landfill and will make little contribution to the production of leachate and landfill gas.

Organic Foods

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what controls are in place on the spraying of organic foods with chemicals by *(a)* wholesalers and *(b)* retailers. [70245]

Mr. Morley: Council Regulation 2092–91 (EEC) prescribes the standards which must be observed if food is to be labelled as organic, including the inputs which may be used in the production and preparation of organic food. The Regulation permits only a restricted range of inputs to be used.

Countryside Stewardship Schemes

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what countryside stewardship schemes are available for small dairy farmers. [70246]

Mr. Morley: There are a number of existing options under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme that may be relevant to dairy production. For example, buffer strips within improved grassland are designed to protect habitats and conservation features from potentially damaging agricultural operations. Capital works programmes under the Scheme can also be relevant to livestock units, including those that are primarily involved with dairy production. In addition, we have recently begun a six-year research programme to investigate a range of possible environmental measures that would be compatible with intensive dairy farming.

Following the announcement of the outcome of the Spending Review on 15 July, the way is now open to implement the recommendations of the Curry Commission on an 'entry-level' agri-environment scheme. This will be designed to be as accessible as possible to all farmers, including those in the dairy sector and will be piloted for two years and rolled out in 2005–06.

New Forest National Park

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will delay the commencement of the public inquiry into the proposed New Forest national park until the current public inquiry into the proposed development of Dibden Bay by ABP has been concluded. [71026]

Alun Michael: Following a pre-inquiry meeting on 1 July, the Inspector has produced a draft programme for the New Forest inquiry. This shows that most of the parties involved in both inquiries are not due to appear at the New Forest inquiry before January. The Inspector has indicated that he is prepared to be sensitive to difficulties experienced by such parties in the programming of their appearances at this inquiry.

I therefore do not intend to delay the start of the public inquiry into the New Forest national park as that would not be in the public interest. I recognise that the October start date may be inconvenient for some who are also involved in the current Dibden Bay inquiry, but that inquiry is due to close in December. Much of its work will therefore be over by October when the New Forest inquiry opens.

Vehicular Access

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the criteria by which roads and pathways will be categorised under the Countryside, England Vehicular Access Across Common and Other Land (England) Regulations 2002. [71232]

Alun Michael: No such criteria exist because the only rights that can be created under the regulations are private ones. The regulations apply where the owner of premises can show vehicular use of any piece of land for such a time and in such a manner that, had it not been an offence to drive across the land, a prescriptive right would have been acquired. The only categorisation of the type of land is that it must be land over which it is a criminal offence to drive.

Village Halls

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many village halls were built in England between 1997 and 2002. [71235]

Alun Michael: This information is not held centrally in the manner requested and the information could be secured only at disproportionate cost.

In 1997 the Countryside Agency published research which showed that 72 per cent. of villages had a village hall. The definition has been refined following responses to that research which indicated that some villages have a community hall which is technically not a "village hall" but fulfils largely the same purpose. In November 2001 the Countryside Agency published a report entitled "Rural Services in 2000" which revealed that 85 per cent. of parishes had a village hall or a community hall in 2000. The proportion of parishes with a hall is 32 per cent. for those below 100 population, 77 per cent. for those with between 100 and 300 people, 92 per cent. for those between 300 and 500, 94 per cent. for those between 500 and 1,000, 95 per cent. for those between 1,000 and 2,000, 98 per cent. for those between 2,000 and 5,000, and 96 per cent. for those over 5,000.

Village halls can play a vital role in rural communities as multi-purpose community centres and hubs for village life. We are supporting the development of active local communities and parish and town councils in a variety of ways; the village hall as a hub for social activity and service provision fits in well with our policy objectives, and support of village halls and the activities that take place there is available from a range of public sector and other sources.

Annual Reports

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was of publishing her Department's annual report and those of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in each of the past five years; and if she will provide a breakdown of the cost incurred. [70105]

Mr. Morley: The DEFRA annual report for 2001–02 was produced with the assistance of the Central Office of Information at a cost of £17,887, exclusive of VAT.

Description	£[1]
Proofreading	3,962
Design, layout and cover	13,400
Production of web version	525
Total cost excluding printing	£17,887

[1] ex-VAT

DEFRA did not incur any of the print production costs. The Stationery Office prints and distributes the annual report as a commercial venture.

The production costs and any print costs for the previous five annual departmental reports for MAFF could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Pesticides Safety Directorate

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the 2001–02 Annual report for the Pesticides Safety Directorate. [72776]

Mr. Morley: The 2001–02 Annual report and accounts for the Pesticides Safety Directorate were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Banned Pesticides/Plant Treatments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the five pesticides and plant treatments which are banned in the United Kingdom but most widely used elsewhere. [60836]

Mr. Morley: There are 25 agricultural pesticides which have had approvals revoked in the United Kingdom but are still available in the rest of the European Union or elsewhere. The majority of these are the organophosphate and carbamate compounds that were not supported in the UK anticholinesterase review, for example, carbofuran. There is a much larger number of substances which have never been approved for use as pesticides in the UK, but may be used in other countries. Differences in approvals between countries can arise because different approval conditions are applied or because commercial approvals are not sought in all countries.

However, it is not possible to list the five pesticides which are banned in the UK but most widely used elsewhere. Accurate information on the quantities of pesticides used elsewhere could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Consultation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what formal consultation has *(a)* taken place and *(b)* is planned relating to the EU Directive 2002/15/ED; and if she will make a statement. [70741]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

My Department is consulting informally with both sides of industry on the transposition of the Directive into domestic legislation and on how it might operate. We expect to launch a formal consultation exercise early next year.

Timber Procurement

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what impact the draft EU public procurement directive will have on the ability of the EU to ensure that all timber procured is from legal and sustainable sources; and if she will make a statement. [68034]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The proposals for amending the public procurement directives include provisions which make clear the scope to take account of green production processes, eco-label criteria and environmental management systems at the appropriate stages of the procurement process. These provisions should, therefore, enable contracting authorities to be clear about their ability to specify, in a non-discriminatory way, that timber and timber-related products should be obtained from legal and sustainable sources. The Government are currently considering its approach to the procurement of sustainable and legal timber in the light of the proposed new directive and the Commission's interpretative communication on environmental issues which preceded it.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions there have been relating to proposed European Directive on public procurement, Article 53 so as to ensure that timber used on EU projects in future will come from legal and sustainable sources; and if she will make a statement. [68033]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have been heavily involved in discussions, both domestically and in Brussels, on the scope to take environmental considerations into account under the EC procurement directives. The proposals for clarifying, simplifying and updating these directives, on which political agreement was reached at the Internal Market Council on 21 May, make it clear that relevant green production processes and eco-label criteria can be used in specifications (Article 24). This clarification should enable a procurer to specify—in a non-discriminatory way—timber from legal and sustainable sources and to exclude offers which are non-compliant in this or other relevant respects. The award stage (article 53), which is concerned with the evaluation of compliant bids on the basis of various value for money criteria, is too late in the process to introduce such specification issues. However, environmental considerations which provide a benefit to the contracting authority, in terms of the most economically advantageous tender, can be taken into account at that stage.

Energy Shortfall

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to address the future shortfall in energy from traditional sources. [71931]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government launched a consultation on energy policy on 14 May with a view to publishing a White Paper around the turn of the year.

The consultation document seeks views on the supply of energy from traditional and renewable sources as well as on issues relating to demand such as energy efficiency.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Recycling

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee, pursuant to the answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1277W, on recycling, if she will publish the monthly data; if she will add the recycling of plastic bottles and plastic covering to the list; and if she will make a statement. [70217]

Mrs. Roe: The monthly data will be placed in the House of Commons Library. Plastic will not be added to the list at present because the quantities generated here are relatively small and priority is being given to maximising the recycling of the other materials on the list.

Computer Access

Bob Spink: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee if he will enable hon. Members to log onto their systems via hon. Members' computers in the Library. [71454]

Michael Fabricant: It is already possible for Members to use the computers in "A" Room to gain access to their e-mail accounts. New instructions are being provided to explain the necessary log-in procedures more clearly. These computers are primarily intended, however, to provide access to on-line information systems available on the parliamentary intranet and the internet. For the convenience of Members, other applications, such as word-processing and spreadsheets, are also provided.

There are also connection points throughout the Members' Library to allow Members to gain access to the Parliamentary Data and Video Network using their own laptops.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the President of the Council how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70534]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 8 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 605W, and both my replies to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 69W.

Parliamentary Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 83W, to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), on parliamentary pensions, if he will estimate the additional cost to the Exchequer of that part of those improved pensions which are not covered by the increase in hon. Members' contributions over the period before the full cost of the accrued rate is borne by hon. Members. [71677]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Exchequer contribution to the parliamentary pension scheme is set by the Government Actuary, as part of his triennial valuation of the scheme. The Government Actuary is currently working on his valuation of the scheme as at 1 April 2002. He will take into account, in setting the Exchequer contribution to apply from April 2003, the number of hon. Members and office holders who choose to pay higher contributions to secure a higher pension accrual.

The Government Actuary has estimated the cost of the improved pension as 5.1 per cent. of pay. If all hon. Members and office holders were to decide to opt to pay increased contributions of 9 per cent. of pay rather than 6 per cent. with effect from 15 July 2002, the additional costs to the Exchequer over the period to 31 March 2003 may be estimated as being in the order of £600,000 in the year 2002–03 and £860,000 for a full year.

Privy Council

Norman Baker: To ask the President of the Council who was present at the meeting of the Privy Council on 26 June; and what business was transacted. [71795]

Mr. Robin Cook: The following were present at the Council held on 26 June:

The Queen

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

The Attorney-General

The Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Minister for Sport)

The Clerk of the Council.

The following Orders were approved at the Council. For statutory Orders the enabling power is given in brackets.

Orders appointing Dawn Primarolo, MP, George Foulkes, MP, and Dr. Oliver Letwin, MP members of the Privy Council;

Proclamation determining the specification of three £5 coins commemorating Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and an order directing the Lord Chancellor to affix the Great Seal to the Proclamation (Coinage Act 1971);

Order approving the grant of a Charter of Incorporation to the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health;

Order amending the Charter of the Institute of Materials;

Order appointing Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville to be a member of the Council of the University of London;

Order appointing Angus John Allan one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education in Scotland (Education (Scotland) Act 1980);

The Consular Fees Order 2002 (Consular Fees Act 1980);

The Air Navigation (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2002 (Civil Aviation Act 1982);

The General Dental Council (Constitution) Order 2002 (Dentists Act 1984);

The Exempt Charities Order 2002 (Charities Act 1993);

The Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) Order 2002 (Scotland Act 1998);

The Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2002 (Scotland Act 1998);

Three Orders approving the following Acts of the States of Jersey:

1. Criminal Justice (Evidence of Children) (Jersey) Law 2002;
2. Companies (Amendment No. 7) (Jersey) Law 2002;
3. Public Finances (Administration) (Amendment No. 10) (Jersey) Law 2002;

Order approving an Act of the States of Guernsey entitled "The Terrorism and Crime (Bailiwick of Guernsey) Law, 2002";

Order approving an Act of the Chief Pleas of Sark entitled "The Conveyancing (Sark) Law, 2002";

Order under the Burial Act 1853 giving notice of the proposed discontinuance of burials in three places;

Seventeen Orders confirming pastoral schemes of the Church Commissioners (Pastoral Measure 1983).

Information on the dates of Privy Council meetings is now available on my Department's website, www.privycouncil.gov.uk. A list of the Orders approved at each meeting is published on the site shortly after it has taken place.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Commonwealth Education Projects

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what initiatives her Department has taken in 2002 in connection with education projects within the Commonwealth. [70614]

Clare Short: The Government are strongly committed to the Millennium Development Goals on education: achieving universal primary education by 2015 and eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary schooling by 2005. Since May 1997, DFID has committed over £700 million to support primary education for poor people, mainly in the Commonwealth. We are using these funds to support national education policies which form part of developing country Governments' broader poverty reduction strategies. In 2002 our priority is to implement successfully these long-term programmes and to develop new partnerships with Commonwealth Governments.

Achieving these education goals will require a strong commitment from Commonwealth Governments to prioritise primary education within their spending plans. Many Commonwealth countries will also need considerable external assistance. The Government are working to mobilise the international community in support of Education for All. Our aim is to achieve consensus by the end of 2002 on well co-ordinated international action for mobilising new resources and better co-ordinated programmes designed to meet this goal. We are giving high priority to working with the World bank to develop its new Action Plan for accelerating progress towards Education for All. We believe the Action Plan's fast track initiative provides an opportunity to try to ensure that no country genuinely committed to economic development, poverty reduction and good governance is denied the chance to achieve universal primary education through lack of resources.

The bank's fast track initiative offers seven poor Commonwealth countries the chance to qualify for additional financing for primary education if they can demonstrate that their Government is fully committed and has effective policies in place. A further four Commonwealth countries can apply for assistance in building capacity, filling gaps in data and developing effective policies for primary education. We will continue to support the fast track proposals and participate in on-going discussions with the World bank about implementation arrangements.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the number of attacks on aid workers in Afghanistan. [71139]

Clare Short: There have been a handful of attacks on aid workers in some areas of Afghanistan and we remain concerned about reports of insecurity in northern Afghanistan, including attacks on aid workers. We support the actions of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, Lakhdar Brahimi, who has written to President Karzai, and visited the north to discuss security issues with the various factions.

We shall continue to monitor the situation closely and to encourage the transitional Administration to work to ensure that all parts of Afghanistan are as safe as possible in order to allow aid work to continue across the country.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Defence Secretary regarding his Department's assistance in reconstruction work in Afghanistan. [71143]

Clare Short: I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a number of issues. Reform of the security sector is vital to the future stability of Afghanistan. DFID, in consultation with colleagues in the FCO and MOD, is working for the creation of accountable national military and police forces subject to the rule of law and under central and civilian control; anti-narcotics activities; and the re-establishment of an appropriate judicial system. The UK has in principle committed $33 million to this process.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of pledges made to fund Afghanistan's reconstruction at the Bonn Conference have been met. [71140]

Clare Short: Pledges for the reconstruction of Afghanistan were made at the Tokyo Conference. Precise data on the disbursement of aid to Afghanistan are not yet available. However, we estimate that donor pledges to Afghanistan amount to a little under $2 billion in 2002, of which about $1.1 billion has been committed and about $0.8 billion disbursed. The pace of further disbursements will now depend on improvements in security and access and on the completion of the National Development Framework and development budget.

Liberia

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to support civil society groups in Liberia. [71145]

Clare Short: We have no development programme to Liberia. Over the last few years my Department has supported a limited number of projects, most of which have been delivered through civil society organisations. These have included community development projects, and projects to enhance peace and promote reconciliation between ethnic groups. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has also provided support to promote democratic values and reduce tension between ethnic groups.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what she estimates the main benefits were for heavily indebted poor countries arising from the recent G8 talks. [70833]

Clare Short: At Kananaskis last month, the G8 reaffirmed their commitment to the full financing of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and agreed to provide an additional US$1 billion for the HIPC Trust Fund to help the multilateral development banks meet their share of HIPC costs. The additional money will provide the remaining financing required under the HIPC initiative, and will help to ensure that those countries whose debt position has worsened because of the global economic slowdown and falls in commodity prices will get enough debt relief to enable them to exit the HIPC process with sustainable levels of debt.

Departmental Spending

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will provide a breakdown of how money was spent by her Department in each year since 1998–99 on each programme listed in table 4 of annex 1 to the departmental report 2002 under the headings: *(a)* bilateral country and regional programmes, *(b)* middle east and north Africa, *(c)* south Asia, *(d)* east Africa and Pacific, *(e)* Asia regional, *(f)* Latin America and Caribbean, *(g)* Europe and Central Asia, *(h)* overseas territories, *(i)* conflict and humanitarian affairs, *(j)* research and economic policy, *(k)* education, *(l)* enterprise development, *(m)* health and population, *(n)* international trade, *(o)* private sector policy, *(p)* rural livelihoods and environmental policy, *(q)* other non-country/regional specific programmes, *(r)* regional development banks and *(s)* the European Community Attribution programme. [71149]

Clare Short: Further information on expenditure against these programmes is given in tables 7–7.5 and 8 of the 2001 edition of "Statistics on International Development", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The expenditure comprises contractual payments, grants, core contributions and encashments of promissory notes.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will provide a breakdown of how money was spent by her Department in each year since 1998–99 on each programme listed in Table 2 of Annexe 1 of the departmental report 2002. [71150]

Clare Short: Details of the form of "bilateral development assistance" are given in tables 7–7.5 of the 2001 edition of "Statistics on International Development", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. This expenditure comprises contractual payments for the supply of goods and services, grants to recipient country governments and civil society organisations, as well as the provision of technical co-operation and humanitarian assistance.

"Multilateral development assistance", including contributions to the "Global Environment Fund" and the "EC development programme", comprises grants to international organisations as well as drawdowns on promissory notes deposited in accordance with UK agreements. Details of the organisations involved are given in Table 8 of "Statistics on International Development".

Expenditure on "conflict prevention" covers activities funded from the inter-departmental Conflict Prevention Pools established in 2001–02.

"Overseas Superannuation": this expenditure relates to pensions paid to former colonial service and Indian Empire officers and their dependants for which the Government have agreed to assume responsibility under the Aid Programme and the index-linked increases paid on these pensions under the UK Pensions Increase legislation.

About 90 per cent. of the 24,000 pensions paid to former colonial and Indian Empire pensioners are paid direct to bank accounts worldwide, with the remaining 10 per cent. paid direct to pensioners by payable order.

The "Gibraltar Social Insurance Fund" benefits Spanish people who worked in Gibraltar and contributed to the fund. It takes the form of pension payments.

"Administration costs" cover staff costs (salaries) and general administrative overheads such as travel, training and accommodation costs.

Central African Republic

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact the use of child labour in the diamond trade of the Central African Republic is having on efforts to educate children in the country; and if she will make a statement. [70871]

Clare Short: None. The Central African Republic is not a country with which we have a close relationship. Our development assistance is provided through multilateral channels.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to bring good governance to the Central African Republic. [70870]

Clare Short: DFID has no programme in the Central African Republic and contributes through multilateral channels. The European Commission's ninth EDF programme sees institutional capacity building and the promotion of good governance as a priority area.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to ensure that HIV/AIDS detection facilities are available in the Central African Republic. [70880]

Clare Short: Our assistance to the Central African Republic (CAR) is provided through multilateral channels. We provide support to UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation who are currently assisting the CAR improve HIV/AIDS surveillance and detection facilities through the implementation of their national AIDS strategy. The EC programme in CAR, to which we contribute, includes work on HIV health education.

Food Shortages (Africa)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of the money allocated by the Government for the procurement of maize meal in Lesotho has been spent; and if she will make a statement. [70873]

Clare Short: Of the £18.75 million that we allocated to the World Food programme for their emergency operations in Central and southern Africa, £1.5 million was earmarked for their emergency operation in Lesotho. The WFP tell us that our allocation in Lesotho has purchased 2,560 tonnes of split peas, 555 tonnes of vegetable oil and 400 tonnes of beans.

Sierra Leone

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she has offered to the President of Sierra Leone to ensure the provision of basic services [illegible] the country. [70876]

Clare Short: This year we plan to provide around £40 million of development assistance to Sierra Leone, of which some £10 million is [illegible] the form of direct budgetary support, in part to help meet social sector expenditure. When I met President Kabbah last month, I indicated that the UK was prepared to make [illegible]0-year commitment to maintain a high level of support [illegible] Sierra Leone, so long as the Government remained firmly committed to raising standards of governance. Tackling corruption, thereby ensuring resources (including those going to health and education) were no longer wasted, would be a tangible indicator of this commitment.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what programmes the Government are funding to fight AIDS in Africa; how much the Government are planning to spend on this in the next three financial years; and what other measures the Government plans on this issue. [71012]

Clare Short: DFID currently commits over £180 million to bilateral programmes working to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa. Major DFID HIV prevention and care programmes are currently running in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi.

Considerable additional financial support continues to be provided by DFID to institutions such as WHO, UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNFPA, the EC and to NGOs and civil society organisations in a coherent effort to combat this disease and support those already living with it. We have committed over £25 million to International Partnership Against AIDS in Africa which specifically supports action in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi and Ghana.

New initiatives are being planned in a number of countries across Africa. A £20 million HIV/AIDS programme is currently being developed in Zambia aimed at behaviour change and HIV prevention. In South Africa, DFID is planning to invest up to £40 million in a multi-sectoral response to HIV/AIDS programme. In Nigeria, a £25 million HIV/AIDS multi-sectoral programme is currently under design to complement a £52 million national behaviour change programme started earlier this year.

African Union

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department intends to give to the new African Union. [71138]

Clare Short: DFID has worked with the African Union through its transition from the Organisation of African Unity into the new African Union. DFID provides support to the African Union's Conflict Management Centre, to enhance its capacity to prevent, resolve and manage conflict in Africa. Capacity is being built through the funding of staff posts, including four specialists, to increase early warning analysis and to improve recommendations to the secretary general.

In financial terms, DFID expects to provide £480,000 from 2002–03 to 2003–04, through the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool, and provided £530,000 between 1999 and 2001–02.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the African Union. [71137]

Clare Short: I warmly congratulate the African Union on its inauguration, and endorse the message of support sent by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to its first summit. The African Union has great potential to play an integral part in resolving the many problems faced by Africa today, including the need for a resolution of conflicts, better economic management and integration, improved health and education systems.

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects have so far received funding from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. [71011]

Clare Short: Since approving its first round of proposals, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria has been working intensively with recipients to agree financial management and monitoring arrangements. Funding will flow as soon as these arrangements are in place.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the progress made by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria in fighting AIDS. [71009]

Clare Short: The Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria is now legally established as a foundation in Switzerland. WHO is providing administrative support and the World bank is the trustee. The first board meeting of the fund took place in Geneva in late January 2002 during which the legal and framework documents for the purpose, scope and operations of the fund were approved. The second Global Fund Board in April made two key decisions. It selected Richard Feachem as Executive Director, and approved funding for the first tranche of proposals. Of 380 proposals received, 40 programmes in 31 countries were approved, totalling $378 million over two years. A further 18 proposals from 12 countries were approved subject to clarifications, totalling $238 million over two years. Total pledges to the fund now amount to around US $2 billion. The UK has pledged $200 million over five years, and has already distributed its first tranche of $40 million.

Over the coming months, the fund will be clarifying fiduciary and other arrangements for approved first round proposals, with funding flowing as clarifications are received. It is also engaged in improving the application process for the second round. There will be a policy Board in October and a second round of proposals for which the closing date will be around early October and which will be considered at a January Board meeting.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether she intends to continue to fund the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria in the next financial year. [71010]

Clare Short: As I have made clear we have committed £500 million to the Global Fund over the next five years.

Angola

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the United Nations regarding the protection afforded to internally displaced people in Angola. [71144]

Clare Short: The United Nations estimates that more than four million people have been displaced from their homes in Angola. Three million of these require urgent nutritional and medical assistance. The UK made strong representations to both the United Nations and the Government of Angola to agree a framework for humanitarian assistance and we have made contributions of £3.3 million this year, including £1.65 million to the UN, to meet urgent needs. I have met Ibrahim Gambari, the UN SGSR for Africa three times this year to discuss the situation in Angola.

With a genuine peace agreement now in place, people are starting to return to their homes. It is vital that human rights are respected during this time. This is the responsibility of the Angolan Government though we expect the UN to monitor the process. The UK are assisting with the disarmament, demobilisation, and re-integration of former UNITA combatants. My Department also has an emergency response team assessing the humanitarian situation in Angola at present. We will continue to monitor the situation as access to more remote areas becomes feasible and maintain a dialogue with the UN.

Human Rights

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what priority her Department accords the promotion of human rights in its development policy. [71147]

Clare Short: Details of our commitment to a rights based approach to development are set out in my Department's publication, "Realising Human Rights for Poor People".

Environmental Know How Fund

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) of 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 959W, what proportion of the funds in 2001–02 were supplied to United Kingdom *(a)* companies, *(b)* organisations and *(c)* other bodies; and if she will list them. [71247]

Clare Short: A list of the projects and the companies contracted has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Developing Countries

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to monitor the effectiveness of voluntary corporate social responsibility strategies of United Kingdom companies which invest in developing countries. [72053]

Clare Short: My Department supports a number of initiatives aimed at monitoring the impact of the corporate social responsible strategies of UK companies on developing countries. For example, in the retail sector, we have supported the work of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) since its establishment in 1998. The ETI is an alliance of 28 UK businesses (with a combined turnover of over £100 billion), NGOs and trade unions that work to improve labour conditions in the supply chains of the company members. The ETI is conducting research to assess the impact of its code of conduct on workers and suppliers, and the business case for adopting such codes.

DFID is also funding research on measuring the impact on poverty of companies' international investments and operations. This will include looking at both the direct impacts, such as welfare provision and training, and the indirect impacts, such as taxation payments to national Governments.

Departmental Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many *(a)* full-time equivalents were employed by her press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in her press office in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [70540]

Clare Short: We currently employ four press officers, and this number of posts has remained the same since January 1997 and we have had no secondees in that time.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if she will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if she will make a statement. [70210]

Clare Short: We have since 1997 published all our major strategy documents, including two White Papers, all country and institutional strategy papers, as well as major consultation papers and speeches. Our publishing output continues to expand.

We do not produce anything which we would regard as campaign material. Our spending on publications over the period in question is as follows:

2001–02: £1,060,000.

We do not have a specific advertising budget. However, the bulk of our paid advertising is in relation to recruitment advertising in newspapers and journals. The cost in 2001 calendar year was £1.208 million.

CDC Capital Partners

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list CDC Capital Partners' investments by *(a)* sector, *(b)* size and *(c)* country since 1997. [67348]

Clare Short: CDC's new investments since the beginning of 1999 are listed in the table, ranked by sector, size and country. Relevant information for 1997 and 1998 can be obtained only at disproportionate cost, owing to a change in CDC's portfolio accounting systems.

Company	*Size*	*Sector*	*Country*	*Date*
Digicel	US$20 million	Telecoms and converging technologies	El Salvador	July 2002
Southern Cone Power Ltd.	US$70 million	Power	Peru, Chile, Argentina	March 2002
DVI, Inc.	US$25 million	Healthcare	Americas	March 2002
UTI Bank	26 per cent.	Financial institutions	India	December 2001
MediKredit	57 per cent.	Healthcare	South Africa	November 2001
NorthPole Ltd.	US$30 million	Consumer business	China	October 2001
Songas	US$18 million	Power	Tanzania	October 2001
MSI Cellular	US$40 million	Telecoms and converging technologies	Pan Africa	September 2001
Medscheme Ltd.	9 per cent.	Healthcare	South Africa	September 2001
Vancouver Airport Services	US$30.5 million	Transport	Americas	April 2001
Ace Power	US$2.7 million	Power	India	April 2001
Praxis Active Equity Fund II	US$8 million	Healthcare	South Africa	February 2001
Aquarius Platinum	US$12 million	Minerals, oil and gas	South Africa	January 2001
The Medicine Shoppe	US$1 million	Healthcare	India	January 2001
MRO-tek	US$1.12 million	Telecoms and converging technologies	India	December 2000
Prime Care Clinics	12 per cent.	Healthcare	Africa	December 2000
Gateway Container	£12 million	Transport	Pan Asia	December 2000
Regal Forest	US$15 million	Consumer business	Central America	December 2000
Puerto Quetzal Power Project	25 per cent.	Power	Guatemala	October 2000
Corporacion Fischel SA	US$5 million	Healthcare	Costa Rica	September 2000
DFCU	35 per cent.	Financial institutions	Uganda	May 2000
Tsavo Power	US$19 million	Power	Kenya	May 2000
Konkola Copper Mines	US$30 million	Minerals, oil and gas	Zambia	April 2000
San Pedro de Macoris	US$25 million	Power	Dominican Republic	April 2000
Cineplex	US$4.9 million	Consumer business	Peru	March 2000
Compania Minera Colquiri (CMC)	US$10 million	Minerals, oil and gas	Bolivia	January 2000
China National Offshore Oil Company	US$25 million	Minerals, oil and gas	China	January 2000
Empresa Generadora de Electricidad	US$74 million	Power	Nicaragua	January 2000
SSB Bank	20 per cent.	Financial institutions	Ghana	December 1999
Satyam Infoway	US$12 million	Telecoms and converging technologies	India	December 1999
Guyana Power and Light	50 per cent.	Power	Guyana	October 1999
Orzunil de Electricidad Limitada	US$20 million	Power	Guatemala	September 1999
Kingdom Transport Ltd.	US$6.9 million	Transport	Ghana	September 1999
South Asia Gateway Terminals	US$42 million	Transport	Sri Lanka	August 1999
Ferrocarril Central del Peru	30 per cent.	Transport	Peru	July 1999
Protea Hospitality Corporation	40 per cent.	Property	Pan Africa	April 1999
African Lion Ltd.	US$8 million	Minerals, oil and gas	Pan Africa	February 1999
Kondapalli Power Corporation Ltd.	25 per cent.	Power	India	January 1999

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Hunting With Dogs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if the Church of England has contributed to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs consultation on hunting with dogs. [68945]

Mr. Bell: The Church Commissioners have made no contribution to the current DEFRA consultation on hunting with dogs, but I understand that other bodies within the Church of England are looking at this issue from an ethical or theological point of view.

Clergy (Terms and Conditions)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, when he expects to make an announcement about terms and conditions of service for the clergy. [70772]

Mr. Bell: The Archbishops' Council, which in its role as Central Stipends Authority is responsible for these matters, publishes details of the stipends paid to clergy in its annual report to the Church of England's General Synod. The report for 2001 was published in January this year; a copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

The Archbishops' Council is in the course of considering the Department of Trade and Industry's discussion document on employment status in relation to statutory employment rights, published earlier this month.

Church Property

Michael Fabricant: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what role *(a)* English Heritage and *(b)* the chancellors of each diocese have in approving schemes of work on church property; and if he will make a statement. [70721]

Mr. Bell: In general, work of substance may not be carried out to a parish church or certain other Church of England places of worship without a "faculty" or permission from the Chancellor of the ecclesiastical court of the diocese or, in some cases involving less significant changes, from the archdeacon. (Separate controls apply to cathedrals.) The faculty system is a legal system of controls which has been strengthened by recent legislation; it predates secular listed building controls, is broader in scope and also applies to unlisted buildings. Because it satisfied Government requirements for "ecclesiastical exemption", Church of England churches are not in general subject to listed building control, though they are not exempt from the need for planning permission where that applies.

It is for the court alone to decide whether to grant the faculty or permission, but with limited exceptions the Chancellor or archdeacon must seek the advice of the Diocesan Advisory Committee before doing so. Three members of that committee are appointed in consultation with English Heritage, with the National Amenity Societies and with Local Government associations.

There is also statutory provision in the faculty jurisdiction system for consultation with a range of bodies, including English Heritage, in appropriate cases. Parishes contemplating changes to listed churches are in any case encouraged to seek its informal advice and that of the Amenity Societies as early as possible. English Heritage will need to approve any works for which it is providing grant aid, and must also be consulted where it has in the past made a grant to a particular church.

Church property not used for worship is subject to normal secular controls.

WALES

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by his Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64627]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since 1 January my Department has introduced three statutory instruments, revoked none, and amended one. Costs and savings are not readily available.

Building Value

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the buildings owned by his Department and estimate the market value of each of them. [66945]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The National Asset Register, published in July 2001 (Cm5221), lists assets owned by each Department and their valuation.

Sunderland Commission

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with Welsh Assembly Government colleagues concerning the Sunderland Commission. [71770]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with Assembly Ministers about a range of matters affecting Wales.

The Sunderland Commission was established by the Assembly. It is therefore for the Assembly initially to respond to its recommendations.

Assembly Finance Minister, Edwina Hart has announced that there will be a wide consultation, over the summer and early autumn, on all the Commission's recommendations.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if he will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if he will make a statement. [70208]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 752W.

Departmental Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70543]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department is staffed entirely by secondees. Since the establishment of the Wales Office on 1 July 1999 it has employed three press officers.

CABINET OFFICE

IT Procurements

Geraint Davies: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the Government policy is on the use of open source software to enable increased value for money in IT procurements across the public sector. [72633]

Mr. Alexander: This Government are intent on securing the best value for money in its IT procurements by encouraging the development of a flourishing IT industry which supplies both proprietary and open source software solutions to the public sector. Government procurement decisions will be based on the ability of the solutions to deliver effective and economic systems and services.

I am pleased to announce new policy on the use of open source software within UK Government. It explains how we will consider open source software solutions alongside proprietary ones in IT procurements and award contracts on a value for money basis, seeking to avoid lock-in to proprietary IT products and services. In addition, the UK Government will consider obtaining full rights to bespoke software code or customisations of COTS (Commercial Off the Shelf) software it procures, wherever this achieves best value for money. It will also explore further the possibilities of using OSS as the default exploitation route for Government-funded R&D software.

The open source software policy has been formulated for use within UK Government because we seek to embrace the fast moving pace of the software industry and to acknowledge the clear potential for open source software to change the software infrastructure marketplace. It also serves as an appropriate response to the recent European Commission's Action Plan for the initiative eEurope—an information society for all. UK Government, in joining with its European partners to explore the availability of open source software solutions, will seek to realise the significant potential for cost-savings in the future and to achieve an increased flexibility in the development, enhancement and integration of our IT systems.

Centre for Management and Policy Studies

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he will publish the annual report and accounts for the Centre for Management and Policy Studies. [72617]

Mr. Alexander: I have today placed copies of the second annual report and accounts for the Centre for Management and Policy Studies for the year 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 in the Libraries of the House.

The report and accounts show that financial targets have been met. The quality targets were met, and in some cases, exceeded. The volume targets for participants in training and development were exceeded in the aggregate.

The changes to Cabinet Office announced by Sir Andrew Turnbull, and presently being implemented in advance of his arrival in September, will have a significant effect on CMPS as an organisation.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the outcome is of the review of policy towards executive agencies. [72632]

Mr. Alexander: The Government have today published the report of the review which was jointly sponsored by the Cabinet Office and the Treasury. Pam Alexander led the review.

The review has far-reaching implications for improving the delivery of central Government services. It concludes that the agency model has been a success in improving, and in some cases transforming, services and functions delivered by central Government and has brought customer focus and a performance culture into the civil service. However, it find that agencies have in some cases become detached from Ministers and from Departments' increasing focus on strategic aims; controls over processes have reduced effectiveness and responsiveness without providing a shared strategic direction

The report makes 12 recommendations to achieve and maintain strategic connection and improve service delivery. These include:

departmental leadership which values equally policy and delivery skills and agency management with a clear understanding of ministerial objectives;

simpler governance structures providing strategic direction from Departments and external challenge from non-executive directors on management boards;

alignment of departmental and agency key targets and a cycle of reviews to ensure that structures and processes across Departments support the achievement of key objectives; and

maximum use of financial and managerial delegations to support responsive, flexible and effective delivery.

The Cabinet Office and Treasury will be working with Departments to put the review's recommendations into effect over the coming months as part of the wider drive to improve the effectiveness of public services and place a culture of delivery at the heart of Government.

Copies of the review's report and recommendations have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

E-Government

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what research has been carried out to assess the level of *(a)* awareness in the population analysed by socio-economic group, *(b)* usage by the population analysed by socio-economic group, *(c)* repeat usage by the population and *(d)* satisfaction of users with respect to the website www.ukonline.gov.uk; and what the findings were. [70520]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) gave to the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) on 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 55W.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the budget is for the website www.ukonline.gov.uk in respect of *(a)* site development and maintenance, *(b)* marketing and *(c)* other matters for the financial years (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [70522]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) gave to the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 484W.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much has been spent on the website www.ukonline.gov.uk for *(a)* design and build prior to launch, *(b)* development and maintenance since launch, *(c)* marketing, *(d)* other and *(e)* the project in total in each of the financial years since the inception of the project. [70519]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), gave the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 484W.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate he has made of the savings which have arisen for each Government Department as a result of the website www.ukonline.gov.uk [70521]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) gave to the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) on 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 54W.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Francois: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to introduce new framework legislation on emergency planning; and if he will make a statement. [71184]

Mr. Alexander: My right hon. Friend Lord Macdonald of Tradeston is chairing a sub-committee of the Civil Contingencies Committee to press forward with work on laying the foundations of a Civil Contingencies Bill. The first meeting of the committee was held on 17 July 2002. A wide range of stakeholders will be involved in the agreed work programme, including those from relevant Government Departments, their agencies and non-departmental public bodies, the devolved Administrations, the local authorities, the emergency services, the private sector and outside organisations.

The Government plan to introduce new legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Public Servant (Definition)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how the Government define the term "public servant"; if he will provide a list of who is included in this definition; and what the average annual salary is for public servants, broken down by region. [71016]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

For the purposes of the New Earnings Survey (NES) public servants are defined as public sector employees in each of the following areas:

(a) *Central Government*—Government Departments and establishments, directly employed health staff (excluding trusts) and various government-financed organisations. (The armed forces are not covered by the NES).

(b) *Local government*—Local government authorities (including education authorities), police service and various other organisations.

(c) *Public corporations*—Nationalised industries, NHS trusts, and other publicly-constituted trading organisations.

Average annual earnings for the Public Sector in 2001 are as follows:

Gross annual earnings

£

	2001
North East	20,199
North West	21,377
East Midlands	21,705
West Midlands	22,048
South West	21,743
East	22,604
London	26,925
South East	22,658
Wales	21,044
Scotland	21,544
Yorkshire and the Humber	21,620
Public Sector Average (GB)	22,435

Source:
New Earnings Survey April 2001

Civil Service Pensions

Mr. Pond: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to introduce new pension arrangements for the Civil Service; and if he will make a statement. [72618]

Mr. Alexander: I am today laying before Parliament, under the provisions of the Superannuation Act 1972, three amendment schemes. The first of these amends the rules of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS) and introduces new provisions for those joining the pension scheme on or after 1 October 2002. The second amendment scheme makes consequential changes to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme, and the third amendment scheme removes the injury benefit provisions of the PCSPS to a separate scheme.

Pension arrangements for civil servants (and those in employments and offices listed in Schedule I to the Superannuation Act 1972) will change on 1 October 2002. New entrants joining after that date will generally be given the choice of a final salary pension or a stakeholder pension with an employer contribution. The new arrangements are being introduced on a cost-neutral basis for employers.

We recognise that pensions form a significant part of the Civil Service remuneration package, and we want civil servants to be able to choose the pension that suits them best. Today's Civil Service does not offer a job for life and is benefiting from greater interchange with other sectors at all levels within the organisation. Final salary pensions may be good for those who spend a long period with one employer, but those who change jobs frequently during their career may prefer their employer to contribute to a stakeholder pension. By giving our new staff a choice of two good quality pension alternatives we aim not only to support a more diverse Civil Service but also to raise awareness and appreciation of the value of the pension element of the pay package.

The new final salary option will be known as the premium scheme. It will provide a pension based on one-sixtieth of final pensionable earnings for each year of service. Other features of the premium scheme include:

option to exchange part of pension for lump sum on retirement;

ill-health pensions varying in amount depending on the extent of incapacity;

death-in-service lump sum of three times pay;

pensions for surviving spouses of 3/8ths of the member's pension;

pension payable to a surviving eligible unmarried partner if the member does not leave a spouse;

pensions for children

Existing members of the PCSPS will have the option of joining the premium scheme or remaining with the current provisions (to be renamed the classic scheme). Members opting for classic will continue to earn a pension based on 1/80th of pay for each year of service plus a retirement lump sum of three times pension. Members opting to join the premium scheme will have their past service reduced—typically to 92 per cent. of its previous amount—to reflect the improved benefit structure. Members may also opt for classic plus; this option effectively provides premium scheme benefits for service from 1 October with service before 1 October continuing to be pensioned broadly on the classic model.

We are moving to the new arrangements on a cost-neutral basis, with the entire cost of benefit improvements being met by increased contributions by members. None of the cost of the benefit improvements will fall on the taxpayer. All premium and classic plus members will pay the new contribution rate of 3.5 per cent. Members opting to remain in the classic scheme will continue to pay contributions of 1.5 per cent. of pay.

The stakeholder pension alternative will be known as the partnership pension account. Employees will choose their pension provider from the following panel:

AMP Corporate Pensions

Scottish Widows

Standard Life

TUC.

Employees opting for a partnership pension account do not need to contribute, but will be encouraged to do so by having their contributions matched up to 3 per cent. of pay. In addition, the employer will pay contributions based on age, varying from 3 per cent. of pay for those under 21, to 12.5 per cent. of pay for those aged 46 and over. Lump sum benefits of up to three times pay on death in service and on ill health retirement will be provided separately, and will be the subject of future schemes under the Superannuation Act.

Civil Service remuneration is set having regard to the need to recruit, retain and motivate staff of the appropriate quality. Full account is taken of the value of pension arrangements, including the cost of index-linking, in setting the balance between the pay and pension elements of the reward package.

The Civil Service unions have been involved throughout the development of the new pension options, both in negotiating the terms and also in appraising their members of the options open to them. The unions' constructive involvement throughout this process stands as a testament to the value of partnership working.

TRANSPORT

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EC-Bulgaria Joint Transport Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [71830]

Mr. Jamieson: This committee is established under the provisions of Article 13 of the Agreement of 26 July 2000 between the European Community and the Republic of Bulgaria establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the agreement. I am not aware that it has met in recent times or that there are any plans for it to meet in the future. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been—and would not in the future be—members of the committee as the matters for which it has responsibility are reserved.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EEC-Slovenia Joint Transport Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [71831]

Mr. Jamieson: This committee is established under the provisions of the Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Republic of Slovenia in the field of transport which was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities on 29 July 1993. The remit of the committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the agreement. I am not aware that it has met since the conclusion of the agreement or that there are any plans for it to meet in the future. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been—and would not in the future be—members of the committee as the matters for which it has responsibility are reserved.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EC-Romania Joint Transport Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [71829]

Mr. Jamieson: This committee is established under the provisions of the Agreement between the European Community and Romania establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the agreement. I am not aware that it has met in recent times or that there are any plans for it to meet in the future. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been—and would not in the future be—members of the committee as the matters for which it has responsibility are reserved.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the European Energy and Transport Forum is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [71821]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand the European Energy and Transport Forum will meet for the first time later this year. Members of the Forum were selected by the European Commission following a call for applications published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities on 7 June 2002. I do not believe any representative of the Scottish Executive has been appointed as a member of the Forum.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EC-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Transport Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [71828]

Mr. Jamieson: This committee is established under the provisions of Article 22 of the Agreement between the European Community and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the field of transport which was published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities on 18 December 1997. The remit of the Committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the Agreement. I am not aware that it has met in recent times or that there are any plans for it to meet in the future. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been—and would not in the future be—members of the Committee as the matters for which it has responsibility are reserved.

Workplace Smoking

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his plans to implement a code of practice on smoking in the workplace; and what consultation there has been with trade unions, health welfare and medical organisations on this issue. [71177]

Mr. Jamieson: The White Paper on Tobacco, "Smoking Kills", stated that the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) would consult on whether to introduce an Approved Code of Practice (ACoP) on passive smoking in the workplace.

HSC has completed that task and announced, in September 2000, that it favoured the introduction of an ACoP. Representatives from trade unions, health welfare and medical organisations were all involved in the consultation.

The Government are giving careful consideration to the Commission's proposals. As part of this process, the Commission has been asked to consider further both the implications of an ACoP on the hospitality sector and small businesses generally, and the role the Public Places Charter could play.

Residential Property Record

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library his Department's departmental-owned residential property record. [70771]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department does not maintain a central residential property record. Nevertheless, two of the Department's agencies own residential property:

(1) the Highways Agency, as the operator of the strategic road network on behalf of the Secretary of State, keeps a database of residential property acquired for road schemes. This contains information restricted under the Data Protection Act 1998 and cannot be released in its current form; and

(2) the Maritime and Coast Guard Agency owns three residential properties: two are official residences and one is currently on the market for sale.

Travel/Retail Information Report

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place a copy of the final report on research conducted for his predecessor Department by Cap Gemini Ernst and Young on Travel Information and Retailing Policy Information in July 2000. [70737]

Mr. Jamieson: A copy of this report was placed in the House of Commons Library last year. The summary of the report is also available on the DfT website, at http://www.dft.gov.uk/itwp/transdirect/capgem/index.htm

Departmental Press Service

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department intends to establish an e-mail press release service similar to that previously provided by the former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. [70657]

Mr. Jamieson: We expect that the Department for Transport will establish a similar service by autumn 2002.

Flight Paths

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes have been made to aircraft flight paths and altitudes over London and the south-east in the past five years. [71234]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been numerous minor changes and adjustments to air traffic routes and procedures over London and the south-east during the past five years. The most significant changes have been:

> the introduction of a second terminal holding pattern, 'ABBOT', and associated reconfiguration of arrival routes for London Stansted airport in April 1999;
>
> minor changes were made in 2000 and 2001 to the noise preferential routes and standard instrument departure (SID) procedures from London Stansted airport to improve track-keeping and airspace management; and
>
> new SID was introduced in 1998 from London Luton airport to improve traffic flows in the light of the traffic growth at Luton airport.

Airport Construction

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* received on the economic consequences of building new (i) airports and (ii) runways; [70866]

(2) what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* received on the economic consequences of building new (i) airports and (ii) runways. [70867]

Mr. Jamieson: The Appraisal Framework for Airports in the South-East and Eastern Regions of England published in November 2000 sets out the approach that the Department is applying in considering options for the development of airport capacity. This includes the economic benefits to passengers, and the air transport industry as well as wider benefits to the economy. In the regional airport studies that the Department has subsequently commissioned, these economic benefits together with the environmental and other impacts of airport development have been assessed.

Ten-Year Plan

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the impact of the increased spending announced in the spending review will be on the 10-year plan, in terms of *(a)* public investment expenditure, *(b)* public resource expenditure, *(c)* total public expenditure and *(d)* private investment in (i) 2002–03, (ii) 2003–04, (iii) 2004–05, and (iv) 2005–06. [71066]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The funding for transport announced in the spending review maintains the 10-year plan public and private spending total at £181.9 billion, as previously announced. In addition, the Settlement takes full account of the Government's guarantee of full funding for the first 7½ years of the tube modernisation plans at an average of £1 billion per annum.

Journey Times

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 221W, on journey times, what research reports have been produced by *(a)* the Highways Agency and *(b)* the Department as a result of the research and studies to which he refers; and if he will place copies of these reports in the Library. [70734]

Mr. Jamieson: A report is being prepared for the Highways Agency on the research it commissioned to investigate the feasibility of displaying journey times to selected destinations on variable message signs. The report is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

A paper entitled 'Driver Information On Journey Time Variability Using Automatic Number Plate Recognition Data' was presented to the Eleventh International Conference on Road Transport Information and Control in March 2002. A copy of this report will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

As part of the current Departmental research to provide a better understanding of the causes of journey time variability in congested conditions on motorways, three technical papers on this subject are expected to be presented to the European Transport Conference in Cambridge in September 2002. They are: Understanding and Valuing Journey Time Variability; Supply Models For Use In Modelling The Variability Of Journey Times On The Highway Network; Assessing Measures Which Reduce Incident Related Delays And Travel Time Variability, and will be placed in the Libraries of the House when published.

Transport Direct

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on recent changes to Transport Direct. [70738]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport Direct team is currently in the process of letting a contract for construction of a web portal, which will be the initial means of distributing Transport Direct. The contract will be let in the autumn with the first stage of the portal to be ready in 2003, in line with the targets set out in the 10-year plan.

Transport Direct is also extending the number of real time information systems for travellers. £20 million was recently given to 19 local authorities to improve bus real time information; schemes are to be in place by the end of 2003. Transport Direct is working with the rail industry and Strategic Rail Authority to extend rail real time information. Work is also continuing on developing standards and technical details for the extension of real time information systems.

My Department has recently appointed Nick Illsley as Transport Direct Chief Executive to carry the Transport Direct programme forward.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been conducted for his Department on Transport Direct; and if he will make a statement. [70736]

Mr. Jamieson: We are currently undertaking a programme of market research to support Transport Direct. This programme is designed to tell us what specific characteristics and features the service should possess in order to satisfy the requirements of its prospective users; what demand there will be for the service; and what it will be used for. The results of this research will be disseminated in due course.

A review of existing travel information systems, and recommendations for Transport Direct, was conducted last year. The report can be viewed on the Department's website at "http://www.dft.gov.uk/itwp/transdirect/travinf/pdf/travinf.pdf".

Research has also been completed on standards, and standards-like initiatives, likely to be relevant to Transport Direct. The study also considered whether any further standards needed to be developed in order to ensure that Transport Direct is successful. The report can be viewed at: "http://www.dtlr.gov.uk/itwp/transdirect/standards/index.htm"

We are also researching areas related to the overall Transport Direct vision. For example, we will shortly place a contract for market research to inform us as to the future direction on behalf of the traveline service.

A study is under way into the business case for bus real-time information. This work aims to provide a tool for Local Authorities and transport operators which would quantify the benefits of such systems and thus facilitate their development and adoption. We also hope to publish best practice advice.

We also have some minor contracts which include research into putting cycling into journey planners and preparatory work for the business plan. We hope to publish the cycling study on the DfT website very soon.

Transport Projects

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the timescale for achievement of the delivery reform measures to which transport funding increases announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July are linked. [71258]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The White Paper makes clear that action is already under way under the Government's 10-year plan for Transport to improve mechanisms for the delivery of transport improvements.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the criteria to be used in assessing whether the connection between national objectives for transport and local delivery have been strengthened. [71257]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* My Department will monitor the extent to which local transport authorities' local targets reflect the national targets in our 10-year plan and the progress they make in delivering against those targets.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the delivery reform measures to which the transport funding announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July is linked. [71256]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* These reforms are set out in the White Paper on the 2002 Spending Review published by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July.

A404(M)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 143W, when work to widen the approach to the M4 from the A404(M) will start; how long the work will take to complete; and if he will place a copy of the planned changes in the Library. [71945]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Richard Thorndike to Mrs. T. May, dated 22 July 2002:

Tim Matthews has been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent question about the proposed work to widen the approach road to the M4 from the A404(M). I am replying since Tim is currently away on Highways Agency business.

This work at M4, junction 8/9, is programmed to start in January 2003 and will take about ten weeks to complete.

In the meantime we will make the necessary arrangements to place plans of the proposed changes in the Library as soon as they have been finalised.

Road User Charging

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the position is of the road user charging research project to be carried out in Leeds; and if he will make a statement. [72629]

Mr. Jamieson: The road user charging research project in Leeds known as DIRECTS (Demonstration of Interoperable Road User End to End Charging and Telematics Systems) is progressing well with the full co-operation and assistance of Leeds city council. DIRECTS is research into the feasibility of an electronic system for charging drivers to use busy roads. It is intended to help local authorities interested in setting up their own local charging scheme; it should also assist the design of the national lorry charging system.

Temporary equipment will be set up on a small network of roads in south-east Leeds and local volunteers will have a small electronic charging unit fitted inside their vehicles to test the system. No-one will be charged for their journeys and the project will not affect other drivers using these roads.

We are now moving towards the first stage of infrastructure installation. The roadside apparatus to support the charging equipment will begin to be installed in September this year, and fitting of in-vehicle units to volunteers' vehicles will follow early next year. Recruitment of volunteers will also begin shortly. Once preparations for the demonstration are complete, it is expected that full trials will start around September 2003 and run for about a year.

Since the project was first planned, the Chancellor announced in the last Budget statement the Government's intention to introduce a distance-based road user charging scheme for lorries from 2005 or 2006. Many features of the DIRECTS research complement this objective.

In keeping with previous undertakings by Ministers, I have today written to all Leeds constituency MPs to explain to them in more detail what progress is being made locally, and copies of the letter have been placed in the House Libraries. I understand the city council is planning its own briefing for Leeds councillors. We will continue to work closely with Leeds city council to ensure that the interests of local people are met as fully as possible for the duration of the project.

Roads

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of *(a)* the current condition of local roads and *(b)* the condition of local roads as at July 2000. [71344]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Trends in the defects index of local roads between 1984 and 2001 are shown at Table 3.1 of the "National Road Maintenance Condition Survey: 2001", copies of which are in the Libraries of the House. The index improved between 2000 and 2001. Data on the current condition of local roads are being collected at present and will be published next year.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of the road network in *(a)* England and *(b)* Great Britain was at 100 per cent. or greater stress in (i) 1996, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2002 to date. [71340]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* A stress map for the English Trunk Road network was published by the Department for 1996 based on actual traffic counts. It showed 3 per cent. of the network was operating above 100 per cent. stress and 10 per cent. of the network between 80 per cent. and 100 per cent. A map based on estimated 2000 traffic flows was included in the published 10-Year Plan. The Plan reported that 7 per cent. of the network was operating above 100 per cent. stress and 13 per cent. of the network between 80 per cent. and 100 per cent. More recent data are not available.

Data for the whole of the English road Network and for Great Britain are not available.

The 'stress level indicator' is not a precise measure and is intended for illustrative purposes at the National level.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will define the major local road improvements, other than bypasses, as given in para 6.61, page 65, of the 10-Year Plan. [71324]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Our guidance to authorities on local transport plans specifies major local road projects as any local road scheme with a gross capital cost exceeding £5 million. Examples of schemes other than bypasses are urban relief roads, rural widening schemes and new/improved accesses to development sites. It is for local authorities to decide what, if any, major schemes they wish to bid for under the local transport plan process.

Roadworks

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been conducted *(a)* by and *(b)* for (i) his Department and (ii) the Highways Agency in relation to the (A) M60 J5–8 widening, (B) M25 J12–15 widening, (C) A46 Newark-Lincoln improvement, (D) A43 M40-B4031 dualling, (E) A11 Roudham Heath-Attleborough dualling and (F) A1 Willowburn-Denwick improvement; if he will place copies of related documentation in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [70682]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of the 1997 Roads Review a key objective was to develop a clear and open framework to appraise and inform the prioritization of trunk road proposals. To achieve this the Government developed a new approach to appraisal which is based on the following five criteria:

(i) Environmental Impact

(ii) Safety

(iii) Economy

(iv) Accessibility

(v) Integration.

Under this appraisal system, my Department and the Highways Agency worked in partnership to produce one-page summaries showing the economic, environmental and social impacts of each trunk road scheme under consideration. The results of the Roads Review were published in July 1998 in "A New Deal for Trunk Roads In England". At the same time "A New Deal For Trunk Roads In England: Understanding The New Approach To Appraisal" was published which included one-page summaries for all the schemes considered during the review including those listed in the question. Copies of both these documents were placed in the Library at that time.

The above named schemes were added to the Targeted Programme Of Improvements (TPI) in July 1998. Once in the TPI these schemes would have been subject to environmental, traffic and structural assessments. However due to the large volume of documentation it would be impractical to place copies of these in the Library.

A1 Willowburn—Denwick, A11 Roudham Heath and A43 M40-B4031 Dualling are currently under construction and are all due to open to traffic by the end of this financial year. Construction of the remaining schemes is either under way or will begin in the next year.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been conducted for his Department and the Highways Agency on the differential costs between programmed maintenance and ad hoc repairs; and if he will make a statement. [70739]

Mr. Jamieson: The strategy for maintenance, which is based on the principles of minimising whole life cost, has been derived over the years from a number of studies. The effect of ad hoc repairs is always considered within a maintenance scheme against planned maintenance as part of a value management process and thus ensures value for money. The process, which has been developed over time, takes account of historical records of ad hoc repair costs and the effects of delaying planned maintenance for the specific network length under consideration.

Road Accidents

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in road accidents on all roads in each of the last three years. [71502]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The table below provides figures for the number of people *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in road accidents in Great Britain in each of the last three years.

	Killed	*Seriously injured*
1999	3,423	39,122
2000	3,409	38,155
2001[1]	3,443	37,094

[1] Figures for 2001 are provisional.

Road and Bridge Maintenance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 7W, on road and bridge maintenance, if he will make a statement on the methodology used when calculating the authorities' funding requirements for road and bridge maintenance from 2001 to 2006. [71373]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Local Transport Plan indicative allocations for highway maintenance announced in November 2000 for 2001–02 and 2002–03 were mainly based on the size and condition of the individual authorities' road networks and the number of their bridges requiring strengthening and structural maintenance. Some large maintenance schemes above £5 million in value were approved individually. Authorities were also told that their maintenance allocations for each of the three years 2003–04, 2004–05, and 2005–06 would be at least 75 per cent. of their allocation in 2002–03.

Consultation on the methodology for the full maintenance allocations in the next three years is currently taking place.

Road Improvements

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the major local road improvements, as given in para 6.61, page 65, of the 10-year plan *(a)* started and *(b)* completed since July 2000. [71325]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The latest information that we have available from the local authorities shows:

Work on the following major local road schemes has been started and completed since July 2000:

Burntwood Bypass Phases 1 and 2 (Staffordshire)
A143 Broome/Ellingham Bypass (Norfolk)
A511 Ashby Bypass Stage 2 (Leicestershire).

Work on the following major local road schemes has been completed since July 2000:

A174 Skelton and Brotton Bypass (Redcar and Cleveland)
Avon Ring Road II: B4465 Shortwood—A420 Warmley (South Gloucestershire)
South Thames-side Development Route 4 (Kent)
Dearne Towns Link Road (Barnsley)
A22 Dualling Nightingale Farm (East Sussex)
West Central Route (Newcastle upon Tyne).

Work on the following major local road schemes has been started since July 2000:

Bridgwater Northern Distributor Road (Somerset)
Dawdon to Seaham Town Centre Link Road (Durham)
A131 Great Leighs Bypass (Essex)
A689 Sedgefield to Wynyard Improvement (Durham)
A617 Mansfield Ashfield Regeneration Route (Nottinghamshire)
Wyre Piddle Bypass (Worcestershire)
A53 Hodnet Bypass (Shropshire)
A6002/A6007 Coventry Lane Improvement (Nottinghamshire)
A6042 Manchester/ Salford Inner Relief Road (Manchester/ Salford)
South Stockton Link (Stockton-on-Tees)
Coalfields Link Road Phases 2 and 3 (Barnsley)
A6023 Denaby Main Diversion (Doncaster).

Road Travel

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicle kilometres were travelled on roads in *(a)* England and *(b)* Great Britain in 1996. [71331]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The total traffic on the roads in England and Great Britain in 1996 are estimated to be 377.0 and 442.5 billion vehicle kilometres respectively.

Fuel Duty

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the level of fuel duty rebate available to community transport services. [71341]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Eligible community transport services will receive fuel duty rebate at the same level as applies to other eligible bus services. The current rates are as follows:

Pence per litre

Fuel	*Rate of rebate*
Ultra low sulphur diesel	36.68
Other diesel	36.68
Lead replacement petrol	34.30

Fuel	Pence per litre
	Rate of rebate
4-star petrol	40.16
Unleaded petrol	34.30
Ultra low sulphur petrol	34.30
Gas	[1]9.00

[1] pence per kilo

Strategic Road Network

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* proportion and *(b)* length of the strategic road network requires maintenance. [71333]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David York to Mrs. T. May, dated 22 July 2002:

Tim Matthews has been asked by the Transport Minister for the Department for Transport to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the proportion and the length of the strategic road network currently requiring maintenance. I am replying since Tim is currently away on Highways Agency business.

The Highways Agency aims to ensure that the network is retained in an optimum, safe condition on a basis that minimises costs over time. To achieve this requires that the proportion of the network requiring maintenance is held between 7% and 8% which equates to between 2,400 and 2,700 lane km.

An assessment of the network was made at the end of March 2002 and this indicated that 7.5% of the network required maintenance.

I hope this is helpful.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the slight casualty rate was on the strategic road network in each year from 1994 to 2002; and what the annual average was for 1994 to 1998. [71503]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The slight casualty rates on the English trunk road network were as follows:

	Per 100 million vehicle kilometres
1994	21.88
1995	21.01
1996	22.35
1997	23.09
1998	22.28
1999	21.40
2000	20.82

The figure for 2001 is not yet available.

The average slight casualty rate for 1994 to 1998 was 22.14 per 100 million vehicle kilometres.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured on the strategic road network in each of the last three years. [71501]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The number of people killed and seriously injured on the English trunk road network were as follows:

	Killed	Seriously injured
1998	628	4152
1999	664	4217
2000	599	3950

Note:
Figures for 2001 are not yet available.

Traffic Lights

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a direction under section 30(7) Greater London Authority Act 1999 in relation to the phasing of traffic lights in Greater London. [71366]

Mr. Jamieson: The power in section 30(7) is a power to issue guidance as to the exercise of the general power of the Greater London Authority. It is not a power to direct Transport for London to alter traffic signal phasings.

Drink-Driving

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many serious injuries have resulted from crashes caused by drivers with *(a)* more than 80 milligrammes alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood in their bloodstream, *(b)* between 50 and 80 milligrammes alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood in their bloodstream, *(c)* between 20 and 50 milligrammes alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood in their bloodstream and *(d)* a trace of alcohol, but less than 20 milligrammes alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood in their bloodstream, in each of the last 10 years; [70959]

(2) how many deaths have resulted from crashes caused by drivers with *(a)* more than 80 milligrammes alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood in their bloodstream, *(b)* between 50 and 80 milligrammes alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood in their bloodstream, *(c)* between 20 and 50 milligrammes alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood in their bloodstream and *(d)* a trace of alcohol, but less than 20 milligrammes alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood in their bloodstream, in each of the last 10 years; [70958]

(3) how many people were *(a)* killed, *(b)* seriously injured and *(c)* slightly injured on roads in England and Wales by a driver who was over the drink-drive limit in each of the last 10 years. [70955]

Mr. Jamieson: Estimates of the number of casualties resulting from road accidents in Great Britain where at least one driver (or rider of a two-wheeled motor vehicle) was over the drink-drive limit are given in the table.

Estimates of casualties resulting from accidents involving illegal alcohol levels: Great Britain 1991–2000.

	Casualties			
Year	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total
1991	660	3,610	13,610	17,880
1992	660	3,280	12,770	16,710
1993	540	2,660	11,780	14,980
1994	540	2,840	11,780	15,160
1995	540	3,000	12,450	16,000
1996	580	3,010	13,450	17,040

Casualties

Year	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*
1997	550	2,940	13,310	16,800
1998	460	2,520	12,610	15,590
1999	460	2,470	13,980	16,910
2000[1]	520	2,530	14,980	18,030

[1] Provisional data

National road accident statistics do not identify cases where drivers' blood alcohol concentration (BAC) was below the prescribed limit.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many crashes on roads in England and Wales involving multiple fatalities were caused by a driver who was over the drink-drive limit in each of the last 10 years. [70957]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of accidents in England and Wales involving multiple (2 or more) fatalities where a driver was over the drink-drive limit, are shown in the table:

Fatal accidents involving two or more fatalities on roads in England and Wales where a driver was over the limit[1]*: 1991–2000*

	England	*Wales*	*All*
1991	11	0	11
1992	15	1	16
1993	10	1	11
1994	9	2	11
1995	6	1	7
1996	13	1	14
1997	16	1	17
1998	7	1	8
1999	8	0	8
2000	10	0	10
Total	105	8	113

[1] Driver tested positive or refused to provide a test.

Bus Services

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 976W, on bus services, if he will list those traffic commission areas in which bus compliance officers have surveyed the performance of bus operators in each of the last five years. [71367]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Vehicle Inspectorate (VI) started its bus monitoring function in 1999–2000. In each of the three years since, VI has undertaken monitoring exercises in each of the eight traffic areas.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of households in rural areas were within 13 minutes walk of an hourly or better bus service for the last *(a)* quarter and *(b)* year, for which figures are available. [71342]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The proportion of households in rural areas in England within 13 minutes walk of an hourly or better bus service was 42 per cent. for 1998–99. Rural areas are defined here as settlements of less than 3,000 population.

The source is the National Travel Survey and normally three years of data are aggregated because the small number of rural households in the sample means that estimates for single years may not be reliable. The rural sample numbers were exceptionally low for 2000, casting doubts on the validity of using the data for that year within the indicator, so the average for 1998 and 1999 has been used instead of the average for the three years 1998–2000, as previously published. Figures for the average of 1999 and 2001 will be published when the results for 2001 are released on 25 July. Quarterly figures are not available.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the powers of bus compliance officers with regards to *(a)* setting operators' punctuality targets and *(b)* enforcing operators' punctuality targets. [71346]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Bus Compliance Officers function is to monitor the reliability and punctuality of local bus services registered with the Traffic Commissioners, who can impose penalties on operators who fail to comply with the registered particulars of the service. It is for the Traffic Commissioners to determine the punctuality target. Bus Compliance Officers provide the main source of evidence on which the Traffic Commissioners judge whether the appropriate level of punctuality has been achieved on individual services.

Twyford Railway Bridge

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when work on the Twyford railway bridge will be completed. [71483]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I understand from Railtrack that work is expected to be completed in late August.

Train Operating Franchises

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total cost of safety case work undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive in relation to the *(a)* re-letting and *(b)* extension of train operating franchises has been since 7 June 2001; and if he will make a statement. [70643]

Mr. Jamieson: Since 7 June 2001, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has only assessed one re-let franchise safety case, for the Chiltern Railway Company, which was completed on 10 July 2002. However, it is not possible for the HSE to separately identify the costs of the assessment work.

Extensions of existing franchises do not normally result in additional safety case assessment costs.

Potter's Bar Crash

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* contractors and *(b)* sub-contractors involved in accident investigation into the Potter's Bar crash under the supervision of the Health and Safety Executive. [70652]

Mr. Jamieson: In addition to all the work undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) internal laboratory, the Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL), HSE engaged AEA Technology Rail to assist with the investigation of the derailment and the examination of the points. The investigation is continuing and further contracts may be let in due course.

Railways Vandalism

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance and directions have been given by his Department to the *(a)* British Transport Police, *(b)* Health and Safety Executive and *(c)* railways industry, regarding vandalism on the railways; what plans there are to update such guidance; and if he will make a statement. [70647]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 772–73W.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made as to the effect of changing the guidance issued to the SRA on the SRA's obligations under the funding package to be structured for the purposes of the SRA's accounts in such a way that disbursements under the funding package only constitute liabilities of the SRA for the accounting period in which the obligation to make disbursements arises, as issued on 22 March in the letter to Richard Bowker; and if he will make a statement; [68388]

(2) what assessment he has made as to the effect of changing the guidance issued to the SRA with regards to Railtrack, or any company which acquires its assets, becoming part of the public sector, as issued on 22 March in the letter to Richard Bowker; and if he will make a statement; [68386]

(3) what assessment he has made as to the effect of changing the guidance issued to the SRA with regard to Railtrack, or any company which acquires its assets, being consolidated into the SRA's balance sheet, as issued on 22 March in the letter to Richard Bowker; and if he will make a statement; [68387]

(4) what assessment he has made as to the effect of changing the guidance issued to the SRA with regards to Railtrack, or any company which acquires its assets, becoming an entity under public control, as stated on 22 March in the letter to Richard Bowker; and if he will make a statement; [68385]

(5) with regard to his letter of 22 March to Mr. Richard Bowker concerning the Railtrack successor body, his letter of 21 June to Mr. Nick Newton concerning the Railtrack successor body and his statement to the House of 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 971 on Network Rail, what representations he received from *(a)* the SRA, *(b)* Network Rail, *(c)* the ONS and *(d)* the NAO regarding the initial guidance that the Government do not wish Railtrack or any company which acquires its assets to (i) be consolidated into the SRA's balance sheet, (ii) become part of the public sector and (iii) become an entity under public sector control; and if he will make a statement. [68619]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement about Network Rail made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 971–73, and the two associated minutes which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State laid before the House on the same day.

The letter of 22 March 2002 gave the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) certain directions and guidance as to the manner in which the SRA was to negotiate a funding and outputs package with any bidder seeking to become the network operator. Since then, negotiations progressed with Network Rail with the result that the transaction contemplated did not entirely reflect the directions and guidance issued on 22 March.

Consequently, my right hon. Friend wrote on 21 June to replace the guidance and directions issued on 22 March and to give the SRA new directions and guidance as to the manner in which the SRA was to seek to conclude the transaction with the Network Rail Group.

No representations were made on the initial guidance by anyone other than the SRA, as it was a letter to them, which was not published until recently.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his letter of 22 March to Richard Bowker Esq, concerning the Railtrack successor body, his letter of 21 June to Nick Newton Esq, concerning the Railtrack successor body, and his oral statement of 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 971, what representations he received from *(a)* the Strategic Rail Authority, *(b)* Network Rail, *(c)* ONS and *(d)* the NAO, regarding the initial guidance on the structure and disbursement of the Strategic Rail Authority's obligation under the funding package; and if he will make a statement. [68374]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given her today [68388].

Network Rail

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 4 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 465W, on Railtrack, on what date he expects to authorise the change of control; and if he will make a statement on the conditions that must be satisfied by Network Rail before he authorises the change of control. [71374]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I understand that Network Rail will shortly make an application. I will need to be satisfied that any change of control of Railtrack will not have an adverse effect on the ability of the operating company to continue to discharge its licence obligations.

Central Railway Project

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received the SRA's latest assessment of the Central Railway Project; and when he expects to publish the Government's response. [71680]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA is expected to provide a report to Ministers by September 2002. We expect to announce our decision about Central Railway's proposal as soon as possible thereafter, after giving it careful and due consideration.

London Underground

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made as to the change in capacity on London Underground resulting from the PPP proposal; and if he will make a statement. [71387]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) on 24 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 660W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made as to the loss of station capacity resulting from work planned under the proposed PPP; and if he will make a statement. [71497]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Nothing on the scale of the modernisation plans for the Underground has ever been undertaken and some disruption is inevitable while the contractors are maintaining and renewing the entire network. Most of the work will be done at night; the plans have been specifically designed to minimise disruption to passengers.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on what powers *(a)* he and *(b)* the London Mayor (i) have and (ii) will have in order to place the Tube Infracos into administration; and under what legislation these powers are in place. [71052]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given him today [70813].

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the criteria for assessing journey times on London Underground services for the purposes of judging performance against the PSA targets for transport set out in the 2002 Spending Review. [71618]

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 9 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 808W, on London Underground, if he will make a statement on the methodology used to determine London Underground's weighted measure. [71482]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Journey times on the Underground are assessed by London Underground using the methodology described in the document "The Journey Time Metric" (published by London Transport in 1999), copies of which I have arranged to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 8 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 668W, on London Underground, if he will publish *(a)* the data and *(b)* the calculations, used in order to produce chart 6j (overcrowding on the London Underground today), on page 67 of the 10-year plan. [71375]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 9 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 794W.

EU Committees
(Scottish Executive Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EU Committee on the movement of air or sea passengers' baggage (principles) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70912]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

This committee has not met in the past five years and has no outstanding items under consideration. No further meetings have been timetabled. One official from HM Customs and Excise attended previous meetings, representing all of the UK.

Chemical/biological Warfare

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library copies of guidance provided for *(a)* the public, *(b)* local education authorities, *(c)* local health authorities and *(d)* other public institutions in the event of deliberate release of (i) chemical and (ii) biological weapons; and where this information is available to the general public. [50856]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health issued restricted guidance to Directors and Regional Directors of Public Health in March 2000. The Cabinet Office issued guidance to local authorities in October 2001 and a copy of that guidance, which is being revised, has been placed in the Library. General advice is available via the website www.ukresilience.info.

DEFENCE

Private Military Companies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the checks needed to *(a)* ensure accountability, *(b)* avoid human rights violations and *(c)* avoid legal actions by the private military companies; and if he will make a statement. [38796]

Dr. Moonie: The paper "Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation", which was published on 12 February 2002, examines the various activities of private military companies and sets out options for their regulation. It is a consultation paper, and invites comments from all interested parties by mid-August 2002. A full regulatory impact assessment would be drawn up once final decisions on any legislative proposal have been made.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what private military companies have been granted licences to operate from the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [67841]

Dr. Moonie: Private military companies operating from the United Kingdom are not at present subject to a licensing regime in respect of the provision of military services. One of the options set out in the FCO's Green Paper "Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation", published on 12 February 2002, is for the introduction of a licensing regime.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British servicemen have been waiting for more than one month for *(a)* an NHS operation or consultation and *(b)* admittance to a waiting list. [64817]

Dr. Moonie: Service patients in the United Kingdom are mainly treated in Defence Secondary Care Agency administered Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs) situated in NHS Trusts. Service patients can opt to be treated in other NHS hospitals and are referred to these where there is a need for specialised care not available in the Defence Medical Services or for geographical reasons.

The MOD only maintains central records on the number of Service patients awaiting a first outpatient appointment or admitted patient treatment (inpatients plus daycase patients) at MDHUs. MDHU waiting list information as at 31 March 2002, the last date for which information is available, is provided in the standard NHS reporting format in the following tables. This excludes outpatient information in respect of MDHU Portsmouth due to the validation of information at that time.

			Waiting time		
	0–13 weeks	*13+ weeks*	*0–3 months*	*3+ months*	*Total waiting*
Outpatients					
Number of Service patients waiting[1]	1,916	437	—	—	2,353
Admitted patients[2]					
Number of Service patients waiting[3]	—	—	1,464	1,029	2,493

[1] Number of patients waiting at four MDHUs (Peterborough, Frimley Park, Derriford and Northallerton).

[2] Inpatients plus daycases.

[3] Number of patients waiting at all five MDHUs (Portsmouth, Peterborough, Frimley Park, Derriford and Northallerton).

This information is provided by MDHU host NHS Trusts. Patients are normally added to the outpatient waiting lists on receipt of a referral from their GP to a consultant. They are normally added to the admitted patient waiting list when the consultant decides that an admission is required.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68724]

Dr. Moonie: All overseas travel by officials is undertaken in accordance with the principles set in Chapter 8 of the Civil Service Management Code, and the detailed rules and guidance set out in the Ministry of Defence Civilian Overseas Travel Manual. The detailed information requested about individual trips is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff have contributed to his Department's input to the Spending Review. [68696]

Dr. Moonie: The Spending Review involves a comprehensive assessment of the Department's performance, priorities and resource requirements and a range of staff make a contribution.

British Troops (Accidents and Reparations)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are taken to minimise the possibility of an accidental attack on civilians by British troops on active service; and what his policy is on reparations to families of civilians accidentally killed by troops of the United Kingdom. [67803]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* All members of HM forces are carefully briefed on their rules of engagement (ROE) for an operation and on when they may be justified in using force. I am withholding details of the ROE in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Additionally, HM forces take all possible measures in the preparation and conduct of operations to minimise possible loss of civilian life and damage to property.

When compensation claims are submitted, they are considered on the basis of whether or not the Ministry of Defence has a legal liability to pay compensation. Where there is a legal liability to pay compensation we do so.

Service Accommodation

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) pursuant to his answer of 4 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 525W, on married quarters, if he will make a statement on the safety attribute used by the Defence Housing Executives and if he will list the married quarters that are unsatisfactory using this criterion, indicating for what reasons; [68802]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 4 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 525W, on married quarters, if he will list the married quarters that fail the safety attribute; and if he will list the Standard 4 married quarters. [68803]

Dr. Moonie: The safety-related criteria used by the Defence Housing Executive (DHE) to measure performance are:

Upper windows—fire compliant
Upper windows—child safe
Safety of low level glazing
Safety gate fixings
Smoke detectors
Lockable bathroom cabinet.

Of the 5,921 service family quarters in Wiltshire, 398 do not fully meet the criteria above for Standard 1 for Condition (S1FC). 253 of these properties have one smoke detector fitted, whereas the criterion requires two. (This figure includes 83 properties which are to be handed back to Annington Homes). The remaining 143 properties do not reach S1FC because they do not fully meet a combination of the other criteria above. The addresses of these properties could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The location and numbers of Wiltshire married quarters which do not meet the smoke detector criterion are as follows:

Location	*Number of properties*
Bulford	4
Colerne	1
Devizes	[1]31
Larkhill	71
Boscombe Down	11
Tidworth	18
Upavon	31
Wroughton	[1]52
Wilton	10
Shrivenham	20
Winterbourne Gunner	4
Total	253

[1] Planned for handback

The following Wiltshire properties are at Standard 4 for Condition for the above criteria.

Location	*Number of properties*
Devizes	2
Hullavington	2
Larkhill	16
Boscombe Down	1
Upavon	19
Wilton	4
Winterbourne Gunner	1
Total	45

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total amount spent on renting private accommodation for armed services personnel was *(a)* in 1999, *(b)* in 2000, *(c)* in 2001 and *(d)* since January 2002; and if he will make a statement. [69546]

Dr. Moonie: The tables show the expenditure on substitute service accommodation in Great Britain, rented by the Ministry of Defence from the private sector, when accommodation according to entitlement and within the travel to work zone could not otherwise be provided for service personnel and their families. The figures are available by financial rather than calendar year.

£ million

Financial year	*Rent*	*Fees*	*Other*[1]	*Total*
Substitute service single accommodation (SSSA)				
1998–99	13.239	0.809	0.191	14.239
1999–2000	18.506	1.004	0.344	19.854
2000–01	19.378	1.001	0.437	20.816
2001–02	21.950	1.230	0.511	23.691
April-June 2002	5.860	0.321	0.079	6.260
Substitute service family accommodation (SSFA)				
1998–99	7.020	0.197	0.019	7.236
1999–2000	8.522	0.182	0.026	8.730
2000–01	8.096	0.146	0.043	8.285
2001–02	8.859	0.196	0.039	9.094
April-June 2002	2.158	0.032	0.014	2.204

[1] TV Licences, dilapidations, administration/check-in fees, inventory fees, etc.

The table excludes utilities, i.e. council tax, water, gas, electricity and telephone line rental, for which information is available by calendar year as follows:

£ million

	SSSA Utilities	*SSFA Council tax/water*
1999	3.462	1.281
2000	2.626	0.917
2001	3.729	1.109
2002 to July 2002	3.292	0.898

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 159–60W, on service accommodation, what plans he has to improve the standard of service families' accommodation in Warminster. [71554]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive is planning a number of minor works schemes to improve the general surroundings of the service families' accommodation in the Warminster area. These include:

Replacement front doors—166 family quarters

External decorations—8 family quarters

Internal decorations to stairwells—12 blocks of flats.

In addition, the possible upgrading of some 400 family quarters is in the early planning stages.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much *(a)* single living accommodation and *(b)* service family accommodation was released to Annington Homes Ltd. in each month of 2001; what grade these were at the time of release; what percentage of the total number of upgraded homes this represents; and if he will make a statement. [70009]

Dr. Moonie: The agreement with Annington Homes Ltd. (AHL) covers service family accommodation only. Under the 1996 sale and leaseback agreement the following vacant service family quarters were handed back to AHL during 2001:

Month	*Number*
January	41
February	204
March	2,098
August	116
September	1
October	29
December	167
Total	2,656

375 of these properties were at Standard 1 for condition at the time of release. This represented 2 per cent. of the total number of service family properties in GB at Standard 1. Whenever possible, the houses released for disposal are those at lower standards, but the sale agreement requires that properties are released in groups rather than individually. This can result in some higher standard properties being released because of their location. Defence Housing Executive area managers maintain close liaison with local service commanders on the selection of surplus properties for disposal.

Bowman Radio System

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost has been of developing the Bowman tactical radio system; and if he will make a statement. [70057]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of developing the Bowman tactical communication system up to the award of a Supply and Support contract to GD UK Ltd., last September, was £405 million. The Supply and Support contract is worth £1.9 billion. To date, £156 million of this contract has been spent on development.

Afghanistan

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what charges are made for *(a)* food and *(b)* accommodation for British armed forces personnel serving in Afghanistan. [69523]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* We do not normally charge personnel on operations for food and accommodation.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to *(a)* ensure that the Defence Medical Services are able to deal with the problems of service men while still in the armed forces and *(b)* make the DMS more approachable. [70130]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Medical Services (DMS) provide primary care and range of secondary care services to members of the armed forces in the United Kingdom and overseas. Where specialist services are not provided by the DMS, service personnel are normally referred to the NHS. Service personnel should feel able to contact DMS staff when necessary.

Veteran Rough Sleepers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to help the ex-services Mental Welfare Society locate veteran rough sleepers in the UK. [70131]

Dr. Moonie: The St. Botolph's Day Centre, which is funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Homelessness Directorate, provide a Contact and Assessment Team (CAT) worker, who is linked into the Ex-Services Fellowship Centre to specifically assist rough sleepers with an armed forces background. Rough sleepers with an armed forces background who wish to be assisted can be referred to New Belvedere House in Stepney. Once placed in permanent accommodation, the CAT worker will continue to assist them by linking them up with a number of support providing organisations, including charities such as the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society (Combat Stress), depending on the nature of individual's needs.

Duchess of Kent Psychiatric Hospital, Catterick

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the reasons for the closure of the Duchess of Kent Psychiatric Hospital, Catterick in April 2003; what will happen to the patients there; and if he will review the decision to close the hospital. [70133]

Dr. Moonie: The Medical Quinquennial Review recommended the closure of the Duchess of Kent's Psychiatric Hospital (DKPH). Following advice from a leading independent consultancy in mental health services, it was recommended that defence mental health services should be switched toward care in the single service community, in line with the approach already well established in the NHS. Most service patients requiring mental health care are already treated by the Defence Community Psychiatric Service, where the emphasis is on local, out-patient care. The reduced requirement for in-patient facilities means that DKPH would no longer be required. Closure of the hospital is currently subject to consultation and no final decision has yet been taken. However, we would not close the hospital until absolutely satisfied that high quality replacement facilities were in place and that suitable alternative arrangements had been made for existing patients.

Service Psychiatric Hospitals

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service psychiatric hospitals there are in the UK; and what proposals there are to open more hospitals for service men. [70132]

Dr. Moonie: The Duchess of Kent's Psychiatric Hospital at Catterick is our only military psychiatric hospital. We have no plans to open any additional military hospitals.

Harriers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the variation in maintenance costs between the engines on the Harrier GR8 and the GR8a. [70161]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* There are no variants of the Harrier designated GR8 or GR8a.

Currently the Harrier GR7 fleet is fitted with the Pegasus Mk105 engine. However, in a programme which is due to commence in February 2003 and be completed by the end of 2005, 30 aircraft will be upgraded to GR7a standard by the integration of the Pegasus Mk107 engine.

In addition, all Harrier GR7 and GR7a aircraft will receive avionics and weapons upgrades to provide the aircraft with a much improved capability, in particular, the ability to deliver the new generation of smart weapons that are about to enter service. These aircraft will be designated Harrier GR9 and GR9a.

The information requested for the Pegasus Mk105 and Mk107 engines is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the

Mk107 engine will have lower support costs due to increased reliability and reduced scheduled maintenance requirements, and over the planned in-service life of the Harrier GR7a and GR9a, it is expected that the resulting cost savings will be in the order of £2 million per year.

ECGD Funding

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish his review of ECGD funding for defence projects. [70160]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has responsibility for the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD). There is no review of ECGD support for the defence sector.

Army Website

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what total expenditure has been on the Army website for *(a)* construction and *(b)* maintenance; and if he will list total traffic on the home page for each month since 1997. [69672]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* Since the creation of the Army website in 1996, approximate total expenditure on construction has been £2.4 million and £230,000 on maintenance.

The Ministry of Defence did not retain information on the total traffic on the home page until November 2001. Figures since then are as follows:

	Total traffic
2001	
November	118,913
December	91,749
2002	
January	140,272
February	103,401
March	126,845
April	151,310
May	143,987
June	140,551

More in-depth figures on the total website usage for the period shown are available on the internet: http://armydev.dera.gov.uk/stats/index.html.

Royal School of Artillery

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many overseas students were sent to the Royal School of Artillery in each year since 1997 broken down by country of origin. [69669]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The information requested is as follows:

Country	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*[1]
Australia	2	1	0	0	0	0
Austria	0	0	0	0	0	1
Brunei	7	2	1	4	1	0
Canada	2	0	3	4	1	0
Denmark	0	0	0	2	1	0
Egypt	0	4	0	0	0	0
France	0	0	0	0	2	4
Republic of Ireland	0	0	0	0	1	0
Italy	0	0	0	0	0	3
Jordan	1	0	0	0	0	0
Kuwait	4	0	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	3	1	5	10	4	5
Nigeria	0	0	0	0	0	1
Slovenia	1	0	0	0	0	0
Turkey	0	0	0	0	0	2
United Arab Emirates	2	1	4	2	0	4

[1] To 15 July 2002

Royal Military Academy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's total expenditure relating to Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in each year since 1997. [69649]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The information requested is as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*
1997–98	23.655
1998–99	24.191
1999–2000	23.961
2000–01	25.510
2001–02	26.961

The figures quoted are cash costs and represent the running costs of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst excluding salary costs of students.

Colombia

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of Her Majesty's forces are assigned to tasks in Colombia; and from which units these personnel are taken. [70751]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Attaché and Assistant Defence Attaché are the only British military personnel currently in Colombia.

Portsmouth Naval Base

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to dispose of land occupied by the Portsmouth naval base; what the time scale is for the process; how the land will be disposed of; and if he will make a statement. [70759]

Dr. Moonie: The only disposal currently contemplated at the naval base, Portsmouth, is of land adjacent to Unicorn Gate. This is required to facilitate the road improvements associated with the Portsmouth city centre re-development scheme. Discussions are under way between my Department and the developers. It is too early to say what the disposal arrangements will be, and the time scale is dependent upon a satisfactory conclusion to negotiations.

Land Disposal (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use for land disposed of within the Portsmouth naval base would be acceptable to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [70760]

Dr. Moonie: Any alternative use of land within the naval base would be subject to operational and security considerations, and if a change of use was involved, this would be subject to the normal planning process.

SA80A1/SA80A2

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many injuries have occurred to service men and service women as a result of the SA80A1's reliability problems. [70703]

Dr. Moonie: None.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what faults have been reported with the *(a)* SA80A2 and *(b)* SA80A1. [70710]

Dr. Moonie: Approximately 24,000 SA80 A2 rifles have now been deployed to the armed forces and eight Equipment Failure Reports (resulting in an inoperable weapon) have been received from units. These reports includes weapons deployed with service shooting teams and infantry units as well as troops deployed to Afghanistan. Three of these reports relate to the trigger guard, three to magazine related parts, one was a welding failure on the sighting system and one related to stoppages experienced. Those reports that related to damage in transit have been disregarded since they are not an equipment failure.

There have been 1,361 recorded faults (resulting in an inoperable weapon), with the SA80 A1 in the last three years. A breakdown of recorded faults with the SA80 since 1986 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations his Department has made into the reliability and accuracy of the rifle grenade-launching capability of the SA80 A2; and what impact it has had on the accuracy of the rifle's optical sight. [70693]

Dr. Moonie: The SA80 A2 rifle entered service late last year. There have been no indications of reliability or accuracy problems when using the A2 in conjunction with the Rifle Grenade General Service (RGGS). Tests were conducted by QinetiQ prior to the A2's introduction to validate with the modified rifle the results of earlier exhaustive performance trials using the SA80 A1 with the RGGS. Some rifle-launched grenades no longer in use did on occasion cause damage to the A1 and its optical sight, but since its introduction into service in 1996 the RGGS has been found to be safe in this respect. For maximum accuracy it is used with a dedicated prismatic sight.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the *(a)* SA80A1 and *(b)* SA80A2 rifles to be admitted to the NATO nominated weapons list. [70702]

Dr. Moonie: The modified SA80 A2 was accepted onto the NATO nominated weapons list in March 2002. We have no intention of seeking the readmittance of the SA80 A1 onto the list as it is being replaced by the modified SA80 A2.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what proportion of the SA80A2 rifles failed to meet the target of 10,000 rounds before failure during testing in Kuwait under hot/dry conditions; [70707]

(2) what proportion of the SA80 *(a)* A2 and *(b)* A1 rifles failed to meet the target of 10,000 rounds before failure during testing; [70700]

(3) what proportion of the SA80A1 rifles failed to meet the target of 10,000 rounds before failure during testing under hot/dry conditions. [70706]

Dr. Moonie: Both the SA80A1 and the SA80A2 were tested during trials in 2001 against the Battlefield Mission rather than a 10,000 round target. The 10,000 round figure relates to the manufacturer's expected life of component parts of the weapon. The new Battlefield Mission requires the rifle to fire in a number of different environments over a prolonged period of time. These included cold and dry conditions in Alaska, hot and wet conditions in Brunei, hot and dry conditions in Kuwait and temperate conditions in the United Kingdom.

The SA80A2 averaged 98 per cent. reliability during trials across all climates and during testing in Kuwait achieved 95 per cent. reliability. The target set for SA80A2 is 90 per cent. reliability. The SA80A1 averaged 55 per cent. reliability across the various climates and during testing in Kuwait achieved 6 per cent. reliability.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inquiries were made by his Department into whether the use of the stabiliser developed by Warminster was considered in SA80 modifications. [70701]

Dr. Moonie: I assume the stabiliser the hon. Member is referring to is the Vortices Activated Muzzle Stabiliser (VAMS), which was designed to improve the accuracy of the Light Support Weapon. Trials were undertaken at Warminster in 1992 using SA80 A1s, but when fitted with the VAMS, the weapon failed to meet accuracy requirements. The VAMS was not therefore procured.

Phoenix UAVs

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if UK Phoenix UAVs were deployed in recent operations in Afghanistan. [70764]

Mr. Ingram: No.

Heavylift Aircraft

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on hiring heavylift aircraft since 1 July 1998 for use in UK defence or aid-related activities. [70782]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* From 1 July 1998 to 4 July 2002, the Ministry of Defence has committed to the charter of civilian heavylift aircraft up to the value of £43.9 million.

HMS Nottingham

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the future of HMS Nottingham. [70786]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Repair options for HMS Nottingham are still being considered.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if warships will be brought out of *(a)* reserve and *(b)* extended readiness to replace HMS Nottingham while she is out of service. [70785]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* No warships are in reserve at present. Decisions on whether to change the readiness state of other warships will be taken once we have a clear assessment of the damage to HMS Nottingham.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy warship will be deployed to replace the duties undertaken by HMS Nottingham. [70948]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* HMS Nottingham deployed for duties associated with the Five Power Defence Arrangements including Exercise Stardex. She was subsequently assigned to Coalition maritime operations in the Middle East, and was being held at notice for this purpose while deployed to the Asia Pacific region. She was also programmed to undertake a series of port visits in support of our defence diplomacy goals and wider security objectives in the region. It will not be possible to deploy another ship to undertake the full range of these duties. However, HMS York has been nominated as the ship held at readiness in support of the fight against terrorism, and options are being investigated for United Kingdom participation in Ex Stardex.

HMS Southampton

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the repairs to HMS Southampton cost following her accident in the Gulf in 1988; and how long the repairs took to make. [70784]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The repairs to HMS Southampton were combined with the ship's 1989 refit. It is not possible, from existing records, to separate the cost of repairs from those for the refit. However, the overall cost of this package of work including replacement equipment was some £45 million at that time. The duration of the repair and refit was 92 weeks.

Fleet Submarines

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans to extend the service life of fleet submarines. [70788]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Plans to extend the service life of fleet submarines are kept under review as part of the Ministry of Defence's normal planning processes.

C-17 Aircraft

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the RAF's C-17 aircraft have exceeded the flying hours agreed under the terms of their lease; and if he will make a statement; [70783]

(2) what the projected cost is of the lease of C-17 aircraft throughout its entire term. [70780]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) on 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 640W.

Since entering service with the RAF the C-17 fleet has now flown just under twice the hours upon which the support was modelled. The additional support costs arising from this level of flying are in the order of £10 million.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the cost of leasing four C-17 aircraft is greater than purchasing individual C-17 aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [70781]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The detailed lease costs and the underlying aircraft price are commercially sensitive and I am withholding this information under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Type 23 Frigates

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Chilean Government have expressed an interest in existing type 23 frigates or new build vessels; and if he will make a statement. [70789]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 852W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Army Cadets

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of Army cadets in Bridgwater, Somerset. [71240]

Dr. Moonie: I understand that there has been recent progress in the negotiations with Sedgemoor district council in order to identify a suitable location in which to provide a joint cadet centre for both the Army and Air Cadets in Bridgwater. Until these negotiations are concluded, however, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further. Once they are completed I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Navigators

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the redeployment of navigators when the Tornado is replaced by the Eurofighter. [71180]

Dr. Moonie: The planned replacement of the Tornado F3 aircraft by Eurofighter will lead to a phased reduction in the requirement for fast jet navigators in the Royal Air Force over the next 10 years. Those F3 navigators who do not leave at an extant exit point during the draw down will be offered employment opportunities on other aircraft types. They will be redeployed as appropriate, taking account of individuals' skill sets, personal aspirations and service needs.

HMS Fearless

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on HMS Fearless; and what plans he has to bring the ship back into service while the launch of HMS Albion is delayed. [71534]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 17 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 275W, to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), and on 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 234W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Wind Farms

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of the development of large scale wind farms in the North sea on *(a)* existing radar defence and *(b)* the UK's ability to co-operate with the USA in respect of the Missile Defence programme; and if he will make a statement. [70045]

Dr. Moonie: All wind farm proposals are examined on a case-by-case basis to establish whether they are likely to have an adverse effect on air defence radar. Rotating turbines can send false returns to radar heads and a study is currently being undertaken in conjunction with the DTI to see what measures, if any, can be taken to mitigate this.

An independent review of the United Kingdom's air defence radar was instituted following the terrorist attacks of 11 September, and this work will inform on-going work on SDR New Chapter.

No assessment has been made of the impact of wind farms on the type of radar currently used for missile early warning, or on those that might be developed for missile tracking, but there is no reason to expect wind farms to affect such radars in view of their different operating characteristics.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if he will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if he will make a statement. [70205]

Dr. Moonie: The expenditure for information literature, advertising and campaign material is spread among many different budgets and budget holders. The information is not therefore held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. More general information on advertising and publicity is expected to be included in the 2001–02 departmental performance report which, will be published later in the year. Copies will be available in the Library of the House.

Royal Military Music School

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's total expenditure relating to the Royal Military Music School, Kneller Hall, Twickenham for each year since 1995. [70517]

Dr. Moonie: Costs are not available for the complete period requested. Information available is as follows:

	£ million
1998–99	1.805
1999–2000	2.546
2000–01	2.414
2001–02	2.287

The figures are cash costs and represent the running costs of the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall excluding the salary costs of students.

Overseas Deployments

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom soldiers were deployed overseas on *(a)* peacekeeping missions and *(b)* active service operations in each year since 1997; and how many United Kingdom soldiers are expected to return from such missions by 1 September. [72075]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mine Countermeasures Vessels

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many mine countermeasures vessels are operational. [70787]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Of 22 Royal Navy mine countermeasures vessels, 19 were operational on 16 July 2002. Of the remainder, one is undergoing a refit, one is at Extended Readiness in her base port, and one is undergoing post-build trials prior to entering fleet service.

Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Ministers in his Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; when and where each meeting took place; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [63069]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 533–34W, by the Minister for Europe, my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain).

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68720]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The FCO's expenditure on overseas trips on departmental business was £9 million in 1997–98, £10.3 million in 1998–99, £9.5 million in 1999–2000, £9.7 million in 2000–01 and £10.9 million in 2001–02. This expenditure covered travel, accommodation and subsistence costs. Detailed information about individual trips is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. All such trips are undertaken in support of our foreign policy objectives and the results are collectively reported to Parliament in the FCO's departmental report. All overseas travel by officials in the FCO is undertaken in accordance with the principles set out in chapter 8 of the Civil Service Management Code, and the detailed rules and guidance set out in the FCO's Code of Management.

Botswana

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what scrutiny has taken place of spending on the programme for supporting and improving protected reserves agreed between the European Union and the Botswanian Government; and with what results. [69226]

Mr. MacShane: No money has yet been disbursed under the EU programme. A steering committee will meet once a quarter to monitor expenditure when the programme has begun. The programme will also be subject to a mid-term review after two-and-a-half years and an end of project review after five years.

G8 Summit

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are for developing a market access initiative for all least developed countries at the G8 level. [69472]

Mr. MacShane: The G8 Action Plan for Africa includes commitments on market access for least developed African countries. These reaffirm pledges made at the United Nations' Third Conference for least developed countries in Brussels in May last year, and reiterated in the context of the Doha development agenda of multilateral trade negotiations. We are keen to see action by other G8 countries to open their markets to LDCs, matching that taken by the EU in its February 2001 "Everything but Arms Initiative". Acting on the Kananaskis commitment to African LDCs would be an important step in this direction.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are for taking forward the commitments made at the G8 summit to support African peace keeping capacity building. [69470]

Mr. MacShane: With its African partners, the G8 intends to deliver a joint plan, by 2003, for the development of African capability to undertake peace support operations (PSO), including at the regional level. This will involve improving co-ordination of existing donor peacekeeping training programmes, especially those of the UK, US and France in West Africa and elsewhere. Joint donor missions will be carried out to assess the logistical and training needs of sub-regional organisations like ECOWAS and SADC to improve, where possible, their capacity. Plans are already well advanced for the co-ordination of G8 support to the establishment of the Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra, Ghana. Bilaterally, the UK is already expanding the capacity of its PSO training programmes in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa and considering how best to provide regional PSO training support in Southern Africa.

Thai Airways Crash

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the crash investigation report into Thai Airways flight TG261; and if he will make a statement. [70761]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The crash investigation report into Thai Airways flight TG261 has not yet been finalised but we are expecting this to issue shortly. Once it has been published and we have received a copy I will be happy to place one in the Library.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when *(a)* he last met and *(b)* plans next to meet representatives of the Kingdom of Thailand in relation to the British nationals killed in the crash of Thai Airways flight TG261 at Surat Thani in 1998; and if he will make a statement. [70762]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), raised the interest of families of British victims in the 1998 Surat Thani crash report with Pracha Guna-Kasem, Chief Adviser to the Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart when he visited Thailand in December 2001. The British Embassy in Bangkok has raised and will continue to raise this matter regularly with the Thai authorities. The most recent contact was on 17 July.

Kenya

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the President of Kenya's proposal to change the law allowing an extension of his presidential term; and if he will make a statement. [69866]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 17 July. 2002]:* On 11 July a KANU spokesman announced that the party would wait to see whether the constitutional commissioners could deliver a draft constitutional Bill by September, before taking any decision on an extension of Parliament or the Presidential term.

Turkey

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Turkish Government with regard to the political situation in Turkey; and if he will make a statement. [71033]

Peter Hain: We have regular discussions with the Turkish Government and are following developments in the Turkish political scene with interest.

Mr. Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press the Pakistani authorities to commute the death sentence passed on Mr. Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh; and if he will make a statement. [70792]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* I spoke to the Pakistani High Commissioner about Mr. Sheikh the day that the sentence was announced. I reminded him of our opposition to the death sentence under all circumstances, and made clear our hope that the Pakistanis would consider commuting the sentence to one of imprisonment.

Gibraltar

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what EU funding, which is not available to the people of Gibraltar, will be made available in the event of an agreement to share the sovereignty of Gibraltar between the United Kingdom and Spain. [71165]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 614W.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the next round of talks under the terms of the Brussels Process will take place. [71595]

Peter Hain: We hope to hold further discussions in the autumn.

Middle East

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 181W, if he will place in the Library his letter to the Board of Deputies of 20 June; and if he will make a statement. [72048]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A copy of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's letter of 20 June to Mrs. Jo Wagerman, President, The Board of Deputies of British Jews, about anti-Semitic articles in the Arab media, has been placed in the Library. The letter sets outs the Government's concern about anti-Semitic incidents and what action the Government have taken to address them.

Overseas Territories

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 175W, on Overseas Territories, which seven Overseas Territories have produced and published statistics over the five year period up to and including either 2000 or 2001; and if he will in each case indicate the years in that period that no publication was made in respect of each overseas territory. [71570]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Further to my answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 175W, on Overseas Territories, the following seven Overseas Territories have produced and published statistics annually over the last five year period: Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Falklands Islands, St. Helena, and Turks and Caicos Islands.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 175W, on Overseas Territories, if he has assessed the recent publication of a compendium of statistics by Gibraltar to be of a standard and detail satisfactory to his Department. [71572]

Peter Hain: Following his request to the Chief Minister of Gibraltar my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has recently received a copy of the Abstract of Statistics from the Government of Gibraltar. We will be assessing its contents in due course.

Kamp van Zeist

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what the total capital costs were of providing the Kamp van Zeist facilities; and what percentage of those costs were met by *(a)* the UK Government, *(b)* the US Government and *(c)* the Scottish Parliament; [63702]

(2) what total current costs were incurred with respect to the Kamp van Zeist facilities; and what percentage of these costs were met by *(a)* the UK Government and *(b)* the Scottish Parliament. [63709]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Scottish Executive was responsible for the conduct of the Lockerbie trial and incurred all of the associated capital costs. These capital costs, currently estimated at £11.5 million, were fully reimbursed by the Government. To date, the US Government have contributed some £15 million to the overall costs, both capital and current, of the trial and subsequent appeal.

Total current costs are estimated to be £63.8 million over the financial years 1998–99 through to 2001–02, but final audited figures for 2001–02 have yet to be finalised. It is also likely that there will be some further current costs into the current financial year 2002–03, though the sums involved will be relatively small. The site was returned to the Dutch Government on 2 April 2002. 80 per cent. of the current costs are being funded by the Government and 20 per cent. by the Scottish Executive.

SCOTLAND

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47153]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Since that date there have been two occasions when a special adviser has accompanied Scotland Office Ministers on overseas visits.

The details of these visits are as follows:

Year	*Occasions*	*Country visited*	*Cost of visit (£)*
2001–02	1	Belgium	545.87
2002–03	1	Spain	728.61

All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Handbook.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many times Ministers in her Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47112]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 552W.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her policy is on overtime payments for staff in her Department. [49116]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office policy on overtime follows the principles detailed in Section 9 of the Civil Service Management Code. This sets out terms and conditions relating to hours of work and how staff should be compensated for working outside their normal pattern of attendance.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible in each of the last five years. [50306]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The Department is responsible for one non-departmental public body, the Boundary Commission for Scotland.

Salary costs for the Commission were as follows:

	£
1999–2000	37,018
2000–01	41,885
2001–02	54,163

Prior to 1999, staffing support for the Commission was provided by the former Scottish Office.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [60999]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which organisations and outside bodies which were in receipt of grant in 1997–98 no longer are; what the annual saving is *(a)* individually and *(b)* in aggregate; which organisations and outside bodies which were not in receipt of grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost (i) individually and (ii) in aggregate is. [62049]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 137W.

Public Inquiries

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her policy is on using 0870 telephone numbers for inquiries by the public to the Department and its agencies. [66198]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department does not use 0870 telephone numbers for inquiries by the public.

Building Values

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the buildings owned by her Department and estimate the market value of each of them. [66950]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) on 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 339W.

Gender Impact Assessments

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the subjects of the gender impact assessments drawn up by her Department since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [66733]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date, no gender impact assessments have been drawn up by the Department.

Data Series

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new data series, separated by *(a)* gender, *(b)* race, *(c)* disability and *(d)* age have been commissioned by her Department since August 1997. [66735]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date no new data series has been commissioned in the Department.

Equal Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she has established a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment; and what progress has been achieved. [66736]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* My Department does not deliver executive services to the public. No baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment has been drawn up.

Open Source Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in her Department. [69328]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department does not currently use open source software. The Government will publish its policy for open source software in summer 2002.

Consultation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available on-line, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69798]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date, the Department has undertaken one public consultation exercise, on the size of the Scottish Parliament.

Copies of the consultation paper were available in print and on-line. The consultation was launched on 18 December 2001 and the period given for responses closed on 29 March 2002.

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost was of publishing her Department's and its predecessor's annual report for each of the past five years. [70484]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present from on 1 July 1999. The cost of publishing my Department's annual reports were as follows:

1999–2000: £1,020

2000–01: £3,160

2001–02: £3,869.

The costs of publishing reports of the former Scottish Office are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Press Officers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* full-time equivalents were employed by her press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in her press office in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [70546]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Since that date the Department has had four full-time press officers. No secondees have been placed in my Department's press office.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if she will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if she will make a statement. [70207]

Mrs. Liddell: In 2001–02, my Department spent £180,000 on advertising material. Most of this expenditure related to election or electoral registration matters.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what her policy is on overtime payments for staff in her Department. [49117]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [60998]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Building Values

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General if she will list the buildings owned by her Department and estimate the market value of each of them. [66951]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, on 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 339W.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Further Education

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the effect the pay and conditions of service of further education lecturers has on her strategy for raising standards in the further education sector. [65076]

Margaret Hodge: As independent organisations it is for further education (FE) colleges to agree the pay and the terms and conditions of their staff within the context of the overall resources available to them.

Extra resources have been made available to FE colleges to support improvements in pay and conditions and to help raise standards in colleges. The total funding for FE has increased by over £1.1 billion between 1997–98 and 2002–03, a 20 per cent. real terms increase. In 2002–03, the Learning and Skills Council has increased colleges' participation funding rates by 2.5 per cent. in cash terms, compared to a 1.5 per cent. increase in 2001–02. We planned to increase total spend on FE by over £300 million in 2003–04. However, the Chancellor's statement of 15 July giving additional resources for education, including a 1 per cent. per annum real terms increase for FE in the unit of core funding, will mean more money in 2003–04 than originally planned, and further real terms increases in future years. We also expect to announce in due course substantial additional resources to take forward elements of the "Success for All" strategy for reforming further education and training.

As part of the overall funding allocation, we are investing more than £300 million in the Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI) to help modernise FE pay arrangements and to recruit, reward and retain teachers and lecturers as part of our drive to improve teaching and learning. We want to see all staff in the sector have a more attractive career structure, increased rewards for their efforts, and support for continuing professional training and development. Developing excellence in teaching and leadership is a key goal in our strategy for reforming the FE sector.

Student Funding

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the unit of funding was for each student in FE and HE in each of the years 1992–93 to 2001–02 as expressed at 2001–02 prices. [65397]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* The unit of funding expressed at 2001–02 prices for FE and HE are set out in the table:

	Unit of funding	
	FE total funding	*Higher education*
1992–93	—	6,320
1993–94	3,910	5,970
1994–95	3,810	5,810
1995–96	3,560	5,550
1996–97	3,470	5,190
1997–98	3,390	5,030
1998–99	3,350	5,030
1999–2000	3,600	5,020
2000–01 (provisional)	3,640	4,970
2001–02 (plans)	3,810	5,020

Medical Students

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 24 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 674W, on medical degree places, how many students applied for medical degree courses in each year since 1997. [71159]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The information is shown in the table.

Students applying to pre-clinical medical courses in the UK

Year of entry	*Applicants*[1]
1997	12,076
1998	11,807
1999	10,972
2000	10,226
2001	10,231

[1] Home and overseas students applying via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

Despite a substantial increase in the number of students studying pre-clinical medicine from 5,020 in 1997 to 5,928 in 2001, the number of applications to places remains just under two to one.

GCSE

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total GCSE points score for *(a)* all pupils, *(b)* pupils in the upper quartile and *(c)* pupils in the lower quartile was in (i) specialist schools designated on or before September 1 1996 (ii) specialist schools designated after September 1996 and (iii) all schools in each of the last five years. [69693]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information is shown in the following table.

Average[1] *GCSE/GNVQ point score in academic year*

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
(a) All pupils					
Maintained mainstream	37.0	38.0	39.1	39.8	40.0
Specialist pre 1996	41.2	42.5	43.8	45.0	45.5
Specialist post 1996	37.9	38.8	40.2	40.7	41.2
(b) Pupils in upper quartile					
Maintained mainstream	59.4	60.9	62.0	62.8	63.4
Specialist pre 1996	62.8	65.0	65.9	67.2	68.1
Specialist post 1996	60.0	61.5	62.3	63.5	64.5
(c) Pupils in lower quartile					
Maintained Mainstream	13.4	13.8	14.9	15.2	15.0
Specialist pre 1996	17.6	18.2	19.6	20.7	20.4
Specialist post 1996	14.3	14.7	15.9	16.2	16.1

[1] The average GCSE/GNVQ point score is calculated as the total points achieved by all 15-year-old pupils in the relevant schools divided by the number of 15-year-olds attempting GCSEs.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if she will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if she will make a statement. [70214]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: In 2001–02, the Department spent £11.688 million from its centrally held Advertising and Publicity Budget, which covers information literature, advertising and campaign material. There is additional spend from departmental programme budgets on publicity activity but this could be identified only at disproportionate cost.

It is possible, however, to list advertising campaigns drawn from all departmental budgets. Campaigns where the spend exceeded £250,000 were as follows:

Science Year

New Deal 50+

Child care Recruitment

Foundation Degrees

Adult Basic Skills ("Get On")

Connexions

Fast Track Teaching

Parents' magazine ("Parents + Schools")

Widening Participation in Higher Education (Aimhigher)

Millennium Volunteers

Child care Link

Modern Apprenticeships.

Youth

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the EU committee for the implementation of the Community action programme concerning co-operation policy in the youth field, including European voluntary service and youth exchange within the Community and with third countries (YOUTH) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70897]

Margaret Hodge: The EU Youth Committee normally meets twice a year in June and December. As yet no date has been finalised by the European Commission for the next meeting.

The UK is represented on the committee by one official from the Joint International Unit of the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions. The Scottish Executive is consulted in advance about the content of the meetings, and makes its views known, in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations.

Asylum Seekers

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many asylum-seeking children *(a)* entered and *(b)* left school in each Government Office region, broken down by (i) age profile and (ii) the first language spoken, at the latest date for which figures are available. [69971]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Information on the number of children of asylum seekers in schools is not collected centrally.

The Refugee Council has estimated that there are in the region of 80,000 children of asylum seekers and refugees in schools in the United Kingdom.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in her Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68732]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: All overseas travel by officials in my Department is undertaken in accordance with the principles set out in Chapter 8 of the 'Civil Service Management Code', and the detailed rules and guidance set out in the departmental 'Travel and Transfer Guide'. The detailed information requested about individual trips is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Office

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* post offices and *(b)* sub-post offices closed in Scotland in each year since 1997, broken down by local authority area. [71126]

Mr. Timms: I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that data on post office closures are not collated on a local authority area basis but will in future be collated on the basis of UK parliamentary constituencies.

I am also informed that data by country on net post office closures are not available before 1998 but that net closures in Scotland by financial year since then were as follows:

	Number of closures
Year to end March 1999	25
Year to end March 2000	27
Year to end March 2001	63
Year to end March 2002	26

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1388W, on the Post Office, if she will make a statement on the level of performance of first class deliveries between Wirral and London in 2001. [69779]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* Targets for the Royal Mail's scheduled services and standards are set in the licence issued by the Postal Services Commission (Postcomm) and agreed between Consignia and the Consumer Council for Postal Services (Postwatch). As the level of performance of first class deliveries between Wirral and London is a matter for the company I have asked Consignia chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are being proposed for Post Office staff and customers to deal with *(a)* balance disputes, *(b)* lost or stolen cards and *(c)* lost PIN numbers for Post Office card account holders; and if she will make a statement. [70190]

Mr. Timms: These are matters which fall within the day to day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Genetic Modification

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what responsibilities she holds in respect of genetic modification; how this connects with *(a)* DEFRA and *(b)* the Department of Health; and if she will make a statement. [69773]

Ms Hewitt: DEFRA has the lead responsibility for genetic modification (GM) policy, sets the regulations concerning the deliberate release and marketing of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and funds a research programme to underpin these regulatory activities. Although DTI has no formal responsibility for GM policy, it leads on competitiveness issues and sponsors the biotechnology sector. The Office of Science and Technology (OST) in the DTI supports the Chief Scientific Advisor in his oversight of transdepartmental science and technology. The OST also funds the Research Councils.

The Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC), the Government's independent strategic advisory body on biotechnology issues affecting agriculture and the environment, advises my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the devolved Administrations, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

The Government Departments, including DEFRA, DTI, Department of Health, and the devolved Administrations and agencies work closely together to ensure a co-ordinated approach on GM. In particular, all three Departments are represented on the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Biotechnology—SCI(BIO)—whose terms of reference are

> "to consider issues relating to biotechnology—including those arising from genetic modification, biotechnology in healthcare and genetic issues—and their economic impact; and to report as necessary to the Committee on Science Policy".

Mineworkers' Pension Funds

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to complete her review of the usage of the surpluses of the two mineworkers' pension funds. [71470]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on 18 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 442W.

Farm Bill

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she is making to the US Government on the proposed Farm Bill; and if she will make a statement. [67598]

Ms Hewitt: HMG are in continual dialogue with the US Government at all levels concerning the US Farm Bill (the "Farm Security and Rural Investment Act 2002"). We have made clear to the US Government our considerable disappointment with the Farm Bill, especially in the context of the Doha Development Agenda, which committed all WTO members to substantial reductions in trade-distorting domestic support.

The US believes the Farm Bill is compatible with their World Trade Organisation commitments and have stressed their intention to remain fully engaged in the Doha negotiations. I will continue to strongly encourage them to do so and to put forward practical proposals to achieve the Doha commitments in agriculture.

US Steel Tariffs

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the US steel tariffs. [69481]

Ms Hewitt: The US action is unjustified and deeply regrettable. The Government fully support the European Commission's robust response in immediately pursuing WTO action and took a lead in pressing for EU safeguard action to protect the UK and EU steel industry against diversion of trade.

We are also proactively negotiating in support of the efforts of UK companies to secure product exclusions from the US measures.

Child Labour

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has to control imports of goods produced by child labour. [69743]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are opposed to the use of trade sanctions to enforce labour standards and believes that the setting and monitoring of labour standards are matters to be dealt with by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The Government strongly support the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which reaffirms the commitment of all ILO member states to respect, promote and implement fundamental labour standards, including the abolition of child labour. The UK has ratified ILO Conventions 138 (Minimum Age) and 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour), and supports the ILO's International Programme on Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

Russian Federation (G8 Assistance)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what budget she has allocated for 2002–03 to implement the G8 agreement on assistance to the Russian Federation with nuclear security and decommissioning. [69533]

Mr. Wilson: The Government initiated a £84 million programme to address the nuclear legacy in the Former Soviet Union in April 2001, and the budget for 2002–03 is £27.4 million. The programme is expected to support a wide range of nuclear legacy issues across the Former Soviet Union with much of the work undertaken in Russia associated with the decommissioning of nuclear submarines, plutonium disposition and the development of Non-weapons related employment in closed nuclear cities.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much financial support was granted to the Russian Federation for nuclear security and decommissioning, broken down by title of each individual project supported in each of the last 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [69534]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 8 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 588W, in which I provided information on Government expenditure on decommissioning of nuclear installations and equipment in the Former Soviet Union.

The UK has provided support to countries of the Former Soviet Union through a Health and Safety Programme and the 'Nuclear Safety Programme' since the mid 1990s. However, there has been only one UK funded Russian Federation project associated with the decommissioning of RBMK reactors. This was in 1997–98 and UK contribution was (£30,000). There is a further £66,000 decommissioning project concerned with reactor sealing at the Beloyarsk nuclear power plant of units but absence of a legal agreement covering liabilities, site access and tax issues which we are negotiating with the Russian Authorities is delaying its start up.

On security, the UK has assisted with the provision of a physical protection system for the icebreaker 'Sevmorput' in the Murmansk Shipping Company's atomic fleet. This was in 2001–02 and total cost to UK was £458K.

The UK (DTI) has also funded a range of activities with the Russian Federation both to help improve understanding of nuclear safeguards generally and also to improve arrangements for nuclear materials accountancy at specific Russian facilities. The programme has included nuclear safeguards and materials accountancy seminars and training courses for Russian regulators and facility operators (approximately £550k since 1993), and co-operative projects to improve nuclear materials accountancy arrangements at the Mayak RT-1 reprocessing plant (approximately £500k since 1994) and the Angarsk enrichment plant (approximately £110k since 1998).

Employment Relations Act

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review the Employment Relations Act 1999. [71792]

Alan Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 11 July 2002 to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda), which announced a review of the operation of the Employment Relations Act 1999. The terms of reference of the review and a schedule describing the Act have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

National Business Debtline

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many businesses have received advice from the National Business Debtline; if the pilot project will be extended beyond three years; and if she will make a statement. [70201]

Nigel Griffiths: At the end of business on Friday 12 July 2002 the Business Debtline had answered calls from 11,008 different businesses since the pilot started. Approximately 19–20 per cent. of the callers ring on more than one occasion and this is not reflected in the 11,008 calls referred to above.

The project will be evaluated in the coming months and a decision will be made in the light of the results of the evaluation and in conjunction with the banks, who are our partners in this, as to whether it will be extended beyond three years.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the costs were of the survey, in October 2001, to measure the success of the advertising campaign in the autumn regarding the Business Link brand. [70199]

Nigel Griffiths: Pre and post campaign tracking research for the autumn 2001 advertising campaign cost £61,270. This cost excludes VAT.

The tracking research measured a number of factors before and after the campaign to assess the impact of the advertising activity. These included: awareness of Business Link; claimed source of awareness; recognition of the national Business Link advertising; and usage of Business Link.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the costs were of the advertising campaign in autumn 2001 to promote the Business Link brand. [70198]

Nigel Griffiths: The cost of the autumn 2001 advertising campaign was £2.3 million.

This cost excludes VAT. This total cost also includes the cost of all research undertaken for the campaign.

This campaign consisted of TV, national press and online advertising, and direct mail.

Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much debt is guaranteed by the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme; and if she will make a statement. [70200]

Nigel Griffiths: During the financial year ending 31 March 2002 the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme guaranteed loans to the value of £255 million.

Since the Scheme started in June 1981, over £3 billion of loans have been guaranteed.

Business University

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made on plans to create a business university for business support. [69679]

Ms Hewitt: The Business Link 'U' has been established for the Small Business Service (SBS), Business Link Operators (BLO) and partners, fulfilling the 2001 Small Business Manifesto commitment to "Create a Business University for Business Support". The 'U' is the world's first virtual corporate university for business development professionals.

Progress so far includes:

management structures are in place, including the appointment of a 'U' Governing Board, Principal and Director;

five initial faculties have been set up (core, customer facing, leadership, marketing and business development);

learning needs analyses have been conducted for business advisers;

'Subject Area Expert' teams have been identified from within the SBS/BLO network and training will commence in September.

Venture Capital

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received regarding the encouragement of venture capital in the UK. [71023]

Nigel Griffiths: We have received no recent representations regarding the encouragement of venture capital. However, the Government fully recognise the importance of the venture capital industry to the UK economy and, since coming to office, has taken a number of measures aimed at creating an economic environment in which it can flourish. We have also been working closely with venture capital firms on programmes such as Regional Venture Capital Funds, the UK High Technology Fund and the Community Development Venture Fund. This has involved regular contacts with representatives of the venture capital industry at both ministerial and official level.

Export Credits Guarantee

Chris McCafferty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of export credit guarantees in 2001 was for environmental technology or services exports. [69413]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* For the financial year 2000–01, 1.2 per cent. of ECGD business issued/underwritten during the year was in respect of environmental technology projects or investments. This figure rose to 7.2 per cent. in 2001–02, a five-fold increase on the previous year.

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards establishing a trading fund for the Export Credits Guarantee Department. [72213]

Ms Hewitt: Earlier this year on 7 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1074W, I told the House that ECGD would give priority to its business and systems in order to make itself ready for establishment as a capitalised Trading Fund, my preferred option for its future operation. Work has now progressed sufficiently for me to confirm that ECGD will become a Trading Fund.

In making this commitment, I am conscious of the need for ECGD to complement market provision of export insurance and guarantees. As a result, ECGD should do more to stimulate the private market and develop new ways of working with them to benefit the UK economy by supporting UK exporters and investors in overseas markets.

ECGD will have greater operational autonomy as a Trading Fund. This will offer an improved service to customers, who have expressed concern during the programme of work, about ECGD's ability to provide adequate levels of support to exporters. Customers can expect greater clarity and certainty as to the levels of ECGD's support. I have also asked ECGD to improve its customer care for new customers and make it easier for them to access its support.

Research jointly commissioned by ECGD and HM Treasury from National Economic Research Associates (NERA) to quantify the net benefits to the UK economy of ECGD's operations will be published in due course.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury—who has been closely involved with this whole process—and I have jointly commissioned ECGD and the Treasury to develop multilateral strategies to secure more robust financial disciplines in respect of Government supported export credit agencies.

Work will now continue to prepare ECGD for Trading Fund status. I will review the position—including the need to hold a further consultation—and will announce a timetable in the autumn.

Industrial Growth

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which industrial sectors within the UK she estimates have the greatest growth potential. [63804]

Ms Hewitt: The Department does not make predictions about which UK sectors have the greatest growth potential. We look at a range of factors that impact on productivity and competitiveness across the UK economy.

Export Licences

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list those countries which have during the last 12 months imported defence equipment from the USA which incorporates equipment exported from the UK to the USA following the granting of an export licence by her Department. [69110]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation does not hold records on actual exports of defence equipment from the USA to a third country.

All relevant export licence applications, including where it is understood that the items are to be incorporated into products for onward export, are rigorously assessed on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 8 July 2002, *Official Report,* columns 650–52W.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will determine export licence application 33863 in respect of *(a)* an order for CHAFF and *(b)* a repeat order for defensive infra-red flares. [70794]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Licences to export arms and other items whose export is controlled for strategic reasons are issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry acting through the Export Control Organisation.

A decision has not yet been reached on export licence application 33863, but will be taken as quickly as possible consistent with the need to give full consideration to the issues involved.

E-Commerce

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps she is taking to encourage the private sector to invest and participate in the consumer market for e-commerce services; and if she will make a statement; [71599]

(2) what steps she is taking to encourage the private sector e-commerce and software industries to serve the public; and if she will make a statement. [71598]

Mr. Timms: The Government recognise the importance and the potential of ICT industries which increasingly underpin much of what is happening elsewhere in the economy. There are many initiatives under way, often in partnership with industry, that aim to encourage growth and awareness of e-commerce and the ICT industries, including UK online for business, the Information Age Partnership and e-Shopping.

Open Source Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in her Department. [69329]

Ms Hewitt: I support the use of open source software where it would provide long-term benefits to the Department.

To date, there is minimal use of open source software in the Department's core IT services, but UNITAS regularly review whether its application would benefit the Department and if this is found to be the case, its introduction would be supported.

The Office of Government Commerce and the Office of the eEnvoy have published a draft policy on the use of open source software which was made available for consultation from December 2001 until March 2002. The draft policy is available for viewing on the OeE Govtalk website reference http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/rfc/rfc_document.asp?docnum=429 and it is planned to publish the policy in summer 2002. The DTI's use of open source software will follow the Government Policy when published.

Computer Hacking

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases of computer hacking her Department has recorded in 2002; and on how many occasions in 2002 her Department's computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers operating *(a)* within and *(b)* outside her Department. [69454]

Ms Hewitt: During 2002, there have been no reported or detected occasions that my Department's computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers, either from within or outside.

Policy Review of Fusion

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government will publish the findings of the Policy Review of Fusion. [68858]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The findings of the Policy Review of Fusion were incorporated into the report on the Quinquennial Review of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, published on 28 November 2001, and as such are already in the public domain.

BNFL

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the viability of BNFL's business plan of 2000. [66100]

Mr. Wilson: The Department and its advisers review BNFL's Corporate Plan annually as part of the strategic oversight of the company. The 2000 plan was subject to a review as part of that process.

Uranium Mining

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received from *(a)* UK non-governmental organisations, *(b)* non-UK non-governmental organisations and *(c)* other Governments regarding (i) uranium mines, (ii) uranium milling plants, and (iii) uranium tailing waste disposal facilities from which the United Kingdom has obtained its mined uranium. [69442]

Mr. Wilson: None.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent information she has received and what measures she has in place to monitor the health and safety of workers and environmental standards at *(a)* uranium mines, *(b)* uranium milling plants and *(c)* uranium tailing waste disposal facilities from which the United Kingdom has obtained its mined uranium. [69452]

Mr. Wilson: None. You should take up any issue about the environment with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and any issues on health and safety of workers with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Nuclear Power

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding unfulfilled overseas nuclear fuel contracts; and what the expected cost overruns are in respect of these contracts. [66101]

Mr. Wilson: I am assuming the question relates to existing contracts between BNFL and overseas electricity utilities for reprocessing spent nuclear fuel rather than to contracts for the supply of fresh fuel. The Government's position is that these contracts are binding, are supported by intergovernmental agreements and should be honoured. Details of contract prices, operating costs and throughput schedules are a commercial matter for BNFL and its customers.

Sellafield

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received regarding *(a)* current leakage levels of technetium-99 into groundwater at Sellafield and *(b)* the point source origin of such leakage. [69505]

Mr. Wilson: None. However, I have replied to two previous questions on this matter tabled by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on 13 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 80 and my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 562.

Nuclear Reactor Safety

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations her Department has received concerning nuclear reactor safety regulations reform; and if she will make a statement. [69444]

Mr. Wilson: In the course of its regular contacts with companies in the nuclear industry, my Department has received representations in recent months on aspects of the nuclear safety regulatory system. Where appropriate, I have taken these into account in the White Paper 'Managing the Nuclear Legacy' published on 4 July, which also made reference to the joint review being undertaken on nuclear regulation by the Government's advisory committees, the Nuclear Safety Advisory Committee and the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee. I look forward to receiving comments on the White Paper, including its consideration of regulatory issues, by the closing date for consultation, 18 October.

Nuclear Industry

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) at what intervals reviews are conducted of the level of nuclear industry liability in respect of a nuclear accident; and when the next review is planned to take place; [71477]

(2) what measures are used in setting the nuclear industry's level of liability in respect of a nuclear accident; and what account is taken of inflation. [71476]

Mr. Wilson: With regard to liability of the UK nuclear industry in the event of a nuclear accident, the UK is a contracting party to the Paris and Brussels conventions on third party liability in the field of nuclear energy. One of the underlying principles of the Paris convention is that all liability arising from a nuclear accident is channelled to the operator of the nuclear installation on a no fault basis. Present UK legislation requires operators to cover their liability by insurance, (the Nuclear Installations Act 1965) and operator's liability is currently limited to a maximum £140 million per accident.

Liability amounts are reviewed by the UK along with our international partners and were last increased in 1990. The Paris and Brussels conventions are currently in the process of revision with a view to substantially increase the operator's liability to £430 million per accident.

On entry into force, the revised Paris and Brussels conventions will provide for a review of liability amounts every five years.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria are applied in varying the salary of the BNFL chairman. [71512]

Mr. Wilson: The starting fee of £150,000 per annum for the chairman of BNFL was set in October 1999 for a period of three years. The increase, effective from 1 October 2002—equivalent to just over 3 per cent. per annum—was considered to be an appropriate increase in recognition of the service provided by Mr. Collum since he became chairman. This is close to the average level of increase awarded to BNFL staff in each of those three years.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals her Department has received regarding the extension between refuelling periods for nuclear reactors. [71546]

Mr. Wilson: None.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations her Department has received regarding the continued operation of BNFL magnox stations. [71532]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL informed the Department of its intention to bring forward the closure dates of the Calder Hall and Chapelcross stations on 22 May 2002.

The Government launched a consultation on energy policy on 14 May with a view to publishing a White Paper around the turn of the year. The role of nuclear is one of the key issues raised in the document. We shall be posting the replies to the consultation on the DTI's website.

Nuclear Waste

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations her Department has received concerning the adequacy of security provision in the event of *(a)* an accident and *(b)* a terrorist attack involving the transportation of nuclear waste in (i) an urban and (ii) a rural environment. [69137]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has received a large volume of representations from hon. Members, their constituents and others over safety and security in the civil nuclear industry, including the transport of nuclear material in all environments, in the period since the attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many tonnes of nuclear waste was imported and reprocessed in the UK in each year since 1997; and what the projected amount is in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004. [69037]

Mr. Wilson: The United Kingdom does not allow the import of "nuclear waste". Spent nuclear fuel belonging to overseas owners is imported for reprocessing in the UK. Details of fuel deliveries and the programming of reprocessing fuel owned by individual customers are operational and commercial matters for BNFL and its customers. It can be noted, however, that BNFL published in 1993 a document setting out the economic and commercial justification for THORP. This included details of the amounts of fuel contracted for reprocessing during the baseload period of THORP's operation. From this it can be seen that the total amount of overseas owned fuel to be reprocessed during that period is 4,547 tonnes.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much nuclear waste was *(a)* generated and *(b)* reprocessed within the UK in each year since 1997. [69034]

Mr. Wilson: Radioactive waste is defined as

"any material which contains or is contaminated by radionuclides and for which no use is foreseen".

Such waste is conditioned for long-term storage. Information on the amount of radioactive waste that is held in the UK and also on predicted future arisings of such waste is published every three years by DEFRA and NIREX Ltd. in the National Radioactive Waste Inventory. The most recent inventory was published in 1999. A copy is in the Libraries of the House. An updated edition of the inventory is due for publication later this year. Reprocessing is an activity carried out in order to recover reusable materials from spent nuclear fuel and to separate out the waste contained in the spent fuel. Radioactive waste is not reprocessed. Details of annual throughput at the reprocessing plants at Sellafield are an operational and commercial matter for BNFL.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many tonnes of nuclear waste were transported by rail in the UK in each year since 1997; and what was *(a)* the source and *(b)* the destination of the waste. [69135]

Mr. Wilson: I am assuming the question relates to movements by rail of spent nuclear fuel discharged from UK nuclear power stations. Spent nuclear fuel from the UK's Magnox and Advanced Gas Cooled Reactor power stations is routinely transported by rail to the Sellafield site in Cumbria for reprocessing. The power stations that are the source of the spent fuel are situated throughout Great Britain.

The total volume of spent fuel that is transported in any given year would depend entirely on operational factors. Such transports are undertaken by Direct Rail Services (DRS), BNFL's rail freight subsidiary. DRS does not collate information on the total tonnage of fuel that is transported each year. To try to obtain the information requested from the records held at the power stations and Sellafield would involve disproportionate time and cost.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department has taken to *(a)* review and *(b)* increase security measures for (i) nuclear facilities and (ii) transportation of nuclear materials including (A) MOX plutonium and (B) nuclear waste following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. [69138]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI's Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS), the security regulator, sets stringent standards for security at nuclear sites and for the security of nuclear material during transportation. Security precautions are kept under regular review and have been reviewed in the light of the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001. Security has been enhanced since the events of 11 September. It is not Government policy to disclose details of these security arrangements.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations her Department has received concerning the length of time a train carrying nuclear waste may safely be left stationary and the *(a)* environmental and *(b)* health implications if this time scale is exceeded. [69041]

Mr. Wilson: None.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what security measures are employed, and at what cost, during the transportation of nuclear waste within the UK. [69133]

Mr. Wilson: Security measures for nuclear material during transportation are regulated by the DTI's Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS), the security regulator. It is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken in connection with nuclear material. The costs of security measures are met by the operators.

Ofgem

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under what statutory powers Ofgem operates. [72561]

Mr. Wilson: Ofgem derives its powers from the Gas Act 1986; Electricity Act 1989; Gas Act 1995; Utilities Act 2000; Fair Trading Act 1973; Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976; and the Competition Act 1998.

It also has powers under the Stop Now Orders (EC Directives) Regulations 2001 and the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999.

Downstream Oil Industry Forum

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the terms of reference are of the Downstream Oil Industry Forum; who the members of the forum are; when the first meeting of the forum will be; who will chair the forum; and if she will make a statement. [70326]

Mr. Wilson: I have invited the main trade associations in the oil distribution and marketing sector (Association of United Kingdom Oil Independents (AUKOI), Federation of Petroleum Suppliers Ltd. (FPS), Petrol Retailers Association (PRA), UK Petroleum Industry Association (UKPIA)), and some of their members to join me for a discussion on 24 July 2002.

This will be an informal discussion under my chairmanship and there are no formal terms of reference. Discussion will focus on the following:

(a) The distribution infrastructure (including its longer-term maintenance, use and implications for security of supply).

(b) Service to motorists in rural areas.

Carbon Dioxide (Underground Sequestration)

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the sites under consideration for underground sequestration of carbon dioxide. [71524]

Mr. Wilson: While no decision has yet been made with regard to specific sites as planning is currently only at the initial stages, those currently under consideration all lie in the UK offshore economic zone.

Wind Farms

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the United Kingdom's electrical power came from wind power in the last year for which figures are available; and what is being done to increase the amount of wind farms. [70802]

Mr. Wilson: In 2001, the last year for which figures are available, electricity generation from wind power in the United Kingdom was 965 GWh. This was 0.3 per cent. of total UK electricity generation for that year.

Wind energy, along with other forms of renewable energy, stands to benefit substantially from the introduction of the Renewables Obligation from 1 April this year. This places an obligation on electricity suppliers to supply a specified proportion of their electricity from renewable sources. The level of the Obligation is set to rise each year reaching a target of 10 per cent. by 2010, by which time its value could be up to £1 billion per year. The Obligation has been set up for a 25 year period (2002–27), providing the right climate for expansion of wind energy and renewable energy generally.

Wind energy, along with other renewables, also benefits from exemption from the Climate Change Levy.

The Government have assigned £74 million over the next three years for capital grants for offshore wind energy projects, where initial capital costs are greater, and the technology is less well established, than is the case for onshore projects. 19 schemes for the development of offshore wind farms have so far been granted leases of areas of the sea bed by the Crown Estate.

We are encouraging a positive approach to new renewable energy proposals, including new wind farm proposals, through regional renewable energy plans and targets.

National Wind Power's Windworks scheme offers farmers and landowners an opportunity to share in the profits of small-scale wind energy projects developed on their land.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many proposals to develop *(a)* onshore and *(b)* offshore wind farms her Department has received in 2002. [71583]

Mr. Wilson: So far in 2002 the Department has received applications for three offshore wind farms (North Hoyle 90 MW, Rhyl Flats 100 MW, Barrow 108 MW) but none for onshore wind farm proposals.

Renewable Energy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's renewable energy supply target is for 2020. [71529]

Mr. Wilson: The Government launched a consultation on energy policy on 14 May with a view to publishing a White Paper around the turn of the year. This consultation covers the issue of a renewable energy supply target to 2020, following a recommendation to Government by the Performance and Innovation Unit that this target should be 20 per cent.

The Government's views will be made known in the White Paper.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which factors have added uncertainty to her predicted future generating costs of power from *(a)* wind power and *(b)* photovoltaic cells. [64343]

Mr. Wilson: Estimates of the future costs of generating electricity from wind and photovoltaic cells are set out in:

> chapter 6 and annex 6 of "The Energy Review", which was produced by the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit (http://www.piu.gov.uk/2002/energy/report/index.htm); and
>
> chapter 5 and annex C of the Inter-Departmental Analysts Group's report, "Long-Term Reductions in Greenhouse Emissions in the UK" (http://www2.dti.gov.uk/energy/greenhousegas/index.htm).

Both reports were published in February 2002 and copies of them are available in the Libraries of the House.

The above publications discuss factors that contribute to uncertainty surrounding future generating costs of different forms of renewable energy. I am not aware of any significant developments since these reports were published that would affect these factors in a material way.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received regarding the intermittency of renewable energy. [71579]

Mr. Wilson: Problems experienced by smaller intermittent generators were raised in the context of the consultation exercise on New Electricity Trading Arrangements (NETA) and smaller generators. A conclusions document was issued in April entitled: "Government Response to the Consultation on NETA and Smaller Generators of 1 November 2001", a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

A number of proposals that smaller intermittent generators suggested to assist them, such as the removal of barriers to consolidation and the reduction of gate closure to one hour, have already been implemented.

Other issues, such as the cost-reflectivity of the balancing mechanism under NETA, will be examined in Ofgem's review of the first year of operation of NETA. The review is expected shortly and a copy will be placed in the Library. The Government will consider in the light of this review whether further changes are required to NETA.

Company Information

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the information that companies are required to provide her Department, indicating where these items are subsequently published. [69401]

Ms Hewitt: Companies registered under the Companies Act are required to deliver certain statutory information to Companies House. This includes their annual financial accounts, details of their directors and shareholders as well as other notifications of changes or events within the company. Under the provisions of the Insolvency Act, they must also deliver details of any insolvency proceedings.

All information delivered to Companies House is made available for public inspection, except in the case of the residential address of directors/secretaries who are beneficiaries of a Confidentiality Order who would be at serious risk of violence or intimidation if their address was made public.

Ministerial Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the annual cost was of ministerial salaries in her Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [60941]

Ms Hewitt: The levels of ministerial salaries are recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body. From May 1997, in this Department there was one Cabinet Minister at an annual salary of £43,991; three Ministers of State at a total annual salary cost of £114,088; and two Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State at a total annual salary cost of £47,246. From June 2001, there was one Cabinet Minister at an annual salary of £68,157; three Ministers of State at a total annual salary cost of £106,068; and two Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State at a total annual salary cost of £53,670.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff have contributed to her Department's input to the Spending Review. [68682]

Ms Hewitt: The Spending Review involved a comprehensive assessment of the Department's performance, priorities and resource requirements and a range of staff made a contribution.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61015]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 130W.

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was of publishing her Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70485]

Ms Hewitt: The costs incurred by the Department for design and artwork of the last five Expenditure Plans Reports are as follows:

	£
	Cost
2002	32,161
2001	35,006
2000	32,727
1999	38,125
1998	34,962

These figures also include the costs incurred in placing electronic versions of the reports on the Departmental website.

Printing costs are met by The Stationery Office, who recoup these costs through sales.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas Party; and how many people attended. [61650]

Ms Hewitt: Christmas parties are held on an individual directorate basis and at no direct cost to the public purse.

Secondees

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was of secondees from her Department to British embassies and consulates overseas in the last 12 months. [67784]

Ms Hewitt: DTI does not second staff to British embassies and consulates overseas. DTI staff taking up postings overseas go on loan to the FCO at no cost to DTI. One position overseas is currently funded by DTI and in the last 12 months the total cost to the Department has been circa £100,000. DTI does, however, fund short-term training attachments to overseas posts for DTI staff under the "Overseas Attachment Training Scheme". This provides for up to 12 staff each year to work in a commercial section overseas for six months. The total cost to the Department in the last 12 months was approximately £400,000.

Stationery

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1376–77W, on stationery, when the next tender process is due to take place; and where it will be advertised. [64341]

Ms Hewitt: The existing stationery contract expires on 31 May 2003. Currently we are exploring options that include using existing Government stationery contracts or conducting our own procurement exercise. In the event of undertaking our own procurement an advert will be placed via OJEC.

Building Values

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the buildings owned by her Department and estimate the market value of each of them. [66955]

Ms Hewitt: The National Asset Register, published in July 2001 (Cm5221), lists assets owned by each Department and their valuation.

Buildings Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost of buildings insurance to her Department was *(a)* before and *(b)* after 11 September 2001. [66937]

Ms Hewitt: Departments are required to comply with the Government's general policy on insurance, which is set out in Government Accounting, Chapter 30, para 30.2.5, which notes that the Government do not need to purchase insurance to protect the viability of its business, and should consider insurance only where the value of claims met would exceed the cost of insurance premiums. Commercial insurance of a building is acceptable in cases where *(a)* insurance is a condition of a lease *(b)* the lessor will not accept a Government indemnity *(c)* incurring the total cost of the accommodation in question, including the cost of the insurance, is more cost-effective than other accommodation options [Government Accounting, para 30.2.11a]. Therefore, my Department does not normally insure the buildings it occupies. However, in some instances our landlords do insure their buildings and we make annual payments of around £100,000 to cover this. These payments have not risen since 11 September 2001.

RDA (Newspapers and Magazines)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money each RDA spent on newspapers and magazines over the last two years. [69397]

Ms Hewitt: The RDAs are not required to report their spend to this level of detail, which could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Each RDA reports a single figure for total spending on administration. Individual RDAs are free to decide the level of detail in their own internal accounting subject to the requirements of Government Accounting and other restrictions.

Public Inquiries

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1092W, if she will make a statement on the nature of the business requirements referred to; and how many 0870 numbers are used. [71129]

Ms Hewitt: My Department uses 0870 numbers for the United Kingdom Information Society technology helpline (UKISHELP) and the Publications Orderline. The Publications Orderline uses three 0870 numbers (general orderline, fax and Minicom).

The use of 0870 numbers conforms with the Office of e-Envoy's Guidelines for UK Government Call Centres and offers a number that is chargeable at the same rate from any fixed telephone regardless of the location of the caller within the UK.

The call centres for both UKISHELP and the Publications Orderline are provided by contractors and an 0870 number has the advantage of providing a geographically independent portable number owned by my Department, so that in the event of a new contractor being appointed the number can be seamlessly transferred without any inconvenience to enquirers.

Written Consultations

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70996]

Ms Hewitt: The Department's designated consultation co-ordinator is Philip Martin of the Better Regulation Team. He can be contacted by telephone on 020 7215 6206, by fax on 020 7215 0480 and by e-mail at Philip.Martin@dti.gsi.gov.uk

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in what format her Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations. [70992]

Ms Hewitt: The Department is committed to the Cabinet Office Code Of Practice on Written Consultation. The Code of Practice requires that decisions in the light of consultation should be made public promptly with a summary of views of expressed, and clear reasons for rejecting options that were not adopted. As far as practicable, this information should be made available to those who responded, including on the Departmental website.

Information on the format of results in each consultation exercise is not held centrally.

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [70995]

Ms Hewitt: All Departmental consultation documents are made available as paper copies.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form her Department has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70993]

Ms Hewitt: All departmental consultation exercises are subject to the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations which came into force on 1 January 2001. The Cabinet Office Code and internal guidance are available to all staff when preparing consultation documents.

Area-based Initiatives

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list for each area-based initiative for which her Department is responsible the amount originally budgeted for in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, stating in each year what funds budgeted for were not spent and if they were carried forward. [71460]

Alan Johnson: The Department is not responsible for any area-based initiatives, as listed by the Office of Deputy Prime Minister Regional Co-ordination Unit.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Financial Services Sector

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Minister for Women what the take-up has been of equal pay questionnaires by women within the financial services sector. [70617]

Ms Hewitt: The Employment Act 2002 provides the power to introduce the equal pay questionnaire through regulations. We will be consulting interested parties on the design and content of the form later this year.

The questionnaire will make it easier for individuals to request key information from their employers about whether they are suffering pay discrimination.

There has as yet been no take up of the questionnaire because it is not yet available to the public.

Returning to Work

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for Women what recent bilateral discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on access to training for women returners to work. [63081]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and I are both committed to expanding opportunities for women returners. My officials from the Women and Equality Unit consulted with officials in the Department for Education and Skills on the unit's recent successful programme of work taster days for women returners. This programme was aimed at women over 40 who had been on extended career breaks or may have never worked and needed help acquiring skills and information to return to paid employment.

The Government, through their range of new deal programmes and employment service programmes, offer back to work help for women returners. Almost 2.4 million women aged 50 to state pension age are in work and 46 per cent. of women aged 50 and above are learners in formal, informal or workplace settings.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Noise

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidelines he has sent to local authorities on the procedures for notifying those against whom complaints have been made about excessive noise prior to an investigation being made; and if he will make a statement. [70008]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

There is no formal procedure for notifying those against whom complaints have been made about excessive noise prior to an investigation being made. However, the types of noise complaints that local authorities are called upon to investigate vary considerably and not all will be considered by the investigating officer to constitute a statutory nuisance. It is common for complaints to receive at least some investigation before the person or business against whom the complaint is made is approached or advised of its receipt. In some instances this may be because the officer handling the complaint decides to try and witness the noise before determining whether or not it merits further investigation as a potential or actual statutory nuisance. In other circumstances it might actually frustrate the investigation of the noise if the person causing it is alerted in advance.

Some individuals take exception to being approached by a local authority without any effort having been made to establish the credibility of the complaint made against them, others may be upset that they have not been contacted immediately. It is not practicable to set out procedures that will satisfy all situations and it is often best that the most appropriate response to a particular complaint is judged by the case officer in the light of his or her knowledge and experience.

An example of the procedures adopted by local authorities is contained within the "Nuisance Guidance Note" published by Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council on their web site at http://www.ellesmereport-neston.gov.uk/. This sets out their particular procedures with regard to noise nuisance and envisages cases where the complainant may not wish monitoring visits to start until after a letter has been sent to the person complained about. Otherwise it seems monitoring is carried out before or at the same time as a letter is sent.

In 1997 the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) produced a noise management guide titled "Guidance on the Creation and Maintenance of Effective Noise Management Policies and Practice for Local Authorities and their Officers". This provides guidance to local authorities on best practice and procedures to be adopted when dealing with noise complaints. To reflect the changes in the noise environment within the UK and the availability of new techniques, CIEH and DEFRA have agreed to jointly revise the document over the next nine months. When this becomes available we will circulate it to all local authorities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and place copies in the House Libraries.

The CIEH guidance is referred to in the Department of the Environment Circular 8/97 dealing with the Noise Act 1996. The Circular provides advice on the investigation of noise complaints but makes it clear that, in the context of that Act,

> "the purpose of the initial investigation is to decide whether or not the noise complained of, exceeds, or might exceed, the permitted level . . .".

The Cabinet Office promotes the adoption and use of the Enforcement Concordat by central and local government organisations with an enforcement function (details are available on their web site). To date 96 per cent. of all such organisations have adopted the Enforcement Concordat. Under the heading "Principles of Good Enforcement: Procedures" is included the following:

> "Before formal enforcement action is taken, officers will provide an opportunity to discuss the circumstances of the case and, if possible, resolve points of difference, unless immediate action is required (for example, in the interests of health and safety or environmental protection or to prevent evidence being destroyed).
>
> Where immediate action is considered necessary, an explanation of why such action was required will be given at the time and confirmed in writing in most cases within five working days and, in all cases, within 10 working days."

In certain circumstances an investigation might necessitate the use of covert surveillance methods, as defined in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). The Home Office Code of Practice on Covert Surveillance provides guidance to public authorities in such cases.

Complaints about excessive noise in the workplace that might be harmful to the hearing of employees in premises that are regulated by local authorities normally would be taken up immediately with the employer.

Crime Reduction Directors

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been allocated to each of the 10 regional crime reduction directors. [69816]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The information is as follows:

£000

Region	2001–02 Expenditure	2002–03 Budget
East	13,569	10,472
East Midlands	15,938	13,277
London	31,911	37,863
North East	11,063	10,081
North West	24,496	27,729
South East	18,409	21,487
South West	12,826	17,102
Wales	8,080	10,162
West Midlands	18,297	18,504
Yorkshire and Humberside	19,346	23,593
Total	173,935	190,270

Funding covers measures and interventions under a range of programmes: the Crime Reduction Programme, Safer Communities Initiative, Communities Against Drugs, Partnership Development Fund (interim allocation for 2002–03), Security for Small Retailers in Deprived Areas.

Crime Reduction Directors also work with their colleagues in the Government offices for the regions and the National Assembly for Wales to ensure that crime reduction is reflected in the delivery of other Departments' programmes. Total funds spent on combating crime in the regions go wider than those administered through Regional Crime Directors.

Retail Crime

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what proportion of each Government office in the regions' annual spending for 2001–02 was allocated to combating retail crime. [69810]

(2) how much was spent on retail crime partnerships in each statutory crime and disorder partnership in the financial year 2001–02. [69811]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The following table sets out the amounts spent by regional crime reduction directors on specific business, (including retail) crime reduction initiatives in 2001–02 and shows these as a proportion of their total spending on crime reduction initiatives. These figures do not include funding spent on non-specific schemes, such as town centre closed circuit television, which will usually benefit businesses in the areas where they operate and which will often have been identified as a priority in consultation with the business community.

The Home Office does not record the amounts spent on retail crime partnerships in each of the 376 statutory crime and disorder partnerships.

Region	Spend on business crime, including retail crime, projects in 2001–02 (£)	Column 2 as a proportion of annual spending of regional crime reduction directors in 2001–02 (percentage)
Eastern	132,262	1.0
East Midlands	221,064	1.4
London	336,225	1.1
North East	262,718	2.4
North West	952,162	3.9
South East	251,500	1.4
South West	94,549	0.7
Wales	132,262	1.6
West Midlands	469,199	2.6
Yorkshire and Humber	325,128	1.7

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates have resigned from the bench since 1 May 1997 other than for reasons of age. [66338]

Yvette Cooper: Between 1 January 1997 and 30 June 2002 6,659 magistrates resigned for reasons other than age.

Consultation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69792]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation applies to all formal national public consultation documents issued by Departments from 1 January 2001 and the information requested is not available before that date. All public consultation papers since January 2001 have been available online and in print. Since 2001, the details are as follows:

Name of consultation paper	Opening date	Closing date
Representative Claims—proposed new procedures	1 February 2001	1 May 2001
Community Legal Service—Financial Conditions for Funding by the Legal Services Commission	12 March 2001	1 May 2001
Pre-Action Protocol for Judicial Review	15 March 2001	7 June 2001
E-conveyancing—A draft order under section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000	19 March 2001	25 June 2001
Distress for Rent	8 May 2001	3 August 2001
Report of the Review Group on the Royal Peculiars	18 July 2001	1 October 2001
Enforcement Review Green Paper	19 July 2001	12 October 2001
The Administrative Court: Proposed changes to Primary Legislation following Sir Jeffrey Bowman's Review of the Crown Office List	31 July 2001	23 October 2001
Payments in to Court in Satisfaction of Claims	16 August 2001	12 November 2001
Report of the Review of Tribunals by Sir Andrew Leggatt	16 August 2001	30 November 2001
General Pre-Action Protocol	12 October 2001	31 January 2002
Payments to Witnesses	5 March 2002	31 May 2002

Name of consultation paper	*Opening date*	*Closing date*
Damages for Future Loss: Giving the Courts the Power to Order Periodical Payments for Future Loss and Care Costs in Personal Injury Cases	13 March 2002	7 June 2002
Freezing Injunctions and Search Orders in Civil Proceedings	21 March 2002	12 June 2002
Promoting Inter-Agency Working in the Family Justice System	27 March 2002	5 July 2002
Making Decisions: Helping people who have difficulty deciding for themselves	10 April 2002	9 July 2002
Selection Procedures for the Circuit Bench and Recordership	8 April 2002	5 July 2002

Departmental Reports

Mr. Beith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost was of publishing his Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70482]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The costs which fell directly on the Lord Chancellor's Department of publishing its Departmental Reports for each of the past five years are: £13,527.07 (1997–98), £8,715.85 (1998–99), £14,614.65 (1999–2000) and £12,109.00 (2000–01). The final invoice for 2001–02 has not yet been received. Other costs of printing and publication are met directly by the publisher, The Stationary Office Limited (TSO), and do not fall to Government.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the review process for a freedom of information complaint. [70887]

Yvette Cooper: The right of access to information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 will come into force on 1 January 2005. Until that date, requests for Government information will be dealt with in accordance with the non-statutory Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

It is for individual bodies to make their own arrangements for the procedure used to review cases internally where information has been refused and the applicant has made a complaint. However, the Guidance on Interpretation of the Code, published by the Cabinet Office, makes it clear that:

> "[Internal Review] should in all cases be a single stage process. The aim should be to ensure that the applicant has been fairly treated under the provisions of the Code, that any exemptions have been properly applied and that charges are reasonably and consistently applied. It is good practice to allow for such review to be conducted by someone not involved in the original decision".

Details of the various internal review procedures which have been adopted by Departments and most agencies or bodies which fall within the scope of the Code of Practice are set out in the annual monitoring reports on the Code. Copies of these reports are available in the House Library. In my Department reviews are carried out by the Head of the appropriate Division and the decision approved by the Permanent Secretary. The target time for responses is 20 working days.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what legislation governs individuals' freedom to request information from the Government. [70888]

Yvette Cooper: This Government introduced the Freedom of Information Act which gives individuals a statutory right to Government information. The Act will be fully implemented by 1 January 2005, 11 months before the deadline set out in the Act itself. Until that date, requests for information are handled in accordance with the non-statutory Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Rape

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to the answer of 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 832W, on rape, if he will place in the Library the content of the Serious Sexual Offences seminar to which he referred. [70890]

Yvette Cooper: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB) which is an independent non-departmental public body. It is chaired by Lord Justice Waller.

The content of the Serious Sexual Offences seminars held on 2–3 July 2001 and 26–27 November 2001 is described in the annual report of the Judicial Studies Board for 2001–02, a copy of which is in the Library.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, whether the Serious Sexual Offences seminar is attended by judges *(a)* before and *(b)* after they are authorised to hear rape trials. [70679]

Yvette Cooper: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB), which is an independent non-departmental public body. It is chaired by Lord Justice Waller.

All Circuit Judges and Recorders are required, by the Lord Chief Justice, to attend a JSB Serious Sexual Offences seminar before they are authorised to hear rape trials. Thereafter, both Circuit Judges and Recorders authorised to hear these cases attend Serious Sexual Offences seminars every three years.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, who teaches the Serious Sexual Offences seminars to judges authorised to hear rape cases. [70685]

Yvette Cooper: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB), which is an independent non-departmental public body. It is chaired by Lord Justice Waller.

The Serious Sexual Offences seminar is chaired by a High Court Judge. The most recent seminar, 8–9 July 2002, was chaired by Mr. Justice Pitchers. The Seminar Director is Judge John Sessions.

Contributors on the most recent seminar were Professor Di Birch, Mrs. Maggie Dodds, Ms Ruth Mann, and Mr. Justice Crane. Details of previous seminars are set out in the annual reports of the Board, copies of which are in the Library.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what steps he will take to ensure improved education for judges into the gender issues in rape trials. [70686]

Yvette Cooper: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB), which is an independent non-departmental public body. It is chaired by Lord Justice Waller.

The subject of education for judges in gender issues, including education for judges in rape trials, is kept under constant review by the Equal Treatment Advisory Committee of the Judicial Studies Board. Gender issues are also covered in Chapter 13 of the JSB's Equal Treatment Bench Book, a copy of which is given to every judge on appointment.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) by when the Judicial Studies Board will have considered the comments made on rape trials by the HMIC/CPSI Thematic report; [70683]

(2) what plans there are for the Judicial Studies Board to report back to her on its consideration of the HMIC/CPSI Thematic report; [70684]

(3) what reports she has received from the Judicial Studies Board in connection with the comments made on rape trials by the HMIC/CPSI Thematic report; [70687]

(4) to whom in her Department, and when, the Judicial Studies Board will report on its consideration of the HMIC/CPSI Thematic report. [70688]

Yvette Cooper: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB), which is an independent non-departmental public body. It is chaired by Lord Justice Waller.

The HMIC/CPSI Thematic report has been referred to the Criminal Committee of the JSB which will consider its response and the manner and form in which this should be communicated to the Lord Chancellor.

New Cities

Bob Spink: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what criteria she uses to determine city status for local authorities; [70815]

(2) how many new cities she expects to create in the next three years. [70816]

Ms Rosie Winterton: City status is not a right that can be claimed by the meeting of specific criteria, but an honour granted by Her Majesty the Queen under the Royal Prerogative, on the advice of Ministers. Important Royal anniversaries (such as The Queen's Golden Jubilee) are the usual occasions for awards of city status to be made. Awards were made, exceptionally, to mark the Millennium. Her Majesty has not yet expressed a wish to create any more new cities and no awards are foreseen in the near future.

Departmental Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* full-time equivalents were employed by The Lord Chancellor's press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [70539]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The number of people who were employed in press or publicity work (excluding internal communications, website developers and administrative support) was as follows:

	Number
1997	5
1998	5
1999	5
2000	9
2001	9
2002[1]	12

[1] July

The increase in press and publicity staff in 2000 reflects new work connected with the Community Legal Service and the Court Service. The increase in 2002 reflects new responsibilities transferred to LCDHQ from the Home Office, Cabinet Office and DTLR.

There have been two secondees working in The Lord Chancellor's Press Office during this period. The first was seconded to work on the launch of the Community Legal Service in April 2000 and is not included in the figure for that year. The second secondee is included in the figure for 2002.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if he will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if he will make a statement. [70211]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have listed the required information for the financial year 2001–02. My Departments did not conduct any campaigns costing over £250,000 during that period.

LCDHQ:

£34,002—Information Literature

Court Service:

£212,720—Information Literature

HM Land Registry:

£140,000—Information Literature

Public Record Office:

£33,400—Information Literature; £5,250 Advertising; £28,500 Campaign Material.

Public Guardianship Office:

£68,761—Information Literature

Northern Ireland Court Service:

£27,885—Information Literature.

Public Record Office

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the nature and status of the Public Record Office projects which were to have been funded by revenue from the 1901 census on-line. [70852]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The PRO did not take account of net income from the 1901 Census online service when assessing funding requirements for its other online projects. However, if there were to be any net income from the service, this would be used to fund the future digitisation of earlier census records.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what proportion of the testing programme for the 1901 census website has been completed; [70854]

(2) whether a million users per hour test has been run on the 1901 census website; and if she will make a statement; [70857]

(3) when she expects the testing programme on the 1901 census website to be completed. [70858]

Ms Rosie Winterton: QinetiQ Ltd, which is the contractor responsible for setting up the 1901 census online website and providing the online service, has been making technical improvements to it.

QinetiQ is currently testing the site and the Public Record Office is also carrying out its own independent test programme. By the very nature of testing, solutions to particular issues often require a more general retesting, to verify that there are no adverse effects on the system as a whole. It is therefore not feasible to quantify what proportion of the testing programme has been completed at any particular time. The Public Record Office's own independent test company has undertaken a test to simulate the experience of one million user per hour accessing the system. These results will be analysed along with the other test results as soon as they are available. The final testing is now under way and it is anticipated that this will be completed by the end of July.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what changes QinetiQ has made to the 1901 census website; [70856]

(2) when QinetiQ started to make changes to the capacity of the 1901 census website; [70859]

(3) if she will make a statement on the ability of QinetiQ to put right the problems preventing public access to the 1901 census website. [71267]

Ms Rosie Winterton: QinetiQ Ltd, who are responsible for the technical aspects of the service, have made the following technical improvements to the site:

increased ISP bandwidth;

dedicated firewalls within the ISP, both to protect the 1901 census online site and also to avoid impact to other sites;

improved load balancer configuration to divert overload;

additional database server engine and the necessary configuration to enable operation with multiple database servers.

QinetiQ has been working on the above enhancements to the site in order to improve its resilience and this should increase its ability to provide a good experience for more users. It will also enable a decision to be made as to whether the system is sufficiently robust to provide general online access. The final testing is under way and it is anticipated that this will be completed by the end of July.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if she will make the agendas and the minutes of the Public Record Office Online Services Advisory Panel available *(a)* in the Library and *(b)* on her Department's website; [70853]

(2) what date has been set for the next meeting of the Public Record Office Online Services Advisory Panel; what the present membership of the panel is; and if she will make a statement. [70855]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The minutes of the Public Record Office (PRO) Online Services Advisory Panel are available from the PRO website: http://www.pro.gov.uk/census/advisory.htm

These are usually published within one month of the last meeting.

The terms of reference of the advisory panel, listing the organisations from which the panel membership is drawn, can be found at this site. The agendas and current membership of the advisory panel are apparent from the published minutes. The next meeting of the panel will take place on 5 September 2002.

Arrangements are being made to place copies of the advisory panel's minutes and other papers in the Library.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if she will make a statement on progress with the Public Record Office's plans to digitise the 1881 and 1891 censuses; [70947]

(2) if she will make it her policy to exclude QinetiQ from handling the project to digitise the 1881 and 1891 censuses. [70860]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Making the 1881 and 1891 censuses available in electronic form is a high priority for the Public Record Office because census records are very heavily used by family historians, who constitute its largest single user group. Any organisation can seek a non-exclusive licence to use digital images of material contained in public records on a commercial basis. Such licensing contracts do not constitute any form of partnership between that organisation and the Public Record Office. MyFamily.com has already applied for, and received, a licence to digitise the census returns from 1841 to 1891 and make this material available on the internet. Other organisations have sought non-exclusive licences to make CDs of the images of these censuses and some for the 1891 census are already on the market. It is open to QinetiQ Ltd to apply for, and to be granted, a licence in a similar manner.

PRIME MINISTER

Recycling

Sue Doughty: To ask the Prime Minister what proportion of *(a)* paper and *(b)* other goods purchased by his Office was recycled paper in each year since 1997; what the annual total cost of these purchases was; what plans there are to increase these proportions; and if he will make a statement. [65762]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 19 July 2002.

Galileo

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from the US Government regarding the proposed Galileo satellite navigation system. [70698]

The Prime Minister: I have received no representations from the US Government regarding the proposed Galileo satellite navigation system.

Refrigerants

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Prime Minister whether the proposed refurbishment of numbers 10 and 11 Downing street will include the *(a)* extension and *(b)* alteration of air-conditioning facilities; and if he will make a statement on compliance with the Government's policy on the use of HFC refrigerants. [71355]

The Prime Minister: There is no planned work on the air-conditioning system.

Senior Civil Servants

Mr. Trend: To ask the Prime Minister what action he takes in ensuring that senior civil servants maintain proper standards of conduct while carrying out their duties. [71495]

The Prime Minister: The standards of conduct required by civil servants are set out in the Civil Service Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Catherine Meyer

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has made to the German Chancellor concerning the case of Catherine Meyer. [71588]

The Prime Minister: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is in regular contact with Lady Meyer. Her case has been actively pursued by both FCO Ministers and officials with their German counterparts. The FCO continues to offer Lady Meyer whatever consular support and assistance it properly can.

Government's Annual Report

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Prime Minister if he will resume publication of the Government's Annual report. [71719]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 12 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 638W.

GP Practices

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his oral answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 219, what evidence he has evaluated that a move away from single-handed general practitioner practices improves the quality of care that people receive. [71888]

The Prime Minister: There is research suggesting a positive association between practice size on the one hand, and effective clinical governance and chronic disease management on the other. However, it is also the case that many single-handed practices provide high quality care.

Downing Street (Expenditure)

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the methods by which expenditure on the fabric of *(a)* 10 Downing street and *(b)* 11 Downing street is (i) formally agreed and (ii) made publicly available. [71794]

The Prime Minister: Expenditure incurred in respect of No. 10 Downing street offices plus the flat at 11 Downing street is included within the overall Cabinet Office budget. Annual budgets, within the departmental limits approved by Parliament, are agreed by the Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary as the Accounting Officer. Actual expenditure against these budgets is recorded in the Cabinet Office resource accounts.

Expenditure incurred in respect of No. 11 Downing street offices plus the flat at 10 Downing street is included within the overall HM Treasury budget. Actual expenditure against these budgets is recorded in HM Treasury's resource accounts.

Accounts for both Departments are published annually and presented to Parliament in accordance with the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000.

Johannesburg Summit

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an assessment of the total amount of carbon emissions that will be accounted for by the attendance of the British Government delegation at the earth summit in Johannesburg. [71775]

The Prime Minister: No decision has yet been taken on the size and composition of the final UK Government delegation for the World summit on sustainable development. The official delegation will include Ministers, MPs, businessmen, representatives from non-governmental organisations and officials. The Government, of course, want to offset the carbon emissions from the delegations's attendance.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the UK Government's priorities for his attendance at the World sustainability summit in Johannesburg in September; and if he will make a statement. [71776]

The Prime Minister: The World summit on sustainable development is important both for the planet and people's future prosperity. We strongly support the priority areas of poverty eradication and the sectoral themes of water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity identified by the UN Secretary-General. The developed world must also take concrete steps towards sustainable development by actions to improve our own use of resources. We are also committed to sustainable development in developing countries as witnessed by the increasing proportion of the UK's gross national income devoted to international aid which will rise to 0.4 per cent. by 2005–06, and through taking forward the important commitments of trade and development made at Doha.

Departmental Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70545]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 469W and the hon. Member for Chelmsford, West (Mr. Burns) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

In October 2001, my Press Office introduced a short-term secondment programme for press officers from other Government Departments to widen their experience. Eight press officers have taken part in the programme.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister if he will instruct the Secretary of State for Health to reply to the letter to him dated 25 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Miss Irene Boyd. [72136]

The Prime Minister: I understand that my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health has replied to my right hon. Friend's letter.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits Claimants

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in what format the information provided to benefits claimants regarding their choice of means to access their entitlement will be given; and if he will make a statement. [70530]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) on 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 874w.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much it will cost a benefits claimant to collect their entitlement in cash from a post office using *(a)* a Post Office card account, *(b)* a basic or no frills bank account and *(c)* an ordinary bank or building society account; and if he will make a statement. [70529]

Malcolm Wicks: People using univeral banking services—access to the banks' basic bank accounts at post office branches and the card account at the Post Office—will be able to access their money free of charge from the Post Office.

The Post Office also has network banking arrangements with a number of banks which allow customers to access current accounts at post office branches. The banks involved do not normally charge their customers for making withdrawals from their accounts.

Customers who have current accounts with banks outside the network banking arrangements can cash a cheque at the Post Office, but will be charged for doing so.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research has been compiled on the cost savings relating to the changeover of benefit payments from payment book to ACT; and if he will make a statement on the results. [70191]

Malcolm Wicks: The move to payment directly into bank and building society accounts assures a safe, convenient, more modern and efficient way of paying benefits and pensions and will bring very substantial savings. Against this, we will incur some additional costs, including those to Post Office Ltd. for the provision of the new card account at the Post Office. The precise costs will depend on the number of card accounts.

Our costings in this area have been based on a number of sources, including the administrative costs of current methods of payment and losses from instrument of payment fraud.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has made for emergency benefit payments if the system for providing benefit claims collapses; and if he will make a statement. [70531]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department has contingency arrangements in place to maintain continuity of benefit payment in the event of benefit system failure. The specific contingency response would be determined by the type and extent of the failure presented.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when and what information will be given to benefit claimants regarding their choice of means to gain access to their entitlement; and whether the information given will be impartial. [70605]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department is currently planning an information campaign to give customers the information they need about the move to paying directly into bank/building society accounts. The campaign will aim to present information on the changes in a straightforward way that helps our customers make the best choices for their circumstances. This will build on the research we have already undertaken to get a first hand understanding of customer needs. Customers will be contacted directly when it is their turn to change.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he plans to place an explanatory leaflet in post offices before the introduction of the universal bank, explaining to customers the different options that will be open to them for claiming their benefits once the universal bank is established. [71787]

Malcolm Wicks: the Department is currently planning a campaign to give customers the factual information they need to make an informed choice. We are working closely with the Post Office and others to ensure that this information can be provided in a consistent way across a range of sources. One possible option is to provide material at post offices but no final decision has yet been taken.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for enabling the temporary collection of benefit payments by persons other than the benefit recipient; and if he will make a statement. [70532]

Malcolm Wicks: Already payments for over 40 per cent. of customers are paid directly into bank and building society accounts. They have a number of options for when they are unable to get to the bank or the post office, and these will continue.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* Benefits Agency staff, *(b)* Jobcentre Plus staff and *(c)* council officers have been (i) disciplined, (ii) suspended, (iii) dismissed, (iv) prosecuted and (v) convicted for matters relating to benefit fraud in each of the last five years; and how much benefit was defrauded in each case. [71779]

Malcolm Wicks: We treat any suspicion of involvement in benefit fraud by the Department's staff very seriously and all cases are thoroughly investigated and appropriate action taken where necessary.

The Department does not hold information in respect of council officers.

The information available on individual cases is in the table.

Outcome	*Monetary loss (£)*
1997–98	
Prosecuted and convicted[1]	5,000.00
Prosecuted and convicted	99,000.00
Prosecuted and convicted	2,500.00
Prosecuted and convicted	2,874.99
Prosecuted and convicted	340.00
Prosecuted and convicted	7,000.00
Prosecuted and convicted	9,600.00
Prosecuted and convicted	9,097.04
Prosecuted and convicted	25,455.08
Prosecuted—found not guilty	7,683.38
Prosecuted and convicted	983.00
Prosecuted and convicted	2,896.00
Total	172,429.49
1998–99	
Disciplinary action—formal reprimand	0
Resigned	2,000.00
Dismissed without prosecution	16,969.45
Disciplinary action—formal reprimand	0
Dismissed without prosecution	0
No action—insufficient evidence	0
No action—insufficient evidence	1,185.95
Resigned	0
Disciplinary action pending	0
Disciplinary action—formal reprimand	0
Dismissed without prosecution	2,400.00
No action—insufficient evidence	0
No action—insufficient evidence	0
Total	22,555.40
1999–2000	
Prosecuted and convicted	8,820.77
Prosecuted and convicted	30,000.00
No action—insufficient evidence	0
Prosecuted and convicted	1,118.00
Prosecuted and convicted	957.56
Dismissed without prosecution	0
Prosecuted and convicted	210.00
Prosecuted and convicted	7,799.10
Dismissed without prosecution	3,255.54
Prosecuted and convicted	1,753.00
Dismissed without prosecution	75.80
Dismissed without prosecution	723.83
Pending	4,462.97
Prosecution pending	17,880.80
Pending	1,947.08
Resigned	134.40
Resigned[2]	0
Prosecution pending	11,184.08
Dismissed without prosecution	3,690.80
Prosecuted and convicted	4,224.28
Total	98,238.01
2000–01	
Dismissed without prosecution	534.64
Prosecuted and convicted	9,335.84
Dismissed without prosecution	6,683.46
Pending	887.18
Pending[3]	0
Prosecuted and convicted[4]	0
Pending[5]	4,272.33
Prosecuted and convicted[6]	0
Pending	0
Pending	10.00
Disciplinary action—formal reprimand	426.14
Pending	218.57
Pending	1,807.10
Total	24,175.26
2001–02	
Pending	2,346.00
Dismissed without prosecution	2,660.72
Pending	0
Resigned	0
Pending	5,000.00
Pending	2,904.00
Pending	0
Prosecution pending	0
Resigned	0
Pending	0
Pending	0
Pending	3,005.00
Pending	0
Pending	150.00
Pending	2,700.00
Pending	126.00
Pending	0
Pending	0
Prosecuted and convicted	180,000.00
Total	198,891.72

[1] Housing benefit fraud. Loss to local authority funds £7,000.

[2] Housing benefit fraud. Loss to local authority funds £3,186.

[3] Housing benefit fraud. Loss to local authority funds £3,697.06.

[4] Housing benefit fraud. Loss to local authority funds £[illegible]20.18.

[5] Housing benefit fraud. Loss to local authority funds £7,631.37.

[6] Housing benefit fraud. Loss to local authority funds £2,140.

Notes:

1. Details of prosecution cases for 1997–98 are provided but information on cases not referred for prosecution is not readily available.
2. The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. Prior to this incidents of suspected benefit fraud within the former Employment Service (ES) were investigated by the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service (BFIS) and included within the overall fraud returns. They are not identifiable separately.
3. All the information for 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01 covers BA staff only. The figures for 2001–02 are inclusive of BA and ES staff. (Relevant information from ES for April to June 2001 was included in the 2001–02 DWP Treasury report).
4. The outcomes are recorded according to definitions provided by HMT for the annual Treasury report.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the average cost to a local authority of a prosecution for suspected benefit fraud in the last year for which figures are available. [71780]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the cost to a local authority of a prosecution for suspected benefit fraud is not collected by the Department, so it is not possible to provide an estimate of the average cost.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the baseline figure is for assessing progress in meeting his target of reducing fraud and error in housing benefit by 25 per cent. by 2006, detailed on page 119 of the 2002 Spending Review. [71781]

Malcolm Wicks: The housing benefit review which is under way will enable us to establish a baseline level of fraud and error for the financial year 2002–03. The results of this review should be available in autumn 2003.

Automated Credit Transfer

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if benefit claimants who receive payments by order book and who already have a bank account will have the option under automated credit transfer of opening *(a)* a basic bank account accessible through a post office and *(b)* a post office card account. [71786]

Malcolm Wicks: Yes. They will also have the option of using their existing account. Customers will be provided with the information to help them make the best choice for their circumstances.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made on the implementation of a national call centre to deal with emergency payments following the introduction of ACT; and if he will make a statement. [70188]

Malcolm Wicks: There are no plans for the implementation of a national call centre to deal with emergency payments.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Government propose to start the advertising campaign to promote the new ACT procedures due to come into operation in April 2003; how much is to be allocated for this campaign; and if he will make a statement. [70523]

Malcolm Wicks: The campaign aims to give customers the factual information they need about the choices they have as we reform the way we pay benefits and pensions. This will begin in October 2002 when we will start to issue mailings to customers as the first stage of an information campaign we are currently developing.

This will be followed by the wider information campaign using a range of media from early next year. As this campaign is currently being developed the final budget has yet to be decided.

Benefit Payment Methods

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) which Minister in his Department is responsible for monitoring the risk presented by the modernisation of payments; [70421]

(2) at what level in the risk ranking and evaluation of process stage 2 of the DWP Risk Management Framework, the controllability of the risk concerning the modernisation of payments and controlling the potential for escalation is considered to be; [70419]

(3) whether the modernisation of payments is considered a risk managed at strategic level; [70420]

(4) if, in the risk ranking and evaluation of process stage 2 of the DWP Risk Management Framework, the modernisation of payments risk is considered a red, amber or green risk; [70418]

(5) what assessment has been made of the risk presented by the modernisation of payments in process stage 1 of the DWP Risk Management Framework were the assumption to turn out wrong; [70425]

(6) to whom the modernisation of benefits payments is risk-assigned; [70424]

(7) what action is being taken to mitigate the risk presented by the modernisation of benefits payments by his Department; [70422]

(8) at what level the stability of the assumption that universal banking services will be established on time has been identified in process stage 1 of the DWP Risk Management Framework. [70417]

Malcolm Wicks: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for dealing with all of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets.

All DWP projects, including modernisation of payments, are subjected to a gateway process staged review and approval by the director of project management throughout their lifecycle. They are subjected to structured independent peer reviews and undertake a formal risk assessment using the Department's assumption based risk identification methodology.

Risk identification is carried out at a very senior level and this provides an outward facing strategic approach to risk presence.

A similar approach is being taken with the cross-Government universal banking programme.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of benefit recipients receive payments via bank or building society accounts or girocheque broken down by benefit type. [70414]

Malcolm Wicks: Over 40 per cent. of payments for benefit claimants are already paid directly into their bank or building society. This provides a more modern, secure and efficient way of making payments. The table provides details broken down by benefits as at March 2002.

Girocheques are not a normal method of payment option for any benefit other than JSA. The estimated number of JSA customers paid by girocheque is 77 per cent.

Benefit	*Percentage paid direct into bank or building society*
Retirement pension, widows benefit and bereavement benefit	40
Child benefit	45
Incapacity benefit	25
Income support (estimated)	18
Disability living allowance	34
Invalid care allowance	16
War pensions	53
Attendance allowance	21
Industrial injury, death and disability benefit	22
Jobseeker's allowance	23

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1058W, to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), on benefits (payment methods), in what order customers of particular benefits will be transferred to payment via automated credit transfer. [70413]

Malcolm Wicks: We will adopt a phased approach to transfer customers to payment into bank or building society accounts.

Social Security Fraud Act

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment the Government have made of the impact of the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 on *(a)* the public and *(b)* the private rented sector; and if he will make a statement; [69490]

(2) what assessment has been made of the impact of the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 on public housing waiting lists; and if he will make a statement; [69489]

(3) what discussions the Government have had with the Scottish Executive regarding the impact of the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 on *(a)* the public and *(b)* the private housing sectors in Scotland; what action is planned to address resulting issues; and if he will make a statement. [69488]

Malcolm Wicks: The Social Security Fraud Act 2001 provides powers for a range of measures to strengthen our fight against benefit fraud, including information gathering, the exchange of information overseas and disqualifying from benefit people convicted of two or more benefit fraud offences within a three-year period. We have not received any report that these provisions are having any impact on the public housing waiting list or the public and private rented housing sector.

Green Minister

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who his Department's Green Minister is; when they *(a)* have attended and *(b)* plan to attend meetings of the Green Ministers' Committee; what the outcomes of meetings were for his Department's activities; and if he will make a statement. [65980]

Maria Eagle: Our Green Minister is my noble Friend the Baroness Hollis of Heigham and she was appointed to the ENV (G) Committee in July 2001.

Following the general election in June 2001, the previously informal Green Ministers Committee was upgraded to a Cabinet Sub-Committee of ENV and it is established practice under exemption two of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

In October 2001 DWP published its first annual, free standing Sustainable Development report which details progress across all DWP activities. This is available in the Library and on the internet at www.dwp.gov.uk. The second report will be published in the coming autumn.

Disability Advice Officers

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many disability advice officers are employed by *(a)* the Benefits Agency and *(b)* the Employment Service; and how many of them are able to use sign language. [65524]

Maria Eagle: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the chief executive, Leigh Lewis. I have asked him to reply to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Alan Campbell, dated June 2002:

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of disability advice officers and their ability to use sign language. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Since 1 April 2002 the functions formally performed by the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency relating to people of working age have been brought together in a new agency, Jobcentre Plus. There are currently within the agency approximately 650 Disability Employment Advisers. No figures are held on how many of those advisers are able to use sign language, but all Jobcentre Plus offices have access to sign language interpreters when required.

I hope this is helpful.

Jobcentres (New Forest)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement about proposals to close jobcentres in the New Forest district. [61921]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the chief executive, Leigh Lewis. He will reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Desmond Swayne, dated June 2002:

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the implementation of Jobcentre Plus in the New Forest area. This falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Plans are currently being drawn up to implement the new integrated Jobcentre Plus service in Hampshire. As part of this exercise feasibility studies are underway to examine the options for the future delivery of services within the New Forest area. One such option is to acquire new premises in one location in place of the existing Jobcentres in Ringwood, Lymington and Hythe. However, no final decisions have yet been taken.

I hope this is helpful.

Lone Parents

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many lone parents were on Income Support in the Portsmouth, South constituency in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [65375]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table. While these estimates suggest a slight increase in the number of lone parents in Portsmouth, South receiving Income Support, they have been drawn from a 5 per cent. sample of Income Support recipients and are subject to a degree of sampling variation.

Estimate of lone parents in the Portsmouth, South parliamentary constituency receiving Income Support

	Number
1999–2000	1,600
2000–01	1,700
2001–02	1,800

Notes:

1. Figures are based on an average of 5 per cent. samples taken four times in each year. They are subject to a degree of sampling variation.,
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100.
3. Lone parents are defined as single people with dependants and who do not receive a pensioner or a disability premium.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries May 1999 to February 2002.

Departmental Offices (Gosport)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether replacement offices for the present Gosport jobcentre and the Gosport Social Security office will be located within Gosport. [61883]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the chief executive, Leigh Lewis. He will reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Peter Viggers, dated June 2002:

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the implementation of Jobcentre Plus in Gosport. This falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Plans are currently being drawn up to implement the new integrated Jobcentre Plus service in Hampshire. As part of this exercise feasibility studies are underway to examine the options for the future delivery of services within Gosport. One such option is the acquisition of new premises within the town from which the full Jobcentre Plus service can be delivered. However, no final decisions have yet been taken.

I hope this is helpful.

Care Home Claimants

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the number of children leaving local authority care homes that go on to claim social security benefits in the last year for which figures are available; and what recent research his Department has published into the number of children leaving local authority care homes that go on to claim social security benefits. [68986]

Maria Eagle: Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, local authorities have a duty to assess and meet the needs of young people aged 16 and 17 who they continue to look after or who have left care. Income-related benefits are therefore not available to these young people. However, other benefits intended to meet a person's special needs, such as non-contributory Incapacity Benefit, may be available. Once they reach 18, care leavers are eligible to claim benefits in the normal way, and in general, the local authority no longer has the major responsibility for their welfare.

The Department holds no data, nor have we published any recent research, on the number of children leaving local authority care homes who go on to claim social security benefits.

Following the introduction of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, the Department of Health has commissioned the University of York to conduct an evaluation of the costs and outcomes of young people leaving care. The evaluation report is due early in 2004.

Consultation Documents

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [69831]

Malcolm Wicks: Yes.

Disability Living Allowance

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many recipients of Disability Living Allowance there are aged under 16 years broken down by local authority in Scotland; [69540]

(2) how many recipients of awards of Disability Living Allowance are also in receipt of Child Benefit, broken down by local authority in Scotland. [69541]

Maria Eagle: The available information, which refers to 30 November 2001, is in the table. Figures for the numbers of people in Scotland who receive both Disability Living Allowance and Child Benefit exclude cases where different members of a family receive the Disability Living Allowance and Child Benefit.

	Number of people in Scotland who receive both Disability Living Allowance and Child Benefit	*Number of Disability Living Allowance recipients aged under 16 in Scotland*
All Scotland	16,400	21,300
Aberdeen City	400	800
Aberdeenshire	600	1,000
Angus	200	300
Argyll and Bute	200	300
The Scottish Borders	300	400
Clackmannanshire	200	100
West Dunbartonshire	300	400
Dumfries and Galloway	400	500
Dundee City	500	700
East Ayrshire	400	500
East Dunbartonshire	100	300
East Lothian	300	300
East Renfrewshire	200	300
City of Edinburgh	1,200	1,500
Falkirk	400	700
Fife	900	1,600

	Number of people in Scotland who receive both Disability Living Allowance and Child Benefit	*Number of Disability Living Allowance recipients aged under 16 in Scotland*
Glasgow City	3,000	3,100
Highland	500	900
Inverclyde	300	400
Midlothian	200	500
Moray	200	400
North Ayrshire	500	500
North Lanarkshire	1,500	1,700
Orkney Islands	—	—
Perth and Kinross	200	400
Renfrewshire	400	800
Shetland Islands	—	100
South Ayrshire	200	300
South Lanarkshire	1,400	1,200
Stirling	300	300
West Lothian	800	900
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	—	100

Note:

Figures under 500 are subject to a high degree of sampling variation, and '—' denotes nil or negligible.

Source:

ASD Information Centre, figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample and rounded to the nearest 100.

Post Office Banking Facilities

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans the Government have to persuade banks which have not already done so to offer cheque clearing facilities at post offices without charges; and if he will make a statement. [70555]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

These are matters which fall within the day-to-day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Benefit Sanctions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many claimants had benefits sanctioned for failure to comply with a community service order in the last 12 months; what the sanction was; and over how long it operated, broken down by sex of claimant; [66729]

(2) what data he has collated on fixed period sanctions to the income-related Jobseeker's Allowance for each year since the sanctions were first applied, subdivided according to whether claimants have without good cause *(a)* failed to carry out a reasonable jobseeker's directive, *(b)* failed to apply for a compulsory training scheme or employment programme where this has been notified to them, *(c)* given up a place on, or failed to attend, a compulsory training scheme or employment programme, *(d)* neglected to avail themselves of a reasonable opportunity of a place on a training scheme or employment programme and *(e)* lost a place on a compulsory training scheme or employment programme because of misconduct; and if he will break down these figures according to whether (i) two or (ii) four weeks' sanction was applied; [66721]

(3) against how many claimants sanctions have been taken since the introduction of the Jobseeker's Allowance; how many cases were because *(a)* they lost their job through misconduct, *(b)* left their job voluntarily without just cause, *(c)* failed to apply or to accept a job notified by the Employment Service without just cause, *(d)* neglected to avail themselves of a reasonable opportunity of a job without good cause and *(e)* other causes; and if he will break this data down by whether the claimants were (i) men and (ii) women and by the age of the claimants, noting for each category the average length during which the sanction applied; [66723]

(4) how many claimants committing fraud have lost benefit on their second offence over the last 12 months; and if he will list the size of the benefit lost and the duration during which the sanction has been or is being applied, broken down by sex; [66722]

(5) against how many people aged 18 to 24 on the New Deal a *(a)* two week, *(b)* four week, *(c)* 26 week and *(d)* 52 week sanction has been applied, broken down by (i) the reason for the sanction being applied and (ii) sex of the claimants. [66724]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* We have taken powers in the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 to strengthen benefit fraud investigation and punish persistent offenders more severely. The provision to sanction people convicted of two separate benefit fraud offences in a three year period came into force on 1 April 2002, and can be applied only to people who commit two separate benefit offences after that date. It is therefore too early for this new sanction to have been applied in practice.

The new community sentence and benefits measures are being piloted in four probation service areas from 15 October 2001. We are giving a clear message to offenders that their rights to benefits must be matched by the responsibility to comply with their community sentence orders. Sanctions are applied when people receiving a relevant benefit are found by a court to be in breach of their orders. The sanction lasts for a maximum period of four weeks.

The available information is in the tables.

Benefit sanctions for failure to comply with a community service order by gender

Percentage

	Female	*Male*
JSA (100 sanction)	10	69
IS (40 sanction)	21	27
IS (20 sanction)	1	2
Total number of people sanctioned	32	98

Notes:

1. All figures are unrounded.
2. Figures include a small number of people who have been sanctioned more than once.
3. Data are from clerical returns received at the DWP Information Centre between 15 October 2001 and 28 June 2002, and relate to the period 15 October 2001 to 7 June 2002.
4. There are four probation service pilot areas: Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Teesside and West Midlands.
5. IS recipients have their benefit entitlement reduced, depending on the circumstances of the individual or family unit, by either 40 per cent. or 20 per cent. of the single person's personal allowance. Those in receipt of JSA incur the withdrawal of the whole of their benefit but may apply for a hardship payment.

Jobseeker's Allowance: fixed-period sanctions—October 1996 to March 2002

	October 1996 to March 1997	April 1997 to March 1998	April 1998 to March 1999	April 1999 to March 2000	April 2000 to March 2001	April 2001 to March 2002
Refused/failed to carry out Jobseeker's Direction	215	1,027	2,218	7,277	5,542	3,819
Refusal of place on training scheme/employment programme	616	1,108	380	1,335	838	308
Giving up place on training scheme/employment programme	881	2,631	3,888	6,146	4,236	2,859
Neglect to avail of place on training scheme/employment programme	1,246	1,714	527	1,089	956	144
Losing place on training scheme/employment programme	183	1,049	2,222	5,671	6,465	6,178
Failure to attend place on training scheme/employment programme	14,528	33,208	7,028	12,637	17,652	19,493

Notes:

1. The data refer to the number of sanctions applied; data are not collected on the number of individuals sanctioned. An individual may receive more than one sanction in the course of a year.
2. Separate data on whether income-based or contribution based Jobseeker's Allowance is in payment at the time the sanction is imposed are not collected.
3. Data on the length of sanction applied are not available.

Source:

Employment Service Labour Market Statistics, Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions/Sector Decision Making, for years ending 31 March 1997 to 31 March 2002.

Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions October 1996 to March 2002

	October 1996 to March 1997	April 1997 to March 1998	April 1998 to March 1999	April 1999 to March 2000	April 2000 to March 2001	April 2001 to March 2002
Losing employment through misconduct	7,155	22,357	22,682	18,888	16,430	15,939
Leaving employment voluntarily	36,573	109,994	103,206	86,226	85,965	73,186
Refusal of employment	4,098	21,906	11,118	19,169	26,370	38,216
Neglect to avail of employment	86	244	146	85	57	52
Others	24,780	40,749	16,268	34,163	35,694	32,807
Totals (all sanction questions)	72,692	195,250	153,420	158,531	164,516	160,200

Notes:

1. The data refer to the number of sanctions applied; data are not collected on the number of individuals sanctioned. An individual may receive more than one sanction in the course of a year.
2. Data are not collected by gender, age or length of sanction.

Source:

Employment Service Labour Market Statistics, Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions/Sector Decision Making, for years ending 31 March 1997 to 31 March 2002.

The number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance has fallen from 2,002,400 in October 1996 to 947,600 in March 2002.

Jobseeker's Allowance: Sanctions under the New Deal for Young People (NDYP)

Reason for sanction	*Number applied*
Leaving option voluntarily	12,932
Misconduct	16,835
Refusal of option	1,983
Neglect to avail of option	1,864
Failing to attend option	23,679
Total	57,293

Notes:

1. The data refer to the number of sanctions applied; data are not collected on the number of individuals sanctioned. Some individuals may have received more than one sanction.
2. Figures cover the period from the introduction of NDYP on 1 April 1998 to 31 March 2002.
3. Data are not available by length of sanction or by gender.
4. There is no 52 week sanction.
5. NDYP options are: subsidised employment option; voluntary sector option; further education and training option; and environmental task force.

Source:

Decision Making and Appeals Computer System

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the CSA will reply to the letter of 28 May from the hon. Member for Walsall, North regarding a constituent, ref. 1040714323. [69258]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. David Winnick, dated 22 July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will provide a substantive reply from myself to your letter of 28th May regarding constituent ref. 1040714323.

I apologise for the long delay in replying to this letter. My reply was sent on 10 July.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 19 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1215W, on the Child Support Agency, what estimates he has made of the costs of new IT for the Child Support Agency in the period 2001 to 2004. [54515]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 23 May 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask pursuant to his Answer of 19th April Official Report column 1215W on the Child Support Agency what estimates he has made of the costs of new IT for the Child Support Agency in the period 2001 to 04.

I am sorry that I cannot provide the costs of the new IT for the Child Support Agency for the period 2001 to 2004 as it is commercially confidential.

I can say that the planned total cost of the project to implement Child Support Reform over the 10 year period of the business case was £651million.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have had their driving licence withdrawn for failure to pay arrears to the Child Support Agency. [67315]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mr. Doug Smith to Ms Gisela Stuart, dated July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask how many people have had their driving licence withdrawn for failure to pay arrears to the Child Support Agency.

In the period from April 2001 to 12 June 2002 one non-resident parent has had his driving licence withdrawn and in a further three cases the disqualification has been suspended giving the non-resident parent a further, and final, opportunity to pay outstanding amounts.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made in the implementation of new computer systems in the Child Support Agency. [68088]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Michael Weir, dated July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask what progress has been made in the implementation of new computer systems in the Child Support Agency.

The testing of the new IT system to support Child Support Reform is progressing well. There is no firm date for the completion of testing and associated work. When this work is complete I will advise the Secretary of State accordingly.

I hope this is helpful.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when quarterly statistical information on the performance of the Child Support Agency was last placed in the Library; and whether he plans to place such information on the performance of the Agency in the Library on a regular basis. [67234]

Malcolm Wicks: The "Quarterly Summary Statistics for the Child Support Agency—February 2002" was placed in the Library on 13 June 2002.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases have been referred to the special payments department by the CSA over the past three years; and if he will make a statement. [63419]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Bill O'Brien, dated 18 July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask how many cases have been referred to the Special Payments Department by the Child Support Agency over the past three years; and if the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will make a statement.

Each year the Child Support Agency receives over 300,000 new applications. It has a caseload of 1.1 million cases. Against that background it has referred 31,232 cases to its Special Payments Team for consideration of re-dress or a consolatory payment following a complaint.

I hope this is helpful.

TREASURY

Sickness Absence (Public Sector)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has succeeded in delivering on the Government's plans in Cm 4011 to reduce public sector sickness absence by 20 per cent. between 1998 and 2001; and if he will make a statement. [66282]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* These targets were recommended in the Cabinet Office report on the management of attendance in the public sector, ("Working Well Together").

It is not possible to say at this time whether the target has been met. Management data for the civil service and a number of other public sector employment groups are published in financial years format and will not be available before the autumn.

Network Rail

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library copies of the documents which have been studied by the Office for National Statistics in deciding on the classification of Network Rail. [70511]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 22 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking if copies of all the documents which have been studied by the Office for National Statistics in deciding on the classification of Network Rail could be placed in the Library. (70511).

In deciding on the sector classification of Network Rail, the main documents that the ONS used were: international statistical manuals—The European System of Accounts (1955) and The System of National Accounts (1993), copies of which are available from the Library. The ONS also studied many legal documents, provided on a commercial and confidence basis. These documents are exempt from disclosure under section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Office for National Statistics

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 8 July 2002, on the ONS, if he will place in the Library the recommendations that ONS made on each classification considered since 1 January; and if he will make a statement. [70752]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 22 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question pursuant to the answer given on 8th July on the ONS, concerning what the recommendations the national statistics made on each classification considered since 1st January and if these recommendations could be placed in the Library. (70752)

We have already announced that in due course we will put all key national accounts classification decisions in the public domain. We are working towards full implementation of this policy. Four important decisions are already on the National Statistics website with supporting explanations.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the ONS annual report and accounts for 2001–02 to be published. [72628]

Ruth Kelly: The Office for National Statistics annual report and accounts is being laid before the House today.

ZANU-PF

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many United Kingdom bank accounts have been frozen as a result of the EU selective sanctions against leading members of ZANU-PF; and what the value is of the money in those accounts. [71452]

Ruth Kelly: European Council Regulation 310/2002 places limits on the extent to which details regarding individual accounts and amounts frozen can be disclosed. However, a total of £76,000 in accounts belonging to two individuals listed in the regulation has been frozen.

Shooting Rights

Mr. Breed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what figures he collates relating to VAT raised from the sale of shooting rights; and if he will place them in the Library. [71941]

John Healey: VAT is charged on shooting rights sold in the course of business unless they form part of a VAT exempt freehold sale of the land over which they may be exercised. No information is collected about the amount of VAT raised from shooting rights.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if he will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if he will make a statement. [70213]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* full-time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70538]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 328W.

As to secondees, records are not maintained.

Double Taxation Convention

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the draft Order in Council and schedule containing the new Double Taxation Convention between the United Kingdom and the United States of America will be submitted to the House for ratification; and if he will make a statement. [72630]

Dawn Primarolo: The text of the Convention together with an amending Protocol has been published today as a schedule to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House. The Protocol amending the Double Taxation Convention was signed on behalf of the two governments on 19 July 2002. The text is available on the Inland Revenue's website.

Community Budget

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will be publishing the statement on the 2002 Community Budget. [72631]

Ruth Kelly: I have today laid before Parliament the Statement on the 2002 Community Budget, entitled "European Community Finances". This White Paper is the 22nd in the series. As in the past, it covers annual budgetary matters and includes details of recent developments in European Community financial management and in countering fraud against the Community Budget. It also describes the Community Budget for 2002 as adopted by the European Parliament, and details the United Kingdom's gross and net contributions to the Community Budget for calendar years 1996 to 2002 and financial years 1996–97 to 2001–02.

I have placed copies of the White Paper in both Libraries of the House.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the decision of the London VAT tribunal in the Kingscrest case on the implementation of free nursing care and the affordability of fee levels; [71678]

(2) if he will amend VAT regulations relating to the VAT status of care homes. [71508]

John Healey: In March the High Court judgment in the Kingscrest Associates Ltd. and Montecello Ltd. case threatened to limit the VAT exemption for residential care. We immediately acted to put this exemption beyond question through the Value Added Tax (Health and Welfare) Order (Statutory Instrument 762/2002).

The decision of the VAT and Duties Tribunal in this case, and the later High Court judgment, do not impact upon any provision of nursing care.

Game Bird Farms

Mr. Breed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many game farms were registered for game bird rearing in the UK; and how many initiatives there were to identify the valuation relating to game bird farms in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [71942]

Dawn Primarolo: The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) is responsible for the valuation of business property for rating purposes. One of the difficulties for valuation officers (VOs) in identifying game farms is the fact that most of them are in remote rural areas and operate on land which was, quite properly, exempt from rating as agricultural land.

Game farms are not exempt from rating, but VOs have difficulty in keeping their records up to date to show when land that was exempt is no longer in agricultural use and should be assessed as a game farm. Billing authorities are responsible for notifying the VOA when such changes take place, but this does not always happen.

In May 2000 the Game Farmers Association provided information to the VOA that there were about 400 game farms in the United Kingdom. This includes Scotland and Northern Ireland, for which the VOA has no responsibility.

The VOA also received representations from a number of bodies including Wales Opponents of Pheasant Shooting and Animal Aid, requesting confirmation that specified game farms are assessed for rating.

In addition, the VOA has been requested by the Game Farmers Association to ensure that their membership and others in the industry are all treated fairly in relation to rating.

The VOA has responded to these approaches by checking its records to identify which of these game farms are already assessed and which require to be assessed for rating purposes. A total of 40 additional game farms were included in rating lists as a result of this initiative.

The VOA does not hold details of the number of game farms registered for game bird rearing.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many properties which were identified as operating as a game farm had not been assessed for non-domestic rates; and what proportion of those properties were *(a)* allowed to remain open and *(b)* closed down, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [71943]

Dawn Primarolo: The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) in England and Wales has assessed a total of 85 game farms for rating purposes.

It is not known how many game farms not in assessment that should properly be assessed.

The VOA takes action to assess game farms as soon as they are brought to their attention.

The VOA has no statistical information as to the proportion of game farms that have remained open or have closed down in each of the last 10 years.

Airport Construction

Tom Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* received on the economic consequences of building new (i) airports and (ii) runways. [70868]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Transport is giving him today at column 733w.

Public Service Monitoring

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2002, on public service monitoring, which targets are considered value for money targets for each Government Department; and if he will make a statement. [70753]

Mr. Boateng: The value for money targets are clearly identified in "Public Service Agreements 2001–04" (Cm 4808).

Financial Advisers (VAT)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimates he has made of the amount of VAT *(a)* due on commission payments to independent financial advisers and *(b)* on commission payments to independent financial advisers collected in the latest year for which figures are available; [71310]

(2) if he will ensure that HM Customs and Excise communicate to independent financial advisers the fact that sales commission attracts VAT. [71309]

John Healey: Customs and Excise has set out the VAT treatment of the services provided by independent financial advisers in the VAT public notice 701/49, "Finance and securities", published in March 2002. They will be issuing more detailed information specifically for such advisers shortly. Where VAT is due on an adviser's services, it will be at a rate of 17.5 per cent. There are no estimates available for VAT collected on such charges.

Public Service Agreements

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the 2000 Spending Review PSAs as referred to in paragraph 1.15 of Public Service Agreements 2003–06, Cm 5571, before 24 July; and if he will make a statement. [71302]

Mr. Gordon Brown: As indicated in public service agreements 2003–06, the Treasury has today published details on its website of how all the headline 2000 spending review PSA targets translate into the new PSAs. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Street Crime

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 634, on street crime, what resources are available to the Metropolitan Police, what information he has received regarding those of the New York Police Department; and if he will make a statement. [44397]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The net budget requirement for the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in 2001/2 was £1,980 million which has risen to £2,038 million in 2002–3. At the end of September, 2001, there were 25,374 police officers in the MPS, a rise of 679 from September 2000. At the same time, there were 10,240 civilian staff (93 more than the previous year) and 669 traffic wardens (60 fewer than the previous year).

In February I met Mr. Rudolph Giuliani, the former Mayor of New York City and Mr. Bill Bratten, the former Commissioner of the New York Police Department to discuss issues of policing, including police resources. I understand that estimates show that in 2000 there were 29,123 police officers and 11,582 civilian staff in London (which comprises the MPS, City of London Police and British Transport Police) compared with 38,779 police officers and 16,629 civilians in New York City.

The Government is pursuing a major initiative to tackle street crime in the ten forces with the highest levels, which includes the MPS. We have drawn together resources, expertise, and initiatives, from Government, the police and other relevant agencies, to help free our streets from robbery and drug driven violence.

Mobile Phone Theft and Crime Figures

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of offences of *(a)* theft and *(b)* robbery relating to mobile phones in the last three years have involved both offenders and victims who are school-age children; [40008]

(2) how many offences of *(a)* theft and *(b)* robbery relating to mobile phones were (i) reported and (ii) recorded by the police in the last two years where those offences took place on school premises. [40006]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The requested information is not routinely collected centrally.

A research study, 'Mobile phone theft' (by Victoria Harrington and Pat Mayhew, Home Office research study 235), included provisional results of a survey of 15,000 11–15 year olds which estimated that 12 per cent. of those questioned had been a victim of phone theft at least once in the last year. However, this survey was conducted in deprived areas.

A MORI survey in early 2001 of 5,000 11–16 year olds, also quoted in the research study, estimated that 5 per cent. had been a victim of mobile phone theft at least once in the last year. The sample used was regarded as being more representative.

The research study separately estimated that, overall, in police areas where the research took place, 48 per cent. of all victims of phone robbery, and 63 per cent. of those accused of the offence, were under 18.

We are working with the police and the mobile phone industry to reduce mobile phone robbery, undertaking public awareness campaigns and joint tracking exercises. Our discussions with operators have recently borne fruit. By the summer all five of the main operators will be able to bar stolen handsets by reference to the unique IMEI number which identifies the handset. All of the operators are also working together to develop a shared database of stolen phones, which will allow them to disable stolen phones if there is an attempt to use them on a different network. We believe that this is a very important step forward, as it should remove one of the major incentives for robbery.

Operators have also agreed to improve security as they invest in new systems. We are pressing the handset manufacturers for similar commitments. A start has been made, but more needs to be done before Britain's mobile phone system can lead the world in security. The mobile phone industry needs to show more interest in the security of phones they are selling to British consumers and, as the motor industry has done, do more to prevent their customers from becoming the victims of crime.

Crime Reduction

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what capital resources are made available for initiatives to change the physical arrangement of an area to reduce crime in residential neighbourhoods in England. [63148]

Mr. Denham: Several crime reduction initiatives provide the opportunity for funding for such projects.

Under the crime reduction programme CCTV initiative up to £80–85 million will be spent in 2002–03 on 279 CCTV schemes in residential areas. Funding for a number of these schemes also includes provision for improved street lighting.

Under the communities against drugs initiative the £50 million funding for 2001–02 (crime and disorder reduction partnerships' baseline allocation) comprised 32 per cent. for capital expenditure. Some partnerships' use of the funding includes regeneration works.

Under the safer communities initiative £20 million funding is available in 2002–03. There is no specific capital element but funding can be used to purchase capital items. Partnerships' plans are still being developed.

There is also funding from the capital modernisation fund to assist small retailers in deprived areas to improve the security of their businesses—£3 million in 2001–02, £6 million in 2002–03 and £6 million in 2003–04. While this funding is not specifically directed towards residential neighbourhoods, environmental improvements such as better lighting and landscaping of shopping parades may well impact on crimes affecting residential neighbourhoods as well as those impacting on small retailers, since many small shops and parades of shops are located within, or close to, residential areas.

Approximately a fifth (£380 million) of the £1.9 billion allocated over ten years to the new deal for communities areas and a fifth (£180 million) of the £900 million allocated over three years to the 88 neighbourhood renewal areas will go towards tackling crime. Money allocated to an area is spent according to priorities agreed by the area and its local strategic partnership. Central records of this spending are not kept and so it is not possible to set out how much is spent specifically on initiatives to change the physical arrangement of an area.

In addition, the cross-cutting review on improving the public space, announced in July 2001 by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, has been exploring how Government policies, funding and targets could produce improvements in the safety and attractiveness of the public space—the local environment where people lead their lives. The lead Minister Lord Falconer presented the review's final report to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in April, in order to inform spending review decisions.

Speeding (Surrey)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many motorists have been caught speeding by police cameras in Surrey in each of the last five years. [66492]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* Data supplied directly from the police showing the number of prosecutions and fixed penalties notices issued for speeding offences as a result of the use of cameras are given in the table.

Prosecutions and fixed penalties for speeding offences detected by camera within the Surrey police force area, 1996–2000

Disposal	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Prosecutions	483	145	326	196	2,353
Fixed penalties	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	2,195	5,274

[1] Not available

Police Reform Bill

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the timetable is for the implementation of section 31A, part 4 of the Police Reform Bill. [70363]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The legislation to which I assume the hon. Member refers is section 31A of the Transport and Works Act 1992, which is to be inserted by clause 59 of the Police Reform Bill.

The provision is parallel to the new section 7A of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to be inserted by clause 57 of the Bill. Both make provision for blood specimens to be taken without consent where, after an accident, a person cannot for medical reasons give valid consent.

It is customary for provisions within a Bill to be brought into effect no sooner than three months after Royal Assent. Subject to that, we intend that these measures should be brought into effect at the earliest possible moment. We have already entered into discussions with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) on the issue of appropriate guidance to the police and shall be liaising with the Department of Health, the British Medical Association and the Association of Police Surgeons in order to ensure that the new procedures run smoothly.

Capita

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* central and *(b)* local government contracts with Capita whose performance was reviewed by his Department prior to awarding that company the Criminal Records Bureau contract. [69275]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* As part of the agency benchmarking exercise, the Criminal Records Bureau procurement team obtained references from the Driving Standards Agency, the Teachers Pensions Agency, operated by Capita Group plc for the Department for Employment and Skills at Darlington and the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) contact centre in Belfast.

Drug Testing

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the impact of the use of urine samples for detection of illegal drugs on the types of drugs used by prisoners; and what plans he has to change his policy of mandatory drug-testing. [70359]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* There is no substantive research evidence that the use of urine samples for detection of illegal drugs permanently affects the types of drugs used by prisoners. However, in light of anecdotal evidence that prisoners may be switching from cannabis to heroin in order to avoid detection (because the latter can be detected in the body for a shorter period), research has been commissioned from the Institute of Psychiatry and the Office for National Statistics which is due to report in December 2002. The implications of this research will be considered carefully.

Prison Suicides

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many suicides of *(a)* women and *(b)* men occurred in prison in England in the (i) last six years and (ii) most recent year for which figures are available. [70609]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is given in the table.

Number of self-inflicted deaths for males and females in prisons in England and Wales, 1996 to 2002[1]

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
1996	62	2	64
1997	65	3	68
1998	80	3	83
1999	86	5	91
2000	73	8	81
2001	67	6	73
2002[2]	44	3	47
Total	853	39	892

[1] To 15 July 2002

[2] To date

The Prison Service employs the term "self-inflicted death" (which includes all those deaths where it appears that the person may have acted specifically to take his/her own life) rather than suicide.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1239W, on prison hospital suicides, if he will make a statement on the timetable for the Prison Service review of the suicide prevention strategy; and what progress has been made. [68261]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* The Prison Service suicide prevention strategy was reviewed in 2000 and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), the then Home Secretary, announced the launch of the new three-year suicide and self-harm strategy in February 2001. Work on the development of the new strategy started in April 2001 and will run to March 2004.

One of the projects currently being developed as part of the new strategy is the Care of Prisoners project. This project includes a review of procedures for prisoners at risk of suicide and self-harm (the F2052SH system) referred to in the answer to my right hon. Friend's question of 26 February. A new process for managing at risk prisoners is being developed and will be piloted in the autumn.

Police Stations

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many functioning police stations there were, broken down by *(a)* police force and *(b)* local authority area, in each year since 1997. [42371]

Mr. Denham: Chief constables have provided information on the number of police stations functioning in the years since 1997. This is given in the table. Police and local authority areas now coincide.

Comprehensive information is available for the three years to March 2000, March 2001 and March 2002, but in some cases forces were unable to provide data for earlier years. This is reflected in the table.

Police station numbers 1997–2002

Force: at March	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Avon and Somerset	35	36	39	39	41	42
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	11	10	9
Cambridgeshire	29	28	25	25	24	24
Cheshire	38	38	36	33	35	35
City of London	2	2	2	2	2	2
Cleveland	24	23	22	22	22	22
Cumbria	34	34	24	24	24	25
Derbyshire	—	—	—	25	27	25
Devon and Cornwall	71	68	68	65	65	64
Dorset	27	27	26	26	25	25
Durham	40	40	40	40	40	38
Dyfed-Powys	44	47	48	48	48	48
Essex[1]	114	114	114	72	57	55
Gloucestershire	62	63	59	47	42	40
Greater Manchester	82	74	70	70	68	68
Gwent	—	57	52	56	49	49
Hampshire	104	102	94	92	89	89
Hertfordshire[1]	23	23	23	21	25	25
Humberside	35	36	34	33	33	32
Kent	32	32	32	32	30	30
Lancashire	109	108	108	108	107	106
Leicestershire	28	28	28	30	30	30
Lincolnshire	43	42	42	42	42	41
Metropolitan[1]	—	—	—	156	144	148
Merseyside	52	51	50	44	43	43
Norfolk	—	—	—	42	42	45
Northamptonshire	12	12	12	12	12	12
Northumbria	—	—	—	36	36	36
North Wales	—	—	—	54	52	51
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	35	35	35
Nottinghamshire	64	42	42	44	46	47
South Wales	138	137	136	125	122	119
South Yorkshire	84	86	82	80	77	75
Staffordshire	39	38	38	38	38	38
Suffolk	27	28	28	28	28	28
Surrey[1]	30	28	26	22	28	29
Sussex	34	34	35	36	36	35
Thames Valley	53	47	55	55	51	53
Warwickshire	15	15	15	15	15	15
West Mercia	53	53	53	53	53	53
West Midlands	72	70	69	68	68	69
West Yorkshire	—	—	—	40	40	40
Wiltshire	28	26	24	24	24	24
Totals	[2]1,677	[2]1,689	[2]1,651	1,970	1,925	1,919

[1] The apparent loss of 12 stations by the Metropolitan police service between March 2000 and March 2001 reflects transfers to boundary forces in April 2000; Essex (2), Herts (4) and Surrey (6).

[2] Individual force figures are given where available. Some forces are unable to provide numbers for years before March 2000.

Police Numbers (London)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extra police officers have been drafted into London after the events of 11 September. [28935]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis informs me that no officers were drafted into London from other forces following the events of September 11. However, officers from all London boroughs were deployed to meet security needs. Crime statistics published on 12 July (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 07/02) showed that, in the period following this redeployment of officers, there were falls in recorded burglary in Westminster and rises in outer London boroughs. A less marked effect was seen in relation to levels of vehicle crime, but there was no noticeable impact on robbery in Westminster during the same period. Operational deployment is a matter for the Commissioner.

Jurors

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent research he has commissioned on *(a)* improper influence of jurors and *(b)* intimidation of jurors. [67653]

Hilary Benn: No recent research has been commissioned on the improper influence and intimidation of jurors. The Home Office has commissioned more general research into juries and jurors' experiences and perceptions of the criminal justice system. A report is scheduled for publication later this year.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been made in south Tyneside. [3070]

Mr. Denham: Antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) are community-based civil orders, which can be applied for by the police or local authority, in consultation with each other against an individual or several individuals whose behaviour is antisocial. Applications are to the magistrates court acting in its civil capacity.

ASBOs were introduced from 1 April 1999. The data given in the table cover the period up to the end of December 2001 (latest available).

We are currently considering whether any further checks are needed to ensure the accuracy of the number of ASBOs reported.

Number of antisocial behaviour orders issued, as reported to the Home Office, from 1 April 1999 to 31 December 2001 within Northumbria by local government authority

Area	*1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000*[1]	*1 June 2000 to 31 December 2000*	*1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001*	*Total*
Police force area/MCC[2]				
Northumbria	8	5	5	18
Local government authority				
Gateshead MB	[3]—	3	—	3
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	[3]—	—	2	2
North Tyneside	[3]—	—	2	2
South Tyneside	[3]—	1	1	2
Sunderland, City of	[3]—	1	—	1

[1] Total figure available only for Northumbria police force area within this period. Local government authority not known.

[2] MCC—magistrates courts committee area.

[3] Not available.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he plans to publish a report on the use and effectiveness of ASBOs; [37773]

(2) what evaluation of ASBOs he has carried out; and what evaluation of ASBOs he has published. [37802]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* A commitment was made to Parliament during the passage of the Crime and Disorder Bill to review the antisocial behaviour order (ASBO) after two years. A review, covering their use and effectiveness, has been undertaken and will be published shortly.

Work Permits

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether Work Permits (UK) has approved permit applications on the grounds of shortage occupations criteria when the specific skills possessed have been described as IT skills; [71545]

(2) what steps are being taken to ensure that work permits applied for under shortage occupations criteria are only granted in circumstances where the skill required is classified as a shortage occupation skill; [71541]

(3) how many work permit applications have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused by Work Permits (UK) on the grounds of shortage occupations criteria in each month since June 2001; [71542]

(4) what process of investigation is undertaken by Work Permits (UK) into work permit applications that are submitted on the grounds of shortage occupations criteria; [71544]

(5) how many documented cases his Department has received from the Professional Contractors Group relating to employers in the technology sector importing labour from abroad in an effort to reduce employment costs; and what steps are being taken by his Department to ensure that the work permit system is not abused in this way. [71543]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 15 July 2002, *Official Report,* columns 107W.

Informal Warnings

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent informal warnings are used against people under suspicion of committing an offence. [71209]

Hilary Benn: This information is not collected.

Life Sentences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are serving a life sentence in prisons in England and Wales. [70278]

Hilary Benn: On 31 May 2002 (the latest available data) there were 5,128 people serving life sentences in prisons in England and Wales. Of these 4,965 were male, and 163 were female.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in prisons in England and Wales are serving a life sentence for sexual offences. [70279]

Hilary Benn: Data show that on the 31 May 2002 (the latest available data) there were 539 people serving life sentences in prisons in England and Wales for sexual offences. All of these were male.

Police Vice Units

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police authorities in the United Kingdom have a vice unit. [70284]

Mr. Denham: There are four police forces in England and Wales who have dedicated vice units: Metropolitan, Nottinghamshire and West Midlands police forces and Hampshire constabulary. In the remaining forces issues such as prostitution and pornography are investigated in a variety of ways most often at the level of basic command units (BCU) who would have discretion to form vice units locally. To contact all the BCUs in England and Wales to find out if they have a vice unit would incur disproportionate cost.

Female Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women serving a prison sentence have their children with them in prison; and how many children are living with their mother in prisons in England and Wales. [70277]

Hilary Benn: There are currently four units for women serving a custodial sentence to have their children with them while in prison. The prisons are Askham Grange, Holloway, New Hall and Styal and provide 68 places. On Monday, 15 July 2002, there were a total of 56 children living with their mother in prisons in England and Wales.

Prison Inmates

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prison inmates under the age of 21 years were serving a prison sentence in England and Wales on 1 July. [70276]

Hilary Benn: On 31 May 2002 (the latest available data), there were 8,827 sentenced young offenders in prisons in England and Wales. Of these 8,358 were male, and 469 were female.

People Trafficking

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policies there are to assist people who have been trafficked into the UK; what financial support is given by the Government to promote such policies; and if he will make a statement. [70287]

Beverley Hughes: As set out in chapter 5 of the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain", in co-operation with the voluntary sector the Government are looking at how to offer the victims of trafficking particular support so that they can escape their circumstances and, in certain cases, help law enforcement against organised criminals. Where victims are willing to come forward to the authorities, we are considering special arrangements for their protection. We will also consider whether it would be appropriate to allow them to remain here.

Where they are to return home, we are looking at how to assist them to do so, providing them with initial counselling, ensuring that they have suitable accommodation to return to, and providing help to enable them to reintegrate into their own community and find employment.

We are developing a best practice toolkit on trafficking, which will be a guide for immigration officers, police and others potentially dealing with trafficking. In particular, it will raise awareness of the difference between trafficking and smuggling, and help those concerned to treat trafficking victims fairly.

The Government are also working with the voluntary sector to identify the cost implications on the provision of support to the victims of trafficking. The Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are running a number of prevention projects aimed primarily at raising awareness and educating potential victims (mostly women and children) of the dangers of being trafficked. We have given £3 million for the International Labour Organisation's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) programme in the Greater Mekong region (parts of Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam). This involves a number of inter-linked interventions to raise awareness, prevent trafficking and to support community reintegration for victims of trafficking.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of trafficking of people for the purpose of sexual activities have been investigated by police authorities in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [70286]

Hilary Benn: As there is at present no specific offence of trafficking, the police and other law enforcement agencies are not able to say how many such cases have been investigated in the last five years.

Reflex, the multi-agency response to organised immigration crime, is currently supporting a number of investigations into trafficking. Reflex is also engaged in Bosnia supporting anti-trafficking operations there and, with the Romanians, developing a team to target traffickers.

We have included a new offence of trafficking for prostitution in the current Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, as a stop-gap measure pending introduction of offences covering trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation when parliamentary time permits.

Prison Governors

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many number one governors in prisons in England and Wales are women; and in which prisons they are in place. [70221]

Hilary Benn: As at 16 July 2002 there are 27 number one governors (or directors, the private prison sector equivalent) who are women. Their locations are as follows.

Location
- Albany
- Brockhill
- Buckley Hall
- Bullingdon
- Cookham Wood
- Dover
- Elmley
- Everthorpe
- Guys Marsh
- Highpoint North
- Hindley
- Huntercombe
- Lancaster
- Leeds
- Littlehey
- Maidstone
- Morton Hall
- New Hall
- Onley
- Ranby
- Rye Hill
- Stafford
- Stoke Heath
- Styal
- Swansea
- Thorn Cross
- Weare.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women from an ethnic minority background hold the rank of prison governor in prisons in England and Wales. [70127]

Hilary Benn: Three men and one woman Senior Operational Manager (Governor Grade) are recorded as being from an ethnic minority as at 13 July 2002.

Care Home Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters his Department has received from *(a)* care home owners and *(b)* hon. Members with regard to delays in the vetting of care home staff applications by the Criminal Records Bureau. [71105]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The information sought by the hon. Member on this sector is not available in the format requested.

Information is currently not recorded by sector, either business or voluntary.

Deputy Chief Constable of Sussex

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the early retirement of the Deputy Chief Constable of Sussex. [22781]

Mr. Denham: We have set out our position on ill health retirement and disciplinary procedures in the White Paper. We have recognised that the current procedure can be damaging to public confidence. Police authorities should consider whether it would be right to exercise its discretion not to retire the officer where public interest in completing the proceedings in a misconduct case outweighs the medical condition. The White Paper says that

> "the Government believes that it is wholly unacceptable for sickness or medical retirement to be used as a means of avoiding discipline".

Rape

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what he plans to do in response to the recommendations of the Joint Inspectorate Domestic report on rape; and if he will make a statement. [71057]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* An inter-agency working group, led by the Home Office and with representation from the police, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Court Service, was formed in response to the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary/ Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate report into the investigation and prosecution of cases involving allegations of rape. The group is producing a detailed action plan for implementing the report's findings. It will detail measures across the whole of the criminal justice system, from police recording procedures and investigation, through review and decision making by the Crown Prosecution Service, to the trial itself and post-trial support for the victim. The action plan is being published today. I will arrange for copies to be placed in the Library.

Police Pay

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has recently had with the Police Federation with regard to changing the pay and terms and conditions of police officers. [52319]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary held his most recent meeting with representatives of the Police Federation for England and Wales on 8 July. At that meeting, he discussed with them the implementation of the package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service that was agreed on 9 May by all parties in the Police Negotiating Board (PNB), including the Federation.

Drug Rehabilitation Programmes

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been in drug rehabilitation programmes in the Portsmouth, South constituency in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [64587]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information requested on the number of people who have been in drug rehabilitation programmes in the Portsmouth, South constituency is not available. Figures are collected by the Portsmouth Drug Action Team (DAT), which covers a much wider area than Portsmouth, South.

The total number of people who have been in drug rehabilitation programmes over the last three years has increased significantly. In 1999–2000 the number of people accessing these services was 283. This number rose in the next two years to 307 in 2000–01 and 417 in 2001–102.

Retail Crime

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of money drawn from the Criminal Justice Reserve will be allocated to retail crime reduction. [54470]

Mr. Denham: No money from the Criminal Justice System Reserve has been allocated to retail crime reduction. However, £15 million has been allocated under the Capital Modernisation Fund to assist small retailers in deprived areas and funding for retail crime reduction measures can also be allocated through various other schemes such as the Targeted Policing an Safer Communities initiatives.

Derek Jack Tully

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason, in relation to the case of Derek Jack Tully, the Parole Board has imposed the parole condition of non-marital residence against the expressed wish of his wife; and if he will call for a report from the Probation Service on why they attempted a late evening supervision in his daughter's home; on how many occasions they tried to arrange two supervisions on the same day; and if he will make a statement. [70093]

Hilary Benn: The inclusion of additional licence conditions in the parole licence of prisoners serving a sentence of four years or more is a matter for the Parole Board. The Parole Board is an independent body; and therefore, it is not appropriate to comment upon its decisions in individual cases. I have referred the hon. Member's inquiry to the Chairman of the Board, requesting that he reply direct.

Furthermore, it is not normal practice to comment on an individual case supervised by the Probation Service. I have asked the National Director for the National Probation Service to request a report of the circumstances from the Chief Officer for the Essex area and will write to the hon. Member when this has been received.

Prisons

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visits from local probation officers prisoners in category B prisons are expected to receive in advance of release; and how many were received per prisoner released from each category B prison in the last year for which information is available. [67193]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* Figures on the information requested are not collected centrally. There is no requirement for the home supervising (local) probation officer to carry out a minimum number of visits to a prisoner in a category B prison who will be subject to supervision on release. Probation officers are expected to use their judgment to ensure that there is sufficient contact at a pre-release stage to enable the successful resettlement of the offender and the preparation of a supervision plan.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons he has visited; and when these visits took place. [67928]

Hilary Benn: Since becoming Home Secretary in June 2001, my right hon. Friend has visited two prisons; Leeds on 8 August 2001 and Belmarsh on 24 January 2002. Further visits will take place in due course.

Policing (Christmas)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were required to be on duty on Christmas day, as a percentage of the normal staffing levels. [30937]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not held centrally. Constables and sergeants who are required to do duty on Christmas day may elect to receive either a payment at double time or time off in lieu equal to twice the time they were required to do duty. In addition, where they receive less than eight days' notice of having to work on Christmas day, they also receive a day off in lieu.

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what format his Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations. [70503]

Hilary Benn: The majority of the results of public consultation documents issued by my Department in 2001 have been published in both printed and electronic form.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70502]

Hilary Benn: The seven consultation criteria were published in one of the consultation documents issued by the Home Department in 2001.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70501]

Hilary Benn: Yes.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form his Department has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70504]

Hilary Benn: All the consultation documents published by my Department in 2001 were available in both written and electronic form. 13 published consultation documents were monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Code of Practice on Written Consultations.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints his Department has received about its 2001 consultations in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70505]

Hilary Benn: The Home Department received two complaints about consultation exercises published in 2001. The first concerned the consultation exercise on 'justification for the use of X/Gamma radiation scanners by the Immigration Service for detecting people seeking to enter the United Kingdom illegally in vehicles and/or freight, by clandestine means' and was received in printed format. The second concerned the 'consultation paper on revising the definition of categories of deaths of members of the public during or following police contact' and was in electronic format.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [70506]

Hilary Benn: All the public consultation documents published by the Home Department in 2001 were available in printed form.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long his Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70500]

Hilary Benn: I have listed details of the length of consultation period allowed for those public consultation exercises published by the Home Department in 2001. The length of the consultation period was the same for documents in printed and electronic form.

Title of Consultation	*Length of consultation period*
Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986: Review of the Ethical Review Process	11 January 2001 to 23 March 2001
Animal Rights Extremism: Government Strategy	28 March 2001 to 27 April 2001
Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000	22 February 2001 to 15 May 2001
Proceeds of Crime: Consultation on draft legislation	5 March 2001 to 29 May 2001
The Law on Extradition: a review	12 March 2001 to 8 June 2001
Review of the Victim's Charter	27 February 2001 to 15 June 2001
Guidance for the use of an intermediary under S.29 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999	8 May 2001 to 29 June 2001
Funding Community Groups: a consultation document	3 May 2001 to 23 July 2001
The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974: A consultation leaflet	1 May 2001 to 31 July 2001
Justification for the use of X/Gamma radiation scanners by the Immigration Service for detecting people seeking to enter the United Kingdom illegally in vehicles and/or freight, by clandestine means	17 July 2001 to 27 August 2001
Extension of the Civil Penalty to rail freight shuttle wagons	18 July 2001 to 29 August 2001
Consultation Paper on the Review of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997	30 July 2001 to 19 October 2001
Making Punishment Work: Review of the Sentencing Framework for England and Wales	5 July 2001 to 31 October 2001
Assessing Communications Data Draft Code of Practice	13 August 2001 to 2 November 2001
Review of Family visitor appeals	29 October 2001 to 14 December 2001
Ratification of the European Union Driving Disqualification Convention	25 September 2001 to 18 December 2001
Consultation paper on revising the definition of categories of deaths of members of the public during or following police contact	14 December 2001 to 31 January 2002

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69805]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Department holds central records on issued consultations from 1997 for the Home Office, its non-departmental public bodies and agencies. Current consultation papers can be found on the website on http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/consult_papers.htm. Archived consultation papers can be found on http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/consuarchive.htm.

Providing all the details requested would involve disproportionate cost. However, the online archive does contain details of the consultation period for most of the consultation documents listed.

Listed in the table are the details available for 2001–02 Home Office consultation exercises.

Title of consultation	*Electronic copies available*	*Printed copies available*	*Start date of consultation period*	*End date of consultation period*
Animal (Scientific Procedures Act 1986) Review of the Ethical Review Process	Y	Y	11 January 2001	23 March 2001
Animal Rights Extremism: Government strategy	Y	Y	28 March 2001	27 April 2001
Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 New Laws for A successful multi racial Britain	Y	Y	22 February 2001	15 May 2001
Proceeds of Crime—consultation on draft legislation	Y	Y	5 March 2001	29 May 2001
The Law on Extradition—a review	Y	Y	12 March 2001	8 June 2001
Review of the Victim's Charter	Y	Y	27 February 2001	15 June 2001
Guidance on the use of an Intermediary under Section 29 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999	Y	Y	8 May 2001	29 June 2001
Funding Community Groups	Y	Y	3 May 2001	23 July 2001
Review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974	Y	Y	1 May 2001	31 July 2001
Justification for the use of X/Gamma radiation scanners by the Immigration Service for detecting people seeking to enter the UK illegally in vehicles and/or freight, by clandestine means	Y	Y	17 July 2001	27 August 2001
Extension of the Civil Penalty to rail freight shuttle wagons	Y	Y	18 July 2001	29 August 2001
Review of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997	Y	Y	30 July 2001	19 October 2001
Making Punishment Work: Review of the Sentencing Framework for England and Wales	Y	Y	5 July 2001	31 October 2001
Assessing Communications Data Draft Code of Practice	Y	Y	13 August 2001	2 November 2001
Review of Family Visitor Appeals	Y	Y	29 October 2001	14 December 2001
Ratification of the EU Driving Disqualification Convention	Y	Y	25 September 2001	18 December 2001
Revising the definition of categories of deaths of members of the public during or following police contact	Y	Y	14 December 2001	31 January 2002
Police and Criminal Evidence Act—Code A	Y	Y	11 March 2002	19 February 2002
The Motor Salvage Operators Regulations 2002 (Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001)	Y	Y	4 January 2002	1 March 2002
Secure Borders, Safe Haven White Paper Consultation	Y	Y	7 February 2002	21 March 2002
Extension of controlled drugs licensing	Y	Y	11 February 2002	1 May 2002
Proposed changes to the Misuse of Drugs legislation	Y	Y	4 March 2002	17 May 2002
Review of Crime Reduction Training	Y	Y	4 March 2002	27 May 2002
Review on Workpermit Policy on Recruitment and Employment Agencies and Contractors	Y	Y	18 March 2002	14 June 2002
Charging for the consideration of Workpermit applications	Y	Y	15 April 2002	5 July 2002

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what public consultations have been commenced by his Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72061]

Hilary Benn: The details requested are listed in the table:

Title of consultation	*Closing date*	*Website address*
Charging for the consideration of work permit applications	5 July 2002	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/consult—papers.htm
Merger of CDRPs/DAT: consultation exercise	26 July 2002	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/consult—papers.htm
Police and Criminal Evidence Act consultation on Code of Practice (Code B-E)	16 August 2002	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/consult—papers.htm
Working Holiday Maker Scheme consultation document	23 August 2002	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/consult—papers.htm
Review of Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme 2002	23 August 2002	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/consult—papers.htm
Breaking the Circle: A report of the review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act	13 September 2002	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/new.htm
Criminal Justice System White Paper: Justice for All	9 October 2002	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/new.htm
Entitlement Card and Identity Fraud: A Consultation Paper	10 January 2003	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/new.htm

Police Houses

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each English police authority, how many specialist police houses have been sold in the past three years. [36620]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The only information available relates to the sale of police dwellings. The number of dwellings sold in the past three years by English police authorities is detailed in the table.

In its report entitled "Action stations—Improving the Management of the Police Estate" (published March 1999), the Audit Commission recommended that police forces identify and dispose of buildings that were unsuitable or had maintenance liabilities which were beyond the forces' means. further it recommended that the remaining residential estate was rationalised. In some cases, for example, it may be appropriate to sell off some vacant accommodation in order to refurbish and bring back into use other accommodation.

In those areas where high housing costs are hindering recruitment and retention of police officers, allocations from the starter home initiative (SHI) will help about 1,100 police staff to buy first homes over the three years to March 2004. (In London about 550 police staff are expected to benefit from the first round allocations announced in September 2001).

We have also recently agreed with the Department of Health that the role of the national health service housing co-ordinator will be extended to cover the police service and a secondee from the police service is due to join the co-ordinator's team shortly.

Number of police dwellings sold

Police authority	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	19	8	8
Bedfordshire	7	1	2
Cambridgeshire	15	54	5
Cheshire	18	10	8
City of London	1	2	1
Cleveland	0	0	1
Cumbria	10	34	12
Derbyshire	8	9	5
Devon and Cornwall	13	8	5
Dorset	12	7	14
Durham	6	3	1
Essex	19	34	36
Gloucestershire	10	37	8
Greater Manchester	21	17	16
Hampshire	14	30	18
Hertfordshire	106	141	34
Humberside	13	14	8
Kent	28	33	19
Lancashire	24	21	12
Leicestershire	2	1	0
Lincolnshire	5	11	7
Merseyside	1	5	5
Metropolitan	138	265	149
Norfolk	3	3	3
Northamptonshire	1	9	6
Northumbria	30	35	30
North Yorkshire	11	82	18
Nottinghamshire	8	13	2
South Yorkshire	8	6	7
Staffordshire	10	10	15
Suffolk	4	4	7
Surrey	30	16	14
Sussex	35	56	16
Thames Valley	46	33	25
Warwickshire	6	8	0
West Mercia	11	5	1
West Midlands	47	45	39
West Yorkshire	9	11	14
Wiltshire	13	9	3
Total	762	1,090	574

Cyber-terrorism

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the cyber-terrorism threat to the energy industry; and what assessment has been made of NISCC cyber-terrorism counter measures since January. [69639]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* No representations from the energy industry have been received to the date concerning the threat from cyber-terrorism, but the National Infra Structure Security Co-ordination Centre (NISCC) keeps its assessment of the threat of electronic attack to the United Kingdom's critical national infrastructure, which includes the energy industry, under constant review.

Murder and Manslaughter Statistics

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people, convicted of *(a)* murder and *(b)* manslaughter who have been released from prison or other custodial institutions, have recommitted (i) murder and (ii) manslaughter following their release in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [65203]

Hilary Benn: For the period 1992 to 2001, those people known to have recommitted homicide following release for their first offence are given in the table. The figures exclude persons who may have been convicted outside England and Wales (for whom there is incomplete information).

Offenders convicted of homicide who have committed a second homicide following release

Year second offence recorded	*Number of offenders*
1992	5
1993	2
1994	2
1995	6
1996	1
1997	2
1998	2
1999	5
2000	2
2001	0

Computer Hacking

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of computer hacking UNIRAS has recorded in 2002; and on how many occasions in 2002 his Department's computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers operating *(a)* within and *(b)* outside his Department. [69640]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* Between 1 January and 12 July 2002 the Unified Instant Reporting and Alert Scheme (UNIRAS) received 21 reports of hacking incidents. No cases of computer hacking have been detected in the Home Office this year.

Road Traffic Penalties

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department plans to publish its response to the road traffic penalties consultation; and if he will make a statement. [70975]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We are currently in the final stages of producing the Government's response to the consultation exercise on road traffic penalties. We hope to have this published before the summer recess.

London Probation Service

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is towards the requirement for preparation of pre-sentence reports by the London Probation Service; and if he will make a statement. [68878]

Hilary Benn: The courts have a statutory duty and right to commission pre-sentence reports where they think it appropriate to do so and the area Probation Service has a statutory duty to provide them. A pre-sentence report may take the shorter form of a Specific Sentence Report where there is reason to believe that the offender presents a lower risk or the court has a specific sentence in mind. National Standards for the supervision of offenders in the community 2000 require pre-sentence reports to be prepared within a maximum of 15 working days of the court's request. This applies in London as elsewhere in England and Wales.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* budget and *(b)* spending has been of the London Probation Service since 1994; and if he will make a statement. [69427]

Hilary Benn: The budget for the London Probation Service from 1994–95 is set out in the table. This is based on the original main service grant allocation issued by the Home Office. The actual spending is not available as the former Inner-London Probation Service was part of the Metropolitan Police District and has not submitted grant claim forms to the Home Office.

£ million

Financial year	*Budget*
1994–95	72.0
1995–96	72.1
1996–97	78.9
1997–98	77.8
1998–99	77.1
1999–2000	80.4
2000–01	84.7
2001–02	88.0
2002–03	92.8

Notes:

1. The sum of £2.7 million in 2001–02 and £3.7 million in 2002–03 were subsequently transferred to the Department of Health for expenditure relating to Drug Treatment and Testing Orders.
2. The budgets for 2001–02 and 2002–03 exclude any provision for the Family Court Welfare Service which was transferred to the Lord Chancellor's Department from April 2001. It is estimated that such expenditure was about 7 per cent. of the budget in 2000–01.
3. The budgets for 2001–02 and 2002–03 include small amounts for small capital works and the capital charges on freehold buildings. The 2002–03 budget also includes small amounts for depreciation of fixed assets and non-reclaimable VAT.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the ratio is of staff to clients operated by the London Probation Service. [69432]

Hilary Benn: The number of clients (offenders) assigned to the staff in the London probation area is currently 32,000. Given that part time staff are on average 0.5 of the overall staffing structure, this gives full time equivalent staffing of 2,402 (including administrative and headquarters staff) giving a client/staff ratio of 13.3:1.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* sex offenders, *(b)* drug abusers, *(c)* domestic violence offenders and *(d)* mentally ill persons are being dealt with by the London Probation Service. [69431]

Hilary Benn: At the end of December 2000, 1,500 offenders sentenced for indictable sexual offences and 5,400 offenders sentenced for indictable drugs offences were being supervised by the London probation area. Information on domestic violence offenders and mentally ill offenders is not available.

Prison and Probation Service Investigations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the target to close 70 per cent. of prison and probation service investigations within 12 weeks was not met. [68783]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The target to which the hon. Member refers is set by the Ombudsman for Prisons and Probation. The Ombudsman sets a target of issuing a final report of his investigations within 12 weeks. In his annual report for 2000–01, published on 27 June, the Ombudsman reports a decline in performance in meeting this target in the case of complaints from prisoners, from 73 per cent. of cases dealt with in 1999–2000 to 63 per cent. of cases dealt with in 2000–01. As explained in his report, the drop in performance was largely brought about by a 53 per cent. increase in the number of eligible complaints, an increase which he attributes to a speeding up of the Prison Service complaints system so that more prisoners are prepared to complete the complaints process before going to the Ombudsman direct. Most complaints and appeals are now answered by the Prison Service within six weeks. The Ombudsman can only investigate once the internal complaints process has been completed.

The Ombudsman was awarded additional resources to cope with the backlog in 2001–02 and it has now substantially decreased.

The Ombudsman's remit did not extend to complaints relating to the National Probation Service until September 2001, and they are not covered in his annual report. All these complaints are being completed by his office on time.

Probation Service

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the financial position of Bull/Integris was taken into account before the standard technical environment for the Probation Service contract was let on 1 January. [65420]

Hilary Benn: The National Probation Directorate commissioned the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) to assess the financial position of Groupe Bull and its subsidiary Bull Information Systems (including the business division Integris) prior to the shortlisting of service providers for the STEPS contracts.

After shortlisting and prior to award of the STEPS contracts, the National Probation Directorate commissioned a firm of forensic accountants to evaluate the financial risks regarding the sale of Integris by Bull Information Systems to Steria.

On-going financial checks will be carried out on Integris (now renamed as Steria following the change of ownership) throughout the life of the STEPS contracts.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many computer terminals are operational within the National Probation Service in England and Wales. [65422]

Hilary Benn: There are currently 17,357 terminals in use in the National Probation Service.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the maintenance charges are for the probation STEPS contract during normal working hours; what the charge is *(a)* between 6.00 pm and 10.00 pm for an office and an area, *(b)* for a Saturday and a Sunday event, *(c)* in relation to an office relocation and *(d)* for the installation of a computer or printer; and whether the contract with Integris for these matters represents value for money. [65421]

Hilary Benn: It is normal in contracts such as these for the information requested to be covered by commercial confidentiality clauses. However, recent press reports on this subject have been so inaccurate and misleading that both the supplier and the National Probation Directorate felt it appropriate to correct some specific points.

The Standard Technical Environment for the Probation Service (STEPS) contract provides the foundation for the development of IT in the Probation Service. Earlier this year it became one of the first contracts to pass through the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) Gateway process, set up to scrutinise Government contracts for value and purpose.

The core support hours for the contract are Monday to Friday from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm. The 'maintenance charges' to extend these hours to provide full service cover for a whole office between 6.00 and 10.00 pm on a weeknight would be £2,661. On a Saturday the cost to support the entire network of 15,000 desktops across England and Wales would be £8,704. On a Sunday, the same cost would be £11,600. To deliver this service the supplier has to provide people on call around the country, responding to incidents and resolving problems. These costs would only be paid should this work be needed. To date, in the lifetime of this contract, it has not been. The cost to move a workstation would be £192. The contract represents good value for money.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the target for the proportion of cases under Probation Service supervision where the service responds to a breach of conditions by taking action in accordance with the national standards has not been met. [68785]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Probation Service national standards provide clear guidelines on what the Probation Service is expected to deliver in respect of enforcement of breach action. Performance is closely monitored and there is clear evidence of an improvement increases of breach action from 51 per cent. of cases in 1998 to 70 per cent. in September 2000 (the last date for validated returns). This is against a target of 90 per cent. This improvement has been achieved at the same time as the standard against which performance was measured was significantly toughened during the period.

The enforcement target is one of a package of targets for which there is a direct cash-related link to performance. That link supports the work which is being undertaken by the Probation Service to improve performance in this area through the review of enforcement procedures.

Child Protection (Sport)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what meetings he has had with Ministers in other Departments with regard to *(a)* child protection in sport and *(b)* inter-agency working on child protection in sport; [69127]

(2) what measures he has put in place to facilitate other Departments' involvement in implementing the Criminal Records Bureau disclosure information checks with regard to child protection in sport. [69124]

Hilary Benn: Although the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) has been set up as an executive agency of the Home Office, its work supports the policy objectives of several Departments including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) objectives of improving child protection in sport. Employers and other organisations taking forward the policies on child protection of DCMS and other Departments are already making substantial use of the CRB service.

No ministerial meetings have been arranged specifically on these subjects. But sport was represented on the CRB's customer forum which advised on the implementation of the bureau. Officials have also had a number of ad hoc meetings with representatives of sports organisations with regard to checks for child protection purposes, as they have with other Departments and with a range of other organisations about checks for this and other purposes.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the status is of *(a)* referees and umpires, *(b)* referees' assistants, *(c)* match officials and *(d)* others who receive remuneration for their involvement in the context of the Criminal Records Bureau disclosure information checks; [69129]

(2) what his definition is of a volunteer for whom Criminal Records Bureau disclosure information checks are necessary. [69128]

Hilary Benn: We announced in February of last year that standard and enhanced disclosures will be issued free of charge in the case of volunteers. The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) Regulations 2002 define a volunteer as a person engaged in an activity which involves spending time, unpaid (except for travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit some third party other than or in addition to a close relative. Those persons in the categories mentioned who met the criteria for these levels of Disclosure which are set out in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 and section 115 of the Police Act 1997 and whose remuneration amounted only to travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses would, of course, be entitled to a free Disclosure.

0870 Telephone Numbers

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 896W, if he will list the services accessed by the public for which 0870 numbers are used; and what factors are considered in reaching a decision. [71130]

Hilary Benn: The Home Office and its agencies use a total of 11 0870 numbers:

Immigration and Nationality Directorate: 0870 606 7766

United Kingdom Passport Service (Main): 0870 521 0410

United Kingdom Passport Service (Textphone): 0870 240 8090

United Kingdom Passport Service (High Street Partners): 0870 243 4477

United Kingdom Passport Service (Complaints): 0870 241 1902

Criminal Records Bureau (Main): 0870 909 0811

Criminal Records Bureau (Registration line): 0870 909 0822

Criminal Records Bureau (Disclosure application line): 0870 909 0844

Criminal Records Bureau (Minicom line): 0870 909 0344

Prison Service: 0870 000 1397

Main Home Office public inquiry line: 0870 000 1585.

Decisions in all cases were taken on the basis of estimates of the cost to the Department, the cost to the customer, the likely volume of calls that might be generated if 0800, 0845 or 0870 numbers were used, and the impact that volume of calls might have on the levels of service provided.

Additionally, for the Immigration and Nationality Enquiry Bureau number, the use of an 0870 number was agreed on the grounds that the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) would reinvest any money earned back into improving the telephone bureau operation and thereby customer service. This has been done and £0.75 million was invested this spring in the purchase of a new switchboard with increased functionality.

Metropolitan Police Trainees

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many trainee Metropolitan Police officers have had their 18 weeks' training extended to allow them to repeat written and practical assessments in each year since 1997; how much this has cost; and if he will make a statement. [58559]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police the Metropolis Police has provided the information in the following table:

Year ended	*Number of officers who have had their training extended*	*Representing percentage of overall number of officers trained*
31 December 1997	[1]—	n/a
31 December 1998	33	2.6
31 December 1999	39	3.2
31 December 2000	76	7
31 December 2001	310	14

[1] Figures not available

There are two reasons for the increase in the number of officers who have had their training extended in the years ending December 2000 and 2001. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of new recruits to the Metropolitan Police Service, and the training school now places more emphasis on helping those officers who do not achieve the required standard within 18 weeks to achieve the appropriate level of competence by extending the basic training period. This is more efficient and cost effective than the previous approach, where it was more generally the case that the force would dispense with the services of officers failing to meet the required standard by the end of the 18-week foundation training course.

The costs are not available.

Police (Negotiations)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the timing of the publication of the conciliation details following negotiations with the Police Federation, on his Department's website; and what negotiations he has had with the Police Negotiating Board as a result. [54886]

Mr. Denham: On 24 October 2001, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary asked the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) to explore and agree a package to modernise police pay and conditions of service. On 27 December 2001, the PNB reached agreement in principle, subject to ratification by all parties following consultation with their members. On 25 February, PNB failed to ratify the agreement reached on 27 December 2001. As required by the PNB Constitution, a period of conciliation followed. On 26 April, the conciliators for the official and staff sides of the PNB agreed on a recommendation for settlement. The details of the recommended conciliated settlement were placed on the Home Office website on the same day.

Under the PNB Constitution, the conciliated settlement recommended by the conciliators for both sides has to be ratified by the full PNB. PNB meetings took place on 1 and 9 May. At the meeting on 9 May, the recommended conciliated settlement was ratified.

Prisoners (Feltham)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many qualified teachers are employed at Feltham Young Offenders Institute on *(a)* full-time permanent contracts, *(b)* part-time permanent contracts, *(c)* full-time temporary contracts, *(d)* part-time temporary contracts and *(e)* agency basis; and if he will make a statement. [67310]

Hilary Benn: At Feltham, there are currently 14 teachers, including the head and deputies, on full-time permanent contracts. There are 30 teachers on part-time permanent contracts and two on full time temporary contracts.

There are no teachers at Feltham on part-time temporary contracts, nor are any employed on an agency basis.

Domestic Violence

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many cases involving domestic violence have been brought to court in each of the past five years; [59855]

(2) how many men have been convicted of offences connected with domestic violence in each of the past five years. [59851]

Mr. Denham: Offences involving domestic violence are not identifiable on the Home Office Court Proceedings database as no specific statute covers such offences.

Prosecutions brought might range from common assault to homicide depending on the level of violence, and as the circumstances of the offences for which prosecutions are brought are not collected centrally, offences involving domestic violence cannot be distinguished from other offences within these categories.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what consultation he intends to undertake in respect of guidance to police authorities on dealing with perpetrators of domestic violence within their ranks; [60449]

(2) when he intends to publish guidance to police authorities on dealing with perpetrators of domestic violence within their ranks. [60452]

Mr. Denham: Work is in progress, in consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), to produce guidance to police authorities on dealing with perpetrators of domestic violence within police ranks. A target date will be set for issuing the guidance once the new ACPO lead takes up his post and consultation will take place with relevant bodies once the guidance is drafted. In addition to this, work is being undertaken on ensuring that police discipline procedures complement any guidance to be issued. Some police forces already have procedures in place to ensure they respond effectively to any indication that police staff may be perpetrating domestic violence and evidence of good practice may be incorporated into the guidance where appropriate.

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70541]

Mr. Blunkett: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 397W which detailed the number of press officers employed during the years 1997 to 2002.

Records of secondees to the press office are not routinely kept as often they are at nil cost to the Department and may only be for periods of six weeks. The press office has had over the period of time in question a number of fast stream policy officials and immigration officers on attachments to the press office, usually for periods of around six months.

Police Numbers (North-West)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time police officers there were in 1997 and each subsequent year in *(a)* Preston, *(b)* Blackburn, *(c)* the north west of England and *(d)* England; and how many there were in Lancashire in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, and (iii) 2000. [40682]

Mr. Denham: Information on police numbers for each force in each year since 1997 for the north-west region is set out in the table.

North West region

Force	*1997*[1]	*1998*[1]	*1999*[1]	*2000*[1]	*2001*[1]
Lancashire	3,247	3,257	3,245	3,179	3,255
Cheshire	2,046	2,042	2,071	2,011	2,002
Cumbria	1,144	1,164	1,126	1,084	1,048
Greater Manchester	6,922	6,949	6,810	6,795	6,909
Merseyside	4,230	4,216	4,211	4,085	4,081
Total	17,588	17,216	17,463	17,154	17,296
England	118,459	118,139	117,195	115,324	116,549

[1] As at 31 March.

Note:

Figures are for full-time equivalent strength.

I understand from the Chief Constable that Preston is part of Central (D) Division of Lancashire Constabulary and that Blackburn is part of Eastern (E) Division. It is not possible to separate police strength for Blackburn and Preston from divisional strength. Information for the strength of these divisions has been provided by the Chief Constable.

D and E Divisions police strength

Year[1]	*D Division*[2]	*E Division*[2]
1997	383	554
1998	382	552
1999	370	531
2000	380	543
2001	389	558

[1] As at 31 March.

[2] As at 31 January.

Note:

Figures are for full-time equivalent strength.

Police and Crime Reduction Funds

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposed transfer of money from police and crime reduction funds to research and statistics current spending and on the *(a)* research and *(b)* evaluative projects which this funding is intended to support. [22135]

Mr. Denham: The transfer of £9.8 million from policing and crime reduction to research and statistics was a technical adjustment to place the funding in the budget of the Home Office Directorate that would be taking forward this previously agreed work. The £9.8 million breaks down as:

£7.4 million to fund external evaluation of crime reduction initiatives; and

£2.4 million to develop the evidence base for sentencing and enforcement practices.

The £7.4 million provision will cover evaluation of the following initiatives:

Reducing burglary;

Targeted policing;

Treatment of offenders;

Drug arrest referrals;

School intervention;

Domestic violence;

Sentencing;

"Tackling Prostitution—What Works?";

Closed circuit television (CCTV); and

a range of initiatives centred on design against crime.

Police Targets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate, for each police force in England, the number of policing plan targets *(a)* set and *(b)* achieved for (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [66885]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The Government require police authorities to set targets in respect of Best Value indicators for domestic burglary, vehicle crime and, in five metropolitan areas, robbery. These five areas are: Merseyside; Greater Manchester; West Midlands; West Yorkshire; and the Metropolitan police. The information requested is not available for the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01. The information requested for 2001–02 is shown in the table. Targets for all other indicators may be set locally by the police authority following consultation with their communities. Performance data are published annually in police authorities' Best Value Performance Plans.

Targets for domestic burglary, vehicle crime and robbery

			Domestic burglary target		*Robbery target*		*Vehicle crime*	
Police forces	*No. targets set*	*No. targets met*	*Set*	*Met*	*Set*	*Met*	*Set*	*Met*
Avon and Somerset	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Bedfordshire	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
Cambridgeshire	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	0
Cheshire	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
City of London	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	0
Cleveland	3	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
Cumbria	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Derbyshire	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Devon and Cornwall	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
Dorset	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Durham	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
Dyfed-Powys[1]	3	1	1	1	1	—	1	—
Essex	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Gloucestershire	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
Greater Manchester	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
Gwent	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1

Targets for domestic burglary, vehicle crime and robbery

Police forces	*No. targets set*	*No. targets met*	*Domestic burglary target* Set	Met	*Robbery target* Set	Met	*Vehicle crime* Set	Met
Hampshire	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
Hertfordshire	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
Humberside	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Kent	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	1
Lancashire	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Leicestershire	3	2	1	1	1	0	1	1
Lincolnshire	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Merseyside	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Metropolitan police	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Norfolk	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	1
North Wales	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
North Yorkshire	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Northamptonshire	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Northumbria	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
Nottinghamshire	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
South Wales	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
South Yorkshire	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Staffordshire	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Suffolk	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Surrey	3	2	1	1	1	0	1	1
Sussex	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	1
Thames Valley	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Warwickshire	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
West Mercia	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
West Midlands	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
West Yorkshire[1]	3	0	1	—	1	0	1	—
Wiltshire	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
England and Wales	107	25	43	9	21	0	43	16

[1] Have set targets for 2004–05.

Pre-Sentence Reports

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the target for the percentage of pre-sentence reports done within the 15-day national standard has not been met. [68786]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Probation service national standards set out what the probation service is expected to deliver in respect of providing pre-sentence reports to the court. Performance is closely monitored and there is clear evidence of improvement in magistrates courts from 54.6 per cent. in 1996–97 to 79.5 per cent. in 2001–02. This is against a target of 90 per cent. The probation service is working with the courts to improve further performance in this area.

Race Hate Literature

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to improve liaison between the police and the CPS regarding the prosecution of those responsible for race hate literature; and if he will make a statement. [36870]

Mr. Denham: Following discussions in the Lawrence Inquiry Steering Group meeting in October 2001, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has issued further guidance to staff. All cases, whether submitted for preliminary advice or as files for prosecution under Part III of the Public Order Act 1986, will be considered by a small team of lawyers within the Casework Directorate at CPS headquarters, in order to ensure that best practice is followed and that there is consistency in decision making. Local Chief Crown Prosecutors will ensure that Chief Constables are aware of this situation and of the ability of the CPS Casework Directorate to provide advice at any stage of an investigation.

The Crown Prosecution Service and the Association of Chief Police Officers will discuss other possible measures, in particular a mechanism for pooling experience concerning cases of successful prosecution, at their next bilateral meeting.

In addition, the Government have introduced, in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, changes to the law on incitement to racial hatred which expand the coverage of the offences to include hatred against groups abroad and which increase the maximum penalty for these offences from two to seven years' imprisonment.

Darren Cowdrey

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations have taken place into the injuries suffered by Darren Cowdrey, prisoner HJ 5552, in Wandsworth prison. [68934]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The police have investigated the incident to which the hon. Member refers. They are satisfied that no crime was committed. A member of Prison Service Construction Unit also visited Wandsworth to look at health and safety aspects of the incident.

Kainos Rehabilitation Units

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Kainos rehabilitation units have been closed; if he will list the closure dates of such units; and if he will make a statement. [69482]

Hilary Benn: The Kainos Community programmes at Highpoint South and North prisons closed by mutual agreement on 31 January 2002 and 30 April 2002 respectively.

The Prison Service is considering a proposal from Kainos Community to continue to run modified versions of the existing programmes at Swaleside and the Verne prisons, on a self funding basis.

Wandsworth Prison

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use is made of *(a)* safety nets and *(b)* CCTV to reduce prisoner harm and self-harm in Wandsworth Prison. [68935]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Wandsworth prison has safety nets on every wing which, in addition to its other safety purposes, prevents prisoners from falling from the landings to the ground floor. Closed Circuit television (CCTV) is present in some areas of the prison, but not in the residential areas. In those areas of the prison where CCTV is present, it might contribute to the prevention of self-harm but this is not its primary purpose.

Voluntary Constables

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of voluntary constables was in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [60716]

Mr. Denham: The numbers of special constables in England and Wales from 1991 to 2001 are given in the table. From 1990 to 1995, statistics on the strength of the special constabulary in England and Wales were collected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. These were compiled at the end of the calendar year until 1993, and then for the financial year 1994–95. Since 1995, these statistics have been collected by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate. They are compiled at the end of March and September each year.

	Figures
December 1991	17,543
December 1992	19,035
December 1993	20,573
March 1995	20,026
September 1995	19,655
September 1996	19,451
September 1997	19,163
September 1998	17,296
September 1999	15,727
September 2000	13,487
September 2001	12,068

Figures to March 1995 supplied by HMIC, figures from September 1995 supplied by Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate

Figures to march 1995 supplied by HMIC, figures from September 1995 supplied by Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate

Special Constables are a key element of our police reform agenda. We are working on a package of measures designed to help reverse the decline in numbers by improving the way they are recruited, managed and deployed. We are particularly keen to improve liaison with employers—after all, Specials bring a wealth of training and experience in to their wider workplace. We are also publishing guidance on good practice by the end of this year. And we have set aside £300,000 to help "specials champions" drive forward initiatives to improve the recruitment and retention of specials.

Prisoners (Literacy and Numeracy)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners discharged from their sentence were at level 1 or below for literacy and numeracy skills in each year since 1998 to the latest available date. [69300]

Hilary Benn: The figures published by the Prison Service are as follows:

	Percentage discharged at level 1 or below for	
	Numeracy	*Literacy*
2000–01	67.6	76.5
2001–02	65.7	77.6

No comparable data were collected before 2000–01. From 2000–01, delivery targets for literacy and numeracy in prisons have been for the number of basic skills qualifications achieved annually by prisoners. In 2000–01, prisoners achieved 12,500 basic skills qualifications at level 2, rising to nearly 16,000 in 2001–02. Targets for this year and next have been widened to cover the achievement of basic skills qualifications at all levels. This will help establishments to be more responsive to the range of prisoners' basic skills needs.

The Government expects prisoners to achieve 28,800 basic skills qualifications in 2002–03 rising to 32,000 in 2003–04. By helping to equip prisoners with the skills they need to resettle effectively back into the community on release, these achievements will contribute to reduced rates of re-offending and to making communities safer.

Investigatory Branch CIB 3

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints of breaches of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 by the investigatory branch CIB 3 have been received in the last four years. [69331]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the Metropolitan Police Service complaints and discipline system indicates that there have been six allegations of breaches of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 by officers from the Anti-Corruption Unit of the Metropolitan Police Service's Directorate of Professional Standards (formerly CIB3) in the last four years.

Police Standards

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the functions and compatibility of the Standards Unit and HMIC. [61180]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and the Standards Unit have separate and complementary roles. They work together to identify where forces and basic command unit's (BCUs) need support to improve their performance. HMIC will continue to report on performance across the whole service, alerting the Police Standards Unit (PSUs) where it believes its support is needed to improve performance: PSU by contrast will focus on particular areas where BCUs and forces need help to improve performance.

In doing this, PSU will draw on advice from HMIC, monthly crime data by BCU and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) (and other sources where available). Its early work includes developing analysis and assessment frameworks to make best use of police performance data and quality assurance processes to ensure the accuracy and reliability of this data.

The Standards Unit will begin a programme of targeting support for forces and BCUs in the autumn. It will also provide funding to help the best BCUs to innovate and develop best practice.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to encourage former officers to rejoin the police service; and if applications from such people will be treated in the same way as those from *(a)* new recruits and *(b)* officers seeking a transfer from another force. [45874]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Home Office issues guidelines on recruitment which do not distinguish between new applicants and those seeking to rejoin the police service. Once appointed, depending on individual circumstances, officers rejoining may not be required to complete the full period of probation or to undertake the initial training programme.

The Home Office does not issue guidance to forces about applications from transferees.

The range of measures we have taken to improve recruitment and retention generally, and the reform we are implementing may encourage former offices to consider rejoining.

Crime Reduction Fund

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each initiative in each year since the start of the Crime Reduction Fund, indicating *(a)* the amount budgeted for each initiative and in total in each year to date and *(b)* the total expended for each initiative and in total in each year of the initiative to date; and if he will make a statement. [37672]

Mr. Denham: The information, covering project grant, evaluation and running costs, is as follows:

£000

	1999–2000		*2000–01*		*2001–02*
	Budgeted provision[1]	*Actual expenditure*	*Budgeted provision*[1]	*Actual expenditure*	*Budgeted provision*[1,2]
Reducing burglary	13,800	2,067	19,830	9,137	20,185
Locks for the over-60s	0	0	5,150	927	5,530
Summer schemes	0	0	1,500	1,890	2,058
Prostitution—what works	0	0	500	42	1,049
Targeted policing	6,000	509	12,450	9,696	21,880
'On Track'[3]	500	169	12,500	4,943	2,819
Innovation fund[4]	0	0	9,000	0	0
Vehicle crime publicity	0	0	8,000	8,000	0
Treatment of offenders	5,300	2,298	8,000	7,732	7,411
Drug arrest referrals	2,000	306	9,000	8,941	10,874
Schools intervention	4,000	205	6,000	6,832	5,438
Violence against women	0	90	5,000	2,007	10,880
Vehicle crime	0	0	4,000	505	3,883
Youth inclusion	0	0	2,750	2,750	5,870
Sentencing practices	675	332	575	866	4,565
Neighbourhood wardens	0	0	1,500	922	4,047
Design against crime	500	589	1,500	551	1,138
Arson control forum	0	0	165	118	0
Offenders index	75	75	75	266	0
Suzy Lamplugh Trust	0	0	205	205	295
Rape Crisis Federation	0	0	0	0	838
CCTV initiative[5]	20,000	5	60,000	23,460	150,841
Total[6]	52,850	6,645	167,700	89,790	259,601

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[1] The voted provision for 1999–2000 and 2000–01—as published in the Home Office annual report for 2000—was £60 million and £160 million respectively. The budgeted provision figures for these years in the table above differ from those in that report because they reflect updated profiles of planned expenditure. The figures for 200–102 take into account the effects of the SR 2000 Settlement.

[2] Shows the amounts required to roll out the remaining projects under these initiatives. Some of this expenditure will be incurred in 2002–03.

[3] Balance of funding transferred to DfEE for completion of programme.

[4] Funding reallocated to other projects.

[5] P[illegible]n comes from the Capital Modernisation Fund. Includes £4.6 million for CCTV in police vehicles.

[6] The [illegible]al figure excludes central and regional programme support costs, which are not allocated to particular initiatives.

Heathrow (Security)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis concerning thefts and robberies at Heathrow; and if he will make a statement. [46203]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis meet regularly to discuss issues relevant at the time, including the Metropolitan police's response to high profile incidents. The Government are considering what further measures are necessary to improve airport security.

Operation Rose

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with respect to Operation Rose in Northumbria, how many individuals were *(a)* suspected of child abuse and *(b)* arrested in connection with charges of child abuse; of the people arrested, how many were subsequently released; how many of the suspects were charged; of the people charged, how many people had the charges against them dropped before going to court; how many individuals were taken to court who pleaded not guilty to the allegations made against them; how many people were taken to court who pleaded guilty to the allegations made against them; how many cases were discontinued and what were the reasons for discontinuance; how many complaints were received and how many suspects and complainants were identified; of the cases sent to the CPS, how many were (i) accepted, (ii) referred for further information and (iii) rejected; what the total cost associated with Operation Rose was, including direct costs of salaries and expenses of officers involved; what defence costs were awarded against the Crown; and who or which organisation has reviewed the way in which Operation Rose was conducted. [49833]

Mr. Denham: 197 individuals were regarded by the police as possible suspects in the course of Operation Rose, of whom 60 were arrested in connection with charges of child abuse. 28 of these 60 were subsequently released and 32 charged. A further 26 cases were sent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for review, but no charges were laid in any of these cases. The CPS reviewed each case before charges were brought, with the result that no case in which charges had been brought was discontinued. 31 of those charged pleaded not guilty to the allegations made against them, and one pleaded guilty. Five of these 31 were convicted. In total 530 complaints were received in the course of the operation; all complainants were identified.

The total cost associated with Operation Rose, including direct costs of salaries and expenses of officers involved, amounted to £5 million. No defence costs were awarded against the Crown—costs were awarded out of central funds. All the agencies involved in Operation Rose—police, CPS, social services and health—have since reviewed the processes involved in the investigation.

Police Pay

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will define working at the sharp end, as quoted in the Home Office police briefing, January 2001. [48289]

Mr Denham: The briefing note stated that "we want to bring in a new scheme to target extra rewards at those working at the sharp end of public service, doing the most difficult and demanding jobs". On 9 May, the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) agreed a package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service, including such a scheme.

Under the special priority payment scheme, it will be for chief officers and police authorities to draw up local schemes, taking account of national criteria and any guidance issued by the Home Secretary. They will also have to consult local staff associations.

Posts may qualify for payment where they:

Carry a significantly higher responsibility level than the norm for the rank; or

Present particular difficulties in recruitment and retention; or

Have specially demanding working conditions or working environments.

Officers in qualifying posts will receive a one-off payment at the end of the year of not less than £500 and not more than £3,000 normally, although exceptionally payments of up to £5,000 may be made.

In the first year of the scheme's operation (2003), forces will have to spend a minimum of 1 per cent. of the force's annual basic paybill for all ranks up to and including chief superintendent, rising to 1.5 per cent. in the second year and 2 per cent. in the third year.

Immigration

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy where family ties are claimed to the UK in third country cases. [72780]

Beverley Hughes: The policy on the exercise of discretion in safe third country cases where family ties to the United Kingdom are claimed is that potential third country cases would normally have their asylum claims considered substantively in this country where:

(a) an applicant's spouse is in the United Kingdom;

(b) the applicant is an unmarried minor and a parent is in the United Kingdom;

(c) the applicant has an unmarried minor child in the United Kingdom.

The policy in *(a)* would not be applied in cases where a marriage was contracted after the applicant's arrival in the United Kingdom. In all cases "in the United Kingdom" is to be taken as meaning with leave to enter or remain or on temporary admission to this country as an asylum seeker prior to an initial decision on their application.

Discretion may be exercised according to the merits of the case where:

(d) a married minor was involved but the criteria in *(b)* or *(c)* above were otherwise fulfilled. (We would be less likely to consider cases under (c) than (b) under these circumstances).

(e) the applicant was an elderly or otherwise dependent parent;

(f) the family link was not one which would normally be considered but there was clear evidence that the applicant was wholly or mainly dependent on the relative in the United Kingdom and that there was an absence of similar support elsewhere.

I would expect cases falling into this latter category to be rare.

Factors which might influence the exercise of discretion in these cases, such as language, cultural links or the number of family members in the United Kingdom may have a bearing, but there would need to be a compelling combination of such factors to ensure the exercise of discretion in favour of an applicant.

Cases citing family ties which would not normally be considered and which did not display any of the features, which engaged the exercise of discretion, would not normally be considered substantively. This means that a brother, who was not dependent on his sibling(s), would not normally have his case considered here, no matter how strong his cultural or linguistic links with the United Kingdom.

The intention of the policy is to re-unite members of an existing family unit who, through circumstances outside their control, had become fragmented. However, I emphasise that where the relationship did not exist prior to the person's arrival to the United Kingdom, the policy would only be applied in the most exceptionally compelling cases.

I am satisfied that this policy complies with the United Kingdom's obligations as regards the European Convention on Human Rights and that it is consistent with our obligations under the Dublin Convention, as set out in Article 1 of Decision 1–2000 of the Committee set up by Article 18 of the Dublin Convention concerning the transfer of responsibility for family members in accordance with Article 3(4) and Article 9 of the Convention.

Public Protection

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the first multi-agency public protection annual report; and if he will make a statement on the publication of local area reports. [72778]

Hilary Benn: I am today publishing the first Multi-Agency Public Protection Annual Report (MAPPA) annual report, a copy of which is being placed in the Library. Local police and probation areas will from tomorrow begin to publish their own reports, and these will provide the public with information on the number of offenders covered by the arrangements.

The work done in the past year by the Multi Agency Public Protection Panel in managing risk has contributed to a higher level of public protection from potentially dangerous offenders in the community.

Our aim is that the MAPPA process should be transparent and that members of the public should be able to see what is being done on its behalf. That is why the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 requires each area to publish a report detailing the work it has done in the past year. That is also why I announced last month that members of the public were being invited to apply to sit on the boards overseeing these arrangements in five pilot areas.

In seeing the information which these reports now make available for the first time, I hope the public will be reassured by the work being done on their behalf.

Nuclear Installations (Policing)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the cost of policing nuclear sites from terrorist attacks for the years *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002. [70891]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary's annual reports provide overall outturn for financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 which were £20.6 million and £21.2 million respectively. The annual report for 2001–02 has not yet been published. The figures are not broken down since the Constabulary's responsibilities include protecting material and sites from theft and sabotage.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the costs of his proposals to create a civil nuclear constabulary. [70892]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

As affirmed in the White Paper "Managing the Nuclear Legacy" the Government intend to separate the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary from the UKAEA and reconstitute it as a stand-alone force, overseen by a statutory Police Authority, in order to make it independent of the nuclear industry and provide improved governance arrangements. The constabulary's role, which has remained broadly unchanged since its inception in 1954, is to protect specified nuclear sites and escort sensitive nuclear material in transit. It is not envisaged that reconstitution will affect its size, role or the locations where it serves.

Estimates of the costs associated with setting up and operating the constabulary as a standalone force are included in the report of the quinquennial review of the UKAEA which was placed in the Libraries of the House in November 2001. The estimated costs comprise (at 2000–01 levels):

Additional running costs—£170,000 per annum.

One-off costs on separation from UKAEA, including new hardware/software for finance/payroll management, legal and financial advice (including setting up a transfer scheme), project management support, transitional recruitment and training costs and rebadging—£1,120,000.

Retail Crime

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 605W, on retail crime, if he will list for each regional crime reduction director the amount spent on business crime reduction in 2001–02. [69807]

Mr. Denham: The following table sets out the amounts spent by regional crime reduction directors on business, (including retail) crime reduction initiatives in 2001–02 and shows these as a proportion of their total spending on crime reduction initiatives. These figures do not include funding spent on non-specific schemes, such as town centre close circuit television, which will usually benefit businesses in the areas where they operate and which will often have been identified as a priority in consultation with the business community.

The Home Office does not record the amounts spent on retail crime partnerships in each of the 376 statutory crime and disorder partnerships.

Column 1	*Column 2*	*Column 3*
Region	*Spend on business crime, including retail crime, projects in 2001–02 (£)*	*Column 2 as a proportion of annual spending of regional crime reduction directors in 2001–02 (Percentage)*
Eastern	132,262	1.0
East Midlands	221,064	1.4
London	336,225	1.1
North East	262,718	2.4
North West	952,162	3.9
South East	251,500	1.4
South West	94,549	0.7
Wales	132,262	1.6
West Midlands	469,199	2.6
Yorkshire and Humber	325,128	1.7

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 605W, to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper), on retail crime, if he will list for each regional crime reduction director the annual budget for crime reduction in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [69808]

Mr. Denham: The information is as follows:

£000

Region	*2001–02 (Expenditure)*	*2002–03 (Budget)*
East	13,569	10,472
East Midlands	15,938	13,277
London	31,911	37,863
North East	11,063	10,081
North West	24,496	27,729
South East	18,409	21,487
South West	12,826	17,102
Wales	8,080	10,162
West Midlands	18,297	18,504
Yorkshire and Humberside	19,346	23,593
Total	173,935	190,270

Funding covers measures and interventions under a range of programmes; the Crime Reduction Programme, Safer Communities Initiative, Communities Against Drugs, Partnership Development Fund (interim allocation for 2002–03), Security for Small Retailers in Deprived Areas.

Crime Reduction Directors also work with their Colleagues in the Government Offices for the Regions and the National Assembly for Wales to ensure that crime reduction is reflected in the delivery of other Departments' programmes. Total funds spent on combating crime in the regions go wider than those administered through Regional Crime Directors.

Medical Confidentiality

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what priority is given to protecting medical confidentiality in combating abusive sexual relations. [69758]

Mr. Lammy: I have been asked to reply.

The circumstances in which confidential information about individuals can be disclosed are governed by the common law duty of confidence. This legal obligation in no way constrains health professionals and others who hold confidential information from disclosing such information appropriately where children are at risk.

The Department issued guidance entitled "The Protection and Use of Patient Information" to the national health service in March 1996. This explains that patient information should only be released on a need to know basis if it is required by statute or the courts, is supported by the consent of the individual, or if it is judged that there is a strong public interest justification in disclosure which overrides the duty of confidence to the patient. For example, in circumstances where failure to do so may expose the patient or others to a risk of death or serious harm or the information is needed to prevent serious crime. Disclosure of information in the public interest is a matter of professional judgment and must be decided on a case by case basis by the health professional responsible for the patient's care.

In child protection cases, the overriding principle is to secure the best interests of the child. Therefore, if a health professional has knowledge of abuse or neglect they may disclose relevant information to an appropriate person or authority where disclosure is felt to be in the medical interests of the child patient.

HEALTH

Contraception

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many courses of contraception and contraceptive devices have been prescribed *(a)* to persons over 16 and *(b)* to persons of each age group under 16 in each year since 1990. [44285]

Ms Blears: Tables showing first contacts with women at family planning clinics by primary method of birth control are as follows. It should be noted that family planning clinics account for only about one fifth of prescriptions for contraceptives to women of all ages; over two-thirds of contraceptive prescriptions in England are provided by general practitioners.

It should also be noted that these figures count only once those women who have attended family planning clinics more than once in a 12 month period.

First contacts with women at family planning clinics by primary method of birth control and age, 1991–92 to 2000–01

Number of first contacts (thousand)

	1992–93		*1992–93*		*1993–94*		*1994–95*		*1995–96*	
Primary method	*Under 16*	*16 & over*	*Under 16*	*16 & over*	*Under 16*	*16 & over*	*Under 16*	*16 & over*	*Under 16*	*16 & over*
Total all methods	18.5	882.7	22.4	858.7	31.7	835.2	44.7	832.4	51.4	835.7
Oral contraceptives-total	13.0	506.8	13.9	482.3	18.0	464.0	24.9	461.2	25.4	433.7
Combined preparation	12.8	448.4	13.7	427.6	17.6	411.9	24.5	410.7	24.9	385.0
Progestogen-only	0.2	58.4	0.2	54.7	0.3	52.0	0.4	50.5	0.5	48.7
IUD	0.1	94.9	0.1	81.7	0.1	73.2	0.1	64.2	0.1	59.5
Cap/diaphragm	0.1	58.9	0.1	50.1	0.1	42.0	0.1	35.9	0.1	32.4
Injectable contraceptive	0.2	19.7	0.3	23.1	0.3	27.7	0.5	35.1	0.7	40.7
Other chemicals	0.0	5.1	0.0	5.2	0.1	4.9	0.1	5.6	0.1	5.3
Male condom	4.4	167.8	7.1	189.0	11.4	185.3	17.2	205.9	22.5	234.5
Female condom[1]	—	—	—	—	0.5	11.8	0.2	2.5	0.3	3.1
Rhythm method	0.0	1.1	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.7
Female sterilisation	0.0	2.3	0.0	2.3	0.0	2.2	0.0	0.9	0.0	1.3
Implant[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.0	1.9
Other methods	0.7	26.0	0.9	23.8	1.2	23.3	1.6	20.0	2.2	22.8

	1996–97		*1997–98*		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*	
Primary method	*Under 16*	*16 & over*	*Under 16*	*16 & over*	*Under 16*	*16 & over*	*Under 16*	*16 & over*	*Under 16*	*16 & over*
Total all methods	54.6	865.4	55.0	861.4	53.8	862.3	56.3	860.0	62.1	852.8
Oral contraceptives-total	23.0	419.9	22.7	413.4	21.8	399.6	22.7	400.9	23.9	396.2
Combined preparation	22.5	369.9	22.2	364.2	21.1	351.6	21.7	319.9	22.8	315.2
Progestogen-only	0.5	50.1	0.5	49.2	0.7	48.0	1.1	30.8	1.1	32.0
IUD	0.1	63.1	0.1	62.0	0.2	63.2	0.2	66.4	0.2	64.6
Cap/diaphragm	0.1	28.8	0.1	22.7	0.1	18.2	0.0	14.9	0.0	12.4
Injectable contraceptive	1.0	47.3	1.2	50.9	1.3	55.5	1.5	60.9	2.0	69.5
Other chemicals	0.1	5.3	0.1	3.7	0.1	4.4	0.1	4.6	0.1	3.1
Male condom	27.1	266.1	27.0	271.6	26.2	272.4	27.6	265.5	30.9	251.9
Female condom	0.2	3.0	0.3	3.0	0.2	3.0	0.2	1.8	0.2	1.6
Rhythm method	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.7	0.1	1.2
Female sterilisation	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.4	0.0	1.2	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.3
Implant[2]	0.1	4.2	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.3	0.0	2.4	0.1	3.3
Other methods	3.0	25.5	3.5	31.0	3.9	43.1	3.8	40.7	4.6	47.7

[1] Information about the female condom was first collected from 1993–94

[2] Information about implants was first collected from 1995–96

Source:

Department of Health Statistics Division SD2B, Form KT31

NHS Trust Staff

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what positions the *(a)* Chief Executive and *(b)* Director of Performance Management at the South Warwickshire General Hospitals NHS Trust, criticised at the time of the publication of the Audit Commission report into inappropriate adjustments of waiting lists, now hold in the NHS; [56925]

(2) what positions the *(a)* Chief Executive and *(b)* Deputy Chief Executive at Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust, criticised at the time of the publication of the Audit Commission report into inappropriate adjustments of waiting lists, now hold in the NHS; [56922]

(3) what positions the *(a)* Chief Executive and *(b)* General Manager in Surgery and Specialist Services at Redbridge Health Care NHS Trust, criticised at the time of the publication of the Audit Commission report into inappropriate adjustments of waiting lists, now hold in the NHS; [56923]

(4) what positions the *(a)* Chief Executive and *(b)* Assistant Director of Operations (Surgery) at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust criticised at the time of the publication of the Audit Commission report into inappropriate adjustments of waiting lists now hold in the NHS; [56926]

(5) what positions the *(a)* Admissions Department Manager, *(b)* two directors of operations and *(c)* Chief Executive, criticised at the time of the Trust inquiry into waiting list maladministration at the Barts and the London NHS Trust, now hold in the NHS; [56929]

(6) what position the Chief Executive at the Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust criticised at the time of publication of the Audit Commission report into inappropriate adjustments of waiting lists now holds in the NHS; [56927]

(7) what positions the *(a)* Chief Executive and *(b)* Director of Operations at the Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trust, criticised at the time of the publication of the Audit Commission report into inappropriate adjustments of waiting lists, now hold in the NHS; [56924]

(8) what positions the *(a)* Chief Executive and *(b)* the Chief Operating Officer at Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust, criticised in the Audit Commission report into inappropriate adjustments in waiting lists, now hold in the NHS. [56930]

Mr. Hutton: Part 2 paragraph 12 of the Open Government Code of Practice prohibits the disclosure of personal information about any person which would constitute or could facilitate an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Of the 17 postholders referred to in the hon. Member's parliamentary questions:

three are working in national health service trusts

two are working in primary care trusts

four are working in health authorities

and the remainder are not known to be working in the NHS.

Regional Organisations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the agencies and NDPBs sponsored by his Department have a regional organisation; and if he will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58943]

Mr. Lammy: The information is provided in the table which is in the Library. Of the Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies, only the National Health Service Estates Agency had a regional structure in 1997. Currently only the National Care Standards Commission, which was established in 2002, has a regional structure.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 24 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 740W, on hospital discharges, (1) where and when the target for a reduction in the number of people experiencing delayed discharge by 20 per cent. between March 2002 and March 2003 was published; [65186]

(2) what his target is for the reduction in the number of bed days lost through people experiencing delayed discharge from hospital. [65185]

Jacqui Smith: The 20 per cent. target figure was published in the Department's "Priorities and Planning Framework 2002–03" in December 2001, which is available on the Department's website. There is no target for bed days lost. We expect that there will be an increase in the number of available bed days as a consequence of the reduction in numbers of patients delayed, in line with that seen over the last two quarters of 2001–02.

Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when his Department last reviewed guidance on hospital discharge with respect to carers' needs; and what arrangements are in place to monitor compliance with the guidance; [65104]

(2) if he will undertake an evaluation of the appropriateness of support offered to carers as part of strategies to reduce the number of delayed discharges from hospital. [65103]

Jacqui Smith: Carer support and strength of caring arrangements are two of the areas assessed when putting together a care plan for the patient leaving hospital. The written care plan which the patient is given includes the support carers are willing and able to offer.

The Hospital Discharge Workbook, issued in 1994, gives guidance to the national health service, social services and other agencies on hospital discharge procedures. The Workbook emphasises that the patient and carer should be made fully aware of arrangements for discharge and understand fully what is going to happen. The chief executive of the hospital trust is responsible for ensuring that discharges take place appropriately. We are revising the workbook and will incorporate the needs of carers.

Psycho-surgery

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has undertaken into psycho-surgery in the last five years. [67610]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which is funded via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC has not supported any research in this area in the last five years. The MRC always welcomes high quality applications for support into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. Awards are made according to their scientific quality and importance to human health.

The Department directly funds research into policy and the delivery of effective practice in health and social care, and provides national health service support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities in the NHS. The Department has not supported any work in this area in the last five years.

Management of much of the research supported by NHS research and development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department. Details of research projects funded by, or of interest to, the national health service are available on the National Research Register at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm

Consultant Psychiatrists

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the vacancy rate was for consultant psychiatrists in *(a)* England and *(b)* each region in each of the last six years. [67710]

Mr. Hutton: The number of consultants in post in the psychiatry group has increased from 2,808 in September 1999 to 3,030 in March 2002. This is an increase of 8 per cent.

The national health service vacancy survey has only been conducted in March each year since 1999. The survey collects information on the number of posts which trusts are actively trying to fill which have been vacant for three months or more.

There are six specialities within the psychiatry group. In 2001, the vacancy survey focused on specialties that were considered particularly problematic. For this reason, only four of the six specialties were collected.

Increased vacancies are to be expected at a time when we are trying to dramatically increase the size of the workforce. New investment enables NHS trusts to create new posts; however, there can be a delay in providing sufficient staff for all the posts.

Available information is shown in the tables.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 1999
Vacancies in NHS trusts by region, psychiatry group, 3 month vacancy rates[1,2] and numbers[3]

	Psychiatry group (consultant)			
	3 month vacancy rates (percentage)	*3 month vacancies*	*Staff in post (wte)*	*Staff in post (hc)*
England	6.7	170	2,360	2,630
Northern and Yorkshire	7.3	20	290	320
Trent	4.0	10	230	250
West Midlands	9.0	20	220	240
North West	10.5	30	280	310
Eastern	4.4	10	210	230
London	5.5	30	510	600
South East	6.2	20	370	420
South West	7.5	20	200	230
Special HAs	0.0	0	40	50

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 1999 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).

[2] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 1998 medical and dental census (whole time equivalent).

[3] Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.

Notes:

1. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
2. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding.
3. Due to rounding, calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
4. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey 1999.

Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census 1998.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2000
Vacancies in NHS trusts by region, psychiatry group, 3 month vacancy rates[1,2] and numbers[3]

	Psychiatry group (consultant)			
	3 month vacancy rates (percentage)	*3 month vacancies*	*Staff in post (wte)*	*Staff in post (hc)*
England	6.9	190	2,520	2,810
Northern and Yorkshire	7.7	30	310	340
Trent	5.0	10	240	260
West Midlands	11.4	30	240	260
North West	7.9	30	290	330
Eastern	6.0	10	210	240
London	7.4	40	550	640
South East	4.7	20	400	460
South West	2.2	10	220	250
Special HAs	15.6	10	50	50

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2000 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).

[2] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three months vacancies plus staff in post from the September 1999 medical and dental workforce census (whole time equivalent).

[3] Vacancy and staff in post number are rounded to the nearest 10.

Notes:

1. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
2. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding.
3. Due to rounding, calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
4. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2000.

Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census 1999.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2001
Vacancies in NHS trusts by region, consultants in the specified areas of work, 3 month vacancy rates[1,2] and numbers[3]

	3 month vacancy rates (percentage)	*3 month vacancies*	*Staff in post (wte)*	*Staff in post (hc)*
Forensic psychiatry (consultants)				
England	5.2	10	150	160
Northern and Yorkshire	0.0	0	10	10
Trent	0.0	0	10	10
West Midlands	0.0	0	10	10
North West	18.2	0	10	10
Eastern	0.0	0	10	10
London	8.5	0	40	50
South East	7.7	0	10	20
South West	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Special HAs	2.7	0	40	40
General psychiatry (consultants)				
England	7.8	130	1,490	1,650
Northern and Yorkshire	8.2	20	170	180
Trent	4.0	10	140	160
West Midlands	11.0	20	130	140
North West	12.2	30	180	190
Eastern	5.8	10	110	120
London	7.5	30	380	430
South East	10.2	30	230	260
South West	1.3	0	150	170
Special HAs	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Learning disabilities (consultants)				
England	13.3	30	170	180
Northern and Yorkshire	13.5	10	30	30
Trent	26.3	10	10	20
West Midlands	8.3	0	20	20
North West	21.7	10	20	20
Eastern	10.3	0	30	30
London	12.2	0	20	20
South East	11.1	0	20	30
South West	6.7	0	10	10
Special HAs	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Old age psychiatry (consultants)				
England	9.3	30	310	330
Northern and Yorkshire	10.0	10	60	60
Trent	11.4	0	30	30
West Midlands	7.9	0	30	40
North West	14.6	10	40	40
Eastern	16.1	10	30	30
London	2.3	0	40	50
South East	8.5	10	50	60
South West	0.0	0	20	20
Special HAs	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).

[2] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 medical and dental workforce census (whole time equivalent).

[3] Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.

[4] Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

[5] Figures where sum of staff in post and vacancies is less than 10.

Notes:

1. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
2. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding.
3. Due to rounding, calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
4. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001.

Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census 2000.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2002
Vacancies in NHS trusts by region, total psychiatry group of consultants, 3 month vacancy rates[1,2] *and numbers*

	Psychiatry group (consultants)			
	3 month vacancy rates (percentage)	*3 month vacancies*	*Staff in post (wte)*	*Staff in post (hc)*
England	8.5	250	2710	3,030
Northern and Yorkshire	10.8	40	330	350
Trent	6.1	20	280	300
West Midlands	9.3	30	280	290
North West	12.2	40	300	330
Eastern	8.6	20	250	280
London	6.8	50	620	730
South East	7.5	30	390	480
South West	7.7	20	250	260
Special HAs	7.7	0	10	10

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2002 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).

[2] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post form this survey.

Notes:

1. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
2. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding.
3. Due to rounding, calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
4. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001.
Department of Health Medical and Dental Mini Census 2002.

Overseas Treatment

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases have been referred from the health authorities in Kent for operations abroad in the last 12 months; and of those completed *(a)* what proportion showed serious post-operative complications and *(b)* what the cost was in each case. [68859]

Mr. Hutton: Earlier this year East Kent Health Authority referred 96 patients to La Louvière Polyclinique in Lille as part of the pilot scheme to refer national health service patients overseas for routine elective surgery.

Information about post-operative complication rates arising after surgery is not collected centrally from the NHS. NHS organisations may collect and analyse this kind of information, among other indicators of quality, as part of their local clinical governance arrangements designed to assure and continuously improve the quality of care for all NHS patients. The NHS is responsible for ensuring that NHS patients receive high clinical standards of care wherever they are treated.

As is standard practice with contracts between the NHS and independent health care providers, the prices for particular procedures are confidential. The total cost of treatment and travel for the East Kent patients treated during the pilot was approximately £576,000.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the total cost to date has been of treating NHS patients abroad under contract; [68036]

(2) what assessment he has made of the complication rates arising from *(a)* treatment carried out abroad under the NHS and *(b)* NHS treatment in the UK since NHS treatment abroad began. [68035]

Mr. Hutton: The total cost of treatment and travel for the patients treated between January and April 2002 during the pilot scheme in south east England to refer national health service patients overseas for routine elective surgery was approximately £1.1 million.

Information about "complication rates" arising after surgery is not collected centrally from the NHS. NHS organisations may collect and analyse this kind of information, among other indicators of quality, as part of their local clinical governance arrangements designed to assure and continuously improve the quality of care for all NHS patients. The NHS is responsible for ensuring that NHS patients receive high clinical standards of care wherever they are treated.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the Health Ministers of the devolved Administrations on the use of PFI and PPP in the health service. [68073]

Mr. Hutton: No discussions have been held with Health Ministers of the devolved Administrations on the use of private finance initiative and public private partnership in the health service.

Care Homes

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly care homes were *(a)* publicly and *(b)* privately funded in the last five years, broken down by region. [68526]

Jacqui Smith: Local authority staffed care homes are entirely funded by local authority social services while independent care homes are partially funded by social services through fees towards supported residents. Table 1 shows the number of residential local authority staffed homes and Table 2 the number of independent residential and nursing care homes for older people by national health service region from 1997 to 2001 at 31 March each year.

Table 1: Number of local authority staffed residential care homes for older[1] *people from 1997 to 2001*

NHS regions	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Eastern	160	160	140	130	120
London	160	160	140	130	110
North West	220	220	220	200	190
Northern and Yorkshire	250	240	220	220	210
South East	250	210	200	190	180
South West	120	120	120	110	100
Trent	190	170	160	160	150
West Midlands	140	200	160	140	140
Total	1,500	1,470	1,360	1,270	1,190

[1] Includes local authority staffed care homes for older mentally infirm people.

Notes:

1. Figures at 31 March each year.
2. All figures are rounded numbers.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns.

Table 2: Number of independent residential and nursing[1] care homes for older[2] people from 1997 to 2001

NHS regions	*1997*[3]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Eastern	1,510	1,550	1,540	1,490	1,470
London	1,290	1,350	1,340	1,310	1,300
North West	2,720	2,920	2,900	2,840	2,700
Northern and Yorkshire	2,190	2,370	2,340	2,310	2,200
South East	3,630	3,720	3,640	3,430	3,170
South West	3,500	3,120	3,000	2,790	2,680
Trent	1,980	3,030	2,070	2,020	1,950
West Midlands	1,890	1,870	1,820	1,740	1,690
Total	18,700	18,910	18,650	17,910	17,160

[1] Includes private hospitals and clinics.

[2] Includes independent residential care homes for older mentally infirm people.

[3] Information on nursing beds relates to registered beds during the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Notes:

1. Figures at 31 March each year.
2. All figures are rounded numbers.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns.

London Health Authorities

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much was allocated to assist the provision of community mental health services by London health authorities in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002; [69961]

(2) how much was allocated to London health authorities to assist the provision of interpreting and translation services in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001; [69960]

(3) how much was allocated to assist the provision of services for rough sleepers by the London health authorities in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [69962]

Mr. Hutton: The national weighted capitation formula, which sets target fair shares for health authorities, includes adjustments for rough sleepers, interpreting and translation services and community mental health services.

However, no specific sums are identified separately in allocations.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) under what circumstances the moment *(a)* when an employee is confirmed in post, *(b)* when a provisional offer of a job is given and *(c)* any offer of employment is given will be the trigger for a registered person to seek a Criminal Records Bureau disclosure; and if he will make a statement. [70313]

(2) how often registered persons will be required to review Criminal Records Bureau disclosures in respect of employees and other affected persons in connection with the Care Home Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [70320]

(3) what investigations his Department made regarding the capacity of the Criminal Records Bureau to process requests for disclosure before he made his regulations for care home standards. [70312]

Jacqui Smith: The Care Homes Regulations require Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks to be satisfactorily completed before a person can be permanently employed in a care home. The national care standards commission will need to satisfy itself that appropriate checks have been completed, in order to protect the care home's residents. Subject to this, it is for individual care home owners to decide when to apply for criminal record checks in respect of any person they plan to employ.

There is no statutory requirement to review CRB checks once obtained. However, under the previous regulatory arrangements it was standard practice for further police checks to be undertaken after a three year period in respect of owners, managers and staff in children's homes.

While drafting the Care Homes Regulations 2001, the department kept in contact with the Home Office about the establishment of the CRB. The department was satisfied that the CRB would be able to meet the demands for disclosures. The CRB has experienced early operating difficulties which have lead to delays in responding to applications for Disclosure, measures are being taken to overcome these. We are determined that the CRB will be in a position as soon as possible to meet the high standards of service that it has made clear it will deliver to its customers. The short-term implications for particular service areas using the CRB service are being closely monitored.

Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who has responsibility for *(a)* co-ordinating the international recruitment efforts throughout England's eight regions, *(b)* ensuring consistent standards and cost-effective best practice in employment, *(c)* developing agreements between Governments, *(d)* ensuring international co-operation and the recruitment and exchange of health care professionals and *(e)* ensuring that developing countries are protected from targeted recruitment. [71505]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service employment branch of the human resources directorate at the department has responsibility for the policies on international recruitment, including issuing guidance to the NHS and establishing government to government agreements.

Workforce development confederations work with the NHS to ensure that recruitment is carried out in line with the Code of Practice for international recruitment and in a cost effective manner.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 781W, on international recruitment, how many international nurse recruitment agencies *(a)* have failed to adhere to the code of practice and *(b)* NHS organisations have been instructed not to deal with; [71573]

(2) when the final list of nursing agencies which comply to the code of practice on ethical nursing recruitment will be posted on his website. [71506]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has written to 45 agencies inviting them to provide references from national health service employers to confirm that they are complying to the principles of the Code of Practice.

The list of agencies who have submitted references will be placed on the website on 1 August.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many international recruitment co-ordinators there are in each NHS region; and what their budget is for *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [71507]

Mr. Hutton: Work force development confederations employ individuals to lead on international recruitment. Some work force development confederations have pooled resources to appoint co-ordinators across boundaries. The table shows the number of co-ordinators in each directorate of health and social care.

	Number of co-ordinators
South	6
Midlands and Eastern	5
North	5
London	3

The first regional international recruitment co-ordinators took up post late in 2000–01. £6 million was available to them for recruitment, retention and return. In 2002–03, £1 million to date has been devolved to the national health service for international recruitment. Funding for 2003–04 has yet to be agreed.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the performance of the Director for International Recruitment in 2001–02. [71574]

Mr. Hutton: In accordance with the human resources policy of the Department, all staff working for the Department are appraised but the content and outcomes of the appraisal are confidential.

NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency will publish their annual report and accounts. [72227]

Mr. Lammy: The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency's annual report and accounts has been published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

Mental Health

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those mental health trusts which have *(a)* expanded and *(b)* reduced the numbers of physiotherapists in the last 12 months. [70389]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of physiotherapists employed by the national health service is collected by the Department's non-medical work force census.

In 2001, 14 new mental health trusts were established. These new trusts are the result of restructuring parts of 30 other organisations where mental health services were provided in 2000. In some cases, the organisation that existed in 2000 has gone, split partly into a new mental health trust and partly into another acute trust. In other cases, the 2000 organisation still exists, but without its mental health services division.

As a result of these changes, it is not possible to compare the latest available figures with those from previous reporting years.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the role of physiotherapy in the treatment and rehabilitation of mental health patients; and if he will make a statement. [70394]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received six parliamentary questions from the hon. Member and one letter from Catherine Pope, chair of the Society of Chartered Physiotherapists. I can confirm that the national service framework for mental health emphasises the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach to care and treatment, and that there is good evidence that regular physical activity reduces the risk of depression and has positive benefits for mental health. This is important for people with severe mental illness who may be at particular risk of physical ill health. However, decisions about the configuration of services are a local matter, in the context of national guidance, following "Shifting the Balance of Power".

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many physiotherapists are employed in mental health trusts in each strategic health authority. [70395]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the number of physiotherapists employed in mental health trusts listed by strategic health authority. It should be noted that physiotherapists are also employed in mental health units of other national health service trusts.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): qualified physiotherapists employed by mental health trusts, by strategic health authority area, in England, as at 30 September 2001

	Head count
All staff	640
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	30
Birmingham and the Black Country	10
County Durham and Tees Valley	10
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	90
Cumbria and Lancashire	[1]—
Dorset and Somerset	10
Essex	60
Greater Manchester	[1]—
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	10
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	20
North Central London	[1]—
North East London	[1]—
North West London	70
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	30
Shropshire and Staffordshire	80
South East London	20
South West London	10
South West Peninsula	10
Surrey and Sussex	50
Thames Valley	10
Trent	50
West Yorkshire	80

[1] Five or less and greater than zero

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

2. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.

Source:

Department of Health 2001 Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions the Mental Health Care Group Workforce team has had regarding the role of physiotherapy in the treatment of mental health patients and disseminating best practice. [70391]

Jacqui Smith: The mental health care group workforce team is looking at issues relating to the patient pathway through mental health services. As yet, no specific discussions have been held concerning the role of physiotherapists. However, issues relating to specific staff groups will be addressed in due course.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the planned closure of the specialist mental health physiotherapy team at Oxleas NHS Trust accords with the Government's national health service framework for mental health. [70387]

Jacqui Smith: Decisions about the configuration of services to meet the needs of people with mental health problems are a local matter, in the context of national guidance. The national service framework (NSF) for mental health emphasises the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach to care and treatment. It also emphasises the importance of attention to physical health and the value of exercise. However, the NSF is not prescriptive about the numbers of different professionals needed. Instead, it emphasises the outcomes to be achieved, and the importance of evidence-based practise. I understand that services are being planned in order to ensure that mental health service users who require physiotherapy continue to receive this both now and in the future.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the evidence base for the value of physiotherapy in the treatment of mental health patients. [70392]

Jacqui Smith: Physiotherapists are experts in movement and mobility. They are trained to use their skills to promote good health, prevent disability and treat people who may have any of a wide range of health problems, including mental health. In order to use and apply the physiotherapeutic skill base with mental health patients, it is necessary for professionals to have a good understanding of mental illness and the health effects from mental illness, in this case particularly physical presentations as part of their condition.

The physical needs of people with mental health problems are recognised in the mental health national service framework (NSF). Following publication of the NSF in 1999, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy commissioned an evidence-based bulletin of the role of physiotherapy in mental health.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether PFI contracts for mental health service schemes valued over £1 million have been signed since 13 February. [68060]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* Cornwall Health National Health Service Trust reached financial close on 30 April 2002 for a mental health facility.

Gulf War Syndrome

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients claim to have Gulf War Syndrome; and what funds are available in 2002–03 for research into its cause and cure. [67805]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Ministry of Defence does not recognise "Gulf War Syndrome" as a medical condition. It accepts that some veterans of the 1990–91 Gulf Conflict have become ill and that many believe this ill health is unusual and related to their Gulf experience. A large number of multi-system, multi-organ, non-specific, medically unexplained symptoms have been reported by some Gulf veterans as well as recognised medical conditions. The overwhelming consensus of the scientific and medical community is that there is insufficient evidence to enable this ill-health to be characterised as a unique illness, condition or 'syndrome'.

Nevertheless, a paper published in the British Medical Journal dated 1 September 2001 entitled: "Prevalence of Gulf war veterans who believe they have Gulf war syndrome: questionnaire study" suggested that approximately 17 per cent. (9,000) of United Kingdom Gulf veterans believed they have "Gulf War Syndrome".

During financial year 2002–03, the MOD expects to spend approximately £1 million (including VAT) on Gulf veterans' illnesses research projects. This figure does not include current and planned MOD research into DU munitions.

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the correspondence from the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed dated 11 February and 18 April, with regard to the implications of the Data Protection Act 1998 for hospital chaplaincy work. [65094]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 July 2002]:* A reply was sent on 19 July.

Sausage Casings

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Food Standards Agency complied with its obligation to consult those directly affected in the case of its proposed ban on sheep intestine on its decision. [68500]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* As no new legislation was being put forward the Food Standards Agency were under no statutory obligation to consult interested parties on the recommendations of the core stakeholder group. The agency did, however, consult over 1,000 interested parties in May of this year. The consultation gave the opportunity for a wide range of interested parties to comment on what was, in effect, a report considering the agency's possible policy options.

As it is the agency's stated aim to conduct its business in an open and transparent way it decided to obtain the views of those most likely to be directly affected at the earliest opportunity, even though they were not proposing new legislation.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 23 July 2002

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

India

14. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the High Commissioner for India to discuss the security situation there. [69590]

Mr. Straw: I last met the High Commissioner on 30 June.

I visited India and Pakistan on 18–20 July. After my meetings I said that we welcomed the steps taken by Pakistan to stop cross-border infiltration and Indian de-escalatory measures, but we remained deeply concerned about the military mobilisation on both sides of the border. I stressed the need for a permanent end to cross-border infiltration and the importance of the forthcoming Jammu & Kashmir elections being free, fair and inclusive. We will continue to work with our international partners to encourage India and Pakistan to find ways to return to productive dialogue on all the outstanding issues between them, including Kashmir.

The House should also know that I published revised travel advice yesterday which, because of the reduced tension between India and Pakistan, no longer advises British citizens to avoid travelling to India or those already in India to consider leaving. I have modified the travel advice for Pakistan, but this has to take account of the continuing internal terrorist threat.

Middle East

19. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role the Government are playing in securing peace in the middle east. [69595]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Her Majesty's Government remains closely engaged in efforts to end the violence and resume a political process leading to a final settlement. We are supervising the detention of six Palestinian detainees in Jericho, and stand ready to assist with Palestinian reform in whatever way we can. I discussed the issue with Palestinian and Israeli leaders when I visited the region between 1 and 3 July.

25. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the present situation in the middle east peace process. [69601]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government are committed to a negotiated and comprehensive settlement between Israel and her Arab neighbours along the lines set out in the declaration made by European leaders at Seville on 21 June. We welcome the Statement of the Quartet (US, EU, UN and Russia), which reaffirmed the goal of a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement within three years. It stated that progress in the political, security, economic, humanitarian, and institution-building fields must proceed together. All parties have a role to play. The Palestinians must conduct security, political and economic reform, with an action plan agreed by the Quartet leading to a Palestinian state committed to combating terror. Israel must take immediate and concrete steps to support the emergence of a viable Palestinian state, including easing restrictions, releasing tax revenues, and freezing settlement activity consistent with the Mitchell Committee's recommendations. The UK will continue to offer political and practical assistance wherever possible.

28. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he is undertaking with Arab Governments to secure their help in the middle east peace process. [69606]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We welcomed the Arab peace initiative, adopted by Arab states in Beirut on 28 March. We welcome the role played by key Arab states in supporting the Quartet's Action Plan for Reform of the Palestinian Authority and Resumption of a Political Process. We regularly discuss the way forward with Arab leaders. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently met President Mubarak, King Abdullah, Prime Minister Hariri and Foreign Minister Maher. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is also in frequent contact with Arab leaders. We met Palestinian Minister for Planning and International Cooperation, Nabil Sha'ath, on 25 June. I met President Arafat and other Palestinian leaders when I visited the Palestinian Authority between 2 and 3 July.

35. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role the Government are playing in securing peace in the middle east. [69613]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Her Majesty's Government remain closely engaged in efforts to end the violence and resume a political process leading to a final settlement. We are supervising the detention of six Palestinian detainees in Jericho, and stand ready to assist with Palestinian reform in whatever way we can. I discussed the issue with Palestinian and Israeli leaders when I visited the region between 1 and 3 July.

EU Enlargement

20. **Joyce Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on progress being made towards the enlargement of the EU. [69596]

Peter Hain: The Foreign Secretary and I have had regular discussions with all our EU counterparts to keep progress on enlargement on track.

EU Overseas Aid

21. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts about the policy underlying the distribution of the EU overseas aid package. [69597]

Peter Hain: EU Foreign Ministers discussed the overseas aid package at the General Affairs Council on 18 February. We agreed on the need to make the EU's external actions, including its aid programmes, more targeted, effective and responsive.

UN Peacekeeping Operations

22. **Mr. Moore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of United Nations peacekeeping operations. [69598]

Mr. MacShane: The UN's involvement in peacekeeping and crisis management continues to be significant. There are 15 peacekeeping operations world wide, involving 45,145 troops, military observers and civilian police from 83 countries. Many of these operations are now in support of solutions to complex intra-state conflicts and tensions; many involve countries close to, or at risk of, collapse.

EU Presidency

23. **James Purnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Greek Government about their priorities for the EU presidency. [69599]

Peter Hain: We are in regular touch with our Greek partners. I am visiting Athens tomorrow. Their presidency priorities include enlargement, immigration, and economic reform.

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Greek Government about their forthcoming EU presidency and EU enlargement. [69577]

Peter Hain: We are in regular touch with our Greek partners. I am visiting Athens tomorrow. Their presidency priorities include enlargement, immigration and economic reform.

Missile Defence

24. **Gregory Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the US administration regarding UK participation in the US missile defence programme. [69600]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK and the US administration have discussed over time issues relating to missile defence.

These include the threats posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, and the role that missile defence could play in countering these threats. However, it remains the case that the US has not yet decided how it wishes to proceed with missile defence and has made no request for the use of facilities in the UK.

Chechnya

26. **Mr. Oaten:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussion he has had with the Russian Government on Chechnya. [69603]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last raised the situation in Chechnya in June, when he discussed the human rights situation in the republic with the Russian Foreign Minister.

Zimbabwe

27. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the economic situation in Zimbabwe. [69604]

Mr. MacShane: What is happening in Zimbabwe is a man-made tragedy. The country is running out of food and its economy is imploding. Ultimately, Zimbabwe's only way back to sustainable development is through respect for the rule of law, a return to democratic principles and sensible economic policies.

European Union (Aspirant Countries)

29. **Mr. Mike Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with leaders of countries seeking to join the EU; and if he will make a statement. [69607]

Peter Hain: The Foreign Secretary and I have had regular discussions with all our EU counterparts to keep progress on enlargement on track.

Sudan

30. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what areas of the Sudan are out-of-bounds to humanitarian organisations; and if he will make a statement. [69608]

Mr. MacShane: Humanitarian access is difficult to many areas of Sudan where conflict exists. The Government of Sudan and the SPLM have committed themselves to facilitating humanitarian access to all regions of Sudan and there is no formal ban on access to any area.

International Criminal Court

31. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he is having with his counterparts in the USA about the International Criminal Court. [69609]

Mr. MacShane: We are in regular contact with the US Administration in respect of this issue. Officials have made several approaches, both bilaterally and in conjunction with EU partners, encouraging the US to ratify the Rome Statute. And we have repeatedly made clear that, while we understand US concerns that the Court might bring malicious or politically-motivated charges against US personnel, we do not share them. The Statute of the Court contains safeguards against this. Most recently, and in connection with the renewal of the UN Security Council mandate in respect of peacekeepers in Bosnia (UNMIBH), my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has had a number of conversations with his US counterpart. The outcome was Resolution 1422, unanimously adopted on 12 July 2002, which respects the Statute of the Court and allows the US to continue to participate in UN peacekeeping operations.

Gibraltar

32. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will cease further talks with Spain about the future of Gibraltar. [69610]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made in the House by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 12 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 1165.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what way the infrastructure of Gibraltar would improve under the proposed sharing of sovereignty of Gibraltar between Britain and Spain. [71166]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made in the House by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 12 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 1166.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conditions were set by the Government of Gibraltar in order for the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to participate in the talks. [71164]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) on 27 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1307W.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people in Gibraltar have indicated to him they would wish to take Spanish nationality. [71596]

Peter Hain: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in the House on 12 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 1166, we are in broad agreement with Spain on many of the principles that should underpin a lasting settlement to the Gibraltar dispute, including that Gibraltarians should retain the right to British nationality and gain in addition the right to Spanish nationality as well if they so choose.

Organisation of African Unity

33. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent talks between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo at the OAU summit in South Africa. [69611]

Mr. MacShane: The conflict in the Great Lakes region must be resolved through negotiations between the parties. We therefore welcome the recent talks in Durban between the Presidents of Rwanda and the DRC. We are encouraged by the decision to hold follow-up talks between senior officials on 18 July in South Africa. We welcome the role that the Government of South Africa, and in particular, President Mbeki, continue to play in trying to help resolve this long-standing conflict.

Cyprus

34. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of Cyprus towards accession to the European Union. [69612]

Peter Hain: Cyprus has made good progress in its EU accession negotiations, having opened 30 of the 31 negotiating chapters and provisionally closed 28. At Seville, the European Council set out its intention of concluding negotiations with Cyprus along with nine other countries by the end of this year, provided progress is maintained, and also reiterated that the Helsinki conclusions formed the basis of the EU's position in respect of the accession of Cyprus.

Developing Countries

36. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the European Union's role with respect to supporting trade with, and increasing aid to, developing countries. [69614]

Peter Hain: We continue to push hard for an EU market more open to developing countries, especially the poorest, and for EU member states to join us in hugely increasing their aid budgets.

Official Photographers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions during the last 12 months an official photographer has accompanied *(a)* him and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department on official visits (i) overseas and (ii) within the UK; what (A) travel expenses, (B) costs of equipment and processing, (C) staff payment and (D) other costs were incurred on each occasion; what publications official photographs have appeared in during the last 12 months and what terms and conditions were attached to the publication of such photographs; and whether photographs taken on official visits are available for use in non-governmental literature. [62832]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO does not employ an official photographer. However, photographs, from a variety of sources, including those taken by Ministers and members of staff of the FCO's work are posted on the FCO website or are used in publications.

Asylum Seekers

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many asylum seekers have entered a United Kingdom overseas mission in China in each year since 1997; what their nationality was; how many were granted asylum; and if he will make a statement. [62909]

Mr. MacShane: We have not received any applications for asylum in any of our missions in China since 1997.

Open Source Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69317]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO awards software contracts on a value for money basis and is prepared to consider open source software solutions alongside proprietary ones in IT procurements. We have no figures available on FCO usage of open source software.

The FCO's use of OSS will follow the Government policy once it is published this summer. The draft policy can be viewed at: http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/rfc/rfc_document.asp?docnum=429.

Consultation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69806]

Mr. MacShane: A list of consultations undertaken by the FCO since 1997 is as follows:

Panel 2000 (future role of the FCO)

(a) yes

(b) yes

(c) 10 September 1998

(d) 15 November 1998

Ascension Island

(a) yes

(b) yes

(c) 22 April 1999

(d) 30 June 1999

International Criminal Court: consultation on draft legislation

(a) yes

(b) yes

(c) 1 August 2000

(d) 12 October 2000

Private military companies: options for regulation

(a) yes

(b) yes

(c) 12 February 2002

(d) 12 August 2002

Strengthening the biological and toxin weapons convention

(a) yes

(b) yes

(c) 29 April 2002

(d) 13 September 2002.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how long his Department allowed for consultation of each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form; [70453]

(2) whether consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations; [70454]

(3) in what format his Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations; [70455]

(4) how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form his Department has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations; [70456]

(5) how many complaints his Department has received about its 2001 consultations in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form; [70457]

(6) which consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [70458]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO produced no consultation documents in 2001.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70459]

Mr. MacShane: Yes.

Sierra Leone

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the potential for the continued fighting in Liberia to threaten the stability of Sierra Leone. [70878]

Mr. MacShane: UNAMSIL and the Government of Sierra Leone have taken measures to minimise the impact of the conflict in Liberia on the emerging peace in Sierra Leone. The UK supports regional and international efforts to bring the conflict in Liberia to an end to halt the worsening humanitarian situation in the sub-region. A considerable number of innocent civilians have been displaced in Liberia, and others have sought refuge in Sierra Leone. We continue to monitor the situation closely.

Macedonia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 10 July, *Official Report*, column 1017W, what conditions in Macedonia have to be met. [71131]

Mr. MacShane: With regard to the UK ratification of the SAA, we have made it clear to the Macedonian Government that we expect to see the continuing implementation of the August 13 agreement, including free and democratic parliamentary elections, rights for all ethnic groups and rule of law.

Nepal

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether military assistance to be provided to Nepal by the UK will include training and capacity building initiatives for its security forces. [71353]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Nepali government has our full support, and we are committed to providing continuity development, political and miliary assistance to help them overcome this crisis.

We intend to implement a number of training programmes designed specifically for the Nepalese security forces. The Nepalese police will receive assistance to help them modernise and enhance their professionalism. We intend to do this through UK and local technical assistance and aim to help local communities by increasing their access to open and accountable policing.

We will also provide training for the Royal Nepalese Army in peace support operations and human rights awareness programmes. This should increase the protection of human rights by way of improved awareness of humanitarian laws and the better reporting of human rights violations.

Catherine Meyer Case

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Lord Chancellor concerning the Catherine Meyer case. [71591]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Lord Chancellor's Department is the lead Department on Hague Convention cases. In 1995 Lady Meyer ceased to pursue court proceeding under the Hague Convention for the return of her children. At that point the Lord Chancellor's Department ceased to be involved in her case. However, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department have offered a joint meeting to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) to discuss Lady Meyer's case and the operation of the Hague Convention.

Entry Clearance

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will meet hon. Members to discuss entry clearance issues relating to his travel advice before 24 July. [71590]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I shall be meeting hon. Members on Wednesday 24 July from 3.30 pm to 4.30 pm in Committee Room 18.

Iraq

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether sanctions on Iraq cover fibre optic cables. [71751]

Mr. MacShane: Yes. The Goods Review List (GRL) introduced by UN Security Council resolution 1409 (2002) lists all dual-use and military goods whose export to Iraq under the UN Oil for Food programme is subject to review by the UN Sanctions Committee. The list, which is publicly accessible on the UN website at www.un.org/Departments/oip/index.html, includes fibre optic cables. All other exports under the Oil for Food programme not included on the GRL are approved automatically by the UN Secretariat.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if he will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if he will make a statement. [70206]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* In financial year 2001–02 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office spent £1,448,314 on information literature and £6,434 on advertising. The figure for information literature includes expenditure on consular publicity campaigns, such as "Know Before You Go", which is run jointly with the travel industry to help ensure that travellers are well prepared for conditions abroad. Expenditure on advertising for recruitment is excluded, as identifying this expenditure would entail disproportionate effort and cost.

British Council (Indemnity Undertakings)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many indemnity undertakings were given by his Department in respect of loss or damage to works of art loaned to the British Council for exhibition overseas for the 12-month period ended March 2002; and what the value was of contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings which remained outstanding at that date. [72877]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council, although not a Government Department, receives a substantial grant-in-aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Council regularly organises or sponsors exhibitions overseas of works of art loaned from national galleries and private collections in the United Kingdom. It provides certain assurances or guarantees in respect of loss or damage while these works are on loan.

In the 12-month period ended 31 March 2002 the British Council provided such assurances to four national lenders and undertakings to 193 private lenders. The value of the contingent liabilities that remained outstanding as at 31 March 2002 in respect of private lenders was £4,358,822. No contingent liabilities remained outstanding at this date in respect of national lenders.

Sino-British Declaration

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will publish the next report to Parliament on Hong Kong and the Sino-British Joint Declaration. [72878]

Mr. MacShane: The eleventh report in this series, covering the period January-June 2002, was published today and copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. A copy of the report is also available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website, www.fco.gov.uk. The report includes a foreword by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I commend the report to the House.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the annual report of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy will be available. [72879]

Peter Hain: I have arranged for copies of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's annual report to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Foundation has continued its crucial work in building and developing democracy overseas during the last 12 months. The Foundation received a grant-in-aid of £4.156 million from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and further £390,056 of funds earmarked for specific purposes. In addition it received funds from the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme and the Department for International Development.

Most of the Foundation's activities were in its priority areas of central and eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Anglophone Africa. The Foundation initiated an important technical assistance programme in Sierra Leone, promoting the development of political parties in the principles of peaceful and responsible conduct in political life. The significant contribution that the Foundation has made to the development of democracy in the Balkans was strongly endorsed by an independent evaluation of its Bosnia programme.

Cayman Islands (Human Rights)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the compatibility of legislation passed in the Cayman Islands with the UK Human Rights Act 1998 and with the European convention on human rights 1972; and what decisions he has made as to whether such legislation is ultra vires with Orders in Council made by the Secretary of State under UK Acts of Parliament. [72161]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Cayman Islands' legislation is scrutinised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to ensure its constitutionality and its compatibility with the Islands' obligations arising under the European convention on human rights and other international agreements. The UK Human Rights Act 1998 does not extend to the Cayman Islands and is therefore not directly considered.

No Cayman Islands' legislation has been disallowed in recent years because it was found to be ultra vires with an Order in Council made under a UK Act of Parliament.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what independent reviews of human rights issues obtained in the Cayman Islands have been commissioned by his Department; and if he will place a copy of the reports on such reviews in the Library. [72160]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: An independent review of human rights in the Cayman Islands has been commissioned and is being undertaken by a UK consultancy. Once the report is available and has been released in the Caymans, a copy will be placed in the Library.

Diplomatic Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many new entrants to the diplomatic service in 2001 were *(a)* educated at independent school, *(b)* educated at public school, *(c)* educated at state school and *(d)* describe themselves as disabled; and for each category, whether they were (i) policy entrants or (ii) operational entrants. [72052]

Mr. Mike O'Brien:

(a) and *(b)* are counted together as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office only differentiates between independent and state schools. 28 new entrants were educated at independent schools. 14 were policy and 14 were operational entrants.

(c) 48 new entrants were educated at state schools. 16 were policy and 32 were operational entrants.

(d) Two new entrants described themselves as having a disability. One policy and one operational entrant.

These figures are published in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 2002 departmental report.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ambassadors and high commissioners are *(a)* from an ethnic minority background and *(b)* describe themselves as disabled. [72051]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As at 1 July 2002 there were three members of the Senior Management Structure (SMS) who had declared themselves to be from an ethnic minority background. None of them is currently serving as either an ambassador or as a high commissioner.

Seven members of the SMS had declared themselves to have a disability. Two of these are currently serving as either an ambassador or a high commissioner.

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost was of publishing his Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70478]

Mr. MacShane: The table shows the costs incurred by the FCO in publishing our annual departmental report; the figures do not include staff time which could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The table reflects only those costs that fall directly to the FCO, any other printing and publication costs are met directly by the publisher, The Stationery Office Ltd. (TSO), and do not fall to Government.

	£
2002–03	35,208
2001–02	24,314
2000–01	17,829
1999–2000	18,000
1998–99	20,114

PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister how many complaints have been made by civil servants to the *(a)* Secretary of the Cabinet and *(b)* First Civil Service Commissioner regarding the actions of departmental special advisers since May 1997. [71721]

The Prime Minister: None.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister if he will instruct the Chancellor of the Exchequer to reply to the letter to him dated 23 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. J. Greenhalgh. [72137]

The Prime Minister: I understand that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has replied to the right hon. Member's letter.

Renewable Energy

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals in support of increasing the use of renewable energy he intends to present to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg; and what recent representations he has received in support of renewable energy. [72297]

The Prime Minister: The UK supports agreement at the World Summit on Sustainable Development on a range of measures to support the increased use of renewable energy, including removing harmful subsidies for the use of fossil fuels, setting a global target for the use of renewable energy, and enhanced international co-operation on research and development and market reform. The Government are investing over £260 million in the development of renewable power over three years, in addition to the work of the Carbon Trust and others active in this field. As a result of the spending review the DTI will be announcing further investment in renewable technologies.

I have received over 400 campaign cards from members of the public supporting a campaign by Greenpeace and the Body Shop to provide renewable energy to the two billion people currently without access to energy.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Open Source Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in her Department. [69304]

Clare Short: Use of open source software within DFID is currently under review. At present no open source software is in operational use.

CPI Consultancies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will provide a breakdown of her Department's expenditure since 1998–99 on CPI consultancies referred to on page 105 of the 2002 departmental report. [67513]

Clare Short: This expenditure was incurred on price investigations for contracts funded by DFID, primarily arising out of continuing commitments under the aid and trade provision. A breakdown of these figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much funding her Department has given for HIV/AIDS projects in each country in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [67867]

Clare Short: The information requested is set out in the table. Please note these figures do not include expenditure on regional programmes or non-region specific work on programmes and research from the UK.

HIV/AIDS related expenditure by country 1997–98 to 2001–02[1]

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Afghanistan	0	0	132	0	351
Albania	0	0	180	0	0
Angola	0	0	0	106	0
Bangladesh	1,873	5,358	15,011	24,113	17,886
Belarus, Republic of	0	0	0	0	8
Bolivia	180	182	499	1,189	2,294
Brazil	0	0	44	65	10
Burkina Faso	0	0	27	0	0
Burma	0	332	232	463	57
Burundi	0	0	146	0	0
Cambodia	151	716	438	620	906
Cameroon	19	35	70	13	0
China	0	0	1,185	2,473	2,426
Colombia	0	95	80	0	0
Congo, Democratic Republic	41	41	0	0	0
Cuba	0	0	0	87	49
Ecuador	0	0	0	82	83
Ethiopia	25	41	107	183	92
Ghana	19	15	136	140	129
Guatemala	96	95	96	0	0
Guyana	125	146	55	188	84
Haiti	0	0	0	22	72
Honduras	0	0	127	153	123
India	2,979	2,571	3,876	4,196	5,894
Iran	0	0	259	161	334
Kazakhstan, Republic of	0	0	181	158	13
Kenya	2,863	5,684	5,176	5,986	8,011
Laos	0	0	14	9	0
Lesotho	205	142	168	130	74
Macedonia	0	0	46	12	0
Malawi	5,270	156	1,663	4,409	14,219
Mali	0	0	0	25	80
Mexico	0	0	49	55	42
Moldova, Republic of	0	0	0	0	12
Mongolia	0	0	0	45	24
Montserrat	0	33	256	300	424
Mozambique	72	283	491	6,500	7,079
Namibia	7	197	261	290	166
Nepal	0	162	216	363	1,886
Nicaragua	0	37	181	193	90
Nigeria	524	576	795	1,939	2,015
Pakistan	595	746	1,242	337	2,472
Peru	650	400	499	378	118
Russian Federation	0	67	184	246	576
Rwanda	0	0	0	34	1,072
Senegal	0	0	45	119	147
Serbia and Montenegro	0	0	0	204	807

HIV/AIDS related expenditure by country 1997–98 to 2001–02[1]

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Sierra Leone	0	162	709	553	408
Somali Democratic Republic	0	28	43	52	6
South Africa, Republic of	1,596	3,933	3,499	6,215	5,570
South Pacific	1,596	3,959	3,579	6,312	5,662
Sri Lanka	0	25	80	97	82
States of ex Yugoslavia	0	0	3,326	417	0
Sudan	0	99	107	166	452
Swaziland	56	42	50	112	54
Tanzania	1,844	2,212	3,161	6,993	46,944
Togo	80	124	114	173	47
Uganda	3,443	3,382	3,592	2,972	2,103
Ukraine	0	0	208	112	52
Vietnam	0	0	0	0	76
West Bank and Gaza	0	0	350	962	575
Zambia	1,808	3,573	2,941	31,621	32,012
Zimbabwe	1,731	2,038	3,498	4,572	8,77[illegible]

[1] Provisional

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what impact assessments have been made of the projects funded by her Department which seek to tackle the spread of HIV/AIDS in developing countries. [68323]

Clare Short: My Department's bilateral programmes are routinely monitored and evaluated as a matter of course. Impact assessments have been conducted on a range of our HIV/AIDS-related work, including condom social marketing programmes, palliative care for people living with HIV/AIDS, and support for adolescent sexual and reproductive health education.

Yugoslavia

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in de-mining in the former Yugoslavia. [68223]

Clare Short: It has proved difficult to obtain the full details requested from all parts of the FRY. I will write with the details and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Education for All

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the UK Government have taken in support of the World Bank's Action Plan to Accelerate Progress Towards Education for All; what input the UK delegation had in the discussions on the Education for All initiative at the recent G8 summit in Kananaskis; and how much financial assistance the UK Government plan to provide to the World bank's proposed fast-tracked countries within the Education for All initiative. [68121]

Clare Short: The Government are strongly committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on education and are working to mobilise the international community in support of them. The World Bank has a critical role in supporting countries as they seek to give priority to education, and primary education in particular, within the overall context of their poverty reduction strategies. We have been working with the bank to develop its new Action Plan for Accelerating Progress Towards Education for All.

We believe the World Bank action plan's fast-track initiative provides an opportunity to try to ensure that no country genuinely committed to economic development, poverty reduction and good governance is denied the chance to achieve universal primary education through lack of resources. The Government were successful in calling for the fast-track initiative to include Nigeria and Ethiopia, where over 14 million children are out of school. If offers 18 poor countries the chance to qualify for additional financing for primary education if they can demonstrate that their Government is fully committed and has effective policies in place. A further five countries can apply for assistance in building capacity, filling gaps in data and developing effective policies for primary education.

At the Kananaskis summit, where G8 leaders considered the education needs of developing countries, the UK endorsed the action plan as an important opportunity to fast-track progress towards Education for All. G8 leaders approved the G8 Education Task Force report, which makes clear the need for increased support for basic education from the G8 countries and the importance of the bank's fast-track initiative in mobilising financial resources. Under its Africa Action Plan, the G8 agreed to increase significantly the support provided bilaterally to basic education for countries in Africa with a strong policy and financial commitment to the sector.

The Government are committed to further increasing our support for basic education, particularly in Africa. We will continue to work with the World bank to support their fast track proposals. Further discussions will be held in Washington on 17 July. This meeting, together with the outcome of the spending review to be announced shortly by the Chancellor, will help determine the level of the Government's additional financial support for basic education in the proposed fast-track countries.

Calgary G8 Meeting

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people attended the G8 meeting in Calgary from her Department; and what the total cost of the visit was. [68392]

Clare Short *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* No officials from the Department for International Development attended the G8 summit meeting in Canada.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking towards tackling hunger in Zimbabwe. [69011]

Clare Short: I have now allocated £32 million to help meet food and health needs in Zimbabwe in the current humanitarian situation.

DFID has provided £4 million since September 2001 for a supplementary feeding programme implemented by NGOs, targeting 400,000 people (mainly children) in the worst hit areas of Zimbabwe. At the beginning of January 2002, we made a contribution of £6 million to the UN's Humanitarian Assistance and Recovery Programme; £3.5 million for WFP feeding programmes and £2.5 million for essential drugs and health supplies through the WHO.

In response to the recent reassessment of needs by the World Food Programme and their new regional appeal, I have allocated a further £22 million for Zimbabwe, of which £7 million will be provided through the WFP appeal; £10 million will be channelled through non-governmental organisations to extend direct feeding programmes; and £5 million will be spent again through NGOs on agricultural recovery. We are monitoring NGO and WFP feeding programmes closely to ensure that they are targeted on a needs basis, and that complaints about political bias are tackled effectively.

Faith Communities

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list projects involving faith communities which are supported by her Department. [71850]

Clare Short: A full account of projects supported through my Department with faith communities is not held centrally. To provide full details would involve disproportionate cost.

Through DFID country programmes we are supporting initiatives through faith based groups in the provision of services (health, micro credit); in peace-building processes; relief, rehabilitation and disaster preparedness; and in election monitoring and voter education.

We are also providing £7.8 million during 2002–03 to faith based organisations in the UK (Christian Aid, CAFOD and CIIR) through Partnership Programme Agreements. One of the aims of the Christian Aid and CAFOD agreements is to strengthen a global alliance of Christian Churches and other faith groups to eradicate poverty.

In developing faith-specific literature to promote awareness of the Millennium Development Goals and development issues, a series of booklets have been co-produced with a number of faith based groups: Christian (Protestant and Catholic), Jewish, Islamic and Sikh.

We are also supporting 26 projects with UK faith based organisations in a variety of sectors through the Civil Society Challenge Fund—total value £1.5 million in 2002–03. Details are as follows:

Agency	*Country*	*Project*	*Funding 2002–03 (£)*
Islamic Relief	Mali	Gourma Rharous Community Development Programme	44,096
Christian Outreach	Cambodia	Agriculture, Business and Commodity Development Activities	57,851
Youth With a Mission	Uganda	Community Based Health Care	9,845
Quaker Peace	Lebanon	Vocational Training	43,784
SIL UK	Ghana	Adult Education and Development	79,720
World Vision	Burma	Street and Working Children	83,329
World Vision	Burma	Community Based Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation	14,350
World Vision	Laos	Savannekhet Integrated Rural Development Project	39,180
World Vision	Laos	Creating Opportunities	29,406
World Vision	Angola	Luanda Civil Society Strengthening Programme	103,702
World Vision	Armenia	Civic Initiatives Project	83,969
World Vision	Burma	Community Action for HIV/AIDS Support	84,355
World Vision	Indonesia	Maluka Peace and Reconciliation Project	130,584
World Vision	Tanzania	Advocating for FGM Eradication	58,585
World Vision	Uganda	Pokatusa Peace Project	58,136
Aga Khan Foundation	Uganda	Programme for Enhancement of Universal Primary Education	94,588
Aga Khan Foundation	Tanzania	Gender Equity and Children's Rights—Primary Education	34,403
Aga Khan Foundation	Tajikistan	Health promotion	33,585
Leprosy Mission	Guinea	Disability Control/Community Awareness	74,100
Leprosy Mission	India	Community Based Leprosy Control Project	25,066
Leprosy Mission	India	Access to Health Service and Information	70,050
Leprosy Mission	India	Vocational Training for Earning Power	58,564
Tear Fund	Uganda	Kigezi Diocese Water and Sanitation Programme	75,000
Tear Fund	India	Primary Health Care Training Programme	16,112
Christian Outreach (CORD)	Cambodia	Agriculture, Business and Community Development Programme	57,851
Y-Care International	South Africa	Adult Sexual Reproductive Health	39,432

Uganda

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the Government of Sudan regarding the Lords Resistance Army in Northern Uganda. [71370]

Clare Short *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I discussed the activities of the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) with the Government of Sudan during my visit to Sudan in January. I have also discussed the LRA with the Ugandans on a number of occasions. Our embassies in Khartoum and Kampala have had regular discussions with the Sudanese and the Ugandans about the LRA in northern Uganda.

International Development Association

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the Government will contribute to the 13th Replenishment of the International Development Association. [73105]

Clare Short: I have decided that the UK will contribute £900 million to the three-year, 13th Replenishment of IDA (IDA-13)—the concessional lending arm of the World bank. This represents a 10.1 per cent. share of IDA-13 donor resources, up from £511 million (7.3 per cent. share) at the last replenishment. The increase reflects the high importance the British Government attaches to IDA, which is one of the most effective channels for reducing poverty in the poorest countries.

The UK will also contribute up to an additional £100 million during the course of IDA-13 towards the cost of compensating IDA for the future loss in loan re-flows resulting from the provision of 18–21 per cent. of IDA-13 resources on grant terms. This contribution is conditional on donors agreeing an appropriate system for funding the enlarged grant provision at the IDA-13 Mid-Term Review in 2003.

Microcredit Summit

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which Ministers will represent the Government at the Microcredit summit plus five meeting in New York in November; and if she will make a statement. [71389]

Clare Short: I plan to attend the annual CGAP meeting in September in Morocco to join discussions on how to improve donor effectiveness in micro-finance, but I do not plan to attend the Microcredit summit as well.

DFID will be represented at the summit at official level. We have invited funding applications to enable would-be participants from developing countries to attend the event.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the level of forced labour and forced militarisation of refugees in refugee camps in Afghanistan. [71142]

Clare Short: We are aware of reports of forcible recruitment of young men, militia domination of camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) and sexual violence. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), in close co-ordination with the Afghan Transitional Administration (ATA), are currently investigating the reported security incidents and discussing what measures might be put in place to prevent further repetition.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether it is her policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via her Department's website. [72273]

Clare Short: Where documents published by DFID are referred to in parliamentary answers, it is normal policy to have those documents available in print and in electronic form from the date of publication.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development for how long she retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on her Department's website. [72269]

Clare Short: Where documents published by DFID are referred to in parliamentary answers, it is normal policy to keep those documents available in print and in electronic form from the date of publication until they are superseded by a subsequent edition or, in the case of consultation documents, by the final version of the document.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in her Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72249]

Clare Short: No such attributable activities were undertaken by departmental special advisers.

Liberia

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the levels of political violence in Liberia; and what discussions she has had with the British High Commission in Liberia regarding political violence. [71146]

Mr. Straw: I have been asked to reply.

We are very concerned at the escalation in fighting in Liberia and have called on all warring parties to declare a ceasefire and enter meaningful dialogue. We are also concerned that President Taylor has used the fighting to justify increased repression, including the imposition of a state of emergency. United National sanctions against Liberia have been effective in disrupting President Taylor's links with the RUF and made it harder for him to obtain weapons. We have urged all countries in the region to implement the sanctions vigorously.

There is no permanent British representation in Liberia. We monitor the situation closely from our embassy in Abidjan, and hope shortly to have an officer based in the American embassy in Monrovia, reporting to our embassy in Abidjan.

DEFENCE

Salisbury Plain

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures are in place to inform National Air Traffic Services of *(a)* military flying exercises and *(b)* artillery firing exercises in the vicinity of Salisbury Plain. [65196]

Mr. Ingram: The procedures for informing National Air Traffic Services Ltd. of all military flying and artillery firing exercises are laid down in the Aeronautical Information Publication. I have placed copies of the most relevant extracts from this document in the Library of the House.

Overseas Deployments

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK regular forces have been committed overseas in each month since 1 January. [69768]

Dr. Moonie: The table shows the average number and percentage of trained service personnel deployed on military tasks overseas in the first six months of 2002. This includes personnel deployed on operations (e.g. in Afghanistan) and ongoing commitments (e.g. in Cyprus).

	Number	*Percentage*
4th quarter 2001–02[1]		
Navy (including Marines)	5,270	14.1
Army	9,843	9.7
Air Force	4,574	9.3
1st quarter 2002–03[2]		
Navy (including Marines)	5,211	13.9
Army	9,992	9.9
Air Force	4,314	8.8

[1] January–March 2002

[2] April–June 2002

In addition to the above, we estimate that around 5–6 per cent. of trained service personnel are either preparing for, or recovering from, deployment on military tasks overseas.

Royal Hospital, Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the cost to the defence budget of *(a)* opening a diagnostic and treatment centre at Haslar and *(b)* closing it in 2007. [69265]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence has not incurred any additional costs following the decision to allow the NHS to develop a Diagnostic and Treatment Centre (DTC) on the Royal hospital Haslar site. The NHS would incur any costs associated with the closure of the DTC.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the annual running cost of the Royal hospital, Haslar was in the last year for which figures are available. [69263]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The total operating cost of the Royal hospital, Haslar, including the financial arrangements for Ministry of Defence hospital unit, Portsmouth, for the financial year ending 31 March 2002, was £47.145 million.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what value the Royal hospital, Haslar is assessed. [69262]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* As at 31 March 2002 the Defence Secondary Care Agency valued the Royal hospital, Haslar land and buildings at £34.555 million.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the financial arrangements are between the Ministry of Defence and the national health service relating to the Royal hospital, Haslar. [69264]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* Following the inception of Ministry of Defence hospital unit (MDHU) Portsmouth on 1 April 2001, Portsmouth Hospitals Trust (PHT) assumed responsibility for the delivery of the majority of the clinical services on the Haslar site. Under the financial and contractual arrangements between the MOD and PHT, the Trust is responsible for ensuring sufficient staffing levels for the clinical services it manages on the Haslar site. The Trust has separate financial arrangements with the MOD concerning the employment of military medical and clinical staff and for the provision of treatment for service personnel, both at the RHH and across PHT. These arrangements are broadly similar to those in place in other MDHUs.

The Royal hospital, Haslar (RHH) is an MOD managed site. The estate and infrastructure is funded by the MOD. PHT pay the cost of any alterations to meet NHS requirements on the site. The financial arrangements also include payments by PHT for the use of RHH infrastructure and support services in MOD-retained Departments.

Queen Alexandra Hospital, Cosham

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what messing, accommodation and recreational facilities will be available for service personnel to be based at Queen Alexandra hospital, Cosham if the proposed expansion through a private finance initiative takes place. [69267]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The Queen Alexandra hospital private finance initiative will include all Ministry of Defence clinical and administrative requirements but not single living accommodation, messing or recreational facilities. A study to determine options for the provision of these services is being carried out.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what dockyard work will need to be carried out to accommodate the two new aircraft carriers; when that work is expected to commence; and if he will make a statement. [70757]

Dr. Moonie: The extent and timing of any modifications at Portsmouth will depend on developments in the carrier programme and the dimensions of the final design that is taken forward. In the light of these, consideration will be given to mitigating any access constraints together with some enhancements to shore support facilities, taking account of environmental issues. It is not yet possible to be firm on the timetable for this potential work.

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints his Department has received about its 2001 consultations in electronic or printed form. [70987]

Dr. Moonie: 12. Of these, 11 were received in writing and one by electronic means.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [70988]

Dr. Moonie: All of the Ministry of Defence's consultations issued in 2001 were either made available as paper copies or were available in paper copy on request.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long his Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70983]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence published seven consultations in 2001. The amount of time given for responses did not differ according to the format of the consultation. Times allowed for response, either in writing or electronically, were:

The Future of the Defence Diversification Agency: six weeks;

The Military Maritime Graves and the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986: three months;

Proposed Introduction of the Voluntary Screening Programme Following Health Concerns in Respect of Depleted Uranium: four weeks;

Armed Forces Pension Scheme Review: five months;

Joint Compensation Review: five months;

2nd Consultative Document on the Introduction of a Voluntary Screening Programme for Depleted Uranium: 12 weeks;

MOD Police Quinquennial Review: six months.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [70984]

Dr. Moonie: All of the consultation documents published by the Department in 2001 were published electronically, and the Ministry of Defence Consultation webpage includes links to the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations, which contains the consultation criteria.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what format his Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations. [70985]

Dr. Moonie: Of the seven consultations published in 2001, two have not yet reported. Of the remainder, results for one were published on the Consultation webpage of the Ministry of Defence website and in printed format, and two were published on the Consultation webpage of the MOD website but would have been made available in printed format if requested. The results of the last two will be published shortly.

European Technology Acquisition Programme

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which elements of *(a)* watchkeeper and *(b)* the Future Offensive Air Strategy the Government intend to procure through the European technology acquisition programme. [70628]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The European technology acquisition programme (ETAP) is a collaborative technology development programme related to combat air systems. Its aim is to sustain and develop generic European capabilities over the next two decades. Although United Kingdom decisions on which technologies to pursue under ETAP will take account of our Future Offensive Air System project, it is not aimed at a specific equipment, nor is it intended as a means of procuring equipment.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 221W, on ETAP, when he expects the ETAP joint study assessing the military capabilities the six nations' armed forces will need around 2020 to report. [70668]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The study report was produced on time and presented to the European technology acquisition programme (ETAP) steering committee on 3 July 2002. The report will provide a focus for future ETAP research and technology programmes.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the criteria to be used in deciding which British procurement decisions to pursue through the European technology acquisition programme. [70629]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The European technology acquisition programme (ETAP) is about collaborative technology development related to combat air systems rather than procurement of specific equipments. United Kingdom decisions on technology development within ETAP will reflect the key capabilities required of the UK's future offensive air system. If one or more of our ETAP partners identify the same technology area as a priority, we will jointly decide whether a collaborative ETAP technology demonstration programme with European industry represents best value for money.

Systems Technology

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mechanisms are in place to ensure that in its procurement of systems technology the UK does not become beholden to one company with the intellectual property. [70766]

Dr. Moonie: When the Ministry of Defence funds development of equipment, it does so using intellectual property conditions which will allow for competition for further supplies of that equipment or its spare parts. Apart from an undertaking that the original developer will be invited to tender for such further supplies or its spare parts, there is no obligation on MOD to limit further contracts to the original developer.

Most systems coming into defence service now, however, comprise an amalgam of commercially developed items and items for which the MOD has funded both the development costs and integration into the final system. Where commercial items are to be incorporated into a defence system, it is MOD's practice to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure continued availability of vital items on a fair and reasonable basis.

In addition to the arrangements made through individual contracts, statutory arrangements exist under the Patent Act 1977 to enable Government use of patents for defence purposes in some circumstances on payment of compensation.

Military Training (Quantocks)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training was carried out on the Quantocks in 2001; and by whom. [71295]

Dr. Moonie: No military training was conducted on the Quantocks between February and July 2001 owing to the outbreak of food and mouth disease. Our records show the following training took place later in the year: a fieldcraft and map reading exercise undertaken by the King's College Combined Cadets Force; a Duke of Edinburgh's Award by Somerset Army Cadet Force; and a Royal Marines load-carrying exercise along roads and bridle paths.

HMS Albion

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Albion will enter service. [71535]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 736W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). I will write to the hon. Member once HMS Albion's in service date has been confirmed.

Service Accommodation

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many married families are awaiting the allocation of appropriate housing in Colchester; [71473]

(2) how many married quarters there are in Colchester, broken down by standard of condition; [71475]

(3) what plans he has to improve the standard of service families' accommodation in Colchester. [71474]

Dr. Moonie: There is no waiting list for the 1,207 service families' quarters in Colchester. Their standard for condition is shown in the table.

Standard	*Numbers*
Standard 1	400
Standard 2	750
Standard 3	57
Standard 4	—
Total	1,207

Around 95 per cent. of the properties are at Standard 1 or Standard 2 for condition. Having completed two phases of a long term programme of upgrade to service housing in Colchester, further phases are planned provisionally for financial years 2003–04 and 2004–05, which will raise over 600 more properties to Standard 1 for condition.

Enhanced Capability Grenade

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the enhanced capability grenade programme; what its size will be; and what weight of explosive will be carried by the new weapon. [71635]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The enhanced performance grenade entered service in July 2001. It is 9.5 cm high, including the fuse assembly, and 6 cm wide. It weights 465 grams, of which the explosives account for 155 grams.

Weapons Systems

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Spike missile systems, manufactured by Rafael of Israel, have been purchased by the Defence Procurement Agency; [71636]

(2) when he will make his decision on the Light Forces Anti-Tank Guided Weapon System requirements for a replacement for the Milan missile; [71637]

(3) when the Light Forces Anti-Tank Guided Weapon System will enter service; [71638]

(4) what trials of the Spike missile system have been held by the Defence Procurement Agency. [71639]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence is considering the Spike and Javelin systems for the requirement in question. The Defence Procurement Agency acquired small quantities of components of both systems for the purpose of conducting comparative assessment trials. We plan to select the preferred weapon around the turn of the year and to introduce it into service in 2005.

Military Exercises

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the military exercises held in the Llandovery area on 17 June. [71764]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to my letter of 5 July (D/US of S/LM 3032/02/C) which explained that the exercise was conducted by the Queen's Dragoon Guards (QDG), who were practising wide-ranging deployments, manoeuvres and communications over long distances—skills essential for their operational training. This exercise was originally scheduled for Salisbury Plain Training Area (SPTA), but the location was changed at less than one month's notice due to urgent operational training requirements of a higher priority unit. The QDG are themselves a high readiness unit and their training was considered of sufficient importance to relocate to another area rather than to delay until SPTA became available.

Waste

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of programmes designed to reduce waste and encourage re-use and recycling in each of the dual services in each year since 1997. [71663]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not currently collect data on the cost of programmes designed to reduce waste and encourage re-use and recycling. However, data collection on all environmental issues, including waste, should be greatly enhanced once implementation of the Department's corporate environmental management system has been completed in 2003–04.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantities of waste have been diverted from landfill by the environmental policies pursued by his Department in the past five years. [71667]

Dr. Moonie: While it is Ministry of Defence policy to divert waste away from landfill by encouraging recycling and minimisation schemes, waste management is handled in practice at a local level by a number of different professional waste contractors.

As these contractors are employed on an individual basis by various budget holders across the Department, information on the quantities of waste diverted from landfill is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Modernisation

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are being undertaken to ensure that Britain's military forces undergo modernisation and have the latest technology available. [72540]

Mr. Hoon: The Strategic Defence Review (SDR) set in hand a programme of equipment modernisation to ensure that our forces are fully able to meet future challenges. Those conclusions remain valid. But operations in Afghanistan, and work on the SDR New Chapter, have recently demonstrated that our forces will require the controlled, precise and rapid delivery of military effect—particularly through what is called 'network-centric capability', bringing together sensors and strike assets. The increase in the defence budget as a result of SR2002 will enable us to make investment necessary to acquire these sorts of capabilities.

General Service Medal

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the award of a general service medal to those who served in the armed forces in the Suez canal zone from 1951 to 1954. [72881]

Dr. Moonie: The Government consider it important to respect the principle that where there is a clear, demonstrable decision taken within five years of a campaign that a general service medal should not be awarded, that decision should not be reopened.

The evidence relating to consideration of a general service medal for the Suez canal zone is, however, less clear-cut. A number of representations have been made by the veterans of that campaign with which the Government have considerable sympathy.

In view of these exceptional circumstances, the Government are setting up a small sub-committee of HD Committee under the chairmanship of General Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank to report on the case for an exceptional award of a general service medal for the Suez canal zone without creating wider precedent or breaching long-standing principles which underpin the making of such awards.

Defence Housing Executive

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Housing Executive for the financial year 2002–03. [72882]

Dr. Moonie: The following key targets have been set for the Defence Housing Executive for 2002–03.

Key Target 1

To house at least 72 per cent. of families in accommodation that matches their entitlement by posting date or on return to GB from overseas, and at least 93 per cent. within 28 days of their required date;

and to give notice of address within 14 days of receipt of an application for accommodation.[1]

Key Target 2

Less than 5 per cent. of occupants should experience significant defects within 14 days of moving in.

Key Target 3

To complete the upgrade of 1,200 properties by 31 March 2003 as part of the programme to upgrade all core stock required for the longer term.

Key Target 4

To complete:

at least 95 per cent. of emergency repairs within 24 hours of notification;

at least 90 per cent. of urgent repairs within five working days of notification;

at least 95 per cent. of routine repairs within two months of notification.

Key Target 5

To reduce the management margin progressively towards 10 per cent. by November 2005, to better balance supply and demand while delivering other key targets. (The DHE's interim target for 31 March 2003 is to have a management margin of 12.1 per cent.).

Key Target 6

To develop a method for indexing the level of satisfaction of SFA occupants.[2]

[1] The revised notice of address procedure will be introduced in December 2002. Therefore, benchmarking will take place over the last half of FY 2002–03 in order to determine the performance targets for subsequent years.

[2] Benchmarking will take place during 2002–03 in order for DHE to be in a position by April 2003 to define precise targets for subsequent years.

Regarding key target 3 on the upgrade programme, as a result of good progress made to date, over 19,000 properties managed by DHE are now at standard one for condition, and some 90 per cent. of families are housed in properties at Standard one or two. The upgrade programme will continue to progress, with demanding targets set for DHE each year until the programme is completed against the services' long-term core requirements for family housing.

Copies of DHE's corporate plan will be placed in the Library of the House.

Gulf War

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest figures are for deaths of *(a)* Gulf veterans and *(b)* among the control group; and if he will make a statement. [72883]

Dr. Moonie: The latest data, as at 30 June 2002, are shown in Table 1. Because of concern among some Gulf veterans over deaths caused by cancer, Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of deaths from cancer (malignant neoplasm) by anatomical site.

We are currently discussing with the university of Manchester proposals for a detailed comparative study of the incidence of cancers among Gulf veterans and the Era comparison group and underlying factors, and hope to place a contract shortly. We also plan to commission a study of a cohort of Bosnia veterans on whom data are already available.

We are also discussing with the university of Manchester a detailed study of the factors underlying the figures for road traffic accident deaths, and hope to place a contract in the near future.

In addition, we have asked the Medical Research Council (MRC) to undertake an independent review of the research work that has been carried out into Gulf veterans' illnesses and advise on appropriate areas for future research. The MRC's conclusions will be published.

Table 1: Deaths to UK Gulf veterans[1]
1 April 1991–30 June 2002—Causes[2]

ICD Chapter/Cause of death	*Gulf*	*Era*	*Mortality rate ratio*[3]
All deaths	551	547	1.00
All cause coded deaths	542	537	1.00
I-XVI—Disease-related causes	213	256	0.83
I—Infectious and parasitic diseases	4	2	1.99
II—Cancers	92	99	0.93
III—Endocrine and immune disorders	1	4	0.25
V—Mental disorders	11	12	0.91
VI—Diseases of the nervous system and sense organs	10	8	1.24
VII—Diseases of the circulatory system	71	99	0.71
VIII—Diseases of the respiratory system	10	5	1.99
IX—Diseases of the diges[illegible] system	12	17	0.70
IV, X-XVI—All other dise[illegible]-related causes	2	10	0.20
EXVII—External causes [illegible]jury and poisoning	329	281	1.17
Railway accidents	4	1	3.98
Motor vehicle accidents	118	92	1.27
Water transport accidents	4	1	3.98
Air and space accidents	25	18	1.38
Other vehicle accidents	0	2	0.00
Accidental poisoning	11	14	0.78
Accidental falls	8	7	1.14
Accidents due to fire/flames	0	2	0.00
Accidents due to natural envir[illegible]ntal factors	2	2	1.00
Accidents due to submersion/su[illegible]tion/foreign bodies	17	7	2.42
Other accidents	31	28	1.14
Late effects of accident/injury	0	2	0.00
Suicide and injury undetermined whether accidental	100	97	1.03
Homicide	6	4	1.49
Injury resulting from the operations of war	3	4	0.75
Other deaths for which coded cause data are not yet available	5	4	—
Overseas deaths for which cause data are not available	4	6	—

[1] Service and ex-service personnel only.

[2] (Coded to ICD-9). World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases 9th revision 1977.

[3] Mortality rate ratios differ marginally from the crude deaths ratio owing to some small differences between the Gulf and Era cohorts.

Table 2: Deaths due to neoplasms among UK Gulf veterans[1]
1 April 1991–30 June 2002—Major anatomical sites[2]

ICD 9	*Site*	*Gulf*	*Era*
140–239	All neoplasms	92	99
140–149	Malignant neoplasm of lip, oral cavity and pharynx	3	4
150–159	Malignant neoplasm of digestive organs and peritoneum	18	23
160–165	Malignant neoplasm of respiratory and intrathoracic organs	15	21
170–175	Malignant neoplasm of bone, connective tissue, skin and breast	14	8

Table 2: Deaths due to neoplasms among UK Gulf veterans[1]
1 April 1991–30 June 2002—Major anatomical sites[2]

ICD 9	*Site*	*Gulf*	*Era*
179–189	Malignant neoplasm of genitourinary organs	2	4
190–199	Malignant neoplasm of other and unspecified site	18	26
200–208	Malignant neoplasm of lymphatic and haematopoietic tissue	19	11
239	Unspecified nature	3	2

[1] Service and ex-service personnel only.

[2] Coded to ICD-9. World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases 9th revision 1977.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Defence Aviation Repair Agency for financial year 2002–03. [72884]

Dr. Moonie: Key Performance Indicators have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA) for financial year 2002–03 as follows:

DARA key performance indicators for financial year 2002–03

Title	*Details*	*Target*
KPI 1—Financial performance 1	The measurement of DARA's ROCE	To achieve a minimum average ROCE of 6 per cent. over the first three years of trading—subject to the maintenance of current MOD customer planning assumptions, the availability of sufficient funding and the understanding that directed sub-contract work will count towards the obligation.
KPI 2—Financial performance 2	The measurement of value of contracts won.	To achieve order intake to the value of at least £60 million.
KPI-3—Quality	The measurement of attributable major customer concerns received from DARA's customers	To have no more attributable major customer concerns than the baseline set on DARA's performance of financial year 2001–02
KPI4—Efficiency	The measurement of the reduction in unit production price of a representative basket of DARA outputs	To achieve a reduction in the unit production price of 4 per cent. in real terms, of the basket of products (weighted by value of annual task quantity), baselined from financial year 2001–02—subject to the maintenance of current MOD customer planning assumptions, the availability of sufficient funding and the understanding that directed sub-contract work will count towards the obligation.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the public-private partnership for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. [72885]

Dr. Moonie: On 1 July 2001 the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency was successfully divided into QinetiQ plc, currently a wholly Government-owned company, and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, which remains part of the Ministry of Defence.

On 6 March 2002, I informed the House that we had decided to sell a substantial stake in QinetiQ to a strategic partner who would help to develop the company in preparation for a future flotation on the stockmarket. Our decision followed a detailed analysis of market conditions, which led us to conclude that this approach offered best value for the taxpayer, and would meet our objectives for a successful public private partnership.

Immediately following this announcement we initiated an open competition and carried out a pre-qualification process to identify potential partners. Almost 40 expressions of interest were received, and at the end of April 2002 12 organisations were selected to receive an Information Memorandum describing the company. Following an evaluation in late May 2002 of indicative offers from bidders, several companies were then provided with access to more detailed information on QinetiQ and invited to submit final binding bids. In order to maximise competition we do not propose to reveal how many companies were selected to participate in this stage, or their identities.

We have received a number of responses within the last few days from the shortlisted bidders, and these are now being comprehensively evaluated by officials and specialist advisers. The results of the selection process are not yet available but we remain on track to identify the preferred bidder within the next few weeks, and complete the initial sale later this year.

QinetiQ

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, in respect of his departmental minute concerning the Ministry of Defence's agreement with QinetiQ on the allocation of pre-vesting liabilities dated 8 July, he will withhold final approval of the proposed indemnity for inherited environmental liabilities to be provided for QinetiQ until such time as a detailed financial appraisal of the prospective size of the liabilities is provided to Parliament for debate. [72296]

Dr. Moonie: No. It is important to understand that the vast majority of environmental liabilities on freehold sites have transferred to QinetiQ. The small number of liabilities inherited by QinetiQ to which the departmental minute refers is being retained in Government as detailed analysis has shown that this represents best value for money in the light of reasonable commercial insurance not being available. The very low level of past claims and specialist analysis suggest actual risk associated with these specific liabilities is extremely small.

Lancer Reconnaissance System

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Lancer reconnaissance integrated technology system is expected to replace the reconnaissance vehicles in service in the UK military; and if he will make a statement. [70056]

Dr. Moonie: The Lancer integrated demonstrator vehicle was one of two developed under the assessment phase of the joint UK/US Tracer programme. This vehicle is undergoing a series of user trials to demonstrate the technical maturity and military utility of a number of key armoured vehicle technologies.

Although the participating nations decided, jointly, to terminate the Tracer programme at the end of the assessment phase, we expect to be able to apply some of the key technologies to future equipment programmes, in particular the Future Rapid Effects System (FRES) programme, which is due to enter service around the end of the decade.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61051]

The Solicitor-General: The amount spent by each of the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible in each of the last five years is set out below.

Crown Prosecution Service

1997–98: £1,234,217
1998–99: £1,339,271
1999–2000: £2,069,216
2000–01: £2,700,903
2001–02: £5,620,922

Serious Fraud Office

1996–97: £127,051
1997–98: £134,692
1998–99: £124,949
1999–2000: £180,936
2000–01: £237,996

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Figures for the last four years are:

1998–99: £213,460
1999–2000: £230,690
2000–01: £337,900
2001–02: £402,080

Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers

1998–99: £13,820
1999–2000: £8,800
2000–01: £11,750
2001–02: £10,500

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

Information is only available for the year 2001–02 as before 1 April 2001 the inspectorate was part of the Crown Prosecution Service and training costs form part of the figures provided by the CPTs. The sum expended on training in 2001–02 was £26,600.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Radioactive Discharges

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to publish the UK strategy for radioactive discharges. [73103]

Mr. Meacher: The strategy is currently being printed and will be published very shortly. Copies will be placed in the Library. The document will also be available on the DEFRA website.

The strategy demonstrates how the UK will achieve substantial reductions in radioactive discharges in the period to 2020, to implement agreements reached at the 1998 ministerial meeting and subsequent meetings of the OSPAR Commission.

Radioactive discharges in the UK have already been reduced to around 1 per cent. of peak levels in the 1970s. This strategy represents the next chapter of what has been an increasingly effective policy to minimise such discharges and shows that the Government are determined to maintain the downward pressure and achieve the objective of the OSPAR radioactive substances strategy.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets she has set the Rural Payments Agency for 2002–03. [72961]

Margaret Beckett: I have set the Rural Payments Agency the following performance targets for 2002–03:

Efficiency Performance

1. To successfully negotiate Office of Government Commerce (OGC) Gateway 3 by 31 December 2002.
2. To ensure the main programme contract is ready to let by 31 December 2002, once Gateway 3 is achieved.

Financial Performance

3. To operate within the 2002–03 resource budget allocations as agreed with DEFRA.
4. To ensure that disallowance within the control of RPA due to non-compliance with EU requirement remains below 2 per cent. of the value of CAP payments made by the Agency.
5. To account accurately and to deadline for EAGGF funds.

Business Continuity and Service Delivery

6. To process and pay at least 96.14 per cent. of valid IACS claims by value within the EU deadline.
7. To process and pay at least 85 per cent. of valid non-IACS claims by volume within ministerial deadlines and all claims within the set EU deadlines or in their absence 60 days.
8. To process at least 98.5 per cent. of all valid claims correctly.

Service Quality and Delivery

9. To publish customer service standards that meet Charter Mark guidelines by 30 June 2002.
10. To use the customer survey to establish a baseline for customer satisfaction and agree and undertake improvement activities by 31 December 2002.

11. To use the EFQM Excellence Model in all RPA business units to assess current enablers' ability to deliver required targets and outcomes, agreeing change action plans by 31 March 2003.

Reform Initiatives

12. To use the staff survey to establish a baseline for staff satisfaction by 31 December 2002 and agree and undertake improvement activities by 31 March 2003.
13. To complete roll out of diversity training across RPA by 31 March 2003.
14. To reduce sick absence to no more than 7.9 days per staff year by 31 March 2003.

Central Science Laboratory

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the 2001–02 annual report for the Central Science Laboratory. [72958]

Mr. Morley: The 2001–02 annual report and accounts for the Central Science Laboratory were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Enriched Cages

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the public consultation on a possible ban on enriched cages in England will begin. [72959]

Mr. Morley: The public consultation will start on 24 July and last for three months.

Common Land

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to announce the outcome of the review of common land policy and legislation, following the consultation exercise that took place in 2000. [72957]

Alun Michael: We have today published a "Common Land Policy Statement" jointly with the National Assembly for Wales. This, together with the "Report on Consultation Responses", is available in the Library of the House, on the DEFRA website, and from the National Assembly for Wales.

The policy statement contains a comprehensive package of proposals relating to the registration and protection of common land and village greens. It also outlines our objectives for improving the agricultural management of common land and announces our intention to set up as soon as possible a working party of stakeholders to make recommendations on how these objectives can best be met.

In the rural White Paper, issued in November 2000, the Government gave a commitment to legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows. We hope to be able to do so in the 2004–05 session.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the 2001–02 annual report for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. [72962]

Mr. Morley: The 2001–02 annual report and accounts for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Veterinary Laboratories Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the 2001–02 annual report for the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. [72956]

Mr. Morley: The 2001–02 annual report and accounts for the Veterinary Laboratories Agency were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Water Industry

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the consultation paper on competition in the water industry will be published. [72960]

Mr. Meacher: I announced to the House on 19 March 2002, the Government's proposals for increasing competition in the water industry in England and Wales, *Official Report*, column 265W. I promised to publish a consultation paper with further details of our proposals later in the year.

I can now confirm that the consultation paper on competition in the water industry will be published in the next few weeks.

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27387]

Mr. Morley: As DEFRA was created in June 2001, retrospective information prior to that date does not exist for the Department. Information on such expenditure by DEFRA's agencies and non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and to provide it would incur disproportionate costs.

There have been three DEFRA managed campaigns where PR consultants were employed . The costs of their services over the past financial year were as follows:

'Are you Doing your Bit?' campaign—£12,000

UK's Emissions Trading Scheme campaign—£95,000

'Your Countryside, You're Welcome' campaign—£210,000.

The delay in supplying this answer to the hon. Gentleman is regretted.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 200, what recent discussions she has had with her French counterpart on reform of the CAP. [63532]

Mr. Morley: All member states set out their initial responses to the European Commission's proposals for the next stage of CAP reform at the EU Agriculture Council on 15 July. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be discussing these proposals with all of her EU agriculture colleagues over the coming months.

Ministerial Speeches

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the speeches which *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers from her Department have made to external organisations and businesses since 7 June 2001, in each case saying where the speech is publicly available; if she will place copies of speeches not available in the Library; and if she will make a statement; [56552]

(2) when she will answer the question of the hon. Member for Gordon, reference 56552, on departmental speeches. [64736]

Mr. Morley: All DEFRA Ministers make a number of speeches every week and so it would be only at disproportionate cost that a fully comprehensive list could be assembled. However, a list has been placed in the Library of the House which shows the principal keynote speeches made by DEFRA Ministers since 7 June 2001. Some of these are available on the DEFRA website (as are other, more minor speeches) and, where possible, the others are available upon request although generally not in an 'as delivered' format.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representation the Scottish Executive will have on delegations to meetings with the European Commission to discuss their proposals for reform of the CAP. [70436]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* In accordance with the Concordat on Co-ordination of European Policy Issues (Part IIB of Cm 4444) and a bilateral concordat, the role of Ministers and officials of the devolved Administrations in the CAP reform negotiations will be to support and advance the single UK negotiating line which they will have played a part in developing. How that role is best fulfilled will be a matter for discussion with the devolved Administrations, but it is expected that Scottish Executive representatives will form part of the UK delegation for appropriate EU meetings.

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's response is to the European Commission's proposals for the reform of the CAP, as referred to in the mid-term review. [69602]

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the EU Commission's proposals to reform the CAP. [69605]

Mr. Morley: The Government welcome publication of the European Commission's proposals for reform of the CAP which will form a good basis for discussion. We believe that the general thrust of the proposals for further market reform, decoupling of direct payments from production, and reinforcement of the rural development regulation is the right one, although in a number of key areas the Government consider that the proposals do not go far enough and do not adequately respond to the challenges ahead.

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on what progress she expects on the reform of the common agricultural policy; and what timetable she expects will be agreed for its reform. [71723]

Mr. Morley: On 10 July the European Commission published a communication to the European Council and European Parliament on reform of the common agricultural policy. Having been discussed at the Agriculture Council on 15 July, we expect it to be discussed again at future Councils during the Danish presidency. We are still at a very early stage in these complex negotiations, and it is difficult to predict when agreement will be reached. However, it is expected that the Commission will not table legislative proposals until late October at the earliest. The Commission has proposed that any reform agreed will apply from 1 January 2004.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on the incomes of hill farmers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England of the proposed changes in the common agricultural policy announced by the European Commission; what representations she made to the European Commission relating to the CAP prior to their recommendations; what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executives on reform of the common agricultural policy; and what meetings she has arranged with the European Commission to discuss their proposals for reform of the CAP. [70373]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* An assessment has yet to be made of the impact on the incomes of hill farmers in England of the changes outlined in the Commission's CAP reform communication. It would be for the devolved Administrations to make such an assessment for farmers in Scotland and Wales. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, met Commissioner Fischler before publication of the Commission's communication to discuss related issues, and she has met him again since publication to discuss the specific proposals. CAP reform has been a recurring agenda item for the regular meetings my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has with Ministers from the devolved Administrations prior to EU Agriculture Council meetings. The most recent such meeting took place in Brussels on 15 July, focusing on the Commission's communication. No further meetings have been arranged with the EU Commission at this stage.

Farming Research

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 472W, on farming research, how many projects, by category, were funded in each year since 1991–92. [64851]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 June 2002]:* Many hundreds of new research projects are initiated every year. I regret that a breakdown of these projects in the form requested could be supplied only at disproportionate cost. However, details of current DEFRA funded projects can be found on the Department's website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/research/projects. Information on all rural livelihoods, natural resources and environment projects funded by the Department for International

Development since 1992 can be found on the Natural Resources Information System (NARSIS) searchable on-line database www.narsis.org.

Feed Additives

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the use of feed additives for animals reared for country sports; and if she will make a statement. [67251]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* Any additive used in animal feed for food producing animals (including birds reared to be shot for the table) must be authorised centrally by the European Commission under EU law. Under these arrangements each product is considered on its own merits.

No general assessment has been made of the use of feed additives for animals reared for country sports. We are aware that dimetridazole (DMZ) is used by game bird producers as a veterinary medicinal product in feed. DMZ was also authorised as a feed additive for use in turkeys and quail but this authorisation was withdrawn by the European Commission after a six month selling off period on 15 May 2002 because the manufacturer did not provide sufficient data to support the product under a review of all feed additive authorisations.

The legality of the UK's authorisation of DMZ as the active ingredient in three veterinary medicinal products for game birds has been challenged by the European Commission. We are seeking early discussions with the European Commission on this issue. In the meantime the marketing authorisations for these three veterinary medicines remain valid.

Fisheries

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether it is the UK Government's policy that the principle of relative stability underpinning the CFP is non-negotiable. [67318]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The Government have stated on many occasions that we consider relative stability to be an integral part of the common fisheries policy (CFP), and we have no intention of moving from that position. We shall argue for this, and our other objectives, to be achieved during this year's review of the CFP.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers' markets have not re-opened since the foot and mouth crisis last year; where these markets are; and what information she has collated on the reasons why they have not re-opened. [70269]

Mr. Morley: The re-opening of livestock markets has been monitored since the introduction of the interim livestock movement rules on 11 February this year.

A livestock market has been taken to be a market opening on a non-seasonal basis, selling livestock species susceptible to foot and mouth disease and which had been operating as a livestock market prior to last year's outbreak.

As of 1 July 2002, of the 171 livestock markets to which the above definition applied:

130 (76 per cent.) had re-opened;

29 (17 per cent.) had indicated they hoped to re-open;

12 (7 per cent.) had indicated they had no plans to re-open.

Of those markets with no plans to re-open, the reasons for not re-opening were understood to be:

Seven (58 per cent.) due to the livestock movement and biosecurity rules;

Three (25 per cent.) due to commercial reasons not connected with the interim rules;

Two (17 per cent.) reasons unclear (reasons are being sought).

These 12 markets are set out in the table:

Market	*County*	*Reason*
Aylsham	Norfolk	Interim rules
Llanfair Caereinion	Powys	Interim rules
Gowerton	Swansea	Interim rules
Broughton	Cumbria	Unclear
Pembroke	Pembrokeshire	Unclear
Gloucester	Gloucestershire	Commercial
Knaresborough	North Yorkshire	Interim rules
Ripon	North Yorkshire	Commercial
Grantham	Lincolnshire	Interim rules
Newport (Isle of Wight)	Isle of Wight	Interim rules
Rye	Sussex	Interim rules
Leominster	Herefordshire	Commercial

These data have been collected from DEFRA Animal Health Offices and are kept under review.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department has plans to form a partnership with countries in central and west Africa to tackle the trade in illegal meat imports. [70304]

Mr. Morley: The Department has already established links with countries in central and west Africa through the establishment of the CITES Bushmeat Working Group and via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's UK diplomatic missions in Harare, Accra, Abuja, Cairo, Pretoria, Kampala, Abidjan, Maseru, Dakar, Luanda, Nairobi, Kigali, Mbabane and Tunis. We believe the latter approach, in particular, to be important in raising the profile of UK restrictions and rules for personal imports of meat and other food items.

Egg Industry

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the EU in respect of the Doha Development Agenda negotiations in order to prevent loss of competitiveness in the UK egg industry from *(a)* increased domestic regulatory costs and *(b)* reducing barriers to trade. [70335]

Mr. Morley: Reducing barriers to trade is fundamental to Government policy. However, I am concerned that there should be no competitive disadvantage as a result of higher EU regulatory costs than those faced by third country competitors. We have played an active part in formulating EU policy in this area and these concerns are fully reflected in the context of specific proposals on animal welfare that the European Commission has submitted in the Doha Development Agenda.

State Veterinary Service

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to increase the numbers of vets employed by the State Veterinary Service. [70265]

Mr. Morley: The State Veterinary Service has recently received additional funding in 2002–03 which will allow the lifting of a moratorium on the recruitment of veterinary staff in the current financial year. We will be reviewing how best to take forward the recruitment of replacement and additional staff in the context of this year's revised budget and anticipated budgets for future years in the light of the SR2002 settlement.

Due consideration will also be given to any relevant recommendations made by the Lessons Learned and Royal Society inquiries.

Department-sponsored Organisations

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs further to her answer of 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 685W, on department-sponsored organisations, what plans she has to ensure that organisations sponsored by her Department are given their budgets prior to the beginning of the financial year. [70294]

Mr. Morley: The Spending Review 2002 settlement will provide the opportunity to allocate indicative budgets for 2003–04 to 2005–06. This also provides the opportunity to give an indication of the anticipated level of support over the period. Following the creation of DEFRA, we are further examining how the budget planning process can be enhanced, and the timetable we are working to should finalise allocation decisions prior to the start of the financial year.

Animal Welfare

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has commissioned and what assessment she has made of evidence on how high standards of farm animal welfare can be incorporated in an economically viable manner in her strategy for the future of farming. [70611]

Mr. Morley: Developing and maintaining high standards of farm animal welfare are at the heart of Government policy. Comprehensive legislation and species-specific welfare codes will form the basis to any new sustainable strategy for food and farming.

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs where health certification was carried out in respect of the five consignments of live sheep exported from Dover to continental Europe on 15 July, how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey; where those sheep were taken; what final destination address was given on the route plan for each of the consignments; and what responsibility she had to check whether the arrangement foreseen in the route plan to rest, feed and water the animals, and the requirements of European Community law, were adhered to once the animals left the United Kingdom. [71540]

Mr. Morley: Health certification was carried out at four approved assembly centres in North Wales. At the time of inspection for certification, three sheep were rejected as unfit for their intended journey and eight sheep were rejected on animal health grounds. The sheep were transported from the assembly centres to Dover and then via Holland to EU approved slaughterhouses, four in France and one in Italy. All route plans are checked before they are stamped to ensure that the proposed journey complies with requirements for rest, feed and water. Completed route plans must be returned within 15 days of the end of the journey showing details of the actual journey and any deviations from the planned journey. Returned route plans are checked and any queries followed up.

Livestock Movements

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to review the 20-day standstill rules on animal movement; and if she will make a statement. [70113]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* No decisions about the future of the 20-day standstill will be taken before the consideration of the report of the Lessons Learned inquiry.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Joint Meetings of Management and/or Regulatory Committees in the field of agriculture-trade mechanisms is next due to meet; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64898]

Mr. Morley: The next meeting of the DG Agri Trade Mechanisms Management Committee is scheduled for 17 September 2002. The Committee oversees a number of import and export CAP market support and control measures. These measures are administered for the UK by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In view of the RPA's UK wide remit representatives from SERAD do not routinely attend. However arrangements are in place in order to ensure that meeting agendas are notified to SERAD with an invitation to comment on any issues of interest.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Madagascar) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70586]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Madagascar. The European Commission negotiates directly with Madagascar on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these Working Groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Angola) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70594]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Angola. The European Commission negotiates directly with Angola on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these Working Groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Comoros) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70592]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Comoros. The European Commission negotiates directly with Comoros on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these Working Groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Gambia) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70936]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Gambia. The European Commission negotiates directly with Gambia on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Equatorial Guinea) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70935]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Equatorial Guinea. The European Commission negotiates directly with Equatorial Guinea on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Russia) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70931]

Mr. Morley: A meeting to discuss the possibility of a new fisheries agreement between the EU and Russia will take place on 24 and 25 July 2002. The European Commission will represent member states in the negotiations. Officials in my Department have consulted with SEERAD colleagues and are aware of the interests of Scottish fishermen in any opportunities afforded under any agreement with Russia. UK representation for EU co-ordination for this and other meetings varies according to the agenda for the meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Lithuania) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70585]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Lithuania. The European Commission negotiates directly with Lithuania on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Poland) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70584]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Poland. The European Commission negotiates directly with Poland on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Greenland) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70590]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Greenland. The European Commission negotiates directly with Greenland on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Estonia) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70937]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Estonia. The European Commission negotiates directly with Estonia on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Sáo Tomé and Principe) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70932]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Sáo Tomé and Principe. The European Commission negotiates directly with Sáo Tomé and Principe on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Guinea Bissau) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70934]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Guinea Bissau. The European Commission negotiates directly with Guinea Bissau on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Morocco) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70933]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU Morocco. The European Commission negotiates directly with Morocco on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Cape Verde) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70580]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Cape Verde. The European Commission negotiates directly with Cape Verde on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Côte d'Ivoire) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70579]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Côte d'Ivoire. The European Commission negotiates directly with Côte d'Ivoire on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Mauritius) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70588]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Mauritius. The European Commission negotiates directly with Mauritius on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Seychelles) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70582]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Seychelles. The European Commission negotiates directly with Seychelles on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Latvia) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70587]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Latvia. The European Commission negotiates directly with Latvia on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Senegal) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70583]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Senegal. The European Commission negotiates directly with Senegal on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Argentina) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70593]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Argentina. The European Commission negotiates directly with Argentina on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Joint Committee (EEC-Guinea) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70591]

Mr. Morley: There is no scheduled date yet available for the next meeting between the EU and Guinea. The European Commission negotiates directly with Guinea on fishery matters on behalf of the EU. However, fishery issues with third countries are discussed at European Council Working Groups on Fisheries. UK representation at European Council Working Group on Fisheries varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of specific interest. The Scottish Executive regularly attends these working groups.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Advisory Committee on Community Policy regarding Forestry and Forest-based Industries is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70578]

Mr. Morley: The EU Advisory Committee on Community Policy regarding Forestry and Forest-based Industries meets as and when business arises. The date of its next meeting has not been fixed as yet. The UK is represented by an official from the Forestry Commission, which reports to forestry Ministers in England, Scotland and Wales.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Standing Committee on Propagating Material and Plants of fruit Genera and Species is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70569]

Mr. Morley: The European Commission has indicated that the EU Standing Committee on Propagating Material and Plants of Fruit Genera and Species is likely to next meet sometime this autumn, although a date for the meeting has yet to be announced. UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include officials from the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of sufficient interest.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Standing Committee on Plant Health is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70571]

Mr. Morley: The next meeting of the EU Standing Committee on Plant Health is provisionally on 26–27 September 2002. UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include officials from the Scottish Executive, other devolved Administrations and the Forestry Commission, where there are items of sufficient interest.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Standing Committee on Propagating Material and Ornamental Plants is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70568]

Mr. Morley: The European Commission has indicated that the EU Standing Committee on Propagating Material and Ornamental Plants is likely to next meet sometime this autumn, although a date for the meeting has yet to be announced. UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include officials from the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of sufficient interest.

New Rural Businesses

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost has been in each of the past five years of programmes designed to start new businesses in rural communities. [71134]

Alun Michael: One aim of the England Rural Development Programme is to encourage new business activity which benefits rural economies and communities. This may be helped through the expansion of existing business activity, new business activity within an existing business, or activity in a new and separate business in a rural area. There is no separate funding programme which solely targets new businesses only.

Within the ERDP, the Rural Enterprise Scheme supports both farmers diversifying via new and expanded business activity, and non-farmers with projects in the rural tourism and food marketing sectors. Similarly, the Processing and Marketing Grant supports both new and expanded business activity in the processing of primary foods. Equivalent measures also exist in objective one areas. We do not have separate figures for assistance to new business start-ups and it would depend how 'new businesses' were to be defined. For example, if a farm business diversifies into running a children's nursery or selling clothes over the internet, it might either still be a single diversified farm business or the nursery and clothing sales might be considered new businesses.

Government Funding

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much funding the Government provide for the *(a)* Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute and *(b)* Veterinary Laboratories Agency; and if this sum will be increased in 2003. [71018]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA has no research contracts with the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute directly. At present, there is no commitment of funds to them for this year or the future.

The accounts for VLA show an income of £74,082,000 from DEFRA for the financial year 2001–02. VLA received a further £4,820,000 from other Government sources (e.g. FSA) giving a total income from Government of £78,902,000. These are figures from the VLA annual accounts which are due to be laid in Parliament on 23 July.

At this stage of the financial year, VLA's anticipated budgets show £78 million receivable from DEFRA and £5 million from other Government sources, giving a total forecast income for 2002–03 from Government of £83 million (an anticipated increase of approximately 5.2 per cent. over 2001–02).

Abattoirs

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* cattle and *(b)* sheep were transported from (i) England to Scottish abattoirs and (ii) Scotland to English abattoirs in each of the last five years; and how many (A) cattle and (B) sheep were transported from (1) the Irish Republic to abattoirs in Northern Ireland and (2) Northern Ireland to abattoirs in the Irish Republic in each of the last five years. [70374]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The full range of statistics requested is not available. However, data from the Cattle Tracing Scheme indicates that:

(a) 56.0 thousand cattle in 2000 and 17.3 thousand cattle in 2001, born in England or Wales and not previously on Scottish agricultural holdings, were slaughtered in Scottish abattoirs; and

(b) 36.7 thousand cattle born in Scotland were slaughtered in English or Welsh abattoirs in 2001—these may include cattle retained on farm in England or Wales for a period of time and not represent those transported directly to an abattoir.

Control measures taken during the outbreak of foot and mouth disease last year will have impacted on animal movements. No data are available for movement of sheep between England and Scotland.

Data provided by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Northern Ireland, show that:

(c) In 2001, 25.1 thousand cattle were imported from the Republic of Ireland for slaughter in abattoirs in Northern Ireland. Data for the last five calendar years are shown in the table:

	Thousand
1997	[1]7.0
1998	1.4
1999	7.0
2000	14.4
2001	25.1

[1] Excluding the 1,200 cattle slaughtered under the Calf Processing Aid Scheme.

No cattle born in Northern Ireland were slaughtered in abattoirs in the Republic of Ireland during this period because exports of live cattle were banned as part of BSE control measures.

(d) In 2001, 22.8 thousand sheep were imported from the Republic of Ireland for slaughter in abattoirs in Northern Ireland. Data for the last five calendar years are shown in the table:

	Thousand
1997	108.8
1998	93.7
1999	127.2
2000	169.4
2001	22.8

Recorded sheep exports from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland are available only since the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. The figures available are:

	Thousand
2001 (from March)	161.1
2002 (to 6 July)	79.4

Nuclear Waste (Sellafield)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many shipments of nuclear waste are expected to be made by sea to Sellafield within the next two years. [70369]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* None. The Government's policy is that radioactive waste should not be imported to (or exported from) the UK, except for the recovery of reusable materials, or, in certain circumstances, for treatment that will make its subsequent storage or disposal more manageable. In accordance with International Atomic Energy Agency and Euratom definitions, spent fuel is not categorised as waste while the option of reprocessing it remains open and a future use for the fuel can be foreseen.

Bovine TB

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the ISG's preliminary analysis of the risk factors associated with cattle TB. [71029]

Mr. Morley: The ISG's preliminary analysis of data from the 'TB99' epidemiological survey is included in its third report which is available on DEFRA's website at: www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/tb/point5/p5prog

We have accepted the main conclusion that a full analysis of data is not possible at present. The preliminary comparative analyses that have been undertaken do, however, indicate the value of the TB99 questionnaire and the soundness of its design based on ISG advice. The completion of TB99 questionnaires has been delayed by the foot and mouth disease outbreak and the subsequent deployment of veterinary resources to address the backlog of cattle TB testing. However, negotiations are under way to employ contractors to help catch up in this important area of the cattle TB research programme.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average time has been between when cattle are being compulsorily slaughtered under TB control measures and the receipt of compensation payments by the farmer over the last 12 months for which figures are available. [71019]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is not readily available for the GB as a whole and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

The Government believe that compensation for animals slaughtered should be paid promptly. We are aware of payment delays in some areas due to the pressure of work generated by increased bovine TB testing.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what strategy options have been considered regarding the economic difficulties and movement restrictions regarding bovine TB; and when a decision will be made on these options. [71031]

Mr. Morley: My officials met industry representatives on 27 June to discuss a range of options for softening the economic impact on farmers of movement restrictions applied to herds as a result of TB breakdowns.

Our priority is to ensure that disease control will not be compromised by any new measures applied, therefore, objective risk assessments of the proposals made by industry representatives are being commissioned. No decisions can be made until the risk assessments and full cost benefit analyses have been completed. Officials plan to meet with industry representatives again on this matter in September.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many false positives for bovine TB have been recorded in the current year; and how many false positives there were *(a)* as a percentage of positive tests and *(b)* as a percentage of all the tests. [71025]

Mr. Morley: No test for the diagnosis of bovine TB is 100 per cent. specific.

In the UK, the diagnosis of bovine TB in live cattle relies on the single intradermal comparative test which involves the use of both avian and bovine tuberculins. This test is designed to exclude animals which react to other, often non-pathogenic bacteria, which would otherwise interfere with the test and produce 'false positive' reactions.

Reactors to the skin test, including animals which give an inconclusive reaction after two retests, are slaughtered and examined post-mortem. Infection is confirmed by either the presence of typical, visible lesions or by the laboratory culture of the organism. In the year 2000, of approximately 7,000 reactors slaughtered, post-mortem examination failed to confirm infection in about 45 per cent. of cases. Infection is confirmed in around 60 to 65 per cent. of herds with one or more reactors.

However, these post-mortem examinations are also less than 100 per cent. sensitive, so failure to detect visible lesions or failure to culture the organism does not confirm the absence of infection. It is not therefore possible to determine how many animals which reacted to the skin test are 'false positives'.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what delays there are in compensation payments for cattle compulsorily slaughtered under TB control; and what extra compensation has been paid for the delays. [71020]

Mr. Morley: The Government recognise that compensation for animals slaughtered should be paid promptly. We are aware of some delays in payment in some areas due to the priority given by Animal Health Offices to clearing the backlog of TB testing after the foot and mouth disease outbreak. No extra compensation payments have been made in these cases.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what compensation is provided for cattle that falsely test positive for bovine TB. [71014]

Mr. Morley: It is Government policy to pay 100 per cent. of market value, with no upper limit, for cattle that are compulsorily slaughtered under TB control measures.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research she has commissioned on a bovine TB vaccine that is better than 60 per cent. effective; and if she will make a statement on progress. [71294]

Mr. Morley: The Department has commissioned an extensive programme of research on the vaccination of animals against bovine TB following recommendations made in the Krebs report. Currently we have four projects which are directly related to generating and testing new vaccine candidates and these involve collaboration between Government agencies, institutes and universities both in the UK and internationally. There are also several allied projects to the vaccine programme which include using information from sequencing the M. bovis genome, studying the immune response and pathogenesis of TB, and developing improved diagnostic tests. However, success in developing a bovine TB vaccine that is better than 60 per cent. effective cannot be guaranteed.

The independent Scientific Group on cattle TB is at present carrying out a scoping study into the feasibility of vaccination and is due to report at the end of the year.

Flooding

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ensure that special precautions are taken to protect the people of Canvey Island at the time of the high tide expected in October. [71455]

Mr. Morley: Responsibility for flood forecasting and warning falls to the Environment Agency (EA) who have well-established arrangements with the Meteorological Office for securing accurate and timely weather forecasts. The emergency response to flooding falls primarily to local authorities, working with the emergency services and in close consultation and liaison with the EA.

In recent years flood warning has been improved, emergency plans checked and amended and liaison arrangements between the EA, local authorities and emergency services improved.

Canvey Island is protected by flood defences to a standard which is among the highest in the country. These defences protect against all but the most extreme conditions (those with a probability of occurrence of 0.001 or less in any one year). No special measures are therefore considered to be necessary to provide further protection during October above those already in place.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance his Department gives to local authorities regarding the granting of planning permission on *(a)* flood plains and *(b)* areas considered at risk from flooding. [70411]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions published planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 25 Development and flood risk for Transport Local Government and the Regions in July 2001. PPG 25 advises on the consideration of flooding issues that is needed at all stages of the planning system. In particular, it establishes a risk-based sequential test that gives priority to lower-risk areas and advises that built development on the functional flood plain should be wholly exceptional.

Canoeists

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the new chairs of the regional fisheries, ecology and recreation advisory committees for the *(a)* Southern, *(b)* South West, *(c)* North West and *(d)* Thames region, on increasing access to water in their region for canoeists. [71586]

Alun Michael: No such discussions have taken place. The new appointees do not take up their posts until 1 October 2002.

French Beef Ban

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* her French counterpart on the French ban on the import of UK beef since the expiry of the 15 day period imposed by the European Court for the lifting of the ban. [70673]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Secretary of State made representations to the French Agriculture Minister on 15 July during the Agriculture

Council. The European Commission decided on 17 July to refer France to the European Court of Justice for a second time in order to enforce the judgment given by the Court on 13 December 2001 that the ban should be lifted. The Commission also requested the Court to impose a substantial daily fine on France of 158,250 euro per day for failure to comply with the judgment.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what input the Government have into the process to be followed by the European Court following the refusal of the French Government to lift the ban on the import of UK beef within the 15 day time limit set down by the European Court. [70633]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The European Commission decided on 17 July to refer France to the European Court of Justice for a second time in order to enforce the judgment given by the Court on 13 December 2001 that the ban should be lifted. Member states may apply to the Court to intervene in the case.

Pet Passports

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about extending the overseas travel arrangements for pets to the USA and Canada; and when she expects to implement the policy. [70798]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I announced on 1 July that the Government intend to extend the Pet Travel Scheme to pets entering the UK from the USA and Canada, subject to satisfactory conclusions from further work to assess the risk of importing rabies. I expect this work to be completed in the autumn.

Agricultural Wages Board

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultations her Department has had with the NFU over the 2002 wages award recommended by the Agricultural Wages Board. [71190]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The president of the National Farmers Union (NFU) wrote on 10 July to Lord Whitty, the Under-Secretary, expressing concern about the decisions made by the Agricultural Wages Board at is meeting on 3–4 July.

In subsequent discussions with the president of the NFU, Lord Whitty has made it clear that the Agricultural Wages Board is an independent body and it is not for Ministers to interfere in the processes of the Board.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultations her Department has had with the Agricultural Wages Board about the 2002 wages award. [71188]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Department has had no consultations with the Agricultural Wages Board about the 2002 wages award. The Agricultural Wages Board is an independent organisation and it would not be appropriate for Ministers to intervene or seek to influence Board decisions.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost to the horticultural industry of the 2002 wages award recommended by the Agricultural Wages Board. [71186]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Department provides statistical information to the Agricultural Wages Board in advance of its negotiations each year. This includes a ready reckoner showing the cost of a 1 per cent. and a £1 per week increase in pay rates for the agricultural industry as a whole.

The proposals made by the Board for 2002 involve a number of changes to the wage structure contained in the Agricultural Wages Order. As a result, the ready reckoner cannot be relied on to provide a reliable estimate of the cost of the proposed 2002 award. However, DEFRA officials are working with the Board to cost its proposals and will share this information with the industry as soon as it is available.

Carbaryl

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department will reconsider its decision to ban the use of Carbaryl (Thinsec). [71187]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The loss of Carbaryl (Thinsec) stems from a commercial decision by the approval holder not to support the compound in the UK review of anticholinesterase pesticides. I see no reason, in the absence of modern safety data, why any pesticide product containing Carbaryl should be allowed back on to the market.

French Lamb Ban

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with *(a)* the Scottish NFU and *(b)* NFU Wales on the potential effects of the ban on the export of lamb as proposed by the French Government. [71676]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The Government are very well aware of concerns about the potentially serious effects of proposed French measures on sheep SRM in relation to the Scottish and Welsh sheep industries. Not least as a result of representations from the NFU, the MLC and from officials in the devolved Administrations who have been assiduous in representing the concerns of their stakeholders.

Both Ministers and officials are continuing to emphasise to the French authorities the very considera[illegible] importance of complying with EU rules on sheep S[illegible] We are also in touch with the European Commi[illegible] about this issue.

The Government will continue to argue strongly for the cancellation of the French proposals banning spinal cords of animals aged between six and 12 months, which provide no significant consumer protection benefit and are widely regarded as a disproportionate measure. Any further restrictions on sheep SRM must be agreed at Community level, not imposed unilaterally by member states. That is the way to maintain consumer confidence across Europe. It also ensures a level playing field for all member states regarding trade.

Nonetheless, there is encouragement in France's recent decision to postpone these measures for six months. This shows that our arguments are having an effect.

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how long the Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70087]

Mr. Morley: The Department issued 55 consultation documents in 2001 published both in electronic and printed form. 20 out of these had periods given for responses of less than 12 weeks.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in what format her Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations. [69847]

Mr. Morley: The Departmental Guidance Notes for Written Consultations provides that at the end of all consultation exercises, sponsoring divisions should place all documents in the Department's main library where it is made accessible to members of the public on request.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [69827]

Mr. Morley: All consultation documents published by the Department in 2001 were made available as paper copies.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many complaints her Department has received about its 2001 consultations by *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed means. [69826]

Mr. Morley: The Department has received nine complaints about its 2001 consultations by electronic means and in addition a further six were received by telephone. No other complaints were received.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department for has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [69828]

Mr. Morley: The Department's designated consultation co-ordinator is Bronwen Jones. Her contact details are:

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Room 534, Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR
Bronwen Jones: 020 7238 5457
email: "bronwen.jones@defra.gsi.gov.uk"

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70088]

Mr. Morley: The departmental guidance notes for written consultations provides that consultation documents should include a summary of the criteria set out in the Code of Practice on Written Consultations. Compliance with this criteria is not monitored so information is not available.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available on-line, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69804]

Mr. Morley: The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation applies to all formal national public consultation documents issued by Departments from 1 January 2001. The information requested for consultations undertaken before that date is not available. All consultation documents issued by the Department since 1 January 2001 were made available in print and on-line.

The table shown sets out the consultations undertaken by the Department since 1 January 2001 indicating the date it was issued and the deadline for responses.

Consultation	*Date issued*	*Deadline*
Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control: a Practical Guide, 2 edition—published for comment	28 June 2002	1 November 2002
New draft Environmental Information Regulations	15 July 2002	4 October 2002
Consultation on CAP reform: mid-term review of Agenda 2000	11 July 2002	4 October 2002
Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications (COM (2002) 119 final)	5 July 2002	30 September 2002
Review of Access in Agri-Environment Schemes	8 July 2002	27 September 2002
Consultation exercise on the bio-energy infrastructure scheme	25 June 2002	16 September 2002
Crime prevention on rights of way: public consultation paper on the designation of areas and other procedural matters	19 June 2002	20 September 2002
Enforcement of highway authorities' duty to prevent obstructions on rights of way: consultation paper on the implementation of section 63 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	19 June 2002	20 September 2002
Implementation of Directive 2000/76/EC on the Incineration of Waste	21 June 2002	9 September 2002
Consultation on shrimp trawls: separator trawls (sieve/veil nets) and sorting grids	18 June 2002	6 September 2002
Draft guidance on control of Johne's disease in dairy herds	31 May 2002	31 August 2002
Energy labelling of household air conditioners and electric ovens: Consultation on New Regulations for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland	11 June 2002	30 August 2002
Implementation of Directive 2001/18/EC on the Deliberate Release of Genetically Modified Organisms into the Environment: second consultation on new regulations for England	31 May 2002	26 August 2002
Consultation on Water Grid PPP: Removal of Restrictions on British Waterways' Statutory Powers	15 May 2002	16 August 2002
Statistical methodology review of the monitoring sites used in the air quality headline indicator	15 May 2002	8 August 2002
Consultation on The Government's Strategy for Combined Heat and Power to 2010	15 May 2002	7 August 2002
Policy Review of Woodland Creation in England under the Woodland Grant Scheme and the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme	13 May 2002	7 August 2002
LAPC Consultation on Risk-Based Regulation and Inspection Frequency	3 May 2002	2 August 2002

Consultation	*Date issued*	*Deadline*
Consultation on Stage II Petrol Vapour Recovery	16 April 2002	9 July 2002
Review of seed certification in England: draft seeds regulations and registration, licensing and enforcement regulation	12 April 2002	8 July 2002
Consultation on draft code of recommendations for the welfare of cattle	26 March 2002	28 June 2002
Economic evaluation of the Apple and Pear Research Council	5 April 2002	27 June 2002
Consultation on UK Ratification of the 1998 Protocol to the 1979 Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution on Heavy Metals	20 March 2002	11 June 2002
Consultation on proposed Agricultural Development Scheme	10 April 2002	31 May 2002
Consultation on Public Rights of Way: Rules for procedures for Inquiries and Hearings held under The Highways Act 1980, Wildlife And Countryside Act 1981 and Town and Country Planning Act 1990	1 March 2002	31 May 2002
Consultation on proposals for amendment to the Potato Industry Development Council Order 1997 (as amended)	6 March 2002	29 May 2002
Review of agri-environmental schemes in England	26 March 2002	27 May 2002
Consultation on Food And Environment Protection Act 1985 (Part II): Charges for Licences to Deposit Materials At Sea and Approval Of Oil Spill Treatment Products	28 March 2002	25 May 2002
Consultation on proposals for an EU Directive on environmental liability	12 April 2002	24 May 2002
Consultation on flood and coastal defence funding review	13 February 2002	17 May 2002
Consultation on Fees for Seed Certification 2002/03	11 March 2002	13 May 2002
Consultation on Fees for National Listing and Plant Breeders' Rights	11 March 2002	13 May 2002
Consultation on the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (England) Regulations 2002	8 February 2002	11 March 2002
Consultation on developing a draft strategy for antimicrobial resistance in animals (VMD consultation)	13 February 2002	7 May 2002
Consultation on detailed rules for determining the mesh size of fishing nets	2 April 2002	6 May 2002
Consultation on an Animal Welfare Bill	2 January 2002	30 April 2002
Consultation on the environmental impact of growing sugar beet	28 January 2002	24 April 2002
Consultation on the Environment Agency's Objectives and Contribution to Sustainable Development	25 January 2002	18 April 2002
Consultation on proposals for Regulations on Dedication of Access Land under Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	21 January 2002	15 April 2002
National Forest Company Quinquennial Review	29 January 2002	20 April 2002
Consultation on changes to the EU sheepmeat regime	29 January 2002	15 March 2002
Consultation on Better Quality Service review of the Egg Marketing Inspectorate	29 January 2002	28 February 2002
Consultation on proposals for Regulations on Dedication of Access Land under Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	21 January 2002	15 April 2002
Consultation on implementation of powers in Animal Health Bill	11 January 2002	15 March 2002
Consultation on conservation of native freshwater fish stocks—amendments to the Prohibition of Keeping or Release of Live Fish (Specified Species) Order 1998	4 January 2002	1 April 2002
Consultation on quinquennial review and better quality services review of the UK Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS)	21 December 2001	31 March 20002
Consultation on draft guidance to Local Highway Authorities on the preparation of Rights of Way Improvement Plans	21 December 2001	28 March 2002
Consultation on quinquennial review of Horticulture Research International (HRI)	21 December 2001	22 March 2002
Consultation on proposals for regulations on the exclusion or restriction of access to open countryside and registered common land under the Countryside And Rights of Way Act 2000	21 December 2001	22 March 2002
Consultation outlining two options for reducing nitrate pollution of waters from agriculture in England	20 December 2001	15 March 2002
Consultation on proposed national ambient noise strategy for England	20 December 2001	15 March 2002
Amendments to 'The Welfare Of Animals (Slaughter Or Killing) Regulations 1995' (Wask)	11 December 2001	5 March 2002
Consultation on Distribution of the £140 Million Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund	21 November 2001	21 January 2002
Consultation on Proposals for Regulations on Provisional and Conclusive Maps under Section 11 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	19 November 2001	8 February 2002
Consultation on changes in the Protected Zone for Rhizomania	15 November 2001	14 January 2002
Quality town and parish councils—consultation	7 November 2001	31 January 2002
Consultation on review of Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976	31 October 2001	31 January 2002
Consultation on guidance to draft codes of practice to minimise noise	26 October 2001	31 January 2002
Consultation on changes to the BSE Offspring Slaughter Regulations	25 October 2001	22 November 2001
Consultation on amendment to the BSE Monitoring (England) Regulations 2001	22 October 2001	14 November 2001
Pollution Prevention & Control (England And Wales) Regulations 2000: Consultation on a Deferral of the Relevant Period for Applications of certain A2 and B Installations	19 October 2001	19 December 2001
Consultation on extending the National Scrapie Plan and issues relating to scrapie reporting	9 October 2001	1 November 2001
Consultation on implementation of Council Directive 1999/22/EC on the keeping of wild animals in zoos	5 October 2001	23 November 2001
Milk Quotas: Consultation on new consolidated Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations	5 October 2001	10 December 2001
Consultation European Commission proposals on measures for the control and prevention of zoonoses	5 October 2001	5 January 2002
Consultation on a contingency plan for the possibility of BSE in Sheep	28 September 2001	21 December 2001
Code of Practice on the Welfare of Red Meat Animals at Slaughter	14 September 2001	7 December 2001
Consultation on managing radioactive waste safely	12 September 2001	12 March 2002
Consultation on flood and coastal defence managed realignment: land purchase, compensation and payment for alternative beneficial land use	24 September 2001	31 December 2001
Consultation on guidance on the role of flood and coastal defence in nature conservation in England	24 September 2001	31 December 2001
Consultation on Radioactive Substances: Proposed Natural Gas Exemption Order	19 September 2001	19 December 2001
Air Quality Strategy: Particles, Benzene, Carbon Monoxide and Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons	17 September 2001	12 December 2001
Consultation on DEFRA voluntary Code of Practice for the prevention and control of salmonella in broiler flocks on farm	3 September 2001	3 December 2001
Second consultation on Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Scheme Prioritisation System	24 September 2001	26 November 2001
Consultation on recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste in 2002	20 September 2001	7 November 2001
Consultation on UK implementation of Regulation (EC) 1093–2001, controlling third country imports of hemp	7 September 2001	3 December 2001
Review of Seed Certification in England: draft Cereal Seed Regulations	12 September 2001	5 December 2001
Second Consultation on Implementing the Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas Provisions of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive	4 September 2001	31 October 2001
Energy Efficiency Commitment—2002–2005: Consultation Proposals	17 August 2001	12 October 2001
Consultation on National Park Authorities and Broads Authority review	8 August 2001	2 November 2001
Consultation on waste management controls: proposed amendment to the duty of care	10 August 2001	26 October 2001
Consultation on implementation of Council Directive 1999/31/EC on the landfill of waste (second consultation paper)	8 August 2001	26 October 2001
Consultation on proposed EC Directive on the Energy Performance of Buildings	9 August 2001	26 October 2001

Consultation	*Date issued*	*Deadline*
Consultation on draft Regulations on vehicular access over common land, under Section 68 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	8 August 2001	1 October 2001
Consultation on DEFRA Aim and Objectives	August 2001	28 September 2001
Consultation on Implementation of Directive 2001/18/EC on deliberate release of genetically modified organisms into the environment	27 July 2001	26 October 2001
Consultation on proposed changes to the Plant Health Directive 2000/29/EC	31 July 2001	26 October 2001
Proposals for regulations on Local Access Forums under sections 94 & 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	31 July 2001	23 October 2001
Consultation on draft Groundwater Protection Code for Fuel Dispensing Facilities Involving Underground Storage Tanks	10 July 2001	19 October 2001
Consultation on the Veterinary Surgeon's Act 1966 Equine Dentistry Exemption Order	23 July 2001	12 October 2001
Consultation on Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Appeals Regulations	13 July 2001	23 August 2001
Technical Amendments to the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994	28 June 2001	23 August 2001
Consultation on the proposed reform of the EU sheepmeat regime	5 June 2001	20 July 2001
Consultation on scallop technical conservation	26 April 2001	20 July 2001
Consultation on the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 Artificial Insemination of Marea Exemption Order	27 April 2001	20 July 2001
Consultation on MAFF's Welsh Language Scheme	19 March 2001	25 May 2001
Consultation on new surveillance and testing measures over TB in cattle	16 February 2001	17 May 2001
Quinquennial review of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew	16 January 2001	9 April 2001
Consultation on External Waters licences for Redfish at Iceland	January 2001	16 March 2001
Consultation on a Statutory Instrument controlling Waste Waters from Rendering Plants	8 January 2001	5 March 2001

Further information on all of the consultations shown in the table can be obtained from the DEFRA website (www.defra.gov.uk)

Landfill

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* the European Commission, *(b)* the Environment Agency, *(c)* local authorities, *(d)* industry and *(e)* others on building developments on former landfill sites; and if she will make a statement. [65961]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

I have had no such recent discussions on the subject of building on former landfill sites but officials are in regular contact with these organisations.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions published planning guidance that included building on former landfill sites in Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 14 "Development on unstable land" Annex 2 "Subsidence and planning" and in the Consultation document on draft planning technical advice on land affected by contamination in February 2002.

In addition, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently revising Part C "Site preparation and resistance to moisture" of the Building Regulations 2000, which includes the precautions to be taken to avoid danger to health and safety caused by substances found on or in the ground to be covered by the building.

Public Finance Initiative

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* guidance (i) has been given and (ii) is planned from her Department to local authorities and *(b)* legislation (1) is in place and (2) is planned regarding the environmental implications of developments through the Public Finance Initiative; and if she will make a statement. [65601]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

Local government PFI projects seeking central government support are required to indicate how they promote sustainable development, by demonstrating an integrated approach to the social, environmental and economic well-being of the area served, now and for future generations. They should also reflect the objectives of any Local Agenda 21 strategy for the area. Advice on enhancing environmental benefits is available in the context of design quality in the OGC guidance "How to achieve Design Quality in PFI Projects" and the 4ps "Achieving Quality in Local Authority PFI Building Projects" and authorities are expected to take account of this. This department plans to issue guidance on 'Green Public Private Partnerships' shortly. No legislation specifically concerning PFI is in place or planned.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

National Association of Citizen's Advice Bureaux

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the recent quinquennial review of the National Association of Citizen's Advice Bureaux. [72972]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The review, which started in January 2002, was recently completed and the subsequent report produced by our consultants was extremely positive about both NACAB and the CAB Service. The report concluded that NACAB is an organisation that represents significant value for money, has made real improvements in its governance and organisation since the last review and is making a very useful contribution in terms of the modernisation and e-Government agendas.

The review demonstrates that, in all areas, both NACAB and the CAB Service make a significant and positive contribution, to individuals and Government at both a local and national level, are performing well and the report gives some useful examples of this.

I am arranging for a comprehensive summary of the report, its findings and recommendations to be made available on the DTI website. Copies of the full report will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Radioactive Metals (Civil Stocks)

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish figures for the United Kingdom's stocks of civil plutonium and uranium as at 31 December 2001. [72966]

Nigel Griffiths: I have today placed in the Libraries of the House figures for the United Kingdom's national holdings of civil plutonium and uranium as at 31 December 2001. In accordance with our commitment under the "Guidelines for the Management of Plutonium", I have today also sent the figures to the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, who will be circulating them to member states in due course.

Science, Engineering and Technology

Albert Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her plans are for the future of science, engineering and technology in the United Kingdom. [72212]

Ms Hewitt: The Government is today publishing "Investing in Innovation: a strategy for science, engineering and technology". This document sets out the Government's strategy for science, underpinned by the substantial new investment in science announced on 15 July by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

It sets out what the Government proposes to do, in partnership with other stakeholders, to ensure the long-term sustainability of our university research base. It provides details of how the Government intends to implement the recommendations of the Roberts Review. It makes clear the Government's commitment to continuing to expand our research base by strengthening existing research programmes through the Research Councils and allowing for research into exciting and promising new areas of science.

The document shows how Government will further encourage collaboration between universities and the business sector through increased investment in knowledge transfer activities, and in particular, through an expansion of the Higher Education Innovation Fund. It also sets out how the DTI will increase the diffusion of advances in science and technology in the economy.

Finally, it shows what steps the Government will take to improve the quality of the science done by Government Departments, and commissioned from others.

Copies of the document have been placed in the Libraries of the House and may be viewed at http://www.ost.gov.uk/whatsnew.htm.

Nuclear Energy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations her Department has received regarding the economic competitiveness of nuclear energy. [69445]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to his question on 17 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 346W.

Energy Policy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures her Department will implement to solicit public involvement in the development of energy policy; and if she will make a statement. [71522]

Mr. Wilson: The Government launched a consultation on energy policy on 14 May with a view to publishing a White Paper around the turn of the year. The consultation paper has been sent to a wide range of stakeholders and is also available on the Department's website. A series of conferences and seminars associated with the consultation paper are being conducted.

In addition, we are undertaking an innovative programme of events to engage members of the general public, including a stand at the Tomorrow's World Live Roadshows where the public can feed in their views on energy policy via a questionnaire which is also on the Department's website. We are also using focus groups and interactive workshops as a way to explore public views and understanding in more depth.

Renewable Energy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's methods are for assessing price imbalance exposure of *(a)* CHP and *(b)* renewable energy generators. [71581]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI does not make formal or detailed assessments of CHP and renewable generators' exposure to the imbalance prices that exist as part of the New Electricity Trading Arrangements (NETA). This is a commercial matter for generators.

On 4 April 2002 the Government published its response to the consultation on NETA and smaller generators of 1 November 2001 http://www2.dti.gov.uk/energy/domesticmarkets/electricitytrading/netaresp.pdf. This identified the following actions that would be taken:

(i) work with OFGEM to look at whether so-called "embedded benefits" could or should be made directly available to smaller generators;

(ii) address some of the administrative burdens faced by smaller generators;

(iii) ask OFGEM to ensure that imbalance prices are genuinely cost-reflective; and

(iv) allow all generators to notify their predicted output closer to "real time".

The Government continues to monitor the situation closely.

Sub-post Offices

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices were closed due to a lack of suitable sub postmasters at the latest available date. [70875]

Mr. Timms: Sub-postmaster vacancies are an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. and I have asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the number of sub-post offices that are expected to close in the next year in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Scotland. [72011]

Mr. Timms: The programme to restructure the urban post office network has not yet started and I am advised by Post Office Ltd. that, until it does, there are no specific plans for post office closures in the UK or in Scotland. When the programme starts it will be taken forward in consultation with individual sub-postmasters, the community, local stakeholders and Postwatch. Under the Code of Practice, Post Office Ltd. is required to consult Postwatch on individual changes and is briefing it on the process envisaged for reaching decisions.

The objective of the urban network restructuring programme is to provide modernised and improved facilities which meet customers' needs and expectations and are in the right location for the local community.

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she had made of the effect of the closure of sub-post offices on the provision of universal banking in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Scotland. [72020]

Mr. Timms: The Performance and Innovation Unit recommended a programme of modernisation and restructuring designed to ensure that urban sub-post offices can operate as viable businesses for their owners and offer improved services from the right locations to serve their communities. The programme to restructure the urban post office network will be taken forward in consultation with individual sub-postmasters.

In some urban areas, there are too many post offices in very close proximity to each other for them all to be viable, regardless of the provision of universal banking services at the Post Office, Universal Banking Services are due to be introduced in 2003 when migration of benefit payments to automated credit transfer (ACT) is scheduled to begin.

The Government are committed to ensuring that on migration to ACT, those people who wish to do so will be able to continue to get their benefits in cash at post offices, in full without charge.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if she will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if she will make a statement. [70216]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The cost of external publications as notified to my Department's Publications Unit and advertising expenditure through COI in 2001–02 was £4,553,677 and £6,630,590 respectively. Expenditure on campaign material is not held centrally.

The following advertising campaigns cost more than £250,000 in 2001–02:

	£
UK Online for Business	2,509,823
Business Link Awareness	2,450,781
Quality Mark Scheme	908,179
National Minimum Wage	324,906
Home Safety	299,558

Diesel Directive

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effects on UK diesel engine marinising companies and on UK agents for EU manufacturers of recreational craft engines of *(a)* the proposed EU Directive Com (2000) 639 and *(b)* an amendment exempting producers of less than 5000 engines per annum from compliance for five years after the directive comes into effect. [71643]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* A Regulatory Impact Assessment submitted to the European Scrutiny Committee on 5 July 2001 provided an assessment of the effect of COM (2000)639 on affected parties including engine marinisers. No specific assessment has been made in respect of UK agents for EU manufacturers of recreational craft. Also no assessment has been made of the effect such an amendment would have on either of the two groups. COM (2000)639 has been under discussion within the Council and European Parliament for some time and the Council reached a Common Position, the text of which was published on 22 April 2002. The European Parliament made no such amendment during the first reading and it is unlikely that such an amendment would be considered at this late stage if it was not already proposed during the first reading. However, it is my understanding that a Council Working Group will meet some time in September to consider any second reading amendments. Once all these amendments have been forwarded to the Council, we will with our partners take a view on the whole package of amendments. Following that, and before the European Parliament second reading takes place, the UK Government will as usual issue briefing to UK MEPs which will make our position clear. In addition, the UK Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees will be kept informed.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to support an amendment exempting diesel marinisers producing less than 5000 engines per annum from compliance with Com (2000) 639 for five years after it comes into force. [71642]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* COM (2000)639 relating to exhaust gas and noise emissions from recreational craft has been under discussion within the Council and European Parliament for some time and the Council reached a Common Position, the text of which was published on 22 April 2002. The European Parliament made no such amendment during the first reading and it is unlikely that such an amendment would be considered at this late stage if it was not already proposed during the first reading. However, it is my understanding that a Council Working Group will meet some time in September to consider any second reading amendments. Once all these amendments have been forwarded to the Council, we will with our partners take a view on the whole package of amendments. Following that, and before the European Parliament second reading takes place, the UK Government will as usual issue briefing to UK MEPs which will make our position clear. In addition, the UK Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees will be kept informed.

Air and Noise Pollution

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effects of Com (2000) 639 on air and noise pollution. [71641]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* No specific assessment has been made. COM (2000) 639 indicated that there would be a slight decrease in overall pollution as a result of implementation. However, this measure is proposed under Article 95 of the Treaty and is mainly concerned with the reduction of technical barriers to trade within the EU. It was on this basis that the UK supported the proposal while noting that in the long term there was likely to be some improvement in air quality and reduction in noise levels.

Developing Countries

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage developing countries *(a)* to conduct an impact assessment before deciding whether to liberalise service sectors and *(b)* to consult civil society and carry out an assessment before the March 2003 deadline for offers. [70939]

Ms Hewitt: The United Kingdom is fully committed to helping developing countries to carry out impact assessments on the liberalisation requests they are receiving. The Department for International Development is providing funding to both the World bank and UNCTAD to support projects aimed at helping to build the capacity of developing countries to carry out such assessments and to participate effectively in the GATS negotiations. We are also working with the key international agencies to make the most appropriate and effective use of the funding that has been made available to help with the assessment question.

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 672W, what evidence she draws on to suggest that liberalisation of business, financial, telecommunications and transport services are most likely to contribute to development in developing countries. [70938]

Ms Hewitt: There are a number of studies on the actual or potential impact of liberalisation of services on developing countries. The World Bank's report "Global Economic Prospects and the Developing Countries 2002" gives a useful overview of the available evidence.

Post Office

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the report evaluating the results of the pilot of the Your Guide service. [72968]

Mr. Timms: The report evaluating the results of the Your Guide service has been published today. Copies are now available in the Libraries of the House.

Manufacturing (Productivity and Competitiveness)

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department will respond to the Trade and Industry Select Committee inquiry into the productivity and competiveness of manufacturing. [72971]

Ms Hewitt: I am delighted to report that my Department is today publishing a Command Paper in response to the report by the Trade and Industry Select Committee's report into the productivity and competitiveness of UK manufacturing.

I warmly welcome the Committee's report, which has made a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate about the future of UK manufacturing. There is much in the Committee's excellent analysis with which the Government agrees, not least the importance of manufacturing to the UK economy.

Manufacturing matters hugely. It produces a fifth of our national income, directly employs almost four million people and millions more in dependent businesses; and it supports many good jobs in some of the poorer regions of Britain. Manufacturing accounts for 60 per cent. of our exports and 80 per cent. of commercial research and development, so it is a driver of innovation and technology uptake. It is a key to future prosperity, our economy and the society in which we live.

There are great opportunities for British manufacturers. The UK has real strengths to build on. We have many world-class companies. We have a stable macro-economic environment, a first class science base and membership of the EU giving access to the world's largest single market. But we recognise that we also have significant weaknesses; lower levels of skills, investment, R&D and innovation. Companies that rely mainly on labour intensive products and processes will find it ever more difficult to compete unless they evolve to meet the challenges. Companies must increase the value they add through innovative management, products and processes to succeed in the longer term.

In particular, if UK manufacturers could match the productivity performance of France, Germany and the US, all else remaining equal, we would be £70 billion better off. Returns on investments would be higher, jobs better paid and companies more competitive. That is why the Department of Trade and Industry has put manufacturing at the heart of its agenda—a fact reflected in the Command Paper—and we have set challenging targets on productivity and are taking significant action across a wide front to deliver on them in the longer term.

I welcome the Committee's call to give a greater focus across the DTI on the importance of the manufacturing industry and its needs, and to work with other Government departments in pushing forward the manufacturing agenda. Much progress has been made since the Committee began its inquiry and published its conclusions. A significant amount of what Government—and particularly DTI—does, supports manufacturing and has done for many years. But I have also instigated a step change by increasing both departmental and ministerial resources focused on manufacturing. The role of the Minister of State for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions has been strengthened—effectively creating a Minister with responsibility for manufacturing. The Department also has a strengthened structure with a new Manufacturing Policy Team and a new Director General for Innovation, when appointed, will play an important role as Chief Adviser on Manufacturing, reinforcing the importance of innovation as a key driver of manufacturing productivity. These changes are already meeting the Committee's recommendation that DTI should have a stronger and more strategic focus, commensurate with the importance of manufacturing.

The Government also published, on 16 May, its Manufacturing Strategy; the first comprehensive and cohesive framework for manufacturing set out by any UK Government for over 30 years.

A key role highlighted in the strategy will be to ensure that DTI champions more effectively the importance and needs of manufacturing and provides a vigorous lead on manufacturing issues. We are working to strengthen communication and co-operation between Whitehall departments and the regions to help UK manufacturers build on the opportunities of renewed world growth. Much progress is already being made here: at Ministerial level, a close working partnership with DTI, DfES, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Treasury has already been established on training and skills issues. This is already yielding benefits, including a better skills policy balance between the supply side—what schools and colleges provide—and the demand side—what employers need from their work forces. We have also seen a joined-up UK approach to strengthening demand side leadership by employers through the creation of new Sector Skills Councils and better co-ordination of regional delivery through initiatives such as the DTI Manufacturing Advisory Service already being delivered in most regions by their designated regional centres for manufacturing excellence (RCMEs).

I am confident that, as outlined in the Command Paper, the combination of a clear and coherent manufacturing strategy with enhanced and better focused Departmental resources in DTI provides a fresh basis for a stronger, better co-ordinated approach and more effective action to contribute to a successful UK manufacturing sector.

Employment Businesses Regulations

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will finalise the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations. [72973]

Alan Johnson: I have today published a consultation document on certain aspects of the draft regulations. After the end of the consultation period on 1 November 2002, I intend to lay the draft regulations, subject to any final amendments, with a view to bringing them into force in the first half of 2003. Copies of the consultation document have been sent to those who responded to the previous consultation and I have also placed copies of the document in the Libraries of the House and on the DTI website.

The Government's response to the recent fixed-term public consultation on the draft Fixed-term Employees' (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 was also published today. We intend the fixed-term regulations to come into force on 1 October 2002.

Broadband

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements she intends to make for the licensing of broadband fixed wireless access at 3.4 GHz. [72970]

Mr. Timms: Following extensive consultation with interested parties, I intend to award licences by auction later this year for the provision of public fixed wireless access at 3.4 GHz. There will be seven metropolitan and seven provincial licences for England, Scotland and Wales and a single licence for Northern Ireland. Each licence will have a forward and return channel both of 20 MHz. There will be no roll-out obligations included in the licences and the proposed service restrictions have been removed. Licences will be for a term of up to 15 years.

Regulations providing for the running of the auction have been made and will be laid before the House this week. I will issue a notice under the regulations that will set out the procedures to be followed during the auction. Once the regulations have come into force, I expect to invite applications for licences in September so that the auction may begin by early October.

Coal Authority

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Coal Authority's report and accounts for 2001–02 will be laid before Parliament. [72967]

Mr. Wilson: I have today laid a copy before each House of Parliament.

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70991]

Ms Hewitt: Consultation documents published by the Department are required to comply with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. Internal DTI guidance also enforces the compliance requirements in the code.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints her Department has received about its 2001 consultations in electronic or printed form. [70994]

Ms Hewitt: The Department received 11 complaints in 2001 regarding its compliance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations.

Other complaints regarding consultation exercises are not held centrally.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how long her Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70990]

Ms Hewitt: Criterion 5 of the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation requires that 12 weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation. If the period is less than 12 weeks, the document should state Ministers' reasons for departing from the code, and what special measures—for example advance notice of at least the broad issues covered—have been taken to ensure that consultation is nevertheless as effective as possible.

The Department is committed to the code and makes every effort possible to ensure that its consultation exercises comply with criterion 5. Data on the Department's performance in complying with the code is currently being compiled. I will write to the hon. Member with the requested information as soon as possible and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Hydrogen Fuel Cell Technology

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment her Department has made of the time horizons for the likely impact of hydrogen fuel cell technology on road vehicles; [72194]

(2) what contracts her Department has awarded to *(a)* TNO (Netherlands), *(b)* IAV (Germany), *(c)* AVL (Austria), *(d)* FEV (Germany) and *(e)* IKA (Germany); [72193]

(3) what funding her Department is providing for development of hydrogen fuel cell technology. [72208]

Mr. Wilson: In support of the objective to promote productivity and competitiveness, the DTI part funds collaborative R&D in the Foresight Vehicle programme to help accelerate the transfer of technology from the science base and promote its subsequent exploitation by industry. Foresight Vehicle is open to all UK-based companies and universities to submit proposals which if successful may receive grant funding. The programme does not commission research and therefore does not invite tenders from any company either in the UK or elsewhere in Europe. No DTI contracts have been awarded to TNO, IAV, AVL, FEV or IKA. Foresight Vehicle, as the national automotive R&D programme, issues calls for proposals based on rigorous technology road mapping conducted in partnership with industry. The latest technology road map, which has a 20 year time horizon, is in preparation and takes account of various options for powering future vehicles, including hydrogen fuel cells. The road map, which we hope to publish in the autumn, identifies enabling technologies and stages in the development of hydrogen fuel cells that are seen as prerequisites for the successful introduction of fuel cell road vehicles. The DTI is also a partner in the "Powering Future Vehicles" strategy and I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

The Department of Trade and Industry has been supporting work on fuel cells and hydrogen under the DTI Advanced Fuel Cells Programme since 1992. The total DTI spend is £12.2 million, and the current expenditure approximately £2 million pa. The programme supports work related to both stationary power generation and transport applications for fuel cells. It is estimated that approximately £6 million of the expenditure to date has been on transport-related fuel cell work.

The Engineering and Physical Science Research Council (EPSRC) also supports fundamental research in universities on topics that relate to fuel cell/hydrogen research. Funding in these areas amounts to £15.7 million in the period 1992–93 to 2002–03.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Accounting Directives Contact Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70901]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The EU Accounting Directives Contact Committee is next due to meet on 10 and 11 October 2002. Company accounting is not a devolved issue and therefore members of the Scottish Executive are not members of the Committee.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on opening up public contracts is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [71822]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee on opening up public contracts is next due to meet on 8 November 2002. The Committee is composed of independent experts appointed by the European Commission after consultation with business and industry. There are no Government officials on the Committee.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of electromedical equipment used in human or veterinary medicine is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66421]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

I am not aware that the Committee has ever met, or of any plans for it to meet.

Solar Power

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has to expand her Department's support of photo-voltaic solar power; [72818]

(2) if her Department will continue to provide support for the installation of photo-voltaic solar panels in the UK. [72817]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's aim is to work with industry and others to achieve a UK solar photovoltaic demonstration programme in line with those of our major competitors.

I announced the first phase of this major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme (PV MDP) on 26 March. The £20 million made available under the first phase is expected to increase tenfold the number of domestic PV installations in the UK by 2005.

Decisions on the next phase will be taken in the light of experience gained with the first phase.

Town Planners

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many registered *(a)* town planners and *(b)* landscape designers work in each Regional Development Agency. [71871]

Alan Johnson: There are 34 registered town planners working in the Regional Development Agencies at present. This figure is broken down as follows.

Regional development agency	*Number of town planners*
Advantage West Midlands	12
East of England Development Agency	3
East Midlands Development Agency	5
North West Development Agency	3
One NorthEast	0
South East of England Development Agency	5
South West of England Development Agency	5
Yorkshire Forward	1

There are no landscape designers working in the agencies.

Universal Bank

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the timescale for the development of the universal bank; and whether it will be fully operational by 2003. [70845]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Detailed work is being carried out on implementing universal banking services for delivery in advance of the migration of benefit payment to automated credit transfer from April 2003.

Ex-miners (Compensation Claims)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims by *(a)* ex-miners and *(b)* widows of families of ex-miners suffering from vibration white finger, chronic bronchitis and emphysema have been processed; and how many still await to be processed, broken down by nation and region of the UK. [69574]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The figures are as follows. They are constantly changing due to the fact that claims continue to be received at the rate of 800 per week for vibration white finger (VWF) and respiratory disease respectively. Claims received very recently are therefore included in the total of "outstanding claims".

Full and final settlements and outstanding claims by region as at 11 July 2002 for VWF

	VWF outstanding claims		
	Live	*Widows/families*	*Total*
Wales	10,312	962	11,274
Scotland	5,377	195	5,572
Nottinghamshire	5,966	1,026	6,992
Yorkshire	35,895	2,444	38,339
North East	28,817	906	29,723
North West	2,564	73	2,637
Midlands	5,836	192	6,028
South	2,367	84	2,451
Other	321	59	380

	VWF full and final settlements (including denied/withdrawn)		
	Live	*Widows/families*	*Total*
Wales	6,771	219	6,990
Scotland	3,015	138	3,153
Nottinghamshire	4,267	91	4,358
Yorkshire	12,384	364	12,748
North East	10,790	449	11,239
North West	1,714	48	1,762
Midlands	2,014	38	2,052
South	1,163	9	1,172
Other	117	22	139

In addition there are over 10,000 VWF general damages offers with solicitors for consideration.

The Department's claims handlers are unable to provide the breakdown of outstanding offers for VWF by region in the time given.

Full and final settlements and outstanding claims by region for respiratory disease as at 11 July 2002

	COPD outstanding claims		
	Alive	*Widows/families*	*Total*
Wales	15,165	15,231	30,396
Scotland	5,862	5,645	11,507
Nottinghamshire	5,906	711	6,617
Yorkshire	31,626	16,817	48,443
North East	20,858	28,492	49,350
North West	2,881	2,200	5,081
Midlands	4,475	2,134	6,609
South	2,540	1,428	3,968
Other	920	701	1,621

	COPD full and final settlements (including denied/withdrawn) as at 14 July 2002		
	Alive	*Widows/families*	*Total*
Wales	5,019	1,756	6,775
Scotland	1,572	172	1,744
Nottinghamshire	1,799	110	1,909
Yorkshire	9,017	1,314	10,331
North East	5,118	1,031	6,149
North West	913	164	1,077
Midlands	1,358	202	1,560
South	890	103	993
Other	10	6	16

In addition there are over 13,000 full and final offers with solicitors for consideration. The breakdown is:

COPD outstanding offers (including denied) as at 15 July 2002

	Total
Wales	5,303
Scotland	1,644
Nottinghamshire	1,288
Yorkshire	6,916
North East	4,089
North West	491
Midlands	1,084
South	741
Other	1

Employment Tribunals

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the length of time it takes to convene an employment tribunal. [71793]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Cases are dealt with on an individual basis by the judiciary of the Employment Tribunals and it is not possible to state how long a case will wait before being heard. In 2001–02, 69 per cent. of single Employment Tribunal cases reached a first hearing within 26 weeks of receipt.

0870 Telephone Numbers

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on using 0870 telephone numbers for inquiries by the public to the Department and its agencies. [66190]

Ms Hewitt *[pursuant to my reply, 11 July 2002, c. 1092W]:* I can now provide the individual Chief Executive replies.

Letter from Julia Fraser to Mr. John Randall, dated July 2002:

Radiocommunications Agency does not use any 0870 telephone numbers for enquiries from the public to the Agency.

We do, however, have an 0845 local-call rate telephone number, advertised as the number to call for members of the public wanting to report radio or TV interference, which connects to our main telephone enquiry point.

Letter from Desmond Flynn to Mr. John Randall, dated July 2002:

I am Chief Executive of The Insolvency Service and have been asked by the Secretary of State to reply to your question (2001/5280) on our policy on using 0870 telephone numbers.

The Insolvency Service is an Executive Agency of the DTI and operates from 33 nationwide locations. Each office has a local telephone number, rather than a central 0870 number, which together with an extensive catalogue of information booklets comprises our primary information-giving service.

Additionally The Service operates a central enquiry line from London with calls charged at the national rate.

Letter from Roger Heathcote to Mr. John Randall, dated July 2002:

You tabled a Parliamentary Question on 1 July 2002 to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry concerning the policy on using 0870 numbers for enquires by the public to the department and its agencies. I have been asked to reply in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service (ETS) which is an executive agency of the DTI.

The ETS does not use any 0870 numbers and has no policy on their usage.

Our public enquiry line and its companion minicom line are operated on 0845 numbers. Calls to these two lines are charged at the local rate regardless of where in the United Kingdom from the call originates.

Letter from Dr. J. W. Llewellyn to Mr. John Randall, dated July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory (NWML) to your question regarding the policy on using 0870 telephone numbers for enquiries by the public to the Department and its Agencies.

The national Weights and Measures Laboratory (NWML) does not employ any 0870 numbers.

Letter from Claire Clancy to Mr. John Randall, dated July 2002:

I am responding on behalf of Companies House Executive Agency to your Parliamentary Question on the Department of Trade and Industry's policy on the use of 0870 telephone numbers for public enquiries.

Companies House uses an 0870 telephone number for our national public enquiry call centre. The decision to employ this type of number is consistent with the guidance set down by the Office of e-Envoy, which states that the choice of a national rate, local rate, freefone or premium rate number should be determined by individual business requirements. As a Trading fund the Agency has to cover the cost of providing services and to avoid cross subsidy. These factors led to the decision to use an 0870 number.

Letter from Caren Fullerton to Mr. John Randall, dated July 2002:

I am replying on behalf of the Patent Office to your Parliamentary question, tabled on 1 July 2002, relating to the use of 0870 telephone numbers for enquiries by the public.

The Patent Office does not use 0870 telephone numbers. It provides 0845 numbers to be used for enquiries by the general public, who are charged local call rates for their telephone calls. This policy, determined by the business requirements of the Patent Office, conforms with the e-Envoy-s Guidelines for UK Government Call Centres.

Letter from Martin Wyn Griffith to Mr. John Randall, dated July 2002:

To ask the SoS what her policy is on using 0870 telephone numbers for enquiries by the public to the Department and its Agencies.

In response to the above Parliamentary Question, please note that:

The Small Business Service's Small Firms Finance team contracts with EC Logistics who distribute Late Payment Guidance and other publications for the SBS via an "0870" number; and

The SBS' Business Services directorate uses an "0870" number for the following purposes:

The "CONNECT" hotline

a) for Business Advisors—

to enable direct contact for Business Advisors to the CONNECT team for booking equipment/technician for shows;

for ordering CD-ROMS, technical advice, requests for presentation and clip finding service; and

for general advice and requests for literature.

b) for small business customers—

for advice on how they can access the CONNECT series via their local Business Link

The Benchmark Index hotline

a) for Business Advisors—

to enable direct contact with the Benchmark Index team for technical queries;

for advice on questionnaires;

for advice on the make up of data sets; and

requests for literature and other general support.

And b) for our small business customers—

sign-posting them to their nearest Business Link operator for access to the Benchmark Index and general help and information.

The Small Business Service uses these 0870 numbers in accordance with DTI central guidelines.

I hope this is helpful.

Deregulation Task Force

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how often the Deregulation Task Force has met in the last 12 months; what recommendations they have made; how many recommendations have been implemented; what savings businesses have made as a result; and if she will make a statement. [72156]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The Better Regulation Task Force meets every month but August. Since July 2001, the Task Force has produced six reports, on regulatory issues concerning: Local Shops, Economic Regulators; Housing Benefit; Employment Regulations; Local delivery of Central Policy; and Higher Education. These reports together made 54 recommendations. The Government have, to date, responded to three of these reports and has rejected only one recommendation. The Task Force is an advisory body and cannot itself directly reduce costs on business.

Nuclear Industry

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will exempt the nuclear energy industry from the climate change levy. [71549]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

The climate change levy is designed to encourage energy efficiency across the business and public sectors and to increase the use of sustainable forms of energy. The Government have no plans to exempt nuclear energy from the levy.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Electromedical Equipment used in Human or Veterinary Medicine is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55212]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directives for Removing Technical Barriers to Trade in Electromedical Equipment used in Human or Veterinary Medicine was established under Council Directive 84/539/EEC on the approximation of laws of the member states relating to Electromedical Equipment used in Human or Veterinary Medicine to give an opinion on:

> any amendments to Annex 1 of the Directive made necessary by the adaptation to technical progress of the harmonised standards by the relevant standards organisation,
>
> any amendments to Annex 1 which are desirable because of adaptation to technical progress where the relevant standards of the organisation has not made the corresponding amendments to the harmonised standard.

We are not aware that the Committee has ever met.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police Ombudsman

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to lay before each House the first annual report of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. [72872]

Jane Kennedy: Copies of the Police Ombudsman's first annual report, covering the period from November 2000 when the office was created to March 2002, have today been placed in the Library. It is a general report on the discharge of the Ombudsman's function during this period which is submitted to me for laying before Parliament in accordance with Section 61 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

TREASURY

Regional Funding

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 862W, on regional funding, if his staff are working on potential changes to the way the departmental expenditure level is allocated to the devolved regions. [72605]

Mr. Boateng: No. The Government's funding policies for the devolved administrations were set out in the updated Statement of Funding Policy published by the Treasury on 15 July.

Withholding Tax

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Swiss Government about the reclaiming of the withholding tax on dividends by UK residents; and if he will make a statement. [72473]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government has held no such discussions with the Swiss Government.

UK Debt Management Office

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the UK Debt Management Office's annual report and accounts. [72873]

Ruth Kelly: The DMO's annual report and administrative accounts for 2001–02 are being laid before the House of Commons and published today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Reports

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the 2002 departmental reports were published. [72876]

Mr. Boateng: The publication dates of the 2002 departmental reports are as follows.

Departmental report	*Date*
Department for International Development	24 April
Department for Work and Pensions	23 May
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	10 June
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions	10 June
HM Treasury	10 June
Inland Revenue	10 June
Department for Education and Skills and Office for Standards in Education	11 June
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	11 June
Charity Commission for England and Wales	12 June
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	12 June
Lord Chancellor's Departments	12 June
Home Office	13 June
Office for National Statistics	13 June
Scotland Office	13 June
Wales Office	13 June
British Trade International	14 June
Department of Trade and Industry	14 June
Export Credits Guarantee Department	14 June
Food Standards Agency	14 June
Government Actuary's Department	14 June
Law Officers' Departments	14 June
National Savings and Investments	14 June
Northern Ireland Office	14 June
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise	19 June
Cabinet Office	26 June
Office of Fair Trading	27 June

Departmental report	*Date*
Ministry of Defence	9 July
Department of Health	18 July

Criminal Finances

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further measures he proposes to take on disclosure of beneficial ownership of companies in attacking criminal finances. [73099]

Ruth Kelly: In response to a recommendation in the report "Recovering the Proceeds of Crime", the Government are today publishing a Consultation Document on the findings of a Regulatory Impact Assessment. This assessment examines ways in which greater disclosure of beneficial ownership of companies could assist law enforcement in tackling serious organised crime and funding of terrorism. The assessment identifies a range of benefits and gauges the potential additional burdens on companies; it concludes that advantages could be derived from enhanced disclosure while imposing limited additional costs on industry. The Government wish to consider the proposals further and welcome responses to the Consultation Document from those with interests in this area.

Publication of the assessment marks the Government's continuing determination that the UK should remain at the forefront of the international fight against organised crime and terrorist funding. At the same time, the Government wish to ensure that UK companies are not subject to disproportionate new burdens and will carefully consider the impact of potential changes in the field of company law.

Copies of the Consultation Document and Regulatory Impact Assessment have been placed in the Library of the House.

Double Taxation Protocol

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to submit to the House the double taxation protocol that the Government recently concluded with Lithuania; and if he will make a statement. [73101]

Dawn Primarolo: The Protocol with Lithuania was signed on 21 May 2002. The text of the Protocol with Lithuania has been published today as a schedule to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House. After signature the text was deposited in the Library of the House and made available on the Inland Revenue's website.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the new double taxation convention with South Africa. [72875]

Dawn Primarolo: The double taxation convention was signed on behalf of the two governments on 4 July. The text has been deposited in the Library of the House and made available on the Inland Revenue's website. It will be scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid for consideration by the House at the earliest convenient opportunity.

Tax Benefit Reference Manual

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the next edition of the Tax Benefit Reference Manual will be published. [72874]

Dawn Primarolo: Copies of the 2002–03 edition of the Tax Benefit Reference Manual are today being deposited in the Library of the House.

Pool Re Scheme

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how negotiations are progressing with industry on changes to the Pool Re scheme to take account of changes in the terrorism insurance and reinsurance markets since 1993 and in particular since 11 September 2001. [73100]

Ruth Kelly: Today I am announcing changes to the Pool Re scheme which will enable insurers to offer terrorism insurance across a wider range of risks. The outcome is part of a package of reforms which have been agreed by a government-industry working group set up to look at changes to Pool Re needed after 11 September.

The working group has reached agreement on the main changes to the scheme. The changes include extension of Pool Re cover from "fire and explosion" only, to an "all risks basis", to ensure that a terrorist attack involving, for example contamination, impact by aircraft, or flood damage could be covered by the scheme. This increased cover will be available in the next few weeks and will be reflected in higher premiums for the period covered. There will be an option to backdate to 1 January 2002. The existing exclusion for nuclear risks will also be removed as soon as practicable, and by 1 January 2003 at the latest.

Other changes to the scheme include changes to the financing of Pool Re to encourage competition, and changes to make governance arrangements more transparent in the public interest. These will take effect from 1 January 2003.

The details will need to be finalised over the coming months. Further information about these changes are published on the Treasury's website and in an explanatory statement in the House Library.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the EU Contact Committee—European economic interest grouping is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70905]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

I am not aware of any plans for a meeting.

The Committee consists of representatives of the Member States and the EU Commission. The Scottish Executive is not separately represented on the Committee.

E-commerce

Mr. Bell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Treasury is taking to introduce public-private partnerships into the e-commerce sector; and if he will make a statement. [71600]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Government has no specific policy to bring public-private partnerships into the e-commerce sector. All Departments when assessing the funding options for a project will consider the possibility of a PFI. However, the final decision will always be based upon which option offers the best value for money for the taxpayer.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Contracts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contracts his Department has recently awarded to *(a)* TNO (Netherlands), *(b)* IAV (Germany), *(c)* AVL (Austria), *(d)* FEV (Germany) and *(e)* IKA (Germany). [72200]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has no contracts with those companies.

Cranford Agreement

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 616W, if he will place a copy of the Cranford Agreement in the Library; when he expects to have completed the review of it; if he will list the parties involved in the Cranford Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the status of the agreement. [72431]

Mr. Jamieson: The arrangement normally referred to as the Cranford Agreement is believed to date from 31 July 1952. It would appear that it was an undertaking given by a senior airport official during a local public meeting of the Cranford Residents and District Amenities Association, which was attended on that occasion by the Minister of Civil Aviation ("Mr. Lenox-Boyd"). If there was a written record, it appears not to have survived. The evidence given by the former DETR to the Terminal 5 Inquiry in July 1997 includes a fuller account and history of the undertaking and I have placed an extract from that evidence in the Library. Our aim is to complete the technical review stage this year. I will then issue a consultation paper.

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70535]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Detailed information on the numbers of permanent press officers employed in departmental press offices during the financial years 1997–98 were provided in a memorandum dated 16 June 1998 to the select Committee on Public Administration and published in its report on The Government Information and Communication Service (HC 770) in July 1998. Copies are in the Libraries of the House.

The number of full time equivalent press officers employed in the relevant departmental press office on 1 January for subsequent years were:

Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (Central)

Year	*Numbers*
1999	34.3
2000	40.8
2001	38.0

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Central)

Year	*Numbers*
2002	27.8

Secondees to the press office during the full calendar years for which information is available were:

Year	*Numbers*
1999	0
2000	1
2001	5

Ministerial Speeches

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the speeches made by Ministers with responsibility for transport issues to external organisations between 1 January and 31 May. [71449]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers responsible for transport issues have undertaken a very wide range of speaking engagements between 1 January and 31 May 2002. A record of all speeches is not held centrally. Archived DTLR speech material can be viewed at www.dtlr.gov.uk/about/ministers/speeches/index.htm

Departmental Reorganisation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes there have been in the total wage expenditure budget since the departmental reorganisation in June; and if he will make a statement. [70712]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no changes in the total pay budget associated with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions' total administration resources. The division of these resources between the two new departments—the Department for Transport and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—is currently being finalised. However, no additional resources are being made available from the Exchequer as a result of the departmental reorganisation.

European and International Business

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what work is being undertaken in his Department by the division responsible for European and International Business; and if he will make a statement. [70655]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 18 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 455–56W.

Travel Times

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the differences between travel times road users would achieve in free-flowing conditions and the travel times they actually achieve, in average time lost per kilometre driven *(a)* on inter-urban trunk roads, *(b)* on roads in large urban areas, *(c)* in other urban areas, *(d)* in London, *(e)* in all other areas and *(f)* on all roads in each of the last three years. [71316]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* We hope to publish a year 2000 baseline figure for congestion.

Transport Benchmarks

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the benchmark is for *(a)* accessibility, *(b)* punctuality, *(c)* reliability and *(d)* use of local public transport against which the PSA targets for transport contained in the 2002 Spending Review are set. [71620]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The underlying target of increasing the use of local public transport (bus and light rail) by more than 12 per cent. by 2010 will be measured against the baseline figure of 3,881 million passenger journeys by light rail and local bus services in England in 2000–01.

We are considering the most appropriate means of measuring improvements to accessibility, punctuality and reliability in relation to this target.

Fuel Reduction Technology

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department's policy is on providing collaboration funding for development of fuel reduction technology with British companies; and whether it is the policy of his Department to seek tenders for other European companies before awarding such funding. [72317]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department's New Vehicle Technology Fund supports the development of clean and low-carbon vehicles and technologies The Fund invites proposals and provides funding towards the costs of successful projects.

Invitations and funding are not restricted to British companies and applications currently being assessed involve a range of British, European and international collaborators.

Alternatively Fuelled Vehicles

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of road journeys in the UK were made by vehicles powered by biodiesel and alternatively fuelled vehicles in 2001. [72820]

Mr. Jamieson: It is not possible to provide figures in the form requested; traffic data collected by the Department for Transport (DfT) is collected according to vehicle type not propulsion type. Calculating the proportion of journeys for cars powered by alternative fuels such as biodiesel is extremely difficult as they are almost always capable of running on pure conventional fuels.

The DfT publishes figures for the total number of vehicles registered according to propulsion type based on DVLA records. As table 1 shows, in 2001, of a total of 29,747,100 vehicles licensed in the UK, 46,700 were alternatively powered, representing 0.16 per cent. of total registrations. This figures does not include vehicles capable of being solely or partially powered by biofuels for the reason outlined earlier.

Table 1. Breakdown of vehicles licensed in the UK in 2001 according to propulsion type

Thousand

	Number
Petrol	23,219.0
Diesel	6,481.5
Petrol/gas	24.0
Gas/gas Bifuel/Gas-diesel	6.0
Electric and hybrid electric	15.1
Steam/fuel cells	1.6
All	29,747.1

Further information is available from the DfT's traffic statistics website at: http://www.transtat.dft.gov.uk.

But this understates the number of alternatively-fuelled vehicles because not all conversions to alternative fuelling are notified to DVLA. There are currently estimated to be over 100,000 alternatively fuelled vehicles in the UK, the vast majority of which are LPG cars.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the future of the Traffic Area Network and the Vehicle Inspectorate. [72955]

Mr. Jamieson: Following an internal departmental review, I intend to establish a new executive agency (name to be determined) on 1 April 2003 to bring together the work of the Traffic Area Network and the Vehicle Inspectorate. The new agency will play a key role in promoting safe, fair and environmentally responsible road haulage and bus industries. It will also provide support for Traffic Commissioners in their role of regulating the road haulage and bus industries.

The agency will be one of four executive agencies which make up the Driver, Vehicle and Operator (DVO) group of agencies within my Department. The other agencies are the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) and the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA). The creation of this new agency within the DVO group will allow a more joined up and customer-focused approach to the services provided to road transport industry, and better targeted enforcement to the benefit of road safety. Traffic Commissioners will be wholly independent of the new agency in the same way that they are independent of TAN and VI now.

The new agency is a positive, practical demonstration of the Government's commitment to promoting road safety and delivery of modern customer services.

Hydrogen Fuel

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the time horizons for the likely impact of hydrogen fuel cell technology on road vehicles. [72201]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government in December published and invited comment on its proposed "Powering Future Vehicles" strategy for promoting the development, introduction and take-up of new low-carbon vehicles and fuels, including hydrogen fuel cell technology. Following wide consultation, the strategy will be finalised and issued shortly. I shall send the hon. Member a copy of the document.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding his Department is providing for development of hydrogen fuel cell technology. [72202]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction.

Driving Licences

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his estimate is of the number of fraudulent driving licences in circulation. [72108]

Mr. Jamieson: It is not possible to provide the estimate which the hon. Member is seeking.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the bar code on the *(a)* driving licence card and *(b)* counterpart driving licence accesses information additional to the information contained on the face of the driving licence card and the counterpart driving licence. [72116]

Mr. Jamieson: The bar codes on these two documents are only for processing purposes. They do not allow access to any additional information.

Cycling

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will initiate a bicycle awareness campaign. [71929]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department is currently developing a cycle safety campaign for teenagers which it intends to launch in early 2003. This is a new departmental commitment and complements existing material for younger cyclists.

Roads

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what national guidelines there are on the use of road signs alerting road users to the presence of cyclists. [71718]

Mr. Jamieson: The primary guidance on the use of traffic signs to alert road users to the presence of cyclists is contained in Chapter 4 of the Traffic Signs Manual, "Warning Signs". Further general guidance on cycle signing is given in Local Transport Note 2–87 "Signs for Cycle Facilities". There is also a wide range of Traffic Advisory Leaflets dealing with the provision of special facilities for cyclists, including guidance on how these should be signed.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road users in the Carmarthen, East and Dinefwr constituency had accidents in the last year for which figures are available; and what the UK average is. [71763]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is not available for parliamentary constituencies. The table gives the number of casualties in road accidents in 2000 and the number of casualties per 100,000 population in the Carmarthenshire unitary authority and the UK.

Road casualties and casualty rates per 100,000 population: 2000

	Carmarthenshire	*UK*
Road casualties	856	335,003
Casualty rate per 100,000	506	560

The casualty rate is the number of casualties per 100,000 people.

Congestion

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the loss of time per kilometre in hours for drivers and passengers on roads in *(a)* England and *(b)* Great Britain in each of the last three years as a result of congestion. [71323]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* We hope to publish the year 2000 baseline for congestion in the autumn.

Road and Bridge Maintenance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 668W, on road and bridge maintenance, if he will place copies of the assessment made by his Department on the condition of roads and bridges as set out by the local transport plans and annual progress reports submitted by the highways authorities last year in the Library; and what assessment he has made of the annual progress reports, submitted by the highways authorities last year, as to the progress made in road and bridge maintenance. [71376]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The individual assessments of the highway maintenance elements of the Local Transport Plans and Annual Progress Reports were rough working documents. For this reason I have not placed them in the Library. Feedback on the assessments is provided to authorities in their decision letters.

The Annual Progress Reports (APRs) for 2001 showed that most authorities had made progress towards halting the deterioration in the condition of principal roads by 2004, and were tackling the strengthening and structural maintenance work outstanding on bridges. This is of course as a result of the increased investment in roads.

A140

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans there are for *(a)* bypasses, *(b)* road widening and *(c)* road schemes on the A140. [71866]

Mr. Jamieson: The A140, from Norwich to the A14 in Suffolk, was detrunked in May 2001 and is now the responsibility of Norfolk and Suffolk county councils. The Councils are jointly developing a route management strategy for the A140, which is expected to be completed later this year. The Strategy will identify a future programme of improvements along this route. Any road improvement schemes, which are identified through this study, will be for the local authority to take forward within the context of their local transport plan.

"In Town Without My Car! Day"

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to promote and facilitate local authorities participation in the "In Town Without My Car! Day"; and if he will make a statement. [71228]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department established a website www.itwmc.gov.uk and appointed a national co-ordinator to give advice to local authorities and others who wish to participate in the European "In Town Without My Car!" campaign on 22 September 2002. The closing date for local authorities to register formal participation is Friday 19 July. By 18 July, 36 authorities had registered.

Drink-driving

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many crashes in which people were *(a)* killed, *(b)* seriously injured, *(c)* slightly injured and *(d)* not injured on roads in England and Wales were caused by a driver who was over the drink-drive limit in each of the last 10 years. [70956]

Mr. Jamieson: Estimates of the numbers of road accidents in Great Britain which involved personal injury and where at least one driver was over the drink-drive limit are given in the table. Information on the number of accidents involving drink-driving where injuries did not occur is not available.

Estimates of accidents involving illegal alcohol levels: Great Britain 1991–2000

	Number of accidents			
	Fatal	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*
1991	570	2,590	8,530	11,690
1992	540	2,360	7,890	10,790
1993	460	1,870	7,160	9,480
1994	470	2,090	7,330	9,900
1995	460	2,140	7,590	10,180
1996	480	2,150	8,240	10,870
1997	470	2,140	8,100	10,710
1998	410	1,860	7,840	10,100
1999	400	1,850	8,800	11,050
2000[1]	430	1,950	9,410	11,780

[1] Provisional

Harbours

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* fishing and *(b)* non-fishing harbours there are in each country and region of the UK. [72563]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department does not keep information on the exact overall numbers of harbours in the UK. There are 74 Fishery Harbours in England and 21 in Wales, listed in Schedule 4 to the Sea Fish Industry Act 1951. Responsibility for fishery harbours in Scotland is a devolved matter and related questions should therefore be addressed to the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what basis he classes harbours as *(a)* fishing and *(b)* non-fishing. [72562]

Mr. Jamieson: Fishery Harbours in England and Wales are designated by virtue of being listed in Schedule 4 of the Sea Fish Industry Act 1951. There is no process of designating general harbours. Responsibility for harbour legislation in Scotland is a devolved matter and related questions should therefore be addressed to the Scottish Parliament.

Housing

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Deputy Prime Minister on the transport implications of the Deputy Prime Minister's oral statement on housing of 18 July. [72111]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State and the Deputy Prime Minister have regular discussions on a range of issues of mutual interest.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to revise *(a)* the 10-Year Transport Plan and *(b)* the SRA 10-Year Plan to accord with the Deputy Prime Minister's oral statement on housing strategy on 18 July. [72113]

Mr. Jamieson: The Deputy Prime Minister's statement on housing strategy will be taken into account in any future review of either Plan.

Mersey Passenger Transport Authority

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the experience and qualifications in rail expertise in the Mersey Passenger Transport Authority. [72486]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1114W.

Rail Freight

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guarantee he has had from the French Government that previous levels of cross channel rail freight will be resumed; and when he expects the full and reliable 100 services each way each week to be achieved. [72093]

Mr. Spellar: After their meeting on 12 July, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the French Interior Minister announced that they would visit in September to confirm the effectiveness of security measures taken to ensure normal service.

A full and reliable service is one which meets demand. Immediately prior to the current disruptions the scheduled inbound service was 96 trains per week.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made towards rail freight targets under the 10-year plan. [72092]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority set out in its Freight Strategy last year the detailed plans for achieving the significant rail freight growth envisaged by the Government's 10-year plan for Transport. During the financial year 2001–02, the first full year of the plan, the amount of rail freight moved has grown by 9 per cent.

We will be producing a review of the 10-year plan later in the year.

West Coast Main Line

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the Strategic Rail Authority to present its report on the upgrading of the West Coast Main Line. [71725]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA are currently expecting their draft strategy for the West Coast Main Line to be issued for consultation in September.

Train Operating Companies

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much revenue has been lost by train operating companies in each of the past five years as a result of *(a)* no staff being available to collect fares on services and *(b)* staff being unable to proceed along trains owing to overcrowding. [71538]

Mr. Jamieson: None. Revenue protection is a matter for the train operating companies. It is in their commercial interest to ensure that passengers travel with valid tickets.

Rail Journey Times

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the reduction in rail journey times in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [71155]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Strategic Rail Authority generally considers journey time improvements at the level of specific routes or investment propositions.

Trains (Punctuality)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what figures he has collated relating to the *(a)* punctuality and *(b)* reliability of trains as given under the former Passenger's Charter measure, in each of the last three years. [71059]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Passenger's Charter data are still published by individual TOCs but are no longer collated by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA). They have been superseded by Public Performance Measure (PPM) which, unlike the Passengers' Charter data covers all trains, on all lines, all days of the week.

Performance data are published quarterly by the SRA in 'On Track' (copies of which are in the Libraries of the House).

Annual Rail Freight Conference

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place a copy of the speech made by the Minister for Transport on 20 June to the annual rail freight conference in the Library. [70644]

Mr. Spellar: A copy has now been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Rail Investment Programmes

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in real terms *(a)* rail investment programmes for 2002 and *(b)* projected plans for 2003. [72462]

Mr. Jamieson: The prioritised programme for rail investment was set out in the SRA's Strategic Plan. Individual investment projects within programmes such as the Rail Passenger Partnership fund and the freight grant scheme are appraised on an on-going basis.

Air Services (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Government will publish the transportation document on the future of Scotland's air services and airports. [72439]

Mr. Jamieson: We are today publishing the consultation document on the future of air transport in Scotland, which has been prepared jointly with the Scottish Executive.

Aviation White Paper

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to meet the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Systems Association to discuss the forthcoming Aviation White Paper. [71849]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State has no plans to meet the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Systems Association. The UAVSA will, however, be sent a copy of the Department's consultation paper on development options at airports around the UK, to which the Association may respond. If the Association has other concerns it wishes to raise then it should make representations to the relevant departmental officials.

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what forecast he has made of the change in the numbers of unmanned aerial vehicles over the next five years; what assessment he has made of the safety and economic benefits of unmanned aerial vehicles; and what assessment he has made of the civilian and commercial applications of unmanned aerial vehicle systems. [71841]

Mr. Jamieson: It is difficult to forecast the change in numbers of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over the next five years, but the CAA has established a framework to help ensure that any future UAV operations are integrated safely and with minimal impact on existing airspace users.

The CAA's Directorate of Airspace Policy has published a guidance document, "Guidance for UAV Operations in UK Airspace", designed to provide consolidated information for UAV operators, both military and civil. The CAA is awaiting applications from industry to fly UAVs but to date there has been little interest.

Flight BA 2069

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who invited the Civil Aviation Authority to participate in the investigation of the incident on flight BA 2069; on what date the Civil Aviation Authority began its investigation; and what the brief was of that investigation. [71233]

Mr. Jamieson: British Airways notified the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) of the incident on the day it occurred, 29 December 2000, and immediately began its own investigation. The CAA has monitored and reviewed the British Airways investigation throughout as part of its ongoing regulatory oversight of UK airlines. As a result, 12 new safety requirements were issued to all UK operators on 18 September 2001.

The Government asked the CAA to keep it advised of the progress of its review and the completed review was sent to the then Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on 23 January 2002. An abbreviated version was placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Thameslink

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his predecessor received the report of the inspector following the public inquiry into proposals by Thameslink; and what the earliest and latest dates are which he has set for a decision. [72087]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The Inspector provided his report on the inquiry into the Thameslink 2000 scheme in January this year. He later provided two addenda reports in May and June. These reports will be published when we make an announcement on this scheme, which we expect to do shortly.

CABINET OFFICE

Government Car and Despatch Agency

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he will publish the Government Car and Despatch Agency's annual report and accounts 2001–02. [73104]

Mr. Alexander: I have today laid the GCDA annual report and accounts 2001–02 before Parliament, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Regulatory Assessment

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when the baseline measures for overall compliance with the regulatory assessment process will be published; and if he will make a statement. [69535]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office is currently undertaking work to calculate a baseline measure for overall compliance with the regulatory impact assessment process. Some further work remains to be done to validate the data underlying the baseline. However, it is currently expected that the Cabinet Office will be in a position to publish the baseline measure before the end of the financial year.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Consultation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69794]

Dr. Howells: The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation applies to all formal national public consultation documents issued by Departments from 1 January 2001 and the information requested is not available before that date. Since 2001, the details are as follows:

Title	*Opening date for responses*	*Closing date for responses*
National Gallery/National Portrait Gallery Review: stage one consultation	8 January 2001	30 January 2001
National Heritage Memorial Fund Review: stage one consultation	4 April 2001	25 May 2001
Report of the Gambling Review Body	17 July 2001	31 October 2001
National Museum of Science and Industry Review: stage one consultation	1 August 2001	19 October 2001
Geffrye Museum/Horniman Museum/Museum of London Review: stage one consultation	8 August 2000	12 October 2001
Consultation on the draft Digital Television Action Plan	12 October 2001	2 January 2001
English Heritage Review: stage one consultation	16 October 2001	11 January 2002
Public Lending Right. Quinquennial Performance Review: Consultation Paper	13 November 2001	1 February 2002
Quinquennial Review on the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art	19 November 2001	8 February 2002
National Maritime Museum Quinquennial Performance Review	22 November 2001	8 February 2002
Consultation on Media Ownership Rules	26 November 2001	25 January 2002
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester: Quinquennial Performance Review	5 December 2001	28 February 2002
Spectrum Planning Consultation	11 December 2001	12 April 2002
Council of Europe—Convention on the Protection of Audiovisual Heritage*	20 December 2001	19 March 2002
Review of Progress toward digital switchover	14 February 2002	8 May 2002
Regent's Park Sports Facilities Consultations	18 March 2002	10 May 2002
UK's Open General Export Licensing (OGEL) Limits	19 April 2002	14 June 2002
Changes to Licensing Hours during All New Year's Eves	24 April 2002	19 June 2002
The Draft Communications Bill	7 May 2002	2 August 2002
Prize Competitions	23 May 2002	31 August 2002
National Lottery Licensing and Regulation Consultation	27 June 2002	30 September 2002

Note:

All consultations were available in print and all were available on-line except for those indicated with a *.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [70981]

Dr. Howells: None—all consultation documents were made available as paper copies.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many complaints her Department has received about its 2001 consultations in electronic or printed form. [70980]

Dr. Howells: The Department received two complaints in electronic or printed form about the consultation process of its 2001 consultations.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how long her Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70976]

Dr. Howells: The following table indicates the length of time allowed for consultation on each consultation published in 2001.

Document name	*Total time allowed for consultation*
National Gallery/National Portrait Gallery Review: stage one consultation	3 weeks
National Heritage Memorial Fund Review: stage one consultation	7 weeks and 2 days
Report of the Gambling Review Body	15 weeks
National Museum of Science & Industry Review: stage one consultation	11 weeks and 2 days
Geffrye Museum/Horniman Museum/Museum of London Review: stage one consultation	9 weeks and 2 days
Consultation on the draft Digital Television Action Plan	12 weeks
English Heritage Review: stage one consultation	12 weeks
Public Lending Right. Quinquennial Performance Review: Consultation Paper	11 weeks
Quinquennial Review on the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art	12 weeks
National Maritime Museum Quinquennial Performance Review	11 weeks and 1 day
Consultation on Media Ownership Rules	9 weeks
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester Quinquennial Performance Review	12 weeks
Spectrum Planning Consultation	Extended to 17 weeks
Council of Europe—Convention on the Protection of Audiovisual Heritage*	12 weeks and 5 days
Review of Progress towards digital switchover	12 weeks
Regent's Park Sports Facilities Consultation	8 weeks
UK's Open General Export Licensing (OGEL) Limits	8 weeks
Changes to Licensing Hours during All New Year's Eves	8 weeks
The Draft Communications Bill	12 weeks
Prize Competitions	14 weeks
National Lottery Licensing and Regulations Consultation	13 weeks and 2 days

Note:
All of these were available in both electronic and printed form, except for the one marked with an *, which was available only in printed form.

National Lottery

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimates her Department has made of the effect on the income for good causes of the rebranding and relaunch of the National Lottery. [71726]

Mr. Caborn: The Department has made no separate assessment of the financial impact of this part of Camelot's marketing expenditure; and it would be difficult to make a meaningful assessment at this stage.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what arrangements she has made to take forward the review of the National Lottery announced on 20 March. [72871]

Tessa Jowell: The review is to be in two parts, one dealing with licensing arrangements and the other looking at distribution of Lottery funding to good causes. A consultation paper on the licensing process was published on 27 June.

I will publish a consultation document on the distribution of Lottery funding to good causes on 29 July. The document is intended to initiate a process of public consultation and I wish to encourage as many people as possible to contribute to the debate.

I will arrange to deposit copies of the consultation document in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sporting Talent

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what she is doing to nurture future sporting talent among young people. [72045]

Mr. Caborn: This Department is working in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills to improve access to and the quality of PE, school sport and club links for 5 to 16-year-olds. Gifted and talented sportspeople, specifically, will benefit from: a national support network based around specialist sports colleges; a programme of summer schools and performance camps; a much stronger emphasis on sporting talent within all parts of our national strategy for gifted and talented education; improved coaching; and stronger links between schools and sports clubs. As far as the last is concerned, we aim to increase the numbers of children and young people moving into sports specific junior clubs in seven major sports from 386,000 now to 1 million by 2006.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what public consultations have been commenced by her Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72072]

Dr. Howells: The following table shows all public consultations commissioned by the Department since 1 April, and the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each consultation.

Title of public consultation	*Closing date*	*Website address*
UK's Open General Export Licensing (OGEL) Limits	4 June 2002	www.communicationsbill.gov.uk
Changes to Licensing Houses during All New Year's Eve	19 June 2002	www.culture.gov.uk
The Draft Communications Bill	2 August 2002	www.culture.gov.uk
Prize Competitions	31 August 2002	www.culture.gov.uk
National Lottery Licensing and Regulation Consultation	30 September 2002	www.culture.gov.uk

Sport

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether the Interdepartmental Group on Sport has discussed the relationship of sport and health; and what conclusions were reached. [72235]

Mr. Caborn: The Interdepartmental Group on sport which includes my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health, has discussed a wide range of issues related to sport policy, including the relationship of sport and health. It is agreed that the promotion of sport can play a valuable role in improving health across the population and we have been working closely with the Department of Health to ensure the co-ordination of sport and health policy.

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement about progress achieved towards meeting the aim of significantly raising the time spent on sport and physical activity by five to 16-year olds. [72234]

Mr. Caborn: We have no data on overall progress as yet. The baseline was set by Sport England's Young People and Sport survey, last carried out in 1999. The survey will be repeated this year in June (with results available in December) and again in 2004. However, there are indicators of performance from individual programmes that suggest a positive trend overall. For example by September this year there will be 142 Specialist Sports Colleges supporting 742 SSCos and 3,576 Primary Link Teachers and 45 Sports Partnerships have been established to enable young people to participate in sport more frequently, improve their skills, and compete at various levels.

Sport England

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether she expects the number of staff positions at Sport England which have a remuneration package worth over £50,000 per annum to increase by 2005–06. [72472]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England expect that the number of staff receiving remuneration packages worth over £50,000 will increase from 14 to 26 by 2005–06. This is due mainly to the regrading of the Regional Director posts and the creation of a new post of Head of Placements and Alliances under the proposed restructuring of Sport England.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what grant-in-aid to *(a)* Sport England, *(b)* UK Sport, *(c)* Sports Scotland, *(d)* the Sports Council for Wales and *(e)* the Sports Council for Northern Ireland has been in each year since 1972. [72467]

Mr. Caborn: Grant-in-aid provided to Sport England and UK Sport is as follows. Funding for sport in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is a devolved matter and an issue for those administrations.

£ million

Year	*GBSC*	*ESC*	*UKSC*
1972–73	3.6	—	—
1973–74	5.0	—	—
1974–75	6.6	—	—
1975–76	8.3	—	—
1976–77	10.2	—	—
1977–78	11.5	—	—
1978–79	15.2	—	—
1979–80	15.6	—	—
1980–81	19.3	—	—
1981–82	21.0	—	—
1982–83	28.0	—	—
1983–84	27.1	—	—
1984–85	28.6	—	—
1985–86	30.1	—	—
1986–87	37.4	—	—
1987–88	37.2	—	—
1988–89	38.4	—	—
1989–90	41.9	—	—
1990–91	44.8	—	—
1991–92	46.7	—	—
1992–93	48.6	—	—
1993–94	50.6	—	—
1994–95	48.9	—	—
1995–96	49.3	—	—
1996–97	28.2	15.2	4.0
1997–98	—	33.7	11.8
1998–99	—	[1]36.5	11.6
1999–2000	—	[1]37.9	12.6
2000–01	—	[1]38.0	12.6
2001–02	—	[1]43.2	17.6
2002–03	—	[1]53.3	19.6
2003–04	—	[1]78.3	19.6

[1] Includes funding for Sportsmatch

Notes:

GBSC = Great Britain Sports Council;

ESC = English Sports Council;

UKSC = United Kingdom Sports Council (established in September 1996 and became fully operational in January 1997)

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 123W, what assessment has been made of the impact on national governing bodies of the reduction in their Exchequer grant aid from 2000–01 to 2002–03. [72595]

Mr. Caborn: The grant that it pays to national governing bodies of sport is a matter for Sport England. The total amount that Sport England has paid to national governing bodies has increased each year from 2000–01 to 2002–03.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 123W, if she will provide a breakdown of Sport England's regional support, listing the budget heads for *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [72503]

Mr. Caborn: The information is set out in the following table.

Sport England grant-in-aid regional support

£000

	2002–03	*2003–02*	*2004–01*
Activities			
School sports co-ordinators	15,000	5,038	—
Sportsmatch	3,550	3,550	3,373
Active schools	1,625	1,587	1,999
Active sports	—	843	1,680
Equity and social inclusion	801	770	959
Active communities	1,098	1,169	529
Positive futures	320	508	235
Training	436	772	828
Regional sports boards	297	247	255
Places—participation	378	365	348
Places—environment	553	454	525

Sport England grant-in-aid regional support

£000

	2002–03	*2003–02*	*2004–01*
Other	114	44	129
Total	24,172	15,347	10,860

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the value of Sport England's Exchequer grant aid is to each national governing bodies for *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [72475]

Mr. Caborn: The information is set out in the following table.

£

Exchequer grants to NGBs	*2002–03*[1]	*2001–02*[2]	*2000–01*[2]
Angling—National Federation of Anglers	40,000	80,500	45,625
Angling—National Federation of Sea Anglers	47,000	38,250	30,000
Angling—Salmon/Trout Association	40,000	32,000	25,000
Archery—Grand National Archery Society	15,000	—	—
Association Football—Football Association	144,000	108,000	132,000
Athletics—Amateur Athletics Association	293,000	293,000	193,000
Badminton—Badminton Association of England	280,000	280,000	280,000
Basketball—English Basketball Association	454,000	473,334	457,500
Boxing—Amateur boxing Association	95,000	98,000	49,333
Canoeing—British Canoe Union	208,000	200,000	200,000
Cricket—England and Wales Cricket Board	205,000	284,500	266,917
Cycling—British Cycling Federation	300,000	270,000	270,000
Equestrian—British Equestrian Federation	40,000	40,000	40,000
Fencing—British Fencing Association	65,000	50,000	45,000
Fitness—Exercise Association of England	—	—	28,000
Golf—Golf Foundation	92,000	92,000	94,000
Gymnastics—British Amateur Gymnastics Association	200,000	201,000	200,000
Hockey—English Hockey Network	450,000	450,000	470,000
Ice Skating—National Ice Skating Association	25,000	16,750	25,000
Judo—British Judo Association	125,000	121,000	79,550
Karate—English Karate Governing Body	35,000	16,250	31,250
Lacrosse—English Lacrosse Association	140,000	151,250	213,750
Mountaineering—British Mountaineering Association	65,000	65,000	72,000
Movement and Dance—English Amateur Dancesport	8,000	8,500	8,500
Movement and Dance—English Folk Song and Dance Society	17,000	17,000	17,000
Movement and Dance—Health and Beauty Exercise Association	15,000	15,500	15,000
Movement and Dance—Keep Fit Association	36,000	36,667	37,333
Movement and Dance—Margaret Morris Movement	10,000	10,000	10,000
Movement and Dance—CCPR	42,000	42,000	27,913
Movement and Dance—Medau Society	20,000	20,000	20,000
Netball—All England Netball Association	442,000	460,000	447,500
Rowing—Amateur Rowing Association	265,000	250,000	200,000
British Amateur Rugby League Association	150,000	320,000	320,000
Rugby League Joint Policy Board	190,000	—	—
Rugby Football—Rugby Football Union	200,000	225,312	297,188
Rugby Football—RFU for Women	141,000	150,000	131,666
Sailing—Royal Yachting Association	135,000	130,000	100,000
Shooting—English Shooting Council	6,750	24,125	7,000
Skiing—English Skiing Council	40,000	30,000	50,000
Squash—Squash Rackets Association	248,000	242,500	252,500
Swimming—Amateur Swimming Association	340,000	340,000	330,000
Table Tennis—English Table Tennis Association	435,000	435,000	450,000
Triathlon—British Triathlon Association	75,000	40,000	30,000
Volleyball—English Volleyball Association	208,000	208,000	208,000
Water Skiing—British water Skiing Federation	35,000	35,000	35,000
Weightlifting—British Amateur Weightlifting Association	40,000	40,000	40,000
Wrestling—British Amateur Wrestling Association	10,000	10,000	10,000
Petanque—British Petanque Association	5,000	—	3,750
Caving—National Caving Association	5,000	5,000	5,000
Handball—British Handball Association	7,000	7,000	7,000
Orienteering—British Orienteering Federation	90,000	90,000	82,500
Rounders—National Rounders Association	32,000	32,000	23,500
Surfing—Surf Life Saving Association	7,000	4,612	6,787
Real Tennis—Tennis and Racquets Association	11,000	12,000	12,000
Tug-of-War Association	3,000	6,583	4,567
Softball—British Softball Association	25,000	25,000	25,000
Yoga—British Wheel of Yoga	10,000	10,000	7,084
Baseball—British Baseball Federation	16,000	16,000	16,000
British Roller Sports Federation	20,000	—	—
English Ice Hockey Association	20,000	—	—
Modern Pentathlon Association	5,000	—	—
Governing Body Development Grants	6,722,750	6,658,633	6,485,713

[1] Annual budget

[2] Actual

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list how many staff positions at Sport England have a remuneration package worth over £50,000 per annum for *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [72474]

Mr. Caborn: The information requested is as follows:

2000–01: 14

2001–02: 14

2002–03: 23.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what instructions Sport England has been given about senior executive salary ranges. [72471]

Mr. Caborn: No instructions have been given to Sport England on the salary ranges of its senior executives.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on staffing levels in *(a)* Sport England headquarters and *(b)* its regional offices for (i) 2000–01, (ii) 2001–02 and (iii) 2002–03. [72468]

Mr. Caborn: Details of staff levels are in the table.

	Headquarters		*Regional offices*	
	Complement	*In post*	*Complement*	*In post*
2000–01	328	268	170	159
2001–02	345	272	209	178
2002–03[1]	182	—	291	—

[1] Proposed

Sport England estimates that its restructuring will result in savings of £1.2 million a year.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

National Audit Office

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission whether the Commission has considered the National Audit Office's Corporate Plan for 2003–04 to 2005–06. [73004]

Mr. Alan Williams: At its meeting on 9 July 2002 the Commission examined the Comptroller and Auditor General and officials of the National Audit Office on the NAO's Corporate Plan for 2003–04 to 2005–06. The plan envisages an increase in spending by the NAO for 2003–04 of some 10 per cent. compared with the current financial year. The additional funding is required for four main purposes: to implement the wide-ranging recommendations of the Sharman report on public expenditure audit; to maintain service to Parliament at a time of rapid public expenditure growth and more complex service delivery mechanisms; to strengthen the audit of revenue departments; and to enable the NAO to increase from 50 to 60, over time, the number of Value for Money studies it carries out annually, as proposed by the Commission and agreed with the Public Accounts Committee.

After satisfying itself on a number of points, including the robustness of the NAO's expenditure plans and its response to comments contained in external evaluations of its Value for Money studies, the Commission approved the Corporate Plan.

A transcript of the evidence given by the NAO to the Commission will be placed in the Library shortly. A report containing more details about the Commission's activities, including its own response to the Sharman report, together with further information provided by the NAO in response to questions from the Commission, will be published in due course.

SCOTLAND

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37824]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Ministerial offices are decorated or refurbished as part of a rolling programme, in accordance with the terms of the buildings' lease. Redecoration work was carried out during 2001–02 in ministerial offices in my Department's London building. Final costs are not yet available but are likely to be around £20,000.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have been employed by her Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44920]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Since that date my Department has employed one person under the New Deal for Young People, one under the New Deal for Over 50s and two under the New Deal for Lone Parents. The only costs to my Department have been salary costs.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in her Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50402]

Mrs. Liddell: The cost of pay increases to staff in my Department in 2001–02 was £91,000. Details of the cost of pay awards for 2002–03 are not yet available.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many letters were received by each Minister in her Department in each month since June 1997. [59309]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The Cabinet Office publishes an annual report on Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. The report for 2001 was published on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 673–76W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

Records of other correspondence by my Department are not kept centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many press releases were issued by her Department in each month from the creation of her Department in July 1999 to 2001 inclusive. [59471]

Mrs. Liddell: From July 1999 to end 2001, the following number of press releases have been issued by my Department (this does not include operational notes issued to the media):

July 1999: 11
August 1999: 6
September 1999: 13
October 1999: 16
November 1999: 32
December 1999: 20
January 2000: 20
February 2000: 20
March 2000: 30
April 2000: 15
May 2000: 33
June 2000: 34
July 2000: 22
August 2000: 15
September 2000: 27
October 2000: 30
November 2000: 42
December 2000: 27
January 2001: 26
February 2001: 25
March 2001: 33
April 2001: 23
May 2001: 11
June 2001: 12
July 2001: 17
August 2001: 20
September 2001: 20
October 2001: 20
November 2001: 33
December 2001: 20.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many press releases have been issued by her Department in each month of 2002. [59472]

Mrs. Liddell: All news releases issued by the Scotland Office are published on the Department's website. The number of news releases issued in 2002 is as follows, and does not include operational notes issued to the media in connection with public engagements carried out by Ministers:

Up to 19 July: 8
June: 9
May: 20
April: 16
March: 20
February: 18
January: 17.

Eurostar

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the importance of securing a Eurostar link from Scotland to the continent. [60789]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government believe that all areas of the country should have good access to Channel Tunnel rail services.

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) have said that they plan to publish a strategy later this year on facilitating rail services through the Channel Tunnel from various parts of Great Britain.

The SRA announced last year that a consortium led by WS Atkins Consultants has been awarded the contract to undertake a feasibility study to ascertain the need for, and viability of, a new dedicated high speed line between London and the "north".

The study should report in the latter half of this year. The resultant report will feed into proposals for the implementation of the Government's 10-year plan and will inform an SRA strategy document regarding long-term capacity between London, the Midlands, the north of England and Scotland.

Outcomes from this study may identify options for greater interconnection between high speed Channel Tunnel services and those from London to Scotland.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information is held by her Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61831]

Mrs. Liddell: Ministers and officials in this Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

Ministerial Visits (Wales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose was of visits by Ministers in her Department to Wales since 1997; and when she next intends to visit Wales. [62072]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

I attended a join ministerial committee in Cardiff on 30 October 2001. All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Ministerial Code and Travels by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Neither of my Scotland Office ministerial colleagues has visited Wales in an official capacity and none of us has, at present, any immediate plans to do so.

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the staff of her Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66912]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 5 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 622W.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in her Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68737]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Since that date no officials have undertaken overseas trips on departmental business, other than to accompany Scotland Office Ministers.

Hewlett Packard

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with *(a)* Scottish Enterprise and *(b)* the Scottish Executive regarding the recent redundancies announced by Hewlett Packard. [72442]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with Scottish Executive and Scottish Enterprise colleagues on a range of issues, including the recent disappointing announcement by Hewlett Packard of the loss of 450 permanent and 180 temporary jobs at its facility in Erskine.

The Scottish Executive takes the lead in responding to local redundancies. Support will be provided to those affected through the Renfrewshire local response team (LRT) in conjunction with the Executive's PACE (Partnership Action for Continuing Employment) framework. This will ensure a rapid response from local agencies in terms of offering advice, support and guidance on the range of retraining/upskilling and employment opportunities.

Air Services

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Government will publish the transportation document on the future of Scotland's air services and airports. [72435]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the oral statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made to the House earlier today at column 848–50.

Unemployment

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with *(a)* Scottish Enterprise and *(b)* the Scottish Executive regarding unemployment in Scotland. [72434]

Mrs. Liddell: I last met Scottish Enterprise on 2 July. I also have regular discussions with Scottish Executive Ministers on a wide range of issues. The latest figures show that claimant count unemployment in Scotland has fallen by 1,900 over the last year to its lowest level for 25 years. There are 2,388,000 people in work in Scotland, the highest for a generation.

Funding Policy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer prior to publication of the third Statement on Funding Policy as it affects Scotland. [72408]

Mrs. Liddell: I have discussions with Treasury Ministers on a range of subjects. The Statement of Funding Policy sets out the arrangements that govern funding for the devolved administrations. These arrangements provide a fair, transparent and flexible basis for deciding spending plans in Scotland.

North Sea Tax

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has received from oil companies since the announcement of the North Sea tax changes. [72409]

Mrs. Liddell: Following the Chancellor's Budget statement, I have had contact with a number of companies involved in oil and gas operations and held a meeting with UKOOA, which represents 31 oil and gas exploration and production companies operating in the UK.

Anglo-Irish Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when and where Ministers in her Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72697]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, on 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, col. 533W.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer with regards to public expenditure in Scotland prior to the publication of the most recent comprehensive spending review. [72407]

Mrs. Liddell: I have discussions with Treasury Ministers on a range of subjects. I welcome the outcome of the comprehensive spending review, which produced an excellent settlement for Scotland. Our successful management of the economy and sound public finances mean that, by 2005–06, spending will be £4.1 billion higher in Scotland than in 2002–03. This shows that Scotland continues to benefit from being part of the United Kingdom and that devolution is working for the benefit of all Scotland's people.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how many people have been employed by her Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over-50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44915]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland at column 981W.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in her Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50401]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland at column 981W.

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what percentage of the staff of her Office are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66913]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 5 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 622W.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Consultation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69795]

Estelle Morris: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [69824]

Estelle Morris: All consultation documents published by my Department in 2001 were made available in both paper and electronic formats.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether consultation documents published by her Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [70086]

Estelle Morris: My Department reproduced the consultation criteria from the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations in 25 per cent. of the consultation documents published in 2001. All on-line consultations have two available links to the Cabinet Office Code of Practice.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether her Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [69825]

Estelle Morris: Yes, my Department does have a designated consultation co-ordinator.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form his Department has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [69822]

Estelle Morris: All 66 consultations carried out by my Department in 2001 were available electronically, in printed form and were included in the Cabinet Office monitoring and evaluation return for 2001.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints her Department has received about its 2001 consultations by *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed means. [69823]

Estelle Morris: I have not received any formal complaints about my Department's 2001 consultations. However, I have responded to feedback from respondents to improve consultations.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in what format her Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations. [69846]

Estelle Morris: The favoured format for publication of results is electronic, via the Consultation website at www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations. Other methods have also been used including: press releases, notifying individuals and by placing results in the House of Commons Library.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how long her Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70085]

Estelle Morris: Of the 66 consultations my Department published in 2001, 36 per cent. allowed 12 weeks or more for consultation, 27 per cent. allowed 8–12 weeks and 18 per cent. under 8 weeks. All consultations were available in printed and electronic formats. In planning consultations with the public, my Department complies with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation, applying formal exemptions where appropriate. The introduction to the Code of Practice also states that

> "occasionally, being a responsive government means acting quickly, because it is clearly in the public interest to do so".

Student Funding

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much capital was made available to *(a)* FE and *(b)* HE in each of the years 1992–93 to 2001–02 as expressed at 2001–02 prices. [65396]

Margaret Hodge: The capital funding made available was as follows:

£ million

	Capital funding FE[1]	*Capital funding HE*[1]
1992–93	171	281
1993–94	185	389
1994–95	189	387
1995–96	187	409
1996–97	0	0
1997–98	0	0
1998–99	0	0
1999–2000	42	167
2000–01	56	243
2001–02[2]	136	381

[1] 2001–02 prices

[2] Estimated

Notes:

1. All figures are in 2001–02 prices, are rounded to £ million and exclude student loans.
2. All figures from 1992–93 to 2000–01 cover the separately identified capital grants made available by the Department to the Funding Councils.
3. The division between FE and HE in 1992–93 is based on allocations made by the then Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) and the Universities Funding Council (UFC) respectively.
4. The figure for HE in 1992–93 includes £9 million expenditure on Higher Education outside of the Universities Funding Council.
5. For 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99 no separate capital payments were made and the capital was funded from the Councils' allocations and not disaggregated.
6. For 1999–2000 and 2000–01, figures cover some additional capital grants made available separately by the Department. Figures for HE in the years 1999–2000 to 2001–02 include moneys made available to higher education institutions by the Office of Science and Technology (OST) through the Joint Infrastructure Fund (JIF).
7. The figures for 2001–02 cover total capital expenditure by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) themselves which, under resource budgeting form 2001–02, counts as departmental expenditure.

Sixth Form Colleges

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much of the additional funding in the spending review will be allocated to sixth form colleges; and when she expects funding for sixth form colleges to be increased to match the level allocated to sixth forms in schools. [71606]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: As a result of the spending review, the core unit of funding per full-time equivalent student for further education colleges will increase 1 per cent. in real terms in each of the next three years in return for improved outcomes from colleges. We will be agreeing new improvement targets with colleges to make sure we maximise the return on these resources. We are now considering further the outcome of the spending review and other decisions on allocations, including to further education, will be announced in the autumn. We remain committed to bringing up the level of funding for colleges towards that of school sixth forms. This will take time and can be done only as resources allow.

Children's Centres

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the activities to be carried out in the Children's Centres referred to in the Chancellor's Comprehensive Spending Review; and what funding will be available for them. [71081]

Estelle Morris: Children's Centres will provide a core offer of services including high quality early years education and child care. They will also provide extensive parental outreach, family support services and child and family health services.

The Comprehensive Spending Review announced a £1.5 billion combined budget for child care, early years and Sure Start by 2005–06, which will be committed to the development of integrated services, including the development of new Children's Centres.

Additional Investment

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much additional investment will result from the spending review for each *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school in Cheltenham. [71753]

Estelle Morris: I will take the decisions on the distribution of the additional resources provided by the spending review between and within the various sectors of education later in the year. Decisions on how each primary and secondary school on Cheltenham will be funded will continue to be taken by Gloucestershire local education authority but typical primary and secondary schools in Cheltenham, as in the rest of England, will get a year-on-year increase of £10,000 and £50,000 in direct funding through School Standards Grant and devolved formula capital.

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by her press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in her press office in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [70536]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The following table shows the average number of Press Officers employed in the DfEE/DfES press office in each of the last 5 years:

	Total (fte)
1997	20.5
1998	29.5
1999	27.5
2000	28
2001	23
2002	26

In addition, for each of the years an average of eight administrative staff were also employed in the Press Office. Since 2001 there have been two posts available in the press office for short-term secondments for staff from other areas of the Department (posts filled sporadically so not included in table). In 2001 there was one press officer on long-term secondment to the Press Office. Currently there are two. They are included in the table.

Higher and Further Education

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the expected total of spending on *(a)* higher and *(b)* further education was (i) in 2002–03 and 2003–04 before the CSR and (ii) in 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 after the CSR. [71388]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Prior to the Spending Review 2002, the total publicly planned funding to higher education institutions and on further education in England was:

£ billion

	Higher education[1]	*Further education*
2002–03	6.1	4.3
2003–04	6.4	4.6

[1] These figures are taken from the grant letter issued to the Higher Education Funding Council for England in November 2001.

The new total allocations for higher and further education in 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 following the Spending Review 2002 will be announced later.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what regulations exist on the space provided for the education of students in further education colleges. [65363]

Margaret Hodge: There are no such regulations for further education colleges.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many school playing fields have been sold since 1997. [68971]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 was introduced on 1 October 1998 to stop the indiscriminate sale of school playing fields that occurred in the 1980s and early to mid 1990s. There are no central records of how many school playing fields were sold before October 1998.

A total of 115 applications to sell areas of school playing field larger than a small sports pitch for the under 10s—that is, over 2,000m^2, have been approved since October 1998. Some 50 of these approved applications involved sports pitches at closed schools, while a further 17 were at operating schools where the playing fields were no longer used by the schools and were not needed by other local schools. In a further 15 cases, alternative sports pitches have been provided to replace those that have been lost. In all cases, we have ensured that the remaining playing fields would meet the full needs of the schools involved and of other schools in the local area.

Applications to sell school playing fields are only approved where it is clear that any proceeds will be used to improve school sports provision or education facilities. Some of the proceeds from these approved applications have been earmarked to provide new sports halls and to improve other sports facilities at schools, such as new all-weather pitches and to bring other, poorly drained pitches back into use. The rest of the proceeds are being used to help lever up standards in our schools—for example, by providing modern, up to date, teaching accommodation, such as science and technology classrooms. In a number of cases, the proceeds are to be used to help build new schools or to enable multi site schools to consolidate on to one site.

All applications made since 16 July 2001 are scrutinised by the School Playing Fields Advisory Panel to make sure that they meet our published criteria. The panel comprises representatives from the National Playing Fields Association, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, Learning through Landscapes, the National Association of Headteachers and the Local Government Association.

Dyslexia

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to assist adult students who have ADHD and dyslexia. [70157]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government is committed to encouraging more students, including those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia, to continue in education and training and to raising attainment levels.

We have introduced a range of legislation designed to ensure that people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not discriminated against in respect of their access to education and training. As a result the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is required, under section 13 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, to consider the needs of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the discharge of its duties to secure facilities for education, training and work experience.

From September 2002, it will be unlawful for those bodies responsible for the provision of further education, higher education, adult and community learning and youth services to discriminate against disabled students and other disabled people and they will be required to make reasonable adjustments to provision where disabled students or other disabled people might otherwise be substantially disadvantaged.

In addition we have made available a range of learning and learner support funds to enable access to and participation in post-16 learning. These funds recognise the need for additional support that may arise for an individual with a learning difficulty and/or disability and help us to provide equality of opportunity and tackle social exclusion.

The department and the LSC are currently reviewing the arrangements for the funding of additional learning support across the post-16 education and training sector and will consider any necessary changes as part of the review.

Apprenticeships

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the *(a)* past, *(b)* current and *(c)* future funding of (i) HNDs and (ii) HNCs within apprenticeship training. [70296]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Before 1999–2000 the further education funding council provided funding for HNDs and HNCs to colleges and universities; since then funding has come from the higher education funding council for England and is allocated through the council's normal funding method for teaching. HND and HNC courses do not form a compulsory part of apprenticeship training.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many modern apprenticeships there were in each of the past 10 years; what the average cost is of a modern apprenticeship; and what percentage of modern apprenticeships are *(a)* commenced and *(b)* completed by (i) men and (ii) women. [71133]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: *(a)* Advanced Modern Apprenticeships (AMA, formerly known as Modern Apprenticeships) were fully operational from September 1995. Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMA, formerly known as National Traineeships) were introduced nationally in September 1997.

The numbers of Modern Apprenticeships (Foundation and Advanced) started are as follows:

	AMA and FMA starts	*% men*	*% women*
1995–96	25,800	66	34
1996–97	70,300	54	46
1997–98	84,200	53	47
1998–99	119,100	50	50
1999–2000	170,700	49	51
2000–01	188,300	49	51
2001–02[1]	167,800	50	50

[1] Starts after 25 March 2001 exclude transfers between AMA, FMA and Other (work-based) Training.

(b) Information on completion of modern apprenticeship (MA) framework is not available.

An average figure for the cost of a modern apprenticeship is not available because the funding paid to training providers varies according to the length of stay, apprenticeship framework, the occupational sector, the age of the apprentice and from year to year.

In 2001–02 payments by the Learning and Skills Council to learning providers for AMAs and FMAs amounted to approximately £432.5 million but this does not include other costs such as administration, learner expenses or publicity.

The funding rates for those in learning on MAs 2002–03, and completing training, are based on the following:

Advanced modern apprenticeship	*Learners aged 16–18 years*	*Learners aged 19–24 years*
Occupational Sector	Total Funding (£)	Total Funding (£)
Agriculture	6,081	4,061
Construction	13,783	7,685
Engineering	14,560	8,850
Manufacturing	13,135	8,364
Transportation	11,191	7,423
Management and Professional	6,981	4,304
Business Administration	5,822	4,077
Retailing and Customer Service	4,736	3,552
Leisure, Sport and Travel	5,498	3,834
Hospitality	5,316	3,552
Hair and Beauty	6,657	4,061
Health, Care and Public Services	8,181	5,825
Media and Design	9,107	4,993

Foundation modern apprenticeship	*Learners aged 16–18 years*	*Learners aged 19–24 years*
Occupational Sector	Total Funding (£)	Total Funding (£)
Agriculture	4,587	2,379
Construction	5,630	3,641
Engineering	6,579	3,411
Manufacturing	4,595	3,252
Transportation	6,878	3,670
Management and Professional	4,117	2,467
Business Administration	3,717	2,353
Retailing and Customer Service	3,018	1,829
Leisure, Sport and Travel	3,586	2,110
Hospitality	3,018	1,829
Hair and Beauty	5,622	2,845
Health, Care and Public Services	3,586	2,379
Media and Design	4,000	2,379

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to replace individual learning accounts with a successor programme; and if she will make a statement. [70450]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Government is committed to introducing a successor scheme to Individual Learning Accounts. An announcement will be made in the autumn.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many learning providers have been investigated by the Individual Learning Accounts Compliance Unit since 1 November 2001; and how many prosecutions have taken place. [70447]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Since 1 November 2001, 698 registered Individual Learning Account (ILA) providers have been referred to the ILA Compliance Unit. Currently 145 providers are being followed up through correspondence; three of these have been referred to the Department's Special Investigation Unit (SIU) and a further 17 providers have been subject to visits by the audit review team. 96 other providers have been referred directly to SIU. 77 of those referred to SIU have been passed to the police. So far no prosecutions have resulted from this action. A further 440 providers are awaiting follow-up.

In total 132 cases have been passed to the SIU; of these, 98 have been referred to the police. To date there have been 45 arrests, which have resulted in 10 people accepting cautions and charges being brought against 13 individuals, 12 of whom are awaiting court appearances. One person has been convicted.

Arts and Humanities Research Funding

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the results were of the review of Arts and Humanities Research Funding announced by the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education in September 2001. [72880]

Margaret Hodge: The review, which was commissioned in conjunction with education Ministers in the devolved Administrations, concluded that the current Arts and Humanities Research Board has done much since its creation in 1998 to establish an effective system for awarding research grants and funding for postgraduate students. It recommended that there should now be a further step, the creation of an Arts and Humanities Research Council. It concludes that this body should have UK-wide responsibilities and the same status as the existing Research Councils, with which it should be closely linked. A copy of the review report has been placed in the Library. The Government will respond to the report in due course, when there has been chance fully to consult the devolved Administrations on the way forward.

SMEs

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many SMEs have lost their Investors in People Award status as of January; and if she will make a statement. [70195]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The numbers of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) that have lost their IiP award at January 2002 are as follows:

Size of enterprise (UK wide)	*Total revoked since the first IiP recognitions in October 1991*
Less than 10	289
10–49	908
50–249	975

Investors in People has a very high customer retention rate. Over the past decade it has maintained a customer retention rate of over 90 per cent. on organisations that have been recognised.

Child Care (Regulation)

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many child care professionals the Government estimate are working in the UK. [69139]

Estelle Morris: The latest published Childcare Workforce Survey shows that in spring 2001 there were 274,520 paid employees, working in nurseries (94,294), playgroups (79,800), Out of School Clubs (28,126) and child minders (72,300), in England.

The latest quarterly Labour Force Survey for spring 2001, which uses a wider definition of child care and covers the whole of the UK, shows that there were 305,000 paid employees within the child care sector.

Nursery Education

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of three-year-olds were in nursery education on *(a)* 1 May 1997, *(b)* 31 December 1998, *(c)* 31 December 2001 and *(d)* the latest date for which information is available; and if she will make a statement. [69296]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The available information on three-year-olds in early years education provision is shown in the following table.

Percentage[1] of three-year-olds[2] by type of early years education provider 1997–2002 (provisional estimates) position in January each year—England

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Private and voluntary providers[3]	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	44	47	47
Independent schools	4	4	4	4	4	4
Nursery and primary schools:	34	35	37	38	37	37
Nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools	34	35	37	37	[4]—	37
Infant classes in primary schools[5]	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	[4]—	0.2
Special schools[6]	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3
All providers[7]	38	40	42	86	89	89

[1] Number of three-year-olds attending provider expressed as a percentage of the three-year-old population.

[2] Any child attending more than one provider may have been counted twice.

[3] Includes some local authority providers (other than schools) registered to receive nursery education grants; excludes independent schools and providers not registered to receive nursery education grants.

[4] Not available.

[5] Includes reception and other classes not designated as nursery classes.

[6] Includes general hospital schools.

[7] Private and voluntary provider information was not available for the years 1997–99.

We are committed to providing all three-year-olds, whose parents want one, with a free nursery education place by September 2004.

Latest figures on three-year-olds in early years education providers were published by the Department in the Statistical First Release "Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England—2002 (Provisional Estimates) (09/2002)" in May 2002, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on the Department's website (www.dfes.gov.uk/ statistics).

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual cost is of providing a child with five full days per week in a nursery school in the latest year for which figures are available [69749]

Estelle Morris: My Department does not collect the information requested.

In England all funding for full and part-time nursery education places for four-year-olds, along with the majority of funding for three-year-olds, in the local authority maintained sector, is determined locally.

The balance of funding for three-year-olds comes through the Nursery Education Grant. In 2002–03 the grant for a free, part-time early education place for three-year-olds is £1,218 per child. This funding purchases five, two and a half hour sessions per week, for 33 weeks per year.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidelines exist on the provision of pre-school education to children with special educational needs. [69721]

Estelle Morris: All children in the early years should be treated as individuals to ensure each has equal opportunity to develop their full potential. This message is reinforced throughout the joint DfES/Qualifications and Curriculum Authority publication, "Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage", which has been made available to all early years practitioners. The guidance stresses the importance of early intervention and the key role practitioners play in identifying learning needs, and in the planning required to support those needs.

The requirements of the Nursery Education Grant require all early years settings that receive it to have an SEN policy and have regard to the revised SEN Code of Practice. We included a new chapter in the revised SEN Code of Practice entitled, "Identification, Assessment and Provision in Early Education Settings", which expands significantly on SEN provision for children under five years of age. In addition, the SEN and Disability Act 2001 enables private, voluntary and independent sector settings to request statutory assessments for the four year olds in their care, and for three year olds by 2004 when we expect universal provision for this age group.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what financial support is available to children with special educational needs to attend mainstream pre-school in the same circumstances as other children. [69722]

Estelle Morris: In March 2001, we announced a £25 million three year programme to support children with disabilities or special educational needs in the early years. This funding supports a number of DfES SEN and disability initiatives all of which are focused on enabling children with SEN to participate in mainstream provision. These initiatives include £9.5 million for local training over three years of identified Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) in the private, voluntary and independent sector early years settings; £11 million additional funding for LEAs and Early Years Development and Child care Partnerships (EYDCPs) this financial year and the next, to support and improve existing SEN support activities; £3 million for support services such as Portage schemes, projects aimed at early identification and intervention for SEN, and better resources for children with low incidence disability; and £1 million for the development of national training materials to support local SEN training activity. The funding has also resourced 4 Area SENCO pilot projects in 2001–02. We are drafting guidance following the conclusion of the pilot projects on the role and objectives of Area SENCOs, and encouraging EYDCPs to start developing networks of "Area SENCOs" who will work with early years settings by the autumn of this year.

The Department continues to work closely with EYDCPs who are making SEN and disability support a priority over the three financial years 2001–02 to 2002–03 and 2003–04. In 2002–03 we asked them through the statutory planning process, to develop local joined up SEN and disability support/resource strategies, and to build networks with local education, social and health support services and other key local agencies. We also asked EYDCPs to provide us with details on planned working groups in 2002–03 involving key local services and to highlight the difficulties in bringing these services together.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. May: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission when he will answer the questions from the hon. Member for Maidenhead of 11 March *(a)* on the electoral systems used for elections to (i) the office of London Mayor, (ii) the Greater London Assembly, (iii) the Scottish Parliament and (iv) the Welsh Assembly, *(b)* on the closed list electoral system for the European Parliament, *(c)* concerning the electoral system used for electing the House, *(d)* concerning electoral systems that may be used for electing the elected element of a reformed second chamber in Parliament and *(e)* concerning electoral systems used for electing directly-elected mayors in England and Wales. [71490]

Mr. Beith: I have already written to apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in replying to her questions of 11 March. At the time she asked similar questions of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I regret that her separate questions to the Speaker's Committee were not noticed. Each of her questions sought information on the plans of the Electoral Commission for work in the areas listed. This answer deals with all five of them.

I understand that the Electoral Commission has no plans to carry out any reviews of existing or proposed electoral systems in the UK. However, the Commission will, in accordance with its statutory duties, report on the administration of elections to the European, United Kingdom and Scottish Parliaments, and elections to the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies. No such duty exists in relation to other elections mentioned, although the Commission is required to keep under review, and from time-to-time submit reports to the Secretary of State on, a range of elections and referendums including local elections in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It is expected that these statutory election reports from the Electoral Commission will examine a wide range of issues linked to the administration and conduct of the election in question, including levels of voter participation and public understanding of the voting system. However, the Commission has taken the view that it would not be appropriate for it to adopt any policy view in relation to the merits of current or alternative systems of voting while there is a prospect of the Government asking the Commission to conduct a referendum on the use of a form or proportional representation for voting in elections to the House of Commons.

Financial Contributions to Political Parties

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, on behalf of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what plans the Commission has to review legislation regarding financial contributions to political parties. [71030]

Mr. Beith: I understand from the Chairman that the Electoral Commission will be launching this summer a review of the funding of political parties, which will examine a number of issues including the capping of donations. The Commission is also undertaking a review of the operation of the financial regulatory framework set out in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, and a separate review of the policy development grants scheme that it administers.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* affirmative and *(b)* negative resolutions his Department plans to make in the next 12 months. [61616]

Mr. Leslie: The negative and affirmative resolutions planned over the next 12 months will be announced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the normal course of business in the usual manner.

Homelessness

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what statutory powers are vested in *(a)* local housing authorities, *(b)* local social services authorities and *(c)* other authorities to offer financial assistance to intentionally homeless families with a child in order to secure for that child a permanent home with his or her family. [69240]

Mr. McNulty: Under section 190(2)(b) of the Housing Act 1996, local housing authorities have a duty to ensure that applicants who are eligible for assistance, intentionally homeless and who have dependant children are provided with advice and assistance in any attempts they may make to secure accommodation for themselves. Advice and assistance may include the provision of financial assistance.

Under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, social services authorities have a duty:

(a) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area who are in need; and

(b) so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families.

Where the child is a child in need solely as a result of family homelessness the social services authority can assist the family to obtain accommodation, possibly by providing temporary accommodation or a rent deposit, if they consider that this is the best way of meeting his needs.

Under section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities have a power to promote the economic, social or environmental well-being of their area, which includes a power to give financial assistance. If the authority chooses, the power in section 2 can be exercised for the benefit of individuals in the area. This power does not apply where an activity is prohibited by other legislation.

The Government have introduced an amendment to the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, currently being considered by Parliament, that will curtail the support that local authorities can provide to certain categories of new arrivals in the UK who seek support.

Sub-post Offices

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what discussions he has had with the Department of Trade and Industry regarding the need to maintain sub-post offices in deprived urban areas; and if he will make a statement; [69510]

(2) what action he is taking to support sub-post offices in deprived urban areas. [69509]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has been working closely with the Department of Trade and Industry to develop a scheme to maintain sub-post offices in deprived urban areas. In particular ring-fenced funding of £15 million has been set aside to support a fund that is being set up to contribute to practical measures to improve and modernise post office premises in deprived urban areas.

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the degree to which cost of living elements are adequately weighted in the local government funding formula; and by what mechanism sparsity and rurality elements are included in the present mechanism. [71853]

Mr. Raynsford: The cost of living is allowed for within the local government grant distribution system by the Area Cost Adjustment. We are currently consulting on options for a new grant distribution formula, and this includes a range of alternatives to the existing Area Cost Adjustment. We will be carefully considering all the views that are put to us during the consultation period before making a final assessment on the best way forward.

In the existing formula, sparsity and rurality are reflected by using a population sparsity indicator that reflects the number of hectares per capita in each authority. This indicator is used in the current formulae for education, elderly domiciliary social services, police and environmental, protective and cultural services. Full details are in the Local Government Finance Report that we publish each year, and which is available in the Libraries of the House.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how he will ensure that the new financial system for local authorities will provide an effective framework within which councils can initiate innovative ways of delivering customer-food services. [69986]

Mr. Raynsford: Our comprehensive agenda for reform of the local government finance system was set out in last December's White Paper "Strong Local leadership—Quality Public Services". Our finance reforms will give councils more space to innovate in all areas of service delivery by providing local authorities with greater freedom to borrow, invest, trade, charge and set spending priorities.

Local Government Act

Mr. Love: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress on the review of access to information in local authorities relating to the Local Government Act 2000. [73109]

Mr. Raynsford: The implementation plan which we issued, following the publication of the 2001 White Paper "Strong Local Leadership, quality Public Services" indicated that we would be reviewing the local authority access to information regime from June 2002. Officials have now begun discussions with the Information Commissioner, the Local Government Association and others to identify key issues for analysis in the review.

We intend, as the next step, to publish during the summer a policy paper to examine the key issues involved, including the future implications for the local government sector of the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The paper will seek to identify practical issues which local authorities are now facing and invite views, in particular from councils, the Local Government Association and the Campaign for Freedom of Information, on the issues discussed and to come forward with examples of good practice. We will place copies of the policy paper the House Library.

We plan to continue working with the Local Government Association, the Information Commissioner and others to secure the most sound and practical implementation by local government of the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We want to link this with a streamlining of the current access to information requirements to maintain and re-enforce the culture of openness and transparency which is essential to effective, democratic local government.

Local Councillors

Paul Clark: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he intends to make regulations governing the local investigation and determination of misconduct allegations concerning local councillors. [73108]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department issued a consultation paper on 20 May, setting out a proposed framework within which the Standards Board for England would refer certain allegations of misconduct for local investigation and determination by standards committees. We have received around 1,000 responses to that consultation which we are now considering carefully. We intend in October, having had regard to these responses, to make regulations putting in place a regime for local investigation and determination of misconduct allegations.

Annual Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost was of publishing his Department's annual report and those of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions in each of the past five years; and if he will provide a breakdown of the costs incurred. [70104]

Mr. Raynsford: Before June 2002, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was part of the Cabinet Office, and its expenditure and work were therefore not separately reported. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions was created in June 2001, from the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). The publication costs of the DETR Annual Reports for 1998–2000 can be identified only at disproportionate cost; those for the 2000–01 report were approximately £5,200. The final publication costs for the DTLR report for 2001–02, which was published last month are not yet known. I will write to the right hon. Member with the details when they are available.

Office Accommodation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been spent in relation to changes in office accommodation which have taken place as a result of the change in Department structure since June; and if he will make a statement. [70743]

Mr. Leslie: Expenditure since June to date on changes in office accommodation resulting from the change in Department structure amounts to £16,000 plus VAT.

Rebranding

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been spent by his Department in rebranding his Department, broken down by *(a)* design of the departmental logo, *(b)* design and orders of new stationery, *(c)* Department signage and *(d)* website designs, as a result of the Department structural change in June; and if he will make a statement. [70746]

Mr. Leslie: ODPM uses the Royal Crest as the main part of its corporate identity and has incurred no 'design' costs as such. A nominal amount has been spent on originating artwork for print and electronic publishing.

My Department's costs have been low as it makes extensive use of electronic templates, keeps low stocks of stationery and generally uses out of date stationery for purposes such as internal photocopying and notepads.

Cost breakdown is as follows:

(a) logo £525 plus VAT

(b) stationery £7,400 including value of existing stock

(c) signage £3,600 plus VAT

(d) website £3,145.

The figure of £3,145 for the website represents half the cost of dividing one site into two sites. The other half of the cost is attributable to the Department for Transport.

Consultancy Fees

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been spent on consultancy fees in relation to the change in Department structure since June; and if he will make a statement. [70744]

Mr. Leslie: Additional consultancy costs of £10,858 (plus VAT) have been incurred, under an existing contract, for estates advice following the creation of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Transport.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those unitary authorities that made representations regarding the review of the SSA formula. [70951]

Mr. Leslie: We have had at least one written representation making at least one point relating to the SSA system from the following shire unitary authorities since the publication of the Green Paper "Modernising Local Government Finance" in September 2000:

Bath and North East Somerset
Blackburn with Darwen
Blackpool
Bournemouth
Bracknell Forest
Brighton and Hove
Bristol
Darlington
Derby
East Riding of Yorkshire
Halton
Hartlepool
Isle of Wight Council
Kingston upon Hull
Leicester
Luton
Medway
Middlesbrough
Milton Keynes
North East Lincolnshire
North Lincolnshire
North Somerset
Nottingham
Peterborough
Plymouth
Poole
Portsmouth
Reading
Redcar and Cleveland
Rutland
Slough
South Gloucestershire
Stockton-on-Tees
Stoke-on-Trent
Swindon
Telford and the Wrekin
Thurrock
Torbay
Warrington
West Berkshire
Windsor and Maidenhead
Wokingham
York.

Others may have made representations either before that point, via representative groupings of authorities, in meetings with Ministers, or when talking to officials. As of Tuesday 15 July, we have not yet received any formal responses from unitary authorities to the current consultation.

Firefighters' Pay

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the formula is for calculating firefighters' pay; and what other public servants have their pay determined by similar calculations. [71017]

Mr. Leslie: Firefighters' pay is negotiated between the local authorities employers and the Fire Brigades' Union in the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire Brigades. Annual pay increases since 1978 have been determined by a formula linking the pay of a fully qualified fire-fighter to the earnings of the top quarter of adult male manual workers.

No other public service pay group has their pay determined by the same formula but Police forces in England and Wales also have their pay determined by a formula. The formula used since 1994 is the median of private sector non-manual pay settlements in the past year.

Departmental Reorganisation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes there have been in the total wage expenditure budget of his Department since the departmental reorganisation in June; and if he will make a statement. [71450]

Mr. Leslie: There have been no changes in the total pay budget associated with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions' total administration resources. The division of these resources between the two new Departments—the Department for Transport and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—is currently being finalised. However, no additional resources are being made available from the Exchequer as a result of the departmental reorganisation.

Air-conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 8 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 584W, on air-conditioning, what his policy is on implementation of the ban on the use of chlorofluorocarbons in chiller plant in buildings owned by his Department; when a decision will be taken on a choice of air-conditioning for the QEII building to replace the present refrigerants of chlorofluorocarbon provenance; and whether it is intended that the new provision will contain not-in-kind and HFC refrigerants. [71597]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends not to purchase products that contain chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) or any other ozone-depleting substances, where there are suitable alternatives.

In respect of the QEII conference centre, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) on 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 874–75W.

Town and Country Finance

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to meet the leaders of the Town and Country Finance Issues Group. [71852]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no meetings fixed at present, but I would be happy to meet the TACFIG group to discuss the current consultation on the system to distribute general grant to local authorities.

Children in Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 196W, on children in care, what figures his Department holds on the number of children that are *(a)* homeless, *(b)* in bed and breakfast accommodation and *(c)* in temporary accommodation. [71887]

Mr. McNulty: Summary information on activity under statutory homelessness provisions is reported to the Department by local authorities in England. This includes the number of households accepted under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, and the number of these households resident in various types of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast, at the end of each quarter.

Precise information on the total number of children is not collected, but from data reported we estimate there were some 112,500 children in households accepted as homeless during 2001–02. Available information indicates that on 31 March 2002 there were some 6,500 households living in bed and breakfast style accommodation, and the Bed & Breakfast Unit have estimated that this represents around 11,000 children. There were 40,700 households with dependent children in all forms of temporary accommodation provided by local authorities for the homeless, but no estimates for the number of children are available.

Mobile Phone Operators

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he plans to review the mobile phone operators' voluntary code of operation on planning. [71790]

Mr. McNulty: My noble Friend the then Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration met representatives of the five mobile phone network operators on 8 May 2002 to discuss their progress in meeting their commitments to best mast siting practice and the audit arrangements that they have put in place to assess continuing compliance with the commitments.

Work currently under way to revise the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Masts is building on the commitments and on our guidance in Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 (Telecommunications) to improve consultation on mast proposals with local communities and local planning authorities. The Working Group established to take that work forward will monitor the operation of the revised code and effectiveness of the commitments themselves.

Empty Homes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many empty homes there are *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each county or metropolitan district; and what each represents as percentage of housing stock. [72282]

Mr. McNulty: The number of empty homes in England at 1 April 2001 (latest data available) was 755,100. This figure represents 3.5 per cent. of all housing stock.

The number of empty homes in each county, unitary or metropolitan district at 1 April 2001 is shown in the table. Also given is the percentage of housing stock the vacant dwellings represent.

Region/county/local authority	*Total number of vacant dwellings*	*Percentage of stock vacant*
North East		
Metropolitan districts		
Gateshead	3,220	3.7
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,767	3.1
North Tyneside	3,814	4.2
South Tyneside	2,578	3.8
Sunderland	4,934	4.0
Unitary authorities		
Hartlepool	1,708	4.3
Middlesbrough	1,977	3.4
Redcar and Cleveland	2,822	4.6
Stockton-on-Tees	3,046	4.0
Darlington	2,095	4.8
Counties		
County Durham	11,341	5.1
Northumberland	[1]—	[1]—
North West		
Metropolitan districts		
Bolton	4,643	4.1
Bury	1,299	1.6
Manchester	17,081	8.8
Oldham	3,362	3.6
Rochdale	4,817	5.4
Salford	5,543	5.5
Stockport	4,255	3.5
Tameside	[1]—	[1]—
Trafford	2,386	2.6
Wigan	5,146	3.9
Knowsley	2,700	4.0
Liverpool	18,734	9.1
Sefton	4,433	3.6
St. Helens	[1]—	[1]—
Wirral	6,493	4.6
Unitary authorities		
Halton	1,842	3.6
Warrington	1,425	1.8
Blackburn with Darwen	4,374	7.5
Blackpool	3,498	5.2
Counties		
Cheshire	[1]—	[1]—
Cumbria	8,540	3.8
Lancashire	23,462	4.7
Yorkshire and Humberside		
Metropolitan districts		
Barnsley	4,602	4.8
Doncaster	6,086	4.7
Rotherham	[1]—	[1]—
Sheffield	11,980	5.3
Bradford	9,980	5.0
Calderdale	5,382	6.1

Region/county/local authority	Total number of vacant dwellings	Percentage of stock vacant
Kirklees	5,798	3.5
Leeds	14,338	4.6
Wakefield	5,197	3.8
Unitary authorities		
East Riding of Yorkshire	4,516	3.3
Kingston upon Hull	8,388	7.3
North East Lincolnshire	3,303	4.8
North Lincolnshire	2,511	3.8
York	3,062	3.9
Counties		
North Yorkshire	11,044	4.4
East Midlands		
Unitary authorities		
Derby	4,470	4.5
Leicester	6,585	5.6
Rutland	543	3.9
Nottingham City	3,328	2.8
Counties		
Derbyshire	10,919	3.4
Leicestershire	[1]—	[1]—
Lincolnshire	[1]—	[1]—
Northamptonshire	8,129	3.1
Nottinghamshire	10,609	3.3
West Midlands		
Metropolitan districts		
Birmingham	21,538	5.3
Coventry	4,807	3.8
Dudley	3,191	2.5
Sandwell	4,542	3.7
Solihull	891	1.1
Walsall	4,178	3.9
Wolverhampton	5,424	5.3
Unitary authorities		
Herefordshire	2,375	3.2
Telford and Wrekin	2,247	3.6
Stoke-on-Trent	6,141	5.7
Counties		
Hereford and Worcester	4,941	2.2
Shropshire	4,211	3.5
Staffordshire	[1]—	[1]—
Warwickshire	[1]—	[1]—
East		
Unitary authorities		
Luton	2,456	3.4
Peterborough	2,517	3.6
Southend-on-Sea	1,889	2.5
Thurrock	1,981	3.4
Counties		
Bedfordshire	3,815	2.4
Cambridgeshire	[1]—	[1]—
Essex	[1]—	[1]—
Hertfordshire	[1]—	[1]—
Norfolk	[1]—	[1]—
Suffolk	[1]—	[1]—
London		
Metropolitan districts		
Barking and Dagenham	1,329	2.0
Barnet	3,153	2.3
Bexley	1,982	2.1
Brent	5,504	5.3
Bromley	4,318	3.3
Camden	4,335	4.7
City of London	31	0.6
Croydon	4,401	3.2
Ealing	2,449	2.1
Enfield	[1]—	[1]—
Greenwich	3,058	3.3
Hackney	3,254	3.8
Hammersmith and Fulham	4,557	5.9
Haringey	4,815	5.1
Harrow	1,218	1.5
Havering	2,702	2.9
Hillingdon	2,511	2.5
Hounslow	1,050	1.2
Islington	3,237	3.8
Kensington and Chelsea	6,067	6.9
Kingston upon Thames	[1]—	[1]—
Lambeth	2,572	2.1
Lewisham	4,025	3.5
Merton	2,114	2.8
Newham	5,102	5.5
Redbridge	[1]—	[1]—
Richmond upon Thames	1,757	2.3
Southwark	6,367	5.6
Sutton	2,238	2.9
Tower Hamlets	5,429	6.6
Waltham Forest	2,739	2.9
Wandsworth	2,079	1.7
Westminster	2,957	2.7
South East		
Unitary authorities		
Bracknell Forest	801	1.8
Reading	2,221	3.8
Slough	575	1.3
West Berkshire	1,596	2.7
Windsor and Maidenhead	865	1.5
Wokingham	1,139	1.9
Milton Keynes	2,259	2.6
Brighton and Hove	2,167	1.8
Portsmouth	1,675	2.1
Southampton	4,411	5.0
Isle of Wight	1,969	3.2
The Medway Towns	2,687	2.6
Counties		
Buckinghamshire	3,953	2.1
East Sussex	10,000	4.4
Hampshire	[1]—	[1]—
Kent	[1]—	[1]—
Oxfordshire	5,355	2.2
Surrey	[1]—	[1]—
West Sussex	[1]—	[1]—
South West		
Unitary authorities		
Bath and North East Somerset	550	0.8
Bristol	6,168	3.6
North Somerset	3,015	3.8
South Gloucestershire	1,842	1.8
Plymouth	4,508	4.3
Torbay	355	0.6
Bournemouth	4,120	5.4
Poole	2,151	3.5
Swindon	1,826	2.3
Counties		
Cornwall	5,035	2.2
Devon	15,970	5.1
Dorset	3,843	2.2
Gloucestershire	[1]—	[1]—
Somerset	[1]—	[1]—
Wiltshire	5,131	2.8

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[1] Unknown (missing or only partial data provided by one or more local authorities within a county).

Sources:

ODPM's 2001 Housing Strategy statistical appendix returns and Housing Corporation's 2001 Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR).

Sustainable Communities

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes will take place to the planned total house numbers in each county or unitary authority as a result of his statement on sustainable communities; and how many houses there were in each in 1997. [72285]

Mr. McNulty: We expect all local authorities to deliver the housing strategy set out in regional planning guidance. We will work with regional and local partners in the four growth areas identified in regional planning guidance for the South East to accelerate the proposals for significant growth. Information on the number of dwellings is given in the Department's Annual Housing Investment Programme Operational Information return submitted by local authorities. A copy of this information is held in the Library of the House of Commons.

Access for Disabled People

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Government proposes to amend Part M of the Building Regulations relating to access for disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [72303]

Mr. Leslie: My officials, with the assistance of the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, have been preparing proposals for amendments to Part M of the Building Regulations relating to access for disabled people. The proposals for public consultation will be published during the summer recess. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House, and the document will be available online on the website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and in hard copy on request. The document will be available in a range of formats to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.

Planning

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what were the median and upper and lower decile periods between *(a)* the receipt and determination of planning applications, *(b)* appeals against refusal of planning permission and inquiries into those appeals, *(c)* inquiries into appeals against refusal of planning permission and inspectors' reports thereon and *(d)* publication of inspectors' reports and determinations by Ministers in the last year for which information is available. [72320]

Mr. McNulty: Available information for the last financial year (1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002) is as follows:

(a) Data are not collected from local authorities on the time taken to determine every planning application. Information from district authorities is collected on the number of applications decided within eight weeks of receipt, between eight and 13 weeks and over 13 weeks.

2001–02	*Percentage*
Planning applications decided	
Less than eight weeks	65
Eight to 13 weeks	18
More than 13 weeks	17

(b) and *(c)*

2001–02	*Upper decile*	*Median decile*	*Lower decile*
(b) From start date (notice of appeal) to inquiry in weeks	15	19	31
(c) From start date to submission of report in weeks	28	58	160

(d) Information on cases which fall to be determined by the Secretary of State (recovered appeals and called in planning applications) is available on the following basis:

Number of recovered appeals decided within eight weeks, between eight and 13 weeks, and over 13 weeks from receipt of inspector's report

2001–02	*Percentage*
Recovered appeals cases determined by the Secretary of State	
Less than eight weeks	44
Eight to 13 weeks	13
More than 13 weeks	43

Number of called in planning applications decided within 13 weeks, between 13 and 20 weeks, and over 20 weeks from receipt of inspector's report

2001–02	*Percentage*
Called in planning applications cases determined by the Secretary of State	
Less than 13 weeks	36
13 to 20 weeks	18
More than 20 weeks	46

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the proposals for the revision of Part M of the Building Regulations will be published for consultation. [72870]

Mr. Leslie: My officials, with the assistance of the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, have been preparing proposals for amendments to Part M of the Building Regulations relating to access for disabled people. The proposals for public consultation will be published during the summer recess. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House, and the document will be available online on the website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and in hard copy on request. The document will be available in a range of formats to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received on his proposals for planning reforms. [72091]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has published a comprehensive statement on the outcome of consultation on the planning Green Paper and copies are available in the Library.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he intends to bring forward to use the planning system to raise the required density of dwellings in new developments. [72816]

Mr. McNulty: Planning Policy Guidance note 3: Housing, states in paragraph 58 that local authorities should "avoid developments that make inefficient use of land (those at less than 30 dwellings per hectare net)".

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends to intervene in planning applications for housing that involve a density of less than 30 dwellings per hectare.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the way in which proposals to reconcile provision for the retention by local authorities of tariffs for the granting of planning permission on major developments as set out in the document, "Reforming Planning Obligations", can be implemented alongside proposals for the reform of the local authority capital finance system as set out in the document, Local Government Finance Formula Grant Distribution-A Consultation Paper. [70111]

Mr. Leslie: We do not consider that there is a significant relationship between proposals on the retention of receipts from planning tariffs and the options for reforming how revenue support for capital finance is distributed, as set out in the Formula Grant distribution consultation paper. Therefore no such assessment has been made.

Parish Councillors

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many resignations of parish councillors he has received notice of by reason of the new Model Code of Conduct for Parish Councils. [72806]

Mr. Leslie: I refer to the answer the Minister for Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), gave to the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on 21 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 629W.

Since that answer, some 20 more parish councillors (making around 50 in all) have written saying that they have resigned in response to the introduction of the code.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he is intending to review next the new Model Code of Conduct for Parish Councillors. [72805]

Mr. Leslie: We will decide the timing and form of any review of the Model Code in the light of the experience of councils' adopting and implementing their own codes of conduct in accord with the Model Code.

Telecommunications Working Group

Mr. Norman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the remit is of the Telecommunications Working Group set up by his Department. [72803]

Mr. McNulty: The mobile phone operators have made a series of commitments to improve the handling of telecommunications development.

The Telecommunications Working Group was set up to update the existing Code of Best Practice for Telecommunications.

The terms of reference for the group are:

to produce a Mobile Phone Network Development Code of Best Practice;

to oversee the implementation of the operators' 10 commitments;

and to monitor the effectiveness of the operators' 10 commitments and the Code of Best Practice.

National Land Use Database

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many local authorities have submitted returns to National Land Use Database; and which authorities have not made a submission. [72845]

Mr. McNulty: 344 local authorities submitted returns to the National Land Use Database, reporting on previously-developed sites in England in 1998. The following authorities did not make a return then:

Aylesbury Vale District Council
Bradford City Council
Council of the Isles of Scilly
Croydon LBC
Kettering Borough Council
Lake District National Park
Maldon District Council
Mid Devon District Council
North Yorkshire Moors National Park
Peak District National Park Authority
Redbridge LBC
Ryedale District Council (outside National Park)
South Bedfordshire District Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
Southwark LBC
Teesdale District Council
Tendring District Council
Tower Hamlets LBC.

227 local authorities have made a return updating the data to 31 March 2001. 135 authorities, as follows have not made a return for 2001:

Arun District Council
Aylesbury Vale District Council
Babergh District Council
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Bassetlaw District Council
Berwick upon Tweed Borough Council
Boston Borough Council
Bradford City Council
Braintree District Council
Brent LBC
Brighton and Hove Borough Council
Broadland District Council
Bromley LBC
Broxtowe Borough Council
Calderdale Borough Council
Carrick District Council
Castle Morpeth Borough Council
Castle Point Borough Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
Chester City Council
Chester Le Street District Council
Chichester District Council
City of Canterbury
City of Oxford
City of Worcester
Colchester Borough Council

Congleton Borough Council
Council of the Isles of Scilly
Craven District Council
Dacorum District Council
Dartmoor National Park
Derby City Council
Derbyshire Dales District Council
Durham City Council
Ealing LBC
Easington District Council
East Devon District Council
East Dorset District Council
East Hampshire District Council
East Hertfordshire District Council
East Lindsey District Council
East Staffordshire Borough Council
Eden District Council
Enfield LBC
Erewash Borough Council
Exeter City Council
Forest Heath District Council
Gateshead Borough Council
Gedling Borough Council
Gloucester City Council
Gravesham Borough Council
Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Harlow District Council
Hart District Council
Hastings Borough Council
High Peak Borough Council
Kerrier District Council
Kettering Borough Council
Lake District National Park
Lewes District Council
Lichfield District Council
Maldon District Council
Mansfield District Council
Mendip District Council
Merton LBC
Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Mid Devon District Council
Mid Suffolk District Council
Mid Sussex District Council
North Devon District Council
North Hertfordshire District Council
North Shropshire District Council
North Somerset Unitary Authority
North Tyneside Borough Council
North Warwickshire Borough Council
North Wiltshire District Council
North Yorkshire Moors National Park
Northampton Borough Council
Norwich City Council
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
Oadby and Wigston Council
Peak District National Park Authority
Pendle Borough Council
Peterborough City Unitary Authority Council
Reading Borough Unitary Authority Council
Richmond Upon Thames LBC
Rochdale Borough Council
Rochford District Council
Rother District Council
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Rugby Borough Council
Rushcliffe Borough Council
Ryedale District Council
Scarborough Borough Council
Sedgefield District Council
Sedgemoor District Council
Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council
Slough Borough Council
Sough Cambridgeshire District Council
South Hams District Council
South Holland District Council
South Northamptonshire District Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
South Tyneside Borough Council
Spelthorne Borough Council
Staffordshire Moors District Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Stroud District Council
Sutton LBC
Taunton Deane Borough Council
Teesdale District Council
Teignbridge District Council
Tewkesbury Borough Council
The Broads Authority
Three Rivers District Council
Thurrock Borough Council
Torbay Borough Council
Torridge District Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Warwick District Council
Watford Borough Council
Wealden District Council
Wear Valley District Council
Welwyn Hatfield District Council
West Devon Borough Council
West Lindsey District Council
West Oxfordshire District Council
West Somerset District Council
West Wiltshire District Council
Westminster City Council
Winchester City Council
Wokingham Council
Wolverhampton Borough Council
Wycombe District Council
Wyre Borough Council.

Ordnance Survey

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Quinquennial Review of Ordnance Survey. [72983]

Mr. McNulty: I am pleased to announce today the outcome of the second and final stage of the Quinquennial Review of Ordnance Survey.

On 19 December 2001 it was announced that the Government were minded to accept the recommendation from stage 1 of the Review of Ordnance Survey, that it should move to become a Government-owned public limited company (GOplc). Ordnance Survey is a Government Department and Executive Agency operating within a trading fund regime. The stage 1 review considered that it needed additional freedoms and flexibilities to enable it to use its full potential to develop the geographic information and e-business marketplace, and concluded that a change in status could offer such freedoms.

Subsequently, a Steering Group chaired by this Department, including representatives from Ordnance Survey, HM Treasury, Cabinet Office and two external members from the Association for Geographic Information, and the London borough of Lewisham, undertook further work based on the stage 1 findings consulting external advisers. As with the stage 1 review, consultation took place with a wide range of stakeholders and customers in the geographic information business in Great Britain.

Following work on stage 2 of the Quinquennial Review, I am now of the opinion that there is no clear evidence to support the view that Ordnance Survey would benefit from a change of status to GOplc.

The stage 2 review has drawn attention to three issues:

> first, there is a need to reach agreement on enhanced financial freedoms and flexibilities that should be made available to Ordnance Survey;
>
> secondly, the provision and location of policy advice to Government on geographic information, currently provided by Ordnance Survey alongside its data supply role, will be reviewed;
>
> and thirdly, in the context of a review of Ordnance Survey's Framework Document, we will consider issues surrounding Ordnance Survey's relationship with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The importance of geographic data to Government has recently been underlined by the pilot agreement to make Ordnance Survey data widely available within central Government to help match the extensive benefit that local government already gains from using such data. Ordnance Survey's work in underpinning Great Britain with geographic information and its successful operation since becoming a Trading Fund in 1999, are clearly worth sustaining in the most appropriate way.

I am satisfied that sustaining Ordnance Survey as a trading fund with some extended freedoms will enable it to continue to develop—and continue to progress its impressive programme of cultural change—to the benefit of all who use its geographic data. Ordnance Survey must be given the right operating framework to enable it to respond to the demands of the geographic information marketplace, which is dependent on the quality, consistency and availability of Ordnance Survey geographic data.

Ordnance Survey must also, quite crucially, be able to play a full part in ensuring geographic information firmly underpins the e-government agenda, and informs policy formulation and delivery of information and services.

I have asked my officials to take forward work as a matter of urgency on the three issues I have referred to, and ensure that the decisions reached are reflected in a new published framework document for Ordnance Survey as soon as possible after the House reconvenes in October, but certainly no later than December 2002.

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* full-time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70544]

Mr. Leslie: Detailed information on the numbers of permanent press officers employed in departmental press offices during the financial years 1997–98 were provided in a memorandum dated 16 June 1998 to the Select Committee on Public Administration and published in its report on The Government Information and Communication Service (HC 770) in July 1998. A copy is in the Library of the House.

The number of full-time equivalent press officers employed in the relevant departmental press office on 1 January for subsequent years were:

	Full-time equivalents
Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (Central)	
1999	34.3
2000	40.8
2001	38.0
Cabinet Office	
2002	18.0

Secondees to the press office during the full calendar years for which information is available were:

	Number of secondees
1999	Nil
2000	1
2001	1

Housing Benefit

Mr. Challen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people claimed housing benefit as a percentage of the total population in *(a)* Leeds, *(b)* Yorkshire and Humber region and *(c)* the London region, in the period 1998 to 2002. [69940]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The information is in the table.

Housing benefit recipients in Leeds, Yorkshire and the Humber and London as a percentage of the total population aged 16 or over in each area: 1998 to 2002

	Leeds city council area	*Government office region of Yorkshire and the Humber*	*Government office region of London*
1998	11.7	10.4	12.7
1999	11.1	10.1	11.9
2000	11.1	9.1	10.6

Housing benefit recipients in Leeds, Yorkshire and the Humber and London as a percentage of the total population aged 16 or over in each area: 1998 to 2002

	Leeds city council area	*Government office region of Yorkshire and the Humber*	*Government office region of London*
2001	9.9	8.7	10.1
2002	9.6	8.5	10.0

Notes:

1. The data refer to households claiming housing benefit which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one benefit household can live in one property, for example, two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.

2. Figures exclude any housing benefit extended payment cases.

3. figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated.

Sources:

Housing Benefit Management Information System quarterly 100 per cent. counts taken in February of each year.

Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates for 1998, 1999 and 2000.

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people claimed housing benefit as a percentage of the total population in *(a)* the Colchester constituency and *(b)* Essex between 1998 and 2002. [71472]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The available information is in the table:

Housing benefit recipients in Colchester and Essex as a percentage of the total population aged 16 or over in each area: 1998 to 2002

	Colchester borough council area[1]	*Essex*
1998	6.9	7.1
1999	6.7	6.6
2000	6.3	6.5
2001	3.1	6.1
2002	5.9	5.8

Notes:

1. Housing benefit data for the parliamentary constituency of Colchester are not available; figures are only available by local authority area.

2. Essex figures refer to the local authorities of Basildon, Braintree, Brentwood, Castle Point, Chelmsford, Colchester, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon, Rochford, Tendring and Uttlesford.

3. The data refer to households claiming housing benefit which may be a single person, a couple of a family. More than one benefit household can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.

4. Figures exclude any housing benefit extended payment cases.

5. Figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated.

Sources:

Housing Benefit Management Information System quarterly 100 per cent. counts taken in February of each year.

Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates for 1998, 1999 and 2000.

Fire Service

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1088W, on the fire service, how much money his Department has provided for rescues by the fire service that did not involve a fire in the last three years. [70767]

Mr. Leslie: Fire service funding is supported through the standard spending assessment arrangements. Over the period in question, the funding distribution formula has included a factor based on the number of fires, false alarms and calls to road traffic accidents, rail and air incidents, and leaks and spills attended by each brigade. Responses to other types of calls are not counted. Responsibility for setting budgets and the allocation of funds received through these arrangements are a matter for individual fire authorities.

Urban Regeneration Company

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will introduce an urban regeneration company to Gloucester. [70844]

Mr. McNulty: Urban regeneration companies (URCs) are established by the relevant local authority, Regional Development Agency, English Partnerships (if appropriate), the private sector and other key partners. It will be for the South West Regional Development Agency and its local partners to decide whether, and when, to bring forward a proposal to central Government for an urban regeneration company in Gloucester.

Congestion

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to promote and facilitate local authorities' participation in the 'In Town Without My Car Day'; and if he will make a statement. [71227]

Mr. McNulty: The UK Government have signed a pledge to support the European 'In Town Without My Car Day'. Responsibility for this now rests with my colleagues in the Department for Transport.

Voting Arrangements

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister who the intended recipients are of the funding for e-voting announced in the 2002 Spending Review. [71231]

Mr. Leslie: Under the 2002 Spending Review, there is provision of £30 million: £10 million for each of the three years 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06, for local e-voting, enabling the Government to contribute this sum to the costs of those local authorities and their IT partners participating in e-voting pilot schemes over the next three years.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total Government expenditure on the trials into new methods of voting undertaken at the May elections was, broken down into *(a)* e-voting, *(b)* postal ballots and *(c)* other. [71226]

Mr. Leslie: The Government made £4.135 million available to contribute to the costs of the 16 local authorities running electronic voting and counting schemes in the May 2002 electoral modernisation pilot programme. The costs of piloting all-postal or other voting techniques were borne by the 14 local authorities concerned.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what study has been made of the trials of e-voting at the May elections. [71229]

Mr. Leslie: The Electoral Commission is evaluating the local authorities that ran e-voting pilot schemes in the May 2002 local and mayoral elections and will provide a detailed assessment of the impact of each scheme to the Deputy Prime Minister by 1 August 2002.

Best Value Programme

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost to local government of administering the Best Value programme was in each of the last three years. [71720]

Mr. Leslie: No reliable estimates exist of the costs incurred by local authorities in complying with their duty under the Local Government Act 1999. Any such costs would have to be set against the benefits of improved services.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has commissioned Cardiff Business School to evaluate the long-term impact of best value in English local authorities from 2001 until 2005. Part of this involves an assessment of the impact of Best Value in delivering improved services, including an element of cost-effectiveness. However, this is reliant upon year-on-year Best Value performance indicator data, which is currently being collected to monitor improvements. In the meantime, we are aiming to publish the results arising from the first year's census of local authorities. The census provides the benchmark against which the implementation of Best Value and its impact on service delivery will be assessed.

Housing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has to ensure that empty homes are *(a)* located and *(b)* put to use. [71204]

Mr. McNulty: The Government set out their policies for locating and bringing back into use empty and abandoned properties in their response to the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee's report on empty homes, published on 8 May 2002. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

The range of measures in place include: funding for the Empty Homes Agency to help local authorities bring empty properties back into use; the reform of private sector renewal legislation; and the introduction of low demand pathfinder projects.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures there are to ensure that public sector workers are able to find affordable homes in *(a)* Coventry, *(b)* London and *(c)* the rest of the UK. [71205]

Mr. McNulty: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by our right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 18 July. This set out our plans for tackling the shortage of affordable homes in London and the south-east, and providing homes for key workers and those in the most need.

With the additional funding for housing and planning announced by our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, spending will rise to £4.7 billion by 2005–06—up by £1.5 billion on this year's figures.

The new plans will supplement our existing measures to deliver new homes for key workers, which include the £250 million Starter Home Initiative (SHI). This aims to help 10,000 key workers in England, particularly teachers, police, nurses and other essential health staff to buy homes within a reasonable travelling distance from their work place in areas where the high cost of housing is undermining recruitment and retention.

Key workers may also be helped through the increased investment provided for rent and low cost home ownership through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme and local authorities. Since 1997, we have almost doubled funding for affordable housing to £1.2 billion a year and this is now supporting the creation of 20,000 new homes every year. As well as the additional funding for new homes, we will be looking at ways to extend our existing programmes for affordable housing through greater partnership with employers and public and private sector landlords.

Measures to assist public sector workers in the rest of the UK to find homes are the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish and Northern Ireland Executives.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many new homes have been *(a)* built and *(b)* improved in Coventry since 1997. [71206]

Mr. McNulty: The number of new homes by tenure built within the district of Coventry city council since 1997 is shown in table A. It is not possible to report exactly how many homes have been improved in Coventry since 1997. However, figures for the numbers of local authority dwellings which received 'capital type' investment and the number of private sector renovation grants allocated is given in table B. This information is available by financial year only.

Table A: Permanent dwellings completed in Coventry

Number of dwellings

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Private enterprise	379	408	483	311	425
Registered social landlords	69	132	69	11	36
Local authority	0	0	0	0	0
All dwellings	448	540	552	322	461

Table B: Housing investment ('capital type') and renovation grants in Coventry

	Local authority dwellings that receive 'capital type' investment[1]	*Private sector renovation grants*
1997–98	5,585	427
1998–99	3,007	574
1999–2000	5,497	597
2000–01	0	594

[1] Coventry city council became an LSVT authority in 2000–01 and they reported doing no 'capital type' investment work on their own dwellings in that year.

Source:

ODPM Housing Investment Programme returns.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for housing construction in the Huntingdon constituency. [72804]

Mr. McNulty: RPG6 identifies that development plans should provide 4,000 additional dwellings in Cambridgeshire each year between 1996 and 2016. It is the role of the local planning authorities to prepare development plans to accommodate the development proposed in RPG. The replacement Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan, prepared by Cambridgeshire county and Peterborough city councils, proposes that 9,500 dwellings be built in Huntingdonshire over the period 1999 and 2016. The structure plan's proposed housing distribution will be debated at an examination in public starting in October.

Last week the Deputy Prime Minister expressed his concerns that housing needs are not being met and that tackling the housing shortage is national responsibility. The Deputy Prime Minister also announced that over the coming months he intended to work with regional and local partners to establish where, at what scale, and how quickly development could be achieved in the potential growth areas, including within the London-Stansted-Cambridge corridor. The Local Government Conference has commenced a review of regional planning guidance for the East of England and I would expect this to consider the issues of where, at what scale and how quickly development can be delivered.

Housing Association Stock

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* houses and *(b)* flats have been completed by housing associations in each of the years 1990 to 2001. [71299]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is available for financial years and is given, for England, in the table.

Numbers of dwellings completed by housing associations: England

Thousand

	Houses	*Flats*
1990–91	5.5	9.1
1991–92	7.0	9.0
1992–93	13.1	10.9
1993–94	19.5	10.7
1994–95	21.6	9.7
1995–96	21.5	8.7
1996–97	16.7	7.8
1997–98	15.2	6.2
1998–99	13.5	5.4
1999–2000	12.3	5.1
2000–01	10.9	6.4

Land Development

Ms Shipley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much *(a)* greenfield and *(b)* brownfield land has been redeveloped by each regional development agency in each year since their formation. [71752]

Mr. McNulty: This information is held by individual regional development agencies, and it has not been possible to obtain all the data in the time available. I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Right-to-buy Receipts

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received from borough councils regarding the proposed redistribution of right-to-buy receipts from local authorities. [72395]

Mr. Raynsford: Written representations have been received from about 20 local authorities, either directly or via local MPs. We will be consulting on the details of the new arrangement shortly.

Local Government Contracts

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Government will publish the draft code of practice on work force matters in local government contracting, relating to the review of best value. [73110]

Mr. Raynsford: The Code of Practice, setting out an approach to work force matters in local government service contracts which involve a transfer of staff, is being published today as part of a draft Government circular for public consultation "Best Value and Performance Improvement".

The draft code will ensure that all contracting exercises and contracts are designed in a way that secures a high quality work force over the life of a contract. It meets our commitment to act to end the threat of a 'two-tier workforce' of transferees and new joiners in local government contracting. And it is consistent with the message in the draft circular that all local authorities must adopt a positive approach to work force matters if they are to achieve best value.

In publishing the draft circular, the Government are delivering on their commitment in the local government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", to streamline and reform best value. The circular consolidates and replaces existing guidance, and emphasises the key role that best value can play in driving up the delivery of local services and improving the quality of life for all. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the House Libraries.

Physical Regeneration

Ms Shipley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on the implications of the comprehensive spending review for the future direction of *(a)* funding for physical regeneration and *(b)* regional development agencies; [71756]

(2) what the levels of spending on physical regeneration will be following the comprehensive spending review; and if he will break down the figures into the various funding streams for which he is responsible. [71855]

Mr. McNulty: Physical regeneration is undertaken on behalf of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by the regional development agencies and English Partnerships.

RDAs are funded through a single programme that enables them to undertake a holistic approach to economic development and regeneration. The level of spending on physical regeneration is not distinguished from other spending within this single programme.

Following the spending review, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced substantial new resources and responsibilities for the RDAs, further strengthening their role as catalysts for economic development and regeneration in the regions. The details are set out in Chapter 23 of the Spending Review 2002 White Paper.

English Partnerships is currently subject to a quinquennial review and we intend to make a further announcement about its future remit shortly, although as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister told the House on 18 July he has

> "instructed English Partnerships to use its new role on brown fields to search out and to deliver even more land for housing".

The expenditure consequences of English Partnerships' new role have not yet been finalised.

New Deal for Communities

Mr. Love: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* total expenditure and *(b)* expenditure in capacity building was in each year in each New Deal for Communities area; what the (i) total planned expenditure and (ii) planned expenditure on capacity building will be until the end of each project; and if he will make a statement. [69187]

Mr. McNulty: The tables, which I shall place in the Library, illustrate the total expenditure and expenditure in capacity building in each year in each New Deal for Communities area so far and the total planned expenditure and planned expenditure on capacity building until the end of each project.

Good regeneration schemes are developed by genuine and effective partnerships. And good regeneration partnerships genuinely empower the local community, local business, schools, service providers and others in the district. Building and maintaining such partnerships, however, takes time and effort.

The Government have designed the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme so as to enable local partnerships to build the capacity of all those involved, including local residents and statutory agencies.

There is no single definition of community capacity building, and so the figures in the tables should not be used as a basis for comparison between partnerships. Community capacity building can involve a wide range of differing activities—for example it may involve training community representatives, providing support workers to help the community develop skills, or providing access to administrative or office resources. Retaining the involvement and support of the community should be a priority throughout the life of any regeneration scheme.

Government guidance for NDC partnerships has made clear that we expect them to spend time and money in building the capacity of local people and agencies to participate. NDC partnerships were given considerably longer to prepare their Delivery Plans than in previous regeneration programmes. For the first time, the Government provided funding to help the partnership prepare its Delivery Plan, so that local people could be genuinely involved in the process of preparing the plan. The rules for NDC partnerships allow them to spend up to 10 per cent. of their funding on management and administration costs (that is double the amount allowed under previous programmes), to ensure that the partnership is properly resourced to deliver a programme with communities at its heart. We have asked each partnership to develop and implement a local learning plan, to equip all of the key players to play their full part in the process of neighbourhood renewal.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Rents

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much he estimates has been saved by the introduction of local reference rent and single room rent. [61382]

Malcolm Wicks: The local reference rent and single room rent were introduced to ensure that the needs of people receiving benefit are balanced against those of the taxpayer. These rules ensure that people receiving housing benefit do not have their rent met in full if it exceeds the broadly average rent for similar sized properties in the locality in which they live, and that the benefit system does not provide unemployed young adults with better housing than their working peers can afford.

The information is in the table.

Estimated reduction in housing benefit expenditure arising from the introduction of the local reference rent and single room rent

£ million

Financial year	*Estimated reduction in housing benefit expenditure*
1995–96	5
1996–97	55
1997–98	135
1998–99	150
1999–2000	150
2000–01	145
2001–02	145
2002–03	160

Notes:

1. Estimates are expressed in nominal terms.
2. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest £5 million.
3. Estimates for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are based on forecast caseload and price levels.

Sources:

Rent Officer data and Housing Benefit administrative data 1996 to 2001.

People's Consultative Forums

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many seats pensioners voluntary groups have on Older People's Consultative Forums, broken down by each nation and region. [64843]

Mr. McCartney: Within central Government pensioners voluntary groups are represented on the Partnership Group on Older People, established to focus on the provision of advice to the Cabinet Ministerial Committee on Domestic Affairs Sub-committee on Older People. There are 22 members, who include voluntary organisations such as Age Concern England, Help the Aged and the National Pensioners Convention.

There is one other central Government forum, the Department of Health's Older People's Taskforce, which includes Age Concern England.

Consultative forums within the devolved Administrations are the responsibility of the Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Executive. Consultative forums are also organised by local authorities.

Information on representation on these and other forums is not held centrally.

Recycling

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of waste produced in his Department was *(a)* recycled, *(b)* composted, and *(c)* re-used, broken down into (i) paper, (ii) plastics, (iii) aluminium cans and (iv) other in each year since 1997; what plans there are to increase these proportions; and if he will make a statement. [65699]

Maria Eagle: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. In 2001, the former Department of Social Security produced 24,000 tonnes of waste, of which 37 per cent. was recycled. The vast majority of recycled waste was paper. No waste was composted. Details are not available prior to 2001.

For 2002, figures show that paper recycling has risen to 55 per cent. of the total waste produced, amounting to 16,172 tonnes. We plan to extend our paper-recycling scheme across the whole Department in the coming year.

Redundant office furniture is recycled by DWP's estates partners wherever possible. Metal components are reused and desktops are pulped and recycled where possible. Volume figures are not available for this.

Surplus IT equipment is refurbished and reused wherever possible. This is facilitated by the Disposal Service Agency, and the refurbished equipment is then distributed through the Computers Within Reach initiative.

DWP as a whole does not currently separate plastics and aluminium cans from the general waste stream, although local schemes to recycle waste are encouraged and are in place at a number of locations. We plan to examine the potential for a national scheme to recycle these waste streams.

In addition to the recycling initiatives in place, staff are also actively encouraged to reduce the amount of waste that they generate.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of *(a)* paper and *(b)* other goods purchased by his Department was recycled paper in each year since 1997; what the annual total cost of these purchases was; what plans there are to increase these proportions; and if he will make a statement. [65770]

Maria Eagle: 2.12 per cent. of the 1,824,682 reams of paper purchased by DWP in 2001–02 was recycled paper. Of this 1,330,392 reams were purchased from the joint OGC/DWP contract at a cost of £4,913,629. Costs for the remaining 494,290 reams are not available.

In 2001–02 DWP also purchased 8,434 tonnes of pre-printed paper (leaflets and forms), of which 16 per cent. was recycled. 721 tonnes of card and board were also purchased of which 68 per cent. was recycled. Costs are not currently available.

Information is not available prior to 2001–02.

We are currently reviewing the measures we have in place to reduce the overall amount of paper used within the Department at the same time as increasing the percentage of recycled paper used.

Departmental Energy Use

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the estimated *(a)* level and *(b)* cost of energy use in his Department and associated agencies was in each year since 1997; what proportion of energy was generated from renewable sources; and if he will make a statement. [65955]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs on 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 385–86W.

Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the statistics that are collected by his Department by English parliamentary constituency; and if he will make a statement. [67097]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly) on 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 769W.

Sanctions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what sanctions have been applied against claimants over 24 on the Government's New Deal programme; and if he will make a statement. [67725]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Up to March 2002, we estimate that around 17,979 sanctions[1] had been applied to people aged over 24 on the New Deal programme. This represents the number of sanctions applied, not the number of people sanctioned as some people will have been sanctioned more than once.

[1] This information has been collected by undertaking a special exercise and is based on a combination of IT-generated statistics and information supplied clerically. The figure is therefore an estimate and should be treated as a guide to the number of sanctions applied only.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many claimants there were to whom deductions in their income support or income based jobseeker's allowance would have been made on their refusal to co-operate with the Department but where the sanctions were not applied because *(a)* their application would put the claimant or their children at risk of harm and *(b)* the claimant was in receipt of the disabled premium, disability premium, or a higher pensioner premium, in the latest year for which figures are available; [66727]

(2) how many claimants there were have had deductions of benefit on the grounds of their refusal to co-operate with the Child Support Agency; what sanctions have been applied; and for what average length of time the sanctions have been applied. [66726]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* Every child has a right to a decent start in life whether their parents live together or apart. Children are entitled to care and support and both parents are responsible for providing it. It is reasonable to expect that the parent with care should co-operate with the Child Support Agency unless there are reasonable grounds for believing there would be a risk of harm or undue distress to the parent or any child living with them. If a parent with care refuses, without good cause, to co-operate with the agency, their benefit may be reduced by up to 40 per cent. of the income support personal allowance for a person aged 25 or over.

The available information is in the tables. Following the introduction in April 1998 of face-to-face interviews with parents with care claiming benefits, there has been a sharp rise in compliance and a corresponding fall in the number of reduced benefit directions issued. These interviews provide the opportunity to explain to parents with care the advantages of co-operating with the agency as well as the good cause rules.

Reduced benefit directions issued in respect of parents with care who have failed to co-operate with the Child Support Agency

	Benefit	
	Income support/ jobseeker's allowance	*Family credit*
1997–98	55,115	19,165
1998–99	36,251	13,437
1999–2000	22,115	6,164
2000–01	13,338	84
2001–02	8,163	6

Notes:

1. Figures are not available before April 1997.
2. Family credit was superseded by working families tax credit in October 1999. Decisions were made on a few residual cases after this date.
3. Data are not held on the average length of time the directions are in place.

Source:

Child Support agency Performance Monitoring Team.

Cases where a reduced benefit direction was not issued because the parent with care could show good cause for not co-operating with the Child Support Agency—2001–02

Reason good cause accepted	*Number*
Risk of physical or mental harm to the parent with care or child	14,393
Other	3,118

Note:

Other reasons include risk of sexual abuse, rape or incest.

Source:

Child Support Agency Performance Monitoring Team.

Reduced benefit direction exemptions—1999–2000

Benefit	*Number*
Income support/jobseeker's allowance	2,028
Family credit	403

Notes:

1. A parent with care receiving a disability premium, disabled child's premium or higher pensioner premium is exempt from a reduced benefit direction.
2. Figures have not been collated centrally since 1999–2000.

Source:

Child Support Agency Performance Monitoring Team.

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for how many people in each of the last five years in *(a)* the UK, and *(b)* the (i) Brighton Pavilion, (ii) Brighton Kemptown and (iii) Hove constituencies (A) the sanction of loss of benefits for up to 26 weeks has been applied and (B) benefit has been restored following a review or an appeal. [63527]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the tables.

Unemployment benefit and jobseeker's sanctions applied in Great Britain

Year	*Sanctions applied*
1997–98	195,343
1998–99	153,420
1999–2000	158,531
2000–01	164,516
2001–02	160,200

Notes:

1. Figures for 1997–98 include 93 sanctions applied against residual Unemployment Benefit cases.
2. Data on the number of cases where benefit was reinstated following review or appeal are not available.
3. Social Security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Source:

Employment Service Labour Market Statistics, Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions/Sector Decision Making, for years ending 31 March 1998 to 31 March 2002

Jobseeker's allowance sanctions applied in the Brighton and Hove area

Year	*Sanctions applied*
2000–01	1,160

Notes:

1. Information is not available by parliamentary constituency.
2. The Brighton and Hove area comprises the area covered by the Brighton Phonenix, Brighton Pavilion, Brighton Regent and Hove Jobcentre Plus offices.
3. Due to a computer failure local information is limited to 2000–01.
4. Data on the number of cases where benefit was reinstated following review or appeal are not available.

Source:

Employment Service Labour Market Statistics for year ending 31 March 2001.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to give the Child Support Agency the power of surveillance in tackling fraud; and if he will make a statement. [67042]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to hon. my Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mrs. Merron) on 24 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 676W.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether student loan repayments and student overdraft interest payments are counted as outgoings when the CSA calculates payments due from absent parents. [70749]

Malcolm Wicks: No.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in how many cases a parent with care withdrew a claim for income support after action by the Child Support Agency in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02. [67237]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available.

Public Consultations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the length was of each public consultation undertaken by his Department since 8 June 2001. [68742]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pensions follows the Cabinet Office's guidance on written consultation which sets 12 weeks as the standard minimum period for a consultation. The table lists the consultations the Department has begun, or completed since 8 June 2001. There were two occasions where shorter consultations have been conducted, and the reasons for this are included in the table.

Title of consultation	*Start date*	*Period in weeks*	*Reason for shorter consultation*
Changes to Invalid Care Allowance	23 July 2001	12	—
Amending the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979	23 July 2002	12	—
The Minimum Funding Requirement: The next stage of reform. Consultation on the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Minimum Funding Requirement and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2001 (Occupational Pensions Minimum funding requirements)	18 September 2001	12	—
Occupational Pension Scheme Winding up Notices and Reports (etc.) Regulations 2001	1 August 2001	12	—
Occupational and Personal Pension schemes (Disclosure of Information) Amendment Regulations 2001	13 August 2001	12	—
Private Pensions Simplification	19 October 2001	14	—
Bulk transfer of accrued pensions rights without member consent	20 December 2001	13	—
Revised code of practice on for gathering of information as required in Social Security Fraud Act 2001	8 April 2002	2	This was a follow-up to a previous exercise to which minor technical changes were introduced
Consultation exercise on Pension Scheme Trustees, Independent Custodians and Encouraging Shareholder Activism (Myners report)	4 February 2002	12	—
Member nominated trustees and directors	12 February 2002	4	The shorter period was needed to fit into a regulatory timetable
Child Poverty measures	18 April 2002	12	—
Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (OPRA) quinquennial review	10 May 2002	12	—
Residential Allowance	22 May 2002	14	—
Equality, opportunity, and independence for all (RRAA)	30 May 2002	17	—

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [70084]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. From then to the end of 2001, the Department published eight consultation documents. Of these, two included the consultation criteria listed in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on written consultation. Procedures are now in place to ensure that all new consultations include this information.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [69830]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security and parts of the Department for Education and Employment. All written consultations published by the Department were available as paper copies.

Benefits

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps have been taken to simplify the benefits system over each of the past three years; what steps it is proposed to take to simplify the system further; and if he will make a statement. [69249]

Malcolm Wicks: There will always be an element of complexity in the benefits system due to the diverse range of contingencies for which it must cater. However, we are overhauling service delivery to meet the different needs of the Department's client groups and investing in improved and modernised services that are more accurate, make better use of technology, and are simpler for people to understand and access.

For people of working age, we are delivering this through Jobcentre Plus, building on the success of the ONE pilots in bringing together employment and benefit services at a single point of contact. Some 50 pathfinder offices opened in October 2001, and Jobcentre Plus was launched as a national organisation at the beginning of April 2002. 56 integrated Jobcentre Plus offices are now open, and we aim to roll out a further 225 between October of this year and April 2003. The 2002 spending review further advances our reform and modernisation programme by announcing the roll-out of Jobcentre Plus nationally by 2006 to deliver an enhanced work-focused service for all people of working age.

Further steps to promote work include the introduction of the Working Tax Credit from April 2003 which extends support to low income workers without children. And the new Child Tax Credit, also from April 2003 will provide a single, seamless system of support for families.

The new Disability and Carer Directorate operates as a discrete business within the Department, responsible for the civil rights agenda for disabled people. Through the Disability and Carers Service, it also delivers Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Invalid Care Allowance and will, over time, streamline benefits delivery and improve customer service.

The Pension Service replaced the Benefits Agency services for pensioners from April 2002, and is working to introduce an improved service tailored to the needs of today's and future pensioners. For the first time, there is a service dedicated to the needs of pensioners and helping people understand their pension options and ways to save for their retirement. Pensioners can use The Pension Service as a gateway to other services such as Housing Benefit and Attendance Allowance.

The Pension Service will also deliver Pension Credit from October 2003. This replaces the Minimum Income Guarantee and represents a major simplification of provision for pensioners. For example, it does away with the rules excluding pensioners with savings of £12,000 or more from receiving help and, from age 65, most pensioners will not have to report changes in income for a fixed period of five years, effectively abolishing the weekly means test.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what notification his Department has provided to benefit recipients about the move to automated credit transfer from April 2003; and what role Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service will have in ensuring that all claimants are aware of the changes. [70021]

Malcolm Wicks: The department intends to conduct a customer information campaign, which will inform customers about the changes to the way we pay benefits and pensions. The campaign will begin in the run up to April 2003 when we will start to move customers to payment into bank or building society accounts so that customers have the information they need at the point of their transfer from payment by order book. The campaign will incorporate the Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he will take to co-ordinate activities between the Child Support Agency and the Benefits Agency to combat benefit fraud; and if he will assess the advantages of measures to deal with deliberate evasion of child support maintenance by absent parents. [69741]

Malcolm Wicks: Jobcentre Plus and the Child Support Agency (CSA) already work closely to identify and investigate benefit fraud.

In a Child Support case where either parent is in receipt of prescribed benefits and fraud is suspected or detected, the case is referred to Jobcentre Plus to investigate. All Departmental fraud investigations (including those carried out by the CSA) are to a common standard informed by a single Professional Standards Unit established in Jobcentre Plus. All fraud structures and processes are informed by the Fraud Head of Profession in Jobcentre Plus who has the function of integrating and co-ordinating good practice.

In January 2001 new criminal offences were introduced to the Child Support legislation. Parents who seek to avoid their child support responsibilities by lying to the Child Support Agency or refusing to provide information now face criminal proceedings. The legislation provides for a fine of up to £1000. The CSA has so far successfully prosecuted 5 non-resident parents under this legislation.

Legislation was also introduced in April 2001 to allow the courts to consider disqualifying a non-resident parent from holding or obtaining a driving licence as an alternative to a term of imprisonment for non-payment of maintenance. The courts decide which, if either, option to use. Since April 2001 the CSA has submitted 94 cases for committal. Of these, 44 non-resident parents began paying maintenance when they learned of the possible disqualification. The courts withdrew one driving licence and imposed a suspended disqualification in three other cases.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he intends to take following the second report by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate on the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit in Kirklees Metropolitan Council. [72979]

Malcolm Wicks: Using the powers available to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in Section 139D of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, my right hon. Friend is today giving Directions to Kirklees Metropolitan Council, following the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's second report on the Council's administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

We are disappointed that Kirklees Metropolitan Council has been the subject of two critical reports by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate before taking action to remedy their problems with benefit administration.

However, we are pleased that the Council is now starting to take its responsibilities seriously and that significant improvements are being made in benefit administration.

We hope the council will look upon the Directions as a further stimulus for continuing improvement.

A copy of the Directions has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the *(a)* total cost of benefit fraud investigations and *(b)* the net savings from benefit fraud investigations in each of the last five years. [71778]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* We set out our strategy for tackling fraud and error in the paper "A New Contract for Welfare: Safeguarding Social

Security" (CM4276) published on 23 March 1999. The overall aim of the strategy is to have a benefit system that is secure from first claim to first payment.

The implementation of this strategy means that an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments. It is therefore not possible to account for the cost of anti-fraud work separately.

The work of benefit fraud investigators has an important effect both through fraud detected and as a deterrent that prevents fraud happening in the first place. It is therefore not possible to provide an estimate of net savings from benefit fraud investigations. However, we know from our continuous measurement of the level of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance that by March 2001 we had achieved a reduction of 18 per cent.—almost twice the target of 10 per cent. for March 2002 and a year ahead of schedule.

The Spending Review announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July includes an increase in our existing target to reduce fraud and error in payments of income support and jobseeker's allowance. We are now committed to a 33 per cent. reduction in these payments by March 2004, as a milestone towards a 50 per cent. reduction by March 2006. And for the first time we have set a target for tackling fraud and error in housing benefit that aims for a 25 per cent. reduction by 2006.

Pension Rights

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to introduce primary legislation to protect the pension rights of British citizens who have worked in Australia. [69936]

Mr. McCartney: We will legislate at the earliest suitable opportunity to ensure that, for British citizens who went to live in Australia before the end of the reciprocal Social Security Agreement on 28 February 2001, any periods of residence in Australia from the start of the Agreement on 29 January 1958 up to and including 5 April 2001 will be used in the calculation of basic state pension if they return to live permanently in the United Kingdom.

Until we can introduce primary legislation, we will continue to make extra statutory payments to such people who return to the UK on a permanent basis, if they have less than the standard rate of basic pension.

ACT

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Government expects the installation of the hardware and software for the ACT system to commence; when the training for Post Office staff will commence; and when guidance for customers will be issued. [70189]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Plans are progressing to put all of the necessary changes in place from April 2003.

Training for Post Office staff is an operational matter for the Post Office, who say they are also on track for April 2003.

The Department is currently planning an information campaign to give customers the information they need about the move to paying directly into bank/building society accounts.

Pension Credit

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners in the Hastings and Rye constituency who will benefit from *(a)* the guaranteed credit and *(b)* the savings credit when the pension credit provisions take effect in April 2003. [70332]

Mr. McCartney: I regret that the information requested is not available. Pension Credit will be introduced in October 2003. The guarantee credit will ensure that no pensioner need live on less than £100 a week. The savings credit will ensure that even those with modest savings will see that it pays to have saved. On average pensioners who qualify for Pension Credit will be £400 a year better off.

Currently in the Hastings and Rye constituency there are around 3,600 pensioners receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee. Those in receipt in October 2003 will be automatically transferred onto Pension Credit which will subsume the Minimum Income Guarantee.

Notes:

1. Based on a 5 per cent. sample; therefore subject to sampling variation.
2. Figure has been rounded to the nearest 100.
3. Parliamentary Constituency has been allocated using the relevant ONS postcode directory.
4. Minimum Income Guarantee claimants are defined as Income Support benefit units where the claimant, and/or partner, is aged 60 and over.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, February 2002.

Age Discrimination

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the Government are doing to encourage private companies to combat age discrimination. [71360]

Mr. McCartney: The Government are determined to combat age discrimination in employment, and are actively doing so under the banner of our Age Positive campaign. We are working hard to encourage companies to use non-ageist employment practices, leading up to the implementation of age legislation in 2006.

In consultation with employers, we have produced the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment. The Code sets the standard for non-ageist employment practices. Evaluation of the impact of the code shows that the number of companies whose policies discriminate against older people has halved, from 14 per cent. to 7 per cent., since 1999.

Our Age Positive campaign is strongly promoting the business benefits of an age diverse work force to employers of all types. Small and medium sized companies are currently participating in our second series of 20 good-practice workshops. Age Positive awards recognise businesses that are tackling discrimination by means of non-ageist employment policies. Employers are supporting the campaign by sharing their experiences with others. These case studies are on the Age Positive website, together with the Code of Practice and other guidance. Last month we published the report 'Flexible Retirement—a snapshot of large employers' initiatives', which shows that an increasing number of companies are now adopting more flexible retirement policies.

Children (Low-income Families)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what baseline figure is to be used in assessing progress in meeting his target of reducing the number of children living in low-income households by at least a quarter by 2004. [71783]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The baseline used to measure this Public Service Agreement target is 1998–99 Households Below Average Income figures. This target is shared with HM Treasury. Full details of the target, its baseline and how it is measured are contained in a technical note which has been placed in the Library.

The latest available HBAI figures for 2000–01 show that there has been a fall of 0.3 million children on the after housing costs measure and 0.4 million children on the before housing costs measure. Therefore, after a third of the way through monitoring this PSA target we are a third of the way to meeting it.

Car Allowance

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what rate of car allowance is payable to a person attending a medical or appeal board; when the rate was set; how the rate is calculated; whether there are plans to raise it; and if he will make a statement. [72013]

Maria Eagle: For people attending a medical board, the standard rate of car allowance payable is 6.5 pence per mile, which is paid towards meeting the fuel costs of customers attending for a medical examination when public transport is not available.

The rate, which was chosen by the Department for Work and Pensions, reflected the rate in payment to its own staff, at the time it was set, where the only element of reimbursement was in respect of fuel. This decision was taken in the interests of safeguarding public resources and was intended to correct the wide variations in interpretation of previous instructions, so as to ensure that customers received the same rate of recompense regardless of where in the country they lived.

In order to continue improving the standard of information provided to its customers, SchlumbergerSema have revised the AL1C form that provides important information about the medical examination.

The AL1C form now states: 'if you do not travel by public transport we will make a 6.5 pence per mile contribution to fuel costs if you use a private motor vehicle'. This will enable the customer to be aware of exactly how much they will receive if they travel by car.

The rate of car allowance payable to people attending an appeal board is set by the Appeals Service, who pay 12 pence per mile and 2 pence per mile for each additional passenger. The rate was set on 1 January 2002. It is calculated by using the average petrol costs as researched by the Automobile Association. The rate is for actual fuel costs and does not cover running costs.

There are no immediate plans to raise the rates. However, a full review of departmental policy with regard to the reimbursement of travelling expenses to interviews, tribunals and examinations is being carried out, with the recommendations to be made later in the year.

Social Fund

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the *(a)* annual report on the social fund 2001–02 and *(b)* Social Fund Commissioner's annual report on the standard of social fund inspectors' decisions will be published. [72421]

Malcolm Wicks: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's annual report on the social fund for 2001–02 (CM 5492) was published today and has been laid before Parliament.

The report records that gross expenditure, excluding winter fuel payments, in 2001–02 was £761.8 million. Together with expenditure on winter fuel payments of around £1.7 billion, this resulted in total gross expenditure of almost £2.5 billion. The discretionary social fund helped more people than ever before with around 2.5 million awards made. This included more than 233,000 non-repayable grants and more than 2,231,000 interest-free loans together worth £646.9 million. 42,000 funeral and 1.8 million cold weather payments totalling £53.7 million were made. More than 11 million people aged 60 or over in eight million households benefited from a winter fuel payment. In addition, 201,000 sure start maternity grants worth £61.2 million were made.

The Social Fund Commissioner's report has also been published today and copies placed in the Library.

Pensions Policy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to change pensions policy. [72458]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 11 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 1054.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answers of 12 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 959W, 10 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 242W and 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 88W, on winter fuel payments, if he has concluded his discussions with the European Commission about the extent of the United Kingdom's legal obligations under European regulations on winter fuel payments; and if he will make a statement. [72604]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Wayne David) on 19 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 599W.

Annual Reports

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the 2000–01 annual reports and accounts for each of his agencies. [72980]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The 2001–02 annual reports and accounts for Benefits Agency (HC 929) and Employment Service (HC 955) which ceased to operate on the 31 March 2002 and those for The Appeals Service (HC1068) and Child Support Agency (HC 894) and have been laid before Parliament today.

Employer Direct

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employers have contacted Employer Direct since it was introduced; and what measures have been taken to ensure that this initiative meets the needs of employers. [61487]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive, Leigh Lewis. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Phil Sawford Esq MP, dated June 2002:

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of employers who have contacted Employer Direct since it was introduced and the measures that have been taken to ensure that this initiative meets the needs of employers. This falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Since the national implementation of Employer Direct on 26 January 2002 over 700,000 calls from employers have been received and nearly 600,000 vacancies notified.

During the development of Employer Direct there was wide ranging consultation with employers. This included the formation of a national group of employers in addition to discussion and liaison at local level.

In addition to taking employers' views in the development and roll out of Employer Direct we seek feedback from employers as a matter of course whenever they use the Employer Direct service.

I hope this is helpful.

Specialist Training

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance and specialist training is given to staff in benefits offices and jobcentres in dealing with people with learning difficulties; and if he will make a statement. [65785]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive, Leigh Lewis. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Benefit Information (Pilot Schemes)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what pilot schemes he will run to ensure that information and procedures given to benefit recipients will have been fully tested prior to the April 2003 deadline; and if he will make a statement. [70556]

Mr. McCartney: There will be a phased introduction of different benefit types and customer volumes. This is aimed at reducing risk and operational complexity during the early part of the conversion period and will also be a way to test conversion processes and the information to be given to customers to ensure that it meets their needs.

Benefits Data

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals' personal data have been processed in data matching exercises in connection with benefit fraud; how many cases were identified as part of that data matching exercise as being possible cases of benefit fraud requiring further investigation; how many cases after investigation were deemed likely to be fraudulent; how many cases were prosecuted; what the total costs were of all data matching exercises, including staff and computer costs; and what the estimated total savings to the public purse are and the multiplier used in this calculation. [59210]

Malcolm Wicks: Data-matching is a powerful tool in the detection of fraud and incorrectness in the benefit system. The Department's Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service (MIDAS) operates the Generalised Matching Service (GMS) for benefits administered by the Department, and the Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) for housing benefit and council tax benefit which are administered by local authorities.

The data-matching process involves data extracts being taken from the Department's main benefit computer systems and local authority benefit systems which are matched against each other using data matching "rules" to identify discrepancies between the data sets. Such discrepancies are then referred for local investigation. Legislation also provides for personal data held by other Government Departments to be matched against departmental and local authority data to identify discrepancies.

It is not possible to say how many individuals' personal data have been processed in data-matching exercises because each individual's details may be held on several systems at the same time.

Information on the overall cost of conducting data-matching exercises and investigating discrepancies is not available.

The available information on the results from GMS and HBMS data-matching operations is in the tables.

General Matching Service

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Referrals issued	62,937	85,071	137,307	139,292	217,039	234,671	167,950
Positive results[1]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	67,121	86,598	83,742
Successful prosecutions	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	63	844	952
Cautions and administrative penalties	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	288	2,417	2,497
Total overpayments[3] (£ million)	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	35.0	59.5	65.5
Total negative monetary value adjustment[4] (£ million)	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	1.9	2.5	3.0

Housing Benefit Matching Service[5]

	Up to 1998	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Referrals issued	25,940	49,084	65,143	86,006	78,144
Positive results[1]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	29,037	32,243
Successful prosecutions	[2]—	75	208	392	319
Total overpayments[3] (£ million)	3.4	10.6	18.6	37.2	36.8
Weekly benefit savings x 32 weeks (£ million)	4.3	12.9	17.8	22.2	21.8

[1] Cases where, following investigation, there was an increase or decrease in the rate of benefit because of fraud, customer error or official error.

[2] Information is not available.

[3] Arising from fraud, customer error or official error.

[4] Monetary Value Adjustment (MVA) is the difference between the weekly amount of benefit that would have been paid, or would have continued to be paid, and the benefit paid following the decision-maker's decision on the information gathered. MVA was introduced during the 1999–2000 financial year. Prior to the GMS recorded a Weekly Benefit Savings (WBS) figure that used a multiplier of 32 weeks. This method of recording savings was used by HBMS until 31 March 2002, after which it began to use MVA. Separate GMS figures for WBS and overpayments prior to 1999–2000 are not available.

[5] HBMS does not record sanctions information.

Source:

Matching Intelligence Detection Analysis Services management information.

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70537]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions was formed on 8 June 2001 from parts of the former Department of Social Security, parts of the former Department for Education and Employment and the Employment service,

The Department for Work and Pensions currently employs 21 full time press officers. No secondees have been placed in the press office.

Council Tax

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to analyse the potential effects of council tax revaluation on the levels of council tax benefit restriction; and if he will make a statement. [68906]

Malcolm Wicks: Council Tax revaluation will start in 2005 and Council Tax bills based on updated property values will be issued in 2007. Nearer the time, when the implications of Council Tax revaluation become clear, we will consider what impact this may have on Council Tax Benefit restrictions.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the annual saving has been to the Exchequer since the council tax benefit restriction scheme was introduced; [70033]

(2) what average cost was borne by each restricted household in *(a)* band F, *(b)* band G and *(c)* band H in (i) England and (ii) each Government office region, in the most recent year for which figures are available; [70026]

(3) how many council tax benefit cases there were in *(a)* band F, *(b)* band G and *(c)* band H in (i) England and (ii) each Government office region in the most recent year for which figures are available; [70027]

(4) how many and what percentage of council tax benefit claims restricted to band E are *(a)* owner occupied and *(b)* rented in (i) England and (ii) each Government office region; [70029]

(5) how many and what percentage of council tax benefit cases are *(a)* owner occupied and *(b)* rented in (i) England and (ii) each Government office region; [70028]

(6) how many and what percentage of council tax benefit claims were restricted to band E for *(a)* all properties, *(b)* RSLs and *(c)* local authority properties in (i) England and (ii) each Government office region in the most recent year for which figures are available; [70030]

(7) how many restricted council tax benefit cases there were in *(a)* band F, *(b)* band G and *(c)* band H for (i) England and (ii) each Government office region in the most recent year for which figures are available. [70025]

Malcolm Wicks: We do not believe it is right that people living in more expensive properties and who therefore have a higher council tax liability, should, as a matter of course, have all that liability met by taxpayers.

Since 2 July 2001, local authorities have been able to make discretionary housing payments to people entitled to housing benefit and council tax benefit who require additional help with their rent or council tax, including those people whose council tax benefit has been restricted. These payments are at the discretion of the local authority and subject to an annual cash limit. For 2002–03, the Government are contributing £20 million nationally towards the overall limit of £50 million which local authorities can spend.

Comparative data from which to calculate the actual reduction in spending since the restrictions were introduced in April 1998, are not available.

Such other information as is available has been placed in the Library.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact on the disabled of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [71015]

Maria Eagle: The Department has commissioned a number of research studies that examine how the Disability Discrimination Act is having an impact on disabled people. Some have yet to report but it is clear that the number of cases being taken under the DDA is increasing, demonstrating that disabled people are making use of their rights[1]. A body of case law is being developed, which will help disabled people to understand the practical application of the law to their own circumstances. There is also evidence that employers are changing their policies and practices with an increase in the number of employers with policies on the employment of disabled people since the Act's introduction in 1996[2].

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[1] Leverton, S. (2002) Monitoring the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Phase 2), DWP in-house report 91. This is a follow-up study to research commissioned by DfEE: Meager et al. (1999) Monitoring the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, DfEE Research Report RR119).

[2] Golstone, C. (2002) Barriers to Employment for Disabled People, DWP In-House Report 95.

Pensioners

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people reached state pension age in each of the last five years; and how many people are expected to do so in each of the next five years. [72417]

Mr. McCartney: The available information is set out in the table.

	Number of women aged 60 and the number of men aged 65
1997	540,000
1998	540,000
1999	540,000
2000	550,000
2001	530,000
2002	560,000
2003	590,000
2004	610,000
2005	600,000
2006	590,000
2007	710,000

Notes:

1. Information is taken from the Government Actuary's Department population statistics.
2. The figures are based on people reaching age 60–65 in a particular year.
3. The total number of people is rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Pensions Advice

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research has been undertaken into the preferred methods by pensioners of accessing pensions advice; and if he will make a statement. [72188]

Mr. McCartney: A number of research projects have been undertaken by the Department and other organisations looking at pensioners' preferred methods of obtaining advice and of claiming pensions and benefits. The research published by the Department is listed below and copies of the reports are available in the Library.

In 2001 the Department commissioned BMRB International to carry out a large scale survey of peoples' attitudes to electronic methods of conducting benefits business. The survey topics include pensioners' current and preferred methods of applying for benefits and pensions. Findings from the research will be published in the autumn.

Bunt K., Adams L. and Vivian D. (2000) Evaluation of the Pension Power For You Helpline, DSS Research report No. 121, CDS, Leeds

Bunt K., Adams L. and Vivian D. (2000) The Pension Power For You Helpline: Final report, DSS In-house report No.70

Chang, D., Spicer, N., Irving, A., Sparham, I. and Neeve, L. (2001), The Better Government For Older People Prototypes, DSS Research report No. 136, CDS, Leeds

Rose, T. (1999) Modernising Service Delivery: The Integrated Services Prototype. DSS Research report 104, Corporate Document Services, Leeds

Stafford, B., Kellard, K. and Horsley, E. (1997) Customer Contact with the Benefits Agency DSS Research report 65, Corporate Document Services, Leeds.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68723]

Mr. McCartney: All overseas travel by officials in the Department is undertaken in accordance with the principles set out in chapter 8 of the Civil Service Management Code, and the detailed rules and guidance set out in the Departmental Business Travel and Relocation Expenses Guide. The detailed information requested about individual trips is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision is planned for HIV-positive mothers in the new asylum seekers accommodation centres. [70561]

Beverley Hughes: HIV positive mothers in accommodation centres will be advised not to breast-feed. We will ensure that safe alternatives to breast milk are available for HIV-infected mothers with young babies, and that these can be accessed in a way that preserves their privacy.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the employment concession for asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [72779]

Beverley Hughes: The asylum system is working increasingly quickly, through reforms and increased resources. Measures in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill will continue this process. This means that the employment concession, whereby asylum seekers could apply for permission to work if their application remained outstanding for longer than six months without a decision being made, is becoming increasingly irrelevant. The vast majority—around 80 per cent. of asylum seekers—receive a decision within six months, and work is continuing to improve that further. An increasingly small number of people, therefore, are entitled to apply for the concession. It is also the case that the great majority of new asylum applicants will have their cases decided within two months and the concession, which dates from a time when lengthy delays were widespread in the asylum system, is therefore no longer appropriate.

I am determined to make it clear that there is a distinct separation between asylum processes and labour migration channels. It is essential that we have a robust asylum process that works effectively and swiftly in the interests of refugees, and also is not open to abuse by those who would seek to come here to work. But that does not mean we are 'fortress Britain'. The Government are putting in place an effective managed migration programme and continues to create a number of work routes to allow more people to come and work here legally in ways which boost our economy. For example, the Government have overhauled the work permits system and the number of work permits issued has doubled over the past two years—in 2001 we issued work permits to nearly 140,000 people. Other entry routes for people who want to work in the United Kingdom include the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme, the Working Holidaymakers Scheme (under which nearly 40,000 Commonwealth young people a year come to the United Kingdom for a working holiday) and the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (which brings in nearly 20,000 seasonal workers a year). In addition, the Government are currently consulting on schemes to bring in more temporary workers in industries with recruitment difficulties.

Those who are granted refugee status can work immediately, and we welcome the enormous contribution that the skills and knowledge of refugees can make to our society and to our economy. However, our asylum system exists to help those fleeing persecution—those who want to come here to work must do so through the various economic routes available rather than abuse the asylum system.

I have therefore decided, with immediate effect, that the concession should be abolished. Asylum seekers who already have permission to work will retain that right until such time as a final decision is made on their claim. Asylum seekers who, prior to this announcement, had sought permission to work but have not had a response, will have their requests considered in line with our previous policy. I will retain a discretion to grant permission to work for asylum seekers in exceptional cases.

It is absolutely vital, of course, that all asylum seekers use their time constructively while their case is considered. Therefore, I have also decided to review our current rules governing the voluntary work which asylum seekers can undertake, in order to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to participation.

To demonstrate our on-going commitment to purposeful activity for asylum seekers, we have also awarded over £900,000 to 135 projects across the United Kingdom for summer programmes to give them the opportunity to get involved in voluntary activities in the community, or partake in sports-orientated and educational events.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives his officials as to the acceptable time within which a decision is notified to asylum seekers after interview. [70383]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 July 2002]*: The Government's target in 2002–03 is for officials in the Integrated Casework Directorate of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to make and serve decisions within two months from the date of application in 65 per cent. of new substantive asylum claims. Against that target the aim is to notify decisions as soon after interview as full consideration of the individual merits of each case can take place.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the length of time set by him an applicant for indefinite leave to remain in the UK should normally be required to wait for their application to be considered; and what information about the progress of the application is provided to the applicant during this period. [70142]

Beverley Hughes: We aim to decide straightforward general immigration applications, which can include those for indefinite leave to remain, on initial consideration within three weeks. At present such applicants are taking on average around four weeks to decide but we are working to reduce this to three weeks as soon as possible. Some applications that need more detailed consideration of further inquiries are, at present, taking up to 12 months to consider due to the large number of cases currently in the system.

All applications are acknowledged within two weeks of receipt which includes advice as to the likely time scale for initial consideration. If the application cannot be completed on initial consideration a further letter is sent advising the likely time scale for considering such cases.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the maternity grant is available to asylum seekers who are mothers living in emergency accommodation. [70562]

Beverley Hughes: Asylum seekers in emergency accommodation are provided with temporary support under section 98 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (the 1999 Act). Asylum seeking mothers in emergency accommodation are not eligible to receive a maternity grant because this is available only to asylum seekers assessed as eligible to receive support and in receipt of support under section 95 of the 1999 Act. Asylum seekers in emergency accommodation who give birth to a baby are provided with a pack of items to enable them to meet the needs of their baby.

Asylum Removals Centres

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are included which take into account the proximity of schools, housing estates, industrial and regeneration sites in respect of asylum removals centres. [70945]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* When examining individual sites differing criteria are used, dependant upon our requirements. These will be specific to a particular site or project.

National Asylum Support Service

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 329W, on the National Asylum Support Service, what the average time taken by NASS to respond to correspondence from *(a)* supported asylum seekers and *(b)* their representatives is. [56636]

Beverley Hughes: The Operations Section of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is responsible for determining applications for support and answering correspondence about the support offered. All correspondence received within the Operations Section of NASS—currently in excess of 4,000 pieces per week—is subject to a target for completion. Targets are applied across the board—there is no distinction between correspondence received from an asylum seeker or a third party.

Targets for response depend on the nature of the correspondence. Correspondence which can be fast tracked will receive meaningful action within three working days. Correspondence raising complex issues will receive meaningful action within 10 working days. For example, an application for a single additional payment will be assessed within three working days of receipt and the applicant is notified of the outcome at this stage. Any payment approved will be included in the support applicant's regular payment within three weeks of the application being made.

All targets are monitored to ensure compliance and any backlog is addressed to avoid unnecessary delay.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received the annual report for 2001–02 of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's independent Complaints Audit Committee; and if he will make a statement. [72982]

Beverley Hughes: A copy of the report has been placed in the Library and will be placed on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website. It is a useful and informative document, and I am grateful to the Committee for its comments and its recommendations. I am currently considering how best to implement the recommendations.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the programme of training, exchanges and co-operation in the field of asylum, immigration and crossing of external borders (Odysseus) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58454]

Beverley Hughes: The Odysseus Committee assisted the European Commission in the management and implementation of a programme to co-fund projects to promote co-operation in matters of asylum, immigration, the crossing of external borders and the security of identity documents. The programme expired on 31 March 2002.

The Odysseus Committee met once a year to discuss the proposed bids for funding and agree the allocation of funds to successful projects. One of the first projects to receive such funding was a seminar held at the Civil Service College in Sunningdale in 1998 on combating illegal immigration.

The United Kingdom was represented on the Committee by a Home Office official and an official from the United Kingdom Permanent Representation in Brussels.

The Odysseus programme was funded by the European Community budget and travel costs to attend Committee meetings were met by the European Commission. However, the Home Office paid a subsistence allowance to cover attendance at a Committee meeting.

The European Commission was required to prepare an annual report on the implementation of the Odysseus programme and is currently preparing the report for its final year. This will be sent to the European Parliament and Council, and will be published on the EUROPA internet website. I did not see a need for further measures to increase the Committee's accountability and transparency during its lifetime.

The Odysseus programme is to be replaced by a new funding programme for co-operation in the fields of external borders, visas, asylum and immigration to be known as ARGO.

Deportees

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in jails in the UK have been deported to the US to face charges that could result in the death penalty in that country in each of the last five years. [71327]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: None. Our policy is in accordance with the Sixth Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, and with the provisions of the Extradition Act 1989. We do not extradite any persons to a jurisdiction where the offence for which they could be tried, or for which they have been tried, carries the death penalty, unless sufficient assurances are provided by the requesting state that the death penalty will not be imposed, or if imposed, will not be carried out.

Accommodation Centres

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the per capita cost of education provision in accommodation centres. [71326]

Beverley Hughes*[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* We are in the process of running a competition for the delivery of accommodation centres. Information about costs is commercially confidential.

Police

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of service was for a *(a)* policewoman and *(b)* policeman in England and Wales in the latest year for which figures are available. [50682]

Mr. Denham: The latest figures available are for March 2000 and they are set out in the table.

The lower average length of service for women officers in part reflects the increase in recent years in the number and proportion of women in the police service from 14,496 female officers (11.6 per cent. of strength) in 1990 to 21,800 (17.4 per cent. of strength) by September 2001.

However, the rate of voluntary resignation by women is higher than the rate for men and this also contributes to the shorter average length of service.

As part of the Dismantling Barriers initiative, we have asked forces to carry out externally audited exit interviews with departing staff to build a picture of why those leaving have decided to do so, and identify where changes might help retain staff.

We are liaising with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Work/Life Balance Team to determine how the Home Office can assist forces in using flexible working.

A research project into the retention of policy officers is under way, to inform the development of effective and practical approaches by forces to improve the retention of police officers. The focus of the research is on those forces identified as having high or increasing levels of resignations and among those groups of officers (including women officers) that have disproportionately high levels of resignations.

Mean average length of service in years for female and male police officers March 2000[1,2]

	Mean
Female officers (0–30 years' service only[3])	9.7
All female officers (includes over 30 years' service[3])	9.7

Mean average length of service in years for female and male police officers March 2000[1,2]

	Mean
Male officers (0–30 years' service only[3])	14.6
All male officers (includes over 30 years' service[3])	15.0

[1] Source—Dismantling Barriers monitoring return March 2002.

[2] Individual officers' length of service is not available centrally. These figures are calculated from aggregate returns showing the total number of officers in each year of service and are therefore approximate.

[3] Two figures are shown. The standard period of service 30 years, although some officers elect to serve beyond this, with the agreement of their chief constable. The first figure is therefore the average for officers who have 0–30 years' service. The second figure includes officers who have over 30 years' service. There are very few female officers with over 30 years' service, so the average length of service does not increase if they are included, where it does for male officers.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contingency plans he has in place should the police work to rule, ban overtime or strike. [38817]

Mr. Denham: Police officers do not have the right to strike. Under section 91 of the Police Act 1996, it is a criminal offence for anyone to cause disaffection among police officers or to induce any police officer to withhold his services. Police officers are under a duty to carry out all lawful orders, so would have to work overtime if required to do so.

On 9 May, we reached agreement in the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) on a package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service. PNB is the statutory negotiating body for police pay and conditions of service, on which all the main police organisations are represented, including the Police Federation, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities. The PNB was, in part, set up to compensate for police officers not having the right to strike. Due process was followed throughout the negotiations leading up to the Agreement on 9 May.

Police Retention

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 299W, on police retention, what proportion of police officers retired from each force in each year since 1997 *(a)* on medical grounds *(b)* at normal retirement age and *(c)* on other grounds; and what the net change was as a proportion of each force in each year since 1997. [38032]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The figures given in the answer of 12 February 2001, were those collected by the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) and published as Police Personnel Statistics. For the purpose of these statistics, wastage is collected on a headcount basis (ie the number of persons) in the following categories: retirements, resignations and other. The statistics do not distinguish between medical and other retirements.

In addition to the information collected by RDS, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) collects information annually about wastage from the police service broken down into the following categories:

Dismissals from force (including requirements to resign)

Voluntary resignations

Medical retirements

Ordinary retirements

Transfers from force

Deaths.

Forces are asked to provide these figures on a full-time equivalent basis, not on a headcount basis. HMIC's information has been used to provide the figures in a table for the numbers and proportion of medical and ordinary retirements and other leavers (excluding transfers), a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. Information for 2001–02 will not be available until later in the year.

As the statistics collected by HMIC are gathered on a different basis from those collected twice a year by RDS, information from the two sources cannot be reconciled directly. We are aware of the inconsistent basis between the two sets of figures and established a task force to consider these issues. The task force report was issued for consultation on 18 December 2001. The report of the task force proposes a comprehensive revision to the current requirements on police personnel statistics. Following consultation with the police service we will implement the necessary changes from September 2002.

Police Firearms

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the most recent statistics are for the police use of firearms. [72974]

Mr. Denham: The statistics for April 2000 to March 2001 show that the number of police operations in which firearms were issued was 11,109. The number of occasions on which firearms were discharged by police increased to nine.

There was a small decrease in the number of operations in which armed response vehicles were deployed.

Full details are set out in the tables:

Number of operations in which firearms were authorised

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	139	88	90	65
Bedfordshire	323	260	190	294
Cambridgeshire	96	43	75	71
Cheshire	216	29	386	545
Cleveland	103	35	76	28
City of London	307	147	125	3
Cumbria	68	52	24	30
Derbyshire	147	176	178	167
Devon and Cornwall	133	61	65	151
Dorset	54	69	79	174
Durham	103	114	114	40
Essex	505	590	497	435
Gloucestershire	51	52	52	48
Greater Manchester	165	160	224	357
Hampshire	217	129	103	114
Hertfordshire	82	75	73	86
Humberside	472	317	193	158
Kent	423	92	85	83
Lancashire	338	616	267	242
Leicestershire	89	109	222	217
Lincolnshire	52	57	155	336
Merseyside	675	484	489	825
Metropolitan	2,578	2,742	2,862	1,862
Norfolk	128	185	239	226
Northamptonshire	77	51	57	58
Northumbria	823	683	465	708
North Yorkshire	102	69	61	72
Nottinghamshire	306	266	255	233
South Yorkshire	302	135	237	127
Staffordshire	240	209	174	203
Suffolk	193	174	165	176
Surrey	87	60	143	221
Sussex	330	123	185	353
Thames Valley	227	158	110	153
Warwickshire	152	291	194	233
West Mercia	132	130	110	36
West Midlands	227	305	362	485
West Yorkshire	630	662	813	822
Wiltshire	26	24	19	66
Dyfed Powys	27	38	37	18
Gwent	86	64	39	30
North Wales	310	386	371	195
South Wales	101	148	255	363
Total	11,842	10,928	10,915	11,109

Number of authorised firearms officers (AFOs)

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	161	153	150	135
Bedfordshire	42	50	46	45
Cambridgeshire	80	80	77	73
Cheshire	82	70	75	74
Cleveland	84	78	80	75
City of London	81	55	73	74
Cumbria	122	98	98	94
Derbyshire	100	87	77	81
Devon and Cornwall	147	82	119	100
Dorset	72	72	66	67
Durham	144	96	101	101
Essex	217	235	228	195
Gloucestershire	84	79	77	72
Greater Manchester	182	217	218	240
Hampshire	112	110	111	100
Hertfordshire	41	43	52	44
Humberside	102	102	97	102
Kent	150	130	136	136
Lancashire	125	132	143	132
Leicestershire	94	90	90	85
Lincolnshire	85	75	78	80
Merseyside	165	121	96	103
Metropolitan	1,971	1,951	1,977	1,940
Norfolk	102	109	110	114
Northamptonshire	92	92	75	77
Northumbria	126	123	114	109
North Yorkshire	95	83	59	66
Nottinghamshire	129	120	116	137
South Yorkshire	108	90	100	98
Staffordshire	86	92	81	67
Suffolk	96	101	98	90
Surrey	61	69	71	72
Sussex	146	156	131	118
Thames Valley	194	179	187	185
Warwickshire	38	44	54	45
West Mercia	159	139	129	130
West Midlands	95	92	93	83
West Yorkshire	114	128	110	117
Wiltshire	105	88	89	71
Dyfed Powys	71	67	65	61
Gwent	59	64	68	66
North Wales	90	97	92	67
South Wales	176	169	155	143
Total	6,585	6,308	6,262	6,064

Number of operations involving armed response vehicles (ARVs)

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	121	83	78	56
Bedfordshire	285	240	172	253
Cambridgeshire	19	27	54	36
Cheshire	166	247	330	441
Cleveland	[1]57	29	25	16
City of London	34	32	24	30
Cumbria	43	38	21	27
Derbyshire	99	153	167	152
Devon and Cornwall	58	43	52	121
Dorset	50	66	69	155
Durham	85	84	67	31
Essex	180	285	244	206
Gloucestershire	48	49	44	39
Greater Manchester	56	43	173	302
Hampshire	170	114	90	84
Hertfordshire	25	26	44	65
Humberside	437	277	181	136
Kent	212	74	58	64
Lancashire	321	[1]596	250	177
Leicestershire	68	109	144	195
Lincolnshire	34	42	141	324
Merseyside	559	396	466	75
Metropolitan	954	1,573	1,812	1,380
Norfolk	117	167	210	192
Northamptonshire	29	32	21	35
Northumbria	515	503	397	655
North Yorkshire	52	30	40	54
Nottinghamshire	[1]256	246	232	207
South Yorkshire	252	115	214	103
Staffordshire	206	185	131	136
Suffolk	135	104	101	103
Surrey	76	46	110	192
Sussex	284	[1]0	172	245
Thames Valley	184	139	108	108
Warwickshire	127	220	158	194
West Mercia	98	99	98	26
West Midlands	102	129	138	243
West Yorkshire	586	630	787	785
Wiltshire	21	17	15	48
Dyfed Powys	19	30	37	18
Gwent	47	39	27	17
North Wales	260	298	354	155
South Wales	97	136	220	298
Total	7,544	7,791	8,276	8,179

[1] These forces have changed the counting method for incidents to which ARVs are deployed.

Police Vacancies

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which 10 police authorities have *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest number of vacancies for police officers; and how many officers were involved in each case. [36912]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many, and what proportion, of employees of the Metropolitan Police were off sick on average on each day in the last month for which figures are available; how many and what proportion of those *(a)* were absent on self-certification or without authorisation, *(b)* were on sick leave of less than a week, *(c)* were on sick leave of more than one week and less than one month, *(d)* were on sick leave of more than one month and *(e)* were on leave as a result of injuries sustained while on duty. [41102]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* I understand from the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police that the available figures for April 2002 are as follows:

	Police officers	*Percentage of all police officers*	*Civilian support staff and traffic wardens*	*Percentage of all civilian support staff etc.*	*All staff*	*Percentage of all staff*
Average daily number of working days lost to sickness absence	710.5	2.7	328.4	2.9	1038.9	2.7
Number of staff who took self-certificated sick leave	1,827	6.9	128.5	11.5	3,112	8.2
Number of staff on sick leave for less than seven days	1,872	7.0	1,488	13.3	3,360	8.9
Number of employees on sick leave for seven or more days	974	3.7	429	3.8	1,403	3.7
Number of employees on sick leave as a result of injury on duty	273	1.0	22	0.2	295	0.8

Police Officers

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of police officers accepted into the Metropolitan Police in each year from 1997 have minor criminal records. [30452]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* I am informed by the Commissioner that no central record of this information is held by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).

The MPS follow the Home Office National Recruitment Standards on criminal convictions, agreed with the Police Service and issued in October 2001.

Applicants who have been convicted or cautioned may still be eligible for appointment, depending on the nature and circumstances of their offence.

Minor offences which would not lead to automatic rejection of an application include, for example failing to have a current television licence or MoT certificate.

West Midlands Police

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the prospects of West Midlands police receiving regional allowance; [39491]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent in the last five years to which police forces have trained police officers and then have lost them by transfer to neighbouring police forces, with particular reference to the West Midlands; and if he will make a statement on measures to prevent this happening. [39482]

Mr. Denham: Figures for the number of officers leaving police forces on transfer are collected annually by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC). In 2000–01, the latest full year for which figures are available, the total number of officers leaving forces in England and Wales on transfer was 1,189 or one per cent. of the police strength.

The figures collected by HMIC do not distinguish between officers who transfer soon after completion of initial training and those who transfer later in their career. Nor do the figures identify how many of the officers transferring have transferred between forces on previous occasions.

In the case of West Midlands police, that between April 2000 and March 2001, 59 officers left the force on transfer. This represented 0.8 per cent. in fall of force strength at the start of the year, a little below the overall rate from England and Wales.

The number of officers transferring between forces remains small. It is healthy for there to be an interchange of experience between police forces and I do not intend to prevent transfers.

Of course, the number of transfers from a force may present a problem if those transferring leave predominantly from particular areas or specialisms, or if the number leaving is not offset by transfers in. We are presently conducting research into the reasons why officers resign from the police service or choose to transfer from one force to another. The findings of this research will help forces decide on which measures to implement in order to encourage officers to stay in the service, or in a particular force.

It is for the Home Secretary to determine police pay and allowances. In doing so, he is required to take into account any recommendation by the Police Negotiating Board (PNB). It would, therefore, be for PNB to consider in the first instance the case for a regional allowance for officers in the West Midlands. In 2001, the PNB failed to reach agreement on a Staff Side claim for a regional allowance for all police forces. The matter was then referred to the Police Arbitration Tribunal (PAT). The PAT rejected the Staff Side claim and decided that there was no evidence of a significant nationwide recruitment problem for the police service.

	Strength as at 31 March			
Force	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Avon and Somerset	2,989	2,976	2,999	2,934
Bedfordshire	1,094	1,079	1,041	1,028
Cambridgeshire	1,302	1,291	1,274	1,237
Cheshire	2,046	2,042	2,071	2,011
City of London	859	825	778	732
Cleveland	1,459	1,483	1,416	1,404
Cumbria	1,144	1,164	1,126	1,084
Derbyshire	1,791	1,772	1,759	1,777
Devon and Cornwall	2,865	2,962	2,887	2,841
Dorset	1,284	1,310	1,279	1,306
Durham	1,461	1,515	1,568	1,558
Dyfed-Powys	1,005	1,002	1,026	1,040
Essex	2,961	2,928	2,891	2,806
Gloucestershire	1,133	1,104	1,104	1,114
Greater Manchester	6,922	6,949	6,810	6,795
Gwent	1,243	1,233	1,247	1,264
Hampshire	3,452	3,490	3,473	3,419
Hertfordshire	1,759	1,740	1,724	1,767
Humberside	2,045	2,021	1,974	1,932
Kent	3,260	3,251	3,201	3,204
Lancashire	3,247	3,257	3,245	3,179
Leicestershire	1,949	1,983	1,993	1,993
Lincolnshire	1,196	1,191	1,140	1,115
Merseyside	4,230	4,216	4,211	4,085
Metropolitan police	26,677	26,094	26,073	25,485
Norfolk	1,432	1,430	1,381	1,381
North Wales	1,369	1,396	1,391	1,403
North Yorkshire	1,338	1,367	1,337	1,283
Northamptonshire	1,177	1,169	1,137	1,117
Northumbria	3,677	3,769	3,840	3,788
Nottinghamshire	2,323	2,323	2,225	2,204
South Wales	2,976	2,986	2,981	2,926
South Yorkshire	3,159	3,182	3,168	3,163
Staffordshire	2,211	2,292	2,238	2,170
Suffolk	1,180	1,186	1,190	1,146
Surrey	1,620	1,608	1,662	1,785
Sussex	3,085	3,038	2,847	2,822
Thames Valley	3,695	3,776	3,748	3,740
Warwickshire	926	924	908	900
West Mercia	2,040	2,010	2,025	1,887
West Midlands	7,113	7,156	7,321	7,195
West Yorkshire	5,209	5,155	4,982	4,822
Wiltshire	1,154	1,156	1,151	1,118
Total	125,051	124,756	123,841	121,956

	Transfers			
Force	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	6	5	16	25
Bedfordshire	7	1	5	21
Cambridgeshire	9	3	6	12
Cheshire	8	5	4	6
City of London	19	13	13	18
Cleveland	6	6	1	4
Cumbria	3	4	6	10
Derbyshire	4	0	6	5
Devon and Cornwall	6	8	8	7
Dorset	2	0	3	9
Durham	8	3	3	5
Dyfed-Powys	10	2	5	9
Essex	10	6	10	25
Gloucestershire	3	1	3	6
Greater Manchester	26	13	15	28
Gwent	6	3	3	5
Hampshire	13	12	20	24
Hertfordshire	16	23	23	43
Humberside	8	5	5	18
Kent	17	11	12	26
Lancashire	4	10	7	7
Leicestershire	9	6	13	27
Lincolnshire	7	1	5	6
Merseyside	17	16	10	14
Metropolitan police	240	234	244	382
Norfolk	5	5	2	6
North Wales	0	5	5	2
North Yorkshire	5	5	5	5
Northamptonshire	14	3	2	10
Northumbria	13	7	9	5
Nottinghamshire	11	13	10	6
South Wales	1	6	11	3
South Yorkshire	12	10	8	4
Staffordshire	13	5	2	9
Suffolk	1	5	5	11
Surrey	32	11	18	171
Sussex	14	13	21	31
Thames Valley	28	10	26	80
Warwickshire	6	7	2	8
West Mercia	6	5	6	6
West Midlands	43	47	42	59
West Yorkshire	14	11	15	19
Wiltshire	9	1	7	12
Total	691	560	642	1,189

Force	Percentage of loss 1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Avon and Somerset	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.9
Bedfordshire	0.6	0.1	0.5	2.0
Cambridgeshire	0.7	0.2	0.5	1.0
Cheshire	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.3
City of London	2.2	1.6	1.7	2.5
Cleveland	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.3
Cumbria	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.9
Derbyshire	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.3
Devon and Cornwall	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2
Dorset	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.7
Durham	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.3
Dyfed-Powys	1.0	0.2	0.5	0.9
Essex	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.9
Gloucestershire	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.5
Greater Manchester	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.4
Gwent	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.4
Hampshire	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.7
Hertfordshire	0.9	1.3	1.3	2.4
Humberside	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.9
Kent	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.8
Lancashire	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2
Leicestershire	0.5	0.3	0.7	1.4
Lincolnshire	0.6	0.1	0.4	0.5
Merseyside	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.3
Metropolitan police	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.5
Norfolk	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.4
North Wales	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.1
North Yorkshire	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Northamptonshire	1.2	0.3	0.2	0.9
Northumbria	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.1
Nottinghamshire	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.3
South Wales	0.0	0.2	0.4	0.1
South Yorkshire	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.1
Staffordshire	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.4
Suffolk	0.1	0.4	0.4	1.0
Surrey	2.0	0.7	1.1	9.6
Sussex	0.5	0.4	0.7	1.1
Thames Valley	0.8	0.3	0.7	2.1
Warwickshire	0.6	0.8	0.2	0.9
West Mercia	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3
West Midlands	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.8
West Yorkshire	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.4
Wiltshire	0.8	0.1	0.6	1.1
Total	0.6	0.4	0.5	1.0

Police Sick Leave

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many days of sick leave were taken by the *(a)* police force, *(b)* fire service and *(c)* prison service in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was. [56065]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The number of days taken as sick leave in 2000–01 and the estimated costs are set out in the table:

	Number of days sick leave taken	*Estimated cost £ million*
Police officers	1,516,147	[1]280
Police support staff	746,928	[2]106
Total	2,263,075	386
Fire service[3]	[4]407,369	[5]—
Prison service	614,150	[6]68

[1] The average daily cost of a police officer is £185.

[2] The average daily cost of a member of support staff is £142.

[3] Responsibility for the fire service rests with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

[4] This is based on 45 out of the 50 brigades providing full information.

[5] Not available.

[6] The prison service figure is calculating using a daily costing of £110 for all staff.

Investigatory Branch CIB3

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received regarding the progress of the investigatory branch CIB3 in investigating alleged misdemeanours. [69332]

Mr. Denham: I received representations on alleged malpractice in corruption investigations by the Anti-Corruption Unit of the Metropolitan Police Service's Directorate of Professional Standards (formerly CIB3) from my noble Friend (Lord Graham) of Edmonton, five hon. Members and a solicitor at a meeting on 20 March 2002. I received a dossier of written material from my noble Friend Lord Graham on 30 April. I have also received nine other pieces of correspondence on related issues.

We have received no other representations this year.

Deaths in Custody

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he is taking to reduce the number of deaths in police custody; [70830]

(2) what assessment he has made of the causes of the change in the annual number of deaths in police custody since 1992. [70952]

Mr. Denham: The number of people dying in police stations has fallen from 16 to five in the period 1998–99 to 2000–01. Provisional figures for 2001–02 show that the decline is continuing.

The definitions of deaths in police custody or otherwise with the police were revised in 1996 to make them clearer, and to distinguish between deaths of those in police detention and other deaths involving the police. This resulted in a broader range of deaths being reported, for example people who died while attempting to evade arrest in vehicles. This has resulted in an increase in the published figures.

The increased figure for 1995–96 reflected the change to collecting the figures on a financial year basis rather than on a calendar year basis and were collected over a 15 month period (1 January 1995 to 31 March 1996).

Much has been done in recent years by the police, the Home Office and the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) to identify the main factors responsible for deaths in custody and to consider how the position can be improved. Police forces in England and Wales are taking a range of actions to reduce such deaths. These include safer custody facilities, improved training, Close Circuit Television (CCTV) monitoring and an emphasis on better care, assessment and monitoring of detainees.

Special Constables

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about establishment, recruitment and retention in the special constabulary. [65610]

Mr. Denham: Special constables are a key element of our police reform agenda. We are working on a package of measures designed to help improve the way they are recruited, managed and deployed.

We are particularly keen to improve liaison with employers. Later this year, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Home Secretary will publish a joint discussion paper on fiscal and other changes we can make to promote community service, including service as a special constable. A new headline role for specials has been published, focusing on intelligence-led patrolling and crime reduction initiatives. A new foundation training package for specials was issued in June and revised conditions of service regulations and new conduct regulations are being prepared.

Central to this process will be Home Office/the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) good practice guidance covering all aspects of the recruitment, management and deployment of specials, which will be issued by the end of the year. We have also set aside £300,000 to help "specials champions" forces drive forward initiatives to improve the recruitment and retention of specials. I have asked deputy chief constable Peter Fahy of Surrey police to help with this.

Bilateral Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Ministers in his Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; when and where each meeting took place; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [63089]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain) on 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 533W.

Ring-fenced Funds

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funds allocated by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its executive agencies are ring-fenced for specific purposes; and if he will list the allocations of funds involved. [22952]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* I regret the delay in responding to this question. Ring-fenced expenditure for the Home Office and Prison Service Agency for financial year 2001–02 is detailed in the table:

£000

	2001–02
Home Office	
Crime Fighting Fund	159,000
Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF)	207,900
Invest to Save	30,897
Drugs	88,218
Non CMF DNA	46,000
Crime Research Programme	110,900
Confiscated Assets Fund	6,000
Criminal Justice System	100,000
Active Communities Project	10,900
Central Service Modernisation	2,025
Youth Justice Board Operating Costs	10,386
Youth Justice Board bail support	10,000
Police Loan Charges grants	14,200
Probation Loan Charges grants	2,597
Superannuation of seconded police	1,081
Total	800,104
Prison Service Agency	
Capital Modernisation Fund	35,470
Invest to Save	1,340
Invest to Modernise	2,740
Drugs programmes	51,950
Total	91,500

Conviction Rate

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes resulted in a conviction as a proportion of total recorded crime in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [55855]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is contained in the table.

Number of convictions for notifiable offences as a percentage of recorded crime, 1998–99 to 2000–01

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Recorded crime	5,109,116	5,301,171	5,170,196
Convictions for notifiable offences	755,705	756,629	705,450
Convictions as a percentage of recorded crime	14.8	14.3	13.6

Notes:

1. A crime may involve more than one offender.
2. Each notifiable offence for which an individual was convicted is counted.
3. Some convictions will relate to crimes recorded in earlier years.

Sources:

Recorded Crime Statistical Bulletin, Home Office, 12/01

Home Office Court Proceedings Database

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether businesses that have lost money as a direct result of the failure of the Criminal Records Bureau to meet its published service standards will be entitled to compensation. [70238]

Hilary Benn: Part V of the Police Act 1997 imposes no time frame for the issue of disclosures and the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) has no liability in contract or tort for taking time to process applications. The CRB has sought advice about the circumstances in which it is suitable to consider paying, or declining to pay, WW compensation.

Air Weapons

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there were for *(a)* carrying a loaded air weapon in a public place, *(b)* a person under 14 having an air weapon, *(c)* a person under 17 having an air weapon in a public place and *(d)* the sale of air weapons to minors in the last five years. [67831]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information requested is contained in the table.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Persons found guilty at all courts for various offences under the Firearms Act 1968, England and Wales 1996 to 2000[1,2]

Offence description	*Statute*	*Year*	*Found guilty*
Carrying a loaded air weapon in a public place, etc.	Firearms Act 1968, Sec 19	1996	202
		1997	220
		1998	195
		1999	176
		2000	170
Person under 14 having with him an air weapon or ammunition therefor	Firearms Act 1968, Sec 22 (4)	1996	12
		1997	8
		1998	6
		1999	12
		2000	16
Person under 17 having with him an air weapon in a public place	Firearms Act 1968, Sec 22 (5)	1996	43
		1997	51
		1998	47
		1999	54
		2000	52
Selling or letting on hire an air weapon or ammunition to a person under 17	Firearms Act 1968, Sec 24 (1)	1996	2
		1997	1
		1998	3
		1999	1
		2000	—

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire police were able to submit sample data only for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts in the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much has been spent by his Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years; [52734]

(2) how much has been spent by his Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years; [52755]

(3) how much has been spent by his Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52715]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* There are no central data available on how much has been spent by the Home Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers in the last five years.

In the financial year 2001–02, the Cabinet Office provided funds for leadership development for officials as part of the invest to modernise programme. Records available show that £583,967 was spent by the Home Department on training in leadership skills for officials from 1 December 2001 to 31 March 2002 under the excellent leaders scheme. All expenditure under the excellent leaders scheme came from a ring-fenced allocation from the Cabinet Office and not from general Home Office funds.

The aim of the excellent leaders scheme was to grow leadership skills in the senior civil service by developing their competencies. In the period December 2001 to March 2002, 84 senior members of staff received executive coaching sessions; 13 specifically tailored Directorate leadership conferences were held for senior Home Office staff, and 40 members of staff attended publicly available leadership programmes and training events.

£316,000 was spent on executive coaching sessions; £197,000 on tailored leadership conferences and £70,967 on leadership training.

Ministers in the Home Department are able to take advantage of the programmes for Ministers organised by the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) in the Cabinet Office. This programme has not delivered training on voice coaching or training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. Neither have officials received such training in the last five years.

Prostitution

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been sent to prison in the United Kingdom for living on the earnings of, or for controlling, a prostitute in each of the last five years. [70283]

Hilary Benn: The information requested, relating to *(a)* males and *(b)* females sentenced to immediate custody for living on the earnings of, or controlling a prostitute in England and Wales from 1996 to 2000 are shown in the table.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively.

Number of persons sentenced to immediate custody for prostitution related offences in England and Wales 1996 to 2000[1] [2]

		Total sentenced to immediate custody				
Offence description	*Statute*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Male						
Living on earnings of prostitution or exercising control over prostitute	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Secs 30 and 31	26	23	23	16	12
Man or woman living wholly or in part on the earnings of male prostitution	Sexual Offences Act 1967 Sec 5(1)	3	1	—	—	—
Total		29	24	23	16	12
Female						
Living on earnings of prostitution or exercising control over prostitute	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Secs 30 and 31	2	1	1	3	—
Man or woman living wholly or in part on the earnings of male prostitution	Sexual Offences Act 1967 Sec 5(1)	—	—	—	—	—
Total		2	1	1	3	—

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates' courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust at a detailed level and so are excluded from this analysis.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls aged under 15 years have been cautioned by police officers in the Metropolitan Police Authority for being involved in prostitution in the last 12 months. [70271]

Mr. Denham: No instances of males or females aged under 15 cautioned in 2000 for prostitution in the Metropolitan Police Force Area were reported to the Home Office.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Justice and Home Affairs Agenda

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to take forward the Justice and Home Affairs Agenda of the EU. [64838]

Mr. Blunkett: I intend to work closely with the incoming Danish Presidency with a view to taking forward the justice and home affairs work programme. Consequently, I met with Lene Espersen, the Danish Minister of Justice, on 19 June to discuss the priorities for the next six months.

My key priority will be to push forward implementation of the conclusions agreed at the Seville European Council on 21–22 June on combating illegal immigration and creating a common asylum policy. Those conclusions were prompted by United Kingdom concerns at the lack of progress on asylum and immigration measures and incorporate specific ideas proposed by the United Kingdom for the purpose of advancing that work. In particular, the conclusions set deadlines for agreeing the instruments which will form the basis of the European Union's common asylum system, and I attach importance to supporting the Danish Presidency in securing agreement to the Dublin II Regulation (on responsibility for processing an asylum claim) by the end of this year.

I also intend to focus greater attention at European Union level on action against drug trafficking as part of the mid-term review of the European Union's Action Plan against Drugs 2000–04. Improved cross-border police co-operation, including the effective use of Europol, is also a priority, as is progress in implementing the programme of measures on mutual recognition of court decisions and judgments. In particular, I would like to see completion of the negotiations on the mutual recognition of financial penalties, which was a joint initiative tabled by the United Kingdom, Belgium and Sweden.

Racism

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent advice he has given to local authorities about tackling racism and promoting community cohesion. [69955]

Beverley Hughes: The Government is committed to making race equality and community cohesion central to its aims.

We are committed to outlaw discrimination in employment by December 2003 as required by the European Employment Directives.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 came into force on 2 April. It places a general duty on specified public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination—and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

Public bodies were required to have in place by 31 May this year, realistic and timely plans to show how they intend to comply with the general duty.

The Government is working right across Departments on a number of measures to promote community cohesion. Our aim is to build communities where:

> there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all people—there is an appreciation of people's different backgrounds and circumstances
>
> where those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
>
> strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the work place, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

The Government published draft Guidance on Community Cohesion in May this year, in conjunction with the Commission for Racial Equality, and the Local Government Association. The draft provides advice to local authorities on ways to integrate community cohesion within their day to day operations. It focuses upon 16 themes covering housing, leisure, education, media, and training and employment schemes. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding has been provided to each authority for tackling racism and promoting community cohesion in the last 12 months. [69956]

Beverley Hughes: The Government believe that effectively addressing community cohesion issues forms a crucial part of the work of local government.

In working to achieve this aim, the Government are investing resources in local authorities through the following ways:

community facilitation work—these projects will help build capacity at a grass roots level and to bring local people together. This is important in order to encourage dialogue and tackle local grievances or misunderstandings that threaten good community and race relations;

a summer activity programme—in response to last summer's disturbances; we made £7 million available to fund summer activities with over 200,000 beneficiaries. We have released further funding for a similar and extended programme for this year, including additional activities in those areas with high levels of street crime;

a community support team programme—this is providing support to areas such as Burnley, Bradford and Oldham to help build the capacity of these areas in promoting community cohesion.

In addition, the Community Cohesion Unit set up by the Home Office this year, which works to the Ministerial Group chaired by me, is working closely with local authorities.

Additionally, and in recognition of the need to genuinely build cohesion into the agenda of local government, the Government recently announced that community cohesion will form one of the key themes of the Government's beacon council scheme.

Draft guidance for local authorities has also been produced in conjunction with the Commission for Racial Equality and the Local Government Association. This sets out practical ways in which local authorities can integrate community cohesion into day-to-day operations. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Police Force (Diabetes)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for what reason the police force is not permitted to recruit diabetics; and what guidance has been issued on the transfer of a diagnosed diabetic from one constabulary to another; [41093]

(2) if he will respond to the letter of the hon. Member for Leominster dated 17 December 2001, on behalf of Mrs. T. A. Smith, a constituent, concerning a transfer to the West Mercia Constabulary. [41197]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The Home Office issues no guidance to police forces on the subject of medical standards for officers transferring from one force to another.

Home Office guidance for forces on the recruitment of diabetics is currently under review by independent medical experts as part of the Home Office's National Recruitment Standards project. This work aims to ensure that occupational medical standards for police recruitment are evidence-based, job-related and not unfairly discriminatory. The new standards are expected to be applied consistently by the 43 forces of England and Wales.

The medical review will also take into account the implications of the proposed extension of the employment-related provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to the police.

Recommendations on proposed new medical standards should be available for consultation shortly.

In the meantime, there are current Home Office medical guidelines on the recruitment of new entrants to the police service. These were formulated after consultations between occupational physicians and force medical advisers, and agreed by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Working Group on Organisational Health, Safety and Welfare.

The Working Group further confirmed that the standards should not only reflect "fitness to serve" at the time of assessment, but should also predict, as far as possible, that the individual is likely to remain fit for the full duties of a police constable for the foreseeable future. This is in order to minimise premature retirement on health grounds.

The guidelines on diabetes state that candidates with diabetes mellitus should be rejected.

I responded to the hon. Member's letter of 17 December to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) on 6 March 2002.

Working Holidaymaker Scheme

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reasons have been for individuals in the working holidaymaker scheme remaining in the UK after the two-year period had lapsed. [70797]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Working holidaymakers can stay in the United Kingdom beyond their initial two-year leave of entry if they obtain leave to remain in another category, for example, as a student.

Working holidaymakers are not normally permitted to remain in the United Kingdom for the purposes of employment, although some are permitted to switch into work permit employment on a case-by-case discretionary basis. A short extension of stay may be granted on an exceptional basis to a working holidaymaker employed as a supply teacher, until the end of the school term. Those working holidaymakers who have not been specifically permitted to stay longer should leave the United Kingdom at the end of the two-year period.

The Working Holidaymaker Scheme

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people participating in the working holidaymaker scheme are based in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [70795]

Beverley Hughes: *[Holding answer 19 July 2002]*: The information is not collected. Under the scheme young Commonwealth citizens come to the United Kingdom (UK) for an extended two-year holiday, during which they can take incidental employment to fund their stay here. They are free to move around the UK as they wish. Around 40,000 come to the UK each year on the scheme but, given its nature, it is not feasible or necessary to collect information on where participants base themselves at any one particular time during their stay.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people participating in the working holidaymaker scheme in each of the last five years have continued to stay in the UK after the two year period has been completed. [70796]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* This information is not available. Unless working holidaymakers have been granted an extension of stay, they should leave the country at the end of their two-year working holiday.

Housing

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make an assessment of the availability of empty housing stock owned by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations, *(c)* public sector bodies and *(d)* the private sector in areas of industrial decline and its suitability to accommodate asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [68805]

Beverley Hughes: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is responsible for administering the support available to asylum seekers including the provision of accommodation. Research to identify cluster areas suitable for the dispersal of asylum seekers was conducted centrally by NASS in consultation with regional consortia. NASS is satisfied that it has a sufficient supply of accommodation for single adults but is currently negotiating for further accommodation for families.

Careless Driving

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers convicted of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs *(a)* served the whole of their sentence and *(b)* had their sentence reduced, in each of the past 10 years. [70972]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I will write to my hon. Friend.

EU Committees (Scottish Executive Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the EU Committee for the Implementation of the Programme of Exchanges, Training and Co-operation between Law Enforcement Authorities (OISIN) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70925]

(2) when the EU Committee for the Implementation of the Joint Action Establishing a Programme of Exchanges, Training and Co-operation for Persons Responsible for Action to Combat Organised Crime (Falcone) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70923]

(3) when the EU Committee for the implementation of the incentive, exchange, training and co-operation programme for combating trade in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children (STOP) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70922]

(4) when the EU Committee for the implementation of the incentive, exchange, training and co-operation programme for the prevention of crime (Hippokrates) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70924]

(5) when the EU Committee for the Implementation of the Programme of Training, Exchanges and Co-operation in the Field of Asylum Immigration and crossing of External Borders (Odysseus) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [70929]

(6) when the EU Committee for the Implementation of the Community Action Programme on Preventive Measures to Fight Violence Against Children, Young Persons and Women (Daphne) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [71836]

(7) when the EU Committee on the Introduction of a Uniform Format for Visas is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [71827]

Beverley Hughes: The committees which assist the European Commission in managing the Oisin II, Falcone, Hippocrates and Grotius funding programmes will meet on 23 July to discuss the bids which have been received for the year 2002 and agree the allocation of funds to successful projects. The STOP Committee will meet on 24 July for the same purpose. The Daphne Committee will next meet on 11 September 2002. The Odysseus funding programme has expired.

The committees consist of a representative of each member state who may be accompanied by additional experts at the expense of the individual member state. The United Kingdom (UK) is represented on each committee by a Home Office official and an official from the UK Permanent Representation to the European Union (EU) in Brussels. A representative from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise also attends the OISIN Committee as appropriate.

In accordance with the Concordat on co-ordination of European Union policy issues, officials from the Home Office are in contact with Scottish Executive officials about the development and implementation of relevant funding programmes. Attendance by Scottish Executive officials at meetings of the committees would be agreed bilaterally, but has not so far taken place. Immigration and asylum matters are reserved subjects and consequently officials from the Scottish Executive were not members of, and did not attend, the Odysseus Committee.

Public Relations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27397]

Beverley Hughes: In November 1999, the Treasury published a statement of Best Practice on the use of consultants within Government. This is accessible on the archive section of Office of Government Commerce's (OGC's) website (www.ogc.gov.uk). It represents a set of principles that should apply to many areas of consultancy. But it is not binding on Departments and has no status in law.

Decisions on the use of consultants is left to individual business units, but in making positive decisions units will take into account value for money considerations and whether the particular skills exist internally.

The increase in expenditure on Public Relations Consultants can be attributed to the Criminal Records Bureau and United Kingdom Passport Agency undertaking a greater degree of Public Relations work in areas such as market research and media. We do not have historical information to provide any other valid comparisons for the increase.

The available information held by the Home Department on cost for the use of external Public Relations Consultants by *(a)* Home Department and *(b)* other bodies over the last four years is as follows:

(a) Home Office

	£
1998	Nil
1999	Nil
2000	32,164
2001	33,881

(b) Other bodies

	£
1998	Nil
1999	81,299
2000	140,150
2001	319,000

Correspondence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter dated 26 April from the hon. Member for Yeovil on the subject of private home security companies. [59719]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* I replied to the hon. Member on 22 July 2002.

Refurbishment Projects

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59759]

Beverley Hughes: The information on existing and forthcoming refurbishment projects with a value over £500,000 in the Home Office including its executive agencies (but excluding sponsored non-departmental public bodies) is as follows:

Projects currently in progress

Establishment	*Project*
Main Home Office estate	
Croydon file store	Refurbishment
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Whitgift Centre, Croydon	Partial refitting
Riverside Exchange, Sheffield	Partial refitting
Prison Service	
Ashwell	Replace wooden buildings—Phase 3
Aylesbury	Wing refurbishment
Birmingham	Health care modifications
Birmingham	Redevelopment
Brinsford	New education building
Brixton	Refurbish Health Care/National roofing programme
Camp Hill	Wing refurbishment
Cardiff	Wing refurbishment/Additional cells
Dorchester	Replace kitchen
Dover	Re-role
Durham	Wing refurbishment
Eastwood Park	Safer locals programme
Everthorpe	Over roofing
Feltham	Safer locals programme
Feltham	Conversion of buildings
Frankland	DSPD Unit
Gartree	Wing refurbishment
Gloucester	Replace kitchen/National roofing programme
Hull	Redevelopment
Huntercombe	New education building/Extend workshop
Kirkham	Replace accommodation units
Lancaster Farms	New workshop complex
Leeds	New gatehouse
Leeds	Safer locals programme
Lincoln	Wing refurbishment
Lindholme	Leger club refurbishment
Long Lartin	Wing refurbishment
Maidstone	Wing refurbishment
New Hall	New gate complex
Portland	New care and custody unit
Risley	New houseblock
Stoke Health	New education building
The Weare	Refit/Re-mooring
Wakefield	Wing refurbishment
Wandsworth	Refurbish workshop
Wandsworth	New kitchen
Winchester	Safer locals programme

Projects due to commence within the next six months

Establishment	*Project*
Main Home Office estate	
Horseferry House, London	Refitting of 6th and 7th floors to house more staff
Ashley House, London	Refitting to house more staff
Allington Towers, London	Refitting to provide temporary accommodation
Metro Point, Canterbury House and St. Anne's, Croydon	Fit out works
IND, Whitgift Centre, Croydon	Major refurbishment
Prison Service	
Ashwell	Replace wooden buildings—Phase 4
Askham Grange	Mother and baby unit
Birmingham	Redevelopment
Birmingham	Safer locals programme

Projects due to commence within the next six months

Establishment	*Project*
Branston	New stores
Brockhill	New kitchen
Buckley Hall	New kitchen
Camp Hill	Roof repairs to workshops
Chelmsford	Health care centre
Drake Hall	New kitchen
Eastwood Park	Mother and baby unit
Eastwood Park	Safer locals programme
Everthorpe	Upgrade main gate
Feltham	Safer locals programme—relocate health care
Highpoint North	Wing refurbishment
Hindley	Separation: New education and workshop
Kirklevington	New kitchen
Leeds	Safer locals programme
Pentonville	Health care centre
Portland	Wing refurbishment
Preston	Wing refurbishment
Stafford	Create pedestrian entrances
Swansea	Separation of pedestrian entrance
Thorn Cross	Renew roof coverings
Wandsworth	Safer locals programme—Phase 1
Wandsworth	Safer locals programme—Phase 2
Wealstun	Replace accommodation blocks
Winchester	Safer locals programme
Winchester	New visits
United Kingdom Passport Agency	
Peterborough Passport Office	Counter refurbishment

National Probation Directorate

In addition to the projects listed in the tables, 155 refurbishment project on the National Probation Directorate estate are either under way or are planned to begin within the next nine months. The average cost will be approximately £100,000. Full details could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pending the issue of central technical guidance the Home Office did not require contracts to specify certified timber although its use was encouraged. Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) issued a model timber procurement clause in May which has been widely disseminated across the Department and all contracts for future major capital build schemes which involve the use of timber will require contractors to demonstrate that such timber will be provided from properly certified sources. This includes the new Home Office headquarters in Marsham Street.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if he will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if he will make a statement. [70212]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* In 2001–02, the Home Office spent £22.4 million (exc. VAT) on information literature, advertising and campaign material. The campaigns that spent over £250,000 include: vehicle crime reduction, police recruitment, electoral issues, drugs misuse and child protection on the internet

Personality Disorder Assessments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the target to complete 180 dangerous and severe personality disorder assessments by 2001–02 was not met. [68782]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The development of an assessment process for those who are dangerous as a result of a severe personality disorder is innovative and groundbreaking work.

We are currently piloting assessments at Whitemoor prison and Rampton hospital and using their experience, along with the latest research evidence, to develop a framework for assessment in which clinicians, tribunals and the courts can have confidence. This is fundamental to ensuring that people are referred appropriately to services and that any new legislative powers are applied properly.

The target to complete 180 assessments was agreed early in the life of the pilots, following which a number of refinements were made, the most significant being to extend the assessment process from 12 to 16 weeks. In addition the Whitemoor pilot has had significant difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified clinical staff and had to be temporarily suspended to allow for some refurbishment work in preparation for the treatment unit there. While these factors have inevitably had an effect on throughput, the 94 assessments completed during the period have proved invaluable in informing the development of a high quality assessment process, and provide a sound basis for further work.

PSA Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated cost to public funds is of the failure to achieve the public service agreement target to increase the number and proportions of recorded crimes for which an offender is brought to justice. [68778]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* As the public service agreement target relates to the number of offences which are brought to justice in 2003–04, it will not be possible to say until after the end of 2003–04 whether or not the target has been met.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the proportion of young people under 25 *(a)* misusing illegal drugs and *(b)* with access to illegal drugs in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [69105]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Results from the 1998 and 2000 British Crime Surveys estimate that 29 per cent. of adults aged between 16 and 24 reported to have used an illegal drug in the previous year.

Results from the 2001 survey of drug use, smoking and drinking among school children aged 11 to 15 years in England (published in a statistical press notice by Department of Health on 15 March 2002) show that 42 per cent. have been offered at least one or more drugs and that 20 per cent. reported the use of an illegal drug in the previous year.

A revised method of measuring the prevalence of drug use was introduced in 2001. The format of the questions was changed as was the wording of the questions, after research showed that pupils found the previous survey difficult to answer. It is likely that the increase in levels of reported drug use is due to this change in question format rather than a real change in behaviour. Because of this revised methodology the 2001 estimates on drug use are not strictly comparable with results from previous sweeps.

The estimates from previous years for those who reported ever having been offered at least one or more drug are 34 per cent. in 1998, 35 per cent. in 1999, and 35 per cent in 2000.

The estimates from previous years for those reporting use of an illegal drug in the previous year are 11 per cent. in 1998, 12 per cent. in 1999 and 14 per cent. in 2000.

Information regarding younger children is not available centrally.

Recovered Assets Fund

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what payments have been made for projects under the Recovered Assets Fund, broken down by region. [69337]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Confiscated Assets Fund (CAF) was the forerunner of the Recovered Assets Fund (RAF) and provided funding for anti-drug projects. In 1999–2000 it approved national projects totalling £764,300. In 2000–2001 its national projects totalled £6,841,000 plus one in Wales for £262,000. Finally, in 2001–2002 it approved national project funding of £5,624,143 plus £2,500 in the south west, £879,600 in the midlands and £625,500 in London and the south east.

I expect to announce shortly a first tranche of projects that are to receive funding under the Recovered Assets Fund, which has replaced the CAF and has a broader scope. These are in addition to RAF grants worth £250,000 for two asset recovery related projects which are already under way.

Mr. B. K. Pathan

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter sent by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) on 22 April, concerning Mr. B. K. Pathan of Leicester, reference P302501; and if he will make a statement. [69247]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 23 July 2002.

Firearms

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has collated on the types of firearms used for criminal purposes since 1997. [47446]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Criminals in the United Kingdom use a range of different firearms obtained from a variety of different sources. The information collected centrally at present relates only to broad categories of weapons and is given in the table.

As part of our efforts to crack down on misuse, we are currently funding a new National Firearms Forensic Intelligence Database which is expected to be operational in 2003. As well as helping to track the provenance of guns which have been recovered and to identify any which have been previously used, it will also help to provide a much more detailed assessment of the types of weapons used.

Recorded crimes in which firearms were reported to have been used by principal weapon: England and Wales

	Number of offences			
Principal weapon	*1997*	*1998–99*[1]	*1999–2000*[1]	*2000–01*[1]
Long-barrelled shotgun	313	322	353	302
Sawn-off shotgun	267	320	340	305
Handgun	2,648	2,687	3,685	4,019
Rifle	51	43	67	36
Imitation firearm	511	566	823	773
Unidentified firearm	713	665	762	953
Other firearm	401	606	813	974
Air weapon	7,506	8,665	10,103	10,227
Total	12,410	13,874	16,946	17,589

[1] Year ending March.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Departments will take the lead in the event of different kinds of emergency taking place in the UK. [72965]

Mr. Blunkett: Most emergencies are handled at a local level by the emergency services and by the appropriate local authority or authorities with no direct involvement by central Government.

Where central Government do become involved because the incident is of such a scale or complexity to require central co-ordination or support, it is essential that we are clear in advance which Department will be in the lead.

The Civil Contingencies Committee has had an up-to-date list of pre-nominated leads produced in order to reflect the devolution settlement; the changes to the machinery of Government made by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister since the general election; and incidents which were not covered in the earlier 'Dealing with Disaster' guidance document.

I am placing in the Library a paper explaining the respective roles of lead Government Departments and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and a table summarising which Departments will have the lead for different categories of emergency.

The table shows the position that holds within the devolved Administrations and arrangements are being made to place the material in the Libraries of the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Arrangements are also being made for this material to be made available to the local authority and emergency services associations and to be placed on the internet at www.ukresilience.info that will be updated whenever necessary and should be consulted for the latest information on pre-designated lead Departments.

Prisons

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of staff absence through *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term sickness is in each prison, broken down by category, in the last 12 months for which information is available. [62378]

Hilary Benn: Information relating to the financial year 2001–02 is contained in the table. Information about privately managed prisons is not available as it is commercial in confidence.

	Absences of one to seven days		*Absences of over 27 days*	
Category/Establishment	*Working days lost*	*Rate per person*	*Working days lost*	*Rate per person*
High Security				
Belmarsh	2,771	3.12	12,841	14.48
Durham	1,065	1.46	7,509	10.29
Frankland	976	1.26	7,304	9.42
Full Sutton	1,455	1.88	6,859	8.86
Long Lartin	1,176	1.76	5,430	8.12
Wakefield	1,084	1.73	5,862	9.34
Whitemoor	1,661	2.20	11,572	15.32
Woodhill	1,531	2.37	8,797	13.60
High Security total	11,719	2.00	66,175	11.28
Category B				
Albany	366	1.29	2,431	8.60
Blundeston	534	1.93	1,536	5.55
Dartmoor	736	1.95	3,520	9.33
Garth	569	1.36	4,597	10.95
Gartree	385	1.43	1,930	7.16
Grendon	589	1.85	3,888	12.19
Kingston	284	2.08	1,794	13.17
Maidstone	694	2.01	4,046	11.75
Parkhurst	780	2.21	4,367	12.36
Swaleside	737	1.79	4,151	10.11
Category B total	5,674	1.78	32,259	10.11
Category C				
Acklington	625	1.62	3,333	8.64
Ashwell	420	1.83	2,321	10.10
Blantyre House	153	2.20	472	6.80
Buckley Hall	391	2.00	1,882	9.62
Camp Hill	469	1.73	2,549	9.40
Channings Wood	536	1.70	3,421	10.85
Coldingley	362	1.80	1,517	7.55
Erlestoke	295	1.50	1,769	8.97
Everthorpe	334	1.40	2,396	10.01
Featherstone	529	1.68	3,105	9.86
Haverigg	510	1.70	2,968	9.90
Highpoint	774	1.89	2,072	5.06
Kirklevington	143	1.52	441	4.70
Lancaster	326	2.02	1,429	8.86
Lindholme	658	1.64	2,583	6.43
Littlehey	616	2.12	3,587	12.33
Moorland	744	1.56	4,724	9.89
Ranby	599	1.52	4,284	10.91
Risley	667	1.34	6,124	12.32
Shepton Mallet	256	1.88	684	5.03
Stafford	619	1.93	3,968	12.35
Stocken	385	1.40	1,396	5.08
The Mount	557	1.78	1,926	6.17
The Verne	569	2.02	1,614	5.73
Usk/Prescoed	246	1.28	1,009	5.23
Wayland	484	1.67	1,740	6.02
Wealstun	430	1.41	2,349	7.68
Weare	406	1.93	1,577	7.48
Wellingborough	415	1.50	2,348	8.50
Whatton	174	1.23	1,013	7.17
Wymott	789	1.91	4,611	11.17
Category C total	14,480	1.68	75,214	8.75
Male local				
Bedford	551	2.28	3,491	14.47
Birmingham	1,069	2.23	6,165	12.86
Blakenhurst	846	4.47	1,479	7.81
Bristol	1,269	2.39	6,379	12.00
Brixton	1,451	3.07	9,167	19.42
Bullingdon	1,136	2.76	3,633	8.83
Canterbury	403	2.09	2,205	11.42

	Absences of one to seven days		*Absences of over 27 days*	
Category/Establishment	*Working days lost*	*Rate per person*	*Working days lost*	*Rate per person*
Cardiff	594	1.50	3,376	8.55
Chelmsford	871	2.59	2,691	7.99
Dorchester	362	2.20	924	5.61
Elmley	1,186	2.68	2,808	6.35
Exeter	686	2.20	3,627	11.65
Gloucester	402	1.81	2,519	11.34
Haslar	178	2.10	966	11.39
Highdown	1,476	2.77	5,824	10.93
Holme House	735	1.51	3,210	6.60
Hull	492	1.18	2,421	5.80
Leeds	1,169	1.69	8,722	12.63
Leicester	436	1.79	2,298	9.43
Lewes	705	2.41	3,492	11.95
Lincoln	788	2.23	3,061	8.66
Liverpool	995	1.26	9,598	12.18
Manchester	1,233	1.63	10,445	13.78
Norwich	917	2.15	3,994	9.35
Nottingham	515	1.56	2,249	6.80
Pentonville	1,526	2.66	5,956	10.37
Preston	622	1.60	3,725	9.59
Shrewsbury	326	1.60	2,491	12.21
Swansea	370	1.57	1,974	8.39
Wandsworth	1,596	2.37	8,159	12.14
Winchester	1,011	2.79	2,945	8.12
Wormwood Scrubs	1,751	3.15	7,729	13.88
Male local total	27,667	2.16	137,721	10.77
Male open				
Ford	422	2.45	1,619	9.39
Hewell Grange	131	1.57	398	4.77
Kirkham	397	1.66	2,450	10.22
Latchmere House	197	2.51	425	5.40
Leyhill	282	1.51	1,725	9.22
North Sea Camp	224	2.11	831	7.84
Standford Hill	393	1.92	1,796	8.77
Sudbury	235	1.26	1,685	9.06
Male open total	2,281	1.81	10,930	8.68
Detention Centre				
Dover	356	1.72	2,515	12.18
Detention centre total	356	1.72	2,515	12.18
Male closed YOI				
Aylesbury	776	2.36	5,177	15.78
Brinsford	637	1.65	2,702	6.99
Castington	572	1.64	4,695	13.45
Deerbolt	412	1.47	1,965	7.00
Feltham	1,901	2.95	6,672	10.36
Glen Parva	1,035	2.08	3,075	6.17
Guys Marsh	395	1.57	2,887	11.45
Hindley	665	1.67	6,330	15.89
Hollesley Bay	627	1.93	3,025	9.30
Huntercombe	575	2.25	3,374	13.22
Lancaster Farms	740	2.09	3,381	9.57
Northallerton	255	1.72	1,675	11.29
Onley	1,043	2.59	6,290	15.65
Portland	556	1.70	3,152	9.65
Reading	425	2.19	2,097	10.81
Rochester	535	1.78	2,772	9.24
Stoke Heath	858	2.11	5,652	13.92
Swinfen Hall	346	1.48	1,099	4.72
Werrington	331	2.08	1,862	11.69
Wetherby	520	2.03	3,096	12.06
Male closed YOI total	13,203	2.03	70,980	10.92
Male open YOI				
Hatfield	111	1.31	370	4.37
Thorn Cross	387	1.76	1,799	8.17
Male open YOI total	498	1.63	2,169	7.11

	Absences of one to seven days		*Absences of over 27 days*	
Category/Establishment	*Working days lost*	*Rate per person*	*Working days lost*	*Rate per person*
Female closed				
Bullwood Hall	339	2.18	1,597	10.28
Cookham Wood	232	2.43	1,144	11.98
Downview	341	1.84	2,454	13.24
Foston Hall	377	2.06	775	4.24
Morton Hall	244	1.70	1,101	7.67
Send	414	3.15	811	6.17
Styal	517	1.58	3,633	11.10
Female closed total	2,464	2.02	11,514	9.43
Female local				
Brockhill	364	2.21	2,661	16.20
Eastwood Park	537	2.41	4,129	18.53
Highpoint North	238	2.31	986	9.58
Holloway	1,314	2.69	8,344	17.05
Low Newton	321	1.40	1,706	7.46
New Hall	584	1.98	2,909	9.87
Female local total	3,357	2.23	20,735	13.80
Female open				
Askham Grange	126	1.62	650	8.34
Drake Hall	261	1.53	2,454	14.40
East Sutton Park	98	1.58	770	12.40
Female open total	486	1.56	3,874	12.48
Total	82,184	1.97	434,087	10.40

Vulnerable Prisoner Units

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prison inmates are held in vulnerable prisoner units in prisons in England and Wales. [70280]

Hilary Benn: On 31 May 2002 there were 3,911 male prisoners held in vulnerable prisoner units. There are no vulnerable prisoner units in the female estate. The female estate does not have any dedicated units specifically for vulnerable prisoners as they are managed within the general female population. There are some beds reserved for women who are vulnerable from the nature of their offence but these are only in very small numbers and not in designated units.

Prisoners

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated timetable will be for implementing the enhanced wages scheme for prisoners outlined in the Social Exclusion Unit's latest report; and if he will make a statement. [67837]

Hilary Benn: An action plan setting out the Government's response to the report will be published later this year.

Prison Service

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the final Key Performance Indicator targets for the Prison Service for 2002–03. [72976]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service Business Plan for 2002–03, published in February 2002, included Key Performance Indicator (KPI) measures for the year but at that stage not all the associated targets had been finalised.

The full set of measures and targets for 2002–03 are listed as follows:

To ensure no escapes of Category A prisoners;

To ensure that the number of escapes from prisons and from escorts undertaken by Prison Service staff, expressed as a proportion of the average prison population, is lower than 0.05 per cent.;

To ensure that the number of escapes from contracted out escorts is no more than one per 20,000 prisoners handled;

To ensure that the number of positive adjudications of assault on prisoners, staff and others, expressed as a proportion of the average prison population is lower than 9 per cent.;

To ensure that the number of prisoners held two to a cell designated for one, expressed as a proportion of the average prison population does not exceed 18 per cent.;

To ensure that the number of minority ethnic staff in the prison service, expressed as a proportion of the total work force is at least 4.5 per cent. by April 2003;

To ensure that average staff sickness does not exceed nine working days per person by April 2003;

To ensure that the average cost per uncrowded prison place does not exceed £38,743;

To ensure that the average cost per prisoner does not exceed £36,539;

To ensure 7,100 accredited offending behaviour programme completions in 2002–03, including 950 sex offender treatment programmes;

To ensure that prisoners spend on average at least 24 hours per week in purposeful activity;

To ensure the rate of positive results from random mandatory drug tests is lower than 10 per cent. by April 2003;

To achieve a 5 per cent. reduction in the number of self inflicted deaths expressed as a rate per 100,000 of average population compared with 2001–02;

Prisoners to achieve 45,000 key skills awards and 28,800 in basic skills including 10,800 at level 2, 12,000 at level 1 and 6,000 at entry level;

To ensure 28,200 prisoners have a job, training or education place after release by April 2003; and

To develop and pilot a joint indicator with Department of Health to reduce waiting times for mental health transfers and to implement the KPI from April 2003.

Prisoners (Feltham)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours per day the *(a)* 16 to 18-year-old and *(b)* over 18-year-old prisoners at Feltham receive (i) compulsory education, (ii) extra-curricular education, (iii) sport and (iv) general exercise; and if he will make a statement. [67311]

Hilary Benn: Education is only compulsory for those under school leaving age; they receive 15 hours of education per week at Feltham in five, three-hour sessions. Anyone over this age cannot be ordered to undertake education, as it is not classified as work.

On extra-curricular education, there are currently no evening classes at Feltham. It is hoped that the prison's local recruitment campaign will deliver sufficient staff to make this possible.

With regard to participation in sporting activities, juveniles (under 18s) are currently receiving an average of 4.9 hours of physical education (PE) a week. Young offenders are currently receiving an average of 5.4 hours per week. However, attendance at PE is voluntary.

For general exercise, all prisoners receive a daily minimum of 30 minutes of time in the open air. Those in segregation receive one hour a day, weather permitting.

London Probation Service

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* full-time, *(b)* part-time, *(c)* agency and *(d)* temporary staff work for the London Probation Service. [69430]

Hilary Benn: The latest figures from the London Probation Area show that they currently employ 2,836 staff in total; 2,137 of which are full time employees, 530 are part time, 89 are agency staff and 80 are on temporary contracts.

Forensic Science Service

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the Forensic Science Service. [72977]

Mr. Denham: A review of the Forensic Science Service will commence on 2 September and is expected to be completed by spring 2003. The review team, independently lead by Robert McFarland, a former chief executive of the BOC Group, has been appointed and preliminary work is already under way. A steering group, chaired by one of my officials, will oversee the review and recommendations will be made to me in due course. I will report back to the House on its findings.

The review process will provide extensive opportunities for consultation work with internal and external stakeholders and will follow the procedures recommended in the guidance for the review of executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies published by the Cabinet Office.

Auld Review

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government expect to publish a detailed response to Sir Robin Auld's, Review of the Criminal Courts of England and Wales, and John Halliday's, Making Punishments Work—A Review of the Sentencing Framework for England and Wales. [72981]

Hilary Benn: 'Justice for All' presented to Parliament on 17 July set out our policy on reform of the criminal justice system. We made clear that we are indebted to Sir Robin auld and John Halliday for their extensive and thorough review of the criminal courts and sentencing policy. Today we publish a detailed response to all their recommendations and copies will be placed in the Library.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32794]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Boateng) on 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 692W.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by how much his Department underspent its expenditure limits in the financial year 2000–01. [40831]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The Home Office full, financial year outturns for the years 1998–99 to 2000–01 are shown in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (Cm 5401) published by the Treasury in May 2002.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total under-spend in his Department was on *(a)* capital and *(b)* non-capital expenditure in each financial year since May 1997. [34026]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The Home Office full, financial outturns for the years 1998–99 to 2000–01 are shown in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (Cm 5401) published by the Treasury in May 2002.

The full, financial outturn for the 1997–98 financial year was shown in the previous Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (Cm 5101).

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of publishing his Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70479]

Beverley Hughes: The information is as follows:

£

Home Office annual report	*Design*	*Print*	*Total cost*
1999	28,120.37	15,200.00	43,320.37
2000	20,639.46	14,681.00	35,320.46
2001	57,695.66	22,842.00	80,537.66
2002	30,411.35	17,967.98	48,379.33

The costs for 1998 are not readily available. To obtain the 1998 figures would amount to disproportionate costs.

We believe the benefit to Parliament and the public of publishing a detailed account of our work is considerable, facilitating more open government.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Transsexuals

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she will make a statement about the ECHR judgments in the cases of Goodwin *v.* UK and I *v.* UK; and when she expects British transsexuals will be able *(a)* to change their NI numbers and *(b)* to marry. [71488]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government reconvened recently the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People, to re-examine the implications of granting full legal status to transsexual people in their acquired gender, and to make recommendations to Ministers before the end of this year. It has now been tasked additionally with considering urgently the implications of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in the cases of Christine Goodwin *v.* The United Kingdom and I *v.* The United Kingdom.

The Government are obliged, under international law, to implement the judgments and will decide as soon as possible how to do so. The devolved Administrations are also considering their approach to these issues where responsibilities are devolved.

The matters under consideration include policy on marriage and national insurance arrangements. Transsexual people may already obtain new national insurance cards in their new names.

Following the ruling, statutes must be interpreted in the light of the ECtHR findings and, where a statute allows, discretion must be exercised differently in any case where the traditional interpretation or exercise of discretion would result in a violation of a transsexual person's Convention rights.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) whether the Government accepts the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Goodwin and I; what action is being taken to bring UK law into compliance with the ruling; and if she will make a statement; [71604]

(2) what the terms of reference are of the reconvened Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual Rights. [71605]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government will decide their response to the Court's judgments as soon as possible. We had already reconvened the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People because the issues faced by the transsexual community affect the policy of a large number of Government Departments and the devolved Administrations.

The group met on 9 July. Its agreed terms of reference are:

> "In the light of the report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People and more recent relevant developments, to re-examine the implications of granting full legal status to transsexual people in their acquired gender; and to make recommendations".

These terms of reference remain valid subsequent to the ruling of the ECtHR, delivered on 11 July: but the Working Group has been tasked to consider urgently the implications of the judgments in the cases of Christine Goodwin *v.* The United Kingdom and I *v.* The United Kingdom. The Government are obliged, under international law, to implement the judgments and will decide as soon as possible how to do so. The devolved Administrations are also considering their approach to these issues where responsibilities are devolved. Recommendations on a course of action will be put to Ministers in october for collective decisions to be reached during the autumn.

Following the ruling, statutes must be interpreted in the light of the ECtHR findings and, where a statute allows, discretion must be exercised differently in any case where the traditional interpretation or exercise of discretion would result in a violation of a transsexual person's Convention rights.

Compensation

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action she has taken to ensure that QinetiQ pays appropriate compensation to genealogical societies, for their administrative costs relating to vouchers for the 1901 Census website. [71268]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All vouchers which have not been used will receive a full refund on request, including the purchase cost, postage and packaging. All vouchers which have been partially used, will have a full six months of active life starting from the date when the online service resumes. Payment of compensation for any additional administrative costs would be dealt with by the contractor, QinetiQ Ltd.

Election Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total Government expenditure was on *(a)* local elections in each year since 1997, *(b)* the 1997 general election and *(c)* the 2001 general election. [71230]

Yvette Cooper: To date, central Government expenditure for the conduct of the parliamentary general elections in 1997 and 2001 is £46.2 million and £44.3 million, respectively.

Central Government makes no direct contribution to the cost of conducting local government elections, the funding of which is the responsibility of local authorities themselves.

Information on the cost of local elections in England and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively. This is a devolved matter in Wales and Scotland.

Law Commission

Gillian Merron: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the next quinquennial review of the Law Commission is to take place. [72978]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The next QQR of the Law Commission is to begin today. The approach to the review will take into account the wider process of law reform and the relationship between the Law Commission and other agencies involved in that process, particularly Government Departments. It is expected that a final report to the Lord Chancellor, outlining key findings and recommendations, will be produced by the end of the year.

John Halliday CB has been appointed as Head of Review. Mr. Halliday has been selected for this role because of the extent of his knowledge of the operation of Government, Parliament and the civil service. In particular, he has experience of working with the Law Commission and of leading the fundamental review of the framework for sentencing criminal offenders in England and Wales. This resulted in the Halliday report, 2001.

Copies of the Terms of Reference for the review have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Public Guardianship Office

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Public Guardianship Office's annual report and accounts for 2001–02 will be laid before Parliament. [72886]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have today laid before the House the Public Guardianship Office's annual report and accounts for 2001–02, which gives full details of the Agency's performance and expenditure for that year.

Departmental Functions

David Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the recent changes in the functions of her Department. [72984]

Ms Rosie Winterton: For the assistance of hon. Members, I have today placed in the Library of each House a list which sets out briefly the current functions of the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Thames Valley Magistrates Court Service

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* staff and *(b)* legal advisers have left the Thames Valley magistrates court service since 1 January 2001; how many trials have been cancelled since 1 January 2001 in the Thames Valley magistrates court area, how many vacancies there are in the Thames Valley magistrates court service; and if she will list them and the salaries offered. [72597]

Yvette Cooper: I have been advised by Thames Val[illegible] Magistrates Courts Committee (MCC) that 52 staff members have left service since January 2001, of which 11 were legal advisers. There are currently 27.4 vacancies within the area, 7.4 of which are for legal advisers. Salaries for legal advisers are advertised at £25,518 to £32,001 (depending upon experience); deputy justices' clerks are advertised at £39,072 to £43,293; and admin/payments staff vacancies are advertised at £10,974 to £14,433.

I am advised by Thames Valley MCC that no trials have been cancelled since 1 January 2001.

Mentally Incapacitated People

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will publish the evidence presented to the consultation exercise on 'Making Decisions: Helping People who have Difficulty in Deciding for Themselves'. [70173]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Consultation on 'Making decisions: Helping People who have Difficulty Deciding for Themselves' is being conducted fully in accordance with the Cabinet Office's code of practice on written consultations. The code recommends that responses should be analysed carefully and that the results of the analysis should be made widely available. Responses are currently being analysed and, once completed, the results of that analysis, including an account of the views expressed, will be made public.

HEALTH

Medicines Commission

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive the annual report of the Medicines Commission for 2001; and if this will be published. [72975]

Ms Blears: We have received the report, and copies have been laid before both Houses of Parliament today in accordance with the requirements of section 5(2) of the Medicines Act 1968.

Bound volumes have been placed in the Library containing the 2001 reports of the Medicines Commission, the Committee on Safety of Medicines, the Advisory Board on the Registration of Homoeopathic Products, the British Pharmacopoeia Commission, the Independent Review Panel on Advertising, the Independent Panel for Borderline Products and the Veterinary Products Committee.

We are glad to acknowledge the valuable work done by the distinguished members of the Medicines Act advisory bodies and thank them for the time and effort dedicated in the public interest to this important work.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the 2001–02 annual report and accounts for the Meat Hygiene Service will be laid before Parliament. [73106]

Ms Blears: The 2001–02 annual report and accounts for [illegible] Meat Hygiene Service were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library, but formal printing and publication will not occur for another 6–8 weeks, pending preparation of a version in Welsh as required by the Welsh Language Act.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the annual report and accounts of the Medicines Control Agency. [73107]

Ms Blears: We have received the report, and copies have today been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of sections 5(2) and 5(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

NHS Pensions Agency

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the key targets for 2002–03 for the NHS Pensions Agency; and if he will make a statement about the future of the Agency. [72783]

Mr. Hutton: I have agreed the Agency's key targets for 2002–03, and have placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses. A review of the Agency will be completed by the end of this year. This will address the performance of the Agency and will examine the options ('prior options') for the future of the Agency.

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the annual report and accounts of the NHS Pensions Agency. [69536]

Mr. Hutton: I have approved the annual report and accounts which have today been laid before the House of Commons in accordance with the requirements of section 7 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000.

Copies have been placed in the Library.

Child Care

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce child care centres in every community in the United Kingdom. [68254]

Estelle Morris: I have been asked to reply.

Following emerging recommendations of the inter-departmental review of child care, recently carried out and due to report in the autumn, the Chancellor announced on 15 July that funding would be provided for children's centres to be set up in the most disadvantaged areas across England. The Government's long-term aim is to have such a centre in every disadvantaged ward in England. Building, where possible, on existing child care and Sure Start facilities, these centres will sit at the heart of the community offering integrated services and support to children, parents and child care providers. By March 2006, an additional 300,000 children and their parents will have access to health, education and other services through children's centres.

Vaccines

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether pneumococcal vaccine will be added to the flu campaign for the elderly. [56920]

Ms Blears: The potential cost-effectiveness of introducing universal vaccination with pneumococcal polysaccharide for everyone over 65 years and efficacy of the vaccine in this age group is under investigation by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme for the prevention of AIDS and certain other communicable diseases is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57474]

Ms Blears: The European Union Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme for the prevention of AIDS and certain other communicable diseases was mandated under Article 5 of Decision 647/96/EC of the European Parliament and the Council (amended under Article 4 of Decision 521/2001/EC).

The committee assisted the Commission in taking forward the programme by providing opinions on proposed measures by the Commission. It is due to terminate with the introduction of the new EU action programme on public health.

The committee met once in the last year, in January 2002. The United Kingdom is normally represented by an official from this Department.

Costs of the committee to public funds are minimal. Meetings last one day, and the Commission pay the travel costs of nominated representatives. UK Departments are required to pay subsistence and UK costs.

The financial framework for implementation of the Community action programme for the prevention of AIDs and certain other communicable diseases, from 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2002, is euro 10.07 million.

The Commission has now decided which projects it will fund. This list will be published on the Department's website.

Together with members states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to the Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 28 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/index_en.html.

PPP

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* progress has been made, *(b)* targets have been set and *(c)* success has been measured, in the public-private initiative in the NHS. [66897]

Mr. Hutton [*holding answer 10 July 2002]:* The Government set out their policies about the role of the private sector in the national health service in detail in the response to the House of Commons Health Committee's first report on the role of the private sector in the NHS, published on 10 July 2002 (Cm 5567).

The NHS plan in 2000 set two main targets for investment in new NHS buildings, involving PFI:

Target 1:

over 100 new hospital schemes in total between 2000 and 2010 (both public and privately financed);

Target 2:

over half of the major 38 schemes given the go ahead at the time (July 2000) will be open by 2003–04 and the remainder will be under construction;

progress against Target 1: 64 major and 33 medium-sized PFI schemes have been given the go ahead. A further four major and six medium-sized schemes are being built under the public procurement route, making a total of 107 new hospital schemes;

progress against Target 2: 23 of the major PFI schemes are scheduled to become operational before the end of 2004. Three of the publicly procured schemes are scheduled to be operational by 2004;

success against Targets 1 and 2: 12 major PFI schemes and eight medium-sized schemes are already built and operational, as are two of the publicly procured schemes;

a further 12 major and 10 medium-sized schemes have signed final contracts and are under construction.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make it his policy to require the release of detailed information, withheld from the public on the grounds of commercial confidentiality when private finance initiative contracts are awarded in the NHS, after a period of three years to permit assessment of their value for money; [66435]

(2) if he will provide information on PFI schemes, withheld on the grounds of commercial confidentiality, to bona fide research bodies, to make objective assessments of their value for money. [67075]

Mr. Hutton: The National Audit Office has indefinite access to all information in the business cases and private finance initiative contracts to allow independent, objective assessments of value for money.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what method the Government use to measure the value of risk in assessing value for money for NHS private finance initiative projects in the NHS. [65532]

Mr. Hutton: Her Majesty's Treasury and the Department's guidance requires that a register of all risks is compiled which will provide a means for monitoring the evaluation and allocation of risk throughout the procurement exercise and whole life of private finance initiative project.

The methodology for assessing the values of risk includes standard techniques such as weighting and scoring analysis, single point and multi-point probability analysis. In addition, sensitivity analysis should always be undertaken on the risks which have been assessed as having relatively large values and those which are subject to the greatest uncertainty (e.g. due to lack of historical information). National health service trusts are required to use as much empirical information as possible in all their risk calculations.

Diagnostic and Treatment Centres

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if pre-existing plans for new hospitals, which already include the elements of diagnostic and treatment centres, will be fast-tracked when submitted for capital funding from the diagnostic and treatment centre funding programme; [66825]

(2) what funds his Department plans to make available for the establishing of diagnostic and treatment centres by primary care trusts in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004; [66828]

(3) what the typical allocation of funds will be to a primary care trust to establish a diagnostic and treatment centre; and on what basis this will be calculated; [66829]

(4) when he expects to announce the first tranche of diagnostic and treatment centres to be established by primary care trusts; [66830]

(5) what his policy is on the establishment of diagnostic and treatment centres by primary care trusts. [66827]

Mr. Hutton: We committed ourselves in the NHS Plan to having eight diagnostic and treatment centres up and running by 2004 with a further 12 in development.

On 21 February 2002, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health, announced the first wave of eight diagnostic and treatment centres. One of these is The Chase Hospital, Bordon, part of the North Hampshire Primary Care Trust. The Department has allocated £700,000 to North Hampshire Primary Care Trust to support this development.

We are now looking to expand and bring forward the diagnostic and treatment centre programme further in order to grow capacity and reduce waiting times. We have asked the NHS to put forward proposals. In certain cases this may result in the acceleration of all or part of existing proposals for hospital development. The proposals may also include additional diagnostic and treatment centres established by primary care trusts.

Capital funding will be available to support the development of some of these diagnostic and treatment centres. Some proposals will involve working with, and/or funding from the private sector.

Smallpox Vaccine

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the smallpox contract awarded to Powderject is estimated to represent profit for Powderject. [67547]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has made no such estimate. Before letting the contract to Powderject, the prices offered by other companies for similar products were compared, and comparisons were made with the price being paid by the United States Government for its smallpox vaccine. On the basis of consideration of all the price information available relating to similar products, the vaccine was deemed to represent value for money.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason he has chosen to purchase a smallpox vaccine which is of a different strain from that ordered by the US Administration. [67544]

Mr. Hutton: The choice of smallpox vaccine strain took into account expert advice under the auspices of a specially convened sub-group of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

The advice of the JCVI sub-group was that there was no difference between the two strains on scientific grounds. Vaccines based on both strains were considered to have been effective in the past. However, the JCVI sub-group concluded that there was a greater body of evidence to demonstrate the efficacy of the Lister strain rather than for the New York City Board of Health strain, and that the smallpox vaccine has been challenged in the field more often by the more severe form of smallpox (variola major) with the strain chosen by the United Kingdom Government. The JCVI sub-group also recommended that using a different strain of vaccine from that used in the United States offered the greatest safeguard if difficulties arose with the production of either strain, ensuring that the alternative strain could act as a fallback.

NHS Hospital Trusts

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS hospital trusts have been merged in the last five years. [67185]

Mr. Hutton: A list of national health service trusts which have been involved in major reconfigurations over the last five years has been placed in the Library. Most of these have merged by dissolution and establishment of new trusts, but there are also absorption mergers and parts of NHS trusts involved in the formation of new NHS trusts and primary care trusts.

Health Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the outcome was of the Health Council held on 26 June; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [67732]

Mr. Hutton: I represented the UK at the Health Council in Luxembourg on 26 June 2002.

The Council debated the Commission's package of proposals for review of pharmaceutical legislation, covering the authorisation of medicinal products through a centralised authorisation procedure and the constitution of the management board of the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMEA). No conclusions were reached.

During discussions of the framework convention on tobacco control, the Commission along with the incoming Danish presidency, urged member states to be flexible to allow the adoption of a strong European Union position for the next round of negotiations in Geneva in October. Some member states called for high level political input to seek to avoid adoption of a position that simply represented the lowest common denominator. The United Kingdom remains a supporter of a strong and effective convention.

Council conclusions on patient mobility were adopted; with the Commission expected to bring forward proposals during the Danish presidency.

The rest of the agenda covered the presentation of new dossiers or updates on the progress of current legislation. The Commission presented a draft directive on the safety of tissues and cells, to complement the current one on blood safety, as well as one on traditional medicines. There were also two recommendations: one on smoking prevention and tobacco control and another on the reduction of risks associated with drug dependence.

Details of these and other agenda items are set out in the table which will be placed in the Library. No votes were taken on any issue before the Council.

Renal Dialysis

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the training of new doctors and nurses in order to staff the opening of new renal stations; and when he expects to provide additional dialysis in east Lancashire. [6916[illegible]]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS plan commits the national health service to 7,500 more consultants and 20,000 extra nurses by 2004. As part of this expansion programme, the north-west deanery are planning a 15 per cent. increase during this year in the number of specialist registrar posts dedicated to the specialty of nephrology. This will support the renal development programme established for Lancashire and south Cumbria.

Nurses required to support the new renal stations at Chorley have been recruited through a process of internal recruitment within the United Kingdom together with an overseas recruitment campaign. The same approach will be adopted for the future planned developments at Blackpool and Burnley.

The Burnley Unit is a private finance initiative scheme which is expected to be commissioned during 2005, and in conjunction with the developments at Chorley and Blackpool, will significantly enhance the 'take-up' rates for each Lancashire from the current level of 73 per million to the planned 'take-up' rate of 90 per million by 2005.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what impact the opening of new renal stations in Lancashire will have on the number of patients at Royal Preston hospital; and if he will make a statement. [69217]

Jacqui Smith: The new renal facility at Chorley and South Ribble district general hospital is due to become operational in August 2002, and is expected to provide for 48 additional patients dialysing three times per week. Initially, patients currently being treated in Manchester hospitals will be given the choice of relocating to the new facility at Chorley. The facilities at Chorley are expected to achieve capacity by 31 March 2004.

Once the new unit becomes operational, the Royal Preston hospital can then ensure that more clinically appropriate patients are managed at what is the main Lancashire renal centre, while the service also increases its 'take-on' rate for new patients.

Social Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the net expenditure of each social services authority in England was in each year since 1990–91 at 2000–01 prices excluding expenditure on places in the private and voluntary homes sector; and what the percentage increase was in each year since 1990–91; [69716]

(2) what the gross expenditure is of each social services authority in England in each year since 1990–91 at 2000–01 prices; [69713]

(3) what the net expenditure was of each social services authority in England in each year since 1990–91 at 2000–01 prices; [69718]

(4) what the net expenditure was of each social services authority in England in each year since 1990–91 at 2000–01 prices on purchasing places in the private and voluntary homes sector. [69717]

Jacqui Smith: Tables have been placed in the Library which provide the information requested except for net expenditure on places in the private and voluntary homes sector by local authorities for the years 1990–91 to 1993–94 (inclusive) and 2000–01 which is not available centrally.

Care Homes

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the meaning of accredited training in relation to Minimum Standard 9.7 for homes for older people and Minimum Standard 20.10 for homes for younger adults. [70314]

Jacqui Smith: The administration of medication within care homes is a major responsibility and should not be undertaken lightly, since inappropriate administration could result in harm or, in some instances, the death of a service user. In this respect care home providers, therefore, must ensure that any staff who are charged with the responsibility to administer medication must fully understand the seriousness of this task, are trained in safe practices, and also have some awareness of the side effects of drugs on service users. The Commission is currently considering what forms of accredited training would be acceptable, but in the first instance, would suggest that training supplied by local pharmacists and community nurses would be acceptable.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will issue guidance to determine what constitutes regular contact with service users in respect of Care Home Regulations; [70318]

(2) if he will list the occupational groups the members of which will be considered as persons having regular contact with service users in connection with the Care Home Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [70319]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission takes 'regular contact with residents' to mean where a member of staff employed by the care home routinely interacts with residents on a one-to-one basis as part of their employment. This interaction may be restricted to talking to residents, but generally the commission will take it to mean where an individual is providing specific forms of care to a resident, such as personal care, nursing care, counselling and general support.

The staff having regular contact with residents will also vary from home to home. A range of internal and external people are likely to have regular contact with residents. This could include care staff, ancillary workers, volunteers and management staff, social workers and specialist health care professionals.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reasons the Care Home Regulations make no reference to a requirement for a business and financial plan as specified in the National Minimum Standard for homes for older people 34.5; [70317]

(2) what must be contained in a business and financial plan as specified in National Minimum Standard for older people 34.5. [70316]

Jacqui Smith: The care homes regulations and the national standards are related but they are not the same. There are, therefore, differences in the language and level of detail they contain. The regulations set out in general terms mandatory requirements with which care homes must comply. The national standards are an assessment tool which the commission must take into account when it makes a decision about whether a care home conforms to the regulations. However, the commission may also take into account any other factors it considers reasonable or relevant to do so. The regulations do not, therefore, specifically refer to business and financial plans.

The regulations and standards do not specify what must be contained in a care home's business and financial plans. In deciding whether a care home's business and financial plans conform to the requirements, the commission will need to satisfy itself that they contain sufficient information to ensure that service users are safeguarded by the accounting and financial procedures of the home.

Queen Alexandra Hospital (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what companies and organisations have expressed an interest in being involved in the private finance initiative for the Queen Alexandra Hospital in Portsmouth; when he expects to make a decision on which of these will be involved; and if he will make a statement; [71000]

(2) what the reasons are for the cost of the private finance initiative of Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth, being raised; and if he will make a statement. [70998]

Mr. Hutton: The bidding process is still under way, but I am advised by Portsmouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust that three organisations were chosen to go through to the next stage. These were: The Hospital Company, Key Health Services and Summit Healthcare. I cannot, at this time, confirm when the bidding process will be completed.

The time scale for a final decision is a matter for the trust itself. The final business case has not yet been submitted because the bidding process is not complete. The cost for the private finance initiative, specified at the outline business case stage, was an estimate and would be expected to increase over the period required to complete the project, partly as a result of inflation and other outside cost pressures.

Doctors (Suspensions)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1209W, on doctors (suspensions), for what reasons absence or special leave or gardening leave are not included in official statistics; and what guidance is issued to NHS trusts on *(a)* staff suspensions and *(b)* placing staff on special or gardening leave. [70724]

Mr. Hutton: The process of formal monitoring of suspensions lasting over six months began in March 1995, six months after the issue of HSG(94)49, the current guidance on suspension of hospital and community medical and dental staff.

As a result of an undertaking to the Public Accounts Committee in April 1995, the Department monitors formal suspensions lasting over six months on a quarterly basis. This has enabled the financial implications of those suspensions to be monitored and helped to ensure that individual cases are being actively managed.

Information on special leave is collected on an ad hoc basis when concerns are raised. No official guidance has been issued on the use of special or gardening leave. In December 2001, the Chief Medical Officer wrote to all national health service trusts requesting information regarding the use of this type of leave. This information is currently being analysed.

Correspondence

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department intends to answer the letter of the hon. Member for North Norfolk of 1 March, in relation to Kelling Park Nursing Home. [71537]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent on 16 July 2002.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 20 March 2002 from the hon. Member for Totnes regarding Mrs. B. A. Bence of Kingsbridge, Devon, a constituent. [59795]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* A reply was sent on 3 July 2002.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the percentage cost is to the NHS of *(a)* a digital hearing aid and *(b)* an analogue aid; and what the differential was 12 months ago. [71758]

Jacqui Smith: Under the national health service contract, digital hearing aids had been available at a cost of between £140 and £205 each, for moderately powered aids. The contracts and prices have been renegotiated by a team set-up by Ministers and led by James Strachan, Chief Executive of Royal National Institute for the Deaf, which includes representatives from the Department and the Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA), and allows moderate powered digital aids to be purchased at £65 to £75 each plus value added tax (VAT).

The cost of a moderately powered NHS analogue aid ranges from £59 to £126 each plus VAT.

Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the shortfall of social workers in *(a)* Portsmouth, *(b)* Hampshire and *(c)* the South East; and if he will make a statement. [72025]

Jacqui Smith: Information on vacancy rates for social workers is not available centrally.

Bed Blocking

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's strategy to tackle bed blocking. [71769]

Jacqui Smith: The Government set a target in October 2001 to reduce the number of acute hospital beds blocked at any one time by 1,000, by 31 March 2002. In March 2001 there were 5,938 beds blocked by the over-75s, and at the end of March this year 4,691 were blocked.

The Government will shortly be consulting on its plans, first announced in, "Delivering the NHS Plan", to introduce a system of charges for delays where people are ready for discharge and are awaiting social services input.

Later in the year, the Government will be responding in full to the House of Commons Health Select Committee's forthcoming report on delayed discharges.

Audit Commission Reports

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to implement the recommendations of the Audit Commission's reports, "Fully Equipped" and "Fully Equipped Two"; and if he will make a statement. [71799]

Jacqui Smith: The Government are progressing their programme to improve equipment services for older and disabled people, and in doing so, are taking fully into account the recommendations made by the Audit Commission in its two reports on the subject.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement recommendations from the Audit Commission's report, "Fully Equipped Two". [72464]

Jacqui Smith: The Government are progressing their programme to improve equipment services for older and disabled people and, in doing so, are taking fully into account the recommendations made by the Audit Commission in its two reports on the subject, "Fully Equipped", published in March 2000, and "Fully Equipped Two".

Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS nurses have left the NHS to take nursing posts in north America in the last year. [72478]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected by the Department.

NHS Staff

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the shortfall of *(a)* nurses, *(b)* general practitioners, *(c)* cancer specialists and *(d)* consultants in (i) St. Helens and Knowsley Health Authority, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the North West and (iv) England. [71279]

Mr. Hutton: The Government's plans for increasing the size of the national health service work force were set out in the NHS Plan and our manifesto before the last election. Both targets for increasing nurse numbers have been met ahead of schedule. Our latest projection for 2008 is 35,000 more nurses than there were in 2001. This has not been broken down by strategic health authority (StHA).

The NHS Plan set a target of 2,000 more general practitioners (GPs) and 7,500 consultants in England by 2004, over the 1999 baseline. To date, there has been an increase of 483 GPs and 3,130 consultants. The target has been broken down by StHA level. Cheshire and Merseyside Strategic Health Authority have an envelope of 141 more GPs and 377 more consultants by 2004.

The number of cancer specialists employed in the NHS is growing. As at March 2002, there were 3,857 cancer specialists in England. This represents an increase of 17 per cent. since 1999. We are on track to hit the target set out in the Cancer Plan of nearly 1,000 extra cancer consultants by 2006, this target has not been broken down by StHA.

Social Workers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the shortfall of social workers in *(a)* St. Helens, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* the North West and *(d)* England. [71281]

Jacqui Smith: Information on vacancy rates for social workers is not available centrally.

Public Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60145]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Since June 2001, the Department has undertaken 87 public consultations. A list of these will be placed in the Library.

The Department does not collect the number of respondents nor the percentage of those specifically consulted who responded either centrally or at all and it would be disproportionately expensive to assemble the information.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 168W, on hospital discharges, for what reason statistics for the Eastern Region on discharges that were delayed for less than eight days are not available. [64852]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 27 July 2002]:* The statistics were not available because of inconsistencies in the data provided by some health authorities in eastern region. By checking with hospitals in the former eastern region, I have been able to estimate the number of discharges delayed for less than eight days in that region. I have placed some corrected figures in the Library.

Length of delayed discharge—patients of all ages—quarter 4 2001–02
National and regional summary

Area	*Total delayed less than 8 days*	*Total delayed 8–14 days*	*Total delayed 14–28 days*	*Total delayed more than 28 days*	*Percentage delays less than 8 days (all ages)*	*Percentage delays 8–14 days (all ages)*	*Percentage delays 14–28 days (all ages)*	*Percentage delays more than 28 days (all ages)*	*Percentage HAs included in analysis*
England	1,323	1,067	1,130	1,968	24.1	19.4	20.6	35.9	95.8
Northern and Yorkshire	125	72	92	126	30.1	17.3	22.2	30.4	92.3
Trent	113	49	71	61	38.4	16.7	24.1	20.7	100.0
West Midlands	247	153	124	185	34.8	21.6	17.5	26.1	100.0
North West	119	115	93	143	25.3	24.5	19.8	30.4	93.8
Eastern	—	120	118	205	—	27.3	26.8	46.6	85.7
London	104	163	190	404	12.1	18.9	22.0	46.9	92.9
South East	299	254	278	611	20.7	17.6	19.3	42.4	100.0
South West	316	141	164	233	37.0	16.5	19.2	27.3	100.0

Health authority summary

Health authority	*Total delayed less than 8 days*	*Total delayed 8–14 days*	*Total delayed 14–28 days*	*Total delayed more than 28 days*	*Percentage delays less than 8 days (all ages)*	*Percentage delays 8–14 days (all ages)*	*Percentage delays 14–28 days (all ages)*	*Percentage delays more than 28 days (all ages)*	*HA included*
Bradford	9	0	2	0	81.8	0.0	18.2	0.0	Yes
County Durham and Darlington	12	6	5	7	40.0	20.0	16.7	23.3	Yes
East Riding and Hull	7	2	6	6	33.3	9.5	28.6	28.6	Yes
Gateshead and South Tyneside	7	6	14	15	16.7	14.3	33.3	35.7	Yes
Leeds	10	5	16	32	15.9	7.9	25.4	50.8	Yes
Newcastle and North Tyneside	23	4	8	11	50.0	8.7	17.4	23.9	Yes
North Cumbria	4	10	11	44	5.8	14.5	15.9	63.8	Yes
Northumberland	0	0	0	0	0	—	—	—	Yes
Sunderland	15	9	3	4	48.4	29.0	9.7	12.9	Yes
Tees	31	21	15	6	42.5	28.8	20.5	8.2	Yes

Health authority summary

Health authority	Total delayed less than 8 days	Total delayed 8–14 days	Total delayed 14–28 days	Total delayed more than 28 days	Percentage delays less than 8 days (all ages)	Percentage delays 8–14 days (all ages)	Percentage delays 14–28 days (all ages)	Percentage delays more than 28 days (all ages)	HA included
Wakefield	0	5	10	0	0.0	33.3	66.7	0.0	Yes
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No
Calderdale and Kirklees	7	4	2	1	50.0	28.6	14.3	7.1	Yes
Barnsley	4	0	0	0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Yes
North Derbyshire	14	2	0	0	87.5	12.5	0.0	0.0	Yes
Southern Derbyshire	9	8	4	1	40.9	36.4	18.2	4.5	Yes
Doncaster	4	1	8	6	21.1	5.3	42.1	31.6	Yes
Leicestershire	18	8	8	8	42.9	19.0	19.0	19.0	Yes
Lincolnshire	6	7	6	3	27.3	31.8	27.3	13.6	Yes
North Nottinghamshire	12	7	11	10	30.0	17.5	27.5	25.0	Yes
Nottingham	13	9	13	4	33.3	23.1	33.3	10.3	Yes
Rotherham	8	5	2	5	40.0	25.0	10.0	25.0	Yes
Sheffield	23	1	13	10	48.9	2.1	27.7	21.3	Yes
South Humber	2	1	6	14	8.7	4.3	26.1	60.9	Yes
Birmingham	65	51	35	90	27.0	21.2	14.5	37.3	Yes
Coventry	21	9	8	16	38.9	16.7	14.8	29.6	Yes
Dudley	8	8	6	2	33.3	33.3	25.0	8.3	Yes
Herefordshire	11	2	2	5	55.0	10.0	10.0	25.0	Yes
Sandwell	3	1	6	17	11.1	3.7	22.2	63.0	Yes
Shropshire	3	3	1	2	33.3	33.3	11.1	22.2	Yes
Solihull	33	1	2	0	91.7	2.8	5.6	0.0	Yes
North Staffordshire	16	5	3	1	64.0	20.0	12.0	4.0	Yes
South Staffordshire	19	15	19	15	27.9	22.1	27.9	22.1	Yes
Walsall	6	6	4	7	26.1	26.1	17.4	30.4	Yes
Warwickshire	34	38	19	11	33.3	37.3	18.6	10.8	Yes
Wolverhampton	8	6	3	5	36.4	27.3	13.6	22.7	Yes
Worcestershire	20	8	16	14	34.5	13.8	27.6	24.1	Yes
South Lancashire	12	1	0	0	92.3	7.7	0.0	0.0	Yes
Liverpool	3	7	5	17	9.4	21.9	15.6	53.1	Yes
Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No
Morecambe Bay	4	10	13	38	6.2	15.4	20.0	58.5	Yes
St. Helens and Knowsley	8	7	11	19	17.8	15.6	24.4	42.2	Yes
Salford and Trafford	3	10	7	5	12.0	40.0	28.0	20.0	Yes
Sefton	4	7	10	7	14.3	25.0	35.7	25.0	Yes
Stockport	0	3	1	2	0.0	50.0	16.7	33.3	Yes
West Pennine	14	0	6	9	48.3	0.0	20.7	31.0	Yes
Bury and Rochdale	4	2	2	3	36.4	18.2	18.2	27.3	Yes
North Cheshire	—	10	10	8	—	41.7	41.7	33.3	Yes
South Cheshire	5	5	6	9	20.0	20.0	24.0	36.0	Yes
East Lancashire	5	6	2	0	38.5	46.2	15.4	0.0	Yes
North West Lancashire	39	5	3	0	83.0	10.6	6.4	0.0	Yes
Wigan and Bolton	18	19	11	7	32.7	34.5	20.0	12.7	Yes
Wirral	0	23	6	19	0.0	47.9	12.5	39.6	Yes
Bedfordshire	3	6	4	11	12.5	25.0	16.7	45.8	Yes
North Essex	—	6	18	41	—	—	—	—	No
South Essex	0	16	17	66	0.0	16.2	17.2	66.7	Yes
Suffolk	—	63	64	96	—	33.5	34.0	51.1	Yes
Cambridgeshire	0	14	15	21	0.0	28.0	30.0	42.0	Yes
Norfolk	12	14	7	6	30.8	35.9	17.9	15.4	Yes
Hertfordshire	17	7	11	5	42.5	17.5	27.5	12.5	Yes
Hillingdon	0	17	25	16	0.0	29.3	43.1	27.6	Yes
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	4	9	5	13	12.9	29.0	16.1	41.9	Yes
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	13	10	13	20	23.2	17.9	23.2	35.7	Yes
Croydon	10	5	1	6	45.5	22.7	4.5	27.3	Yes
Kingston and Richmond	7	10	6	49	9.7	13.9	8.3	68.1	Yes
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	3	18	22	35	3.8	23.1	28.2	44.9	Yes
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	18	30	40	0.0	20.5	34.1	45.5	Yes
Barking and Havering	41	10	22	65	29.7	7.2	15.9	47.1	Yes
Brent and Harrow	6	3	2	5	37.5	18.8	12.5	31.3	Yes
Camden and Islington	16	13	17	30	21.1	17.1	22.4	39.5	Yes
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	4	11	17	49	4.9	13.6	21.0	60.5	Yes
East London and the City	—	22	13	58	—	25.9	15.3	68.2	Yes
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	0	17	17	18	0.0	32.7	32.7	34.6	Yes
Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich	—	20	8	26	—	—	—	—	No
Berkshire	29	19	35	72	18.7	12.3	22.6	46.5	Yes
Buckinghamshire	25	14	7	25	35.2	19.7	9.9	35.2	Yes
East Kent	7	9	13	23	13.5	17.3	25.0	44.2	Yes
West Kent	4	27	16	41	4.5	30.7	18.2	46.6	Yes
East Surrey	8	10	12	16	17.4	21.7	26.1	34.8	Yes
West Surrey	21	20	34	85	13.1	12.5	21.3	53.1	Yes
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	26	46	38	62	15.1	26.7	22.1	36.0	Yes
West Sussex	50	13	30	14	46.7	12.1	28.0	13.1	Yes
Northamptonshire	28	9	24	37	28.6	9.2	24.5	37.8	Yes
Oxfordshire	9	16	12	15	17.3	30.8	23.1	28.8	Yes
North and Mid Hampshire	18	18	23	98	11.5	11.5	14.6	62.4	Yes
Southampton and SW Hampshire	36	29	23	99	19.3	15.5	12.3	52.9	Yes
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	38	24	11	24	39.2	24.7	11.3	24.7	Yes
Somerset	13	9	7	5	38.2	26.5	20.6	14.7	Yes
South and West Devon	44	6	8	0	75.9	10.3	13.8	0.0	Yes
Wiltshire	12	16	9	26	19.0	25.4	14.3	41.3	Yes

Health authority summary

Health authority	*Total delayed less than 8 days*	*Total delayed 8–14 days*	*Total delayed 14–28 days*	*Total delayed more than 28 days*	*Percentage delays less than 8 days (all ages)*	*Percentage delays 8–14 days (all ages)*	*Percentage delays 14–28 days (all ages)*	*Percentage delays more than 28 days (all ages)*	*HA included*
Avon	107	46	83	107	31.2	13.4	24.2	31.2	Yes
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	37	17	12	31	38.1	17.5	12.4	32.0	Yes
Dorset	55	13	11	8	63.2	14.9	12.6	9.2	Yes
North and East Devon	48	21	17	21	44.9	19.6	15.9	19.6	Yes
Gloucestershire	0	13	17	35	0.0	20.0	26.2	53.8	Yes

NHS Maternity Units

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list NHS maternity units in descending order of the percentage level achieved against the standards expected of such a unit. [67457]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* There is no data available centrally on percentage levels against standards for maternity units.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason general practitioners practising within the area covered by the North Surrey PCT have been refused permission by the PCT to refer expectant mothers to the maternity units of their choice. [67468]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* North Surrey Primary Care Trust has not stopped general practitioners referring expectant mothers to the maternity unit of their choice.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff vacancies there are in the mental health sector of the NHS, broken down by region. [67972]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) today.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many remanded prisoners were transferred under the provisions of section 48 of the Mental Health Act 1983 in each of the last six years, including the most recent year for which figures are available. [70239]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

Section 48 of the Mental Health Act 1983 empowers the Home Secretary to transfer people from prison to hospital who require urgent treatment in a psychiatric hospital. The section covers those remanded by the courts to custody; those convicted but awaiting sentence; those detained under the Immigration Act 1971; and civil prisoners.

Figures for remand prisoners only are not available. The figures are for all four categories.

	Number
1995	473
1996	481
1997	495
1998	482
1999	464
2000	393

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the money to improve wards and conditions for psychiatric patients announced on 6 April 2001 was spent. [68148]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* £3,890,200 was spent in the financial year 2001–02.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve the monitoring of children for the first signs of the onset of mental illness. [67947]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 351W, regarding current mental health promotion and early intervention services for children and adolescents. Additionally, under the NHS Plan, 50 early intervention services will be established over the next three years to reduce treatment delay in psychosis. All young people who experience a first episode of psychosis such as schizophrenia will receive the early and intensive support they need. This is expected to benefit 7,500 young people in the 14–35 age range each year. The early detection of the onset of mental illness is also an issue we expect to consider in the child and adolescent mental health services strand of the children's national service framework on which work is currently progressing.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies exist in *(a)* clinical psychology and *(b)* psychiatry in each health authority. [58841]

Mr. Hutton: The number of vacancies and the vacancy rates for clinical psychology and consultants in psychiatry and psychotherapy have been placed in the Library.

Hotspot Councils

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 176W, on care funding, what his definition is of hotspot councils; and what the names are of the hotspot councils as referred to in Annexe B. [68748]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 176W, and the information provided in Annexe B. 'Hotspot' councils were those 55 selected to receive additional funding. The 55 councils are as follows:

Barking and Dagenham
Barnet
Bath and North East Somerset
Birmingham
Bracknell Forest
Brighton and Hove
Bristol
Bromley
Buckinghamshire
Cambridgeshire
Cumbria
Dudley
East Sussex
Enfield
Essex
Gloucestershire
Hackney
Halton
Hampshire
Haringey
Havering
Hertfordshire
Hillingdon
Isle of Wight
Kent
Knowsley
Leeds
Medway Towns
Milton Keynes
North Somerset
Northamptonshire
Peterborough
Portsmouth
Reading
Richmond-upon-Thames
Sheffield
Slough
South Gloucestershire
Southampton
Southend-on-Sea
St. Helens
Staffordshire
Suffolk
Surrey
Sutton
Swindon
Thurrock
Waltham Forest
Warwickshire
West Berkshire
West Sussex
Wiltshire
Windsor and Maidenhead
Wokingham
York.

Food Safety

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the level of public confidence in the Government's arrangements for food safety measured by public opinion surveys in each year since 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [69086]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has had responsibility for food safety since its establishment in April 2000. Levels of public confidence have been measured quantitatively rather than estimated as part of the annual "Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards", published in January 2001 and February 2002. In the most recent survey, 71 per cent. of consumers are aware of the FSA and, among them, levels of trust are high approximately 80 per cent. When asked how confident they were about the role played by the FSA in protecting health with regard to food safety, only 13 per cent. of consumers stated that they were not confident. Both surveys were widely reported by national media and are freely available on the Agency's website. The next annual survey will be published in early 2003. There were no similar surveys or estimates of public confidence by the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, now the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, before 2000.

Cancer

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government funding was allocated to *(a)* treatment for and *(b)* research in (i) prostate, (ii) breast, (iii) lung and (iv) colon cancer in each of the last 10 years. [69292]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* The Department does not collect figures on the cost of national health service services in a way that enables an accurate figure to be calculated for the cost of treatment or research for individual cancers.

Residential Child Care

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will undertake research into the reasons underlying the increase in the number of children being looked after in residential placements in the south west since 1997. [70356]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The most recently published figures for children looked after by local authorities at 31 March 2001 show that, over the past three years, while the overall number of children looked after by local authorities in the south west region has risen slightly, the relative proportion of children in residential placements has declined from 9 per cent. to 8 per cent. There is no evidence that south western local authorities have increased their use of placements in residential care.

Doctors (Recruitment)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 298W, on doctors (recruitment), how many health care professionals from developing countries have been provided with formal training and education in the UK since 1997; and of these, how many returned to their home countries after completing their studies. [71046]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

NHS Leadership Centre

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1317W, on the NHS Leadership Centre, how many people are employed by the NHS Leadership Centre. [71038]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The leadership centre is part of the National Health Service Modernisation Agency. As at 1 July 2002, there are a total of 48 staff who work for the leadership centre. 26 of those staff are on secondment or fixed term contracts from the NHS.

Overseas Recruitment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has recently met the Secretary of State for International Development concerning the recruitment of nurses and doctors from developing countries. [71041]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* No. Officials from the two Departments are due to meet at the end of July to discuss the recruitment of health care professionals.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated cost to the NHS is of compliance with new junior doctors' hours regulations. [71563]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The junior doctors' hours regulations are those incorporated into the new contract for junior doctors which requires Pre-Registration House Officers to be contracted for no more than 56 hours from August 2001, with senior house officers and specialist registrars following suit in August 2003.

The estimated cost of implementing the new contract from January 2001 to December 2003 is in the region of £210 million on a total junior doctors' pay bill of some £1.3 billion per annum. However, detailed information on doctors' pay is not held centrally. The driving principle underlying the new contract was to create financial disincentives through the pay bill if trusts continued to employ doctors in non-compliant posts. The effect of these cost pressures on trusts has been to bring overall non-compliance down from 44 per cent. in March 2001 to 32 per cent. in March 2002, with consequent potential long-term reductions in the junior doctor pay bill.

Acute Services

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make a decision on the re-organisation of acute services in East Kent. [71189]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the information I gave him in my response of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 219.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 24 July 2002

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Death in Custody

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Solicitor-General when the Attorney-General will announce the outcome of the review of the role and practices of the Crown Prosecution Service in cases arising from a death in custody. [73440]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General hopes to make an announcement around the end of September. He had hoped to do so before Parliament rose this month, but because of the thought provoking contributions that have been made, and because he wishes to examine aspects of the handling of a trial which ended in acquittal earlier this month, he has decided to extend the period of the review. He is grateful to all those who have so far responded to the consultation paper or contributed their views in other ways.

DEFENCE

Aircraft

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by aircraft type, the RAF's *(a)* requirement, *(b)* actual operating fleet and *(c)* the total number of aircraft of each type owned and leased by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [52132]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* The information requested is set out in the table. The figures provided in the table are a snapshot of the situation as at 3 May 2002.

The Required Operating Fleet is the total number of aircraft needed to undertake the defined military task, the Actual Operating Fleet is the total number of aircraft available to undertake the defined military task and the Departmental Fleet is the total number of aircraft.

MOD owned aircraft

Aircraft type	*Required operating fleet (ROF)*	*Actual operating fleet*	*Departmental fleet*
BAe 125 ccMk3	5	6	6
BAe 146 ccMk2	2	2	3
C-17	4	4	4
Canberra PR9	4	3	5
Canberra T4	1	2	4
Dominie	8	10	17
Harrier GR7	51	54	74
Harrier T10	9	8	12
Sea Harrier FA2	26	28	49
Harrier T8	4	4	7
Hawk	98	99	132
Hercules C-120J	25	23	25
Hercules C-130K	25	25	34
Islander	1	2	8
Jaguar GR1a/3/3a	39	43	93
Jaguar T2a/T4	7	—	19
Jetstream TMk	9	11	11
Nimrod MR2	20	20	21
Nimrod R1	3	2	3
Sentry E-3D AEW Mk1	6	6	7
Tornado F3	93	90	135
Tornado GR	112	112	168
Tristar	8	8	9
Tucano Mk1	71	71	126
VC10	19	19	22
Rotary wing aircraft			
Sea King Mk3/3a	23	25	25
Wessex	4	4	4
Contractor owned aircraft			
Firefly	43	43	45
Griffin	9	9	9
Squirrel	41	41	41
Tutor	99	99	99

The RAF also operates the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, which comprises 10 fixed wing aircraft. The breakdown of this figure by aircraft type and number is detailed in the table.

Aircraft type			
Chipmunk	1	2	2
Dakota	1	1	1
Hurricane	2	2	2
Lancaster B1	1	1	1
Spitfire	5	5	5

Suez Medal

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Honours and Decorations Committee re-opened the case to consider awarding a 1951–54 Suez Canal Campaign Medal; who requested that the matter be reviewed; and when he expects a decision to be made. [61264]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 43W to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard).

The Government considers it important to respect the principle that where there is a clear, demonstrable decision taken within five years of a campaign that a General Service Medal should not be awarded, that decision should not be reopened.

The evidence relating to consideration of a General Service Medal for the Suez Canal Zone is however less clear-cut. A number of representations.

In view of these exceptional circumstances, the Government is setting up a small sub-committee of HD Committee under the chairmanship of General Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank to report on the case for an exceptional award of a General Service Medal for the Suez Canal Zone without creating wider precedent or breaching longstanding principles which underpin the making of such awards.

International Criminal Court

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the UK Government's policy towards the surrender of UK nationals where accused of a crime in connection with a UN peacekeeping or enforcement operation committed after 1 July upon request of the International Criminal Court. [66479]

Mr. Hoon: Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), investigation and, if necessary, prosecution of any allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide by United Kingdom nationals would be carried out by the UK. The purpose of the ICC is to bring to justice those who commit these crimes and to act as a deterrent against their being committed. The UK strongly supports the ICC and these aims. The ICC will intervene only when it determines that a state is unwilling or unable to pursue a particular case, but it is inconceivable that this would ever apply to the UK. We do not, therefore, envisage that the UK would ever be required to surrender its nationals to the ICC.

RAF Chilmark

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the closure of RAF Chilmark was announced; what was the *(a)* planned date and *(b)* actual date of closure; what was the (i) estimated and (ii) actual date of disposal; what was the (A) estimated and (B) actual sale value of the site ; what was the (1) estimated and (2) actual cost of remediation; who calculated the estimated sale value of the site and on what basis; what the (x) estimated and (y) actual annual running costs of the site were between closure and disposal; and what the annual costs have been of decontamination work since the announcement of closure. [68927]

Dr. Moonie: The closure of RAF Chilmark was formally announced in September 1992, with a planned closure date of April 1995. The site closed on 1 April 1995.

RAF Chilmark originally comprised separate sites at Dinton and Chilmark. Sales of the various parts were planned to follow clearance of explosive ordnance devices and any necessary decontamination, although it was accepted that final clearance of the entire site could take a considerable time.

The first major sale was completed in July 1995, with seven further sales since. Chilmark HQ site and land at Ladydown are the only parts remaining unsold.

No formal estimate was made of overall sale receipts, since at the time of closure, no firm estimation could be made as to the eventual timetable for sale.

Receipts from those parts sold since closure total approximately £1.5 million.

No formal figure was prepared prior to the results of the Land Quality Assessments and prior to the introduction of more refined investigatory equipment.

The cost over the first five years since closure of clearing explosive ordnance has been in the region of £1.7 million. A further £371,000 has been spent on preparation of Land Quality Assessments and remediation. Later figures have not yet been compiled.

The values of those parts already sold have been assessed either by consultants to the Ministry of Defence or by the District Valuer. All sales have been at not less than open market value.

The total of the actual holding costs of the site from closure in 1995 to 31 March 2002, excluding remediation works but including the cost of security guarding, is in the region of £1.9 million (excluding VAT). Estimated costs are prepared on an annual basis, and have proved to be very close to the actual costs.

The future cost of any necessary decontamination of the remaining parts at Chilmark HQ site and Ladydown cannot be assessed until clearance of explosive ordnance is complete.

Nuclear Arsenal

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of maintaining Britain's nuclear arsenal in each of the last five years; and what the projected annual cost of maintaining the nuclear arsenal is in each of the next five years. [71007]

Mr. Hoon: The cost of maintaining Britain's nuclear weapons has been about 1 per cent. of the total annual defence budget and is expected to remain at around that level for each of the next five years.

Consultation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69797]

Dr. Moonie: The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation applies to all formal national public consultation documents issued by departments from 1 January 2001 and the information requested is not available before that date. Since that date, all formal consultation documents have been published on-line and either immediately made available in print or made available in print on request. Details are as follows:

Public consultations	*Issued*	*Responses required by*
The Future of the Defence Diversification Agency	Mid February 2001	23 March 2001
The Military Maritime Graves and the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986	14 February 2001	14 May 2001
Proposed introduction of the Voluntary Screening Programme following Health concerns in respect of Depleted Uranium	13 February 2001	9 March 2001
Armed Forces Pension Scheme Review	1 March 2001	31 July 2001
Joint Compensation review	1 March 2001	31 July 2001
Second Consultative Document on the introduction of a Voluntary Screening Programme for Depleted Uranium	11 April 2001	4 July 2001
Ministry of Defence Police Quinquennial Review	26 April 2001	Within six months

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [70989]

Dr. Moonie: Yes.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic or *(b)* printed form his Department has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [70986]

Dr. Moonie: For two of the consultations it is too early in the process for meaningful evaluation. The remainder have not yet been monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice.

Galileo Satellite Navigation System

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from *(a)* other European countries and *(b)* the United States regarding the possible military implications of the Galileo satellite navigation system. [70695]

Dr. Moonie: Secretary for Defence Rumsfeld discussed Galileo with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence at the NATO Defence Ministers' meeting of 6–7 June 2002. Deputy Secretary for Defence Wolfowitz had previously written to my right hon. Friend about United States concerns over Galileo in December 2001. No representations to the Secretary of State about possible military implications of Galileo have been received from European countries.

Armed Forces (Recruitment)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the recruitment figures to the armed forces from the Glasgow, Pollok constituency and the city of Glasgow were in the latest year for which figures are available; if he will list the services and units to which people have been recruited; how many individuals were recruited as *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks in each service; and what the figures were in each of the last five years. [71652]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Chinook ZD576

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Chinook ZD576. [71185]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made to the House on 22 July 2002, *Official Report,* columns 689–704.

Emergency Repairs

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of emergency repairs have been done within 24 hours of notification; what percentage of urgent repairs have been completed within five working days of notification; what percentage of routine repairs have been completed within two months of notification in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [71818]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive became an Agency of the Ministry of Defence in 1999. Prior to this date the information requested was not collected in a comparable way. The information requested is as follows:

Per cent.

	Target	*Outturn*
To complete emergency repairs within 24 hours of notification:		
1999–2000	95	95
2000–01	95	94
2001–02	95	93
To complete urgent repairs within five days of notifications:		
1999–2000	90	79
2000–01	90	86
2001–02	90	87
To complete routine repairs within two months of notifications:		
1999–2000	90	90
2000–01	90	96
2001–02	95	99

The 2001–02 figures are provisional. Routine repairs within the required time scale have consistently achieved or exceeded the targets. The achievement on urgent repairs continues to fall slightly short of the target but still represents a year on year improvement. There has also been a slight shortfall against target emergency repairs for the past two years. The Defence Housing Executive (DHE) is addressing areas of under-performance and will take remedial action to improve their service to service families. The DHE is also developing a more sophisticated system of measuring its performance on repairs which will take into account quality and customer satisfaction.

Defence Housing Executive

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who manages the Defence Housing Executive IT national database of recorded repairs; and if he will make sta[illegible]nt. [72026]

Dr. Moonie: Data is inputted into the Defence Housing Executive (DHE) database of repairs by DHE staff. The provision of IT services to DHE, including an application that maintains the database of housing repairs, is managed by Steria Ltd. (formerly Bull Information Systems Ltd.) under a contract let on 7 September 2001.

Property Disposal

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what role Annington Homes Ltd. has in deciding which properties are released back to them for disposal; and if he will make a statement; [71817]

(2) how much money has been received in each year since 1996 from the profit share on his Department's homes released to Annington Homes Ltd. for disposal; what share of the profit these amounts represent; and if he will make a statement. [71840]

Dr. Moonie: Annington Homes has no influence over which properties are released to them. They can only reject properties if a release is not in accordance with the sale agreement. This states that a release must comprise, as Annington's minimum entitlement, the lesser of

10 per cent. of a site or 20 units. The Ministry of Defence releases to Annington Homes only those families quarters for which there is no longer a service requirement.

The sale agreement incorporates a profit share agreement which has yielded the following by financial year:

	£ million
1997–98	2.29
1998–99	3.53
1999–2000	6.80
2000–01	8.03
2001–02	18.79

The Exchequer receives a proportion of any gains in excess of an agreed level according to the sliding scale as follows:

	Percentage
1997	50
1998	45
1999	40
2000	35
2001	30
2002	25
2003	25
2004	25
2005	25
2006	25
2007	22
2008	19
2009	16
2010	13
2011	10

National Asset Register

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what disposals and acquisitions have been made by his Department since the publication of the National Asset Register on 19 July 2001; and if he will make a statement. [71767]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Funding

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list his net cash requirement and planned net cash requirement in 2002–03 cash terms for financial years from 1997–98 to 2005–06; [71633]

(2) if he will list his Department's parliamentary funding and planned parliamentary funding in 2002–03 cash terms from the Consolidated Fund (Supply) for financial years from 1997–98 to 2005–06. [71632]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The data requested are given in the table. All figures are at 2002–03 prices and include costs of un-programmed operations/conflict prevention. Figures beyond 2002–03 are not available.

	£ million
	Net cash requirement
1997–98	23,617
1998–99	24,671
1999–2000	24,175
2000–01	24,782
2001–02	25,512
2002–03	26,092

Budget Holders

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's top level budget holders and their related management grouping for each financial year since 1997–98. [71634]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

C130J

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what problems have arisen with the propellers of RAF C130Js when landing on non-concrete runways; and if he will make a statement. [71715]

Dr. Moonie: No RAF C130J aircraft have landed on non-concrete runways. The first rough strip landing trial is scheduled for later this year.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made on troop seating on RAF C130Js; and if he will make a statement. [71713]

Dr. Moonie: No changes have been made to the configuration of troop seating in the RAF C130J aircraft. A maximum of 128 personnel can be accommodated in the C-Mk 4 and 91 people in the C-Mk 5. At present, however, passenger seating in the cargo compartments of both C130J marks is restricted while an investigation is carried out into the cause of noise and vibration within the compartment and its effect on passengers. This has temporarily reduced the seating capacity by 22 seats on the C-Mk 4 and 23 seats on the C-Mk 5.

Ammunition

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long after their arrival in, and how long before their departure from Afghanistan, Royal Marines were issued with, and had to return, their ammunition; and if he will make a statement. [71700]

Dr. Moonie: Royal Marine commandos at Bagram were issued with ammunition prior to specific tasks or operations, and returned any unused ammunition upon their completion. Ammunition was also issued to troops at Bagram for force protection tasks, including guarding.

SA80s

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many SA80s and SA80 A2s have been issued to *(a)* the Royal Navy, *(b)* the Royal Marines, *(c)* the RAF, *(d)* army armoured regiments, *(e)* airborne regiments, *(f)* infantry regiments, *(g)* the TA and *(h)* other units; and if he will make a statement. [71699]

Dr. Moonie: As the SA80 A2 deployment continues and the unmodified weapon is withdrawn, the information requested changes daily. As at 19 July 2002 the following information was available.

MOD unit	*SA80 A2*	*SA80 A1*
(a) The Royal Navy	131	10,179
(b) The Royal Marines	3,713	5,012
(c) The RAF	5,437	27,389
(d) Armoured regiments	514	6,982
(e) Airborne regiments	2,137	[1]—
(f) Infantry regiments	2,415	32,939
(g) The TA[2]	100	—
(h) Other units (including the TA)	9,522	89,264
Total	23,969	171,765

[1] SA80 A1 figures for Airborne troops are included within Infantry regiments figures.

[2] Reserve Training and Mobilisation Centre (RTMC), Chilwell.

Approximately 4,000 SA80 A2s are being issued each month and the deployment is expected to be complete by May 2006.

Reserve Forces Doctors

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the opportunity cost was of the compulsory mobilisation of reserve forces doctors on 16 May. [72552]

Dr. Moonie: I understand that the opportunity costs requested relate to any national health service (NHS) operations or activities which did not take place because of compulsory mobilisation of reserve forces doctors on 16 May. Such details are not held by the Ministry of Defence.

Defence Spending

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what defence spending was as a percentage of United Kingdom gross domestic product in each year since 1980. [72576]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 565W to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws). On the basis of provisional outturn for 2001–02, United Kingdom defence spending as a percentage of UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in that year is now estimated to be 2.5 per cent.

All the figures are based on cash outturn and include the unprogrammed cost of operations and other additions to the planned budget provided in Supplementary Estimates. They are not therefore comparable to forecasts of future defence spending as a percentage of UK GDP, based on the defence spending plans published in the White Paper "2002 Spending Review: New Public Spending Plans 2003–06" (Cm 5570).

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the projected defence spending is, as a percentage of UK GDP, from 2002–03 to 2005–06. [72577]

Dr. Moonie: The defence budget is expected to represent the following share of forecast GDP.

Financial year	*Percentage GDP*
2002–03	2.3
2003–04	2.3
2004–05	2.3
2005–06	2.2

This reflects the defence budget expressed as 'near-cash spending in MOD DEL' in Table 12.1 of the White Paper "2002 Spending Review: New Public Spending Plans 2003–06" (Cm 5570), which is the most appropriate basis of comparison with forecast GDP. Outturn figures are likely to be higher than these plans, when the costs of operations and any other in-year additions are taken into account, and this would increase the share of GDP represented by defence spending in these years.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of incremental 2002–03 defence spending announced in the 2002 comprehensive spending review by *(a)* type of expenditure, *(b)* country and *(c)* region of the United Kingdom in which this increase is likely to be spent. [72579]

Dr. Moonie: The 2002 spending review covered the period 2003–04 to 2005–06. Additional resources will also be made available during 2002–03 to enable us to manage the pressure arising from the high levels of activity in which we are currently engaged, but these will not be finalised until later in the year and it is therefore not possible to provide the breakdown requested.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much of the increase in defence spending announced in the recent comprehensive spending review will be spent on Trident in each year from 2002–03 to 2005–06. [72575]

Dr. Moonie: Decisions on the allocation of the defence budget plans announced in spending review 2002 will be made in the normal way through the Ministry of Defence's annual planning process.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of defence spending in each year since 1997–98 by each country and region of the United Kingdom in which it was spent. [72578]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Future Rapid Effects System

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Future Rapid Effects System and the future of *(a)* the UK's heavy warfighting capability, *(b)* the development of lighter forces and *(c)* the role of the medium force in the UK army. [72539]

Dr. Moonie: In order to meet the full range of security challenges it might encounter in the future, the Army must be able to draw upon a full spectrum of forces—heavy, medium and light. The Strategic Defence Review, with its emphasis on expeditionary forces, recognised the requirement to develop further the capabilities of all our forces for more rapid intervention.

The Future Rapid Effects System (FRES) is intended to balance our capacity to meet the requirement for capable medium forces. We shall continue to develop our heavy and light forces as we anticipate a continuing need for the capabilities they provide. None of the capabilities is discrete. We shall continue to organise our forces for specific operations into force packages tailored to the requirements of the missions, using joint capabilities drawn from across the services.

Army Pensions

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the current pension system for widows of army personnel who decide to remarry or cohabit. [72151]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Defence and the Social Security Minister announced on 20 July 2000 that changes would be made to the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) to allow widows and widowers in receipt of an Attributable Forces Family Pension to retain their pension if they remarry or cohabit. These changes took effect from 31 October 2000. Previously, an attributable widow(er)s' pension was withdrawn on remarriage or cohabitation, although it would have been automatically restored on second widowhood or at the end of a period of cohabitation. Those widows or widowers who had already remarried, and have had their attributable pension withdrawn, were not included in the change. Those in receipt of a War Widows' Pension payable under the Naval, Military and Air Force etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Order 1983, or a non-attributable widows or widowers' AFPS pension, are also not affected by the change; their pensions will still cease on remarriage or cohabitation.

No further changes to widow(er)s' pensions under the current pension scheme are envisaged, however, the review of the AFPS currently proposes extending the October 2000 change to non-attributable pensions. On current plans, this would only apply to those joining the new scheme.

Anglo-Irish Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when and where Ministers in his Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72695]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 533–34W, by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe (Peter Hain).

Memorandums of Understanding (US)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what memorandums of understanding have been signed with the United States Administration since 1 January 1999; on what dates each was signed; where each was signed; and with which Department of the United States Administration each was signed. [72690]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Colchester Garrison

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W, if the Investment Approvals Board has further considered the Colchester Garrison PFI project; if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Board's considerations; and when it will next meet to consider this matter. [72608]

Mr. Ingram: The Colchester Garrison PFI Project remains under review by the Investment Approvals Board (IAB), and an outcome of their considerations has not yet been reached. The IAB is scheduled to convene again on 12 August.

Runways

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's airfields in the UK have runways in excess of 1,800 metres in length; how many have a runway and taxiway bearing strength sufficient to take large civil aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [71899]

Dr. Moonie: The table lists all Ministry of Defence airfields with runways in excess of 1,800 metres. 16 of these 34 airfields, indicated by '*', can in principle accommodate a large civil aircraft, such as a DC10. To give a specific answer on the capability of any of these airfields to take large civil aircraft, details would be required of the aircraft type, variant, Aircraft Classification Number (ACN), maximum all up weight and tyre pressure for the load to be carried, as well as details of crash category and handling equipment requirements.

Barkston Heath
Benson
Boscombe Down
Brize Norton*
Chievnor
Church Fenton
Coltishall*
Coningsby*
Cottesmore*
Cranwell
Culdrose
Dishforth
Fairford*
Kinloss*
Lakenheath*
Leeming*
Leuchars
Llanbedr
Lossiemouth
Lyneham
Marham*
Mildenhall*
Odiham
Scampton*
Shawbury
St. Athan
St. Mawgan*

Topcliffe

Valley

Waddington*

Wattisham*

Wittering*

Wyton*

Yeovilton.

Military Maritime Graves

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in offering protection to military maritime graves. [73461]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 435W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). A Statutory Instrument (SI) was made on 9 July 2002 which prohibits intrusive activity without licence on 11 vessels: HMS Bulwark, HMS Dasher, HMS Formidable, HMS Hampshire, HMS Natal, HMS A7, HMS Vanguard, HMS Affray, HMS Exmouth, HMS Royal Oak and H5, and in addition the U-boat U12, as representative of all U-boats lost in United Kingdom territorial waters. The SI prohibits intrusive activity without licence by UK national on a further five vessels: HMS Hood, HMS Prince of Wales, HMS Repulse, HMS Gloucester and RFA Sir Galahad which lie in international waters. These regulations come into force on 30 September 2002.

Army Headquarters

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has completed the final assessment of the decision to locate the Army's headquarters in the north in Edinburgh. [73462]

Dr. Moonie: A post Project Evaluation into this decision has been completed and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Warship Support Agency

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Warship Support Agency for financial year 2002–03. [73463]

Dr. Moonie: Key Targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the War Support Agency for financial year 2002–03. The targets build on progress already made and are as follows:

Key Target 1: Timeliness

Upkeep period timeliness—target: Less than 7 per cent.

Key Target 2: Quantity

Available Vessel Days—target: More than 95 per cent.

Key Target 3: Timeliness

Timely completion of high priority upgrade programme—target: 95 per cent.

Key Target 4: Quantity

Provision of the appropriate standard of single living accommodation to Naval Personnel—target: 25 per cent.

Key Target 5: Quality

Operational support services—meeting the customers need ISO Quality Control Comment Form—targets:

Group 1: 0 failures

Group 2: Less than 1 per cent. failure

Group 3: Less than 5 per cent. failure

Survey target:

Greater than or equal to 95 per cent. to standard by survey

Greater than or equal to 45 per cent. of customers more than satisfied

Key Target 6: Quantity

Availability of material/manpower to Support the Naval Force General Plan—target: green assessment against all elements.

Key Target 7: Cost/Efficiency

To make the necessary Agency contribution to the DLO Strategic Goal of reducing output costs by 20 per cent. by 2005 while ensuring that we continue to deliver and indeed where appropriate improve the quality of our outputs.

RAF Personnel Management Agency

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the RAF Personnel Management Agency for the financial year 2002–03; [73464]

(2) what key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the RAF Personnel Management Agency for financial year 2002–03. [73468]

Dr. Moonie: The Commander-in-Chief Royal Air Force Personnel and Training Command has set the Chief Executive of the Agency the following targets for financial year 2002–03.

Key Target 1: Peacetime Manning

Performance indicator: The percentage of available trained personnel either filling established posts or on diversions for which there is an approved Manning and Training Margin—Greater than or equal to 93.25 per cent.

Key Target 2: Operational and Non-Operational MOD Authorised Unestablished Tasks

Performance indicator: The percentage manning level of operational and non-operational MOD authorised unestablished tasks—target: Greater than or equal to 98 per cent.

Key Target 3: Career Management

Performance indicator: The percentage of PMA's customers who are either satisfied or not dissatisfied with the service provided by the PMA—target: Greater than or equal to 82.5 per cent.

Key Target 4: Manpower Planning

Performance indicator: Percentage variation between actual trained strength and the authorised trained strength taken as an average over the financial year—target: No greater than or equal to ±1 per cent.

Key Target 5: Efficiency

Performance indicator: Maintain operating costs within resources allocated—target: Expenditure contained within RCT.

Duke of York's Royal Military School

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Duke of York's Royal Military School for the financial year 2002–03. [73470]

Dr. Moonie: The Chief Executive of the Duke of York's Royal Military School has been set the following Key Targets for 2002–03.

Key Target 1

To achieve 95.9 per cent. of 15-year-old pupils gaining five or more passes graded A* to C at GCSE.

Key Target 2

To achieve 23.93 per cent. of GCSE passes at grades A* or A.

Key Target 3

To achieve an average GCSE points score per 15-year-old pupil of 57.36.

Key Target 4

To achieve an average GCE points score per candidate of 20.59.

Key Target 5

To achieve 38.72 per cent. of GCE passes at grades A or B.

Key Target 6

To achieve a pupil per capita cost of no more than £12,542.

Key Target 7

To generate income of at least £600,000.

Key Target 8

To achieve at least 300 applications for September 2003 intake.

Afghanistan

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to send a TA infantry platoon to support the International Security and Assistance Force in Afghanistan. [73502]

Dr. Moonie: We plan to deploy a composite Territorial Army infantry platoon to Kabul in order to provide a protection platoon to the United Kingdom component to the International Security and Assistance Force. The platoon will comprise members of the Territorial Army who have volunteered to be called out for this task. They will be mobilised at the end of July and deployed for three months from the end of August. The deployment is in line with the policy of making the Territorial Army more usable and integrated with the regular force.

Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency for the financial year 2001–02. [73452]

Dr. Moonie: The role of the Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency is to provide imagery intelligence and geographic support to Defence policy, operations and training; to meet customer requirements for imagery intelligence and geographic support in accordance with Defence priorities; to maintain and develop Agency capabilities and readiness in line with future Defence requirements; and to become progressively more efficient, while improving the quality and delivery of its products and services. The Key Targets for the Agency for the 12 months from April 2002 are:

Key Target 1

To satisfy operational requirements for Imagery Intelligence and Geographic Support within time scales and to standards agreed between the Agency and its customers.

(a) For Imagery Intelligence, by satisfying at least 95 per cent. of requirements overall, while delivering not less than 98 per cent. of Priority 1 tasks.

(b) For Geographic Support, by satisfying 100 per cent. of the geographic products and services essential to support current and potential operations, both from the Agency's United Kingdom based capabilities and its deployable units.

Key Target 2

To achieve the required levels of operational readiness for the deployable geographic support elements of the Agency in line with Defence Planning Assumptions.

To maintain agreed states of readiness as set by PJHQ for all contingency forces (JRRF).

Key Target 3

To satisfy strategic and contingency requirements for Imagery Intelligence and Geographic Support within time scales and to standards agreed between the Agency and its customers.

(a) For Imagery Intelligence, by satisfying at least 54 per cent. of the requirements as set out in the Imagery Exploitation Programme (IEP) agreed during Financial Year (FY) 2001–02, while delivering not less than 92 per cent. of Priority 1 tasks.

(b) For Geographic Support, completing at least 90 per cent. of a customer endorsed programme of work for geographic products and services.

Key Target 3T (Transitional)

To develop Regional Support Agreements (RSAs) and establish an accurate baseline of the totality of Defence requirements for geographic information to be used as measurement in FY 2003–04.

The implementation of the new Key Target.

Key Target 4

To demonstrate a further 1 per cent. improvement in the coverage of geographic information holdings resulting in a cumulative 3 per cent. improvement on the baseline established in 1999 and to maintain their quality for Defence use.

Maintain the Ministry of Defence Map Library collection at the agreed level of readiness and achieve a further 1 per cent. improvement in coverage of geographic information holdings.

Key Target 5T (Transitional)

In FY 2002–03, to develop output related targets and performance measures for implementation in FY 2003–04, which taken together across the Agency deliver outputs through a more efficient utilisation of resources.

The implementation of the new Key Target.

Army Personnel Centre Agency

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Army Personnel Centre Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [73453]

Dr. Moonie: The Chief Executive of the Army Personnel Centre has been set the following key targets for 2002–03:

Key Target 1

To maintain at 94 per cent., the percentage of posts which are manned (excluding posts gapped for less than 28 days and all posts for private soldiers and subaltern officers). The 2001–02 performance was the maintenance of 94 per cent. of posts manned.

Key Target 2

To increase to 98 per cent. the proportion of personnel posted in-year by the APC whose rank and service qualifications meet the specifications of the post. The 2001–02 performance was 98 per cent. of personnel posted in-year who met the specifications of the post.

Key Target 3

To increase to at least 65 per cent., the percentage of in-year postings authorised by the APC where personnel are given at least four months notification. The 2001–02 output was 63 per cent. of personnel were given at least four months notification.

Key Target 4

To remain within 0 per cent. to -1 per cent. of the annual resource allocation while achieving targets.

Transport and Movements Agency

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Transport and Movements Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [73455]

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Transport and Movements Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [73467]

Dr. Moonie: The Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Agency has been set the following Key Targets for 2002–03:

Key Target 1

To meet the customer's requirements as negotiated and agreed in Customer Supplier Agreements.

Key Target 1a

95 per cent. or more of Agency transactions and services provided under call-off contracts to be within agreed (TQQC) criteria.

Key Target 1b

At least 92 per cent. of transactions against each Agency service, and call-off contracts, to be within agreed (TQQC) criteria.

Key Target 2

To achieve an overall 3 per cent. increase in efficiency.

Key Target 3

To demonstrate improved net added value.

Key Target 4

To achieve at least a satisfactory rating in the provision of operational transport and movements support.

British Forces Post Office Agency

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the British Forces Post Office Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [73456]

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the British Forces Post Office Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [73465]

Dr. Moonie: The chief executive of the British Forces Post Office Agency has been set the following key targets for 2002–03:

Key Target 1

To meet 95 per cent. of customers' requirements as negotiated and agreed in customer supplier agreements.

Key Target 2

To achieve an overall 4 per cent. increase in efficiency.

Key Target 3

To reduce the net level of Customer Care Unit (CCU) compensation paid that is directly attributable to BFPO by 3 per cent. on the 2001–02 financial year.

Storage and Distribution Agency

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [73457]

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [73466]

Dr. Moonie: The Chief Executive of the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency (DSDA) has been set the following key targets for 2002–03:

Key Target 1

To meet the customers' requirements as negotiated and agreed in customer supplier agreements.

Key Target 1a

95 per cent. of all issues to consumers to meet that element of the supply chain pipeline for which DSDA has a responsibility.

Key Target 1b

98 per cent. of all receipts that conform to the specifications laid down in the contract and/or material regulations to be processed within time limits agreed with each individual customer.

Key Target 2

To achieve an overall 5 per cent. reduction in the unit cost of output.

Key Target 3

The value of inventory written-off as a result of DSDAs action to be less than levels agreed within each specific customer supplier agreement.

Training Group Defence Agency

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Training Group Defence Agency for the financial year 2002–03, [73458]

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Training Group Defence Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [73469]

Dr. Moonie: The Commander-in-Chief Royal Air Force Personnel and Training Command has set the Chief Executive of the Agency the following targets for financial year 2002–03.

Key Target 1—Training Output

To recruit and select Royal Air Force personnel in the required numbers to achieve the Into Training Targets defined by the Royal Air Force manning plans.

To train aircrew of the three services to standards for entry to the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy Operational Conversion Unit training, the Defence Helicopter Flying School and other specialist flying training courses.

To train military personnel to the standards required to undertake ground appointments.

KT1a—Quantity of Output (ab initio flying training)—the number of RAF aircrew trainees graduated as follows:

	Target
Fast Jet Pilots	67
Multi-Engine Pilots	57
Rotary Wing Pilots	33
Fast Jet Navigators	28
Multi-Engine Navigators	9
Rotary Wing Navigators	10
Airman Aircrew	104

KT1b—Quantity of Output (ab initio ground training)—the number of RAF trainees who graduated from the following courses:

	Target
Officer Initial Specialist Training	358
RAF Tradesmen Training	2,104

Key Target 2—Quality of Output (Training Places)

To train the aircrew of the three services to standards for entry to the Royal Air Force, to Royal Navy Operational Conversion Unit, the Defence Helicopter Flying School and other specialist flying training courses.

To train military personnel to the standards required to undertake ground appointments.

KT2a—Training Place (Flying)[1]

	Target
Flying Training Courses—RN	202
Flying Training Courses—Army	374
RAF Flying Instructor Courses	150
RAF Refresher and Orientation Courses	170
RAF Specialist and Operational Courses	240
Flying Training (F and C)	92

[1] The number of training places provided on the following RN, Army, RAF instructor Refresher and Orientation, and specialist and operational flying courses. Also, the number of training places provided for Foreign and Commonwealth (F and C) flying courses.

KT2b—Training Places (Ground)

	Target
Pre-Employment Training	15,547
Career Development Training	6,506

Key Target 3—Quality of Output

To underpin the military effectiveness of the Royal Air Force by the timely provision of military personnel trained to the standards agreed with the Agency's customers.

KT3—Quality of Output: Achievement of a satisfactory assessment of customer satisfaction with the quality of graduate trainees as reflected in an assessment based on a matrix of the following measures:

Reports from the Aircrew Training Standards Sub-Committees;

Quantitative reports from the Owner's Customer Advisory Committee;

Quantitative reports on the satisfaction level of graduate trainees.

Target: Satisfactory rating.

Key Target 4—Cost Management

To ensure the necessary systems are in place to manage the business on an output cost basis.

KT4—Cost Management: Output based management.

Target: Deliver an Agency wide prototype of the planned financial management and accounting system to provide unit costs of output by 31 March 2003.

Key Target 5—Efficiency

KT5—Efficiency: By 2005–06, reduce by 3 per cent. the average annual per capita cost of training a successful recruit to the agreed standard.

Target: Performance level for 2002–03 to be £0.138 million.

Queen Victoria School

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of Queen Victoria school for the financial year 2002–03. [73459]

Dr. Moonie: The Chief Executive of Queen Victoria school has been set the following key targets for 2002–03:

Key Target 1

To maintain the staying on rate at school of S4 to S5 at a minimum of four per cent. above the Scottish national average.[1]

Key Target 2

To maintain the percentage of pupils obtaining at least five credit awards at standard grade at two per cent. above the Scottish national average.[1]

Key Target 3

To maintain a percentage of the S4 roll gaining 3+ awards at level 6 or better by the end of S5, at least equal to the Scottish national average.[1]

Key Target 4

To achieve a pupil per capita cost of not more than £14,000 by March 2003.

Key Target 5

To generate gross income to the school of at least £295,000 per annum.

[1] All Queen Victoria school statistics to be based on the school's results over the last three years, compared with the Scottish national average for the current year, those statistics being as published in the Scottish Executive Official Statistics.

Test and Evaluation Facilities

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future provision of test and evaluation facilities. [73460]

Dr. Moonie: It is widely recognised that the Test and Evaluation (T&E) business has been in need of radical restructuring for many years. As part of tackling this problem head on, a long-term partnering contract is currently being negotiated with QinetiQ for the delivery of the T&E capability. The process includes the Ministry of Defence setting challenging targets to ensure that the T&E structure is more closely aligned with MOD's requirement for T&E capabilities. To achieve this within the taut budget, QinetiQ has put forward a number of proposals, which aim to remove excess capacity, duplication and obsolete facilities.

QinetiQ has identified three major rationalisation proposals for the air ranges. These are: conversion of the Aberporth range to an instrumented training range, the closure of Llanbedr airfield, and the reduction to campaign operation status of the West Freugh range.

The proposals will potentially deliver net savings in excess of £300 million across the life of the 25-year contract, and will transform the T&E business into the effective, modern organisation that we require.

The delivery of these savings is likely to lead to around 400 job losses, spread across all three establishments. I will be writing today to fully inform interested parties, including the unions, about the proposals beginning the consultation process.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Consultations

Mrs. Calton: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission how many times the Electoral Commission has been consulted in accordance with 7(1) and 2(h) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000; where their consultation responses are reported; and on how many occasions the Electoral Commission has provided a response. [69787]

Mr. Beith: I will write to the hon. Member.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

World Bank

7. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the forthcoming United Nations world summit on sustainable development will review the performance of the World bank business partners for development initiative. [69879]

Ms Keeble: Business Partners for Development (BDP) was a project-based initiative set up in 1998 to initiate partnerships for development. It involved 30 focus projects in 20 countries around the world. The BPD final report containing conclusions and recommendations was launched in April of this year. An independent evaluation of BPD, funded by my Department and the World bank, has already been conducted, and the findings will be available later this month. WSSD will review general progress on sustainable development to see where the implementation gaps are, as well as new challenges. Although not formally part of the WSSD process, the review will of course be available to all participants.

Zimbabwe

8. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she next expects to meet representatives of international aid agencies to discuss their plans for assisting Zimbabwe; and if she will make a statement. [69880]

Clare Short: My Department is in frequent contact with representatives of development agencies in Harare and internationally. We are working to try to prevent the current crisis becoming a catastrophe but the situation is very worrying.

9. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her policy towards aid for Zimbabwe. [69887]

Clare Short: Our aim is to prevent loss of life arising from current food shortages and the increasing burden of disease and to support survival strategies of the poorest people. We have increased our financial provision for Zimbabwe to £32 million to meet humanitarian needs. Aid is being channelled through non-governmental and international organisations.

Cameroon

11. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to relieve poverty among the anglophobe minority in Cameroon. [69882]

Clare Short: The support my department provides to Cameroon is not restricted to a particular linguistic or ethnic group. As part of the international community we support Cameroon's efforts to develop a poverty reduction strategy for all its people. Moreover, my department contributes directly to overall poverty reduction through our support to the forestry sector, in recognition of the sector's importance to the Cameroonian economy and the number of poor people living in the forest zone.

Famine (Southern Africa)

12. **Gregory Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what she is doing to prevent famine in southern Africa. [69883]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W. Since then our contribution to the world food programme has been used to buy about 60,000 tonnes of commodities which are being shipped now. Further allocations from the overall commitment of £45 million have been made to NGOs, and support has been provided for logistics personnel and vulnerability and nutrition assessments.

Fatal Diseases

13. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to tackle *(a)* HIV/AIDS, *(b)* TB, *(c)* malaria and *(d)* other fatal diseases. [69884]

Clare Short: Approximately half of infectious disease deaths in developing countries can be attributed to three diseases: HIV, TB and malaria, which cause more than five million deaths per year. DFID is working to strengthen developing countries' health systems to deliver effective services to the poorest. We have committed more than £1 billion to that purpose since 1997. The UK has also taken an active role in the establishment of the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria, which is designed to improve provision of drugs and commodities to treat those diseases. DFID has pledged $200 million over five years for the fund.

Clean Water (Africa)

14. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to improve supply of clean water in Africa. [69885]

Clare Short: My Department is working with Governments, civil society and the private sector to achieve the Millennium development goals for access to safe water in Africa. With all partners we seek to ensure that activities are sustainable and have a pro-poor focus. Expenditure on water in Africa was over £29 million last year.

Sub-Sahara

15. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her policy towards assisting economic and agricultural developments in the sub-Sahara. [69886]

Clare Short: DFID policy is to work with African Governments to implement internationally agreed poverty reduction strategies and to work through multilateral organisations, African institutions and the international community to promote private investment, create an equitable international trading system and bring an end to conflict in Africa.

Trade Links

16. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she will take to seek reform of European Union policy on international aid and development relating to promotion of trade links with aid recipients. [69888]

Clare Short: The European Union has three instruments to help improve trading opportunities for developing countries:

First, the Everything but Arms initiative (EBA), which grants the worlds 49 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) duty and quota free access to EU markets for all their export products, excluding arms and munitions.

Second, the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), which are about to be negotiated with the 77 countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions which are party to the Cotonou Agreement. These EPAs will seek to create WTO compatible free trade areas between coherent groups of ACP countries and the EU.

Third, the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), which grants all developing countries zero or reduced tariffs on the majority of their exports to the EU.

The Government will continue to work to improve the trade access offered under these arrangements.

Agricultural Exports

17. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact on the economies of developing countries of subsidised agricultural exports from the European Union; and if she will make a statement. [69889]

Clare Short: The UK understands the damaging impact of subsidised agriculture exports on developing countries. We recognise that subsidised agriculture exports have a dampening effect on world prices and thus constrain agriculture investment and growth in developing countries. The UK is therefore pressing for substantial CAP reform under the current mid-term review, to reduce EU subsidies.

Ethiopia

18. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the development aid she is providing to Ethiopia. [69890]

Clare Short: We are building up a development partnership with Ethiopia which will support the Ethiopian Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy. We understand that the Government of Ethiopia hope to produce a final version of the strategy in the next few weeks. Excluding humanitarian support our initial aid framework for 2002/03 was £9 million. There are also additional funds for a three-year input to help tackle HIV/AIDS.

Current and planned support includes assistance in the road sector, water, food security including rural transportation, pastoralism and tax reform. We are currently developing a strategy for future years when the programme will expand. The strategy will address which sectors will be focus areas for DFID support. There will be full consultation during the strategy process. Initial discussions with the Ethiopian Government suggest that our focus should be on education, food security and capacity building across sectors. We shall continue to bear in mind political developments in Ethiopia while drawing up our plans.

Afghanistan

19. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the oral answer of 26 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 866, on Afghanistan, what the result has been of the Under-Secretary of State's inquiries. [69891]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 258W.

20. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. [69892]

Clare Short: Thanks to the efforts of the UN-led humanitarian system, with the support of the international community, a potential humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan after 11 September 2001 has been avoided. The achievements of recent months have led to an optimism that can be seen in the massive influx of returning refugees from neighbouring countries—over 1.25 million Afghan refugees have returned to their country since 1 March 2002. However, serious challenges remain. Chronic malnutrition, food shortages and socio-economic vulnerability are still alarmingly high. According to the UN, almost one third of the Afghan population is dependant on some form of emergency assistance. In many parts of the country these challenges are compounded by problems of access due to continuing insecurity, the presence of land mines and UXOs, and, in the later winter months, will be further complicated by heavy snows and extreme cold temperatures.

The United Nations estimates that donors must provide a further US$780 million in order to meet immediate requirements in Afghanistan up to December 2002; almost US$400 million of which is required to cover needs over the next three months. Support from the international community, under the guidance of the Afghan transitional administration (ATA), will be used to address the on-going humanitarian crisis, support the return of refugees to Afghanistan, develop a comprehensive analysis of and approach to vulnerability in Afghanistan, and support the transition of competence, ownership and technical capacity to the ATA to meet the immediate needs of its own people.

In addition to the £60 million that my Department disbursed from September 2001 to March 2002 under our humanitarian programme, we pledged at the Tokyo conference in January 2002 to commit a further £200 million over the next five years. This amount is already being allocated and disbursed. We are fully committed to helping to meet the immediate priorities of the ATA and are encouraging other donors to do likewise by maximising their contributions and speeding up the disbursement of promised assistance.

26. **Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's relief activities in northern Afghanistan. [69898]

Clare Short: My Department is supporting a range of humanitarian agencies working across Afghanistan, including in northern areas; these include UN humanitarian agencies, the Red Cross, and international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs). We remain concerned about continuing insecurity in northern Afghanistan, including attacks against NGOs. We support the actions of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General, Lakhdar Brahimi, who has written to President Karzai, and visited the north to impress upon the various factions the need for a secure environment. Other UN representatives have also visited insecure areas and received assurances from local leaders that measures are being put in place to control factional fighting and allow for the safe delivery of humanitarian and recovery assistance. We will continue to monitor the situation closely.

29. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of the aid money promised to Afghanistan has reached that country. [69901]

Clare Short: Precise data on the disbursement of aid to Afghanistan are not yet available. However, we estimate that donor pledges to Afghanistan amount to a little under $2 billion in 2002, of which about $1.1 billion has been committed and about $0.8 billion disbursed. The pace of further disbursements will now depend on improvements in security and access and on the completion of the national Development Framework and Development Budget.

The UK has disbursed over £60 million to Afghanistan since September 2002 and is in the process of completing a further round of disbursements to UN agencies, NGOs, quick impact projects and the Afghan Authority for the Co-ordination of Assistance.

Social Exclusion

21. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is giving to programmes combating social exclusion of vulnerable groups in south eastern Europe. [69893]

Clare Short: We are working with governments, civil society and international organisations in the region to tackle this issue. Specifically: we are supporting two regional programmes on promotion of minority rights and rights and access to justice for Roma communities and a project in Bulgaria focused in reduction in social exclusion. In Romania we are assisting the Anti-Poverty Commission to develop a social exclusion policy.

We are funding projects in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria to assist with the reform of social policy, focused on more effective social services, social welfare and employment systems, including improved cooperation between government and civil society. These will, in part, address the situation of socially-excluded groups. These projects are mostly linked to World bank structural adjustment credits.

We are supporting poverty surveys in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania to assist the authorities in identifying the features of poverty and monitoring measures to address it.

We have provided grants totalling £8.4 million to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for family welfare payments targeted at the poorest section of the population.

We have assisted with the preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy for Albania, and are supporting their preparation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia.

We are working with the World bank to support social mitigation programmes in Romania (targeted at ex-mining communities) and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also in Romania we are assisting the Social Development Fund.

In Romania and Bulgaria we are supporting child welfare and protection projects.

In Albania we are funding a programme of suppo[illegible] rural livelihoods, targeted at the poorer, mounta[illegible] regions.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

22. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on UK funding to international sexual and reproductive health organisations. [69894]

Clare Short: My Department supports a number of international sexual and reproductive health organisations which share our aim of eliminating poverty including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations. We believe that the goal of the international conference on population and development of universal access to reproductive health is central to attainment of the health Millennium Development Goals, specifically those related to maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and child mortality. Without access to high quality reproductive health services and care, it is most unlikely that progress will be achieved in meeting the health MDGs. We will continue to support international organisations which make an effective contribution to these goals, and of course the efforts of governments seeking to improve people's access to reproductive health services.

Departmental Management Board

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development who has been recruited as non-executive directors to her Department's management board. [73499]

Clare Short: Bill Griffiths, Director of WRG Associates, and Nemat Shafik, Vice-President for Private Sector Development and Infrastructure at the World bank, have been recruited as non-executive Directors to sit on DFID's Management Board. Mr. Griffiths will also chair our Audit Committee.

Common Agricultural Policy

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the European Commission's proposal for the reform of the common agricultural policy, with particular reference to farmers in developing countries; and if she will make a statement. [72768]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on 17 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 261W.

Gujarat

23. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she has given to refugees in the State of Gujarat. [69895]

Clare Short: My Department has provided nearly £750,000 of assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Gujarat, channelled through international and local NGOs operational on the ground.

Primary Education

24. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of World Bank proposals to fast-track support for primary education in certain poor countries. [69896]

Clare Short: The Government are strongly committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on education and is working to mobilise the international community in support of them. The World bank has a critical role in supporting countries as they seek to give priority to education, and primary education in particular, within the overall context of their poverty reduction strategies. We have been working with the Bank to develop its new Action Plan for accelerating progress towards Education for All.

We believe the World bank Action Plan's fast-track initiative provides an opportunity to try to ensure that no country genuinely committed to economic development, poverty reduction and good governance is denied the chance to achieve universal primary education through lack of resources. The Government were successful in calling for the fast-track initiative to include Nigeria and Ethiopia, where over 14 million children are out of school. It offers 18 poor countries the chance to qualify for additional financing for primary education if they can demonstrate that their Government is fully committed and has effective policies in place. A further five countries can apply for assistance in building capacity, filling gaps in data and developing effective policies for primary education.

The Government are committed to further increasing our support for basic education, particularly in Africa. We will continue to support the Fast Track proposals and participate in on-going discussions with the World bank about implementation arrangements.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she expects the additional resources committed for good quality primary education to the group of 18 countries selected to receive immediate financing to be provided. [72767]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on 17 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 291W.

Steel Industry (Eastern Europe)

25. **Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's policy is in relation to financial support for the steel industry in eastern Europe. [69897]

Clare Short: The UK believes that the countries of Eastern Europe need to privatise and restructure their steel industries as part of their transition from central planning to open market orientated economies. Privatisation and restructuring help to improve efficiency and enable governments to redirect subsidies—which currently keep inefficient companies afloat—into investment in essential public services.

The UK does not provide direct financial support to the steel industry in Eastern Europe. The UK is a shareholder in the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) which both support the restructuring of former communist economies in Eastern Europe, including through non-concessional loans to support steel industry privatisation and restructuring.

Renewable Energy

27. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to widen access to renewable energy in developing countries. [69899]

Clare Short: My Department takes the approach that a full menu of options should be considered when providing access to energy in developing countries, not just renewable energy. Poor people will rely on fossil fuels and traditional biomass resources for many years to come, so cleaner more efficient uses of these energy resources should not be ignored.

Our recent consultation document 'Energy for the Poor' invited comments on the role that DFID can play in providing poor people in developing countries with access to energy for poverty reduction. The final Paper will be produced in August.

We have a number of on-going activities in the energy sector in specific countries, which are listed on the attachments to this reply, together with details of our research work in this sector. We are also a contributor to the multi-donor technical co-operation facilities (ESMAP and PPIAF), which have activities in the energy sector, some of which include renewables. Brief details of the work of these are also attached to this reply.

Commodity Prices

28. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has to ensure that the work done to reduce the debt burden of highly indebted poor countries and other countries is not undermined by recent declines in commodity prices. [69900]

Clare Short: The Government have been working to try to ensure that countries exit the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative process with sustainable debt levels. At the Annual Meetings of the World bank and IMF we asked the World bank staff to revisit the debt sustainability analyses of all commodity dependent low-income countries, including HIPCs. The IMF and World bank analysis shows that, although the situation varies from country to country, the external debt indicators for most HIPC countries have deteriorated, and several HIPC countries now face unsustainable debt burdens as a result. Following UK pressure, the World bank and IMF Boards have agreed to provide additional relief to countries in this situation. This was reconfirmed at the Spring meetings, in April, and Burkina Faso became the first HIPC country to benefit from 'topping up' at Completion Point.

World Summit

30. **Mr. Luke:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her priorities are for the world summit on sustainable development in September. [69902]

Clare Short: The Government's strategic objective for the world summit is to make globalisation work for sustainable development, especially for the poorest. We see the summit as part of a broader process that includes the Millennium Declaration, the WTO Doha Development Agenda and the agreement reached at the Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the affordability of HIV/AIDS drugs to patients in Africa. [71933]

Clare Short: The Government are strongly committed to increasing access to essential medicines for the world's poor, especially in Africa.

The Working Group on Access to Medicines, which I chair, has brought together UK Government, pharmaceuticals and others over the last year to look at options for bringing about widespread, sustainable and predictable differential pricing of medicines, including HIV/AIDS drugs. Good progress has been made. The final meeting will be held tomorrow and the group will report back to the Prime Minister by September.

Affordability is only one of four key factors that influence access to medicines. Others are the need for sustainable financing, the rational selection and use of existing drugs and reliable health and supply systems.

On sustainable financing, we have pledged $200 million over five years to the Global Fund to Fight TB, AIDS and Malaria (GFATM). We have also committed over £1 billion since 1997 to strengthening developing countries' health systems, building their capacity both to deliver medicines to the poor and to make effective choices about the selection and use of drugs.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the Government support a continued role for the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in the EU candidate countries after accession. [73472]

Clare Short: Yes. We have refined the view taken in the UK's institutional strategy paper for the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) that accession to the EU would complete transition for eligible countries and should trigger a graduation from EBRD operations. We now consider that there will still be important transition challenges in less advanced sectors of the countries of Central Europe and the Baltics after they join the EU. Working within its three key principles—transition impact, additionality and sound banking—the EBRD will continue to have a role assisting the countries address these challenges. The UK believes that the EBRD should take a strategic approach, co-ordinating closely with other public institutions and working to widen the benefits of transition to those who have benefited least.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she will answer the written question from the hon. Member for Chichester, tabled on 22 May, on the official travel of departmental and non-departmental special advisers. [72677]

Clare Short: According to the Order Paper, no such question was tabled to my Department on 22 May by the hon. Member for Chichester.

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked in her Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72643]

Clare Short: The information on staff numbers is set out in the following table as at 1 April 2001 and 1 April 2002, which are the only two of the last five years for which figures are available. The table shows the information as a percentage of total DFID staff numbers in the UK.

	April 2001	*April 2002*
Temporary agency staff employed	29	58
Temporary agency staff as a percentage of total staff number in UK	2.2	3.6

No central data are held on the cost of agency staff. However as a proportion of the total staffing budget, this will be less than percentages for staff numbers shown in the table because the majority of such staff are contracted to fill temporary positions at junior level.

Departmental Bodies

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many jobs under the remit of her Department in *(a)* the core Department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by her Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual Department, body or organisation. [72731]

Clare Short: The information in respect of DFID's civil service posts as at 1 April 2002 is contained in the table. Information in the other categories listed is not readily available.

	Number	*Percentage of total*
Scotland	527	33.5
Greater London	791	50.3
Overseas	255	16.2

G8 (Expenditure and Policies)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how the G8's commitment to focusing their development efforts on cultures that demonstrate a political and financial commitment to good governance and the rule of law, investing in their people and pursuing policies that spur economic growth and alleviate poverty will be reflected in *(a)* their development spending for 2003 and *(b)* their policies in 2003. [72304]

Clare Short: Each G8 member will decide for itself how to meet the commitments entered into at the Kananaskis Summit. These commitments reflect the Department for International Development's existing policies as set out in its Strategies for Achieving the International Development Targets published in 2000–01, copies of which are available in the House Library. The Department is currently reviewing how these should be applied to the outcome of the recent Comprehensive Spending Review. The resulting allocation and its underlying rationale will be set out in the 2003 departmental report. In setting our priorities we will take fully into account the extent to which developing country Governments pursue effective pro-poor policies. We encourage other donors to do likewise.

Developing Countries

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to ensure that poorer people in developing countries benefit from water supply projects in which United Kingdom companies invest. [72055]

Clare Short: My Department is working in many different ways to ensure that all water companies who engage in water supply projects cater for all, especially the poor. Our policy for achieving the Millennium Development Goal of halving the number of people without access to safe water by 2015 is set out in the strategy paper "Addressing the Water crisis—Healthier and More Productive Lives for Poor People". The policy seems sustainability in water supply and sanitation service delivery with a proper pro-poor focus. We are working with developing country Governments to ensure priority for pro-poor water supply and sanitation services within the Poverty Reduction Strategy processes. We are also supporting a considerable body of research that is seeking specifically to develop mechanisms by which the private sector is able best to provide for the poor.

My Department has been at the forefront of developing new facilities to ensure that the engagement of the private sector in water supply and sanitation addresses the needs of the poor. These include the Public Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF), which is building capacity for effective regulation, and the Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund (EAIF), which seeks to harmonise developmental and commercial objectives.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises, as they relate to developing countries are monitored. [72054]

Clare Short: Like all 36 signatories to the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises (MNEs), the UK has a national contact point (NCP), responsible for ensuring effective implementation of the guidelines, this includes contributing to the resolution of concerns about the behaviour of MNEs raised with it. The UK NCP is based on the Department of Trade and Industry working in liaison with other Government Departments. Signatories to the guidelines recognise that there are greater difficulties in implementing them in non-adhering countries (which includes almost all developing countries), not lest because they do not have NCPs. However, the Government's expectations of UK MNE behaviour are the same wherever they operate. In developing countries positive co-operation between the NCP, UK Government representation locally, business, unions, NGOs, and individuals is important for successful implementation and promotion. The UK Government are working hard to raise the profile of the guidelines in developing countries, for example through the recent G7/8 Action Plan for Africa initiative, through UK overseas posts, and through discussions with fellow signatories and interested parties at the regular NCP meetings in the OECD. We will continue these efforts as it is in developing countries where, arguably, the guidelines can make the most impact.

Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what public consultations have been commenced by her Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72062]

Clare Short: Since April 2002, my Department has conducted limited public consultations on the following documents:

"Better Livelihoods for Poor People: The Role of Agriculture" (consultation closed 5 July 2002)

A DFID-wide research policy study, "Research For Poverty Reduction", (consultation closed 10 May 2002);

"Energy for the Poor" (consultation closes 31 July 2002)

"Making connections: Infrastructure for poverty reduction" (consultation closes 31 July 2002).

All these documents are made available in print form and electronically on our website www.dfid.gov.uk for the public to comment on.

Centre for Tropical Veterinary Medicine

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what level of funding her Department intends to provide for research by the Centre for Tropical Veterinary Medicine in Edinburgh *(a)* over the current financial year, *(b)* in the period up to 2005 and *(c)* after 2005. [72152]

Clare Short: The Centre for Tropical Veterinary Medicine at the University of Edinburgh is contracted by my Department to manage a programme of animal health research. The programme develops, and promotes the adoption of, cost-effective strategies for the sustainable control of livestock diseases affecting the livelihoods of poor people in parts of east and southern Africa and in Asia. The contract runs to March 2005. Funding available under the contract by financial year is:

2002–03: £3,373,000

2003–04: £2,771,000

2004–05: to be determined.

These figures include funds provided specifically for a project to develop an improved vaccine to prevent losses from East Coast fever, a fatal tick-transmitted disease of cattle in eastern, central and southern Africa.

No decisions have been taken on funding for animal health research after March 2005.

China

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will ascertain from the Government of China if the population and family planning law due to come into effect in China in September requires detailed population control quotas; and if she will make a statement. [72543]

Clare Short: We understand that the new Population and Family Planning Law in China, which is due to come into effect on 1 September this year, does not include detailed population quotas. The law sets out the rights and responsibilities of the state and individuals in the areas of reproductive health and family planning. Birth targets and quotas remain a feature of population policy in China, but we are supporting the work of the United Nations population fund which seeks to demonstrate to the Chinese authorities that a client-oriented quality of care approach is a viable alternative to the current administrative family planning approach. Birth targets and quotas have been removed in counties where UNFPA is operating.

Somalia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer of 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 41W, on Somalia, which individuals her Department have lobbied for the lifting of the ban on Somali livestock exports. [72436]

Clare Short: Our embassies in relevant Arab states have lobbied foreign Ministers about the livestock restrictions affecting Somalia. My Department is in regular touch with the FCO about these efforts.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimates her Department has made of how the planned increases in her departmental budget announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review will assist in reaching the UN millennium targets for development. [71728]

Clare Short: The planned increase in my Department's budget announced in the 2002 spending review settlement will enable us to increase significantly our bilateral contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and to play a greater role in strengthening the contribution of the international system. There is no room for complacency. Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals will entail a massive collective effort by the entire international community, developed and developing countries, to support poverty reduction. This includes further progress by donors towards the 0.7 per cent. target; delivering on the Doha commitments to make trade fairer for developing countries; improving the effectiveness of development assistance through sharpening its poverty focus; untying and promoting harmonisation of donor practices to reduce transaction costs. for developing countries it means tacking responsibility for developing and implementing poverty reduction policies and tackling the constraints on pro-poor growth including corruption, weak governance and conflict.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the progress being made with the campaign for good governance her Department is supporting in Sierra Leone; and what plans she has for developing further this work. [72332]

Clare Short: DFID's current support for the civil society campaign for good governance is committed for two years. Its aim is to help build up a well informed, strong, viable and active civil society that effectively addresses political, socio-economic and human rights issues in Sierra Leone, particularly in areas of corruption, local government, economic empowerment, and the legal and human rights of women. It is just over half way through its course.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about progress being made with the Chieftans' Government reform projects in Sierra Leone; and what plans she has for developing this work further. [72331]

Clare Short: In response to the wishes expressed by civil society, soon after the conclusion of the peace agreement signed at Lomé in July 1999, I agreed to support a project that would help restore the machinery of government at the local level in Sierra Leone. This entailed returning Paramount Chiefs to their Chiefdoms.

A project was designed for this purpose and became known as the Chiefdom Governance Reform Programme. It had three components: the construction of a chiefdom house from where chiefdom business is conducted; the filling of chiefdom vacancies (there are presently more than 60 and the drafting of a code of conduct that would constitute a uniform set of regulations determining chiefdom administration and practices.

The project has run its course and has recently been reviewed. The review findings are awaited. They will help to inform us whether we should approve a second phase to complete what we have begun or take forward only a limited range of activity, concentrating on what the review team deem to be the crucial components of the project.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress in implementing the EU health programme in Sierra Leone. [72168]

Clare Short: The EU Health Sector Support Project was approved under the 8th EDF, National Indicative Programme for Sierra Leone. It will concentrate on revitalising much needed health care delivery and management systems with an emphasis on first contact and first referral levels in rural areas.

It is disappointing that despite lobbying from DFID and others the project has not yet started, over 18 months since the EDF Committee approved it in November 2000. We are advised that their preliminary assessments will be completed by last August and implementation will commence in early 2003.

Street Children

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what estimate she has made of how many street children there are in the developing world; and what plans she has to provide support for the work being done in developing countries to bring street children into mainstream society to benefit from more general education and health programmes; [72326]

(2) what account her Department will take of the policy statement on promoting and protecting the rights of street children formulated by the South Asian Civil Society Forum meeting in Colombo last December when developing programmes to support Governments in South Asia combating poverty, ill health and poor education. [72167]

Clare Short: Children live on the streets because of poverty in their communities. We have no specific estimate of their numbers, but street children form a proportion of the 600 million children who live in poverty, and we know that some 113 six to 11-year-olds are not in school (1998 figure). Some of these will be street children. Support for children's rights to basic health care, education, nutrition, shelter, and protection from violence and abusive labour, along with work on sustainable livelihoods for their parents, is central to our effort towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

We are currently providing financial support of nearly £2 million to a number of organisations that work directly with street children. We also support many more organisations and Governments working to tackle the underlying causes of the poverty, deprivation, and social exclusion that force children on to the streets.

Arms Exports

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the proposed changes to guidelines on UK arms exports on the possibility of British military equipment reaching developing countries in regions of instability. [72623]

Clare Short: I have made no assessment of the impact of the proposed changes to the guidelines on UK arms exports on the chances of British military equipment reaching developing countries in regions of instability.

Anglo-Scottish Ministerial Meetings

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings her Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive Department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72723]

Clare Short: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Malawi

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the percentage of farmers in Malawi who will receive seed and fertiliser as overseas aid for planting 2003's crop. [73402]

Clare Short: DFID is currently discussion with Malawi Government and other potential donors the options for supply of inputs for the 2002–03 crop. These discussions will take account of the national food needs and the availability of finance for this and other interventions within an overall National Food Security Programme. Agreement is expected within the next three weeks to enable registration and required procurement to proceed in a timely manner.

Spring Meetings

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people attended the spring meetings of the IMF and World bank from *(a)* her Department and *(b)* other UK Government Departments; and what the total cost of the visit was. [66227]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I am giving today to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* full-time equivalents were employed by her press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in her press office in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [70549]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* As DEFRA was set up in June 2001, information relating to the last five years is not available.

There are 18 full-time press officer posts in the DEFRA Press Office. None of these posts are secondees.

Farm Payments

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was paid in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 to farmers in matching funds to charitable payments. [72487]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Under the Charity Matched Funding Scheme, the Government matches charitable donations from the public pound for pound from Government funds. The Government paid over £17,000,000 to charities to alleviate rural hardship resulting from the foot and mouth disease outbreak in match funding in 2001–02. Match Funding was not made available in 2000–01.

Foot and Mouth

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her latest assessment is of the contribution that the closure of footpaths made to resisting the spread of foot and mouth disease. [72488]

Alun Michael: In the early stages of last year's outbreak of foot and mouth disease (FMD), the extent to which the disease might have spread was highly uncertain. At this stage MAFF encouraged local authorities to close footpaths and other rights-of-way on a precautionary basis. On 28 March MAFF and DETR published guidance advising authorities to reopen footpaths as quickly as possible when reopening was justified by the veterinary risk assessment. It is not possible to quantify the impact that footpath closures had in helping to control the disease.

Responding to the recommendations of the Rural Task Force report published last October, the Government made clear that in any future outbreak of FMD, any restrictions on countryside access would take account both of the requirements of disease control and of the impact on countryside users, the businesses that depend on them, and the wider rural economy. On the basis of the current veterinary risk assessment, closures of rights of way would probably be advised only within a 3 km radius zone around infected premises; this is set out in DEFRA's published Interim Contingency Plan for FMD.

There is no case in which FMD is known to have been spread by walkers; but the Royal Society's report "Infectious Diseases in Livestock", published last week, states at paragraph 3.24 that

> "There is a theoretical risk that tourists on footpaths close to infected areas can spread disease, particularly if their route brings them into intimate contact with animals, but the actual risks from this source are poorly understood and require proper investigation."

The Government will respond in full to this and other recommendations from the FMD inquiries later this year.

Bushmeat Trade

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for the latest machinery for monitoring and checking bags to tackle the illegal trade of bushmeat into the UK. [70306]

Mr. Morley: In March of this year the Department published its action plan to reduce the risk of plant and animal diseases entering the country and damaging our horticultural and agricultural industries.

In implementing this action plan the Department has been investigating a variety of alternatives for improved detection and deterrence of illegal imports of meat and animal products. The Department has held discussions with officials from other countries on their experience with different regimes and technologies, as well as other individuals, and has a number of pilot schemes due to start this summer to determine the effectiveness of these in detecting illegal imports of meat and animal products.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on those groups which are involved in illegally importing bushmeat into the UK. [70307]

Mr. Morley: The Department currently has no conclusive evidence of specific groups involved in the illegal importation of bushmeat into the UK. We are in the process of improving our intelligence gathering and sharing this with enforcement agencies and specialised units such as the Wildlife Crime Unit. If and when such intelligence builds up a suitable evidence action will, of course, be taken accordingly.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements are in place to check against the illegal importation of meat by sea and air, with specific reference to *(a)* their cost and *(b)* man hour equivalents devoted to them. [69991]

Mr. Morley: Consignments of meat or animal products entering the European Union are subject to documentary and identification checks as well as physical checks, testing and sampling. The proportion subject to physical checks is dependent on the product—for example, at least 20 per cent. of beef, pork and lamb and at least

50 per cent. of consignments of poultry, game and honey are checked to ensure they comply with the appropriate rules. The cost of these checks are recovered from importers.

Checks on other consignments not declared as meat or animal products are targeted on a risk basis.

There are enforcement officers employed by local and port health authorities, HM Customs and Excise, Meat Hygiene Service and DEFRA who contribute directly or indirectly to policing laws on meat imports. Total numbers are not held centrally.

Targeted checks for illegal imports of meat and animal products are carried out at sea ports and air ports. We do not hold information centrally on the costs of these checks.

Through its action plan published in March, the Government are stepping up activities to improve the prevention and detection rates for illicit trade. Measures include improved co-ordination and co-operation with, and between, enforcement agencies. Certain measures in the action plan measures will have implications for future arrangements. For example the volume and type of checks made will be informed by the outcome of a disease risk assessment, and how checks are arranged, by the outcome of a Cabinet Office review of the current enforcement arrangements. Both reports are due this autumn.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make a statement on the Government's strategy to tackle illegal meat importation; [72008]

(2) what steps she has taken since March to tackle illegal meat importation. [72007]

Mr. Morley: The strategy to tackle illegal imports is to assess the disease risks linked to imports; identify the critical control points that need to be strengthened in order to reduce those risks, and to maximise opportunities for the prevention and detection of illicit trade. The strategy is underpinned by improved communication, including campaign to increase public awareness of our import rules and reasons for them.

The various measures we are taking are set out in the action plan published [illegible] March, and which have been endorsed by the [illegible], Follett and Anderson reports. I refer the hon. Member to our progress report published on 8 July: a copy of which can be viewed on the illegal imports pages on the DEFRA website (www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/illegali).

Correspondence

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many letters from hon. Members received by her Department before 1 January have not been answered. [72018]

Mr. Morley: As at 23 July there are 113 letters from hon. Members received before 1 January that have not been answered.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to improve the performance of her Department in replying to correspondence. [72016]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and all of her ministerial team have afforded the highest importance to improving performance against correspondence targets and this has been tackled at the highest levels within the Department.

The Department has addressed this by trebling the number of staff in the correspondence unit and strengthening its line management; introducing a more up to date IT system to facilitate faster transmission of letters within the Department, better case recording and improved management data; strengthening contingency arrangements to deal with surges of correspondence on a particular issue and enhancing guidance and training throughout the department (with input from Ministers) to improve the timeliness and quality of draft replies.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average time taken by her Department has been to answer a letter from an hon. Member since January; and what the longest time for which such a letter has been awaiting a reply is in this period. [72017]

Mr. Morley: The average time taken to answer a letter from an hon. Member since January is 21 working days. The longest time for which such a letter has been awaiting a reply in this period is 139 working days. The latter relates to problems of disruption carried out during the FMD outbreak.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 10 June from the hon. Member for the Vale of York on behalf of constituent L. Peter Davies, concerning the Meat and Livestock Commission. [71301]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 18 July.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when a reply will be sent to the letter of 4 March from the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, on behalf of Mrs. Griffin, a constituent. [69360]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 17 July.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Totnes of 19 April about illegal trade in wildlife, which was transferred to her Department from the Home Office on 26 June. [71273]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 19 July.

Livestock Movements

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria the Government have set for the removal of the 20 day standstill rule on livestock movement. [72006]

Mr. Morley: There is firm veterinary and scientific advice in support of the present 20 day standstill, as a means of helping protect against the rapid spread of any new incursion of disease. Such a standstill both improves the prospect of identifying disease on infected premises before animals move off and slows the rate of spread of any undetected disease.

Before making a decision on the future of the 20 day rule, we wish to consider—and discuss with stakeholders—the relevant recommendations of the Royal Society and Lessons Learned Inquiries into the FMD outbreak. In reaching a view, we will seek to strike a balance between disease control considerations and the economic impact of movement standstills on livestock farmers and markets.

Rural Farms

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what help she plans to give *(a)* rural farms to help with modulation and *(b)* environmental schemes (i) in national parks and (ii) elsewhere. [71297]

Mr. Morley: Because of the requirement for match-funding, modulation means an increase in the national funds available to farmers. Depending upon their ability to deliver the objectives of agri-environment or other rural development schemes, farmers may have access to additional funding streams. In England, the Government plan to roll-out a new "broad and shallow", entry-level agri-environment scheme during 2005–06, following a successful pilot. This scheme will be widely drawn so that most farmers will be eligible to enter.

The scheme will be introduced as an addition to the existing agri-environment schemes, Countryside Stewardship, Environmentally Sensitive Areas and the Organic Farming Scheme. Under the England Rural Development Programme the Government planned to spend a total of £1 billion on these schemes in the period 2000–06.

There are currently no plans to give English rural farms within national parks additional help with national modulation or environmental schemes over and above that which they receive at present or may be eligible to apply for. However, individual national park authorities are able to negotiate their own management agreements with individual farmers and landowners within their boundary.

Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committees

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many appointments have been made to Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committees since 1997; and how many have a *(a)* canoeing background and *(b)* fishing background. [71587]

Alun Michael: Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committees were established under the Environment Act of 1995 to replace the previous Regional Fisheries Advisory Committees. Their principal remit is to deal with issues of relevance to fishing. Representation of fishing interests therefore form the majority of their members. There is no statutory requirement to have recreation and navigation interests represented on these committees but the Environment Agency with the approval of Ministers, has agreed that these interests should be represented. The committees comprise no more that 21 members and each has at least two members representing recreation interests.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what public consultations have been commenced by her Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72073]

Mr. Morley: The Department has commenced 28 consultations since 1 April 2002. The following table is a list of the consultations indicating the date it was issued, the deadline for responses and the website address for each consultation.

Current public consultations since 1 April 2002	*Date issued*	*Deadline date*	*Website address*
Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control: a Practical Guide, 2 edition—published for comment	28 June 2002	1 November 2002	http://defraweb/environment/ppc/ippcguide/index.htm
Consultation on the proposed Animal Health Rules Regulation	17 July 2002	18 October 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/ahealth/index.htm
New draft Environmental Information Regulations	15 July 2002	4 October 2002	http://defraweb/environment/consult/envinfo/index.htm
Consultation on CAP reform: mid-term review of Agenda 2000	11 July 2002	4 October 2002)	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/capreform/index.htm
Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications (COM (2002) 119 final)	5 July 2002	30 September 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/profqual/index.htm
Review of Access in Agri-Environment Schemes	8 July 2002	27 September 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/erdpaccess/index.htm
Consultation exercise on the bio-energy infrastructure scheme	25 June 2002	16 September 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/bio-energy/index.htm
Crime prevention on rights of way: public consultation paper on the designation of areas and other procedural matters	19 June 2002	20 September 2002	http://defraweb/wildlife-countryside/consult/rowcrime/index.htm
Enforcement of highway authorities' duty to prevent obstructions on rights of way: consultation paper on the implementation of section 63 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	19 June 2002	20 September 2002	http://defraweb/wildlife-countryside/consult/rowcrime/obstruct/index.htm

Current public consultations since 1 April 2002	*Date issued*	*Deadline date*	*Website address*
Implementation of Directive 2000/76/EC on the Incineration of Waste	21 June 2002	9 September 2002	http://defraweb/environment/consult/wasteincin/index.htm
Consultation on shrimp trawls: separator trawls (sieve/veil nets) and sorting grids	18 June 2002	6 September 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/shrimps/index.htm
Draft guidance on control of Johne's disease in dairy herds	31 May 2002	31 August 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/johnes/index.htm
Energy labelling of household air conditioners and electric ovens: Consultation on New Regulations for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland	11 June 2002	30 August 2002	http://defraweb/environment/consult/energylabel/index.htm
Implementation of Directive 2001/18/EC on the Deliberate Release of Genetically Modified Organisms into the Environment: second consultation on new regulations for England	31 May 2002	26 August 2002	http://defraweb/environment/consult/ec-gmo/index.htm
Consultation on Water Grid PPP: Removal of Restrictions on British Waterways' Statutory Powers	15 June 2002	16 August 2002	http://defraweb/environment/consult/bwpowers/index.htm
Statistical methodology review of the monitoring sites used in the air quality headline indicator	15 May 2002	8 August 2002	http://defraweb/environment/statistics/des/airqual/research/index.htm
Consultation on the Government's Strategy for Combined Heat and Power to 2010	15 May 2002	7 August 2002	http://defraweb/environment/consult/chpstrat/index.htm
Policy Review of Woodland Creation in England under the Woodland Grant Scheme and the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme	13 May 2002	7 August 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/woodlandcreation/index.htm
LAPC Consultation on risk-Based Regulation and Inspection Frequency	3 May 2002	2 August 2002	http:///defraweb/environment/consult/lapcrisk/index.htm
Consultation on Stage II Petrol Vapour Recovery	16 April 2002	9 July 2002	http://defraweb/environment/consult/pvrstage2/index.htm
Review of seed certification in England: draft seeds regulations and registration, licensing and enforcement regulation (third consultation)	12 April 2002	8 July 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/seedcert-three/index.htm

Closed public consultations since 1 April 2002	*Date issued*	*Deadline date*	*Website address*
Economic evaluation of the Apple and Pear Research Council	5 April 2002	27 June 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/aprc/index.htm
Consultation on Sustainable Food and Farming: Working Together	2 April 2002	18 June 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/sustainworking/index.htm
Consultation on possible changes to the Landfill Credit Tax Scheme	17 April 2002	17 June 2002	http://defraweb/environment/consult/landfillcredit/index.htm
Mid-term evaluation of the England Rural Development Programme: consultation on proposed strategy	1 May 2002	12 June 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/erdpstrategy/index.htm
Consultation on proposed Agricultural Development Scheme	10 April 2002	31 May 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/adscheme/index.htm
Consultation on proposals for an EU Directive on environmental liability	12 April 2002	24 May 2002	http://defraweb/environment/consult/liability2/index.htm
Consultation on detailed rules for determining the mesh size of fishing nets	2 April 2002	6 May 2002	http://defraweb/corporate/consult/mesh/index.htm

Groundwater Regulations

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what help and advice is available to sectors affected by the requirements of the Groundwater Regulations 1998. [73503]

Mr. Meacher: Following publication of a groundwater protection code for sheep dipping last summer, the Department has prepared two further codes of advice. A groundwater protection code for those involved with petrol stations and underground storage tanks for hydrocarbons will be published shortly. In addition the

Department will be consulting this summer on a code aimed at businesses which use solvents. These codes will provide a useful source of advice on all aspects relating to groundwater protection, including site design and development, operation and decommissioning.

Farms

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* mean and *(b)* median farm (i) incomes and (ii) sizes were in the last five years broken down by region. [71028]

Mr. Morley: Mean and median full-time farm incomes and sizes as recorded by the Farm Business Survey in England are given in the table. A regional breakdown is not available due to sample size limitations.

Mean and median full-time farm incomes and sizes in England

	Farm income (£ per farm)		*Farm size (European size units)*	
	Mean	*Median*	*Mean*	*Median*
1996–97	29,830	18,430	75	49
1997–98	13,850	8,050	76	49
1998–99	10,360	5,460	77	53
1999–2000	7,980	5,930	78	51
2000–01	9,890	5,530	80	51

Note:

Accounting years ending on average in February.

Bovine TB

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals have been tested for bovine TB in 2002, broken down by month, in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Herefordshire and Worcestershire. [71021]

Mr. Morley: The total number of cattle tested for bovine TB by month in 2002, in the areas specified, is shown in the table.

	(a) England	*(b) Wales*	*(c) Hereford and Worcester*
January	217,232	49,342	18,535
February	317,197	70,750	27,493
March	327,290	67,644	19,613
April	414,503	81,636	30,459
May	209,926	52,869	14,676
June	125,319	31,386	10,012
Total	1,611,467	353,627	120,788

Source:

DEFRA Vetnet database system as at 16:30 22 June 2002. Figures subject to revision as more data become available.

Contaminated Land

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial support is being given to English local authorities to meet the capital costs of dealing with contaminated land. [73505]

Mr. Meacher: The Contaminated Land Supplementary Credit Approval (SCA) programme has provided support to English local authorities' capital works for 12 years. It assists local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities under the contaminated land regime which was introduced on 1 April 2000, under part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The regime makes local authorities responsible for identifying contaminated land as defined in the Act, and they may also be responsible for its remediation in their capacity as regulators or in carrying some responsibility for the land's condition. The SCA programme assists local authorities to meet these obligations.

I have agreed the programme for new projects to start this year. The Department has already written to the successful authorities notifying them of the allocations which have been made for these new projects, and in respect of continuing commitments for projects approved in previous years.

Some bids are still being discussed with the authorities concerned, and there may be further allocations in respect of these and any further bids received later this year. The following table sets out the allocations which have been made so far this current financial year.

Local authority	*Number of sites*	*Allocation for each authority (£)*
Barnsley MBC	1	4,000
Bexley LB	1	50,000
Bristol City	2	216,000
Calderdale MBC	2	720,000
Cherwell DC	1	35,000
Cheshire CC	2	150,000
Chorley BC	1	13,500
Darlington BC	1	13,907
Devon CC	7	650,065
Durham CC	5	76,500
Ellesmere Port and Neston BC	1	30,500
Gateshead MBC	1	246,000
Hammersmith and Fulham LB	1	7,851
Newcastle City	3	779,935
Newham LB	1	30,219
Northamptonshire CC	7	344,983
North Lincolnshire C	1	830,000
Oldham MBC	1	9,496
Plymouth City	1	4,275
Poole B	2	60,000
Portsmouth City	1	19,500
Rotherham MBC	3	99,000
Sandwell MBC	2	7,722
Solihull MBC	1	193,000
Southampton City	2	4,200
Stoke-on-Trent City	1	12,000
Thanet DC	1	2,900
Warrington BC	1	126,015
Warwickshire CC	1	23,000
West Sussex CC	1	1,143,304

Sustainable Development

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will publish their Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate. [73504]

Mr. Meacher: I am pleased to announce that, from today, the first three parts of the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate are publicly available on the Government's Sustainable Development website. Copies of the website on floppy disk have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Part A of the Framework sets out the overarching commitments to which all Departments have signed up, and outlines the means by which progress towards these targets will be monitored and reported. It also sets a new target for Environmental Management Systems to be rolled out across the Estate. Parts B and C contain specific targets and guidance in the areas of Travel and Water consumption.

It is planned that the remaining parts of the Framework—covering Waste, Energy, Procurement, Estates Management, Biodiversity, and Social Impacts—will be rolled out over the coming year.

The online publication of the Framework is designed to facilitate the provision of the most up-to-date guidance, and examples of best practice, in relation to targets to all those involved in management of the Government Estate.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will publish its response to the Environmental Audit Committee's third report of Session 2001–02, "UK Preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development". [73506]

Margaret Beckett: I am pleased to announce that I have today, laid in the Libraries of both Houses, copies of the Government's response to the Environmental Audit Committee's third report of the 2001–2002 Session, "UK Preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development".

The Government's response sets our continued commitment to the achievement and promotion of sustainable development both internationally and at home. We have continued to play a significant role in preparations for the World summit on sustainable development taking place in Johannesburg between 26 August and 4 September 2002.

Sheep

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of *(a)* the number of sheep and *(b)* the proportion of the national flock which were born before the imposition of the ban on feeding animal protein to ruminants and are still alive. [65467]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* Pursuant to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 8 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 695W. My answer referred to an estimate that the number of sheep still alive which were born before 1 August 1996 is less than 500, representing approximately three per cent. of the UK national flock. This is incorrect. The number of sheep still alive which were born before 1 August 1996 is 500,000, representing approximately three per cent. of the national flock of around 17 million breeding sheep. The rest of the answer remains correct.

Foxhunting

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what volume of correspondence she has received on the consultation on the future of foxhunting; and how many of those were in favour of the continuation of the sport. [64130]

Alun Michael: Over 7,000 communications were received following my statement to the House on 21 March. The majority were pro-hunting and came in response to a pro-hunt campaign. These have to be balanced against a smaller number of anti-hunting representation received immediately prior to the statement. We have also received many contributions providing evidence and referring to practical experience from a variety of viewpoints.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the EU directives and regulations that have been implemented through her Department in 2002; and what was the cost of each to public funds. [64990]

Mr. Morley: In answer to the first part of the question the information is in the tables. The first table shows all EC directives transposed in the whole of the UK and notified in 2002, for which DEFRA took the lead. The second table shows Council regulations agreed in 2002 for which DEFRA took the lead. Regulations have a direct effect in the laws of member states and do not usually require Governments to take action to implement them. The table does not show Commission regulations. Details of all regulations and directives agreed can be found on the Eur-Lex database available on the European Union's website.

The Department does not hold information in the form requested in the second part of the question. This information could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

EC directives transposed in the whole of the UK and notified in 2002 for which DEFRA took the lead

Directive number	*Directive name*
2002/8/EC	Minimum conditions for examining vegetables and agricultural varieties
2001/109/EC	Statistical surveys to be carried out by member states to determine potential of certain species of fruit trees
2001/57/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues
2001/49/EC	Placing of plant protection products on the market
2001/48/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues
2001/47/EC	Placing of plant protection products on the market
2001/39/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues
2001/36/EC	Placing of plant protection products on the market
2001/35/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues
2001/33/EC	Organisms harmful to plants
2001/32/EC	Recognising protected zones exposed to particular plant health risks
2001/28/EC	Placing of plant protection products on the market
2001/21/EC	Placing of plant protection products on the market
2000/82/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues
2000/81/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues
2000/80/EC	Placing of plant protection products on the market
2000/58/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues
2000/57/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues

EC directives transposed in the whole of the UK and notified in 2002 for which DEFRA took the lead

Directive number	*Directive name*
2000/48/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues
2000/42/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues
2000/37/EC	Veterinary medicinal products
2000/27/EC	Control of fish diseases
2000/24/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues
2000/20/EC	Animal health problems affecting intra-community trade in bovine animals
1999/71/EC	Fixing of maximum levels in pesticide residues
1999/32/EC	Sulphur content of certain liquid fuels
1999/54/EC	Marketing of cereal seed
1999/8/EC	Marketing of cereal seed
1998/96/EC	Unofficial field inspections
1998/95/EC	Genetically modified plant varieties

Council regulations agreed in 2002 for which DEFRA took the lead

Regulation number	*Regulation title*
120/2002	Amending Regulation (EC) No. 2793/1999 as regards the adjustment of the tariff quota for wine.
154/2002	Amending Regulation (EEC) No. 2358/71 on the Common organisation of the market in seeds and fixing the aid granted in the seeds sector for the 2002–03 and 2003–04 marketing year.
179/2002	Amending Regulation (EC) No. 2792/1999 laying down the detailed rules and arrangements regarding Community structural assistance in the fisheries sector.
249/2002	On the conclusion of the Protocol establishing the fishing opportunities and the compensation provided for in the Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Government of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau on fishing off the coast of Guinea-Bissau for the period from 16 June 2001 to 15 June 2006.
254/2002	Establishing measures to be applicable in 2002 for the recovery of the stock of cod in the Irish sea (ICES Division VIIa).
284/2002	A proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) renewing for 2001 the measures laid down in Regulation (EC) No. 1416/95 establishing certain concessions in the form of Community tariff quotas in 1995 for certain processed agricultural products originating in Norway.
301/2002	On the conclusion of the Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and financial contribution provided for in the Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Republic of Cape Verde on fishing off the coast of Cape Verde for the period from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2004.
322/2002	Amending Regulation (EC) No. 772/1999 imposing definitive anti-dumping and countervailing duties on imports of farmed Atlantic salmon originating in Norway.
442/2002	Amending Regulation (EEC) No. 2019/93 introducing specific measures for the smaller Aegean Islands concerning certain agricultural products. Covering aids for the maintenance of olive groves, other products and farming activities.
545/2002	Extending the financing of quality and marketing improvement plans for certain nuts and locust beans approved under Title IIa of Regulation (EEC) No. 1035/72 and providing for a specific aid for hazelnuts.
546/2002	Fixing the premiums and guarantee thresholds for leaf tobacco by variety group and member state for the 2002, 2003 and 2004 harvests and amending Regulation (EEC) No. 2075/92.
579/2002	Amending Council Regulation (EC) No. 1587/98 of 17 July 1998 introducing a scheme to compensate for the additional costs incurred in the marketing of certain fishery products from Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands and the French departments of Guyana and Reunion as a result of those regions remoteness.
580/2002	On the conclusion of the Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for by the Agreement between the European Community and the Gabonese Republic on fishing off the coast of Gabon for the period 3 December 2001 to 2 December 2005.
962/2002	Amending Regulation EC No. 1868/94 establishing a quota production of potato starch.
1149/2002	Opening an autonomous quota for imports of high quality beef (Paraguay).
1150/2002	Opening an autonomous quota for imports of high quality beef (Argentina).

Beef Exports

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the level of UK beef exports was in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [69093]

Mr. Morley: *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The following table shows the volume and value of UK exports of beef and beef products between 1997 and 2001.

	Beef		*Beef product*	
Year	*Tonnes*	*£ thousand*	*Tonnes*	*£ thousand*
1997	6,061	15,104	4,040	6,626
1998	4,884	12,157	7,746	6,110
1999	5,647	19,720	3,708	5,598
2000	5,387	20,983	3,884	6,070
2001	5,202	18,175	2,962	5,614

Source:

HM Customs and Excise

Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities & Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA

Frozen Chicken Imports

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tons of imported frozen chicken breasts were consumed in the UK in the past year. [68844]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Information on the consumption of frozen chicken breasts in the UK is not available. The following table shows the total volume of UK imports of; frozen chicken breasts (with bone-in) and frozen cuts(boneless)in 2001.

	Tonnes
Product	2001
Frozen chicken cuts, (boneless)[1]	103,902
Frozen chicken cuts, breasts (bone-in)	15,373
Grant total	119,275

[1] Includes boneless chicken breasts and other boneless chicken cuts

Source:

HM Customs and Excise

Data prepared by statistics (Commodities & Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA

Scottish White Fish Producers Association

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Fisheries Minister next intends to meet the Scottish White Fish Producers Association. [70333]

Mr. Morley: I am always ready to meet representative organisations where there is business which would justify this. I am currently considering a response to a letter of 28 June from the Scottish White Fish Producers Organisation about the deep water fishery.

Infectious Diseases

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her proposed action following the Royal Society's report into infectious diseases in livestock. [71930]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement on the foot and mouth inquiries, given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to the House, on 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 669.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which regulations under Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 need to be in force before the Act can be implemented in any region before 2005. [72940]

Alun Michael: Regulations on the following must be put in place before land shown on maps of open country and registered common land may be opened up for access under Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000:

(a) mapping of access land and consultation on draft maps (section 11);

(b) the issue of provisional maps, appeals against such maps, and the issue of conclusive maps (section 11);

(c) the exclusion or restriction of access under Chapter 11, including appeals (section 32);

(d) the exclusion of access in emergencies (section 31);

(e) appeals relating to notices in respect of means of access (section 38);

(f) references to public places in existing enactments (Section 42).

Regulations under (a) came into force on 1 November 2001. Regulations under (b) will come into force on 29 July 2002. We have completed consultations on (c) and, subject to the outcome of consultations on the remaining regulations, expect all of them to be in force by the end of 2003.

Free Range Poultry Units

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received concerning planning applications for the erection of mobile and static free range poultry units. [72519]

Mr. Morley: Producer interests wish to see a positive approach taken by local planning authorities when planning permission is needed for new or enlarged poultry units. Other interests are concerned about the environmental effects of some proposals. Government planning policies for local authorities make clear that an efficient and competitive agricultural industry is very important. In particular, local authorities are encouraged in general to support proposals relating to the requirements of new environmental, hygiene and welfare legislation.

DEFRA contributes to both national and regional planning and, through Government offices, provides technical advice to local authorities to help achieve sustainable development. This includes advice on giving farmers flexibility to adapt to changing animal welfare legislation and market conditions. In doing so, local authorities are enabled to take due account of these aspects as part of considering all economic, environmental and social issues when preparing their local development plans and assessing individual planning applications.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 717W, on air conditioning, if she will make a statement on the results of the monitoring of the Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment; and what progress has been made in BREEAM to discourage the procurement of refrigerants with a high global warming potential. [71453]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

BREEAM is a commercial product of the Building Research Establishment and its methodology is revised annually. I understand that the current revision, which is due to be applied for assessments from September 2002 onwards, is likely to address the global warming potential of refrigerants.

Sausages

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what scientific evidence she has collated that supports the proposed ban on the use of sheep's intestines in the manufacture of sausages. [68068]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that the basis of their recommendation to the European Commission that sheep intestine be banned as specified risk material (SRM) is outlined in a report by a core group of stakeholders endorsed by the Board of the FSA on 13 June 2002. The risk assessments taken into account in this report indicate that the proposed ban, added to the current controls, could increase the reduction in potential infectivity entering the food chain to up to two-thirds if BSE were found in sheep. Current precautionary SRM measures are estimated to reduce risk by very approximately one-third. The FSA believes the proposed measure has to be considered in the context of the lives that might be saved from variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (vCJD) if BSE were present in sheep.

A copy of the report can be found on the FSA's website www.food.gov.uk

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made of the potential presence of BSE in beef protein collagen used in the manufacture of sausages. [68069]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Food Standards Agency have advised me that the European Commission Scientific Committee gave an opinion on safety with respect to TSEs (transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, including BSE) and the risks of collagen produced from ruminant hides at its meeting of 10–11 May 2001. They concluded that on the basis of current knowledge the parts of ruminant hides used for the production of collagen do not present a risk with regard to TSEs, provided contamination with potentially infected material is avoided. It is a regulatory requirement that food and food products (including collagen) must not be derived from BSE cases or suspected cases, or from specified risk material.

Chickens

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what checks are made for the presence of nitrofurans and chloramphenicol in chicken imported into the United Kingdom *(a)* directly from non-EU countries and *(b)* from a third country via another EU member state. [64117]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Chloramphenicol and nitrofurans are veterinary medicines no longer permitted in the European Union for use in food producing animals and therefore residues of these chemicals should not be present in food.

Imports of products of animal origin for human consumption such as poultry meat to the United Kingdom from third countries are subject to harmonised EU import controls and must enter the EU through designated border inspection posts (BIP). Where the official veterinary surgeons at the BIPs have reason to suspect that poultry meat being imported to the UK direct from a third country may be contaminated with chloramphenicol or nitrofurans, they may take samples of the product for testing.

Imports of poultry meat from third countries to other EU member states must enter the EU through designated BIP where they may be subject to checks for chloramphenicol and nitrofurans. Once a food product is in free circulation within the EU it is not subject to routine checks at points of entry to the UK under EU single market requirements.

In response to concerns that poultry meat from South East Asia may be contaminated by illegal residues of veterinary medicines, the Food Standards Agency initiated a retail survey. As a consequence of the publication of these results and others from the Netherlands, an EU Commission Decision has recently required sampling and testing of poultry meat coming from Thailand. This requirement to sample and test applies to all EU member states.

The veterinary medicines directorate also undertakes testing of imported poultry meat as part of its non-statutory surveillance programme. In 2001, 50 samples of raw chicken were tested for the presence of chloramphenicol. No residues above the reporting limit were detected.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Consultations

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in what format her Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations. [70978]

Dr. Howells: The following table indicates in what format the Department published the results of all its 2001 written consultations:

Title	*Format that results were published*
National Gallery/National Portrait Gallery Review: stage one consultation	Summary of the views of consultees was published on the Department website and copies were also placed in the libraries of both Houses.
National Heritage Memorial Fund Review: stage one consultation	Results not yet published.
Report of the Gambling Review Body	Results of the consultation were published in A safe bet for success (Cm 5397). In addition, copies of all the substantive responses (unless respondents requested otherwise) were placed in the libraries of both Houses.
National Museum of Science & Industry Review: stage one consultation	Summary of the views of consultees was published on the Department website and copies were also placed in the libraries of both Houses.
Geffrye Museum/Horniman Museum/Museum of London Review: stage one consultation	All responses (unless respondents requested otherwise) and a summary of the views of consultees were published on the Department website and placed in the libraries of both Houses.
Consultation on the draft Digital Television Action Plan	Responses to the consultation were confidential but they informed the content of a revised Digital Television Action Plan, which was published on 20 December 2001.
English Heritage Review: stage one consultation	Summary of the views of consultees was published on the Department website.
Public Lending Right. Quinquennial Performance Review: Consultation Paper	Results not yet published.
Quinquennial Review on the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art	Results not yet published.
National Maritime Museum Quinquennial Performance Review	Results not yet published.
Consultation on Media Ownership Rules	All responses (unless respondents requested otherwise) and a summary of responses were published on the Department website.

Title	*Format that results were published*
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester: Quinquennial Performance Review	Results not yet published.
Spectrum Planning Consultation	All responses (unless respondents requested otherwise) were published on the joint DCMS/DTI digital television website.
Council of Europe—Convention on the Protection of Audiovisual Heritage	Results not yet published.

Religious Broadcasting

Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether in the course of her consultations on the draft Communications Bill she plans to meet representatives from the Christian broadcasting industry to discuss the statutory ban on religious organisations holding several categories of broadcasting licence. [70728]

Dr. Howells: I met representatives from the Centre for Justice and Liberty on 21 March 2002 and discussed a range of issues concerning religious organisations and broadcasting licensing.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if it is her policy to seek to regulate religious broadcasting by *(a)* placing limits on ownership, *(b)* regulation and *(c)* legislation. [72406]

Dr. Howells: Yes. We have set out our position on religious broadcasting in the document "The draft Communications Bill—The Policy".

Libraries

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which libraries have *(a)* opened and *(b)* reopened since 1997; and what sources of public funding are available to them. [71167]

Dr. Howells: The number of library openings and re-openings is not held centrally. However, the total number of libraries in England between 1996–97 and 2000–01 was:

	Number
1996–97	3,083
1997–98	3,053
1998–99	3,037
1999–2000	3,031
2000–01	3,032

The figures in the table reflect only branch and central libraries open for at least 10 hours a week. They do not include static libraries open for less than that duration, mobile libraries or special services provided by English library authorities to senior citizens' homes and others in sheltered housing schemes. In 2000–01 the figures for these two types of provision were, respectively: 130 static libraries open for less than 10 hours, 465 mobiles and 16,819 outlets in institutions.

Core funding for public libraries is provided through the Environmental Protection and Cultural Services block.

It is for local authorities to decide how much of their EPCS funding to allocate to their libraries in line with their statutory duty to provide library services that are comprehensive and efficient.Core funding for public libraries is provided through the Environmental Protection and Cultural Services block.

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National Foundation of Youth Music

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment has been made of the success of the National Foundation of Youth Music in increasing the participation of young people from low-income families in its activities. [71926]

Dr. Howells: Youth Music has established 19 Youth Music Action Zones in the most deprived areas of the country, and its programmes have already reached over 270,000 young people.

All Youth Music programmes are evaluated. Youth Music's ongoing programme of Youth Music Action Zones (YMAZ) began in August 2000 and an interim evaluation of each of the zones was carried out from December 2001 to April 2002.

Website

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for how long she retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website. [72284]

Dr. Howells: My Department will seek to retain any document held on my Department's website referred to in a parliamentary answer for at least the life of that Parliament and while the document remains valid.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether it is her policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via her Department's website. [72292]

Dr. Howells: My Department makes all publications available through the Department's website. Other documents, if referred to in a parliamentary answer, may be published on the website if it is felt relevant and useful to do so.

Tourism

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she will take to encourage people to holiday in the United Kingdom. [72400]

Dr. Howells: This year the Government are spending £72 million on tourism, of which £54 million is available to the British Tourist Authority (BTA). The BTA promotes Britain as a tourist destination in 27 countries and is currently running the 'Only in Britain, Only in 2002' campaign in our seven biggest overseas markets with television, radio and press advertising.

On 13 May we announced that we will be working with the English Tourism Council to improve the marketing within the UK of England as a tourist destination.

BBC

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what representations she has received regarding the BBC's digital curriculum proposition; and if she will make a statement; [72337]

(2) when she expects to make a decision on the BBC's digital curriculum proposition; and if she will make a statement. [72336]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering the digital curriculum proposal in accordance with the Department's published guidelines on proposed new BBC public services. The proposal has been subject to a period of public consultation which closed on 22 July and a substantial number of comments have been received. My right hon. Friend will now assess the response to the consultation and reach a decision as soon as possible.

Wembley Stadium

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish the Government's response to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's sixth report entitled "Wembley National Stadium Project: Into Injury Time". [72964]

Tessa Jowell: I am today publishing the Government's response to the Select Committee's sixth report entitled "Wembley National Stadium Project: Into Injury Time". The response is available on the DCMS website (www.culture.gov.uk) and copies of the response have been laid before Parliament and deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings her Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72711]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for Sport regularly meet the Scottish Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport at the Sports Cabinet meetings. These were held on:

6 October 1999;
6 October 2000;
16 February 2001;
31 October 2001;
18 June 2002.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts met with the Scottish Deputy Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport on 25 April 2002 to discuss Design Champion issues.

In addition Ministers in DCMS and the Scottish Executive are in regular contact on policy issues by telephone, e-mail and letter.

Free Television Licences

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many households are entitled to free television licences in Taunton; and if she will make a statement. [73272]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers the free television licence scheme for the BBC as Licensing Authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 8,500 people aged 75 or over in the Taunton constituency.

Science and Discovery Centres

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to assist the funding of science and discovery centres; and if she will make a statement. [72324]

Dr. Howells: The Government have currently no plans to assist the funding of science and discovery centres. The Millennium Commission, together with the Wellcome Trust and the Wolfson Foundation has on Monday 22 July launched a £33 million fund for science centres and museums to allow them to renew or replace high quality science, education and technology exhibitions.

"A Force for Our Future"

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made on implementing the recommendations contained in the Government's statement on the historic environment: A Force for Our Future. [73437]

Dr. Howells: Since A Force for Our Future was published in December 2001 the following has been achieved:

December

The Listed Places of Worship Grant scheme was launched.

March

Paradise Preserved, a guide to local authorities and cemetery managers on the care of the built and natural history of cemeteries was published.

April

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment put in place arrangements for providing advice on all post-war listing proposals.

May

The Heritage Lottery Fund's Strategic Plan for 2002–07, agreed with the DCMS, DEFRA and then DTLR was published. Entitled Broadening the Horizons of Heritage it sets out proposals, among other things, to ensure that everyone can learn about, have access to and enjoy their heritage.

The Quinquennial Review of English Heritage was completed with the full involvement of the DTLR (now OPDM), DEFRA, HMT and DfES. English Heritage are taking forward the recommendations as part of their modernisation programme;

The review of PPG 15 'Planning and the Historic Environment' and PPG16 'Archaeology and Planning' commenced with full involvement from the sector.

Heritage Link, an umbrella organisation for the voluntary organisations working in the sector was established. It will be formally launched in December.

The Construction Industry Training Board set up a heritage working group with full participation of the Building Skills Action Group and English Heritage to coordinate the promotion of heritage skills. English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund are promoting training in conservation craft skills by making it a requirement that all projects over £1 million produce a Training Plan, and by supporting training, including Modern Apprenticeships, as part of wider projects. HLF also support stand-alone projects for training volunteers in heritage skills.

June

The consultation document People and Places: a draft social inclusion policy for the built and historic environment, was launched by the Secretary of State, during Architecture Week.

July

The National Heritage Act 2002 Act came into force. This allows English Heritage to operate in overseas countries and to become involved in underwater archaeology in territorial waters adjacent to England. A Statutory Instrument specifying the boundaries of English territorial waters is being drafted in consultation with he Devolved Administrations and other relevant bodies.

The Statutory Order extending the definition of Treasure was laid before Parliament in July. It comes into force in January 2003 subject to its successful passage through both Houses.

English Heritage hosted a workshop with key players in the sector to consider how to take forward the consultation on how to broaden access to the historic environment. This was informed by the National Trust leaflet "Making History Matter".

English Heritage published a consultation document Making the Most of our Civic Heritage—some guiding principles for decision makers—at the Local Government Association Conference in June.

Sustainable Communities: Delivering through Planning, sets out the Government's plans for transforming the planning system.

DEFRA have agreed that English Heritage become a distributor for the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, alongside the Countryside Agency and English Nature. Together they will disburse over £30 million to mitigate the impact of aggregates extraction.

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment has distributed Our Street: Learning to See and From One Street to Another to every school in the UK.

This is only the beginning of the process. We and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister are working closely with the sector to take this forward. We will publish a full progress report in December.

Playing Fields

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Playing Fields Monitoring Group will be publishing statistical information concerning playing fields. [73447]

Tessa Jowell: The Playing Fields Monitoring Group has today published for the first time statistics which clearly show that Government policy is already protecting playing fields that schools and local communities need. The statistics are available from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's website at: www.culture.gov.uk/sport/

Out of 875 planning applications to change the use of playing fields referred to Sport England in 2000–01, only 39 which were deemed to represent a net detriment to sport were approved. Indeed, 92 per cent. of the 1,765 playing field planning applications referred to Sport England over the last two years were either not detrimental to sport or did not proceed—ensuring that sport is the winner in the vast majority of cases.

This Government is committed to the protection of playing fields and will continue to look closely at how current protective measures are working as well as publishing figures through the DCMS Playing Fields Monitoring Group. I should like to pay tribute to the assistance that the Central Council of Physical Recreation and the National Playing Fields Association are providing to the work of the Group.

Sport Expenditure

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Government's expenditure plans are for sport following the 2002 Spending Review. [73448]

Tessa Jowell: Increasing opportunities for all to participate is key to the Government's strategy for sport. As a result of the Spending Review, the Government will channel £6 million into talent scholarships up to 2005–06. When combined with funding from other sources, these will provide quality-assured support to 2,000 young people in higher education.

The Youth Sports Trust has already produced web-based guidance for local coordinators and teachers. Now, for the first time, they have a clear framework for responding to the needs of talented young sportspeople of different ages and abilities. Next year, we will build on those foundations. We will expand the website into a one-stop shop for teachers, coaches, mentors and parents; develop a national support network based around specialist sports colleges; introduce a full programme of summer schools and performance camps for different ages and abilities; and ensure a much stronger emphasis on sporting talent within all parts of our national strategy for gifted and talented education. For the first time, teachers and coaches will be working together to ensure that all of our talented young sportsmen and women reach their full potential while continuing to receive a broad and balanced education.

As a final rung of the talent development ladder, over £25 million over the next three years will enable the key recommendations of the Coaching Task Force to be implemented. This investment will create 3,000 full-time, qualified Community Coaches to help develop sports skills across the country by 2006, with particular emphasis on improving opportunities for those in areas of deprivation.

For the first time, nationally-recognised qualifications will be established to give coaches a professional career pathway, and we will create new opportunities to enable skilled coaches in a number of disciplines to be deployed across the country.

There will also be support for governing bodies of sport to help them make the most of our new coaching initiatives. This will ensure that new coaches work in partnership at local level with clubs, schools and other regional organisations supporting sport.

Complementing this, £ 4 million of funding for the Step into Sport programme will enable more than 60,000 young people to achieve awards for leading sport. By developing a sense of teamwork, responsibility and self-esteem while serving their schools and communities, the young sport leaders of today will form the volunteer and coaching base of our sporting future.

These and other programmes stand to benefit more from the extensive reform of Sport England that is now under way. I expect substantial savings to be made and these resources to be directed into our priority programmes for sport.

Finally, the Government is committed to ensure that funding of the World-Class Performance programme in the four years leading up to the Athens Olympics remains as high as in the run-up to Sydney, our most successful Olympics since London in 1920.

Criminal Records Checks

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will share information with other countries about UK citizens who have been convicted of offences against children within sport. [68831]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

If a person is convicted of a relevant sex offence against a child they become subject to the notification requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997.

New provisions in the Criminal Justice and Courts Services Act 2000 (including regulations made under the power contained therein) provide that if an offender subject to the notification requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 leaves the United Kingdom for eight days or longer, he must notify the police at least 24 hours prior to his departure: of his date of departure; the country to which he is travelling; the identity of the carrier he intends to use; his point of arrival in the country; details of his first night's accommodation; if he intends to return to the United Kingdom; and if so, the date of his return and point of arrival.

On such a notification, the police will assess the level of risk the offender poses and then make a decision over whether to pass on this information to the authorities of the destination country or not.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Employment Relations Act

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, when he expects an announcement to be made about granting the clergy the rights and privileges given to workers under the Employment Relations Act 1999. [73304]

Mr. Bell: The Church of England is currently considering issues raised by the Department of Trade and Industry's "Discussion Document on Employment Status in Relation to Employment Rights". It will make a formal response by 11 December.

CABINET OFFICE

Central Office of Information

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he expects to publish the Central Office of Information's annual report and accounts 2001–02. [73438]

Mr. Alexander: I have today laid the COI annual report and accounts 2001–02 before Parliament, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Public Appointments

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what rules govern appointments to non-departmental public bodies; and what have been the *(a)* ethnic, *(b)* gender and *(c)* party breakdown of these appointments in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002. [72445]

Mr. Alexander: Appointments to non-departmental public bodies made by Ministers are subject to the Commissioner for Public Appointments' code of practice, and regulated accordingly. Appointments to tribunals follow the code of practice as best practice, but are not regulated by the Commissioner. It is Government policy that appointments to non-departmental public bodies, not made by Ministers, also follow the code as best practice.

The Commissioner for Public Appointments issued the seventh annual report on 17 July 2002. Included in this publication are tables showing details of gender, ethnicity, disability, and political activity of those appointed for regulated appointments made in the year ending 31 March 2002, and a comparative set of figures for the previous five years. Additionally, the Cabinet Office's annual publication, "Public Bodies", includes details of diversity in public appointments as a cumulative total rather than for those appointments made in any one year. "Public Bodies 2002" will be published shortly.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what public consultations have been commenced by his Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72070]

Mr. Alexander: The following formal national public consultations, which are subject to the Code of Practice on Written Consultation, have been commenced by the Cabinet Office since 1 April 2002:

"In the Service of Democracy". A consultation paper on a policy for electronic democracy, July 2002. The closing date for the consultation is 31 October 2002. The web address for the consultation document is www.edemocracy.gov.uk

"Privacy and Data-sharing: the Way Forward for Public Services", published by the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit on 11 April 2002. The report included three recommendations that were raised for consultation. The consultation exercise is being managed by the Lord Chancellor's Department. The consultation period ended on 12 July. The web address for the consultation document is www.lcd.gov.uk/foi/sharing/index.htm

Legal and Regulatory Framework for Charities

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when the Strategy Unit Review of the Legal and Regulatory Framework for Charities in the not-for-profit sector will be published. [73439]

Mr. Alexander: The Strategy Unit (formerly Performance and Innovation Unit) review of the legal and regulatory framework for charities and the not-for-profit sector will be published in September.

EU Legislation

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what mechanism there is to ensure Government Departments produce explanatory memoranda on proposed EU legislation in time for proper consideration by the European Scrutiny Committee. [71654]

Mr. Alexander: The Government is committed to the effective scrutiny by Parliament of proposed EU legislation and has given an undertaking that Ministers will not agree to proposals in the Council of Ministers until scrutiny by Parliament has been completed. This undertaking is the cornerstone of the scrutiny process and is embodied in a Resolution of the House of Commons dated 17 November 1998.

The Government is committed to depositing proposals for primary EU legislation in Parliament within 48 hours of receipt by the Government, and to the provision of an Explanatory Memorandum (EM) within 10 working days of an EU document's deposit in Parliament, wherever practicable.

The Cabinet Office is responsible centrally for the maintenance of scrutiny procedures, working closely with Departments and the staff of the European Scrutiny Committee. Where EMs cannot be submitted quickly, the Cabinet Office ensures that the lead Department provides the European Scrutiny Committee with an explanation for any delay together with an assessment of the impact on the opportunity for consideration by the Committee. The Cabinet Office also liaises with Departments to ensure Departments plan ahead effectively to avoid occasions when late submission of an EM will cause difficulties for the proper consideration of issues by the European Scrutiny Committee.

Politics (Young People)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent meetings he has had regarding young people's involvement in the political process; and what the outcomes of those meetings were. [72386]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

I have held a number of meetings with young people, members of the UK Youth Parliament, hon. Members, and the media, relating to the re-engagement of young people in democracy and voting. Those discussions have supported the recommendations of the YVote?/YNot? project published on 3 July.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what *(a)* legislation is in place and *(b)* programmes are being funded that encourage young people's involvement in the political process. [72387]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have taken several legislative steps in recent years to modernise and simplify electoral law and processes so that they are more relevant to modern lifestyles, including those lived by young people. These measures should make access to the process more flexible and make it easier both to register to vote and to cast a ballot. The Government, with the help of others such as the Electoral Commission, will continue to consider carefully any suggestions for changes that will lead to increased involvement of the young in the electoral process.

The National Curriculum Order for Citizenship laid before Parliament on 23 June 2000 sets out the statutory requirements for citizenship education. The subject will be part of the national curriculum for secondary schools from this August. It will consist of three main strands: political literacy, social and moral responsibility and community involvement. These will help young people to develop the skills and confidence they need to engage in active citizenship and understand their role in the political process.

The Children and Young People's Unit will continue to work with a range of organisations to support the action recommended in the YVote?/YNot? project. The independent Electoral Commission, with whom the Children and Young People's Unit has been working closely, has a statutory responsibility for raising public awareness of the electoral process and democratic systems, and has run focused advertising campaigns aimed at encouraging higher levels of voter participation within specific communities, including young people. The commission intends to continue to run bi-annual advertising campaigns, linked to key dates in the electoral calendar, including local and national elections and the annual registration canvass. The commission will also be launching later this year a 'New Initiatives Fund' which will provide grant funding to individuals and organisations outside government to test innovative ideas aimed at increasing participation in elections by young people and others.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Publications Scheme

Michael Fabricant: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement about the House's publications scheme under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [73374]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires any public authority, including this House, to develop and implement a publication scheme setting out details of the classes of information which it publishes or intends to publish. I am pleased to announce that the House of Commons scheme has now been approved by the Information Commissioner and will be available on the parliamentary website at www.parliament.uk from Wednesday 24 July. Paper copies are available to hon. Members in the Library and to any member of the public on request from the House of Commons Information Office.

House of Commons Staff

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what percentage of House of Commons staff are *(a)* full-time employees and *(b)* agency staff provided by outside contractors. [72814]

Mr. Kirkwood: At 30 June 2002, the House employed 1,373 full-time staff and 90 agency staff, out of a total work force of 1,740 individuals. Thus full-time staff represent 79 per cent. of the total, and agency staff represent 5.2 per cent.

Sir Edward Heath Statue

Mr. Banks: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what arrangements have been made for re-siting the bust of the right hon. Sir Edward Heath by Martin Jennings within the Palace of Westminster. [73638]

Mr. Kirkwood: I have been asked to reply.

Hon. Members will wish to know that Mr. Speaker has amended the "10-year rule", governing the display of representations of politicians in the main building of the Palace. A portrait, bust or statue of a politician other than a Prime Minister may be displayed once 10 years have passed after their death. A portrait, bust or statue of a former Prime Minister may now be displayed either once five years have passed after their death, or when three Parliaments have elapsed after they have resigned the office of Prime Minister (provided they are no longer Members of the House and that a minimum of 12 years has elapsed), whichever of these events comes first. There remain no restrictions on the siting of representations of living politicians in the outbuildings of the Palace.

Accordingly the bust of Sir Edward Heath may now be displayed in the main building of the Palace. It is the intention that it should be sited in Members' Lobby from later this year.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the President of the Council what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72245]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Computer Equipment

Dr. Cable: To ask the President of the Council what his policy is for the disposal of computer equipment that has been updated; and if he will make a statement. [72843]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer given on 19 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 398W.

TREASURY

Value Added

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his most recent estimate is of the gap between value-added per employee in the public and private sectors in the UK. [73653]

John Healey: The Office for National Statistics publish data on jobs in the public and private sectors annually in an article in *Economic Trends*. The latest, which gives data for 2001, appeared in the June 2002 edition of *Economic Trends* (page 39–52). Value Added by sector of the UK economy is available in the ONS Blue book. The latest Blue book dataset, including statistics for 2001, will be published on 26 July.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will indicate, in respect of the graph entitled UK Transport Spending on page 3 of the leaflet 2002 Spending Review, how much spending in each year is *(a)* subject to the decisions of devolved Administrations and *(b)* central Government's own investment. [71608]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The information requested is set out in table 8.1 of the Spending Review 2002 White Paper, "Opportunity and Security for All: Investing in an Enterprising Fairer Britain".

There was a misprint in the table as set out in the White Paper. A corrected version of the table is as follows. The Treasury will be issuing a corrigendum shortly.

Table 8.1: Key figures

				£ million
	2002–03	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Department for Transport				
Resource budget	4,960	7,632	7.749	8,650
Capital budget	2,948	3,369	3,811	3,391
Total departmental expenditure limit[1]	7,661	10,692	11,197	11,640
Near-cash spending in DfT DEL[2]	7,843	10,829	11,333	11,774
UK transport spending (estimated)[3]	11,962	15,347	15,827	16,406

[1] Full resource budgeting basis, net of depreciation.

[2] Consistent with previous control basis.

[3] Subject to spending decisions of local authorities and devolved Administrations.

Statistics

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what proportion of the population in *(a)* Wigan MBC, *(b)* the North West Region and *(c)* England had an income of (i) up to twice, (ii) up to five times and (iii) more than five times the national average in each of the past 10 years; [71898]

(2) what proportion of the total relevant population were higher rate tax payers in *(a)* Wigan MBC, *(b)* the North West Region and *(c)* England for each of the last 10 years. [71897]

Dawn Primarolo: Available estimates are in the tables.

Number of higher rate taxpayers[1] as a percentage of the total population[2] for the respective geographical areas

	Wigan	*North West[3]*	*England*
1995–96	1.5	2.5	3.8
1996–97	1.7	2.5	3.7
1997–98	1.4	2.5	3.8
1998–99	1.4	2.8	4.2
1999–2000	1.9	3.1	4.4

Number of individuals[4] with total income up to twice GB average earnings[5] as a percentage[6] of the total population[2] for the respective geographical areas

	Wigan	*North West[3]*	*England*
1995–96	99.5	98.6	97.7
1996–97	99.3	98.5	97.7
1997–98	99.3	98.6	97.6
1998–99	99.4	98.4	97.4
1999–2000	99.1	98.3	97.3

Number of individuals[4] with total income up to five times GB average earnings[5] as a percentage of the total population[2] for the respective geographical areas

	Wigan	*North West[3]*	*England*
1995–96	99.9	99.9	99.7
1996–97	99.9	99.8	99.7
1997–98	99.9	99.8	99.6
1998–99	100.0	99.8	99.6
1999–2000	99.9	99.8	99.6

Number of individuals[4] with total income over five times GB average earnings[5] as a percentage[6] of the total population[2] for the respective geographical areas

	Wigan	*North West[3]*	*England*
1995–96	0.1	0.1	0.3
1996–97	0.1	0.2	0.3
1997–98	0.1	0.2	0.4
1998–99	0.0	0.2	0.4
1999–2000	0.1	0.2	0.4

[1] Number of higher rate taxpayers based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

[2] Source for population estimates: Official for National Statistics, General Register Office for Scotland, and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

[3] Government Office Region of North West.

[4] Number of individuals based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

[5] Average earnings based on the New Earnings Survey.

[6] Rounded to 1 decimal place.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the annual report of the Statistics Commission. [72457]

Ruth Kelly: The 2001–02 annual report of the Statistics commission, which was released on Wednesday 17 July 2002 is a thorough review of the year's developments and details the Commission's progress in achieving its aims as set out in the "Framework for National Statistics".

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the independence and quality of national statistics. [72452]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's commitment to improving trust and confidence in official statistics was set out in the National Statistics Framework document which became operational in June 2000. Since then the National Statistician has issued a National Statistics Code of Practice for public consultation. This showed widespread support for the Code of Practice and its aim of promoting and demonstrating the independence and quality of National Statistics. The final version of the Code of Practice will be published shortly.

R and D Tax Credit

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has carried out on the impact of the DTI guidelines on the definition of development for tax purposes on the research and development tax credit in respect of large companies; and if he will make a statement. [70864]

Dawn Primarolo: The current definition of Research and Development (R&D) in the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's guidelines is based on UK accounting principles—in SSAP (Statement of Standard Accounting Practice) 13—and on international standards established by the OECD. It was introduced in 2000 and underpins both the R&D tax credit for SMEs, also introduced in 2000, and the new R&D tax credit for large companies, in the current Finance Bill.

This definition was introduced after extensive consultation. It has only been in force for a short time, and it will not be possible to assess either its impact or that of the credits themselves (which are measures for the long-term) until companies have had a period of stability in which to make use of them. In the meantime, the Inland

Revenue, the Treasury and the DTI are working with industry on case studies to clarify the application of the definition.

Energy Efficiency

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the reduced rate of five per cent VAT to all purchases of energy efficiency materials. [72705]

John Healey: The existing reduced rate applies to installations by contractors of certain energy-saving materials whose primary purpose is to save energy. European law does not permit a reduced rate for energy-efficient or energy-saving materials sold direct to the public, but the Government has pressed the European Commission to bring forward proposals to allow a reduced rate for energy-saving materials.

Jobs Location

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase the number of customs staff employed in Scotland. [72706]

John Healey: HM Customs and Excise focuses its resources on areas of greatest risk and keeps its staffing numbers and locations under review to ensure that staff with the necessary skills are in place to support the Department's operational activities.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core Department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and other such organisations are, located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72727]

Ruth Kelly: The numbers of whole time equivalent staff employed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Department are shown in the following table:

Staff in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Department

	Scotland	*England excluding Greater London*	*Greater London*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*Overseas*	*Total*	*Percentage of Chancellors staff*
HM Treasury	—	—	1,030	—	—	—	1,030	1.1
(Percentage)	—	—	100.0	—	—	—	100.0	
Customs and Excise	1,233	14,544	5,735	569	594	—	22,675	23.5
(Percentage)	5.4	64.1	25.3	2.5	2.6	—	100.0	
Inland Revenue	6,230	44,880	6,875	3,778	1,421	—	63,184	65.5
(Percentage)	9.9	71.0	10.9	6.0	2.2	—	100.0	
ONS	—	1,535	941	1,042	—	—	3,518	3.6
(Percentage)	—	43.6	26.7	29.6	—	—	100.0	
OGC	9	239	183	—	—	—	431	0.4
(Percentage)	2.1	55.5	42.5	—	—	—	100.0	
Debt Management Office	—	—	77	—	—	—	77	0.1
(Percentage)	—	—	100.0	—	—	—	100.0	
National Savings and Investments	6	9	111	—	—	—	126	0.1
(Percentage)	4.8	7.1	88.1	—	—	—	100.0	
Royal Mint	—	—	2	966	—	—	968	1.0
(Percentage)	—	—	0.2	99.8	—	—	100.0	
Valuation Office Agency	81	2,812	725	236	—	—	3,854	4.0
(Percentage)	2.1	73.0	18.8	6.1	—	—	100.0	
Government Actuary's Department	—	2	96	—	—	—	98	0.1
(Percentage)	—	2.0	98.0	—	—	—	100.0	
Crown Estates	34	230	194	—	—	—	458	0.5
(Percentage)	7.4	50.2	42.4	—	—	—	100.0	
Statistics Commission	—	—	10	—	[illegible]	—	10	0.0
(Percentage)	—	—	100.0	—	[illegible]	—	100.0	
Total	7,593	94,251	15,979	6,591	2,0[illegible]	—	96,429	100.0
(Percentage)	7.9	66.6	16.6	6.8	2.1	—	100.0	

Anglo-Scottish Ministerial Meetings

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings his Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive Department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72721]

Mr. Boateng: Treasury Ministers meet Scottish Executive Ministers on occasion on a range of subjects.

White Van Imports

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many vehicles have been impounded by HM Customs and Excise in respect of white van imports since 1 January 2000. [72505]

John Healey: Customs' centrally held information on vehicle seizures does not differentiate the types of vehicle seized as outlined in the answer given by the former Financial Secretary (Paul Boateng), to the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty), on 3 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 65W. The total number of vehicles seized for all excise offences across the whole of the UK was 5,200 in the financial year 1999–2000, and 10,219 for the year 2000–01. Figures for 2001–02 will be published in the context of the overall performance of the 'tackling tobacco smuggling' strategy later in the year.

Hearing Aids

Rachel Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to exempt from tax the hearing aids required for hearing impaired people to pursue employment. [72203]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) on 11 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 1104W.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will change the rules so that hearing aids paid for by employers are exempt from tax. [71717]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are continuing to remove barriers to work and ensure that disabled people do not face discrimination in the work place. Regulations came into force on 9 July 2002 to ensure that benefits for disabled employees which may be used both in and out of the work place, such as a hearing aid, will not be liable to a tax charge.

Non-domicile Tax Status

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what methodology the Inland Revenue is using to assess the number of individuals claiming non-domicile tax status; what the cost is of such status; what other work is being undertaken as a result of the review announced in paragraph 5.83 of the 2002 Budget; and if he will make a statement. [70274]

Dawn Primarolo: In his Budget statement, the Chancellor announced a review of the residence and domicile rules as they affect the tax liabilities of individuals. The work of the review is being undertaken by officials. As part of that work the Inland Revenue will be carrying out various fact-finding exercises, drawing on a range of sources.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when the EU Customs Code Committee on customs warehouses and free zones is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [71834]

(2) when the EU Customs Code Committee on transit is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [71839]

(3) when the EU Customs Code Committee on the movement of air or sea passengers' baggage (technical problems) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [73150]

(4) when the EU Customs Code Committee on favourable tariff treatment (nature or end-use of goods) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [73151]

(5) when the EU Customs Code Committee on counterfeit and pirated goods is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [73148]

(6) when the EU Customs Code Committee on the single administrative document is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [73149]

(7) when the EU Customs Code Committee on general customs rules is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [73156]

(8) when the EU Customs Code Committee on the recovery of claims is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [73157]

(9) when the EU Customs Code Committee on customs procedures with economic impact is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement; [73147]

(10) when the EU Customs Code Committee on customs valuation is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [73144]

John Healey: The following table indicates when the various EU Committees are next due to meet.

EU Committee[1]	*Next meeting (2002)*
Transit	16 September
Customs warehouses and free zones	25 September
Customs Valuation	23 September
Movement of air or sea passengers' baggage (technical problems)	[2]—
General Customs Rule	Date to be arranged
Counterfeit and Pirated Goods	3 September
Customs Procedure with Economic Impact	25 September
Favourable Tariff Treatment (Nature or End-use of Goods).	25 September
Single Administrative Document	Date to be arranged

[1] There is no EU VAT or Customs Committee on the recovery of claims other than that on mutual assistance.

[2] This Committee has not met in the past five years and has no outstanding items under consideration. No further meetings have been timetabled.

The UK is normally represented by one or two officials from HM Customs and Excise on each of these Committees. The Customs delegates at these Committees represent all of the UK.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the European Advisory Committee on statistical information in the economic and social spheres (CEIES) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [71838]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Angus Robertson, dated 24 July 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question concerning the EU European advisory committee on statistical information in the economic and social sphere (CEIES). I am replying in his absence. (71838)

The European advisory committee on statistical information in the economic and social sphere (CEIES) next meets on 22nd November 2002. In addition to the National Statistician there are 2 UK members who serve in a personal capacity. Members do not represent individual interests or organisations.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the EU Committee on monetary, financial and balance-of-payments statistics is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [71826]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Angus Robertson, dated 24 July 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question concerning the EU Committee on monetary, financial and balance-of-payment statistics. I am replying in his absence. (71826)

The EU Committee on monetary, financial and balance-of-payments statistics is due to meet at the end of January 2003. The exact date of the meeting is not yet fixed.

The Scottish Executive has never attended and is not a member.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the EU Committee on the harmonisation of the compilation of gross national product at market prices is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [71833]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mr. John Pullinger to Mr. Angus Robertson, dated 24 July 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question concerning the EU Committee on the harmonisation of gross national product at market prices. I am replying in his absence. (71833)

The EU Committee on the harmonisation of gross national product at market prices is due to meet on 5th November 2002.

The terms of reference of the committee relates to methodology for compilation of National Accounts, which is a reserved issue. The Scottish Executive has never attended and is not a member.

PFI Contracts

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 120W, on PFI contracts, what estimate his Department has made of the payments under PFI contracts for each year from 2002–03 to 2027–28 for Government PFI deals which are expected to reach preferred bidder stage in the next three years. [71927]

Mr. Boateng: During the competitive process, before a preferred bidder is selected, it is not possible to determine with any degree of accuracy exactly what the long term payment obligations are likely to be for any project. However, once projects have reached preferred bidder status, Departmental estimates of the relevant future service payments are published twice a year.

The most recent publication of this information can be found in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2002, Table C 19. As is customary, I shall provide an update of these figures later this year.

Inward Investment

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the level of inward investment into the United Kingdom was in the years ending *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* 1 May 2002; and if he will make a statement. [72094]

Mr. Boateng: The Office for National Statistics publishes annual figures on inward investment into the United Kingdom in its Foreign Direct Investment Business Monitor (MA4). It also publishes quarterly estimates as part of the Balance of Payments First Release. Both of these can be found on the ONS website (statistics.gov.uk). The UK has continued to attract the largest share of inward investment in Europe and announcements made in this year's Budget will further serve to consolidate the UK's lead position.

DEL Spending

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of DEL spending labelled 'transport' is spent on *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* England and Wales and *(d)* England, Wales and Scotland in each year from 2002–03 to 2005–06. [72591]

Mr. Boateng: The amount allocated to the Department for Transport to spend on transport provision in England, and the national rail system, is given in the Spending Review 2002 White Paper, table 8.1. (An amended version of this table follows, which corrects a misprint. A corrigendum will be issued shortly.). The line in this table which gives an estimate of total UK transport spending does so on the basis of estimated spending by local authorities and devolved Administrations. It is of course a matter for devolved Administrations as to how they spend their allocated budgets.

Table 8.1 key figures

£ million

Department for Transport	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Resource budget	4,960	7,632	7,749	8,650
Capital budget	2,948	3,369	3,811	3,391
Total Departmental Expenditure Limit[1]	7,661	10,692	11,197	11,640
Near-cash spending in DfT DEL[2]	7,843	10,829	11,333	11,774
UK transport spending (estimated)[3]	11,962	15,347	15,827	16,406

[1] Full resource budgeting basis net of depreciation.

[2] Consistent with previous control basis.

[3] Subject to spending decisions of local authorities and devolved Administrations.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which mid-year population estimates were used to determine incremental Scottish DEL expenditure for 2002–03; and which mid-year population estimates will be used for the same determination for Scottish funding for each year from 2003–04 to 2005–06. [72594]

Mr. Boateng: The mid-year estimates were set out in the Statement of Funding Policy on 15 July 2002 and were the Office for National Statistics latest mid-year estimate published last year. Future funding changes will be based on the latest available ONS estimates as explained in the Statement of Funding Policy.

Taxis and Buses

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new incentives he will introduce to stimulate the use of less environmentally damaging vehicles as *(a)* taxis and *(b)* other public service carriers. [73207]

John Healey: In Budget 2002, the Chancellor announced a number of measures to encourage reductions in the environmental impact of transport, which could apply equally to taxis and public service carriers. Any new incentives will be considered as part of the normal Budget process.

United Kingdom Listing Authority

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make available the annual objectives for the United Kingdom Listing Authority. [73471]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services Authority, acting in its role as the competent authority for listing, is referred to as the United Kingdom Listing Authority. Every year, the operational objectives of the UKLA are discussed with the Treasury. The annual objectives for 2002–03, which the Treasury has endorsed, will be placed in the Library, and also put on the Treasury website.

Royal Gifts

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what mechanism is in place to distinguish between gifts received by *(a)* the Queen and *(b)* other members of the royal family in (i) their official roles and (ii) their private capacities; what rules govern the receipt of gifts donated to members of the royal family in their official capacities; and whether such gifts are exempt from taxation. [65160]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* Gifts are categorised as official if given during an official engagement or in connection with the official role or duties of a member of the royal family.

Gifts received in an official capacity are not taxed because they do not belong to the individual members of the royal family. Gifts received in a private capacity are treated by members of the royal family in the same way as gifts received by anyone else. The normal inheritance tax and lifetime transfer rules would apply to such gifts subject to the arrangements for Her Majesty and the Prince of Wales set out in the Memorandum of Understanding in the Royal Trustees report (HC464) published on 11 February 1993.

Records are kept of official gifts received by the Queen and where they are stored. Other members of the royal family follow similar practice. Gifts received by any member of the royal family in a private capacity are not listed in official records.

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what public funds were expended in 2001 on gifts given by *(a)* the Queen and *(b)* other members of the royal family in their official roles. [65161]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* The cost of official gifts given by Her Majesty the Queen and other members of the royal family in 2001 amounted to £36,783 and £11,071, respectively.

Royal Finances

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether paragraph 31 of the 1993 Memorandum of Understanding on the subject of royal finances has been invoked since its inception. [69414]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* No.

Throat Cancer

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the survival rate was for throat cancer in the UK in the last 12 months. [71097]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Tim Loughton, dated 24 July 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the survival rate for throat cancer in the UK in the last 12 months. I am replying in his absence. (71097)

Cancer of the larynx is commonly referred to as "throat cancer". Information on laryngeal cancer survival for the UK as a whole is not available. Survival rates for the constituent countries of the UK are not comparable.

Cancers of the throat and related areas are formally classified to codes C13 and C14 (malignant neoplasm of hypopharynx, and malignant neoplasm of other and ill-defined sites in the lip, oral cavity and pharynx) according to the International Classification of Disease tenth revision (ICD10). There were 311 newly diagnosed cases of cancers in these locations in England in 1998, the most recent year for which information is available. No information on survival is available.

Information on survival from cancer of the larynx for patients diagnosed in England and Wales is summarised in chapter 21 of the book Cancer Survival Trends[1]. This publication present cancer survival trends in patients diagnosed between 1971 and 1990 and followed up for at least five years to the end of 1995.

For men, the most recent information available relates to diagnosis in 1991–93 and follow-up up to the end of 1998 (Health Statistics Quarterly 6[2]). The crude['] survival rate was 51% and relative['] survival 64%, based on 4,501 men diagnosed. Women are not included in the analysis, as they represent less than 20% of all the cases of cancer of the larynx.

The figures for patients diagnosed in 1986–90 and followed up to the end of 1995, are given in the table below.

One-and five-year survival from cancer of the larynx[*] for patients diagnosed in 1986–90, England and Wales

		One-year (%)		*Five year (%)*	
	Number of patients	*Crude*[']	*Relative*[']	*Crude*[']	*Relative*[']
Men	7,195	80	84	51	64
Women	1,592	76	79	49	58

Source:

Coleman MP et al. Cancer Survival Trends in England and Wales, 1971–1995: deprivation and NHS Region.

Studies in Medical and Population Subjects No. 61. London: The Stationery Office, 1999.

[*] Cancer of the larynx has been defined to the International Classification of Disease eight and ninth revision (ICD8 and ICD9) code 161 for the period 1975–1994, and to the code C32 according to the International Classification of Disease tenth revision (ICD10) from 1995 onwards.

['] Crude survival is the proportion of a cohort of subjects alive at the end of a specified time interval since diagnosis (irrespective of the cause of death). Relative survival is the ratio of the observed survival in the group being studied and the survival that would have been expected had they been subject only to the mortality rates of the general population.

[1] Coleman MP et al. Cancer Survival Trends in England and Wales, 1971–1995: deprivation and NHS Region. Studies in Medical and Population Subjects No. 61. London: The Stationery Office, 1999.

[2] Coleman MP, Babb P, Harris S, Quinn MJ, Sloggett A, De Stavola B. Cancer survival in England and Wales, 1991–98. Health Statistics Quarterly 6:71–80, The Stationery Office (2000) on the National Statistics website at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/HSQ6Book.pdf

Drug Seizures

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many drug seizures from foreign vessels have been made in Scottish waters since 1995; [70635]

(2) what the weight of drug seizures from foreign vessels caught in Scottish waters has been in each year since 1995, broken down by type of drug. [70636]

John Healey *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Since 1995, HM Customs and Excise have made 58 seizures from UK and foreign flagged vessels in international and UK waters. Of these, three were made from foreign vessels in Scottish waters. Two of the three seizures were made in 1998, one from a German and one from an Irish vessel. The third seizure was made in 2000, from a Maltese vessel. A total of 80 kilograms of amphetamine, 120 tonnes of cannabis, 14 and a half tonnes of cocaine, and 25 kilograms of heroin were seized as a result of these 58 cases. The three seizures in Scottish waters resulted in the recovery of 17 tonnes of cannabis.

Family Resources Survey

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 20 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 462W, on tax credits, when the Family Resources Survey 2000–01 was received by the Treasury; when full analysis of the survey began; and when he expects the analysis to be concluded. [65385]

Dawn Primarolo: The final data set was received in May 2002.

Government Art Collection

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when an inventory was last prepared of the Government's holdings of art and antiques [68461]

Mr. Boateng: The National Asset Register, published for the first time in 1997 and updated, with full valuations, in 2001, summarised asset holdings across Departments. Where appropriate, Departments summarise heritage assets separately.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* disposals from and *(b)* acquisitions to the Government's art and antiques collection there have been since 1997. [R] [68463]

Mr. Boateng: The National Asset Register summarised departmental asset acquisitions and disposals between 1997 and 2001. Similar information is provided annually in Departments' accounts. Where relevant, heritage assets are categorised separately.

The aggregate information requested is not held centrally. Details of individual asset acquisitions and disposals are available from individual Departments.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have to sell its holdings of art and antiques; and what discussions his Department is having on the subject. [R] [68464]

Mr. Boateng: Specific asset sales are a matter for individual Departments. Departments' asset acquisition and disposal strategies will be set out in full in new departmental investment strategies, to be published in the autumn.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value is of the Government's holdings of art and antiques. [R] [68462]

Mr. Boateng: The 11,500 items that comprise the Government Art Collection are not valued, in accordance with accounting policy on heritage assets. Details of departmental asset holdings—including art and antiques assets—and their values are available in summary in Departments' accounts and are also published in the National Asset Register.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68728]

Ruth Kelly: All overseas travel by Treasury officials is undertaken in accordance with the principles set out in Chapter 8 of the Civil Service Management Code, and the Department's own rules and guidance.

Consultation Documents

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which consultation documents published by the Treasury in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [69852]

Ruth Kelly: Paper copies of all Treasury consultation documents are available from the Treasury's public inquiries unit.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how long the Treasury allowed for consultation on each of the consultation documents it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form. [70094]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Twickenham on 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 865W. The same time is allowed for consultations regardless of the format in which the document is published.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints the Treasury has received about its 2001 consultations by *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed means. [69851]

Ruth Kelly: Records of complaints about consultations are not held centrally by the Treasury.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what format the Treasury has published the results of its 2001 written consultations. [69849]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury consults regularly on a wide range of policy areas. Results have so far been formally published for a number of 2001 consultation exercises including responses to the Review of the Supply of the Supply of Scientists and Engineers (the Sir Gareth Robert's Review) and Securing our Future Health (the Wanless Review).

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether consultation documents published by the Treasury in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [70091]

Ruth Kelly: Recent Treasury consultation documents have not carried the criteria. The relevant guidance will be re-issued.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form the Treasury has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [69850]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has not yet formally monitored and evaluated consultation documents published in 2001.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Treasury has appointed a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations. [69853]

Ruth Kelly: Yes, the Treasury has appointed a designated consultation co-ordinator.

Public Consultations

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69793]

Ruth Kelly: The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations applies to all formal national public consultation documents issued by Departments from 1 January 2001 and the information requested is not available before that date. For consultations issued from January 2001, the information is available on the Consultations section of the Treasury's website, www.htm-treasury.gov.uk, which includes both launch dates and closure dates. Paper copies of Treasury publications are available on request.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what public consultations have been commenced by his Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72066]

Ruth Kelly: A list of consultations commenced since 1 April, with closing dates, is available on the Treasury's website at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/Consultations_and_Legislation/.

Accounts

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the rules governing the publishing of *(a)* the Queen's accounts, *(b)* 10 Downing Street's accounts, *(c)* Chequers' accounts and *(d)* accounts relating to grace and favour apartments. [69012]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The accounts for The Queen's Civil List, and for the grants in aid for royal travel by air and rail, maintenance of the occupied royal palaces in England, royal communications and information, and for the maintenance of Marlborough House are published annually by the royal household on a purely voluntary basis.

Expenditure on No. 10 Downing Street is included in the Cabinet Office annual accounts and is not reported separately. Resource accounts for the Cabinet Office are laid annually before the House of Commons under sections 6 and 7 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000. They are then published.

Chequers is a private trust and not a Government building. As a private trust the accounts are confidential.

Trading Partners

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* the coefficient of the exchange rates variation with sterling and *(b)* the value in sterling of reciprocal trade with the UK was for each of the United Kingdom's 20 principal trading partners from 1997 until 31 December 2001. [71813]

Ruth Kelly: The coefficient of variation of a data series can be calculated by dividing the standard deviation by the mean.

A detailed geographical breakdown of UK trade is published by the Office For National Statistics in section 9 of the annual Balance of Payments publication (The Pink Book). The ONS also publishes a list of the UK's top

50 trading partners for goods exports and imports in the Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics. Both publications are available on the ONS website (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/).

Employee Share Schemes

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the potential for employers to offer fractional shares within employee share schemes; and if he will make a statement. [71697]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has not received any representations on the potential for employers to offer fractional shares within employee share schemes.

Payroll Software

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much is set aside for Government Departments to replace their existing payroll provision with new software which has the Inland Revenue payroll standard; and if he will make a statement; [71709]

(2) which Government Departments have filed their P14 and P35 IR documents electronically; when those Departments that have not filed electronically will do so; and if he will make a statement; [71706]

(3) which elements of the payroll standard the Government's payroll provisions do not meet; and if he will make a statement; [71708]

(4) how much is to be set aside to enhance Government Departments' existing software to comply with the Inland Revenue payroll standard and undertake the testing; and if he will make a statement; [71710]

(5) which Government Departments pay their employees through software that has the Inland Revenue payroll standard; and if he will make a statement. [71707]

Dawn Primarolo: This information is not available or could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Quality standards for mandatory electronic filing of employers' end of year tax returns have not yet been settled.

Tax Return Errors

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* financial and *(b)* promotional incentives are offered to staff at the Inland Revenue for investigating errors in tax returns. [71870]

Dawn Primarolo: No financial or promotional incentives are offered to Inland Revenue staff specifically for investigating errors in tax returns. However, annual pay awards take account of overall individual performance.

National Rail

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether debt incurred by National Rail will be included in the net cash requirement. [72098]

Mr. Boateng: The Office for National Statistics has decided that Network Rail will be classified as a private sector company in national accounts. Therefore, its borrowing will not be included in the public sector net cash requirement.

Enterprise Investment Scheme

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on take-up of the Enterprise Investment Scheme. [71660]

Dawn Primarolo: Information on investment in EIS companies is published on the Inland Revenue website. The latest figures for take-up of EIS for the last three years are:

	£ million
1998–99	278.1
1999–2000	469.0
2000–01	661.6

The figures for 2001–02 will be available in September. The amounts for the earlier years will also be updated then as there is a considerable time lag between the year to which the claim relates and the receipt of the claim.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many outstanding claims are pending in respect of the cases at issue in Clark (Inspector of Taxes) v. Perks and other appeals. [72566]

Dawn Primarolo: 720 claims were still receiving consideration as at 19 July 2002.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates to be the total potential payout due from the Inland Revenue to claimants stemming from the cases at issue in Clark (Inspector of Taxes) v. Perks and other appeals. [72568]

Dawn Primarolo: No estimate of the total to be repaid has been made.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what redress can be sought by claimants who have not been paid their back-tax, pursuant to the Court of Appeal's decision Clark (Inspector of Taxes) v. Perks and other appeals. [72571]

Dawn Primarolo: If a taxpayer wants to find out why a decision on their entitlement to a tax repayment has not yet been made they should follow up their claim with the Inland Revenue involved. If they are concerned about the way in which their claim is being handled they should contact the officer in charge.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason payments have ceased following the Court of Appeal's decision Clark (Inspector of Taxes) v. Perks and other appeals; and if he will make a statement. [72570]

Dawn Primarolo: They have not ceased. Repayment claims continue to be considered.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for which years claimants may have valid claims for refunds from the Inland Revenue after the Court of Appeal's decision, Clark (Inspector of Taxes) *v*. Perks and other appeals. [72569]

Dawn Primarolo: Taxpayers who were employed on a jack up rig before 17 March 1998 may be entitled to claim the foreign earnings deduction for tax years up to and including the year ended 5 April 1998 (1997–98). Taxpayers have until 31 October 2002 to request a return for 1996–97 and until 31 October 2003 to request one for 1997–98. For the year 1995–96 and earlier years claims can only be made within six years of the end of the tax year in which an assessment was made.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the *(a)* lowest, *(b)* highest and *(c)* average payout to claimants stemming from the cases at issue in Clark (Inspector of Taxes) *v.* Perks and other appeals. [72567]

Dawn Primarolo: The lowest repayment to date is £11. The highest is £70,590 and the average is £5,333.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claims made by offshore workers have been paid as a result of the court decisions in Clark (Inspector of Taxes) *v.* Perks and other appeals. [72565]

Dawn Primarolo: 851 repayments of tax have been made up to 19 July 2002.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Court of Appeal's decision Clark (Inspector of Taxes) *v.* Perks and other appeals, for what reason taxpayers who overpaid due to mistaken classifications between offshore jack-up rigs and ships, have not been repaid in full. [72572]

Dawn Primarolo: All taxpayers who establish a valid claim to the foreign earnings deduction will have the tax they overpaid as a result refunded. Work is still continuing in some cases to determine whether the various conditions for entitlement to FED are satisfied.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the status is of claims made by offshore workers regarding payment to them by the Inland Revenue stemming from the court decisions in Clark (Inspector of Taxes) *v.* Perks and other appeals; and if he will make a statement. [72564]

Dawn Primarolo: A majority of these claims have now been dealt with and either repayments made, or the claims turned down because entitlement to the foreign earnings deduction has not been established. Decisions will be made on the cases that remain under consideration in due course.

Development Assistance

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 73W, on development assistance, what strategy he has for raising UK official development assistance to the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of GNP from 2005–06. [72544]

John Healey: Since this Government came to power our aid has doubled and our aid ratio has increased from 0.26 per cent. in 1997, to 0.32 per cent. in 2001. The Government have pledged our aid ratio will rise to 0.40 per cent. in 2005–06, its highest level since 1981. This will take the UK above the commitment agreement at the UN Financing for Development conference held at Monterrey in March, to bring the EU average oda/GNI ratio to 0.39 per cent. by 2005–06. This is also more than double the current G7 country oda/GNI average of 0.18 per cent. and above the current OECD average of 0.22 per cent.

Any timetable beyond 2005–06 is a matter for future Parliaments.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is his policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via his Department's website. [72277]

Ruth Kelly: When answering parliamentary questions, Treasury Ministers refer to a wide range of documents published by the Treasury, the other Chancellor's Departments and by other organisations, such as National Statistics.

Where a document is specifically referred to in a parliamentary answer as being on the Treasury website, it will be found there, as well as in the House of Commons Library. Other documents referred to in a parliamentary answer will be available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for how long he retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website. [72287]

Ruth Kelly: Website documents which have been referred to in answers to parliamentary questions, will be on the Treasury's website for at least the next year and will be available on request thereafter.

Pharmaceutical Companies

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 17 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 336W, on pharmaceutical companies, what steps he is taking to ensure such tax incentives are not exploited by UK-based pharmaceutical companies, for the clearance of expired or nearly expired medicines to developing countries. [72432]

Dawn Primarolo: Donors will be encouraged to comply with the World Health Organisation's Guidelines for Drug Donations. Reference will be made to them in the guidance that the Inland Revenue issues to its inspectors which is published on the Inland Revenue website and is widely used by taxpayers and businesses in determining their tax liability.

Where a company makes a gift from its trading stock it would normally be required to bring the market value of the gift into its tax computation in order to reflect the sales proceeds foregone. The relief in Clause 55 of the Finance Bill 2002 works by removing this charge, subject to certain conditions. If stock is unsaleable because it is time expired or nearly so, there would be little or no tax charge to add back—therefore the tax relief would be of little or no value to the donor company.

Incomes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people's annual gross income increased by more than £2,500 in each of the last two financial years for which such figures are available. [72416]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that this information is not available.

Scotland Office Budget

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the budget of the Scotland Office is determined. [72553]

Mr. Boateng: Provision for the costs of the Scotland Office is found from within the total resources voted for Scotland by the United Kingdom Parliament, as allowed for in the Statement of Funding Policy.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the comparability factors for Scottish expenditure via Barnett were determined. [72592]

Mr. Boateng: The comparability factors for Scottish expenditure via the Barnett formula were published in the Statement of Funding Policy on 15 July, following consultation with the devolved Administrations. They reflect the extent to which UK departmental expenditure is devolved.

Spending Review Targets

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government will ask the National Audit office to determine whether the spending review targets have been met. [72448]

Mr. Boateng: Departments are responsible for delivering and reporting progress against their public service agreement targets. The Government have invited the Comptroller and Auditor General to take responsibility for the validation of systems used in reporting on PSA targets where measurement of performance depends on data.

Culture, Media and Sport (Scotland)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason the comparability factor for Culture, Media and Sport in Scotland has decreased. [72593]

Mr. Boateng: The comparability factor for Culture, Media and Sport in Scotland has decreased because a higher proportion of the DCMS budget is not devolved.

Scottish Fiscal Autonomy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Scottish Executive on the issue of Scottish fiscal autonomy. [72554]

Mr. Boateng: No specific representations have been received on this topic, although the Executive makes representations to Government on a wide range of issues.

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked in his Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72646]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave her on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 574–75W.

Ministerial Meetings

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people attended the G7 Finance Ministers meeting in Halifax in June from *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other UK Government Departments; and what the total cost of the visit was; [66224]

(2) how many people attended the World Economic Forum in New York in February from *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other UK Government Departments; and what the total cost of the visit was. [66214]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I am giving today to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when and where Ministers in his Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72700]

Ruth Kelly: No formal meetings have been held between Treasury Ministers and their Irish counterparts since 1 June 2000. However, Treasury Ministers meet regularly with their Irish counterparts, for example in the margins at ECOFIN council meetings.

Growth Rates

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much growth would be required in the United Kingdom over the next two quarters of 2002 in order to meet the GDP growth targets set out in the 2002 Comprehensive Spending Review. [72589]

Mr. Boateng: The economic assumptions underpinning the public finance projections in Budget 2002 are set out in table C3 of the April 2002 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average GDP growth rate for the United Kingdom has been in each year since 1997–98. [72590]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Alex Salmond, dated 24 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on GDP annual growth rates. (72590)

The information requested is given in the table below.

GDP annual growth rates in percentages covering the period from 1997–2001

Year	*Percentage*
1997	3.4%
1998	2.9%
1999	2.4%
2000	3.1%
2001	1.9%

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on *(a)* the real growth rates of UK (i) total and (ii) average managed expenditure outlined in the 2002 Comprehensive Spending Review and *(b)* real growth rates in UK total managed expenditure over the last five years. [72555]

Mr. Boateng: Total managed expenditure (TME) is planned to rise in real terms by 4.3 per cent. a year on average between 2002–03 and 2005–06, while annually managed expenditure will rise at 3.0 per cent. a year in real terms over the same period, as detailed in the 2002 Spending Review White Paper, "Opportunity for all: investing in an enterprising, fairer Britain" (Cm 5570, July 2002). Between 1997–98 and 2001–02, TME rose in real terms by an average of 1.6 per cent. a year.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on *(a)* the real growth rates of UK departmental expenditure levels as outlined in the 2002 Comprehensive Spending Review and *(b)* real growth rates in UK departmental expenditure levels over the last five years. [72556]

Mr. Boateng: Total spending within departmental expenditure limits, on a full resource budgeting basis, is growing at 5.2 per cent. a year in real terms on average between 2002–03 and 2005–06, as detailed in the 2002 Spending Review White Paper, "Opportunity for all: investing in an enterprising, fairer Britain" (Cm 5570, July 2002). On a near-cash basis, the growth rate is 5.4 per cent. Between 1997–98 and 2001–02, real growth in total spending within departmental expenditure limits was on average 3.0 per cent., in near-cash terms.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in cases where two parents share the care of a child, which parent will be eligible for the child tax credit. [72427]

Mr. Boateng: Where two people share the care of a child the decision as to who is eligible to claim or who will receive payment depends on who has the main responsibility or is the "main carer" for that child or those children. This will depend on the particular circumstance of each case.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) pursuant to his answer of 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 336W, on tax credits, for what reason the Family Resources Survey for 2000–01 cannot be used to calculate a figure for the take-up of the working families tax credit; [64206]

(2) what assessment the Treasury has made of the research conducted by the Policy Studies Institute on behalf of the Department of Work and Pensions and the Inland Revenue on the take-up rate of the working families tax credit. [64124]

Dawn Primarolo: I have nothing to add to my previous answer.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the draft application form for the child tax credit and the working tax credit, with the relevant guidance notes. [72420]

Mr. Boateng: As the Paymaster General made clear in the debate in Standing Committee on the Child Tax Credit Regulations on 16 July, in August we shall start to send out application packs to potential claimants. She confirmed then that we would keep hon. Members informed, and provide them with the guidance to ensure they can property advise their constituents at that time.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which non-Government organisations will help distribute information about the new tax credits. [72428]

Ruth Kelly: The new tax credits, child tax credit and working tax credit, are to be introduced in April next year. In the run-up to their introduction, the Inland Revenue is working with a large number of organisations from across the voluntary sector to make sure they have the information they need.

Government (Appraisal and Evaluation)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the consultation paper on a revised version of appraisal and evaluation in central Government before 24 July; and if he will make a statement. [71303]

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury is today publishing for consultation a revised version of the new Green Book: Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government. Copies are available in the Vote Office and in the Library of the House.

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was of publishing his Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70486]

Mr. Boateng: Over the past five years the costs of publishing the Treasury's annual report that were born directly by the Department are set out in the table. Other costs of printing and publication are met directly by the publisher, The Stationery Office Limited (TSO), and do not fall to Government.

	£ Direct cost
2002[1]	4,100
2001	11,760
2000	4,450
1999[2]	—
1998[2]	—

[1] Costs are approximate and, pending some outstanding issues, will be finalised shortly.

[2] Prior to 2000, the report was designed in-house and thus no additional costs were incurred.

Statistical Information

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many questionnaires or forms seeking statistical information were sent to businesses by *(a)* the Office for National Statistics, *(b)* the Inland Revenue and *(c)* HM Customs and Excise in the latest year for which figures are available; and how many in each case were mandatory. [70838]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. J. Whittingdale, dated 24 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on how many questionnaires or forms seeking statistical information were sent to businesses by (a) the Office for National Statistics, (b) the Inland Revenue and (c) HM Customs and Excise in the latest year for which figures are available; and how many in each case were mandatory. (70838)

The information requested is given in the table below.

Statistical surveys of business and local authorities, carried out by the Office for National Statistics, HM Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue, 2000[1]

		Number of surveys		
Department	*Forms*[2]	*Total*	*Voluntary*	*Statutory*
ONS	1,476,229	74	11	63
HM Customs and Excise	156,000	2	1	1
Inland Revenue	100,000	197	197	0

[1] All surveys are attributed to the sponsoring department.

[2] Includes telephone interviews, personal interviews, etc.

Source:

ONS—Government Statistical Service Report 2000—Annex A Tables, published 2002

Taxation

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answers of 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 769W, and 26 June, *Official Report*, column 945W, on taxation, if he will restate his answers excluding benefits and assumed changes in original incomes; and if he will make a statement. [70755]

Mr. Boateng: The table gives the information requested. The estimates are based on a pooled Family Expenditure Survey dataset for the three years from 1997–98 to 1999–2000 with incomes and expenditure projected forward to 2001–02. The estimates themselves only include the impact of measures introduced and do not include any assumed changes to original incomes.

Net income Decile	*Percentage change in net income*
Bottom	1
2	2
3	1
4	1
5	1
6	1
7	1
8	1
9	0
Top	0

Note:

The decile groups are of all households ranked by net income before housing costs and equivalised using the McClements scale.

Marks and Spencer

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the implications for his consultation document on VAT on Face Value Vouchers of the 11 July judgment of the European Court of Justice in Case C-62/00, Marks and Spencer v Commissioners of HM Customs and Excise; [71696]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total cost to the Exchequer of the 11 July judgment of the European Court of Justice in Case C-62/00, Marks and Spencer v Commissioners of HM Customs and Excise, relating to HM Customs' three year rule on retrospective VAT claims across the economy; [71695]

(3) with reference to the 11 July judgment of the European Court of Justice in Case C-62/00, Marks and Spencer v Commissioners of HM Customs and Excise, if he will estimate the total VAT erroneously charged on *(a)* chocolate coated teacakes and *(b)* face value vouchers since 1973; and if he will make a statement. [71698]

John Healey: Customs officials are in the process of consulting with legal advisers on the implications of the judgment of the European Court of Justice in Case C-62/00, Marks and Spencer plc v the Commissioners of Customs and Excise.

As the ECJ has endorsed the UK's three year time limit for repayments of overpaid VAT, Customs' view is that the judgment will only affect certain claims which were made, or could have been made, around the time when the cap was introduced in 1996.

Customs will be publishing guidance on the wider implications of the judgment for VAT registered businesses soon.

We are currently unable to provide an accurate estimate of the total revenue effect of this judgment, nor of its effect on claims relating to particular types of product. However, given the limited scope of this judgment, it is not expected to have a significant revenue effect.

This judgment is not thought to have implications for the current consultation document on 'VAT on Face Value Vouchers'.

Salaries

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the percentage increase in spending on salaries in his Department for each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [71722]

Ruth Kelly: The percentage change in spending on salaries for the Treasury, including what is now the Office of Government Commerce, can be seen in the table. Data for years before 1996–97 could only be collated at disproportionate expense. Growth rates may be affected by changes of functions.

	Pay bill £ million	*Percentage change on previous year*
1996–97	56	—
1997–98	55	−1.8
1998–99	49	−10.9
1999–2000	51	4.1
2000–01	55	7.8
2001–02[1]	61	10.9

[1] unaudited outturn

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans there are to monitor annual progress against long term targets set out in public service agreements. [71614]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Progress against all targets in public service agreements (PSAs) is set out in departmental reports and autumn performance reports. The Government will provide regular web-based reports on all the new PSA targets from next year.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sanctions he will use against Departments which fail to deliver their public service agreements. [71615]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Departments are accountable to the public and Parliament for their performance against their public service agreement targets (PSAs). Performance is also one of a number of factors taken into account during a spending review, where performance can indicate where resources can best be deployed and the need for action and reforms to ensure delivery.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why there is no public service agreement target for Customs and Excise in respect of the illicit market share for oils in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [71607]

John Healey *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* As explained in "Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud", published in November 2001, the non-UK duty paid share of the road fuel sector in Northern Ireland is more complex than in the rest of the UK. Because of the long land border with the Republic of Ireland, Customs are unable to distinguish clearly between legitimate cross-border shopping and fraud there in the same way they are able to on the UK mainland.

As a consequence, while the Government have judged it right to set a PSA target for reducing the size of the illicit market for England, Scotland and Wales, it is not yet possible to set a comparable target for Northern Ireland.

The Government are, however, determined to tackle road fuel fraud in Northern Ireland and Customs have, over the last two years, enhanced its enforcement activity by increasing the number of officers tackling oils fraud in Northern Ireland from 25 officers to over 160. This has resulted in the first increase in the volume of UK duty paid fuel delivered into Northern Ireland for over four years.

The Government still consider the level of fraud to be unacceptable and Customs is pursuing, with other agencies and in addition to steps taken on mainland oils fraud, ways in which the impact on oils fraud in Northern Ireland can be increased.

Public Works Loan Board

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money is on loan from the Public Works Loan Board, broken down by country or region of the United Kingdom; and how much money is available for lending from the PWLB. [72588]

Ruth Kelly: The 127th Annual Report of the Public Works Loan Board, laid before Parliament on 8 July 2002, notes that at 31 March 2002 the following principal amounts were on loan:

	£ million
England	34,359.0
Scotland	9,254.4
Wales	3,267.6
Total	46,881.0

The Public Works Loan Board does not lend to Northern Ireland authorities.

The maximum amount of loans outstanding to the Public Works Loan Board at any one time should not exceed £55,000 million.

Inheritance Tax

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have applied for conditional exemption from inheritance tax in the last 12 months; and how this tax relief is being amended to take into account the implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 about access to the countryside. [72185]

Ruth Kelly: In the last 12 months the Inland Revenue have received eight inheritance tax exemption claims involving land. Of these, only one covers land in England not associated with a building where access may in due course be available by virtue of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000; the remainder are outside the territorial scope of the Act, or relate to the land surrounding a historic building, or both. Given this limited overlap, and the other public benefits secured by inheritance tax exemption, we are not persuaded that early change to the inheritance tax rules is called for: but we will keep the matter under review.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the number of employees working in the UK without national insurance numbers. [72124]

Ruth Kelly: No estimate has been made of the number of employees working in the UK without national insurance numbers.

Local Government Staff

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he estimates would be saved on the working families tax credit and other benefits if local government staff were paid a rate of £5 an hour. [72220]

Ruth Kelly: No reliable estimate can be made except at disproportionate cost.

Identity Cards

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how fees for an *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* compulsory proposed entitlement identity card will be treated in the national accounts. [72115]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mr. Len Cook to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 24 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on treatment of identity cards in the National Accounts. (72115)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) will treat any fees relating to identity cards in the National Accounts according to established international guidelines. ONS have not been asked to offer advice on this subject and will not do so until requested and proposals are clearly specified.

Strikes

Hywel Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many strikes due to industrial dispute have occurred in the UK in the past 10 years; and what the *(a)* location and *(b)* duration was of those that went beyond six weeks. [71789]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Hywel Williams, dated 24 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number and location of strikes due to industrial dispute in the UK over the last 10 years. (71789)

Figures for 1992–2001 are given below. They cover the number of days that strike action took place; not the number of days that the parties to the dispute were actually in disagreement. Data on the location of stoppages are not available.

Stoppages due to labour disputes in the UK in the last ten years

Year	*Total number of stoppages*	*Of which, over 30 days duration*
1992	325	28
1993	211	13
1994	205	4
1995	235	9
1996	244	15
1997	216	7
1998	166	8
1999	205	5
2000	212	5
2001	194	7

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72244]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer the Prime Minister is giving him today.

Public Appointments

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action his Department has taken in response to the comments in the Seventh report by the Commissioner for Public Appointments concerning *(a)* an independent element in interviews undertaken by HM Treasury and *(b)* performance assessment systems; and if he will make a statement. [72676]

Ruth Kelly: *(a)* HM Treasury is already fully compliant with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments that requires an independent member to form part of any appointments panel. In the past, we have used fully independent members who understand Treasury business, and who are familiar with the nature of the relationship between the Treasury and its public and other bodies. We will ensure—for the future—that such independent members receive formal training from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

(b) We will consider whether it is appropriate to introduce more formal performance assessment processes for any bodies that currently have only informal systems in place.

Pregnancy Statistics

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the incidence per 1,000 population of *(a)* under-16 pregnancies, *(b)* 16 to 18-years-old pregnancies, *(c)* under-16 having abortions and *(d)* 16 to 18-years-old having abortions in (i) St. Helens, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the North West and (iv) England in each year since 1996. [71278]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Shaun Woodward Esq MP, dated 24 July 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on incidences per 1,000 population of *(a)* under 16 pregnancies, *(b)* 16 to 18-years-old pregnancies, *(c)* under 16 having abortions and *(d)* 16 to 18-years-old having abortions in (i) St. Helens (ii) Merseyside (iii) the North West and (iv) England in (A) 1996, (B) 1997, (C) 1998, (D) 1999, (E) 2000 and (F) 2001. (71278)

The information requested is given in the table.

Conception and abortion rates in St. Helens, Merseyside, North West Region and England 1996–2001

	Year of occurrence					
Area of residence	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*[3]2000*	*[3]2001*
Conception rates at ages under 16[2]						
St. Helens[1]	12.1	11.6	12.3	11.7	11.4	[4]—
Merseyside	7.9	8.2	8.5	8.1	8.4	[4]—
North West	9.8	8.5	8.9	8.8	8.6	[4]—
GOR	—	—	—	—	—	—
England	9.3	8.8	8.8	8.2	8.3	[4]—
Conception rates at ages 16 to 18[3]						
St. Helens[1]	88.5	73.6	80.6	97.0	71.5	[4]—
Merseyside	73.6	72.4	76.2	75.0	69.1	[4]—
North West	72.6	70.8	74.1	69.7	69.8	[4]—
GOR	—	—	—	—	—	—
England	64.4	64.1	66.7	64.1	63.4	[4]—
Conception rates at ages under 16[2]						
St. Helens[1]	3.8	4.8	3.3	3.6	4.7	4.1
Merseyside	3.0	3.5	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.1
North West	3.8	3.6	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.8
GOR	—	—	—	—	—	—
England	3.9	3.7	4.0	3.8	3.9	3.7

Conception and abortion rates in St. Helens, Merseyside, North West Region and England 1996–2001

	Year of occurrence					
Area of residence	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*[1]2000*	*[1]2001*
Abortion rates at ages 16 to 18[5]						
St. Helens[3]	23.7	23.5	26.7	26.0	23.0	18.8
Merseyside	24.2	25.7	28.4	27.9	28.5	26.8
North West	22.8	22.8	24.4	23.6	25.9	24.8
GOR	—	—	—	—	—	—
England	22.5	22.7	24.6	24.1	24.6	24.9

[1] Conception data for 2000 and abortion date for 2001 are provisional.

[2] Rates per 1,000 resident females aged 13 to 15.

[3] Population denominators are less reliable than for larger areas.

[4] Not yet available.

[5] Rates per 1,000 resident females aged 16 to 18.

Advertising

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on advertising in the last five fiscal years by *(a)* National Savings and *(b)* National Statistics. [72675]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W.

Departmental Appointments

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions on which appointments were made by Treasury Ministers in financial year 2001–02 an additional candidate was added to the shortlist at the request of the Minister. [72654]

John Healey: On one occasion in 2001–02 an additional candidate was put forward to a selection panel, at the request of a Minister, to improve the sectoral and regional balance of the available candidates. The selection panel considered that he merited a place on the shortlist.

Cervical Cancer

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of deaths from cervical cancer occurred in women *(a)* over the age of 60, *(b)* between 30 and 59 and *(c)* under 30 years for (i) 2001 and (ii) 2002; and if he will make a statement. [72502]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Dr. Vincent Cable, dated 24 July 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question, on what proportion of deaths from cervical cancer occurred in women (a) over the age of 60, (b) between 30 and 59 and (c) under 30 years for (i) 2001 and (ii) 2002. (72502)

The latest available data are for deaths occurring in 2000. For that year, figures are shown in the table below.

Deaths from cervical cancer,[1] *England and Wales, 2002*[2]

Age	*No*	*Percent*
Under 30	14	1.3
30–59	443	40.0
60 and over	649	58.7
All ages	1,106	100.0

[1] Cancer of the cervix has been defined to the International Classification of Disease, 9th Revision , code ICD9 180.

[2] Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year.

Source:

Office for National Statistics. Mortality statistics cause. Series DH2 No.27

Euro Preparations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the staff costs are for NHS staff from trusts in the South East Region NHS trusts involved in the possible UK changeover to the euro preparations; [72195]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of the non staff costs for health trusts in Sussex involved in possible UK changeover to the euro preparations. [72196]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Details of changeover planning work in the national health service were set out in the Sixth Report on Euro Preparations, published on 18 July. Copies of the report are available in the Library of the House.

Euro

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rate of entry he regards as suitable to join the euro. [72900]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the then Financial Secretary, Mr. Boateng on 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 125W.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has obtained EU permission to enter the euro without first rejoining the ERM, subject to a referendum. [72898]

Ruth Kelly: The Government has no intention of rejoining the ERM.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of British overseas trade in 2001 took place using the euro. [72923]

Ruth Kelly: Customs and Excise conduct an annual survey of trade invoices used by British business for the import and export of goods between the UK and the rest of the world. The survey indicates the extent to which UK traders use the euro as a means of payment for international trade.

The results for 2001 are not yet available. They will be detailed in the next Press Release, now scheduled for the 30 July 2002.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total cost involved to date in collating, drafting, completing and publishing the National Changeover Plan. [72948]

Ruth Kelly: Details of expenditure on changeover planning were included in the Sixth Report on Euro Preparations, published on 18 July 2002. Copies of the report are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the period the UK should hold steady at his preferred rate for joining the euro before holding a referendum. [72899]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the right hon. Member to the comments made by the then Chief Secretary, Andrew Smith on 24 January *Official Report*, column 992–93.

11 Downing Street (Functions)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times he has permitted charities to use 11 Downing Street for functions since 1997; and how much money has been raised. [73243]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my written answer of 11 July to the hon. Member for Yeovil, (Mr. Laws), *Official Report*, column 1107W. The funds raised are a matter for the charities concerned.

EU Economy Report

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the document he sent to the EU giving the six monthly report on the UK's economy. [72897]

Ruth Kelly: The UK submits an Excessive Deficit return (Article 104 of the Treaty) to the European Commission every September and March. Copies can be found in the Library of the House. The returns are based on figures published in the previous Budget or Pre-Budget Report, and on figures included in the "Government deficit and debt under the Maastrict Treaty" First Releases issued by the Office for National Statistics in August and February.

Solicitors

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what accounting procedures exist to log the amount of funds given to solicitors from private practice who are instructed to act for the Treasury. [73242]

Ruth Kelly: Direct transactions between the Treasury and solicitors in private practice are recorded in the Department's accounting system against the appropriate account code, together with details of the relevant supplier and the responsible unit within the Department. Other transactions are similarly treated. To distinguish transactions with solicitors in private practice would require a review of every transaction, which would entail disproportionate cost.

Equities

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the *(a)* real and *(b)* nominal annual rate of return on UK equities between May 1997 and 16 July 2002. [72903]

Ruth Kelly: Between May 1997 and 16 July 2002, the nominal annual rate of return for the FTSE All Share was one per cent. equivalent to a total nominal return of 5.6 per cent. over the period. The annual real rate of return over the same period was 1.1 per cent. equivalent to a total real return of minus 5.8 per cent. over the same period.

Financial Services Offences (Buckingham)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which *(a)* companies and *(b)* individuals in Buckinghamshire have been found to have committed offences by the FSA; and what action was taken in each case. [73145]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA assumed its powers and responsibilities as single statutory regulator under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 on 1 December 2001. Where appropriate, it has disciplined under the Act those responsible for conducting financial business in breach of the rules and it has publicised the measures taken. These measures do not include any companies or individuals in Buckinghamshire.

Pension Taxation

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Inland Revenue review of pension taxation will be completed; whether the report will be published; and if he will make a statement. [73018]

Ruth Kelly: When the Inland Revenue review of pension taxation was commissioned early last year, it was expected to take a couple of years. Work is proceeding well and, when Ministers have considered the proposals, there will be a public consultation exercise in the autumn.

Pension Schemes (Tax Relief)

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the annual tax relief in each of the last five years received by individuals in *(a)* final salary, *(b)* defined contribution, *(c)* group personal and *(d)* personal pension schemes; and if he will make a statement. [73540]

Ruth Kelly: A breakdown of tax relief into the categories asked for is not available. However, estimates of the annual cost of tax relief attributable to individual and employer contributions to occupational and personal pension schemes are contained in table T7.9 of Inland Revenue Statistics. The latest version is on the Inland Revenue's website http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/pensions/pt091.htm

Service Attributable Pensions

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice his Department has given to the Ministry of Defence about the eligibility of retired disabled officers in receipt of a pension granted on account of medical unfitness attributable to military service to *(a)* have their pensions exempted from income tax and *(b)* be awarded a refund of tax wrongly deducted from their pension; and what advice it gave on whether such entitlement should be backdated to the date of discharge. [72853]

Mr. Boateng: The Inland Revenue has provided advice over a number of years to the Ministry of Defence on matters relating to the taxation of pensions granted to disabled officers. The Inland Revenue has advised that the tax legislation exempts from income tax:

> "retired pay of disabled officers granted on account of medical unfitness attributable to or aggravated by naval, military or Air Force service".

Unless a pension was granted because of a disabling condition attributable or aggravated by service, the statutory exemption will not apply.

The Inland Revenue has further advised that where the Veteran's Agency (VA) or one of its predecessors has made an award in respect of a disability which is attributable to service, it is prepared to treat the VA award and any service pension in payment as one combined and tax exempt pension from the date of the VA award.

Where tax has been wrongly deducted from an exempt pension, the Inland Revenue has advised that the tax should be refunded and backdated to the date on which an attributable pension was first granted.

Community Development

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 286W, on the community development venture capital fund, if he will list those private sector initiatives in which his Department has invested in the last three years, indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the purpose. [71364]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

The UK High Technology Fund has been developed to encourage institutional investment in predominately early stage high technology venture capital funds, and to increase the finance available for investment in technology based businesses. Government cornerstone investment of £20 million enabled a fund of £126.1 million to be raised.

Regional Venture Capital Funds (RVCFs) are being established to ensure that small businesses in each of the English regions have access to equity based finance in amounts below £500,000, and to demonstrate to institutional investors that robust returns can be made in this sector. £155 million of small scale risk capital is now available from the five funds that have become operational during 2002. £46.75 million of this is Government cornerstone investment.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Symbols

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what actions his Office is taking to address the problem of *(a)* paramilitary flags, *(b)* paramilitary murals and *(c)* kerbstone painting; and if he will make a statement. [67222]

Jane Kennedy: The subject you have raised is now a devolved matter and therefore no longer the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Public Inquiries

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his policy is on using 0870 telephone numbers for inquiries by the public to the Department and its agencies. [66196]

Jane Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Office does not have a central policy on the use of such telephone numbers.

EU Funding

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what assessment he has made of the future job security of those employed in the voluntary and community sector after EU funding ceases in 2006; [70621]

(2) what provision is being made financially to support the voluntary and community sector when EU peace funds cease to be accessible after 2006. [70620]

Dr. John Reid: The subject matters raised have been devolved and are no longer the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Escaped Prisoners

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the commitments he has given on the future treatment of prisoners on the run when they voluntarily return to the United Kingdom. [66085]

Jane Kennedy: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given to question refs. 63942, 3943 and 63944 from the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford on 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 136–37W.

Faith Communities

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list projects involving faith communities which are supported by his Department. [71851]

Jane Kennedy: There are no projects involving faith communities supported by the Northern Ireland Office.

Police Co-operation

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the agreement between the British and Irish Governments on police co-operation will come into operation. [73435]

Jane Kennedy: The agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Ireland on police co-operation was signed in Belfast on 29 April 2002 and was laid before Parliament on 22 July (Cm 5579). It will come into operation when the necessary parliamentary procedures have been completed in both jurisdictions; this may not be until the autumn. In the meantime, both Governments and the two police services will continue to progress work on the various measures required to give it effect.

Forensic Science

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish the accounts of the Forensic Science Northern Ireland for the year 2001–02. [73436]

Dr. John Reid: The accounts have been published today and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Life Sentence Review Commissioners

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends publishing the annual report of the Life Sentence Review Commissioners. [73446]

Dr. John Reid: The annual report has been published today and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Basingstoke on 4 July on the future of the full-time police reserve in Northern Ireland, ref 68440. [73534]

Jane Kennedy: The question referred to has now been answered.

Full-time Reserve

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many full time reserve police officers there were in Northern Ireland on 1 April in each year since 1990. [68458]

Jane Kennedy: The numbers of full-time reserve police officers in Northern Ireland in each year since 1990 are as follows:

	Number of officers
1990	3,007
1991	2,969
1992	3,072
1993	3,199
1994	3,211
1995	3,181
1996	3,066
1997	2,898
1998	2,963
1999	2,858
2000	2,668
2001	2,459
2002	2,123

Police strengths are calculated at the end of each month. Therefore the figures illustrated in the table reflect the number of full-time reserve officers on 30 April in each year.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of the full-time reserve in Northern Ireland. [R] [68460]

Jane Kennedy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Gentleman for Lagan Valley on 27 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 1040W.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Grant Distribution

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will revise the exemplifications of each of the options set out in "Formula Grant Distribution: A Consultation Paper" to take account of the comprehensive spending review decisions. [72907]

Mr. Leslie: We are not intending to revise the exemplifications set out in the consultation paper, because using the spending review figures would introduce a new source of variation between the figures 2002–03 and those produced by the options we have set out. This variation would obscure the consultation's focus on options for the new system.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the proposed percentage rates are of the floors and ceilings in relation to the transition to the new local government funding methodology set out in "Formula Grant Distribution: A Consultation Paper"; [72904]

(2) what options he is considering for the length of the transition period for the new formula grant distribution system. [72905]

Mr. Leslie: We will take decisions on the movement between the old and new grant distribution systems, including the duration of the transition and the levels of floors and ceilings, ahead of the 2003–04 provisional local government finance settlement. As in previous years, we will announce those decisions around the end of November as part of the provisional settlement process.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate for each London borough the effects of each of the options set out in Chapter 9 of "Formula Grant Distribution: A Consultation Paper". [72906]

Mr. Leslie: The effects on each London Borough of the options contained in Chapter 9 of "Formula Grant Distribution: A Consultation Paper" are set out on page 112 of that document.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will set out illustrative grant charges for Wokingham DC and West Berkshire DC for the current year on the assumption that each of his possible changes to grant distribution was taking effect this year. [72896]

Mr. Raynsford: The question cannot be answered except at disproportionate cost.

Area-based Initiatives

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list for each area-based initiative for which his Department is responsible the amount originally budgeted for in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, stating in each year what funds budgeted for were not spent and if they were carried forward. [71464]

Mr. Leslie: The RCU Area-based Initiative (ABI) website lists 11 ABIs that are currently the responsibility of Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The details requested are as follows:

£ million

Area-based Initiative	*2000–01*	*Carried paforward*	*2001–02*	*Carried forward*
Coalfields	54	16	52	7
Community Chest	0	0	10	3
Community empowerment fund	0	0	12	7
European regional development fund	239	4[1]	204	89
Neighbourhood management	0	0	6	n/a
Neighbourhood renewal fund	0	0	200	n/a

£ million

Area-based Initiative	*2000–01*	*Carried paforward*	*2001–02*	*Carried forward*
Neighbourhood wardens	4	0	5	0
New deal for communities[2]	166	129	240	160
Single regeneration budget	794	69	872	n/a
Street wardens	0	0	5	0
Urban regeneration companies[3]	—	—	—	—

[1] ERDF funding carried over into the next FY can be called upon at any time during the programming round (2000–06).

[2] The partnerships wrote their delivery plans after the provision had been made and planned to spend £49 million in 2000–01 and £129 million in 2001–02.

[3] URCs do not receive any central Government funding. Running costs are met by the main partners themselves—the local authority, the Regional Development Agency, English Partnerships (in some cases), the private sector and other key partners.

Note:

All figures rounded to nearest million.

Improvement and Development Agency

Mr. Steen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the annual cost is of the Improvement and Development Agency to public funds; how many staff have been employed there in each of the last four years; and what evaluation has taken place as to its effectiveness. [72745]

Mr. Leslie: The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) received £14.2 million of revenue support grant for 2002–03.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding with the ODPM the Local Government Association is required to assess the IDeA's effectiveness at intervals of no more than five years. The first review is due within the next 18 months.

The IDeA from time to time receives additional financial support to implement particular projects. For example, with support from the capital modernisation fund it has undertaken work on the preliminary stages of a platform for a national electronic electoral register. In line with other Government-funded IT projects this has been subjected to a Gateway Review process, designed to review the arrangements for leading and managing the project.

The approved number of permanent full-time staff as at 1 April for each of the last four years were as follows:

	Permanent full-time staff
1999	193.5
2000	185.2
2001	204.0
2002	210.0

Council Housing

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which councils retain control of council housing. [73032]

Mr. McNulty: The 251 local authorities in England with council housing are in the following list. A few of the 103 authorities which have carried out whole stock transfers continue to own a small number of dwellings.

Adur
Alnwick
Amber Valley
Arun
Ashfield
Ashford
Aylesbury Vale
Babergh
Barking and Dagenham
Barnet
Barnsley
Barrow-in-Furness
Basildon
Bassetlaw
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Birmingham
Blaby
Blackpool
Blyth Valley
Bolsover
Bolton
Bournemouth
Bracknell Forest
Bradford
Braintree
Brent
Brentwood
Bridgnorth
Brighton and Hove
Bristol
Bromsgrove
Broxbourne
Broxtowe
Bury
Cambridge
Camden
Cannock Chase
Canterbury
Caradon
Carlisle
Carrick
Castle Morpet
Castle Point
Charnwood
Cheltenham
Cherwell
Chesterfield
Chester-le-Street

Chorley
City of London
Colchester
Copeland
Corby
Craven
Crawley
Crewe and Nantwich
Croydon
Dacorum
Darlington
Dartford
Daventry
Derby
Derwentside
Doncaster
Dover
Dudley
Durham
Ealing
Easington
East Devon
East Riding of Yorkshire
Eastbourne
Ellesmere Port and Neston
Enfield
Epping Forest
Exeter
Fareham
Fenland
Forest Heath
Forest of Dean
Gateshead
Gedling
Gloucester
Gosport
Gravesham
Great Yarmouth
Greenwich
Guildford
Hackney
Halton
Hammersmith and Fulham
Harborough
Haringey
Harlow
Harrogate
Harrow
Hartlepool
Havering
Herefordshire
High Peak
Hillingdon
Hinckley and Bosworth
Hounslow
Hyndburn
Ipswich
Isles of Scilly
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Kettering
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk
Kingston upon Hull
Kingston upon Thames
Kirklees
Lambeth
Lancaster
Leeds
Leicester
Lewes
Lewisham
Lincoln
Liverpool
Luton
Macclesfield
Maidstone
Manchester
Mansfield
Medway Towns
Melton
Merton
Mid Devon
Mid Suffolk
Middlesbrough
Milton Keynes
Mole Valley
New Forest
Newark and Sherwood
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Newham
North Cornwall
North East Derbyshire
North East Lincolnshire
North Hertfordshire
North Kesteven
North Lincolnshire
North Norfolk
North Shropshire
North Somerset
North Tyneside
North Warwickshire
North West Leicestershire
Northampton
Norwich
Nottingham/City
Nuneaton and Bedworth
Oadby and Wigston
Oldham
Oswestry
Oxford
Pendle
Peterborough
Plymouth
Poole
Portsmouth
Preston
Purbeck
Reading
Redbridge
Redditch

Ribble Valley
Richmondshire
Rochdale
Rochford
Rossendale
Rotherham
Rugby
Runnymede
Rushcliffe
Rutland
Salford
Salisbury
Sandwell
Scarborough
Sedgefield
Sedgemoor
Sefton
Selby
Sheffield
Shepway
Slough
Solihull
South Bedfordshire
South Cambridgeshire
South Derbyshire
South Gloucestershire
South Holland
South Kesteven
South Lakeland
South Norfolk
South Northamptonshire
South Tyneside
Southampton
Southend-on-Sea
Southwark
St. Albans
Stafford
Stevenage
Stockport
Stockton-on-Tees
Stoke-on-Trent
Stroud
Sutton
Swindon
Tamworth
Tandridge
Taunton Deane
Teesdale
Teignbridge
Tendring
Thanet
Three Rivers
Thurrock
Torridge
Tower Hamlets
Trafford
Uttlesford
Wakefield
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Wansbeck
Warrington
Warwick
Watford
Waveney
Waverley
Wealden
Wear Valley
Wellingborough
Welwyn Hatfield
West Lancashire
Westminster
Wigan
Winchester
Wirral
Woking
Wokingham
Wolverhampton
Worcester
Wychavon
Wycombe
York.

Social Landlords

Ms Buck: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many units were disposed of and what the total value was of disposals by registered social landlords in each year since 1997. [70275]

Mr. McNulty: The Housing Corporation advises that the number of units disposed of by registered social landlords (RSLs) during the past four years were as follows:

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
100 per cent. sales				
Total right-to-buy sales	4,532	4,414	7,245	7,127
Total voluntary sales	550	370	359	213
Total outright sales	554	317	1,008	1,134
Total 100 per cent. sales	5,636	5,101	8,612	8,474
Estimated market value per sale	49,308	51,288	56,661	60,373
Estimated total value of 100 per cent. sales (£ million)	277.9	261.6	488.0	511.6

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
				£
Partial sales and other disposals				
Shared ownership: total sales of initial shares	6,887	6,209	4,392	3,718
Total demolitions	1,612	1,961	3,335	2,640

Notes:

1. Sales and demolitions data are derived from the Housing Corporation's annual Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR).
2. The estimated market values of 100 per cent. sales are derived from CORE (reported sales).
3. The value of the sale of initial shares sold under Shared Ownership schemes cannot easily be determined.
4. A monetary value cannot be associated with demolitions.
5. Sales under the Home Buy scheme are not reported on separately the RSR—but it is likely that they have been included in the Shared Ownership total.

The market values of sales are "estimated" rather than "actual" because not all sales are reported in CORE. Consequently the average value derived from CORE may not be the actual average value of the total sales as reported in the RSR.

Buildings (Height Restrictions)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what height restrictions there are on buildings in major cities throughout the UK. [72859]

Mr. McNulty: Within the plan-led system of development control, local development plans form the framework within which decisions on proposals for tall buildings are taken. A number of local authorities have, or are developing, policies on tall buildings.

Fire Safety Legislation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans his Department has to introduce new fire safety legislation. [70777]

Mr. Leslie: We intend to publish shortly a consultation document giving details of our proposals to reform fire safety legislation by means of a Regulatory Reform Order under the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. The aim of the reform is to simplify, rationalise and consolidate fire safety law. It would provide for a risk-based approach to general fire safety allowing more efficient, effective enforcement by the fire service and other enforcing authorities. It would reduce the burden on business by removing the confusion caused by overlapping fire safety regimes. We hope to make the Order next year.

Single Housing Inspectorate

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much it will cost to set up and run the Single Housing Inspectorate; and if he will make a statement. [72510]

Mr. McNulty: As my right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister told the House on 18 July (column 441), he intends to establish a single housing inspectorate, building on the excellent work of the Audit Commission and the Housing Corporation. He said he would announce further details later in the year, in the light of discussion with key stakeholders.

English Partnerships

Mr. Pond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he proposes to announce the outcome of stage 2 of the review of English Partnerships; and if he will make a statement. [73451]

Mr. Leslie: I am today announcing the conclusion of stage two of the Review of English Partnerships.

English Partnerships will be a key player in the delivery of my new "living communities" agenda. As I announced in my Statement to the House on 18 July, I am instructing English Partnerships to use its new role to search out and deliver even more land for housing and sustainable urban development. I also want English Partnerships to help in regenerating those places most badly affected by abandonment and decay.

Stage one of the Review confirmed English Partnerships as having an important role as an agency for best practice regeneration and development of brownfield land. I am keen that it develops that role, and in particular, I am asking the organisation to draw up plans to meet the following objectives:

To bring about speedy development of new schemes that can help meet the objectives set out in my policy statement of 18 July. In particular, I am determined to see a step change in both the quantity and the quality of new development in those areas that are facing acute demand pressures. I am therefore today announcing an initial list of their sites on which I wish EP to concentrate, as shown in the table, and we will be consulting on the way forward for those sites. A further list of sites will be announced in the autumn.

2. To work closely with the Housing Corporation, and with other key agencies including the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), to ensure effective co-ordination in the delivery of plans for key worker and affordable housing within the wider context of "living communities".

3. To advise on the efficient and effective development of surplus Government land and buildings that may help deliver new communities where most needed.

4. To help with the assembly of sites for regeneration and sustainable development purposes.

5. To produce and maintain a national brownfield strategy, to include best practice guidance in the assembly, remediation and development of land and buildings, to help drive forward the Urban Renaissance.

6. To continue to operate its innovative programmes, including the Coalfields Programme, Millennium Communities, support for Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs), the English Cities Fund, the National Land Use Database (NLUD), Priority Sites Ltd, Land Stabilisation Programme, and Englishsites.com, and to develop new ideas for extending good practice.

7. To operate a regime that enables developers to use approved 'gap' funding for the delivery of housing projects that would otherwise be commercially unviable.

Initial list of sites

Location	*Site*
Eastern	
1) Basildon	Gardiners Lane
2) Basildon	Lry Street
3) Basildon	Five Links (Phase 2)
4) Harlow	Sports Centre
5) Hatfield	Town Centre
6) Hemel Hempstead	Spencers Park
7) Hemel Hempstead	Paradise Fields
8) Hemel Hempstead	Breakspear
9) Stevenage	Town Centre
10) Stevenage	West Stevenage
11) Peterborough	Various sites
North East	
12) Middlesbrough	Middlehaven
13) Stockton	North Bank
14) Stockton	Haverton Hill
North West	
15) Liverpool	Kings Waterfront
16) Liverpool	Liverpool Land Development Co. sites
17) Preston	Preston East
18) Preston	Cuerdon Regional Business Park
19) Runcorn	Castlefields
20) Skelmersdale	Town Centre
21) Warrington	Omega
Yorkshire and the Humber	
22) Sheffield	Various sites in the URC
East Midlands	
23) Corby	Various sites in the URC
24) Northampton	SW District Phase 1
25) Northampton	SW District Phases 2 and 3
West Midlands	
26) Telford	Town Centre
27) Telford	South Telford (Woodside)
28) Telford	Lightmoor
29) Telford	East Ketley Millennium Community
30) Telford	Lawley
South West	
31) Weston-super-Mare	RAF Locking
South East	
32) Crawley	Expansion sites
33) Crawley	Town Centre
34) Milton Keynes	Central MK / Campbell Park
35) Milton Keynes	Oak Grove Millennium Community
36) Milton Keynes	Bletchley / MK Stadium
37) Milton Keynes	Broughton Atterbury
38) Milton Keynes	East Flank
39) Milton Keynes	West Flank
40) Milton Keynes	National Bowl / East Ashland
London	
41) Greenwich	Greenwich Peninsula including the Millennium Community
Cross-regional	
42) Various	Key Worker Housing Initiative sites

Land and Property Programme

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the land and property programme budgets were calculated for 2000–01 and 2001–02. [72963]

Mr. McNulty: The allocation of the Land and Property (L&P) budget (from April 1999) between the RDAs and the LDA (from July 2000), took into account both their anticipated capital receipts arising from the L&P programme and the level of European funding they expected for L&P purposes. This was achieved by adding the total of all capital and European receipts to the grant in aid to create a 'gross' L&P budget that was then allocated to the RDAs and LDA.

The European funding was as follows:

£ million

	2000–01	*2001–02*
European funding		
North East	6.800	1.800
North West	12.000	7.800
Yorkshire and Humber	0	0.700
West Midlands	1.000	0.600
East Midlands	0	0
East of England	0	0.400
South West	8.100	8.100
South East	0	0
London	0	0
Total	27.900	19.400
Total RDA and L&P allocations without the European funding		
North East	151.193	162.671
North West	231.186	280.387
Yorkshire and Humber	191.727	246.267
West Midlands	145.880	170.850
East Midlands	93.596	97.439
East of England	43.997	62.956
South West	81.844	91.940
South East	86.364	110.542
London	283.151	298.158
Total	1,308,938	1,521,210
Land and Property Allocations		
North East	42.924	49.254
North West	74.776	100.388
Yorkshire and Humber	43.223	43.700
West Midlands	40.934	49.428
East Midlands	34.551	30.413
East of England	9.478	14.560
South West	32.758	47.798
South East	20.635	37.966
London	28.626	49.100
Total	327.905	422.607

Transport (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much public money has been invested in transport provision for deprived areas in each of the last five years. [69378]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The following table compares total capital allocations for local transport provision in England with the amounts allocated to those local transport authorities which include within their boundaries one or more of the 88 local authorities in the most deprived areas of England which are eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). London is excluded.

£ million

	Total	*NRF area authorities*
1998–99	541	256
1999–2000	540	276
2000–01	657	367
2001–02	1,360	698
2002–03	1,580	817

For London, capital allocations for local transport provision for the years 1998–99 to 2000–01 were £82 million, £84 million and £102 million respectively. Of this, £46 million, £47 million and £52 million was allocated to authorities in the most deprived areas which are eligible for the NRF. From 2001–02 onwards, capital allocations for local transport provision in London have been the responsibility of the Mayor and Transport for London.

Indices of Deprivation

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what indices of deprivation he will use to allocate funds within the proposed new formula for the SSA for education. [71743]

Mr. Miliband: I have been asked to reply.

The options illustrated in the consultation paper issued on 8 July use the following indices of deprivation: the proportion of children of parents on income support; the proportion of children of parents in receipt of working families' tax credit; English as an additional language and ethnicity, as recorded in the annual schools' census; and the proportion of live births less than 2.5kg. All indices have been calculated at local authority level.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment has been made of the accuracy of the figures used for deprivation in the DETR report "Indices of Deprivation 2000"; and what use is made of these figures. [73000]

Mr. McNulty: The "Indices of Deprivation 2000" was based on a robust review of methods and data sources in 1999. Where possible, the data underpinning the indices have been published via the Neighbourhood Statistics website hosted at the Office for National Statistics. The indices have been used to inform the allocation of resources that are directed to areas affected by multiple deprivation, including the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund administered by my Department. They are also used in the formulation of the Government policy towards deprived areas, such as the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

Children Act

Ms Buck: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many families with children have been assisted with accommodation through the provisions of the Children Act 1989 in each of the last 10 years. [67684]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not collected centrally.

Housing Statistics

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a document specifying for each of the last three years *(a)* the number of people presenting as homeless, *(b)* the number of council homes sold under the right to buy, *(c)* the number of new affordable homes completed, *(d)* the capital value of public investment in affordable housing and *(e)* the number of new lets of affordable homes, and at a specified date in each of the last three years (i) the number of people on the housing waiting list and (ii) the stock of affordable homes in each (A) English region and (B) housing authority in England. [72014]

Mr. McNulty: Data on the requested items can be found in various ODPM publications, available in the House of Commons Library and electronically via the ODPM website. The publications provide the data for each local authority in England and regional totals include estimates for any incomplete or missing data.

(a) ODPM publication "Statutory Homelessness: England", quarterly statistical release and associated "Supplementary Tables";

(b) ODPM publication "Progress on Council Houses Sales" quarterly report;

(c), (d) and (e) ODPM "Housing Investment Programme: Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix 2001" return and "Operational Information" return for earlier years; Housing Corporation "Annual Review" report.

Information about stock completions or acquisitions of additional affordable housing by local authorities (LA), Registered Social Landlords (RSL) and the private sector for rental, outright or shared equity for each year since 1997–98 were collected for the first time on the 2001 return. Summary data on recent years' LA and RSL lettings is also presented.

Local authority capital investment in housing, including HRA dwelling stock and support to RSLs, since 1997–98 is summarised on the 2001 return. Equivalent information about RSLs' expenditure is included in each of the Housing Corporation's "Annual Review" reports.

LA and RSL dwelling stock as at 1 April is reported on each year's HIP return. Total private sector dwelling stock is also reported, although there is no centrally collected information on those classified as affordable.

Property Statistics

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of properties are in *(a)* Band A, *(b)* Band B and *(c)* Band H in (i) Wigan MBC, (ii) the North West Region, (iii) inner-London boroughs, (iv) outer-London boroughs and (v) England. [71894]

Mr. Leslie: Information on the number of properties in each council tax band is shown on the valuation list, compiled by the Valuation Office Agency. The number and percentage of properties in council tax Bands A, B and H as at 26 March 2002, for Wigan Metropolitan borough council, the North West Region, inner-London boroughs (including the City of London), outer-London boroughs and England are shown in the table below.

Number and percentage of properties in council tax bands A, B and H

	Number of properties				Number of properties as percentage of total		
	Band A	Band B	Band H	Total	Band A	Band B	Band H
Wigan Metropolitan borough council	65,562	28,110	49	131,735	49.8	21.3	0.0
North West Government Office region	1,322,421	563,533	5,612	2,996,664	44.1	18.8	0.2
Outer-London boroughs	53,358	212,568	15,594	1,928,308	2.8	11.0	0.8
Inner-London boroughs (including the City)	55,859	212,013	37,315	1,197,376	4.7	17.7	3.1
England	5,562,268	4,131,021	117,936	21,436,841	25.9	19.3	0.6

Note:

Percentage figures are subject to rounding.

Open Space and Playing Fields

Claire Ward: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he intends to take to increase the protection for open space and playing fields through the planning system. [73376]

Mr. McNulty: The Government have today published revised planning policy on open space, sport and recreation. Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 17 replaces PPG17 published in 1991. It contains a range of policies designed to protect and enhance open spaces and sports and recreational facilities.

PPG17 sets out how the Government expect local authorities to plan for the delivery of high quality open space, sport and recreational facilities in a sustainable manner. The policies it contains are crucial to our efforts to deliver an urban renaissance and rural renewal by ensuring that everyone has access to high quality and well maintained and managed open spaces, sports and recreational facilities. It will be a vital tool in delivering the Government's agenda for sport by providing an up-to-date strategic framework within which local authorities can plan effectively for new sports and recreational facilities. The policies in PPG17 will be supported by Good Practice Guidance on how to plan effectively for open space. This will be published shortly.

The Government remain fully committed to the protection of playing fields. PPG17 sets strict criteria to limit the circumstances in which playing fields can be developed for non-sporting and recreational purposes. Additionally I intend to reduce the threshold for the size of playing field upon which Sport England must be consulted when a planning application for development is submitted from 0.4ha to 0.2ha. This will enable Sport England to be consulted on planning applications affecting these smaller playing fields, and help to protect these important facilities which are used by young people for the small sided games of football and rugby.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the process for deciding which regions will be the first to hold a referendum on establishing an elected regional assembly. [73682]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 5 July to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady). When the announcement is made, a copy will be put in the Library.

Planning Appeals (Castle Point)

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many planning appeals relating to Castle Point were successful in each of the last five years for which statistics are available. [73031]

Mr. McNulty: The number of planning appeals allowed in Castle Point in each of the last five years were:

	Number of planning appeals
1997–98	24
1998–99	29
1999–2000	13
2000–01	20
2001–02	13

Town Planning

David Wright: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what consultations will take place with relevant former new town local authorities on which sites and projects will be designated as strategic under stage two of the review of English Partnerships. [70793]

Mr. McNulty: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that the Deputy Prime Minister gave today to a question from my hon. Friend, the Member for Gravesham (Chris Pond), announcing a number of sites on which English Partnerships will concentrate.

There will be consultation, in due course, with the relevant local authorities and other interested parties about the way forward for the sites announced today and over the remaining portfolio

Ministers (Compensation)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much his Department paid in compensation to Ministers from the former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions who left Government in June; and if he will make a statement. [70747]

Mr. Leslie: Under the terms of section 4 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991, all Ministers (except my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor) are entitled to a severance payment equal to one quarter of their final ministerial salary on leaving office, provided that the individual has not attained the age of 65 or been appointed to another paid office within a period of three weeks. The salaries of Ministers who left the Government in June are already in the public domain.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72246]

Mr. Leslie: All special advisers' contacts with the media, speeches and presentations must be conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers. All civil servants, including special advisers are expected to keep departmental heads of information informed of contacts with the media. Details of such contacts are for internal purposes only.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) for how long he retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website; [72289]

(2) whether it is his policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via his Department's website. [72270]

Mr. Leslie: My office aims to be as helpful as possible in responding to hon. Members' questions. Where it is helpful to refer hon. Members to other documents as part of the substantive reply, this may be done by making hard copies of documents available in the Libraries of the House, or by reference to material available on the office's website.

Minimum requirements for the type of documents which should be published on Government websites are set out in guidance issued by the Office of the E-Envoy, 'Guidelines for Government Websites' (Illustrated Handbook for web management teams section 2.2 'What content should be on your website?' and section 2.3 'Cross-government requirements'). In addition to setting out guidelines on documents for inclusion, the guidance explicitly requires Departments to ensure that content of the site as a whole is up to date and current, and where it is necessary to update the content of individual documents, to show the latest date of amendment clearly on the document concerned. Section 1.2.7 deals with the issue of .Record management and the Office of the e-Envoy currently has a consultation paper out on archiving websites. The purpose of this draft annexe to the Illustrated Handbook is to provide government website managers with a framework towards developing within their website management policy suitable procedures and systems to assist in the management, appraisal and preservation of electronic records. A copy of this draft is available online at http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk:/webguidelines.htm

A copy of the Guidelines for UK Government websites is available at http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/webguidelines.htm

Crichel Down Rules

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to bring forward proposals to change the Crichel Down rules. [72770]

Mr. McNulty: The Government's policy statement entitled "Compulsory Purchase Powers, Procedures and Compensation; the way forward", published on 18 July, made it clear that there will be a consultation exercise on the details of a revised set of rules which we envisage will then form the basis for the formulation of statutory rules in due course.

Double Glazing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many council homes in the UK do not have double glazing; and what is being done to ensure that modernisations to council housing take place as soon as possible. [72858]

Mr. McNulty: We estimate that approximately 1.3 million council homes (45 per cent.) did not have any double glazing in 2001. This estimate comes from 1996 English House Condition Survey, which showed that two million council homes did not have any double glazing (about 60 per cent. of all council homes), updated by data provided by local authorities on the works they carried out between 1996 and 2001. Final 2001 estimates will be available when the 2001 English Housing Condition Survey results are published later this year.

A target was set in the 2000 Spending Review to bring all council houses, and those owned by housing associations, up to a set standard of decency by 2010. The commitment to meet this target was reaffirmed in the Deputy Prime Minister's statement on the 2002 Spending Review.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Minister will be responsible for taking decisions related to planning applications in respect of the Dome and surrounding developments on the Greenwich peninsula. [73450]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Taking account of the constituency interests and other policy responsibilities of Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), and in order to ensure that the advice set out in the "Guidance on Propriety Issues in the Handling of Planning Casework" is followed, I have decided that any planning matters arising in respect of the Dome and related developments should be dealt with by Christopher Leslie MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State).

Lord Rooker will be responsible within ODPM for policy issues related to the Dome.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what representations his Department has had regarding the fitness of Anschutz Entertainment Group to proceed with the deal to hand over the Millennium Dome; and if he will make a statement; [72515]

(2) what assessment he has made of the suitability of the Anschutz Entertainment Group as partner for the Millennium Dome's development; and if he will make a statement; [72513]

(3) what processes of due diligence have been undertaken by his Department during the deal to hand over the Millennium Dome to the Anshutz Entertainment Group; and if he will make a statement. [72514]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received no representations about the fitness of Anschutz Entertainment Group to proceed with the deal that was signed on 29 May, other than a number of press inquiries.

The Anschutz Entertainment Group is part of one of the largest private companies in the United States, and has extensive expertise and experience in delivering world class entertainment facilities. It is, therefore, an eminently suitable partner for the development of the Dome and the continued regeneration of the Greenwich peninsula.

English Partnerships, which is the contracting party on behalf of the Government, has carried out full due diligence on all relevant counterparties, as is the normal practice for a commercial transaction of this nature.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of progress with the deal to hand over the Millennium Dome to Anschutz Entertainment Group; and if he will make a statement. [72516]

Mr. McNulty: Following the exchange of contracts between English Partnerships and Meridian Delta Limited (MDL) on 29 May, MDL and Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG) are continuing to work up their proposals and to consult with stakeholders. They expect to embark on a public consultation exercise early next month, and to submit a planning application in the autumn.

Social Services

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what level of demand he estimates there will be for social care beds in each London borough area over the next three years; what resources will need to be made available to meet that demand; and if he will make a statement. [69148]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 626–27W. Funding for personal social services will increase by an average of 6 per cent. a year in real terms for each of the next three years.

Foster Care

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what action he is taking to improve recruitment rates of foster carers for London boroughs; what has been the change in use of agency foster placements *(a)* for each borough and *(b)* for London as a whole in the last five years; what steps he is taking to limit the cost of agency foster care placements in London; and what representations he has received on this subject; [69153]

(2) how many looked-after children there were in the care of each London borough and how many were *(a)* in borough foster care, *(b)* fostered with family or friends, *(c)* in agency foster placements and *(d)* in care homes in each of the last five years. [69216]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

A table has been placed in the Library which provides total numbers of looked-after children, and the proportion in foster care and in residential care in each London borough for years ending 31 March 1997 to 31 March 2001.

The breakdown of placements between family and friends care, in-house placements, and agency placements is collected on the SSDA 903 statistical return, a one-third sample of anonymised care histories of looked-after children. In 2000–01 a breakdown of in-house and agency placements has been collected for the first time. However the resulting figures for these particular placement categories are too small to form a reliable basis upon which to estimate activity for individual London boroughs. Therefore such a breakdown has not been included in the table.

A national campaign for recruiting foster carers was carried out in 2000 by the Department.

Local authorities commission placements according to their needs and strategies, and will negotiate with agencies accordingly. It is the responsibility of local authorities to consider and agree the level of payments that it makes to fulfil the needs of those children who require these services.

The role of independent foster agencies will be reviewed in the context of the current "Choice Protects" review, announced on 20 March, and in particular in relation to the Government's plans to improve the number and quality of placement options for looked-after children.

Housing Benefit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people claimed housing benefit as a percentage of the *(a)* population of London and *(b)* population of the UK in (i) each London constituency and (ii) each London borough in each year since 1995; and if he will make a statement. [72834]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The available information is in the tables.

Housing benefit recipients in each London borough as a percentage of the total population aged 16 or over in the Government office region of London: 1995 to 2002

London borough	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Barking	0.33	0.33	0.32	0.31	0.3	0.29	0.26	0.26
Barnet	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.34	0.33	0.31	0.29	0.3
Bexley	0.21	0.21	0.22	0.21	0.19	0.18	0.17	0.17
Brent	0.6	0.6	0.57	0.54	0.5	0.43	0.4	0.38
Bromley	0.29	0.29	0.28	0.26	0.25	0.24	0.23	0.22
Camden	0.6	0.6	0.58	0.54	0.51	0.48	0.47	0.46
City of London	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Croydon	0.44	0.44	0.44	0.44	0.42	0.35	0.37	0.36
Ealing	0.49	0.49	0.46	0.43	0.38	0.38	0.26	0.32
Enfield	0.33	0.33	0.38	0.36	0.35	0.3	0.3	0.3
Greenwich	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.48	0.47	0.38	0.37	0.37

Housing benefit recipients in each London borough as a percentage of the total population aged 16 or over in the Government office region of London: 1995 to 2002

London borough	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Hackney	0.74	0.74	0.76	0.71	0.65	0.41	0.46	0.51
Hammersmith	0.41	0.41	0.39	0.37	0.35	0.31	0.31	0.31
Haringey	0.71	0.71	0.61	0.6	0.56	0.51	0.48	0.42
Harrow	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.19	0.19	0.16	0.15	0.16
Havering	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.2	0.19	0.18	0.17	0.17
Hillingdon	0.28	0.28	0.27	0.26	0.25	0.25	0.24	0.24
Hounslow	0.32	0.32	0.31	0.29	0.26	[illegible]	0.25	0.24
Islington	0.61	0.61	0.6	0.59	0.6	[illegible]	0.46	0.45
Kensington and Chelsea	0.33	0.33	0.31	0.28	0.27	[illegible]	0.24	0.24
Kingston-upon-Thames	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Lambeth	0.8	0.8	0.74	0.65	0.58	0.6	0.53	0.48
Lewisham	0.64	0.64	0.65	0.6	0.54	0.5	0.47	0.46
Merton	0.22	0.22	0.21	0.2	0.18	0.17	0.16	0.15
Newham	0.69	0.69	0.7	0.67	0.63	0.54	0.51	0.48
Redbridge	0.24	0.24	0.26	0.24	[illegible]	0.2	0.19	0.19
Richmond-upon-Thames	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.15	[illegible]	0.15	0.13	0.13
Southwark	0.78	0.78	0.75	0.66	0.59	0.53	0.54	0.55
Sutton	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.18	0.17	0.15	0.15	0.13
Tower Hamlets	0.6	0.6	0.59	0.58	0.56	0.54	0.52	0.5
Waltham Forest	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.41	0.35	0.29	0.27	0.31
Wandsworth	0.55	0.55	0.48	0.45	0.41	0.36	0.35	0.34
Westminster	0.48	0.48	0.42	0.39	0.36	0.33	0.3	0.31

Housing benefit recipients in each London borough as a percentage of the total population aged 16 or over in Great Britain: 1995 to 2002

London borough	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Barking and Dagenham	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03
Barnet	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04
Bexley	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Brent	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.05
Bromley	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Camden	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
City of London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Croydon	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.05
Ealing	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.04
Enfield	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04
Greenwich	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.05
Hackney	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.05	0.06	0.06
Hammersmith and Fulham	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04
Haringey	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.05
Harrow	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Havering	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Hillingdon	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Hounslow	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Islington	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06
Kensington and Chelsea	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Kingston-upon-Thames	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Lambeth	0.1	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.06
Lewisham	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06
Merton	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Newham	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.06
Redbridge	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02
Richmond-upon-Thames	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Southwark	0.1	0.1	0.09	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07
Sutton	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Tower Hamlets	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.06
Waltham Forest	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.04
Wandsworth	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.04
Westminster	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04

Notes:

1. Housing benefit data for parliamentary constituencies are not available; figures are only available by local authority area.
2. The data refer to households claiming housing benefit which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one benefit household can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.
3. The percentages are rounded to two decimal places.
4. '—' indicates that the percentage is statistically negligible.
5. Figures exclude any housing benefit extended payment cases
6. Figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated.
7. Social security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Sources:

Housing Benefit Management Information System quarterly 100 per cent. counts taken in February of each year;
Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates, 1995 to 2000.

SCOTLAND

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many overseas visits she has undertaken since her appointment; to which countries; to meet which institutions and bodies; and at what cost. [30315]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* Since my appointment as Secretary of State, I have visited Europe, North America and South East Asia, at an approximate cost of £17,500. My meetings on these visits focused on constitutional and trade issues and the Friends of Scotland initiative.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the House Library.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the running costs were of *(a)* her Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff, and *(b)* her Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40977]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

In the period 1 July 1999 to 31 March 2000, an incomplete year as it was the first for the Department, were £3.6 million, of which £2.0 million were staff costs. The running costs in 2000–01 were £5.7 million, of which £3.6 million were staff costs.

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost to his Department of litigation was in each year. [41110]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

My Department has not been involved in any industrial tribunal cases since it was established.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in her Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44944]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department's 2002–03 target time for replying to letters is 15 working days in both instances.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the total amount of money spent by Ministers in her Department since its creation on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes. [47210]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46833]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Since that date, my special advisers have not spent any departmental funds on entertainment.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46817]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

The identifiable cost of running the press office in 2001–02 was £147,244. This does not include certain accommodation and support costs, which are not held separately.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland with reference to the 2000 Spending Review service delivery agreement targets, if a three-year rolling audit programme of local authorities by the Food Standards Agency in Scotland began in April 2001; and if a third of Scottish authorities were audited in 2001–02. [49073]

Mrs. Liddell: This is a matter for Scottish Ministers, but I understand that the local authority audit programme undertaken by the Food Standards Agency Scotland commenced in April 2001. The three-year rolling programme consists of each Scottish local authority receiving an annual partial audit, equating to a full audit over the three-year programme, and the target was met in 2001–02.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many net additional staff her Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52421]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has recruited seven net additional staff in the 12-month period from June 2001—three at executive officer level: one in September 2001, one in november 2001, one in April 2002; and four at administrative level: two in June 2001, one in November 2001 and one in April 2002.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by her Department, stating for each subscription the *(a)* number of copies taken and *(b)* annual cost. [52824]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* My Department subscribes to the following magazines and periodicals:

Title	*Average number of copies*
Economist	2
European Voice	1
New Statesman	2
Press Gazette	1
Private Eye	2
PR Week	1
Scottish Field	1
The Week	1
Spectator	2

Some titles are cancelled during the recess and the numbers supplied may vary depending on the location of Ministers. The total cost of magazines and periodicals in 2001–02 was £1,328.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by her Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52823]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* My Department subscribes to the following newspapers:

Newspaper	*Average number of copies*
Aberdeen Press and Journal	2
Business AM	2
Daily Express	3
Daily Mail	4
Daily Mirror	3
Daily Record	5
Daily Star	2
Daily Telegraph	4
Dundee Courier	1
Evening News	1
Evening Standard	2
Evening Times	2
Financial Times	4
Guardian	4
Herald	5
Independent	4
Le Monde	1
Scotsman	5
Sun	4
Times	4
Tribune	1
West Highland Free Press	1
Sunday newspapers	
Independent on Sunday	2
Mail on Sunday	2
News of the World	1
Observer	2
Sunday Express	2
Sunday Herald	4
Sunday Mail	3
Sunday Mirror	1
Sunday Post	3
Scotland on Sunday	4
Sunday Telegraph	2
Sunday Times	2

Some newspapers are cancelled during the recess and the numbers supplied vary depending on the location of Ministers. The total cost of newspapers in 2001–02 was £11,640.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of ordinary written questions for her Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58987]

Mrs. Liddell: Approximately 60–70 per cent. of both types of written question were answered within the required time scales. In view of the large increase in the number of questions being tabled, an upgraded PQ tracking system is being considered as one of the options in improving performance in this area.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff were employed by her Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60926]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1402W.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many families are in receipt of the national minimum wage in each constituency in Scotland. [61303]

Mrs. Liddell: The information is not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, some 110,000 people across Scotland have benefited from the national minimum wage since it was introduced in April 1999.

Beef Exports (France)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she plans to have with French representatives concerning the export of beef from the UK to France. [72441]

Mrs. Liddell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regularly raises the French Government's illegal ban on British beef with her French counterpart and will continue to do so until the ban is lifted.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has received from quarry operators since the aggregates levy come into effect in April. [72410]

Mrs. Liddell: One representation from the British Aggregates Association has been received since the levy came into effect on 1 April. The Aggregates Levy has been introduced to address the environmental impacts of the extraction and transportation of aggregates, including noise, dust, vibration, visual intrusion, loss of biodiversity and amenity. The levy will result in prices for primary aggregates which better reflect these environmental costs, and so encourage both the use of recycled aggregates as an alternative and more efficient use of aggregates.

Offshore Workers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding claims by offshore workers, pursuant to the Court of Appeal's decision Clark (Inspector of Taxes) *v.* Perks and other appeals; and if she will make a statement. [72550]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answers he has received from my right hon. Friend, the Paymaster General, on this subject.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in her Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72256]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister.

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked in her Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72645]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date my Department has had a number of employees under contract from temping agencies. Details are given in the table.

Year	*Number of temporary staff*	*Total spend on temporary staff (£)*	*Percentage of total staffing budget*
1999–2000	13	38,431	1.9
2000–01	16	79,643	2.4
2001–02[1]	19	90,798	2.4

[1] Provisional

Departmental Bodies

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many jobs under the remit of her Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by her Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72738]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is as follows:

Scotland Office

Location	*Number of staff*	*Percentage of Department*
Scotland	86	72
Greater London	33	28

The Boundary Commission

Location	*Number of staff*	*Percentage of NDPB*
Scotland	4	100

Ministerial Meetings

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings her Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72710]

Mrs. Liddell: Information is not available in the form requested. Ministers from my Department have frequent meetings with Ministers from the Scottish Executive, both formal and informal, covering a broad range of topics.

LPG

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the location of each liquefied petroleum gas vehicle filling station in Scotland. [72709]

Mrs. Liddell: The following list (provided by the LP Gas Association) comprises 93 filling stations in Scotland which currently supply LPG:

Aberdeen—Aberdeen Calor Centre;
Aberdeen—Five Mile Garage;
Dyce—Johnston Oils Ltd.;
Balmedie—Aberdeen Auto Gas;
Dyce—Dyce Service Station;
Dinnett—Dinnett Service Station;
Fordoun—Fiddes Bridge Services;
Inverurie—Gauld Gas;
Laurencekirk—Mann Automotive;
Ellon—Overton Garage;
Peterhead—Peterhead Motors;
Portsoy-Portsoy Motors;
Aberdeen—Wellington Service Station;
Fraserburgh—Ugle Motors;
Dundee—Bullionfield Filling Station;
Montrose—Montrose Commercial Motors;
Tarbert—Kintyre Filling Station;
Oban—Oban Service Station;
Oban—Tralee Bay Holiday Park;
Stevenston—Global (Manufacturing) Ltd.;
Ayr—Ayr Calor Centre;
Isle of Arran—Glencloy Garage;
Lugton—Custombuilt Vehicles Ltd.;

Irvine—Flogas Irvine;
Duns—Aitken-Walker Cars;
Galashiels—Borders Autogass;
Eyemouth—Eyemouth Service Station;
Earlston—Rhymers Towers Service Station;
St. Boswells—Johnston Oils Ltd.;
Peebles—Techauto Ltd.;
Gretna—Gretna Services;
Dumfries—St. Michaels Garage;
Lockerbie—Castlehillgate Garage;
Newton Stewart—Wigtown Road Service Station;
Balloch—Lomond Autogas;
Dundee—Johnston Oils Ltd.;
Dundee—Caird Park Service Station;
Kilmarnock—John Forbes Motors;
Kilmarnock—Glencairn Service Station;
Kilmarnock—Tom Palmer (Scotland) Ltd.;
Musselburgh—Betaheat Ltd.;
Leith—Crewe Tool Filling Station;
Edinburgh—Flogas Edinburgh;
Edinburgh—Russells of Edinburgh Ltd.;
Longniddry—Seton Engineering;
Edinburgh—Circle Filling Station;
Edinburgh—Dreghorn Filling Station;
Grangemouth—Earlsgate Filling Station;
Grangemouth—Refinery Filling Station;
Falkirk—JAB Autogas;
Dunfermline—Kingdom Services;
Newburgh—Clathcard 4 x 4;
Kirkcaldy—Randolph Gas Supplies;
Queensferry—Forth Road Bridge Filling Station;
Cowdenbeath—Gleaner Services;
Glasgow—Autogass Ecosse;
Glasgow—Stuart Filling Station;
Glasgow—Clarksons of Glasgow;
Glasgow—Clyde Coin;
Bridge of Weir—Eddie Lovett;
Glasgow—Express Fuels (Scotland) Ltd.;
Paisley—Flogas Glasgow;
Uddingston—Allans of Uddingston Ltd.;
Glasgow—Fullarton Service Station;
Paisley—Glasgow Airport Filling Station;
Glasgow—Hillington Filling Station;
Glasgow—Universe Filling Station;
Dingwall—Westend Filling Station;
Inverness—Go-Gas Depot;
Inverness—S & D Harpers;
Evanton—Skiach Service Station;
Brora—Sutherland Arms Garage;
Isle of Lewis—Engebret Ltd.;
Isle of Skye—Sutherlands Garage (Broadford) Ltd.;
Airdrie—Colston Garage Ltd.;
Rigside—Colliershall Motors;
Bellshill—Lanarkshire Calor Centre;
Coatbridge—Scotcast;
Biggar—Abington Filling Station;
East Kilbride—Spring Autopoint;
Loanhead—MB Autogas Ltd.;
Elgin—Allarburn Farm Dairy Ltd.;
Forres—Alves Autos;
Grantown on Spey—Dulnain Bridge Garage;
Keith—KCR Autogas Services;
Elgin—Tyock Filling Station;
Perth—2Xcel;
Perth—Oswald Gas Supplies;
Aberfeldy—King & Sons;
Kinross—Wellside Motors;
Paisley—Paisley & Barrhead Gas;
Stirling—Maxwell Conversions;
Livingston—Deer Park Filling Station;
Bathgate—Johnston Oils Ltd.;
Livingston—Lizzie Brice Filling Station.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she is having with Customs and Excise on *(a)* detecting the people responsible for importing illegal meat products from China and *(b)* increasing checks on meat imports coming into Scotland. [73002]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office has frequent discussions with HM Customs & Excise on a wide range of issues.

The relevant public authorities, including HM Customs & Excise, are participating in discussions about illegal meat imports and in an action plan to tackle the problem.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he is having with the Scottish Executive on illegally imported meat from China found on sale in shops; and if she will make a statement. [73003]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office has frequent discussions with the Scottish Executive on a wide range of issues.

The question of illegally imported meat is the subject of discussions and an action plan involving the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Scottish Executive, HM Customs & Excise and other public authorities.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will publish for each constituency in Scotland the *(a)* actual and *(b)* percentage change in (i) youth, (ii) long term and (iii) total unemployed since May 1997 and present. [61294]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The National Statistician will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in her Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44942]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Advocate-General how many net additional staff her Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52422]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how many staff were employed by her Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60924]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, on 13 June, *Official Report*, column 1402W.

Overseas Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General if she will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in her Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68738]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

TRANSPORT

Ferries (Southern Europe)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in extending the terms of the Stockholm Agreement to ferries operating in Southern Europe. [73198]

Mr. Jamieson: The European Commission's proposal for a directive to extend the "Stockholm" stability standards to all EU-flagged ro-ro ferries and third country flagged ro-ro ferries calling at EU ports was agreed at Transport Council in June. It will now go to the European Parliament for debate, under co-decision procedures.

Community Councils

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many community councils were operating in England in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [58877]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

Community councils operate in Wales and Scotland. Their counterparts in England are parish councils. 79 new parishes have been created between the years 1997 and 2001.

Mobile Telephones

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce legislation *(a)* enforcing a ban and *(b)* introducing a criminal offence for driving while operating a hand held mobile telephone; and if he will make a statement. [72517]

Mr. Jamieson: In accordance with our road safety strategy we are keeping the need for new legislation under review.

Aviation Policy

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Government are evaluating runway options for Heathrow and Gatwick that will provide additional runway capacity in five years or less; and if he will make a statement. [71900]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East airports consultation document published on 23 July 2002 sets out options for future development of runway capacity in the South East, but none of these options could deliver more runway capacity within five years.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that London Gatwick maintains a network of full service operators and operations to enable passengers from UK regional points who fly into Gatwick to make connections to a network of world-wide services. [71901]

Mr. Jamieson: It is a commercial choice for airlines to decide which routes they serve. Gatwick airport offers a range of inter-connecting opportunities which enables passengers from UK regional points to make connections to a variety of world-wide destinations.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many take-off and landing slots have been handed back to the airport co-ordination slot co-ordinator at London Gatwick in the last 12 months, broken down by airlines. [71902]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not held by the Department.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many Ministry of Defence airfields have been included in the Government review of UK aviation policy and subsequent consultations; and if he will make a statement. [71801]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made to the House on 23 July 2002 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. The use of military airfields is considered in the published consultation documents on regional air services and airports. These documents cover the whole of the UK.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many take-off and landing slots have been bought at London Heathrow and Gatwick in the last 12 months, broken down by company. [71904]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not recorded.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to hold discussions with airlines giving up slots on re-allocating them through the slot co-ordinators for use by regional air services. [71903]

Mr. Jamieson: DfT officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with airlines about regional air services. When an airline gives up a slot, it is returned to the slot pool and allocated by the co-ordinator in accordance with the criteria set out in the Regulations 95–93.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Ministry of Defence about opening up more RAF airfields for civil operations; if such openings will be on a full cost recovery basis; and if they will recognise the obligations on other Government owned airfields. [71905]

Mr. Jamieson: During the preparation of the consultation documents on the Future of Air Transport in the UK, which was published yesterday discussions were held with MOD about the potential commercial use of some of their airfields. The outcome of those discussions is reflected in the consultation documents.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has ensured that in the negotiations with the EU on changes to the slot allocation rules the existing mechanisms to allow for ring fencing of slots and application of public service obligation protection will be maintained after the change in the rules. [71895]

Mr. Jamieson: During Working Group negotiations on the Commission's proposal to amend European Regulation 95-93, the UK will argue that the existing mechanisms available for the ring-fencing of slots for regional air services be maintained.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on recent studies undertaken by his Department on UK-US Government aviation policy options and place the findings of such studies in the Library. [71785]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The Civil Aviation Authority have undertaken an analysis of UK-US aviation policy options on behalf of the Department. This study is informing the evaluation of those options. It would not be appropriate to place the CAA study in the Library at this time, as to do so might undermine the UK's position if further bilateral aviation talks were to be held.

Runways

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his policy regarding the location of new runways to be built in the South East. [71928]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made to the House on 23 July 2002, *Official Report,* columns 847–68 by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Transport.

Passenger Overcrowding

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the level of passenger overcrowding on the railways as the percentage of passengers in excess of capacity was during *(a)* the morning peak, *(b)* the evening peak and *(c)* both peaks together, (i) for each train company and (ii) overall in each of the last three years. [71061]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The number of passengers now travelling into London each morning are at the highest level for over 10 years. Overcrowding figures for 2001, which were published in June, show a decrease on most lines compared to the previous year. That year, however, showed an increase overall compared to 1999. The figures are:

Per cent.

	AM			PM			AM/PM combined		
TOC	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Chiltern	5.4	2.5	2.4	2.0	0.3	0.6	4.0	1.6	1.6
South Central	5.2	6.2	11.2	2.2	2.7	1.0	3.9	4.7	6.9
Connex South Eastern	3.2	3.7	3.2	1.5	1.9	1.3	2.4	2.9	2.3
Great Eastern	4.1	6.4	3.7	1.2	1.4	1.6	2.7	4.1	2.7
c2c	3.1	1.6	0.3	0.1	1.0	0.6	1.7	1.3	0.5
Silverlink	3.0	9.8	8.1	2.0	3.1	3.4	2.5	6.6	5.9
South West Trains	4.7	7.9	6.3	1.7	1.1	2.5	3.4	4.9	4.6
Thames	0.8	1.9	3.3	2.7	1.9	1.6	1.7	1.9	2.5
Thameslink	4.0	4.4	4.3	2.5	2.7	3.9	3.3	3.6	4.1
WAGN	2.4	2.8	2.3	1.0	1.6	1.6	1.8	2.3	2.0
London Total	3.8	5.1	5.0	1.6	1.8	1.7	2.8	3.6	3.6
Scotrail (Forth Bridge)	1.7	3.1	1.0	4.1	2.9	3.2	2.8	3.0	2.1

Note:

The information is only collected for train operating companies serving London and South East commuter lines and one Scotrail commuter line.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which train operating companies have an overcrowding standard as part of their franchise agreement; and what each such standard is. [71062]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* All train operating companies are required by their franchise agreements to avoid "regular, systematic, excessive overcrowding".

In addition, train operating companies which provide local services into London (South Central, Connex South Eastern, South West Trains, Thameslink, Thames Trains, Chiltern Trains, Silverlink, c2c, First Great Eastern and

West Anglia Great Northern) and Scotrail (for Fife/Edinburgh area services only) are required by their franchise agreements to comply with the standards laid down under "Passengers in Excess of Capacity". These are the same for each operator and are: not more than 4.5 per cent. in excess of nominal capacity which varies with journey length and rolling stock type; and not more than 3 per cent. overall.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the discussions his Department has held with the EU about the PPP for London Underground and state aid. [62418]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to Part *(a)* of my answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 67W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what the extra money in expenditure on the London underground announced in the spending review will be spent on; and if he will make a statement; [71064]

(2) what representations he has received from the consortia involved with the public-private partnership for the London underground about the extra spending announced in the spending review. [71065]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The spending review takes full account of the Government's commitment to full funding for the first seven-and-a-half years of the tube modernisation plans. A statement of how the Government intend to fund the London underground in the long term was annexed to the draft letters of comfort reported to Parliament by my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State's Minute of 20 March 2002.

No representations have been received from the consortia involved with the public-private partnership.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 143W, what contingency plans he has for the case where, after the financial close of PPP, a key partner in the Tubelines or Metronet Consortium fails and no replacement partner is found. [71812]

Mr. Jamieson: As my answer of 16 July made clear, the PPP contracts allow for changes in the shareholders of the consortia, subject to the consent of London Underground, including changes to the number of shareholders.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out Government spending on London Underground in each of the next three years as a result of the CSR. [72216]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I have given to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) today.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the overcrowding statistics for *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002 to date for the London Underground. [71735]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* This is an operational matter for London Underground (LU), who have informed me that they measure how crowded services are in terms of the percentage chance of boarding a train with:

(i) all seats full,

(ii) one person standing for each seated passenger, and

(iii) two persons standing for each seated passenger.

LU have provided the information in the table showing this information for 2001–02 and the first quarter of 2002–03.

Percentage

	2001–02		*2002–03*[1]	
	Peak	*Off peak*	*Peak*	*Off peak*
Chance of being on a train with all seats full.	53	30	53	27
Chance of being on a train with at least one person standing for each one sitting.	14	4	14	3
Chance of being on a train with at least two people standing for each one sitting.	1	1	1	[2]—

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[1] First quarter

[2] Sample is too small to provide a meaningful percentage figure, but is less than 1 per cent.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to send the first payments to London Underground PPP contractors. [72894]

Mr. Spellar: The Government will make no direct payments to the PPP contractors. London Underground will pay a monthly Infrastructure Service Charge to the contractors, once the Infrastructure Companies have been transferred to the private sector, following completion of the PPP contracts.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish details of the performance and investment targets set for London Underground in 2002–03. [73536]

Mr. Spellar: The table shows the targets that have been set for London Underground Ltd. in 2002–03, together with the previous targets, and actual performance achieved at the end of March 2002.

Measure	*Targeted performance by end March 2002*	*Actual performance at end March 2002*	*Targeted performance by end March 2003*
Performance			
Excess journey time (unweighted) (minutes)	3.63	3.44	3.42
Train kilometres operated (million)	65.6	65.4	67.2
Customer satisfaction[1]:			
Overall evaluation	n/a	n/a	75
Train service	75	75	[2]—

Measure	*Targeted performance by end March 2002*	*Actual performance at end March 2002*	*Targeted performance by end March 2003*
Safety and security	80	78	[2]—
Staff helpfulness and availability	69	69	[2]—
Cleanliness	67	68	[2]—
Information	77	76	[2]—
Investment			
Project expenditure (£ million)	410	429	587
Project delivery[3]:			
Track renewals (km)	19.5	24.0	25.4
Station upgrades	5	5	3
Station designs	n/a	n/a	50
Escalator refurbishments	20	19	20
Other asset improvements	n/a	n/a	4

[1] Average scores out of 100.

[2] Customer satisfaction scores are being rebased in 2002–03 to better reflect customers' views of journeys undertaken in the peak periods. Although not set as formal targets the five individual elements of the customer satisfaction scores will continue to be monitored and published by London Underground Ltd.

[3] A number of other investment works on escalators, rolling stock, signalling, stations and track will also be started, progressed or completed during the year.

The Government are separately discussing longer-term performance targets for the London Underground with the Mayor as part of the proposed tube modernisation plans.

Railtrack

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action the Government are taking to ensure that Railtrack consults with the relevant local authority before it removes trees from railway property. [71773]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* I understand that Railtrack seek to consult with local authorities and other interested parties wherever practicable.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent on maintenance of track by Railtrack in each of the financial years since 1996–97. [72901]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to the Hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 18 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 179W.

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the European Commission's decision of 13 February to approve state aid towards the rescue of Railtrack Plc (in administration) has been published. [73547]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government informed the house on 13 February 2002 that state aid clearance towards the rescue of Railtrack plc in administration had been given *Official Report*, column 390W. However the Commission only recently published the decision and copies have been placed in the House Libraries of the House for the record.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the expenditure on capital account by Railtrack in administration since being placed in administration. [72890]

Mr. Spellar: As the administrator holds this information, and not the Department, this is a matter for him.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been drawn down by *(a)* Railtrack in administration and *(b)* Network Rail. [72891]

Mr. Spellar: £1.9 billion was drawn down from the original Government loan facility, and to date, £1.2 billion has been drawn from the commercial banking facility. The Government loan facility was repaid, with interest, on 25 March 2002.

Railway Vandalism

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 25 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 772–3W, on railway vandalism, if he will *(a)* place a copy of the speech referred to in the Library and *(b)* state how the Department was represented at the recent National Route Crime Group. [66045]

Mr. Spellar: A copy of my speech to the Trespass and Vandalism on the Railways Conference on 17 October 2001 has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The Department is not represented on the National Route Crime Group, which is a cross-industry group. However, the Health and Safety Executive and the Strategic Rail Authority are members.

Rail Insurance

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action is proposed to ensure that companies involved in railway repair and maintenance continue to have access to insurance cover liability in respect of their companies' and their employees; and if he will make a statement. [63619]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* Railtrack is aware that certain infrastructure maintenance companies have experienced difficulties in renewing insurance cover; and is considering a range of alternative options in response to emerging circumstances and changing market conditions.

Replacement Rails

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average present cost is of relaying one mile of twin track on the UK railway network with replacement rails, and what the cost was five years ago. [65636]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* My Department does not possess the information requested. I understand from Railtrack, however, that the cost of rail replacement will vary significantly according to track layout, maximum linespeed, tonnage capacity and other factors relating to particular lines.

Gatwick-Inverness Transport Link

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make a decision on the proposed public service obligation between Gatwick and Inverness. [66878]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) following yesterday's statement on the future of air transport, *Official Report,* columns 847–68.

Rail Delays

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply of 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 524–25W, on rail delays, if he will place copies of the latest updated information in the Library. [70637]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 8 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 665W.

Crossrail

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made for his Department and the Strategic Rail Authority on the benefits of Crossrail; and if he will make a statement. [70740]

Mr. Jamieson: Cross London Rail Links has been charged with developing the case for Crossrail, and will be reporting to Ministers, the Mayor of London and the Strategic Rail Authority in October. The project development work will include a full assessment of the benefits Crossrail could deliver in terms of relieving congestion on the existing national rail and underground network, increasing transport accessibility and capacity in London, and its contribution to the national economy.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations his Department and the Strategic Rail Authority have received on Crossrail proposals from *(a)* the Royal Docks Cross Rail Group, *(b)* Crossrail and *(c)* other groups; and if he will make a statement. [70745]

Mr. Jamieson: A number of groups have made representations on Crossrail either to my Department, the Strategic Rail Authority, or Cross London Rail Links Ltd.—particularly in response to the CLRL's Stakeholder Consultation document issued in May. The Royal Docks Crossrail Group is one. CLRL will give full consideration to all these representations in reaching a view on a preferred scheme, which will be reported to Ministers, the Mayor of London and the Strategic Rail Authority in October.

Great Western Rail Network

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investment programmes are planned for the Great Western Rail Network; and if he will make a statement. [70828]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan sets out its plans for investment in the rail network in the short, medium and longer term.

Rail Fares

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to allow increases in regulated rail fares above the current cap. [71384]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Strategic Rail Authority issued a consultation paper on fares on 19 July. The document sets out current policy and practice on fares regulation, and invites views. We will review our current policy on fares regulation in the light of responses to this consultation. Copies of the SRA's paper have been placed in the House Library.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made as to the changes in the level of unregulated rail fares in comparison to the RPI in each of the last three years; and if he will list those train operating companies that have increased unregulated fares above the RPI, in each of the last two years. [71385]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The level of unregulated fares is a matter for train operating companies. The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has responsibility for monitoring fare levels and pricing policies. As part of its duties, the Authority has compiled a 'fares index', published in the June (2001–02 quarter 4) edition of National Rail Trends, available in the House Library. This details the average increase in unregulated fares since January 1999 by class of operator. Information on company specific increases is commercially confidential and is not published by the SRA.

Fatalities

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what value for preventing a fatality is used by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Highways Agency when assessing cost benefit ratios on (i) the roads and (ii) the railways; and how these are calculated. [72943]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department and the Highways Agency use an appraisal figure of £1.14 million (in 2000 prices) per fatality prevented when assessing the costs and benefits of road investments. The Department uses the same appraisal figure of £1.14 million for valuing road and rail fatalities prevented through railway investments. The final decisions on all transport investments are not just based on cost benefit ratios, but a wide range of criteria, namely: environment, economy, safety, accessibility and integration.

The appraisal value was derived from research into individual's willingness to pay for reductions in highway risk. Full details of the road values used are published annually in Highway Agency's Economics Note No. 1, which is available in the Library of the House and on the Department's website. The value is updated annually for inflation and economic growth.

Public Transport (Taunton)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the reliability of rail services to Taunton. [73268]

Mr. Jamieson: Performance figures for each of the train operating companies are published by the Strategic Rail Authority in their quarterly publication, "National Rail Trends", and in more detail in their six-monthly publication, "On Track". Copies of these publications are available in the Libraries of the House. The most recent editions of both documents were published on 6 June.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage the greater use of bus travel *(a)* within Taunton, *(b)* within Wellington and *(c)* in and around Wiveliscombe in Somerset. [73267]

Mr. Jamieson: Our policies are aimed at encouraging the greater use of buses in all parts of the country. Implementation at local level is a matter for the local transport authority, in this case, Somerset county council, through its local transport plan. The Department is providing local authorities, including Somerset, with substantially increased capital funding and on-going increases in revenue funding to enable them to plan and implement a range of measures to improve bus services in their areas.

In addition, Somerset county council has been allocated £1.49 million for the support of rural bus services in the current financial year. Since 1998, the council has also been successful with nine bids under the Department's Rural Bus Challenge scheme, including an award last year of £100,000 towards a community transport service for the areas around Wiveliscombe.

Train Protection and Warning System

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what value for preventing a fatality is used in assessments conducted *(a)* by and *(b)* for his Department from the fitting of (i) train protection and warning system, (ii) ERTMS level 1, (iii) ERTMS level 2 and (iv) ERTMS level 3. [72944]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive tell me that in the regulatory impact assessment, which they conducted for the train protection and warning system, a figure of £2.65 million (1997–98 prices) was used for the prevention of fatalities in railway accidents. This is broadly equivalent to the figure of £3.46 million (2002–03 prices) currently used by Railway Safety for the prevention of multiple fatalities or where the risks are close to intolerable.

The report on ERTMS, published earlier this year by Railway Safety and the Strategic Rail Authority, did not use an explicit value for preventing a fatality.

Following research into the willingness of individuals to pay for reductions in risk and independent expert evidence given to the Ladbroke Grove public inquiry, the Health and Safety Executive no longer encourages the use of a higher figure than that used by the Department for Transport and the Highways Agency for appraising road risk. This is £1.14 million at 2000 prices.

Railway Lines

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of new railway line have been completed in the last year; and how many are planned for each of the next two years. [72892]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack's Network Management Statement estimates 790 km of line renewed in 2001–02, and 785 km in each of the following two years.

Railway Rolling Stock

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new carriages have been delivered to train operating companies in Britain in the last year. [72889]

Mr. Spellar: In the year 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002 a total of 615 new passenger vehicles entered service.

Railway Bridges

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to ensure that Railtrack and its successor body are undertaking the work necessary *(a)* to maintain, *(b)* to clean and *(c)* to keep free of birds those railway bridges in its ownership; and if he will make statement. [73009]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand from Railtrack that their maintenance regime for rail structures includes visual inspection annually and in detail every six years. Annual inspection includes cleaning as required. Railtrack seeks to work in partnership with local authorities to tackle pigeon nuisance and is also currently assessing alternative pigeon deterrents to netting.

Railway Infrastructure (Repointing)

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many square metres of gridland stone work on the railway system have been repointed in each year since 1992. [72848]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not hold this information.

Railway Speed Restrictions

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many structures on the railtrack system have been subject to speed restrictions in each year since 1992. [72847]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not hold this information.

Network Rail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what interest rates have been agreed for the different financial facilities being made available by the SRA to Network Rail. [67056]

Mr. Jamieson: The interest rates that would be charged in the unlikely event of a drawdown on the standby credit facilities will be:

(a) facilities supporting the bridge financing: LIBOR plus 1.5 per cent;

(b) facilities supporting the financing of legacy costs: LIBOR plus a margin of between 1.5 per cent. to 6 per cent., depending upon the facility drawn upon and the circumstances of the drawdown;

(c) facility for long-term contingency buffer: LIBOR plus 6 per cent.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what Railtrack's cost of borrowing was in 2001–02; and what the cost of borrowing for Network Rail will be; [71260]

(2) by how much the proposed financing arrangements for Network Rail will increase the buying power of the transport settlement announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July. [71261]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Railtrack's cost of capital was determined by the Rail Regulator. He determined an eight per cent. rate of return (in real terms) in his October 2000 periodic review.

The interest rate on the finance secured by Network Rail is a commercial matter for the company. Network Rail has been designed to secure a strong investment grade credit rating to raise finance in a cost-effective and efficient manner. It is expected to have a cost of capital substantially lower than that of Railtrack, which will have a significant positive impact on the buying power of the company's income.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the documents referred to in the Rail Regulators statement on 27 June on the *(a)* enhancement refitting, *(b)* funding and *(c)* co-operation regime between SRA and Network Rail. [71053]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* These documents remain confidential, as Network Rail has yet to conclude its purchase of Railtrack plc shares. Disclosure now could harm Network Rail's competitive position if its bid failed and the administrators then proceeded with inviting bids for a transfer of Railtrack plc's assets under Schedule 7 to the Railways Act 1993. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will review the status of these documents and the information in them if Network Rail's acquisition of Railtrack plc is successfully completed.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his estimated date is for the first day of trading of Network Rail CLG. [72895]

Mr. Spellar: Network Rail have said that it is possible that Railtrack could be released from administration by the end of September.

Road Deaths

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action the Government are taking to reduce the number of road related deaths. [73686]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on 9 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 805W.

Disabled Parking

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recommendations the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee have made to him in relation to the Disabled Persons Parking Badge Scheme Consultation Paper; and if he will make a statement. [73400]

Mr. Jamieson: The Committee have made a series of recommendations following analysis of responses to the discussion paper, covering eligibility, administration and enforcement. We are currently considering their report together with our colleagues in the devolved Administrations with whom we are working collaboratively on this review.

Alternative Fuels

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that the UK takes a leading role in meeting the European Commission's objective of a 20 per cent. substitution by alternative fuels in the road transport sector by 2020. [72862]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK actively promotes the wider use of alternative fuels through the low rates of duty on liquefied petroleum gas, natural gas, biodiesel and hydrogen road fuel; the lower rates of vehicle excise duty and company car tax on alternatively-fuelled vehicles; Enhanced Capital Allowances for investment in compressed natural gas and hydrogen fuel infrastructure; and the TransportAction programmes of grants for purchase of or conversion to alternatively-fuelled cars, buses and goods vehicles. There are also fuel duty exemptions under the Green Fuels Challenge, subject to European agreement, for three pilot projects relating to the capture and use of landfill bio-gas, hydrogen refuelling infrastructure and the use of methanol, with a further round of the Green Fuels Challenge currently in progress, offering support for the pilot testing of further promising alternative fuels.

A46 (Little Beckford)

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ask the Highways Agency to remove the bollards at the pedestrian safety refuge on the A46 at Little Beckford. [72860]

Mr. Jamieson: The pedestrian safety refuge and bollards at Little Beckford are part of a general scheme of traffic calming through the village to enable pedestrians to cross the A46 safely. A road safety audit carried out after installation has shown no major problems with the scheme design and the police have not identified any safety concerns as a result of their accident investigations. To remove any of the refuges would reduce the effectiveness of the traffic calming and thus increase the risks to road safety. The Highways Agency will, however, continue to monitor the performance of these measures to ensure that they remain effective.

Intelligent Motor Generator Technology

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the intelligent motor generator technology developed by Ricardo in reducing fuel consumption in road vehicles. [72624]

Mr. Jamieson: There are a range of technologies in development—including the intelligent motor generator system developed by Ricardo—that promise substantial reductions in vehicle fuel consumption. My Department's New Vehicle Technology Fund is currently assessing proposals from various suppliers of such technology for demonstrating and testing the effectiveness of their vehicles in real-world operating conditions. The results of the projects will be available from the Energy Saving Trust which manages the Fund on behalf of my Department.

Road Schemes (South West)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for new road schemes in the South West; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* commencement date is in each case. [73266]

Mr. Jamieson: Within the targeted programme of improvements for the Highways Agency the following major schemes (that is schemes costing more than £5 million) are being delivered in the South West area:

Scheme	*Estimate of cost (£ million)*	*Estimated start of construction*
A303 Stonehenge	130	2005–06
A30 Bodmin—Indian Queens	49	2004–05
A38 Dobwalls bypass	17	2005–06
A419 Blunsdon bypass	20	2006

Further schemes may emerge from the London to South West and South Wales Multi-Modal Study.

In addition, the Highways Agency will deliver a number of small scale schemes aimed at, for example, improving safety. It is estimated that around £11 million will be spent on these schemes this year.

A12 (Colchester)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects work to be completed on connecting the Colchester northern approach road to the A12. [72097]

Mr. Jamieson: Proposals for a junction between this road and the A12 trunk road are included in one of five current applications for planning permissions for comprehensive redevelopment of the site of the former Severalls hospital. The Highways Agency has agreed to the principle of the proposed junction and is currently discussing with the developers details of its design and location. Work is not programmed to begin on site within the next three years.

HGV Lanes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the strategic routes with HGV lanes. [71336]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* There are no lanes in the Highways Agency's strategic road network dedicated solely to the movement of heavy goods vehicles.

Car Use

Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 143W, on car use, what evaluation he has made of the impact of the Mayor of London's policies in this regard. [72001]

Mr. Jamieson: Road engineering in London is a matter for Transport for London and the London local authorities.

A3 Hindhead

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his latest estimate is for *(a)* the commencement and *(b)* the completion of construction of the A3 at Hindhead; what representations he has recently received about the improvement scheme there; and what further steps must be completed before its commencement. [71915]

Mr. Spellar: There has been no change to the programme for the A3 Hindhead scheme. The Highways Agency is presently assessing bids from contractor/designer teams to progress the scheme through statutory procedures and construction phases. It is expected that the contract will be awarded in September, that draft orders will be published in the late summer of 2003; and a public inquiry, if required, would be held in 2004. Subject to the satisfactory completion of these statutory procedures, work would start in 2005 and be completed by 2009.

Amendments to the preferred scheme as a consequence of on-going consultation with the local community were announced last March. Since then 11 representations have been received about the revised proposals. These were either seeking more information on specific local impacts or about changes in traffic patterns on local roads as a result of the scheme.

Variable Road Speeds

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 217W, on variable road speeds, if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [70694]

Mr. Jamieson: The trials on the use of variable message signs outside schools formed part of a wider piece of research carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory on behalf of the Department. The results of the trials were unpublished.

However, my Department is preparing guidance in the form of a traffic advisory leaflet on the use of vehicle activated signs. This new guidance will reflect the results and conclusions of these earlier trials. We expect to publish by the end of the year, and at that time, a copy will be placed in the Library.

Highways Agency Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research and contract work has been conducted for the Highways Agency since 7 June 2001 by *(a)* W. S. Atkins, *(b)* Amey and *(c)* Balfour Beatty; and if he will make a statement. [70660]

Mr. Jamieson: The research and contract work that has been conducted for the Highways Agency since 7 June 2001 to the present time by these companies is as follows:

Contract description	*Approximate value*	*Date awarded and duration*
(a) W.S. Atkins		
Research		
Provision of research and development advice facilities framework. For design and management of highways structures	£700k	7 September 2001, for 3 years
General roadworks, including design services		
Highways Agency (HA) area 2 managing agent (MA)	£25 million	Commenced pre-June 2001; runs until 31/3/04
HA area 4 MA	£5.8 million p.a.	Commenced pre-June 2001; runs until 31/5/03
HA area 6 MA	£3.5 million p.a.	Commenced 1/9/2001 for 5 years[1]
HA area 10 MA	£5 million p.a.	1/7/2002 to 30/6/2006[1]
HA area 11 MA	£7 million p.a.	Awarded pre-June 2001, ending 30/6/2002
HA area 11 Managing Agent Contractor (MAC)—(as member of a joint venture (JV))	£25 million p.a.	1/7/2002 to 30/6/2006[1]
Consultancy design framework—midlands	Orders of various values	1/7/2001 to 1/6/2006
Consultancy design framework—north	Orders of various values	9/7/2001 to 1/6/2006
Consultancy design framework—south east	Orders of various values	1/7/2001 to 1/6/2006
Project management support services framework	Orders of various values	1/6/2001 to 1/6/2004
Development control advice (for SW of west midlands area)	£750k	27/2/2002, 3 year contract
Tactical traffic control	£182k	31/3/2002, 1 year
Consultancy framework arrangement	£3 million	15/4/2002, 3 years
Northern development control consultancy	£600k	12/6/2002, 3 years
Procedural and technical advice facilities	£150k	24/5/2002, 3 years
(b) Amey		
General roadworks		
HA area 6 term maintenance contractor (TMC)—(as a member of a JV)	£15 million p.a.	Runs 1/6/2002 for 5 years[1]
HA area 9 MAC—(as a member of a JV)	£30 million p.a.	Runs 1/7/2002 for 4 years[1]
HA area 10 TMC—(as a member of a JV)	£20 million p.a.	1/7/2002 for 4 years[1]
HA area 18 TMC	£10–11 million p.a.	Awarded pre-1/6/2002, runs to 1/4/2003
HA area 19 TMC—(as member of a JV)	£26 million p.a.	Awarded pre-1/6/2002, runs to 1/4/2003
(c) Balfour Beatty		
General roadworks		
Midland framework for roads and structures	Individual task orders varying in value between £500k-£5 million	1/7/2002–1/7/2006 (extendable by 1 year)
Technology framework agreement	Orders of various values	18/9/2001–17/9/2004[2]
A5 Nescliffe bypass	£11 million	10/12/2001—completion in 2006
A41 Aston Clinton bypass	£21.7 million	Awarded 30/3/2001[3]
A303 Stonehenge bypass—(as a member of a JV)	£136 million	15/3/2002—completion in 2013
M1 Wilne Lane to M25, M1 J25 noise barriers and M1 J24–30 Notts/Derby renewal of technology (advance works) hybrid	£4.8 million	24/9/2001–21/3/2002
A120 Stansted to Braintree improvements	£75.5 million	17/7/2001, runs until spring 2004
HA area 16: northern framework agreement for roads and structures	Individual task orders varying in value between £500k and £5 million	1/8/2001–30/4/2003[3]
HA area 18: framework for roads and structures	Individual task orders varying in value between £500k and £10 million	30/6/2002 (extended by 1 year to 30/6/2003)

[1] With options for extensions.

[2] Extendable by 2 periods of 1 year.

[3] To be incorporated into a MAC from 1/7/2003

Silverstone Bypass

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 28 June 2002 to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), *Official Report*, column 880W, on the Silverstone Bypass, if he will *(a)* place his letter of direction in the Library, *(b)* state the component reasons of the wider national interest that justified his decision and *(c)* state the category of direction; and if he will make a statement. [70237]

Mr. Jamieson: A copy of the letter of direction from the then Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions my right hon. Friend the

Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) to the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency has been deposited in the Library.

The British Grand Prix is an important global showcase for the UK motorsport industry, which is estimated to contribute approximately £5 billion annually to the national economy. In addition it brings about £30 million to the local economy over the Grand Prix weekend. In the light of doubts expressed by the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) about retaining the British Grand Prix at Silverstone because of access problems in previous years, Ministers felt that the wider national interest would be best served by speeding up the Silverstone project and thereby providing the best available road access for this year's event.

The direction was sought for reasons of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Public Highway Closures

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1094W, on public highway closures, when and by which magistrates court Downing street was closed under section 116 of the Highways Act 1980. [69973]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to my answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 538W.

Road Accidents

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average incidence of people *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in road accidents in Great Britain was for 1994 to 1998; and what the average incidence was in disadvantaged communities. [71624]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit has designated, for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, 88 local authorities which include the majority of the most deprived wards in England. Casualty figures are available for these authorities. However, these figures relate to the whole of the authority areas, which may include relatively advantaged areas as well as deprived wards. The averages for these authorities therefore, as shown in the table, do not fully represent the position in the most disadvantaged areas.

The table provides the average number of people, and the average number of pedestrians, *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in road accidents for 1994 to 1998, together with the rate per 100,000 population. Figures are given for Great Britain, and the average for the 88 most deprived local authorities in England as designated for Neighbourhood Renewal funding.

1994–98 average	Number	Rate per 100,000 population
All casualties		
Killed		
Great Britain	3,578	6.3
Average for 88 NRF authorities in England[1]	871	4.4
Seriously injured		
Great Britain	44,078	77.1
Average for 88 NRF authorities in England[1]	13,929	69.8
Pedestrian casualties		
Killed		
Great Britain	1,008	1.8
Average for 88 NRF authorities in England[1]	422	2.1
Seriously injured		
Great Britain	10,662	18.7
Average for 88 NRF authorities in England[1]	5,087	25.7

[1] As designated for Neighbourhood Renewal funding

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the criteria for assessing whether a road accident in Great Britain takes place in a disadvantaged community for the purposes of the PSA targets for transport set out in the 2002 Spending Review. [71622]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit has designated 88 local authorities which include the majority of the most deprived wards in England. The criteria for the purposes of the road casualty PSA target set out in the 2002 Spending Review will be looking to specifically address the child pedestrian problem within these areas.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average incidence of children *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in road accidents in Great Britain was for 1994 to 1998; and what the average incidence was in disadvantaged communities. [71623]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit has designated, for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, 88 local authorities which include the majority of the most deprived wards in England. Casualty figures are available for these authorities. However, these figures relate to the whole of the authority areas, which may include relatively advantaged areas as well as deprived wards. The averages for these authorities therefore, as shown in the table, do not fully represent the position in the most disadvantaged areas.

The table provides the average number of children under 16, and the average number of child pedestrians, *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in road accidents for 1994 to 1998, together with the rate per 100,000 population under 16. Figures are given for Great Britain, and the average for the 88 most deprived local authorities in England as designated for Neighbourhood Renewal funding.

1994–98 average/severity	Number	Rate per 100,000 population
All child casualties		
Killed		
Great Britain	260	2.2
Average for 88 NRF authorities in England[1]	87	2.0
Seriously injured		
Great Britain	6,600	56.5
Average for 88 NRF authorities in England[1]	2,706	63.9
Child pedestrian casualties		
Killed		
Great Britain	133	1.1
Average for 88 NRF authorities in England[1]	56	1.3

1994–98 average/severity	*Number*	*Rate per 100,000 population*
Seriously injured		
Great Britain	4,034	34.5
Average for 88 NRF authorities in England[1]	1,906	45.0

[1] As designated for Neighbourhood Renewal funding
Note:
Figures relate to children aged 0–15

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he plans to take forward his responsibility for delivering the public service agreement to reduce fatalities and serious injuries in traffic accidents in Scotland. [71619]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* My Department's public service agreement target for reducing road casualties covers Great Britain as a whole. We will continue to work in partnership with the devolved Administration in Scotland—and likewise the one in Wales—to achieve the casualty reduction targets set out in the national road safety strategy document "Tomorrow's roads—safer for everyone" that we agreed and published in March 2000.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many children were *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in Great Britain in road accidents in each year from 1994; and what the average was for 1994 to 1998. [71504]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The table gives the number of children *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in Great Britain from 1994.

Year	*Killed*	*Seriously injured*
1994	299	7,226
1995	270	6,983
1996	270	6,719
1997	255	6,197
1998	206	5,873
1999	221	5,478
2000	191	5,011
2001[1]	218	4,768
1994–98[2]	260	6,600

[1] The figures for 2001 are provisional
[2] Average

Roads

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total length of HGV lanes is on the strategic network. [71337]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* There are no lanes in the Highways Agency's strategic road network dedicated solely to the movement of heavy goods vehicles.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the roads providing drivers with instant access to network conditions; and what the total length of road is providing this information. [71334]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Variable message signs are being installed on the busiest parts of the motorway network as part of a commitment to have automatic hold up warning systems operating on 30 per cent. of motorways (825km) in England by March 2005. As part of the Traffic Control Centre project, variable message signs are also being installed at strategic points on the English trunk road network to provide drivers with information about major incidents, including, where appropriate, advice on alternative routes. Some local authorities provide similar information on their own roads but those details are not held centrally.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of new *(a)* motorway and *(b)* trunk roads have been completed in the last two years; and how many are planned for the next two years; [72893]

Mr. Spellar: 9.4 miles of new motorway and 13.75 miles of new trunk road were completed in the last two years. 30 miles of new motorway and 66.1 miles of new trunk road are planned for completion in the next two years.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the estimated number of people living within 600m of a trunk road; [71338]

(2) what length of strategic road network was widened in each of the last three years; [71321]

(3) what the average noise level is *(a)* 100m, *(b)* 300m and *(c)* 600m away from a trunk road in each of the last three years; [71339]

(4) what length of the trunk road network has been given lower-noise surfaces *(a)* since July 2000 and *(b)* in each of the last three years. [71335]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mrs. Theresa May dated 24 July 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the estimated number of people living within 600m of a trunk road; the length of trunk road that has been given lower-noise surfaces; the average noise level at 100m, 300m and 600m away from a trunk road; and the length of strategic road network widened in each of the last three years.

The Highways Agency estimates that there are over 2.1 million households located within 600m of the trunk road network. In the National Office of Statistics 'Living In Britain' publication (published 2000) the average number of people per household was 2.3. it is therefore estimated that approximately 4.83 million people live within 600 metres of the trunk road network.

Since July 2000, 3,257 of the 34,000 trunk road lane kilometres have been laid with lower noise surfacing. Between April 2001 and March 2002 lower noise surfacing was laid on 1,611 lane kilometres and between April 2000 and March 2001 this figure was 1431 lane kilometres. Prior to April 2000 this information was not collated by the Agency.

It is not possible to provide average noise levels at given distances from a trunk road because the noise level arising from any major road is determined by the characteristics of the traffic it carries, principally the amount of traffic and the percentage of heavy goods vehicles. The type of road surface and other noise mitigation measures will also affect the noise level. Provided that other factors remain the same, the effect of traffic growth year on year is minimal.

A number of important widening schemes are currently under construction, but none have been completed in the last three years. The M1 to A1 Lofthouse—Bramham Link Road DBFO was completed in May 1999 and this contained within it some stretches of widening of the A1, the M1 and the M62 totalling 9.9km. These stretches were completed by February 1999, just prior to the three-year period in question.

I hope this is helpful.

Congestion

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent he estimates the Mayor of London's proposals for congestion charging will contribute to the delivery of the public services agreement targets to reduce congestion in large urban areas in England. [71627]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* My Department's forecasting work for the 10-year plan assumed that a central London road user charging scheme would be introduced as part of the plan. The impact of individual schemes was not assessed.

While congestion reduction benefits of road user charging schemes may be significant at the local level in specific urban centres, they are likely to be small within the context [illegible] total traffic volumes, and hence the national congestion target, in England as a whole.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he plans to take forward his responsibility for delivering the Public Services Agreement to reduce congestion in London to below 2000 levels by 2010. [71628]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Public Service Agreement target relates to large urban areas, including London. The Mayor of London's Transport Strategy and Transport for London's Business Plan set out measures which are designed to tackle congestion. We shall monitor the delivery of them and their impact on congestion and from time to time we shall review the situation with the Mayor.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on progress towards the target of a 15 per cent. reduction in traffic congestion across London, as given in the 10-year plan; [71320]

(2) what the benchmark is against which he will judge the 10-year plan target of 15 per cent. reduction in traffic congestion across London; and what the subsequent performance statistics relating to this target are. [71319]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* There is a Public Service Agreement target to reduce road congestion in large urban areas below 2000 levels by 2010. The 10-year plan listed the 15 per cent. reduction in traffic congestion across London among a number of possible outcomes for transport in London which could be delivered over the life of the plan, but the plan made it clear that the Mayor was responsible for specific priorities. The Mayor's Transport Strategy and Transport for London's Business Plan indicate these priorities. We shall monitor the delivery of them and their impact on congestion and from time to time we shall review the situation with the Mayor.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish the next surveys relating to the level of congestion on the inter-urban trunk road network and in large urban areas. [71565]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* We hope to publish the year 2000 baseline for congestion in the autumn.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will bring forward proposals to restrict the power of the Mayor of London to introduce congestion charging. [72953]

Mr. Spellar: No. Parliament has given powers to the Mayor in the Greater London Authority Act 1999 to decide whether or not to introduce congestion charging.

Transport Benchmarks

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the benchmarks are for *(a)* rail punctuality, *(b)* rail reliability and *(c)* rail use against which the PSA targets for transport contained in the 2002 Spending Review are set. [71621]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The benchmark year is 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, against which we will measure the PSA target to increase rail use, while at the same time securing improvements in rail punctuality and reliability.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the level of overcrowding on London trains; and if he will give the benchmark against which he will judge the target of reducing overcrowding to meet the SRA standards by 2010, as indicated in annex 2 of the 10-year plan. [71345]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Strategic Rail Authority publishes overcrowding statistics on an annual basis. The most recent information was published on 6 June 2002 in the Authority's "On Track" publication. Overcrowding in London is controlled by the Authority's "Passengers In Excess of Capacity" (PIXC) mechanism.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department will publish local competition benchmarks. [71617]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I assume the hon. Member's question refers to local congestion benchmarks.

The Department plans to use the national transport model to provide congestion benchmark profiles for different areas and reflecting different needs. Publication will follow once we are satisfied this information will be helpful to local authorities in planning how to tackle local congestion.

Road Maintenance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made as to *(a)* the current level and *(b)* the level as at July 2000 of maintenance backlog for (i) local roads, (ii) bridges and (iii) lighting. [71343]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The maintenance backlogs on local roads in England in 2000 were estimated at £2 billion for carriageways and footways, £750 million for bridges and retaining walls, and £1 billion for street lighting. Estimates of the current backlogs will depend upon data that is being collated at present.

Road Works

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice his Department issues to the Highways Agency with regard to the *(a)* phasing of roadworks and *(b)* timing of verge grass cutting. [72949]

Mr. Spellar: In line with Road User's Charter targets, the Highways Agency is tasked with ensuring that a minimum of 90 per cent. of works carried out during a year are no more than 2.5 miles long and are at least six miles apart.

The guidelines for verge grass cutting are set out in the Agency's Trunk Road Maintenance Manual. This sets out minimum standards. Higher standards may be used at particular locations for, for example, safety or environmental reasons.

Buses

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many *(a)* passenger journeys on buses and *(b)* bus trips per person per year there were in each of the last three years for which figures are available; [71330]

(2) how many *(a)* passenger journeys on local bus services and *(b)* local bus trips per person there were in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [71329]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Department collects details of passenger journeys on local bus services as part of the annual public service vehicle operators' survey. We do not at present collect information on passenger journeys on other types of bus service.

Figures for England are as follows:

(a) passenger journeys on local bus services

	Million
1998–99	3,719
1999–2000	3,732
2000–01	3,761

Source:

DfT annual survey of Public Service Vehicle operators.

(b) Local bus trips per person per year

	Number
1996–98	62
1997–99	59
1998–2000	58

Source:

DfT National Travel Survey. (Three year averages. Excludes trips made by non-householders, for example, tourists and students).

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, (1) pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 205W, on bus priority schemes, how many routes were operated by guided buses as part of the London bus initiative in each of the last three years; and what the average level of Government funding was for each route; [71383]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 205W, on bus priority schemes, what the components are of the London Bus Initiative, including the breakdown of the purposes for which funding provided by Government have been used; and if he will make a statement. [71382]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The London Bus Initiative (LBI) is a matter for the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL). I understand from TfL that improvements are specifically tailored to each route but could include:

Upgraded buses;

Improved safety measures;

Improved accessibility;

New bus priority measures;

Improved customer information systems;

Passenger waiting environments;

Enforcement of bus lanes and other bus stop infringements.

There are currently no guided bus routes forming part of the LBI.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on progress towards the output of *(a)* improved bus frequencies, *(b)* enhanced off-peak and *(c)* enhanced night bus services in London as part of the 10-Year-Plan; [71318]

(2) what the benchmark is against which he will judge the 10 year plan output of *(a)* improved bus frequencies, *(b)* enhanced off-peak and *(c)* enhanced night bus services in London; and what the subsequent performance statistics relating to this target are. [71317]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The 10-Year-Plan indicated a number of possible outcomes for transport in London which could be delivered over the life of the Plan, while making clear that the Mayor was responsible for specific priorities. In respect of improvements to bus services in London, we shall monitor delivery and from time to time we shall review the situation with the Mayor.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 976W, on bus services, against what benchmark he will judge whether his Department is meeting its public service agreement to secure improvements in bus punctuality. [71372]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* We are considering the most appropriate means of measuring improvements to punctuality in relation to this target.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the accessibility indicator (households within 13 minutes walk of a bus stop with a service frequency at least once an hour was for *(a)* small urban areas three to 25k, *(b)* small urban areas three to 10k, *(c)* small urban areas 10 to 25k, *(d)* median urban areas, *(e)* large urban areas, *(f)* metropolitan built-up areas and *(g)* London boroughs in each of the latest three years for which figures are available. [71328]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The proportion of households within 13 minutes walk of a bus stop with a service frequency of at least once an hour was:

England

	1996–98	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
(a) small urban areas 3–25k	79	76	75
(b) small urban areas 3–10k	69	66	63
(c) small urban areas 10–25k	88	85	87
(d) medium urban areas 25–250k	95	96	96
(e) large urban areas over 250k	98	98	97
(f) metropolitan built-up areas	99	99	98
(g) London boroughs	98	98	98

In 1998–99 we introduced new funding to improve accessibility to bus services in all rural areas. Since that year, Rural Bus Subsidy Grant has supported 1,800 new or improved bus services in rural England. The grant was extended in 2001–02 to cover all areas outside towns with a population of 25,000 or more and has now been increased to £47.5 million this financial year. In addition, we are now supporting over 200 rural transport projects under the Rural Bus Challenge scheme, which was also first introduced in 1998–99.The source is the National Travel Survey and normally three years of data are aggregated. However, the sample numbers for rural areas were exceptionally low for 2000, casting doubts on the validity of using the data for that year within the indicator. To provide consistency across areas, the average for 1998 and 1999 has been used instead of the average for the three years 1998–2000, as previously published. Figures for the average of 1999 and 2001 will be published when the results for 2001 are released on 25 July.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he collates on the frequency of buses in London; and if he will provide such statistics for the last four years. [71498]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Bus services in London are the responsibility of the Mayor and Transport "for" London (TfL), and my Department does not routinely collect this information. However, I understand from TfL that there are currently 322 high frequency routes (every 12 minutes or better) and 185 low frequency routes. These exclude school routes, mobility services and night services. Figures for previous years are not available.

Bus service frequencies are planned by TfL to allow the majority of passengers to use the network on a "turn-up-and-go" basis, with as many routes as possible running every 12 minutes or better. In general, service frequencies will not fall below hourly, including night services where applicable.

Buses and Taxis

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to improve the sustainability and environmental quality of buses and taxis in city areas. [73206]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have introduced a range of fiscal incentives to encourage the wider availability and use of cleaner fuels such as ultra-low sulphur petrol and diesel and road fuel gases such as LPG and natural gas. These incentives are relevant to all road vehicle sectors including buses and taxis.

My Department's PowerShift and CleanUp programmes—administered by the Energy Saving Trust—provide grants towards the cost of converting vehicles to run on cleaner fuels and towards the cost of fitting emission reduction technologies such as particulate traps. Both taxis and buses have benefited from these programmes.

In addition, my Department has set up the New Vehicle Technology Fund to support the demonstration of innovative clean, fuel-efficient technologies such as fuel cells and hybrid vehicles. The Department views urban vehicles such as taxis and buses as important early markets for the introduction of these technologies and is currently assessing a number of taxi and bus proposals.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will establish a working group to review the quality of taxi systems in major English cities. [73204]

Mr. Jamieson: While we are responsible for the legislative framework for taxis throughout England and Wales, taxi licensing rests with local authorities; it is up to them to use their licensing powers to ensure that their local taxi system is of a satisfactory standard.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will license a new class of taxis in inner city areas based on smaller vehicles. [73203]

Mr. Jamieson: Under the legislation governing taxi licensing in England and Wales, a taxi must be a vehicle with fewer than nine passenger seats. Within this broad provision, it is up to local licensing authorities to determine which vehicles they consider suitable for licensing as taxis, bearing in mind that taxis are licensed for the purpose of enabling both individuals and small groups to hire them at a rank or hail them in the street.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the Smart car and similar vehicles as taxis for city areas. [73205]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has made no specific assessment of the Smart car or any similar vehicle for use as taxis in city areas. Decisions about which vehicles to license as taxis are made by local licensing authorities based on their assessment of local conditions and circumstances. They would, of course, want to bear in mind the needs of people who wish to travel in small groups as well as those of disabled people, some of whom may need to travel in a wheelchair.

Trams and Light Rail

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment for the purposes of the 10-year plan he has made as to the change in journey speeds on tram systems in London over the last two years; and if he will make a statement; [71499]

(2) what the average journey speed on light rail systems in London was at July 2000; and what the benchmark is against which he will judge whether he has achieved the output of faster journeys by light rail in London in the 10-year plan; [71312]

(3) what assessment he has made of the change in journey speeds on light rail systems in London in the last two years; and if he will make a statement; [71315]

(4) what assessment for the purposes of the 10-year plan he has made as to the change in journey speeds on guided buses in London over the last two years; and if he will make a statement; [71500]

(5) what the average journey speed on tram systems in London was at July 2000; and what the benchmark is against which he will judge whether he has achieved the output of faster journeys by tram in London in the 10-year plan; [71313]

(6) what the average journey speed on guided buses in London was at July 2000; and what the benchmark is against which he will judge whether he has achieved the output of faster journeys by guided bus in London in the 10-year plan. [71314]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The 10-year plan indicated a number of possible outcomes for transport in London which could be delivered over the life of the plan, while making clear that the Mayor was responsible for specific priorities. We shall monitor delivery and from time to time we shall review the situation with the Mayor. The outcome in the plan concerning new routes and faster journeys by light rail, tram or guided bus, was a general reference to possible new services which could result from new infrastructure which could be delivered using the plan's resources.

Departmental Reorganisation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent by his Department in re-branding his Department *(a)* in total and *(b)* sub-divided between (i) design of the departmental logo, (ii) design and orders of new stationery, (iii) Department signage and (iv) website design as a result of the Department structural change in June; and if he will make a statement. [70692]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department is spending a nominal sum of less than £25,000 from within existing budgets, to make the required changes to these items.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much has been spent on consultancy fees in relation to the change in Department structure since June; and if he will make a statement; [70711]

(2) how much has been spent on changes in office accommodation as a result of the change in Department structure since June; and if he will make a statement. [70704]

Mr. Jamieson: So far no changes to office accommodation have been made as a result of the recent machinery of government changes and no money spent to date. Over the summer Ministers and officials will be co-located with Department for Transport staff currently in Great Minster House. This will be more effective and reduce travelling between Great Minster House and Eland House.

Public Transport

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish new guidance on the flexible public transport services which the law already allows. [73537]

Mr. Spellar: Fresh guidance on the range of flexible public transport services, which can currently be undertaken, will be published later this week. It is aimed at bus, taxi and private hire vehicle operators, local authorities, transport partnerships and voluntary groups because many may not be aware of the opportunities available. We want to encourage greater use of these services because they can bring more benefits both to passengers and providers and help improve public transport provision. We are distributing the document, which is a free publication, widely as well as publishing it on our website. Although this guidance has been produced as a follow up to the rural White Paper and gives examples of schemes being undertaken in rural areas, I would stress that the services apply equally for urban areas.

REPPIR

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the meaning is of the term 'carrier' as used in REPPIR. [73189]

Mr. Jamieson: In the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001 a 'carrier' is an employer undertaking the transport by rail of any radioactive substance, which includes a carrier for hire or reward and a carrier on own account, and an employer transferring or conveying a radioactive substance through any public place otherwise than by rail, road, inland waterway, sea or air or by means of a pipeline or similar means.

Anglo-Scottish Ministerial Meetings

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings his Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72717]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers have held meetings with members of the Scottish Executive on a variety of transport issues since May 1999.

Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when and where Ministers in his Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72699]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers have held meetings with representatives of the Irish Government on a variety of transport issues since June 2000.

Job Location

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core Department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and other such organisations, are located in *(i)* Scotland, *(ii)* England, excluding Greater

London, *(iii)* Greater London, *(iv)* Wales, *(v)* Northern Ireland and *(vi)* overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual Department, body or organisation. [72733]

Mr. Jamieson: I would refer the hon. Member to the following table, which shows the position within the Department for Transport at 1 June 2002:

Department for Transport	*Full-time equivalent*	*Location*
Core Department[1]	1,700	London, rest of England and Scotland
Executive Agencies[2] *consisting of:*	12,212	
Driver and vehicle licensing	5,144	England, Scotland and Wales
Driving Standards Agency	1,970	England, Scotland and Wales
Highways Agency	1,770	England
Vehicle Certification Agency	112	UK, USA and Japan
Vehicle Inspectorate	2,116	England, Scotland and Wales
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	1,100	UK
Grand Total:	13,912	

[1] The core Department for the Department for Transport (DfT) employs approximately 1,700 staff. This figure is composed of staff working on policy areas and includes an estimate of 50 per cent. of the support staff who worked for the former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). This figure may change when re-structuring is complete and final decisions have been taken on how support staff are to be allocated to the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and Department for Transport (DfT).

[2] The figures for the Executive Agencies are estimates—based on their plans for year 2002–03 and are taken from the DTLR (C) departmental annual report 2002.

I will write to the hon. Member with details for non-departmental public bodies and independent statutory bodies in due course.It has not been possible to calculate the percentage per individual Department, body or organisation as we do not have a breakdown of the total figures by region.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Chichester, tabled on 22 May, on the official travel of departmental and non-departmental special advisers. [72683]

Mr. Jamieson: We have no record of such a question being tabled to this Department or its predecessor by the hon. Member.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72248]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked in his Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72637]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is not held centrally and is therefore not available.

Travel Concessions

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which local authorities grant a 100 per cent. concession for travel by *(a)* bus, *(b)* train and *(c)* bus and train. [72670]

Mr. Jamieson: In England, Crawley, Reading and Redditch provide free concessionary travel for pensioners and disabled people on local bus services only. There are no free concessionary travel schemes that cover only local train travel. Those areas which provide free concessionary travel on local bus services and other transport modes (including travel by local train) for pensioners and disabled people are: the London boroughs (together), Merseyside PTE, West Midlands PTE (pensioners only), and Rutland (disabled people only).

An additional 81 areas in England provide free concessionary travel for blind people on local bus services; of those areas 39 also offer free concessionary travel on other transport modes.

Transport Schemes

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many transport schemes to address demand in rural areas were funded by the Government in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [72671]

Mr. Jamieson: Precise information on the number of transport schemes in rural areas is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, funding for transport schemes in rural areas is available through the Government's targeted programme for improvements (TPI) to the trunk road network, the local transport plan (LTP) system and the rural bus challenge.

Of the schemes in the TPI, one rural bypass has been completed and a further 15 rural bypasses and road improvements are under construction. Under the LTP system, local authorities have been allocated ring-fenced capital funds for major schemes costing over £5 million, some of which will benefit rural areas, and block allocations for smaller scale schemes. Authorities have reported in their LTP annual progress reports that capital allocations for local transport are expected to deliver 31 schemes in rural areas in 2000–01 and 55 schemes in 2001–02. This covers rural bypasses on local roads, quiet lane schemes and rural 20-mph zones. The rural bus challenge supported 77 innovative public transport projects in 2000–01 and 85 such projects in 2001–02.

We have also funded improved transport services in rural areas through the rural bus subsidy grant, and the rural transport partnership and parish transport fund schemes administered by the Countryside Agency.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether it is his policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via his Department's website; [72278]

(2) for how long he retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website. [72288]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department aims to be as helpful as possible in responding to hon. Members' questions. Where it is helpful to refer hon. Members to other documents as part of the substantive reply, this may be done by making hard copies of documents available in the Libraries of the House, or by reference to material available on the Department's website.

Minimum requirements for the type of documents which should be published on Government websites are set out in guidance issued by the Office of the E-Envoy, "Guidelines for Government Websites" (Illustrated Handbook for web management teams section 2.2 'What content should be on your website?' and section 2.3 'Cross-government requirements'). In addition to setting out guidelines on documents for inclusion, the guidance explicitly requires Departments to ensure that content of the site as a whole is up to date and current, and where it is necessary to update the content of individual documents, to show the latest date of amendment clearly on the document concerned. Section 1.2.7 deals with the issue of record management and the OeE currently has a consultation paper out on archiving websites. The purpose of this draft annex to the Illustrated Handbook is to provide Government website managers with a framework towards developing, within their website management policy, suitable procedures and systems to assist in the management, appraisal and preservation of electronic records. A copy of this draft is available online at: http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk:/webguidelines.htm

A copy of the guidelines for UK Government websites is available at: http://www.-envoy.gov.uk/webguidelines.htm

Thames Gateway

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding is available to develop transport links to the Thames Gateway. [72110]

Mr. Jamieson: Approved transport schemes will be funded from the resources in the 10-year Plan for transport.

Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what public consultations have been commenced by his Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72067]

Mr. Jamieson: A list of the public consultations by the Department or its predecessors since 1 April 2002 is listed below, including the closing dates for responses and the website address of each document. The list is based on central records and reflects the public consultations undertaken within the areas for which the Department is currently responsible.

Local Transport

Reform of national regulations and approval schemes for the construction and use of minibuses, buses, and coaches. Issued 15 July 2002. Responses requested by 11 October 2002.

"http://www.local-transport.dft.gov.uk/consult/busconstruct/index.htm"

Public Consultation on the Proposed Trunk Road Charging Schemes (Bridges and Tunnels) (Keeping of Accounts) (England) Regulations. Published 8 July 2002. Responses requested by 27 September 2002.

"http://www.roads.dft.gov.uk/consult/trunkroad/index.htm"

Railways

Establishing a Rail Accident Investigation Branch. Issued 18 July 2002. Responses requested by 10 October 2002.

"http://www.railways.dft.gov.uk/consult/raib/index.htm"

EC Second Railway Package. Issued 24 May 2002. Responses requested 23 August 2002.

"http://www.railways.dft.gov.uk/consult/ecsecond/index.htm"

Exemptions from sections 76 and 77 of the Railways Act 1993 (as amended by section 228 of the Transport Act 2000) and section 248 of the Transport Act 2000. Issued 30 April 2002. Responses requested by 24 June 2002.

"http://www.railways.dft.gov.uk/consult/act/index.htm"

Roads Vehicles and Road Safety

Joint consultation with DTI and DEFRA—Developing Energy Policy—Key Issues for Consultation for the White Paper (13 September 2002). Issued

1 July 2002. Responses requested by 20 September 2002.

"http://www2.dti.gov.uk/energy/developep"

Pedal Bicycles (Safety) Regulations 2002 (20 September 2002) Archive Papers. Issued 21 June 2002. Responses requested by 20 September 2002.

"http://www.roads.dft.gov.uk/consult/pedbicreg/index.htm"

Public Consultation on the Proposed Trunk Road Charging Schemes (Bridges and Tunnels) (Keeping of Accounts) (England) Regulations. Published 8 July 2002. Responses requested 27 September 2002.

"http://www.roads.dft.gov.uk/consult/trunkroad/index.htm"

Joint consultation with HM Treasury—Implementing the Fourth Motor Insurance Directive. Issued 24 April 2002. Responses requested by 17 July 2002.

"http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/ConsultationsandLegislation"

Proposals for regulation changes to enable MOT computerisation. Issued 5 July 2002. Responses requested by 4 October 2002. "http://www.roads.dft.gov.uk/consult/mot/index.htm"

Shipping

Port Waste Reception Facilities: A consultation paper Issued 23 May 2002. Responses requested by 19 August 2002.

"http://www.shipping.dft.gov.uk/consult/portwaste/index.htm"

Light Dues Review: Meeting the Costs of Marine Aids Issued 10 May 2002. Responses requested by 31 July 2002.

"http://www.shipping.dft.gov.uk/consult/light/index.htm"

Financial Assistance for Moving Freight from Road to Inland Waterway and Maritime Transport Issued 29 April 2002. Responses requested by 26 July 2002.

"http://www.shipping.dft.gov.uk/consult/famcon/index.htm"

Consultation Documents

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form his Department has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations; [70963]

(2) which consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies; [70965]

(3) whether his Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations; [70966]

(4) how many complaints his Department has received about its 2001 consultations in electronic or printed form; [70964]

(5) how long her Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form;. [70960]

(6) in what format his Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations; [70962]

(7) whether consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations; [70961]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has issued internal guidance to ensure consultation documents comply with the requirements of the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation. The Department has also appointed a consultation co-ordinator in accordance with criterion 7 of the Code.

A list of the public consultations undertaken by the Department or its predecessors in 2001 has been placed in the Library, including the dates for which the period for responses opened and closed. The list is based on central records and reflects the public consultations undertaken within the areas for which the Department is currently responsible. More specific details concerning the handling of individual consultation exercises are not held centrally.

Home Zones

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which home zones have been introduced in each of the last three years. [71332]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Information is not held centrally on the home zones introduced in each of the last three years. Figures for the number of home zones proposed by English authorities outside London within their August 2001 Local Transport Plan Annual Progress Reports were given in my answer to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 8 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 663–64W.

Direct Electronic Access

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the transport-related services offered by Government via direct electronic access. [71322]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Publicly available policy statements, reports, guidance, statistics and press notices are made available through the Department for Transport's website: http://www.dft.gov.uk. The Department's consultations are available on the website and facilities are available for response by e-mail.

The Department already offers a large number of transport-related services via electronic direct access. For example, the portal http://www.motoring.gov.uk brings together the range of Government services for the motorist. Further initiatives are also under way for the future electronic provision of transport-related services.

Galileo Satellite System

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates his Department has made of the economic and transport-related benefits to the United Kingdom and the European Union from the proposed Galileo satellite navigation system. [70697]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon on 12 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 884W.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investigations have been made by his Department into the possible use of the Galileo satellite system for monitoring the movements of motorists. [70696]

Mr. Jamieson: None. Satellite-based positioning systems do not of themselves permit the movement of vehicles to be monitored. However, many commercial "intelligent transport systems" such as those used for fleet management purposes by operators of commercial vehicles, do make use of satellite-based navigation technology, in conjunction with communication systems. Galileo could improve the performance of such intelligent transport systems.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates have been made by his Department of the extent to which the proposed Galileo satellite navigation system will duplicate services available under the Global Positioning System. [70708]

Mr. Jamieson: At present the civil community makes use of an open access signal provided by the US Global Positioning System (GPS) but this is subject to US national security interests, is not guaranteed and is not adequate for some safety critical uses such as in air traffic management. GPS is managed and operated by the US Government and funded by the US Department of Defense (DOD). It was developed primarily as a military system with the main purpose of enhancing the effectiveness of US military forces. Through co-operation agreements, the US has made available the GPS military signals to NATO and individual States such as the UK. GPS will continue to be used by NATO and the UK for military applications.

Galileo has the potential to provide Europe with its own purpose built civil navigation and positioning system which could generate strategic and economic benefits to the UK, Europe and globally. For example, in transport it could help in the development of traffic management and intelligent transport systems across all modes of transport to help control congestion, reduce pollution and contribute to improved safety. Additionally, as it is intended that it should complement and be interoperable with the civil signal (and future planned signals) provided by GPS, users should obtain improved availability and reliability particularly in urban areas. The two systems could provide the integrity of service required for greater use of the technology in safety critical applications such as air traffic management.

The Government intends to work to ensure that there is co-operation with the US, so that Galileo is interoperable with GPS civil signals and is developed in such a way as to give value for money to UK and European taxpayers and users.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total estimated cost is of the Galileo Satellite Navigation System; how much the United Kindgom is contributing; and if he will make a statement on the need for the Galileo system. [71032]

Mr. Jamieson: A study carried out last year by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) on behalf of the Commission has put the capital cost of Galileo at euro 3.4 billion, with annual operating costs of euro 224 million over a 20-year concession period. PWC considered that the programme would require some continued public funding for deployment of the system and payments during operation. Total public sector funding was estimated at some euro 3.8 billion, depending on the private sector assessment of revenues and risks, and subject to the outcome of a competitive tendering process for a public-private partnership (PPP) for the deployment and operational phases.

The UK is helping to fund Galileo through contributions to the European Space Agency (ESA), which is jointly funding and carrying out the programme with the European Union. For the definition phase (1999–2000) and some early development work (2001) the Government contributed about £10.4 million. For the development and validation phase (2002–05) which was approved in March by the EU Transport Council, negotiations within ESA over member states' contributions are still progressing. Funds for the development and validation phase are also being provided from the budget of the European Communities to which the UK contributes.

Galileo has been discussed at a number of European Councils including the Laeken Council in December last year, which reaffirmed the strategic importance of the project to Europe. The UK has always supported the Council's conclusions on Galileo as it recognises the potential benefits that it could bring to the UK and Europe in transport and other economic and industrial areas.

Former Ministers (Compensation)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was paid by his Department in compensation to Ministers from the former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who left Government in June; and if he will make a statement. [70705]

Mr. Jamieson: Under the terms of section 4 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991, all Ministers (except the Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor) are entitled to a severance payment equal to one quarter of their final ministerial salary on leaving office, provided that the individual has not attained the age of 65 or been appointed to another paid office within a period of three weeks. The salaries of Ministers who left the Government in June are already in the public domain.

Government News Network North East

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what occasions press releases have been released on behalf of *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Highways Agency and *(c)* the Health and Safety Executive by the Government News Network North East since 7 June 2001; and if he will place copies of such press releases in the Library. [70653]

Mr. Jamieson: Between 7 June 2001 and 15 July 2002 Government News Network North East (formerly the Central Office of Information North East) issued press releases on behalf of the Department for Transport, the Department for Transport, Local Government and Regions, the Highways Agency and the Health and Safety Executive as follows:

Department	*Total despatched*	*Regionally generated*	*Despatched for national department*
Department for Transport	7	6	1
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions	218	125	93
Highways Agency	40	35	5
Health and Safety Executive	47	26	21
Totals	312	192	120

I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Adventure Holidays

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many deaths have occurred on adventure holidays in the past five years. [69772]

Mr. Jamieson: Based on information provided by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority there have been 31 fatalities (which includes adults) during organised adventure activity holidays since 1997. Of the three deaths at licensed centres, one involved a pre-existing condition and two involved instructors. This figure includes fatalities to UK residents participating in overseas adventure activity holidays that were organised through UK providers as set out in the table.

Number of fatalities during participation in adventure activities from 1 January 1997 to 21 July 2002[1] as recorded by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority

Group type	*Number of fatalities*
Scouts	6
Schools	16
Licensed Centres	3
Others (vol.clubs/army training/unlicensed centres)	6
Total	31

[1] Deaths recorded over a period of five years six months

Notes:

1. Of these deaths three are thought to be as a result of a previous and unknown medical condition.

2. The figures do not include sub-aqua diving fatalities.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68722]

Mr. Jamieson: All overseas travel by officials in my Department is undertaken in accordance with the principles set out in Chapter 8 of the Civil Service Management Code (available on the Cabinet Office website at http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/civilservice/managementcode/csmc.pdf)

The annual expenditure on overseas travel for the last financial year for the predecessor department, the Department for Transport, Local Government and Regions, was £1,804,386.65. This total includes the travel, accommodation and subsistence costs.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made towards meeting the targets set out in 'Our towns and cities: the future', relating to *(a)* journey times on the London underground, *(b)* road congestion in large urban areas, *(c)* increasing bus use, *(d)* increasing rail use, *(e)* reducing the number of people killed and injured in road accidents and *(f)* increasing light rail use. [69385]

Mr. Jamieson: These targets were set out in the 10 Year Plan for Transport and referred to in "Our towns and cities: the future". The progress recorded so far is as follows:

(a) Journey times on the London Underground PSA target: "Cut journey times on London Underground by increasing capacity and reducing delays. Specific targets will be agreed with the Mayor after the PPP has been established."

London Underground Limited's Reliability Improvement Programme delivered improvements in both indicators last year. In 2001–02 capacity increased by 2.5 per cent. and delays reduced by 6.7 per cent.

(b) Road congestion in large urban areas PSA target: "Reduce road congestion in large urban areas below current levels by 2010 by promoting integrated transport solutions and investing in public transport and the road network".

A new congestion monitoring exercise to establish the baselines from which progress will be measured is being finalised and the results will be published in due course.

(c) Increasing bus use PSA target: "Increase bus use from 2000 levels by 10 per cent. by 2010, while improving punctuality and reliability".

The latest figures for bus use, for 2000–01, show the number of passenger journeys increased by 1 per cent. across England as a whole. Results for 2001–02 are due in October. Latest results for service reliability, for the fourth quarter in 2001–02 show 98.7 per cent. of scheduled local bus mileage in England was completed compared with 98.6 per cent. one year ago.

(d) Increasing rail use PSA target: "Increase rail use in Great Britain by 50 per cent. between 2000 and 2010, while improving punctuality and reliability".

The latest results for 2001–02 show an increase of 2.4 per cent. in passenger kilometres travelled compared to the previous year.

(e) Reducing the number of people killed and injured in road accidents PSA target: "Reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured in GB in road accidents by 40 per cent. by 2010 and the number of children killed or seriously injured by 50 per cent. compared with the average for 1994–98."

Provisional results for 2001 show a reduction of 14.9 per cent. (total) and 27.3 per cent. (children) compared to the baseline.

(f) Increasing light rail use PSA target: "Double light rail use from 2000 levels by 2010".

The latest results, for 2000–01 show a 27 per cent. increase in passenger journeys compared to the previous year. Results for 2001–02 are due shortly.

Infrastructure Pricing Reform

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the forthcoming European Directive on infrastructure pricing reform. [66059]

Mr. Spellar: The European Commission indicated in its European Transport Policy White Paper that it would propose a framework directive in 2002 to establish the principles of infrastructure charging and a pricing structure for all modes of transport.

The Commission has not yet brought forward its proposals. And, at this stage, it is unclear what it wants to achieve by proposing a common methodology across all modes. Clearly, it would need to be demonstrated that these measures are necessary at a Community level and respect the principles of subsidiarity. It would also be essential that any proposals are based on the appropriate Treaty provisions.

Transport Projects

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the review of the planning process for transport projects to which transport funding announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July are linked. [71255]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* This will be the subject of discussions between my Department and that of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* benchmark lead times for major infrastructure transport projects and *(b)* shortened lead times are which form part of the delivery reform measures to which transport funding announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July are linked. [71259]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* It is too early to provide precise details of the work to streamline processes for transport planning and delivery, but it is the intention to build on the improvements already made by the Highways Agency, while the SRA will be working with the rail industry to develop special purpose vehicles to deliver major rail projects more effectively.

EU Committees (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EU Scientific Committee for occupational exposure limits to chemical agents is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [71820]

Mr. Jamieson: The European Union's Scientific Committee on Occupational Exposure Limits (SCOEL) is next due to meet on 26 and 27 September 2002. No member or representative of the Scottish Executive either has been or is currently a member of SCOEL. The Health and Safety Executive nominates the two UK members of SCOEL on the basis of their scientific and toxicological background rather than as representatives of the UK Government. The current UK nominees are a Senior Toxicologist at the Medical Research Council Institute for Environment and Health and the Head of the Health and Safety Executive's Industrial Chemicals Unit.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Joint Committee on the carriage of goods and passengers by inland waterway (EC-Czech Republic-Republic of Poland-Slovak Republic) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [73153]

Mr. Jamieson: I have not been able to identify the Committee referred to by the hon. Member.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EC-Slovak Republic Joint Transport Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [73154]

Mr. Jamieson: This Committee is established under the provisions of an agreement between the European Community and the Slovak Republic establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the Committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the agreement. I am not aware that it has met in recent times or that there are any plans for it to meet in the future. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been—and would not in the future be—members of the Committee as the matters for which it has responsibility are reserved.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EC-Hungary Joint Transport Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [73158]

Mr. Jamieson: This Committee is established under the provisions of the Agreement of 12 July 2000 between the European Community and the Republic of Hungary establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the Committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the agreement. I am not aware that it has met since the conclusion of the Agreement or that there are any plans for it to meet in the future. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been—and would not in the future be—members of the Committee as the matters for which it has responsibility are reserved.

EU (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State when the EC-Czech Republic Joint Transport Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [73155]

Mr. Jamieson: This Committee is established under the provisions of an Agreement between the European Community and the Czech Republic establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the Committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the Agreement. I am not aware that it has met in recent times or that there are any plans for it to meet in the future. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been—and would not in the future be—members of the Committee as the matters for which it has responsibility are reserved.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EC-Poland Joint Transport Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [73159]

Mr. Jamieson: This Committee is established under the provisions of an Agreement between the European Community and Poland establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the Committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the agreement. I am not aware that it has met in recent times or that there are any plans for it to meet in the future. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been—and would not in the future be—members of the Committee as the matters for which it has responsibility are reserved.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 4 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 606–07W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances (SEVESO II); and if he will make a statement. [73168]

Mr. Jamieson: The Scottish Executive has not attended meetings of the EU Committee on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances (SEVESO II) since May 1999.

The mandate of the EU Committee on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances (SEVESO II) is to promote coherent implementation and consistent application of the provisions of the Seveso II Directive throughout the Community. This necessitates close co-operation of the competent authorities of all member states and the European Commission. The committee of competent authority meetings (CCA) provide such a forum. The CCA consists of representatives of the member states and the Commission services. It discusses all issues concerning the implementation of the Seveso II Directive and gives guidance as to their practical application.

The committee meets twice a year and is attended on behalf of the UK by representatives of the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency. Where appropriate officials from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Scottish Executive [illegible] other agencies may also attend.

In Great Britain a Competent Authority for the Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1999, which implements the Seveso Directive, has been established. This committee meets twice a year, and its meetings are attended by the Health and Safety Executive, the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency.

General Lighthouse Fund

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport under what terms the General Lighthouse Fund has lent money to operate holiday homes to Trinitas Services; what net rental proceeds have been remitted to the fund; and if he will make a statement. [72310]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The General Lighthouse Fund has made available to Trinitas Services Ltd. a loan facility up to £1 million for the refurbishment and marketing of the lighthouse cottages under a commercial contract with Rural Retreats Ltd. To date £440,000 has been drawn down against this loan facility.

The loan is repayable over 10 years and carries an interest rate of 5 per cent. starting after three years. Security is by a Deed of Charge over TSL's interest in each property. The lease provides for ground rents in addition to the interest on the loan. There is no direct rental income. A non executive director of Trinity House Lighthouse Service (THLS) has been appointed to the board of TSL as a nominee of the Lighthouse Service.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the General Lighthouse Fund report and accounts for the financial year 2001–02 will be published; and if he will make a statement. [72313]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* We expect to publish the General Lighthouse Fund report and accounts for the financial year 2001–02 in early 2003.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the lighthouse centres opened to visitors over the past two years; what the *(a)* capital costs, *(b)* revenue costs and *(c)* income of each of those centres has been in each of the last two years; and if he will make a statement. [72311]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The Northern Lighthouse Board has none of its lighthouses opened to visitors over the last two years other than by exceptional special arrangement. The board is currently negotiating with two local trusts one in south-west Scotland and the other in Orkney to reach agreement for regular public access to two lighthouses.

All of the Trinity House Lighthouse Service visitor centres are operated through third parties and not directly by the Lighthouse Service. The GLF benefits from an agreed share of the profits under each scheme and thus profits and costs are set out in the table.

£

Lighthouse	*Income*	*Capital cost*
2000–01		
Alderney	405	—
Flamborough	370	3,500
Lizard	5,616	3,000
North Foreland	472	2,474
Pendeen	797	2,807
Portland Bill	7,746	3,000
South Stack	3,364	26,721
Southwold	30	2,500
Start Point	894	3,307
	19,695	40,310
2001–02		
Alderney	466	—
Flamborough	643	—
Lizard	5,117	—
North Foreland	—	—
Pendeen	570	—
Portland Bill	595	—
South Stack	9,223	—
Southwold	5,963	2,965
Start Point	251	—
	1,781	—
	23,470	2,965

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investment has been made by the General Lighthouse Fund in the development of the 40 vacant houses owned by Trinity House to turn those dwellings into holiday lettings; and if he will make a statement. [72314]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The properties are ex lighthouse keepers' cottages and have been empty in recent years. In order to put them in a suitable material state for transferring to Trinitas Services Ltd. it was necessary to bring them up to modern building standards and comply with health and safety regulations. The cost is in the order of £500k which includes reinstatement of kitchens and bathrooms. This cost would have been similar if the cottages had been prepared for sale.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the value is of the General Lighthouse Fund's reserve fund; and if he will make a statement. [72312]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The General Lighthouse Fund is valued at £64 million as at 22 July 2002. This includes a reserve of £32 million to support pension arrangements.

The fund is maintained at a level to meet liabilities under Section 211 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, including expenditure on wreck removal, pensions and self insurance of assets.

Transport 10-year Plan

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a list of the 96 major local road and public transport schemes approved under the transport 10-year plan. [71609]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the lines included in the target given in his 10-year plan for an 80 per cent. increase in patronage on intercity lines, at paragraph 6.22, page 49; and if he will publish the relevant patronage levels for each of the last three years. [71566]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The 80 per cent. increase in patronage on intercity lines is an expected outcome over the period of the 10-year plan. There are six operators who run high-speed services between major towns and cities. These are listed in the table, which shows passenger kilometres for these operators over the last three years. These figures are included in the Strategic Rail Authority's annual report.

Passenger Kilometres

Million

Long distance operator	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
First Great Western	2,387	2,387	2,428
Great North Eastern Railways	3,931	3,910	3,768
Midland Mainline	1,070	1,091	1,134
Virgin CrossCounty	2,374	2,205	2,423
Virgin West Coast	3,398	3,322	3,177
Anglia	726	666	774

Note:

The Anglia figure includes both local as well as intercity services

Source:

SRA Annual Report

Passenger kilometres on long-distance operators fell by 8 per cent. following the Hatfield accident, down from 13.2 billion km in 1999–2000 to 12.1 billion km in 2000–01. This has been followed by a rise of 7 per cent. to 12.9 billion km in 2001–02. These figures are included in the Strategic Rail Authority's National Rail Trends publication, the most recent of which was published on 6 June, a copy of which is in the House Library.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library an updated copy of Table A3 from the 10-year transport plan *(a)* at outturn prices or *(b)* at today's prices. [72771]

Mr. Jamieson: A breakdown of revised 10-year plan spending will be published in the autumn as part of the first year report on the plan.

Public Service Agreement

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason the public service agreement target in respect of the national cycling strategy was removed in the 2002 Comprehensive Spending Review; and what impact he estimates the removal will have on the implementation of the strategy. [71736]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Although no target for cycling was included in either the 2000 or 2002 public service agreements, the target set out in the 10-year plan for Transport to treble the number of cycling trips from 2000 levels by 2010 remains in place, as does the strategy aimed at delivering it.

Mersey Passenger Transport Authority

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the extent to which his officials consult the Mersey Passenger Transport Authority on questions about the authority. [72155]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority is consulted from time to time in relation to aspects of Government business in which it may have an interest

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what information is held by her Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61829]

Yvette Cooper: Ministers and officials in this Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

The Department may also hold information in connection with applications for judicial appointments or Queen's Counsel and information that relates to court proceedings.

Any request to the Department for the disclosure of information relating to individuals are handled in accordance with the principles laid down in the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998.

EU Committees (Scottish Executive Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when the EU Committee on the service in the member state of judicial and extrajudicial documents and on co-operation between the courts of the member states in the taking of evidence in civil or commercial matters is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70926]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are two separate committees, one relating to the regulation on the service in the member states of judicial and extrajudicial documents and the other relating to the regulation on co-operation between the courts of the member states in the taking of evidence in civil and commercial matters. No meetings are scheduled for the former. The latter will not meet until after the regulation applies from 1 January 2004. It will meet only when it is necessary to review the standard forms in the annexe to the regulation. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in, discussions at official and Ministerial level, with the Lord Chancellor's Department on the formulation of EU policy which touches on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive. A representative of the Scottish Executive attended the one previous meeting of the former committee and a representative is likely to attend further meetings as well as any meetings of the latter committee.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the EU Committee on the jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and in matters of parental responsibility for children of both spouses and on the jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters (Brussels I and II) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70927]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Consideration of the draft 'Brussels I' and 'Brussels II' Regulations was concluded by the end of 2000 and both Regulations are now in force. The Scottish Executive was fully represented throughout. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved with discussions on the formulation of EU policy by the Lord Chancellor's Department which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for how long she retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on her Department's website. [72230]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My Department aims to be as helpful as possible in responding to hon. Members' questions. Where it is helpful to refer hon. Members to other documents as part of the substantive reply this may be done by making hard copies of documents available in the Libraries of the House, or by reference to material available on our Departmental website.

My Department aims to ensure that it follows guidance issued by the Office of the e-Envoy "Guidelines for UK Government Websites" and that records are kept for a period appropriate to their use.

The website does not have any local policies which go beyond the requirement set out in the e-Envoy's guidelines but aims to follow Departmental policy on record management, namely that policy documents are subject to first review after five years after the last-dated correspondence, and second review 25 years after first-dated correspondence.

Bonded Legal Assistance

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what plans she has to regulate and control solicitors and companies who provide bonded legal assistance; and what plans she has to review her policy on protection for parties to civil actions by bonds. [73360]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Solicitors and companies providing legal assistance are regulated by a range of bodies, including the Law Society, the Financial Services Authority and the General Insurance Standards Council. The possibility of further regulation is kept under review.

Parties to civil actions have a range of methods by which they may fund their litigation. These include public funding, conditional fee agreements, trade union support or the purchase of insurance against the risk of losing and paying costs. Bonds are not one of these methods, as far as the Government are aware.

Insurance cover is available to protect against the risk of losing and paying costs. The cost of the premium is dependent on the extent of cover, the complexity and type of case and any inherent risk. With effect from 1 April 2000 it has been possible to recover the premium from the losing party as an item of costs, subject to the normal rules of court. Where the court is called on to assess those costs the court will allow only such costs as are reasonable and proportionate.

Rape Trials

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will set up a Thematic inquiry into the way rape trials are dealt with by the judiciary; and if she will make a statement. [65209]

Yvette Cooper: The Lord Chancellor has no proposal to set up a Thematic inquiry into the way rape trials are dealt with by the judiciary. The conduct of a rape trial is a matter for the judge in the exercise of his or her judicial discretion.

To assist those who have to give evidence the Government will be introducing special measures for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses in the Crown court from today. These will be subject to judicial discretion but they will, for example, allow witnesses to give evidence over a live television link from outside the courtroom.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what procedure there is for removing the authorisation to judges to hear rape trials; and to whom the procedure is available; [70680]

(2) what authorisation is necessary before a court of appeal judge may hear rape appeals; [70681]

(3) who decides whether a judge ought to be authorised to hear rape trials; and how the decision is taken; [70689]

(4) whether there is outside inspection of judges' conduct before they are authorised to hear rape trials; [70690]

(5) if she will list the judges in the Court of Appeal who were authorised to hear rape trials when they were judges of first instance; [70818]

(6) if she will list the judges in the *(a)* High Court and *(b)* Crown Court who are authorised to hear rape trials. [70827]

Yvette Cooper: My noble and learned Friend, the Lord Chancellor, is concerned that only those Judges with the appropriate experience and sensitivity hear rape cases.

Section 75 of the Supreme Court Act 1981 states that the Lord Chief Justice, with the concurrence of the Lord Chancellor, can, by means of a practice direction, determine the cases or classes of cases suitable for allocation to High Court Judges, Circuit Judges and Recorders. From time to time successive Lord Chief Justices have issued such practice directions. In October 2001 the current Lord Chief Justice, Lord Woolf, issued a practice direction which, again, determined that all High Court Judges and those Circuit Judges and Recorders, approved for that purpose by the Senior Presiding Judge, with the concurrence of the Lord Chief Justice can hear rape cases.

In practice, primarily those High Court Judges assigned to the Queen's Bench Division hear rape cases. Authorisations of Circuit Judges and Recorders are sought by the Presiding Judge of each Circuit in consultation with the Resident Judge of the relevant Crown court. The Senior Presiding Judge then makes the decision on the basis that the Judge is suitable to try sensitive cases.

Those Judges selected for authorisation have to attend a Judicial Studies Board seminar on serious sexual offences before they are formally authorised. They also have to attend further seminars from time-to-time. The names of Circuit Judges currently authorised to hear rape cases are listed.

There is no "outside inspection" of a Judges' conduct prior to authorisation. If he thinks it appropriate, the Lord Chief Justice can remove an authorisation.

All 35 Judges of the Court of Appeal were formerly Justices of the High Court and could hear rape cases when they held that office. All Judges of the Court of Appeal can hear rape appeals without any further authorisation.

Midland circuit

His Honour Judge Alexander QC
His Honour Judge Appleby QC
His Honour Judge Dudley Bennett
His Honour Judge Richard Benson
His Honour Judge Brunning
Her Honour Judge Butler QC
His Honour Judge Cavell
His Honour Judge Chapman
His Honour Judge Paul Clark
His Honour Judge Marten Coates
His Honour Judge Richard Cole DL
His Honour Judge Corrie
His Honour Judge Eades
His Honour Judge Eccles QC
His Honour Judge Trevor Faber
Her Honour Judge Elizabeth Fisher
His Honour Judge Fletcher
His Honour Judge Geddes
His Honour Judge Griffith-Jones
His Honour Judge Julian Hall
His Honour Judge Simon Hammond
His Honour Judge Charles Harris QC
His Honour Judge Heath
Her Honour Judge Hindley QC
His Honour Judge Christopher Hodson
His Honour Judge Inglis
His Honour Judge Richard Jenkins
His Honour Judge Macduff QC
His Honour Judge Marshall
His Honour Judge Matthews
His Honour Judge Mayor QC
His Honour Judge McCarthy
His Honour Judge McCreath
His Honour Judge David McEvoy QC
His Honour Judge Metcalf
His Honour Judge Morrell
His Honour Judge Morris
His Honour Judge Mott
His Honour Judge Oliver-Jones QC
His Honour Judge Orme
His Honour Judge Orrell
His Honour Judge Perrett QC
His Honour Judge Pollard
His Honour Judge Pugsley
His Honour Judge Pyke
His Honour Judge Rubery
His Honour Judge Shand
His Honour Judge Stanley
His Honour Judge Michael Stokes QC
His Honour Judge Stretton
His Honour Judge Styler
His Honour Judge Alan Taylor
His Honour Judge Teare
His Honour Judge Tonking
His Honour Judge Wait
His Honour Judge Richard Wakerley QC
His Honour Judge Warner
His Honour Judge Wide QC

North eastern circuit

His Honour Judge Adams
His Honour Judge Armstrong
His Honour Judge Barber
His Honour Judge Barr-Young
His Honour Judge Bartfield
His Honour Judge Bentley QC
Her Honour Judge Bolton
His Honour Judge Bowers
His Honour Judge Briggs
His Honour Judge Bryant
His Honour Judge Bullimore
His Honour Judge Bush
Her Honour Judge Annabel Carr QC
His Honour Judge Carr
His Honour Judge Cartlidge
His Honour Judge Charlesworth
His Honour Judge Cockroft
His Honour Judge Crabtree
His Honour Judge Cracknell
Her Honour Judge Davies
His Honour Judge Dobkin
His Honour Judge Faulks QC
His Honour Judge Fox QC
His Honour Judge Goldsack
His Honour Judge Grant
His Honour Judge Grenfell
His Honour Judge Gullick
His Honour Judge Hawkesworth QC
His Honour Judge Heppel QC
His Honour Judge Hewitt
His Honour Judge Hodson
His Honour Judge Hoffman
His Honour Judge Norman Jones QC

His Honour Judge Kamil
His Honour Judge Keen QC
His Honour Judge Langan QC
His Honour Judge Lawler QC
His Honour Judge Lowden
His Honour Judge McCallum
His Honour Judge Mettyear
His Honour Judge Milford QC
His Honour Judge Murphy QC
His Honour Judge Reddihough
His Honour Judge Robertshaw
His Honour Judge Scott
His Honour Judge Spencer QC
His Honour Judge Shaun Spencer QC
His Honour Judge Spittle
His Honour Judge Stewart QC
Her Honour Judge Sutcliffe
His Honour Judge Michael Taylor
His Honour Judge Robert Taylor
His Honour Judge Walford
His Honour Judge Walton
His Honour Judge Whitburn QC
His Honour Judge Wolstenholme
His Honour Judge Wood

Northern circuit

His Honour Judge Appleton
His Honour Judge Atherton
Her Honour Judge Badley
His Honour Judge Stuart Baker
His Honour Judge Raymond Bennett
His Honour Judge Blake
His Honour Judge Boulton
His Honour Judge Mark Brown
His Honour Judge Robert Brown
His Honour Judge Burke QC
His Honour Judge Ian Campbell
His Honour Judge David Clarke QC
His Honour Judge Denis Clark
His Honour Judge Clifton
His Honour Judge Crompton
His Honour Judge Sir Rhys Davies QC
His Honour Judge Duckworth
His Honour Judge Duncan
His Honour Judge Ensor
His Honour Judge Fawcus
His Honour Judge Fish
His Honour Judge Geake
His Honour Judge George
His Honour Judge Gilmour QC
His Honour Judge Hammond
His Honour Judge Henshell
His Honour Judge Holloway
His Honour Judge Humphries
Her Honour Judge Kusher QC
His Honour Judge Lakin
His Honour Judge Lewis
His Honour Judge Lynch
His Honour Judge Lyon
His Honour Judge Maddison
His Honour Judge Mahon
His Honour Judge Morgan
His Honour Judge William Morris
His Honour Judge Mort
His Honour Judge Openshaw QC
His Honour Judge Phillips
His Honour Judge Phipps
His Honour Judge Roberts
Her Honour Judge Ruaux
His Honour Judge Singer
His Honour Judge Slinger
His Honour Judge Adrian Smith
His Honour Judge Peter Smith
Her Honour Judge Elizabeth Steel
His Honour Judge Steiger QC
His Honour Judge Swift
Her Honour Judge Watson
His Honour Judge Woodward

South eastern circuit

His Honour Judge Addison
His Honour Judge Ader
His Honour Judge Ansell
His Honour Judge Anthony
Her Honour Judge Anwyl QC
His Honour Judge Findlay Baker QC
His Honour Judge Balston
His Honour Judge Barham
His Honour Judge Barker QC
His Honour Judge Christopher Barnett QC
His Honour Judge Bassingthwaighte
His Honour Judge Bathurst-Norman
His Honour Judge Beaumont QC
His Honour Judge Beddard
His Honour Judge Binning
His Honour Judge Black
His Honour Judge Blacksell QC
His Honour Judge Boal QC
His Honour Judge Brown
His Honour Judge Bull QC DL

His Honour Judge Byers
His Honour Judge Campbell
His Honour Judge Carroll
His Honour Judge Clegg
His Honour Judge Coleman
His Honour Judge Colgan
His Honour Judge Collins
His Honour Judge Colston QC
His Honour Judge Coltart
His Honour Judge Jeremy Connor
His Honour Judge Roger Connor
His Honour Judge Coombe
His Honour Judge Copley
His Honour Judge Crocker
His Honour Judge Crawford QC
His Honour Judge Croft QC
His Honour Judge Curl
His Honour Judge De Mille
His Honour Judge Devaux
His Honour Judge Downes
His Honour Judge Dunn QC
His Honour Judge Ellis
His Honour Judge Elwen
His Honour Judge Fabyan Evans
His Honour Judge Fingret
His Honour Judge Focke QC
His Honour Judge Forrester
His Honour Judge Freedman
His Honour Judge Gerber
Her Honour Judge Goddard QC
His Honour Judge Goldstein
His Honour Judge Gordon
His Honour Judge Gosschalk
His Honour Judge Goymer
His Honour Judge Hardy
His Honour Judge Charles Harris QC
His Honour Judge Michael Harris
Her Honour Judge Hamilton QC
His Honour Judge Hawkesworth
His Honour Judge Hawkins QC
His Honour Judge Jonathan Haworth
His Honour Judge Richard Haworth
His Honour Judge Hayward
His Honour Judge Hitching
His Honour Judge Holt
His Honour Judge Hordern QC
His Honour Judge Hucker
His Honour Judge Hyam
His Honour Judge Inman
His Honour Judge Issard-Davies
His Honour Judge Jacobs
His Honour Judge Joseph
His Honour Judge Katkhuda
His Honour Judge Kemp
His Honour Judge Anthony King
His Honour Judge Lait
His Honour Judge Langdon
His Honour Judge Laurie
His Honour Judge Lawrence
His Honour Judge Lindsay QC
His Honour Judge Lockhart
His Honour Judge Lyons
His Honour Judge MacRae
His Honour Judge Maher
His Honour Judge Martineau
His Honour Judge McDowall
His Honour Judge Rodney McKinnon
His Honour Judge Warwick McKinnon
His Honour Judge Medawar QC
His Honour Judge Meier
His Honour Judge Mellor
His Honour Judge Mercer
His Honour Judge Fergus Mitchell
Her Honour Judge Agelica Mitchell
His Honour Judge Moss
Her Honour Judge Mowat
His Honour Judge Nash
His Honour Judge Norris OBE
His Honour Judge Paget QC
His Honour Judge Patience QC
Her Honour Judge Pearlman
His Honour Judge Pearson
His Honour Judge Philpot
His Honour Judge Pitman
His Honour Judge Pollock
His Honour Judge Pontius
His Honour Judge Pratt
His Honour Judge Radford
His Honour Judge Rant QC
His Honour Judge Reid QC
His Honour Judge Rivlin QC
His Honour Judge Robbins
His Honour Judge Roberts
His Honour Judge Jeremy Roberts QC
His Honour Judge Samuels QC
His Honour Judge Sanders
His Honour Judge Scott-Gall
His Honour Judge Sessions
His Honour Judge Simpson
His Honour Judge Simon Smith
His Honour Judge Colin Smith QC
Her Honour Judge Zoe Smith
His Honour Judge Spence
His Honour Judge Stephens QC
His Honour Judge Stokes QC
His Honour Judge Thomas
His Honour Judge Thorpe
His Honour Judge Thompson
His Honour Judge Tilling
His Honour Judge Tyrer
His Honour Judge van der Werff
His Honour Judge Wadsworth QC
His Honour Judge Walker
His Honour Judge Waller
His Honour Judge Webb
His Honour Judge Welchman
His Honour Judge Wilkie QC
His Honour Judge Wilkinson
His Honour Judge Winstanley

His Honour Judge Yelton

His Honour Judge Zucker QC

Wales and Chester circuit

His Honour Judge Burr

His Honour Judge Clarke

His Honour Judge Curran

His Honour Judge Daniel DL

His Honour Judge Diehl QC

His Honour Judge Denyer QC

His Honour Judge Dutton

His Honour Judge Elgan Edwards DL

His Honour Judge Gaskell

His Honour Judge David Hale

His Honour Judge Robert Hughes

His Honour Judge Merfyn Hughes QC

His Honour Judge Graham Jones

His Honour Judge Llewellyn Jones QC

His Honour Judge Wynn Morgan

His Honour Judge David Morris

His Honour Judge Christopher Morton

His Honour Judge Gerald Price QC

Her Honour Judge Eleri Rees

His Honour Judge Philip Richards

His Honour Judge Rogers QC

His Honour Judge Griffith Williams QC

Western circuit

His Honour Judge Beashel

His Honour Judge Boothman

His Honour Judge Brodrick

His Honour Judge Burford QC

His Honour Judge Bursell QC

His Honour Judge Cottle

His Honour Judge Crowther QC

His Honour Judge Cutler

His Honour Judge Darlow

His Honour Judge Darwall Smith

His Honour Judge David Smith QC

His Honour Judge Foley

His Honour Judge Gilbert QC

His Honour Judge Griffiths

His Honour Judge Griggs

Her Honour Judge Hagen

His Honour Judge Hooton

His Honour Judge Hughes QC

His Honour Judge Hutton

His Honour Judge Jarvis

His Honour Judge Jones

His Honour Judge Leigh QC

His Honour Judge Longbotham

His Honour Judge MacKean

His Honour Judge MacLaren Webster QC

His Honour Judge McKintosh

His Honour Judge McNaught

His Honour Judge Meston QC

His Honour Judge O'Malley DL

His Honour Judge Overend

His Honour Judge Price

His Honour Judge Pryor QC

His Honour Judge Roach

His Honour Judge Rucker

His Honour Judge Selwood

His Honour Judge Shawcross

His Honour Judge Taylor

His Honour Judge Thompson QC

His Honour Judge Ticehurst

His Honour Judge Wiggs.

Code of Practice on Access to Government Information

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she plans to publish the monitoring report for the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information covering the year 2001. [73441]

Yvette Cooper: I am pleased to inform hon. Members that the monitoring report for the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information for the year 2001 will be published in August. A pre-print copy of the report has been placed in the House Library and a copy is available on my Department's website.

Libra Project

Jim Knight: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the progress of discussions between the Lord Chancellor's Department and Fujitsu Services on the Libra project to provide IT services for the magistrates courts in England and Wales. [73445]

Yvette Cooper: There are two parts to the Libra project: the provision of a modern IT infrastructure and network to link the magistrates courts with other parts of the criminal justice system and the special software for case management, accounting and other administration within the courts. Installation of the infrastructure and network is 75 per cent. complete and will be completed during the first half of 2003. The specialised software has been delayed.

The Department has now signed a variation to the contract with Fujitsu Services (formerly known as ICL) in respect of the Libra project.

Under these new arrangements, Fujitsu Services will continue to deliver the IT infrastructure and network and provide support until March 2007.

However, the Department has decided that Fujitsu Services will not be required to continue with the development of the specialised software for case management, accounting and other administration. Serious concerns arose last year when delays in delivery of the software and increases in their costs led Fujitsu Services to seek to renegotiate the contract. As many courts and offices had already been equipped with the IT infrastructure, a basis for renegotiation was agreed.

Despite intensive negotiation however, it has not proved possible to reach an agreement on the specialised software at an acceptable price, which will deliver value for money for the taxpayer.

Instead, the Department will procure application services separately. Assessments show that robust, tried and tested software, is now available in the marketplace, which could meet requirements at a lower cost than that on offer from Fujitsu Services.

The original 1998 contract was valued at £183 million to run until July 2009. A variation to this was signed with Fujitsu/ICL in 2000, which was valued at £319 million and was to run until 2013. This was not a real price increase as the extra cost was for the extra years and other benefits. In each case the contract with Fujitsu Services was for the delivery of both the infrastructure and the specialised software.

The estimated value of the revised contract with Fujitsu Services is £232 million which includes some £31 million paid under the existing contract from 2000 to the end of June 2002 for the delivery and operation of the infrastructure services received by the magistrates courts. In addition, the Government have paid Fujitsu Services £6.8 million for design products produced as part of the software application development that can be reused. Apart from this amount, the financial and management risks of developing the software have been borne by the supplier.

A number of studies have been carried out by external organisations to provide assurances on the way forward, including a benchmark exercise on the infrastructure costs and an assessment of the costs, timescales and market capacity to deliver the software application services.

The benchmarking exercise shows that the cost of the provision of the infrastructure service in the revised contract is in line with the cost of similar services provided to organisations of similar size, structure and complexity in the private and public sectors. It is possible, but by no means certain, that a new competitive procurement could deliver the services for less cost, but the Department's assessment of the costs of delays and procurement and completing the implementation of the service to all courts shows that the revised contract provides best value for money to the taxpayer.

The studies on the software application services indicate that the services can be delivered by the end of 2004—a delay of nine months on the original 1998 contract—and at a price that will be affordable and provide value for money. The Department is planning on this basis. However, these services will be subject to new procurements and the House will be informed of the outcome when the procurements have been completed.

There are lessons to be learned for all parties from the project. Since the original award of contract a range of Government guidelines on managing IT contracts and on PFI/PPP contracts has been issued. These have been fully utilised in the recent negotiation. Improvements introduced on Libra in the last 12 months include strengthening of the governance arrangements, better risk management, the use of external benchmarking and an external review under the gateway process. This has provided more effective controls for the negotiations and future plans. The new arrangement separates the delivery of the infrastructure from the application which is designed to better ensure the success of the overall programme and at the same time place appropriate risk with the respective providers and the Department.

Asylum Seekers

Liz Blackman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the personal delivery of some appeal determinations to asylum seekers. [73102]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Under the Immigration and Asylum Appeals (Procedure) (Amendment) Rules 2001, the Home Secretary has been responsible since 7 January 2002 for the delivery of asylum appeal determinations to appellants who have no further rights of appeal within the Immigration Appellate Authorities (IAA). While the majority of these determinations have been served by post, some determinations have been deemed suitable for delivery in person either by a home visit or at a reporting centre.

A pilot scheme to test the effectiveness of personal delivery procedures commenced on 7 January in the areas covered by Croydon, East Midlands and Leeds Local Enforcement Units and more recently Eaton House (Heathrow). The primary focus of the pilot scheme has been to establish that the correct procedures are in place to ensure that determinations are delivered promptly and that asylum seekers have access to their legal representatives and to the courts.

The Home Office has set targets of 48 hours for posting determinations and six weeks for those being served personally. This allows the Home Office, where appropriate, to serve the determination at a time when the appellant attends a reporting centre, in line with any reporting conditions, or by home visit. Where the Home Office is unable to deliver the determination in person within six weeks, it is posted to the appellant.

The first evaluation of this pilot has now been completed and the results are as follows. Between 7 January and 31 May 2002 the average time taken to deliver a determination in person (including those delivered at reporting centres when a person attends for their regular appointment) has been 19 days. A copy of the determination has been forwarded to the appellant's representative within a maximum of two and a half hours of personal delivery. For those appellants who were removed by 31 May, the average time between delivery of the determination and removal has been 13 days and the minimum time was one day.

Failed asylum seekers who have been taken into detention or removed have been informed of their right to contact a legal representative and given reasonable opportunity to do so. Those wishing to apply for judicial review have had three working days in which to submit an application and a day in which to obtain the High Court reference number. During this time removal directions have been suspended.

Two such applications for judicial review were made between 7 January and 31 May. There have been no applications for a review (under rule 16 or 19 of the Immigration and Asylum (Procedure) Rules) by the Chief Adjudicator or President of the Tribunal respectively.

As of 31 May 2002, of the 76 determinations deemed suitable for personal delivery, 34 were successfully delivered in person and 24 people have been removed from the country.

The Home Office is now considering expanding the scheme in the light of the evaluation results.

Gibraltar

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Electoral Commission will be advised of the need to incorporate Gibraltar within a European Constituency in time for the next European Elections; and if he will make a statement. [67853]

Yvette Cooper: The Government intends to seek legislation at the next convenient opportunity to allow people of Gibraltar to vote in the next European parliamentary elections and to provide for the Electoral Commission to recommend of which regional constituency Gibraltar will form a part. Preliminary consultations with the Commission have begun.

Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what public consultations have been commenced by his Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72063]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The titles and closing dates of each of the written national public consultations commenced by the Lord Chancellor's Department since 1 April are listed.

Each national public consultation carried out by the Department is normally published on the Lord Chancellor's Department website at http://www.lcd.gov.uk/consult/confr.htm. However the third and fourth of these consultation papers were originally published online by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions at http://www.elections.dtlr.gov.uk/consult. Following the recent machinery of Government changes both of these papers now fall under the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor's Department. Arrangements are currently being made for their transfer onto the Lord Chancellor's Department website.

Title	*Closing date*
5) Selection procedures for the circuit bench and recordership	5 July 2002
6) Making Decisions: Helping people who have difficulty deciding for themselves	9 July 2002
7) Electoral Registers—Access, Supply and Sale—Regulatory Impact Assessment Questionnaire	13 June 2002
8) Electoral Registers—Access, Supply and Sale—Policy paper and draft regulations	13 June 2002

Anglo-Irish Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when and where Ministers in her Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72694]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I met the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform briefly in the margins of an Inter-governmental Conference on domestic violence entitled 'Raising the Standards', held in Dublin in December 2001. No other LCD Ministers have met Ministers or officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on what grounds a freedom of information request can be denied by the Government; and how many of these requests have been denied in the last five years, broken down by reason for denial. [70886]

Yvette Cooper: The right of access to information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 will come into force on 1 January 2005. Until that date, requests for Government information will be dealt with in accordance with the non-statutory Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Under the code, the approach to release of information should in all cases be based on the assumption that information should be released except where disclosure would not be in the public interest, as specified in Part II of the code. Part II of the code sets out categories of information that are exempt from the commitments to provide information under the code. These exemptions are listed in table 2.

Table 1 gives details of the numbers of requests under the code that were received and the number of code requests refused in the last five years for all of the bodies covered by the code. We do not have records of the reason for denial for each of the requests refused. However, if an applicant is dissatisfied with the response to their request they can ask the Department to review that decision internally. Table 2 sets out the number of times each exemption has been cited at this stage in the review process for the last five years. Monitoring reports on the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information are published annually and copies are available in the House Library.

Annex A

Table 1: Number of requests received and refused under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information

Year	*Number of requests received*	*Number of requests refused*
2001[1]	4,668	797
2000	5,969	1,072
1999	4,863	1,398
1998	23,754	1,745
1997	3,772	1,894

[1] The code monitoring report for 2001 has not yet been published.

Table 2: Number of exemptions cited at internal review of code of practice requests

	Number of times cited in					
Code exemption	*2001*[1]	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1994–2001*
1) Defence, security and international relations	4	5	4	3	0	21
2) Internal discussion and advice	18	11	10	7	11	72
3) Communication with the royal household	1	0	0	0	1	2
4) Law enforcement and legal proceedings	12	11	8	8	9	58
5) Immigration and nationality	0	6	0	2	0	9
6) Effective management of the economy and collection of tax	2	1	1	0	4	8
7) Effective management and operations of the public service	1	1	1	1	2	17
8) Public employment, public appointments and honours	0	3	4	1	3	14
9) Voluminous or vexatious requests	4	6	6	6	10	40
10) Publication and prematurity in relation to publication	3	3	4	0	3	13
11) Research, statistics and analysis	1	0	1	0	0	2
12) Privacy of an individual	6	9	3	5	2	30
13) Third party's commercial confidence	2	1	2	5	3	22
14) Information given in confidence	6	3	0	2	3	23
15) Statutory and other restrictions	7	2	0	0	2	13

[1] The code monitoring report for 2001 has not yet been published.

Thames Valley (Trials)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many trials in the Thames Valley Magistrates' Court area have been cancelled because of a shortage of legal advisers since November 2001. [71629]

Yvette Cooper: I am advised by the Thames MCC that they have not cancelled any trials, but that approximately 300 trials have been postponed; deferred or rescheduled because of a shortage of legal advisers.

To place this figure in context, the statistical returns from the Thames Valley Magistrates' Court Committee show that proceedings in 55,261 criminal and civil matters were concluded, in the Thames Valley Magistrates' Court Committee area, in the period October 2001 to March 2002.

Magistrates' Courts Committees

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what arrangements are being made to transfer civil servants from national to local employment in connection with the replacement of magistrates' courts committees. [70800]

Yvette Cooper: The Government said in the White Paper "Justice for All" (CM 5563) that it intends to legislate to integrate the management of the courts within a single national courts organisation to replace existing magistrates' courts committees and the Court Service. The new organisation will have local management boards operating within a national framework of standards. No arrangements are being made to transfer civil servants from national to local employment.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the performance targets that the Lord Chancellor's Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999–2002 and 2001–2004; and if he will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60474]

Yvette Cooper: The Lord Chancellor's Department performance targets are all set out in our Public Service Agreement and supported by our Service Delivery Agreement. The targets and our current progress against them is set out in the Lord Chancellor's Department's Departmental Report (Cm 5408), which was published recently.

The Court Service's performance targets are set by Ministers, and the Chief Executive reports directly to the Lord Chancellor. The current targets are set out in the following table.

We have three executive non-departmental public bodies.

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) came into being in April 2000. Its targets are set out each year in its corporate plan, which is approved by the Lord Chancellor and laid before the Houses of Parliament. The Commission's chair reports progress and achievements directly to the Lord Chancellor. The LSC also reports progress in its annual report; its first report was published in July 2001. The second annual report, published on 22 July, reports against the 2001–02 to 2003–04 corporate plan. In its annual report, the Commission also reports against four categories of business performance targets: applications processed; bills paid; correspondence, appeals and reviews of civil funding decisions. The Commission's second corporate plan, for the period 2002–03 to 2003–04, sets out its 54 performance targets. These are broken down into 24 Community Legal Service targets, 13 Criminal Defence Service targets and 17 targets on the work of the Commission. These are set out in the following list.

The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) has been in existence since April 2001 and will be publishing its first annual report later this year. CAFCASS's corporate plan for 2002–06, published earlier this year, includes the development of five key performance targets for use in the future. These are laid out in the following table.

The Information Commissioner sets her own performance targets which are set out in the Commissioner's annual reports, the latest of which was published in June 2002. These are laid out in the following table.

The Lord Chancellor's Department monitors achievement against the targets through the supply of quarterly reports by the Office of the Commissioner.

Court Service key performance indicators

		Target
KPI 1	The percentage improvement in the level of satisfaction to court and tribunal users	2 per cent. improvement on the current level of 79 per cent.
KPI 2	The percentage of civil cases heard within target (from allocation to track to hearing)	75 per cent.
KPI 3	The percentage of value recovered of enforceable warrants in the county court	76 pence in the pound
KPI 4	The percentage of public law Children A[illegible] cases dealt with in target (from commencement to final order)	70 per cent.
KPI 5	The percentage of defendants/appellants in the Crown court whose cases commence within target time	78 per cent.
KPI 6	The percentage of asylum appeals completed (through both the Immigration and Appellate Authority) within four months	65 per cent.
KPI 7	The percentage improvement in the European foundation for Quality Management Excellence Model score for the Court Service	10 per cent. improvement by March 2004

Legal Services Commission

CLS—Access to services: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

Commence Family Information and Advice Network pilots

Secure a year-on-year increase in the number of CLS Information Points.

Commence further telephone advice and specialist support service pilot contracts

Ensure that by April 2002 the CLS Directory of General and Specialist help services is confined to Quality Mark holders

Issue proposals for the allocation of resources under the replacement General Civil Contract

2003–04

Secure a year on year increase in the number of CLS information points.

CLS—Service quality: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

Implement the Specialist Quality Mark (April 2002)

Implement Quality Mark standards for the Bar (certifying 100 chambers), mediation and websites

Complete peer review pilot (January 2003)

Complete cost compliance audit of all contracted suppliers by March 2003, reducing the number of suppliers with a 'poor' rating

Complete pilot supplier development projects in central and east London and Birmingham (March 2003)

Establish whether targets can be set for numbers of minority ethnic firms with contracts by March 2003

Introduce remuneration policy changes:-

grants for training contracts

payment of registration fees for specialist and generalist panels

2003–04

To ensure that 95 per cent. of expenditure from the CLS Fund is on work carried out by quality assured suppliers by March 2004.

To increase the percentage of funding from Community Legal Service Fund and funding members of CLS partnerships going to CLS providers of legal services holding the Quality Mark.

CLS—Co-ordinate service and provision: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

75 per cent. of population covered by a CLS Partnerships strategic plan by March 2003.

Publish first report on the CLS Partnership performance indicators.

2003–04

Achieve 100 per cent. population coverage of CLS Partnerships in England and Wales by March 2004.

CLS—Value for money: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

Payments to suppliers by March 2003 not to exceed the value of claims by more than 2.5 per cent.

Make amendments to the General Civil Contract:

Simplifying the taking of sanctions against suppliers not complying with the contract.

Promoting value for money in not-for-profit agency contracts.

Bring 95 per cent. of new qualifying high cost cases under individual case contract.

Introduce and monitor value for money targets for social welfare law, legal help and non-family legal representation.

2003–04

Secure a year on year increase in the number of disputes resolved with funding from the CLS Fund through ADR including mediation.

By March 2004 reduce CLS cost inflation to 0.5 per cent. p.a. for:

the average cost of very high cost cases (civil and criminal).

the average cost per case of legal help in a) immigration, and b) all other work.

CDS—Access to services: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

LSC ensures access to quality assured criminal defence services:

Rota solicitors accept 80 per cent. of police station duty solicitor requests.

Police station duty solicitors to contact client within 45 minutes in 90 per cent. of cases.

100 per cent. coverage of magistrates' court sessions requiring a duty solicitor.

Introduce targeted remuneration policy changes:

pay for duty solicitor accreditation.

grants for training contracts.

2003–04

Ensure that by March 2004 90 per cent. of people in police stations requesting the service of a duty solicitor receive the service within 45 minutes.

Ensure by March 2004 100 per cent. access to a quality assured solicitor for people charged with criminal offences and meeting the interests of justice tests.

Ensure that by March 2004 all magistrates' courts are covered by the duty solicitor service.

Ensure that 95 per cent. of expenditure from the CDS Fund is on work carried out by quality assured suppliers by March 2004.

CDS—Value for money: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

Introduce new payment regime for police station duty solicitor claims (April 2002).

Extend the counsel graduated fee scheme in the Crown court to cover all cases with trials of up to 25 days in length.

Ensure payments to all suppliers under the General Criminal Contract do not exceed the sums billed by more than 5–10 per cent. during the year.

Complete cost compliance audits of all contracted suppliers by March 2003, reducing the number of suppliers receiving a 'poor' rating.

2003–04

Transfer accountability from the Court Service for legal aid in the Crown and Higher courts (April 2003).

By March 2004 reduce CDS cost inflation to 0.5 per cent. p.a. for:

the average cost of very high cost cases.

the average cost of all CDS representation (excluding very high cost cases).

CDS—Contribute to CJS Plan: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03 to 2003–04

Contribute to CJS strategic targets:

Reduce by 2004 the time from charge to disposal of defendants

Improve the standard by which the CJS meets the rights of defendants.

Improve the level of public confidence in the CJS by 2004, including that of ethnic minority communities.

LSC—Ensure sufficient asylum legal services: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

Reduce the volume of applications for asylum refused on grounds of non-compliance with application rules.

Reduce the number of adjournments of appeals before the adjudicators because of the lack of representation.

LSC—Ensure actions and decisions are justifiable to those affected: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

Put in place mechanisms to ensure equal opportunities are promoted by the Commission's priority decision making activities by 31 May 2002.

Develop and apply an organisational standard for consulting users and stakeholders, including those with special needs.

LSC—Quality and efficiency: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

Improve levels of supplier satisfaction with:

Telephone contact.

Correspondence handling.

Communication about important issues.

Consistency of decision making.

Improve the levels of consistency in:

Audit decision making.

Funding and bill assessment work.

Cash flow to suppliers.

Attain published customer service standards, including:

reduce the time files are held for audit.

providing prompt feedback on cost compliance audits so it is co-ordinated with the management audit or, where this is not possible, provided within 28 days of the completion of the file audit.

LSC—Developing people: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

Achieve improved staff satisfaction with:

How people are helped to understand their performance.

Reward.

Working environment.

Training and development opportunities.

Improve recruitment and selection—measured by the number of new staff who complete their probation period successfully.

Improve quality of personal objective setting.

Complete an independent verification of LSC's position within the labour market.

Ensure all staff have a personal development plan.

Deliver an average of nine days training per full time employee.

Put in place mechanisms to ensure equal opportunities are promoted for staff by May 2002.

LSC—Developing systems: Key objectives and performance targets

2002–03

Develop MI systems for:

Statutory charge.

Debtors.

Damages on deposit.

Complete supplier information and audit performance management system (Aug 2002).

Migrate the core business systems to a new IT platform (Jan 2003)

CAFCASS

KPI 1	Performance against CAFCASS National Standards. We will establish in 2002–03 performance benchmarks and targets for evaluation of service provision.
KPI 2	Satisfaction with CAFCASS services. We will establish in 2002–03 ways of measuring satisfaction of children, families and other stakeholders with the CAFCASS service.
KPI 3	Timeliness and quality of service to the courts. We will establish our performance baseline by the end of 2001–02 and in 2002–03 establish measures of timeliness and quality of the service provided to courts.
KPI 4	Value for money targets for service. We will undertake work in 2002–03 to establish measures of value for money.
KPI 5	Human Resources. We will establish in 2002–03 measure of performance, alongside development of the CAFCASS Human Resources Strategy.

Information Commissioner output measures and performance indicators

Output measure/Performance indicator	*Estimate and targets* *2002–03*	*2003–04*
Notification		
Number of weighted transactions processed	361,223	237,155
Number of weighted transactions processed per officer day	'82.61	'83.77
Assessment and complaints		
Total requests for assessment received	13,500	14,000
Complaints not investigated	—	—
Inquiries handled	6,548	6,790
No assessment made	945	980
Sub-total	7,493	7,770
Assessments completed	6,480	6,720
Complaints investigated and closed	120	120
Sub-total	6,600	6,840

Information Commissioner output measures and performance indicators

Output measure/Performance indicator	*Estimate and targets* 2002–03	2003–04
Contact with our customers		
Telephone inquiries received by the information line	57,000	57,000
Calls received per line hour	9.36	9.36
Data protection—public awareness		
Percentage of large data controllers aware of subjects' rights	85.0	86.0
Percentage of small data controllers aware of subjects' rights	60.0	62.0
Percentage of data subjects aware of own rights	42.0	42.0
Freedom of information—public awareness		
Among the public (percentage)	15.0	15.0
Within public authorities (percentage)	25.0	35.0

[1] Dependent on increased staffing to handle current level of telephone calls.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Steen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will reply to the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) transferred to her Department by the Department of Trade and Industry, refs., 67261 and 67262, before 24 July. [72520]

Yvette Cooper: Yes. They are being answered today.

Legal Services Commission

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when the Legal Services Commission's Land Charges Department will complete its project to cleanse the data held on its computer system. [71704]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Commission's project to produce accurate statutory charge statements has depended upon its Land Charges Department carrying out a number of data cleansing exercises. Those exercises, and the first stage of the project, are expected to be completed by the end of August 2002. The Commission will then carry out checks to ensure that no further data cleanse is required.

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training has been given to staff of the Legal Services Commission Land Charges Department to improve the accuracy of data inputting in relation to clients. [71705]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Steps have been taken to improve the knowledge and understanding of all staff within the Commission who deal with the statutory charge. A programme of two days' training for 160 staff including those within the land charge department has taken place. The training covered the nature of the charge; the circumstances in which it arises; how its value is determined; the conditions on which the Commission can postpone its enforcement; the technicalities of how the charge is secured by registration on land; and the rules on payment of interest where enforcement is postponed by registration on the client's home.

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Legal Services Commission will complete its project to enable its computer system to produce statements of amounts owed by each client with a charge secured by registration on their home. [71701]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission is in the final stages of testing the system for the production of statutory charge statements. If the testing proves successful the Commission intends to issue an initial 1,500 statements by the end of August 2002. The Commission will then review the impact before finalising a timetable for sending a statement to all the clients affected.

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Legal Services Commission's computer system will be able to provide an on-screen explanation of the change to the statutory charge for use by the Commission's caseworkers. [71703]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Subject to satisfactory completion of the final stages of testing, which are currently under way, the Commission will be able to provide an on-screen explanation of the changes to the statutory charge for use by its caseworkers by the end of August 2002, in parallel with the timetable for issuing the initial 1,500 statutory charge statements as detailed in my earlier answer today (question 71701).

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Legal Services Commission's computer system will produce statements on a rolling basis, annually from the date of first registration or when required. [71702]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission intends that all clients will receive a statutory charge statement by the end of August 2003. Statements will then be issued annually on a rolling basis on the anniversary of first registration of each charge and on request. Statements are issued manually on request at present.

Fines (Greater Manchester)

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the total fines imposed in each of the last three years for each magistrates court area in Greater Manchester; what percentage of fines was collected in each area in each year; what percentage of fines was written off in each year in each area and what progress is being made in improving the enforcement ratio. [70723]

Yvette Cooper: Magistrates courts committees have a responsibility for the collection of a range of debts imposed by the courts, including not only fines but also fees, compensation, confiscation orders, legal aid contributions and some maintenance orders. It is not possible to separate out just fines from the total.

The figures for the magistrates courts areas within Greater Manchester are contained in the table.

The Government are committed to improving the enforcement of financial penalties. Variations in performance across the country are too wide. We transferred lead responsibility for warrant execution from the police to magistrates courts committees (MCCs) on 1 April 2001, giving MCCs control over the whole enforcement process.

We have established an information sharing scheme, which enables magistrates courts to obtain basic information on defaulters from the Department for Work and Pensions. We have set performance targets for 2002–03 and magistrates courts committees have been given nearly £10 million extra from April 2002, ring-fenced for enforcement purposes. We will monitor the position carefully to check that performance improves.

Greater Manchester magistrates courts committee

	Imposed (£)	*Percentage paid*	*Percentage amount written off*
April 1999-March 2000			
Trafford	4,728,186	24	9
Tameside	1,861,182	57	13
Stockport	2,227,346	49	[1]—
Oldham	1,106,743	101	57
North and West Manchester (includes Rochdale, Wigan, Leigh and Bury)	10,727,563	60	23
Manchester	6,035,529	49	36
April 2000-March 2001			
Trafford	3,951,052	33	35
Tameside	1,776,096	54	22
Stockport	1,558,011	89	35
Oldham	1,063,770	114	50
North and West Manchester (includes Rochdale, Wigan, Leigh and Bury)	9,921,380	63	30
Manchester	6,700,253	52	35
April 2001-March 2002			
Trafford	4,302,658	28	6
Tameside	1,334,217	71	30
Stockport	1,381,183	92	30
Oldham	1,028,870	106	46
Salford	931,028	123	52
Bolton	1,448,566	97	18
Wigan (includes Bury, Leigh and Rochdale)	6,329,356	54	21
Manchester	6,278,014	52	40

[1] Date not available

Following the amalgamation in April 2001 there was a change of areas making up Greater Manchester magistrates court committee.

Please note that information regarding debt is calculated over a rolling year and that the percentages paid and written off in each area could also include amounts that were imposed in previous years. This is why the amount recorded as paid in any one year can exceed the amount imposed.

Life-Prolonging Treatment

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the draft guidance to doctors "Withholding and Withdrawing Life-Prolonging Treatments: Good Practice in Decision Making", in particular the recommendation that a junior doctor be removed from the care of a patient should they have a conscientious objection to ending a patient's life by withholding fluids. [67211]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It is not appropriate for me to make a statement on the draft guidance "Withholding and Withdrawing Life-Prolonging Treatments: Good Practice in Decision-Making" which has been recently issued by the General Medical Council. My officials are currently considering this guidance and in the meantime, I would welcome the comments of the General Medical Council on the Government's current consultation paper "Making Decisions: Helping People who have Difficulty in Deciding for Themselves".

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department with reference to consultation on "Making decisions: helping people who have difficulty in deciding for themselves", what legal advice is available to patients faced by a doctor's decision to withhold food or fluid. [70171]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The current legal position, and the advice available, is set out in the consultation paper referred to by my hon. Friend. Usually agreement can be reached between health care professionals, the patient and people close to the patient about the best treatment and whether treatment should be continued. Artificial hydration and nutrition can only be withdrawn if that is clearly in the patient's wishes or, in circumstances where the patient is unable to give consent, if receiving it is no longer in his or her best interests. Where the patient is in a persistent vegetative state, authorisation must also be sought from the court. If there is doubt in a particular case, the court may be asked to decide what is in the patient's best interests. In such cases, where the patient lacks capacity to be able to instruct his or her own solicitors, the Official Solicitor will be appointed to act on the patient's behalf.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether it has been assumed that ending the life of a patient on grounds of poor quality is standard practice in her consultation on "Withholding and Withdrawing Life-Prolonging Treatments: Good

Practice in Decision Making"; and for what reason those consulted have not been asked for their opinions on this. [67210]

Ms Rosie Winterton: "Withholding and Withdrawing Life-Prolonging Treatments: Good Practice in Decision Making" has recently been produced by the General Medical Council, not by my Department. My Department is however consulting on guidance explaining mental incapacity issues in "Making Decisions: Helping People who have Difficulty Deciding for Themselves". This consultation paper reflects our view that decision-making relating to withdrawal of medical treatment which may lead to the death of a patient is a most sensitive area of medical practice and must be carried out according to strict guidelines and procedures. The draft guidance contained in my Department's consultation paper refers readers to guidance produced by the British Medical Association and by the General Medical Council which assist in promoting high-quality decision-making in this difficult area. The Government welcome responses on all issues addressed in the consultation paper and these will be thoroughly considered and will inform the guidance leaflets when they are published later this year.

Trials

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of trials were ineffective in each of the last three years. [71645]

Yvette Cooper: A criminal trial is deemed as being ineffective when, for some reason, it cannot proceed on the day it has been listed for hearing and has to be re-listed at a later date. Figures relating to the proportion of ineffective criminal trials in the Crown court are set out in the table. This information is not available for the magistrates courts. Data on ineffective cases in the magistrates courts did not start to be collected on a national basis (England and Wales) until April of this year. The first quarterly figures should be available in September 2002.

	Total cases listed for trial	*Total ineffective trials*	*Proportion of ineffective trials (%)*
1999	50,791	12,444	24.5
2000	51,510	12,468	24.2
2001	52,338	12,612	24.1

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will place in the Library copies of each version of the guidance distributed to officials to advise them on how to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. [72622]

Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon, North (Mr. Wills), gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe), on 25 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 446W.

Judges' Lodgings

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action has been taken since the publication of Lord Justice Auld's report to assess the value for money provided by individual judges' lodgings; and what action will be taken in respect of judges' lodgings assessed not to provide value for money in line with the recommendation of the Auld report. [72810]

Yvette Cooper: The overall value for money and cost effectiveness of the Lodgings network is under continual review and has been so since the publication of Lord Justice Auld's report.

In terms of the general administrative efficiencies, of which the hon. Member is already aware, a general cost reduction of approximately £300k p.a. across the network had been expected. The estimate is now that this will rise as far as £400k p.a. These efficiencies include discontinuing the use of the Lodgings at Mold.

As the hon. Member will be aware the Government's White Paper "Justice For All" has now been published which sets out legislative proposals to modernise the criminal justice system. There are many issues connected to the White Paper, including Judges' Lodgings, which are under active consideration. When we have determined the way forward on Lodgings, I will write to the hon. Member with details.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average cost was of running judges' lodgings per night of accommodation provided in the financial year 2001–02. [72808]

Yvette Cooper: The figures for the financial year 2001–02 are not currently available, but I will write to the hon. Member with the figures as soon as they are.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the *(a)* units of residential accommodation owned or rented by his Department for occupation by judges on circuit, *(b)* accumulative capital value of the same when last valued, *(c)* the running costs of maintaining the same for the financial years (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02 and *(d)* the number of judges accommodated in the same for each of the above years and the number of nights they were so accommodated. [72809]

Yvette Cooper: A list of the units of residential accommodation owned or rented by the Lord Chancellor's Department for occupation by judges on circuit was supplied in the reply to the hon. Member's question 02/407 on 29 November 2001. The only change to this list is in respect of the Lodgings at Mold, use of which, as the hon. Member is already aware, has been discontinued.

The capital value of the freehold lodging estate was £12.97 million as at September 2001.

The cost of running the judges' lodgings for the year 2000–01 was:

Total cost—£5.616 million

Cost of lodgings (excluding the Treasury capital charge payable on all freehold properties)—£4.814 million.

Costs solely attributable to judicial occupation—£2.244 million.

The figures for the year 2001–02 are currently not available. Similarly it has not proved possible in the time provided to collate the judicial occupancy statistics requested. I will therefore write to the hon. Member with this information in due course.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average cost was of running judges' lodgings per judge accommodated at each of the individual lodgings in the lodging estate for the financial year 2001–02. [72807]

Yvette Cooper: The figures for the financial year 2001–02 are not currently available, but I will write to the hon. Member with the figures as soon as they are.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average cost was of running judges' lodgings per judge accommodated in financial years *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [72811]

Yvette Cooper: The average cost of running judges' lodgings per judge accommodated for the financial year 2000–01 is set out in the table on three bases:

£

	Cost per judge accommodated
Total Cost of Lodgings	
2000–01	61, 047
Cost of lodgings[1]	
2000–01	52,326
Costs soley attributable to judicial occupation	
2000–01	24,676

[1] Excluding the Treasury capital charge payable on all freehold properties

The figures for 2001–02 are not currently available, but I will write to the hon. Member with them as soon as they are.

Magistrates Courts

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will make a statement on the implications of the criminal justice White Paper for her plans for magistrates court closures. [72219]

Yvette Cooper: The Government said in the White Paper, "Justice for All" (CM 5563), that it intends to legislate to integrate the management of the courts within a single courts organisation to replace existing magistrates courts committees and the Court Service.

The Government believe that an integrated system will support its aim of providing the widest possible network of viable local venues, keeping the delivery of justice local.

Referendums

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what her responsibilities are for the organisation of referendums. [60314]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The former responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for policy on referendums have been transferred to the Lord Chancellor. The procedures for the organisation of referendums are set out in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

Goodwin and I *v.* UK

Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how much public money has been spent fighting the case of Goodwin and I *v.* UK. [63971]

Mr. McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

The costs involved are spread across several Departments over a number of years and are available only at disproportionate cost. Counsels' fees are commercially confidential.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mali

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the fairness of the recent parliamentary elections in Mali. [70874]

Mr. MacShane: The first round of parliamentary elections in Mali was on 14 July. The second is due on 28 July. Turnout for the first round was low, at under 20 per cent. However the Malian Government has worked hard to overcome some of the problems experienced in the presidential elections earlier this year. The elections are being observed by a number of Malian NGOs, who will not release their assessments of the elections until after the second round. Our Embassy in Bamako is also monitoring the elections closely.

Liberia

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to bring all sides in Liberia's civil war to peace negotiations; and if he will make a statement. [72173]

Mr. MacShane: We are concerned about the fighting in Liberia. Our Embassy in Abidjan regularly presses the Government of Liberia to end the fighting. In meetings of Security Council members we have urged all parties to the conflict to begin ceasefire negotiations. We have called on all states to stop supporting armed groups in Liberia. We believe that providing military assistance to any armed group in Liberia would be a breach of Un sanctions against Liberia (as renewed by UN Security Council Resolution 1408 on 6 May 2002). We support the efforts of the various regional and local initiatives under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States, King Mohammed of Morocco, the Liberian Leadership Forum and the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia, to find a solution to the conflict in Liberia. A Security Council Workshop on the Mano River Union (Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea), which was held on our initiative and chaired by my noble Friend Baroness Amos on 18 July, identified the need for greater co-ordination between these initiatives. We also provide political and diplomatic support to the EU presidency representative to the Mano River Union.

Central African Republic

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the relationship between the Central African Republic and its neighbouring countries. [70879]

Mr. MacShane: The relationship between the Central African Republic (CAR) and its neighbours is linked to political and social tensions within the country. There was an attempted coup in May 2001 and fighting in November, and serious economic difficulties continue.

Relations with Chad deteriorated late last year when President Deby granted political asylum to General Bozize, former Chief of Staff of the CAR armed forces, allegedly implicated in the May 2001 coup attempt. There was fighting in the border area, but the two governments are now working to reduce tension.

Relations with the Government of DRC are minimal, but the border area is under the control of DRC rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba. CAR's relations with Bemba were reportedly strained because the CAR Government believed that he had supported the May 2001 coup attempt; and exacerbated when 23,000 civilians and 1,250 soldiers fled to DRC. Most refugees have now returned with the opening of dialogue between the Government of CAR and their political opposition.

Sudan and CAR currently enjoy good relations. The Sudanese were the first to respond to President Patasse's request for a peacekeeping force following the coup attempt in May 2001.

Cameroon and CAR also enjoy good relations. Negotiations are in train on border delineation and the free movement of goods.

We are not aware of any significant problems in relations between CAR and the Republic of Congo.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had and what representations *(a)* he has made and *(b)* plans to make on the moving of international sporting events from Zimbabwe, as part of his policy on sanctions against Mr. Mugabe. [72627]

Mr. MacShane: It is for the relevant sporting bodies to decide whether Zimbabwe is a suitable venue for international events in the light of the security, political and humanitarian situation in that country. The FCO travel advice highlights our concerns about political and social unrest and violence in Zimbabwe.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was discussed at the meeting with Foreign Minister Mudenge on 10 November 2001; and what the conclusions were from that meeting. [72301]

Mr. MacShane: During the meeting my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary expressed concern at Zimbabwe's failure to honour commitments made at the commonwealth ministerial meeting in Abuja in September 2001. There were no conclusions recorded from the meeting.

Sierra Leone

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the appeal of the UN Security Council President for additional funding for peace building support in Sierra Leone. [70877]

Mr. MacShane: With the assistance of the United Nations, regional countries and the UK, Sierre Leone is emerging from over a decade of civil war and destruction. President Kabbah has appointed a new government following peaceful elections in May. The focus is now moving from conflict resolution to development. The challenges facing the new government have been identified by the UN to include security, reintegration, governance/corruption, poverty reduction and human right/reconciliation. The UK remains strongly committed to helping rebuild Sierra Leone. My noble Friend the Baroness Amos chaired a meeting of the Security Council on 18 July, which considered how best the international community could continue to engage in Sierra Leone and reduce conflict in the Mano River Union.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that the international community continues to protect the peace process in Sierra Leone; and if he will make a statement. [72176]

Mr. MacShane: Ending the conflict in Sierra Leone after more than a decade of brutal civil war and destruction is a remarkable achievement. It comes as a result of the sustained engagement and commitment of the international community, particularly the United Nations, the UK and regional leaders. But the peace will remain fragile as long as many of the root causes of the war are not resolved. This is why it is so important for the international community to continue to support the efforts of the new Government of Sierra Leone, formed by President Kabbah after his re-election in May.

We expect to spend some £100 million in Sierra Leone related activities in 2002–03, including £36 million in assessed contributions to the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). We continue to urge other donors to come forward and help us provide the support needed by the Government of Sierra Leone to meet the many challenges ahead in consolidating the peace and rebuilding the country and the lives of its citizens.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received concerning divisions between Sierra Leone's army and the Sierra Leone People's party; and if he will make a statement. [72177]

Mr. MacShane: None. The army is accountable to the democratic Government of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the threat posed to peace and stability in Sierra Leone by *(a)* President Charles Taylor of Liberia and *(b)* Revolutionary United Front insurgents and Kamajor militia inside Liberia. [72174]

Mr. MacShane: The role of President Taylor in destabilising Sierra Leone and prolonging the war there through his support for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels has been well documented in the reports of the UN Expert Panel on Liberia. Although the conflict in Sierra Leone has now ended and UN sanctions against Liberia have disrupted President Taylor's links with the RUF rebels, we believe that Taylor still has links with the RUF and harbours intentions to cause renewed instability in Sierra Leone.

One of the risks to stability in Sierra Leone is that the fighting in Liberia could spill into Sierra Leone. There are reports of RUF fighters fighting on President Taylor's behalf in Liberia, and of Kamajor (or Civil Defence Force) fighters from Sierra Leone fighting for the Liberian dissident group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). To ensure that our large commitment to restoring peace to Sierra Leone is not wasted, we will monitor closely the threats posed by President Taylor, RUF fighters in Liberia, incursions by armed groups from Liberia and flows of deserters and refugees.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has collated concerning the fairness of the May electoral process in Sierra Leone; and in particular the levels of fraud and coercion; and if he will make a statement. [72181]

Mr. MacShane: The legislative and presidential elections held simultaneously in May 2002 were free from violence and generally credible. Eminent international observers representing the EU, the Commonwealth, the OAU and ECOWAS, and the Carter Foundation noted that, while the elections were not flawless, the overall results reflected the will of the overwhelming majority of ordinary Sierra Leoneans.

The success of the elections was a remarkable achievement for a country just emerging from over a decade of war and destruction, and is further evidence of the international community's commitment to resolving conflict and bringing peace to Sierra Leone. Despite Opposition concerns over the conduct of the elections, they have decided to accept the results in the interests of moving the country forward. We have reiterated to President Kabbah our continued support to his efforts to consolidate the peace, improve governance and bring prosperity to Sierra Leone for the benefit of all Sierra Leoneans.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs until when the UN Mission and the British military and police training teams are scheduled to remain in Sierra Leone; and if he will make a statement. [72180]

Mr. MacShane: The end of the conflict in Sierra Leone does not mean that sustainable peace has been achieved. Consolidating the peace will require the continued engagement of the international community for the foreseeable future.

It is right therefore that the UN Secretary-General re-examine the role and composition of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). As a member of the UN Security Council and a key player in the Sierra Leone peace process, we are taking part in the discussion of UNAMSIL's future. We support the Secretary-General's intention to consider a phased drawdown according to timings yet to be agreed, taking into account the vital role UNAMSIL continues to play in maintaining peace in Sierra Leone.

In December 2001, we announced our intention to re-configure our military presence in Sierra Leone. From the end of July, we will focus our military engagement there on a contribution of about 100 troops leading the International Military Advisory Training Team, which over the next three years, and possible thereafter, will be responsible for taking forward training for the new Sierra Leone army. A police project was designed for implementation over a period of three to five years, commencing December 2000. A review of the project has recently been completed, seeking to ensure that the police are able to fulfil their responsibilities for providing internal security by the time that UN troops withdraw.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to seek to ensure that Revolutionary United Front insurgents and Kamajor militias inside Liberia will not be a threat to peace and stability in Sierra Leone; and if he will make a statement. [72175]

Mr. MacShane: We take very seriously the threat posed by Liberia to peace in Sierra Leone. We have worked with the Government of Sierra Leone to ensure that the new Republic of Sierra Leone armed forces (largely trained by the UK) are deployed in strength on the Liberian border and regularly patrol the border. Some UK military advisers are deployed alongside these Sierra Leonean units. We have also encouraged the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, to maintain regular patrolling of the border areas. Sierra Leonean armed forces and UNAMSIL have successfully intercepted armed groups crossing from Liberia into Sierra Leone. We played a leading role in securing the renewal of UN sanctions against Liberia in May. These sanctions, which include an arms embargo, a ban on the export of diamonds and a travel ban on President Taylor and his associates, continue to put pressure on President Taylor to break his links with the RUF rebels and restrict his ability to procure arms and destabilise Sierra Leone. We have made it clear to the Government of Sierra Leone and the Government of Guinea that they should take steps to prevent the recruitment of fighters, including from the Civil Defence Force and Kamajors, for the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) within their countries. But Sierra Leone's stability will be threatened for as long as there is fighting in Liberia. We are supporting international and regional moves to promote a ceasefire in Liberia.

G8 Summit

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what plans there are for taking forward the commitments made at the G8 summit to support African efforts to consolidate peace in *(a)* Angola and *(b)* Sierra Leone; [69469]

(2) what plans there are for taking forward the commitments made at the G8 Summit to support African efforts to resolve conflict in *(a)* the Democratic Republic of Congo and *(b)* the Sudan. [69468]

Mr. MacShane: In the Africa Action Plan, adopted at Kananaskis in June, G8 leaders committed themselves to providing additional support to efforts to bring peace to the DRC and Sudan, and to consolidate peace in Angola and Sierra Leone within the next year. The Africa Action Plan is a welcome basis for increased effort and greater co-ordination with other countries involved in providing political and financial support.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the G8 will take forward discussions relating to war economies. [69471]

Mr. MacShane: In the Africa Action Plan, adopted at Kananaskis in June, G8 leaders committed themselves to working with African governments, civil society and others to address the linkage between armed conflict and the exploitation of natural resources. A number of multilateral initiatives are already underway, for example the Kimberley Process which attempts to limit the trade in conflict diamonds, and the UN expert panels working on resource exploitation in DR Congo and Liberia. In the coming months the UK will also be seeking greater and more effective dialogue between G8 countries and the private sector on ensuring better accountability and greater transparency, and on promoting the adoption of voluntary principles of corporate social responsibility by companies involved in developing Africa's economic resources.

Kashmir

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with *(a)* the Governments of India and Pakistan, *(b)* other Governments and *(c)* international agencies with regard to seeking a resolution to the continuing violence in Kashmir. [71727]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited India and Pakistan on 19–20 July, and had discussions with the governments of both countries on the subject of Kashmir. He welcomed the recent lowering of tensions between the two countries, but encouraged both to continue to take steps to continue the de-escalatory process. He reminded both governments that in the longer term, only full dialogue on all outstanding isssues, including Kashmir, will pave the way for lasting solutions.

Although this is a bilateral dispute, it has potent international implications. We have been active in working with our international partners, including through the EU, the G8 and the UN, to encourage India and Pakistan to find ways to return to productive dialogue.

Entry Clearance

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the opening hours of the entry clearance posts in *(a)* Islamabad, *(b)* Lahore, *(c)* Mumbai and *(d)* New Delhi are; and how many applications were made for visitors' visas in those centres on 15 July. [71589]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our office in Mumbai is open Monday to Friday between 0800 and 1130 for personal callers and 0900 to 1200 for the drop box. They received 275 visitor applications on 15 July.

New Delhi is open Monday to Friday between 0800 and 1200. They received 433 visitor applications on 15 July.

Due to the security situation in Islamabad the visa section is not open to personal callers. A restricted service is being provided, with applications delivered by a local courier service. On the 15 July Islamabad received 483 applications.

The visa issuing office in Lahore has been closed; a future service there will be dependent on identifying a new property which can be made suitably secure.

We are working to resume a fuller visa service in Pakistan as soon as the security situation allows.

Visa Facilities

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will meet the hon. Member for Leicester East and other hon. Members to discuss the reduced visa facilities, in New Delhi, Mumbai, Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore. [73051]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 23 July *Official Report,* column 887W.

Iran

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he had collated on how many executions there were on average in Iran each month in each year since 1997 and 2002 to date; how many women and men have been stoned to death since President Khatami came to power; and how many women and men have been punished by flogging in the same period; and what estimate he has made of the impact of his representations on these matters to the Government of Iran in the last 10 months. [72171]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Precise figures are not available. But drawing on press reporting, information from NGOs and from the annual reports of the UN Special Representative for Human Rights in Iran, we estimate that:

(a) there were at least 199 executions in 1997, 155 in 1998, 165 in 1999, 130 in 2000 and 139 in 2001. There were at least 49 up to the end of May this year;

(b) three men and three women were stoned to death in 1997 and two, possibly three, women in 2001. We have heard of three sentences against women in 2002, but we do not yet know whether they have been carried out;

(c) we have no figures for floggings in 1997 or 1998 but are aware of at least 360 between 1999 and the end of 2001.

The British Government opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and urges all states to abolish the death penalty. Debate on such issues is growing in Iran and we and EU partners continue to make clear our views to the Iranian Government at every suitable opportunity.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Iran on the discrimination against women set out in child custody laws reported on by the UN special representative for Human Rights in Iran in the report to the UN Human Rights Commission earlier this year. [72170]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have not made any specific representations on this subject. But the UK plays a leading role in promoting and protecting the rights of women. The most recent UN Commission on Human Rights Resolution on Human Rights in Iran, which the UK co-sponsored as a member of the EU, noted "systematic discrimination against women and girls in law and in practice". It called upon the Government of Iran to "take further measures to ensure full and equal enjoyment by women and girls of their human rights". We will continue to monitor developments in this area.

East Timor

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 310W, on East Timor, if he has congratulated the Government of Indonesia on their President's visit to East Timor to take part in the Independence Day celebrations on 20 May 2002; and what representations he made about the warships which accompanied the President. [72573]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We welcomed President Megawati's decision to attend the independence celebrations in East Timor. This was an important signal of Indonesia's commitment to developing a strong bilateral relationship with an independent East Timor.

The British Embassy in Dili kept in close contact with the East Timorese Foreign Minister who took a pragmatic and measured response to the Indonesian warships entering their waters as part of the protection for the President's visit.

Cayman Islands (Human Rights)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal challenges he has received to the application of the Human Rights Act 1998 in the Cayman Islands. [72162]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* None. The Human Rights Act 1998 has not been extended to the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal challenges he has received in respect of application of the European Convention on Human Rights in the Cayman Islands, effective under clause 53(1) of the Human Rights Act 1998. [72163]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* None. The Cayman Islands has accepted the extension by the UK of the European Convention on Human Rights to the Cayman Islands, but not the right of individual petition.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 175W, on overseas territories, if he will list those overseas territories with whom Her Majesty's Government are in consultation about refining and improving their statistical returns. [72309]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) today (UIN71571).

EU Committees

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's representation on the European Union's Economic and Social Committee. [73497]

Peter Hain: The Government has submitted to the Council Secretariat details of the United Kingdom's twenty-four nominees for membership of the Economic and Social Committee, along with twenty-four reserve nominees.

Nominees	
Group I	
Bryan Cassidy	Consultant
David Sears	Former Deputy Director General, British Chamber of Commerce
Ben Butters	Director, Small Business/Europe
Donna St. Hill	International Consultant
Sheila Ritchie	Solicitor
Brenda King	Chair, African and Caribbean Finance Forum
Robert Baird	Economist
Clive Wilkinson	Consultant, Gin and Vodka Association
Group II	
David Feickart	TUC European Officer
Sir Ken Jackson	AMICUS
Alison Shepherd	Vice President, UNISON
Monica Taylor	Transport and General Workers' Union
Judy McKnight	General Secretary, NAPO
Derek Hunter	Regional Secretary GMB Southern Region
Sandy Boyle	Deputy General Secretary, UNIFI
Brian Curtis	RMT Regional Organiser

Nominees	
Group III	
Ann Davison	Executive Director, European Research into Consumer Affairs
Rose D'Sa	Law Professor, University of Glamorgan
Sukhdev Sharma	Former Chief Executive, Commission for Racial Equality
Richard Adams	Fairtrade Foundation
John Simpson	Consultant Economist
Madi Sharma	Managing Director
Maureen O'Neil	Director, Age Concern, Scotland
Claire Whitten	Executive Director, Northern Ireland Centre in Europe
The reserve nominees are:	
Group I	
Len Collinson	Management Consultant
Brendan Burns	Company Director, Burns, Burns and Burns
Kathleen Secker	City College Norwich
William McKee	DG British Property Federation
Brian Prime	Federation of Small Businesses
Brian Rostron	Director General, Confederation of UK Coal Producers
Edmund Tucker	Consultant, Scotch Whiskey Association
Gary Parker	Forum for Private Business
Group II	
Nicholas Clark	Policy Officer, GPMU
Andrew Baird	Regional Secretary (Scotland) Transport and General Workers Union
Danny Carrigan	National Officer, AMICUS
Jim McCusker	NIPSA
Peter Bunting	Assistant Secretary, Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Patrick Carragher	General Secretary, British Association of Colliery Management
Tom Leney	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
Anne Middleton	STUC
Group III	
Bill Ure	Secretary, Rail Passengers Committee Scotland
Hamish Morrison	Chief Executive, Scottish Fishermen's Association
Laura Hayes	Director, Management Development and Coaching Programmes
Jane McKay	Glasgow Trades Union Council
Barbara Kelly	Former Chair, Scottish Consumer Council
Rita Rees	Brain Injured and Families European Confederation
Naomi Sargant	Visiting Professor, The Open University
Shahwar Sadeque	Former Commissioner for Racial Equality

European Bodies

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the proposed percentage increase in staff following the forthcoming enlargement to the *(a)* Commission, *(b)* Council of Ministers, *(c)* Court of Justice and *(d)* European Parliament in relation to the percentage of the population of the respective applicant counties; and if he will make a statement. [72232]

Peter Hain: The Government accept that enlargement requires additional staff in the EU institutions, and will continue to scrutinise proposals from the institutions closely.

The Government reiterate the importance of keeping to the financial agreement reached at Berlin as well as to the timetable for enlargement agreed at Gothenburg and Laeken. The UK will work to ensure the necessary human resources are made available to make enlargement a success—but believe this is achievable within the agreed budgetary ceilings. The Government note the proposal for a Standing Committee debate as proposed by the European Scrutiny Committee.

Enron

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the reviews by the Turks and Caicos Islands and Cayman Islands of Enron-related offshore companies. [71711]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The United Kingdom's overseas territories are expected to co-operate internationally and regulate their financial services sector in line with international standards. The Cayman Islands Monetary Authority and the Turks and Caicos Islands Financial Services Commission respectively are responsible for the regulation of the financial sector in the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands, including licensed company service providers who are responsible for ensuring that non-resident companies comply with the laws and regulations of the territories concerned. The regulatory and criminal investigation authorities in both territories are actively assisting the Securities and Exchange Commission and other relevant authorities in the United States, where the investigation into the Enron case is currently focused. In the event that regulatory or criminal offences involving Enron subsidiaries were to be discovered in either jurisdiction, it would be for the legal and regulatory authorities in the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands, in co-operation with the US and other authorities, to consider appropriate action to enforce the law.

United States (Terrorism)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of the United States of America concerning the US Justice Department's planned terrorism information and prevention system; and if he will make a statement. [71035]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are monitoring the developments in the USA although we have had no formal discussions on this issue at this point. The Terrorism and Prevention System is a US Department of Justice proposal to develop a reliable and comprehensive national system for reporting suspicious and potentially terrorist-related activity. The system is to be developed in conjunction with federal agencies and industry.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he plans to hold to account countries that have reneged on their ratification of global treaties on the spread of weapons of mass destruction. [71940]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: When a country ratifies an international treaty, it places itself under the obligations of that treaty once it is in force. The global treaties dealing with weapons of mass destruction, such as the existing chemical weapons convention and the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, have mechanisms aimed at ensuring compliance with their provisions. While the biological and toxin weapons convention has no comparable mechanisms, procedures exist for clarifying concerns.

The UK routinely monitors the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and is a strong supporter of the effective functioning of treaty compliance mechanisms. We also work with the OPCW and IAEA to ensure that the verification and inspection mechanisms are as effective as possible. Other methods may also be employed as appropriate, including bilateral discussions. We have to be ready to make full use of all instruments to deter and uncover those who do not comply with their international obligations.

Arms Exports

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 12 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1256W, on arms exports, to which EU countries representations were made by the UK Government about the new criteria; what representations were made by the UK Government about the EU consolidated criteria on arms exports; what representations have been made to the UK Government by the EU member states about the introduction of the new criteria; and when these representations were made. [71361]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave her on 12 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1256W, in which I said HMG conducted two rounds of consultations with other EU member states to find out their approach to export license applications for goods to be incorporated into products for onward export. All EU member states have been approached at least once over the last two months. Some were approached a second time in order to clarify the information they provided. The application to such cases of the EU Code of Conduct on arms exports was covered in these discussions.

No representations have been made to HMG by EU member states about my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's reply on 8 July 2002 to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), *Official Report*, columns 650–52W.

Export Licences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 650–52W, on export licences, with which countries the Government attach importance to the maintenance of a strong and dynamic defence relationship. [70226]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Pursuant to the answer of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 650–52W, the Government attach importance to maintaining strong and dynamic defence relationships with our NATO allies, our EU partners, and many other countries around the world who share our commitment to international peace and stability.

Rapid Reaction Embassies

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs where he plans to instigate his first rapid reaction embassies. [71939]

Mr. MacShane: We were the first western embassy to open in Kabul. This involved extremely rapid provision of personnel, vehicles and IT communicating equipment.

It is not possible to predict where the next rapid deployment will be.

Applications for Asylum

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the method of handling the applications for asylum by two boys in Melbourne on 18 July. [72128]

Mr. MacShane: It is the responsibility of the Australian authorities to deal with applications for asylum in Australia in accordance with their obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention. While the brothers remained in the Consulate in Melbourne they were allowed access to legal representation, provided with food and drink, and given the opportunity to telephone their parents.

Overseas Territories

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 175W, on overseas territories, with which overseas territories his Department is consulting about refining and improving their statistical returns. [71571]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: *[holding reply of 22 July]:* We maintain a dialogue with all overseas territories over governance issues including, as appropriate, statistics. HMG is providing assistance to help refine and improve the statistical returns in Anguilla and Turks and Caicos Islands through DFID's development programme and has, in the past, provided such assistance to Gibraltar. St. Helena has received similar support through the United Nations Development Programme. In addition, the Governments of other Overseas Territories have from time to time employed external consultants to assist them in producing statistical data. This has been the case in the British Virgin Islands, Bermuda and Cayman Islands.

Travellers Tips

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 17 July 2002, ref. 68235, if he will list his travellers tips for gay travellers and his guidelines on forced marriage. [72549]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The tips for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender travellers and the guidelines for the police on forced marriage are both available on the FCO website—www.fco.gov.uk.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) for how long he retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website; [72266]

(2) whether it is his policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via his Department's website. [72263]

Mr. MacShane: This Department aims to be as helpful as possible in responding to hon. Members' questions. Where it is helpful to refer hon. Members to other documents as part of the substantive reply, this may be done by making hard copies of documents available in the Libraries of the House, or by reference to material available on the Department's website. Such documents are currently retained on the FCO website indefinitely.

The FCO also adheres to Office of the e-Envoy "Guidelines for UK Government Websites", which sets out policy on website content and information management.

Malcolm Rennie/Brian Peters

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 633W, on Malcolm Rennie/Brian Peters, whether the document that his Department has agreed to publish will include *(a)* the Department's correspondence with Mr. Rennie's and Mr. Peters' families from 1975 to 1977 and *(b)* the minutes of the meetings with Mr. Horta in 1976 and Mr. Dunn in 1977. [72574]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The political files relating to the Indonesian intervention in East Timor and the deaths at Balibo that the FCO will be releasing shortly will include:

the minutes of a meeting that an FCO official held with Mr. Horta in February 1976;

documents about an approach made to the FCO in 1976 by an MP on behalf of relatives of Malcolm Rennie. I am informed that other correspondence with relatives of Mr. Rennie and Mr. Peters was routinely destroyed after some years in accordance with the usual practice for consular case files.

We were requested to release files from 1975 and 1976 and did not, therefore, intend to release documents from 1977.

Bilateral Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 534–35W, on bilateral ministerial meetings, on what date Baroness Amos visited Dublin in July 2001; and which Ministers she met during her visit. [72619]

Peter Hain: On 22 July 2001, my noble Friend Baroness Amos attended the memorial service in Dublin to mark the 25th anniversary of the assassination in 1976 of Christopher Ewart-Biggs, Ambassador to Ireland. She met the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, and the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Brian Cowen, as well as a number of other senior Irish representatives.

UN Special Rapporteur

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to support the establishment of a UN Special Rapporteur on violence against children. [72327]

Mr. MacShane: The Government are appalled by the use of violence against children and we fully support the UN mechanisms that tackle the issue of violence against children. These include:

the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its causes and consequences (which covers the girl child)

the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children in Armed Conflict.

We also fully supported calls for a study on violence which is being carried out by the UN Secretary-General, and we await the results of this study.

Given the existing mechanisms, we do not believe that the creation of an additional Special Rapporteur would be the most efficient or practical way of addressing the immediate problems faced by these children although we continue to consider all proposals on their merits.

Grant in Aid

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the actual and planned grant-in-aid to the *(a)* BBC World Service and *(b)* British Council for each of the years 1990–91 to 2005–06, expressed in constant prices. [72769]

Mr. MacShane: The table lists actual grant in aid outturns for the BBC World Service and the British Council from 1990–91 to 2001–02 and plans for 2002–03 to 2005–06. All figures are stated in real terms at current prices (2002–03). Plans are on a full resource budgeting basis, net of depreciation. From 1997–98 the BBC World Service grant in aid has included c. £4 million in respect of overseas relay station costs transferred from the FCO and from 1998–99 it has included c. £4 million to £5 million in respect of the World Service's subscription to BBC Monitoring.

	£ million real terms (2002–03 prices)	
	BBC World Service	*British Council*
1990–91	192	109
1991–92	186	119
1992–93	189	118
1993–94	196	121
1994–95	194	121
1995–96	196	123
1996–97	181	119
1997–98	177	108
1998–99	178	139
1999–2000	182	144
2000–01	191	145
2001–02	193	149
2002–03	201	157
2003–04	215	166
2004–05	214	167
2005–06	222	172

Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what public consultations have been commenced by his Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72059]

Mr. MacShane: The following consultation document has been issued since 1 April 2002:

Strengthening the biological and toxin weapons convention: countering the threat from biological weapons.

The closing date is 13 September 2002.

The website address is http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/btwc290402,0.pdf or the page can be accessed through the Consultations page in the Documents and Reference area on the FCO website.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72252]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to this question by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister today (UIN 72246).

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked in his Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72649]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We do not have a central record of the numbers of staff employed under contract from agencies and it would involve disproportionate cost to obtain them. We do, however, have the costs, which are:

FY	*Paybill costs (£)*	*of which: Agency costs (£)*	*Percentage*
1997–98	188,078,000	445,944	0.24
1998–99	189,169,000	804,788	0.43
1999–2000	200,368,000	971,657	0.48
2000–01	204,900,000	1,255,817	0.61
2001–02[1]	217,997,000	1,933,841	0.89

[1] 2001–02 paybill provisional costs

Departmental Jobs

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core Department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and *(e)* embassy, consular other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual Department, body or organisation. [72729]

Mr. MacShane: The information requested is detailed in the table. The figures for FCO UK based staff appear in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's departmental report 2002. The figures for NDPBs and the BBC World Service will appear shortly in the Cabinet Office publication Public Bodies 2002.

	Scotland		*England*		*Greater London*	
	Staff	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*
FCO						
(i) UK based	0.00	0.00	750.00	12.80	2,784.00	47.51
(ii) Locally Employed (LE)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
NDPBs						
Britain-Russia Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.50	100.00
British Association for Central and Eastern Europe	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.00	100.00
British Council	26.00	0.36	418.00	5.71	601.00	8.21
Great Britain-China Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.00	100.00
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.50	100.00
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.00	100.00
Wilton Park	0.00	0.00	61.00	100.00	0.00	0.00
BBC World Service	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,606.00	86.67

	Wales		Northern Ireland		Overseas		
	Staff	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*	*Total*
FCO							
(i) UK based	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,326.00	39.69	[1]5,860.00
(ii) Locally Employed (LE)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	9,512.00	100.00	[1]9,512.00
NDPBs:							
Britain-Russia Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.50
British Association for Central and Eastern Europe	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.00
British Council	6.00	0.08	28.00	0.38	6,237.00	85.25	[2]7,316.00
Great Britain—China Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.00
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.50
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.00
Wilton Park	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	61.00
BBC World Service	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	247.00	13.33	[3]1,853.00

[1] The staff numbers for FCO include staff working at posts overseas, and include consular staff

[2] The staff figures for British Council include staff on local contracts and teachers on contract

[3] The staff figures for BBC World Service includes BBC Monitoring staff

Asylum Seekers

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstances asylum seekers would be handed over by the staff in UK overseas missions to the local authorities; if he will list how often this has happened in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [62897]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Whether a person seeking asylum in a UK mission overseas would be handed over to the local authorities would depend on the circumstances of each case. There is no general right for persons to seek asylum in a UK mission overseas.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EU Committees (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for senior labour inspectors is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [71825]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The EU Committee for senior labour inspectors is due to next meet in 5–7 November 2002.

No representative of the Scottish Executive is, or has been, a member of it. The UK is, however, adequately represented.

Directives (Trade Barriers)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of explosives for civilian uses is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66416]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

No date has yet been fixed for the next meeting of this Committee. Officials from the Health and Safety Executive, which is sponsored by my Department, represent the UK on the Committee as policy responsibility for health and safety is a reserved matter. However, officials would consult the Scottish Executive in the event that there were agenda items in which it has an interest in accordance with our Concordat with the devolved Administrations.

Arms Exports

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arms export licences to *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan her Department examined from January 2000 to June 2002; how many were (i) approved and (ii) denied in each month ; and if she will make a statement. [65435]

Nigel Griffiths: The number of Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) issued and refused in each month from January 2000 to June 2002 is as follows:

	India		Pakistan	
	SIELs issued	*SIELs refused*	*SIELs issued*	*SIELs refused*
2000				
January	84	1	0	0
February	57	1	0	2
March	42	8	0	1
April	14	4	0	0
May	44	9	0	0
June	122	3	1	0
July	49	12	17	30
August	72	5	0	0
September	63	0	5	0
October	64	16	29	2
November	58	8	15	4
December	30	5	21	13
2001				
January	—	4	—	4
February	—	14	—	9
March	—	5	—	3
April	—	12	—	2
May	—	16	—	6
June	—	9	—	4
July	—	3	—	0

	India		Pakistan	
	SIELs issued	*SIELs refused*	*SIELs issued*	*SIELs refused*
August	—	7	—	4
September	—	8	—	1
October	66	5	35	0
November	50	2	17	0
December	73	4	8	3
2002				
January	22	7	3	2
February	33	6	1	0
March	88	9	38	1
April	106	4	16	3
May	53	12	7	2
June	2	4	0	0

The number of Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) issued and refused, where the end users were in India and Pakistan, in each month between January 2000 and June 2002 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

For information on SIELs and OIELs issued, where the end users were in India and Pakistan, between January 2001 and September 2001, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) on 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 77–78W.

Details of all individual export licences issued and refused are published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, copies of which are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of UK arms exports she estimates to have been incorporated into products for annual export in each year since 1997. [72217]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 54W.

Departmental Policies (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the activities pursued by her Department that have had a particular impact on the Isle of Wight since 7 June 2001. [57672]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* There are a wide variety of Trade and Industry initiatives being undertaken to help the Isle of Wight economy that are delivered by a number of different agencies. Among those initiatives that have had a particular impact since 7 June 2001, is the south-east RDA-led Isle of Wight Enterprise Hub initiative that has secured £500,000 funding to upgrade skills in the composites and advanced materials sector; DTI Smart Scheme grants totalling £230,517 offered to three companies; and DTI Enterprise Scheme grants totalling £468,135 offered to 18 companies.

Company Takeovers

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received on the takeover offer made on 28 March by GBV Funfte GmbH. for the whole of the issued share capital of Innogy Holdings plc with regard to the requirements of section 429(4) of the Companies Act and Schedule 12 to the Financial Services Act 1986; and if he will make a statement. [66591]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has received two written representations on behalf of shareholders raising issues concerning section 429(4) of the Companies Act 1985 and Schedule 12 to the Financial Services Act 1986 and arising from the above takeover offer.

Data Protection Act

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the Data Protection Act 1998 on business transactions and volume of paperwork which has resulted. [67262]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

I apologise for the delay in replying. This was due to an administrative oversight. An estimate of the likely impact upon business of the Data Protection Act 1998 is contained in the December 1997 Regulatory Impact Assessment on the EC data protection directive to which the 1998 Act gives effect. This shows recurring costs to business of £630 million a year, and non-recurring costs of £836 million. The regulatory impact assessment is available on the Lord Chancellor's Department's website (www.lcd.gov.uk), and a copy is in the Library of the House. I have no additional quantified information on the impact of the 1998 Act on business transactions or the volume of paperwork.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from businesses as to difficulties in meeting the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998; and if she will make a statement. [67261]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply. I apologise for the delay in replying. This was due to an administrative oversight. About 25 organisations representing business interests responded to the Government's autumn 2000 consultation on the impact of the Data Protection Act 1998. A list of the respondents is in the summary of responses which was published in December 2001. The summary of responses is available on the Lord Chancellor's Department's website (www.lcd.gov.uk), and a copy is in the Library of the House. Since the consultation, the Lord Chancellor's Department has additionally received a small number of representations from or on behalf of businesses.

Auditors

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on rotation of companies' auditors for quoted public companies; and if she will make a statement. [68250]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government will consider the need for rotation of statutory auditors for quoted public companies in the light of the interim report of the Co-ordinating Group on Audit and Accountancy issues.

Auditing

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new steps she is taking to tighten the rules on auditing procedures. [71937]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government will consider the need to review auditing procedures in the light of the interim report of the Co-ordinating Group on Audit and Accountancy issues.

Export Centres

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether an application was made by Harvey Logistics/Harvey Military Supplies in 2001 for the export of mortar bombs and parts of mortar primers to Namibia. [68811]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department of Trade and Industry's export control organisation does not normally comment on export licence applications, which are commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Exemption 13 and 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Details of all relevant export licences issued and refused since 2 May 1997 are published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, copies of which are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Trawlermen (Compensation)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of processed claims made under the Icelandic Waters Trawlermen's compensation scheme have been rejected. [70839]

Nigel Griffiths: Excluding duplicates, 60 per cent. of claims have been accepted and 40 per cent. of claims have been rejected. The calculation does not include claims that have not yet been decided. It includes as rejections claims that have been rejected but are being reviewed by the Department or have been referred to the independent adjudicator.

WorldCom

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what complaints were received by her Department about accounting practices at WorldCom in Britain in 1999; and what action was taken to investigate. [70754]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is a long established practice that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry does not comment on the affairs of individual companies nor does she confirm or deny any particular investigation.

Accountancy and Audit Regulator

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her co-ordinating Group on Audit and Accountancy issues *(a)* has discussed and *(b)* will discuss (i) an independent Regulator of Accountancy and (ii) a ban on sales of other services by auditors to audit clients. [70715]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Co-ordinating Group has discussed both regulation of the accountancy profession and the provision of non-audit services by auditors to their audit clients. I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry earlier today.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether she plans to review major reform in accountancy regulation *(a)* now and *(b)* at the end of the first five years of the existence of the Accountancy Foundation; [70716]

(2) what plans she has to set up an Independent Regulator for Accountancy and Audit. [70714]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government will consider the need to review accountancy regulation in the light of the interim report of the Co-ordinating Group on Audit and Accountancy issues.

Gas Storage

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals her Department has to encourage oil and gas companies to utilise existing offshore gas reservoirs for re-injected gas storage; and if she will make a statement. [71468]

Mr. Wilson: Making such proposals is a commercial matter for the oil and gas companies; the Department stands ready to assess such proposals for the purpose of issuing the necessary consents, notably production licences and pipe-line authorisations. Meanwhile the Department and Ofgem are ensuring industry and public awareness of the case for additional gas storage facilities, whether offshore or onshore, through the work of the Joint Energy Security of Supply Working Group (JESS). JESS's first report, published in June, noted that there is uncertainty about the adequacy of gas supplies to meet demand from consumers during a period of sustained peak demand from about 2004–05, and that additional infrastructure (including gas storage) may be the most efficient way of ensuring security of supply.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with major oil and gas companies about the future utilisation of depleted gas reservoirs in offshore fields for gas storage; and if she will make a statement. [71466]

Mr. Wilson: The Department discusses this and other issues with petroleum companies from time to time. Details of such discussions are commercially confidential.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessments she has made of the *(a)* current volume of depleted gas reservoirs in offshore fields and *(b)* potential volume of gas reservoirs in offshore fields, which could be used for re-injected gas storage; and if she will make a statement about gas reservoir depletion. [71467]

Mr. Wilson: It is for the oil and gas companies to make such assessments, and to come forward with commercial proposals. As gas production from some gas fields on the UK Continental Shelf stops, there may well be further opportunities—following the example of Rough—to use a number of reservoirs for gas storage. Whether a particular reservoir is suitable will depend on such factors as: how far it is depleted; whether it has the right physical characteristics, including "cushion gas" to permit easy injection/withdrawal without excessive production of liquids; and its proximity to shore.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about the development of onshore subterranean gas storage and processing facilities; and what her Department's policy is on the development of such facilities. [71469]

Mr. Wilson: The Department discusses such schemes with oil and gas companies, and other interested parties, from time to time. Details of such discussions are commercially confidential. In correspondence with Cheshire county council my Department has noted that gas storage facilities make a valuable contribution to the reliability of physical gas supplies and to maintaining competition in the gas supply chain, and that consumers (including electricity consumers who indirectly rely on gas) benefit in both ways. I am placing a copy of my Department's letter of 27 March in the Libraries of the House.

Electricity Licences

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what electricity standard licence condition modification proposals she has received in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002. [71584]

Mr. Wilson: Ofgem has notified the Secretary of State under section 11A(4) of the Electricity Act 1989 of its proposal to make the following modifications to electricity standard licence conditions since they were introduced on 1 October 2001:

Distribution licences

SLC5: to suspend the effect of paragraphs 2 and 3 of the condition in relation to licensees to whom SLC 49 applies.

SLC 39 and 40: to introduce revised conditions relating to the use of certain information relating to the distribution business.

Transmission licences

SLC C3: to enable a change to the procedural requirements for modifying the Balancing and Settlement Code proposed by the BSC Parties.

Nuclear Industry

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received regarding UK emission reduction obligations without nuclear energy. [71517]

Mr. Wilson: The Government launched a consultation on energy policy on 14 May with a view to publishing a White Paper around the turn of the year.

One of the questions raised in the document is how confident can we be that we can continue on a path of reducing our carbon emissions as most nuclear stations close over the next 20 years.

We shall be posting the replies which we receive to the consultation on the DTI's website.

Small Energy Generators

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of NETA on small energy generators. [71580]

Mr. Wilson: Ofgem, the gas and electricity regulator, is currently preparing a report on the operation of NETA in its first year. This is due to be published this month and will include a section on the impact of NETA on smaller generators. I shall ensure a copy of the document is placed in the Libraries of the House.

Export Licence Applications

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when a decision will be made in respect of export licence application No 29747; and if she will make a statement. [71254]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Licences to export arms and other items whose export is controlled for strategic reasons are issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry acting through the Export Control Organisation.

A decision has not yet been reached on export licence application 29747, but will be taken as quickly as possible consistent with the need to give full consideration to the issues involved.

Business Start-ups

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specific programmes her Department has to encourage environmental enterprise in rural areas. [71669]

Nigel Griffiths: The Farm Business Advice Service (FBAS) is one of the measures announced under the "Action Plan for Farming", published in March 2000. The action plan aims to move farming forward and help farmers improve the way they run their business.

The spread of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in the spring and summer of 2001 saw the need to design an enhanced FBAS service for farmers who had compulsorily culled their livestock as a result of FMD control measures. This service was announced in June 2001.

The Development Fund for Rural Renewal, part of the Phoenix Fund, was announced in November 2001. £3 million is being spent to assist business communities hard hit by the foot and mouth.

In addition, the SBS is spending £30 million up until March 2004 on 96 Phoenix Development Fund projects in disadvantaged areas and among under-represented groups in all areas. So far the development fund has enabled the start-up of over 400 new enterprises and the creation or safeguarding of more than 1,600 jobs.

SBS is also supporting 46 Community Development Finance Initiative projects in disadvantaged areas. These CDFIs are receiving almost £20 million of support over the next two years. A number of the projects supported are researching new and innovative ways of providing last resort finance to disadvantaged communities.

Finally, SBS' 45 business link operators assisted almost 245,000 businesses during 2001–02 and have helped over 18,000 new businesses to start-up in all areas.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what partners her Department works with in identifying and encouraging enterprise in rural areas. [71672]

Nigel Griffiths: In the public sector these include the Countryside Agency and the English Tourism Council, and in the private sector organisations, as diverse as the National Farmers Union (NFU), the Village Retail Services Association (ViRSA) and the British Association of Licensed Parks, Piers and Attractions (BALLPA).

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new businesses in the environmental enterprise sector have been established with the help of resources from her Department in each year since 1997. [71671]

Nigel Griffiths: The New Business Relation Group of the DTI does not hold this information.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* conferences and *(b)* seminars her Department has (i) organised and (ii) supported in the past five years aimed at stimulating new enterprises in rural areas; and what organisations have partnered her Department in these initiatives. [71666]

Nigel Griffiths: Business Link Operators, which are part-funded by the DTI, have undertaken numerous local activities which have the effect either directly or indirectly of stimulating new enterprises in rural areas e.g. attendance at agricultural shows and participating in events to promote rural social enterprise.

WEEE Directive

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on basing the proposed waste electrical and electronic equipment directive on the principle of individual producer responsibility. [72022]

Mr. Wilson: DTI works very closely with all Departments, but especially with DEFRA on this directive.

The Government support the principle of individual producer responsibility, but believe that making this mandatory might impose disproportionate cost and administrative burdens on some firms, especially SMEs with little additional environmental gain. We therefore continue to support the common position text, which would allow a collective or an individual approach.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to ensure that the proposed waste electrical and electronic equipment directive is introduced in a way that is *(a)* beneficial to the environment and *(b)* cost-effective for the producer. [71935]

Mr. Wilson: Studies undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the Department show that the WEEE directive is likely to offer significant environmental benefits over current practice. A report was written in 1999 and updated this year. It is available on the DTI website.

We have negotiated hard in Brussels for as much flexibility as possible in the directive and will implement in the most cost-effective manner permitted by the final text, while maximising the environmental benefits. The Regulatory Impact Assessments already completed will help inform this. We will, of course, continue to consult widely.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what responsibility for the implementation of the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive into UK law will lie with *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. [71934]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has lead responsibility for negotiating this directive. We work very closely with other Government Departments, especially DEFRA. We have yet to make a decision on which Department will transpose the WEEE directive into UK law.

Company Accounts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the way in which small firms present their accounts, following her recent announcements on audit practice. [71938]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I announced on 17 July that I propose to raise the definition of a small company to the current EU maximum, benefiting some 15,000 companies who will no longer have to include a cash flow statement, and can produce simplified profit and loss account and balance sheet. I also propose that small companies should file their accounts with Companies House: the current option to file abbreviated accounts would be abolished.

Eco-design

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure that incentives are in place for the eco-design of products. [71936]

Mr. Wilson: Both the Department and my colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs are involved in the negotiation and implementation of a number of EC initiatives that are concerned with the eco-design of products. In addition, as part of their promotional effort to stimulate the adoption of waste minimisation and cleaner techniques within business, the Departments jointly sponsor the Envirowise programme to run workshops and publish design guides specifically to promote cleaner design.

At European level, a Commission Green Paper on the establishment of a framework of Integrated Product Policy (IPP) was published in February last year. This aims to improve the environmental performance of a wide range of products throughout their life cycle.

The Commission also published the first draft for a directive on the impact on the environment of electrical and electronic equipment, known as the EEE proposals, last year. These proposals aim to harmonise European requirements concerning the design of electrical and electronic products to minimise their overall impact on the environment.

In addition, the final negotiating stages of a directive on the waste from electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) are currently taking place. This will encourage elements of eco-design by placing recycling costs on producers.

Small Businesses

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had regarding small business growth; and what the outcomes of those meetings were. [72459]

Nigel Griffiths: I meet small business representative organisations on a regular basis to discuss small business growth, including the British Chambers of Commerce, the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Business, the Small Business Council, and the Ethnic Minority Business Forum.

In addition, I regularly visit all the Business Link Operators and I visit small businesses regularly to discuss the issues affecting their future development and growth.

The outcomes of these discussions inform SME policy development and the strategy of the Small Business Service, the new Strategy Board of which I am the chair.

In May I launched a consultation on a Comprehensive Strategy for Business Start-Ups in a drive to boost the enterprise culture and encourage more people to set up their own business. The strategy includes proposals for a new package of measures to support first-time entrepreneurs and growing businesses—particularly those from under-represented groups and disadvantaged parts of the country—and proposals to reduce the barriers facing start-ups. The consultation period will run until the end of July 2002.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the Government defines a small business; and what *(a)* guidance has been given and *(b)* legislation is in place regarding the encouragement of small business growth. [72454]

Nigel Griffiths: For statistical purposes the DTI uses the following definitions:

Micro firm: 0–9 employees

Small firm: 0–49 employees (includes micro)

Medium firm: 50–249 employees.

Section 249 of the Companies Act, 1985 states that a company is 'small' if it satisfies at least two of the following criteria:

A turnover of not more than £2.8 million

A balance sheet total of not more than £1.4 million

Not more than 50 employees.

A medium-sized company must satisfy at least two of the following criteria:

A turnover of not more than £11.2 million

A balance sheet total of not more than £5.6 million

Not more than 250 employees.

(a) The Small Business Service provides, through 45 local Business Operators, guidance, advice or access to experts, on just about everything needed to start or grow a business. Services include: business planning, finance, regulation, exporting, innovation, management, quality, employment issues, training and development, design, and E-commerce.

(b) The Government's aim is to make Britain one of the most competitive environments for business in the world—since 1997 the Government have cut the corporate tax bills of small companies by around 30 per cent. rewarding entrepreneurial spirit and promoting growth.

The Government have introduced numerous measures to help small enterprises since 1997, including:

taking forward the recommendations of the Carter Review of Payroll Services;

cutting the small companies rate of corporation tax from 23 per cent. to 19 per cent. and introducing a starting rate which we are now cutting from 10 per cent. to zero;

introducing a 10p starting rate of income tax;

making 40 per cent. first year capital allowances permanent; and

introducing measures to ease the impact of VAT on small business.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many small businesses have *(a)* started up and *(b)* closed down in the past five years by region. [72453]

Nigel Griffiths: The number of VAT registrations and de-registrations is the best official measure of business start-ups and closures. VAT data do not capture much of the activity of the very smallest firms that operate under the VAT registration threshold (turnover of £52,000 at 1 April 2000). The latest data available are those for 2000.

Number

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Start-ups: VAT registrations 1996–2000					
United Kingdom	168,200	182,570	186,250	178,460	183,325
North East	4,085	4,170	4,215	4,230	4,280
North West	16,475	18,120	18,595	18,085	18,535
Yorkshire and the Humber	11,315	11,825	11,820	11,635	11,975
East Midlands	10,845	11,745	11,895	11,255	12,030
West Midlands	13,295	13,635	15,030	14,405	14,485
East of England	16,140	18,270	17,920	17,080	18,420
London	34,055	37,165	39,670	37,335	37,915
South East	27,055	29,955	29,915	28,325	29,185
South West	13,840	15,315	15,545	15,140	15,440
England	147,105	160,200	164,605	157,490	162,265
Wales	6,105	6,240	6,135	5,995	6,190
Scotland	11,275	12,280	11,825	11,410	11,410
Northern Ireland	3,715	3,850	3,685	3,565	3,460
Closures: VAT De-registrations 1996–2000					
United Kingdom	165,065	164,455	155,930	171,970	177,080
North East	4,505	4,390	4,035	4,295	4,220
North West	17,245	17,120	16,115	17,215	17,690
Yorkshire and the Humber	12,000	12,250	11,350	12,295	12,755
East Midlands	11,365	11,235	10,695	11,480	11,880
West Midlands	13,670	13,885	13,335	14,200	14,220
East of England	15,600	15,750	15,200	16,515	17,455
London	29,320	28,295	28,375	32,765	35,200
South East	25,680	25,665	22,985	25,900	27,255
South West	14,315	14,400	13,845	15,040	15,475
England	143,705	142,990	135,935	149,705	156,150
Wales	6,750	6,320	6,240	6,740	6,410
Scotland	11,535	11,540	10,930	11,900	11,390
Northern Ireland	3,080	3,605	2,825	3,625	3,130

Source:
Business Starts and Closures: VAT Registrations and De-registrations 1980–2000, Small Business Service

Energy Supply

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the powers Ministers have with regards to securing the supply of energy. [72559]

Mr. Wilson: Responsibility for energy security under the law is shared by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Ofgem. My right hon. Friend is responsible for setting the overall regulatory framework for the supply of gas and electricity. A key part of that framework is set out in the Electricity Act 1989 and the Gas Act 1986. These provide that in carrying out their functions the Secretary of State and Ofgem shall have regard to the need to secure that all reasonable demands in Great Britain for electricity and (so far as it is economical to do so) for gas are met.

Under this legislation, the powers of the Secretary of State and Ofgem relating to security of supply are mainly exercised through their licensing functions. My right hon. Friend has laid down Standard Licence Conditions which apply to all classes of licensees. Power to modify these rests with Ofgem, with reference to the Competition Commission if a company and Ofgem cannot agree. My right hon. Friend has a power to veto agreed modifications. Enforcement of licence conditions is for Ofgem.

My right hon. Friend has statutory responsibility for regulation of the offshore and onshore oil and gas industries, including the authorisation of pipeline construction and settlement of disputes about access to pipelines. She also has general responsibility for gas regulation and for strategic international issues including European policy, and hence for security of supply issues falling within these areas. There are also provisions under HSE's Gas Safety (Management) Regulations 1996 and under the Electricity Supply Regulations 1988 which provide for maintaining security of supply.

The Electricity Act 1989 gives my right hon. Friend powers to require particular measures to be taken by licence holders in the event of an electricity supply emergency. The Government may also use the powers contained in the Energy Act 1976 and the more general powers in the Emergency Powers Act 1920, which is the responsibility of the Home Office.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) for what reasons her Department has engaged Andersens as a consultant to advise on the restructuring of BNFL; [72430]

(2) who the *(a)* engagement partner and *(b)* client partner at Andersens are who will be carrying out the work on behalf of her Department into the restructuring of BNFL. [72429]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has not engaged Andersens. Following a competitive tender, the Department is in the process of appointing Deloitte and Touche as its accountancy adviser on BNFL and the proposed Liabilities Management Authority. Deloitte and Touche has invited partners and staff at Andersens in the UK to join Deloitte and I understand that arrangement is currently being implemented. The Deloitte's team will be led by David Wadsworth, a long-standing partner at Deloitte.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the financial position of BNFL. [72548]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL announced its results for 2001–02 on 16 July 2002. The company reported a loss after tax and exceptional items of £2,090 million, caused primarily by exceptional charges of £1.9 billion relating to a review of strategy for historic waste management and £375 million for the early closure of the Magnox nuclear power stations Calder Hall and Chapelcross. Before tax and exceptional items, the company made a profit of £22 million.

BNFL also announced a net asset deficit of some £1.85 billion. However, the Company has a strong cash position. Further, in November 2001 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced proposals to establish a Liabilities Management Authority (LMA) which will take on financial responsibility for the nuclear legacy liabilities. The Government are committed to pushing ahead with the proposed LMA at the earliest opportunity and published on 4 July 2002 a White Paper "Managing the Nuclear Legacy" which, among other things, sets out in more detail the plans for the LMA.

Business Ethics Training

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the SBS Business Incubation Fund has been allocated; how many applications have been rejected; how many applications are awaiting a decision; and if she will make a statement. [70194]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The SBS Business Incubation Fund was created in October 2001.

Applications totalling £4.5 million have been received. The fund's panel of independent experts are evaluating these. Further applications from projects, currently at an early stage, are expected to be made to the fund once they reach their appropriate level of development. To date, three have been rejected.

Auditing and Accounting

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government are taking to strengthen auditing and accounting requirements. [72969]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement to the House earlier today.

Office for Civil Nuclear Security

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 17 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 353W, on OCNS, which other Government agencies are used to train OCNS staff; and for what reason the publication of the first annual report from OCNS was not accompanied by a press release. [72603]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* OCNS staff are given the training which is considered necessary in order to complete their tasks. This training will vary from task to task and from person to person, therefore the agency giving the training will vary according to the requirement.

It was thought more appropriate for the publication of the OCNS annual report to be placed in the Library of both Houses and to be made generally available on the DTI website.

European Energy and Transport Forum

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the European Energy and Transport Forum will meet; where it will meet; how often meetings will take place; and if she will make a statement. [72674]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 1 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 132W. The European Energy and Transport Forum is a Commission Committee. It is for the Commission to decide organisational arrangements for meetings.

Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times in the last 12 months members of the SBS have met the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership. [70193]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Seven.

Employment Tribunals

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects the Employment Tribunal System Taskforce to report; and if she will publish the report. [73548]

Alan Johnson: The Employment Tribunal System Taskforce have just completed their work. I expect to receive their report shortly. I know that Members of the House and the public are keen to see the outcome of their work, so I hope to publish as soon as practical after receipt of the report; copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the regional development agencies have prepared annual accounts and reports for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [73549]

Alan Johnson: The regional development agencies' annual reports and accounts for 2001–02 have been published today. Copies have been laid before Parliament. These cover the period from 1 April 2001 through to 31 March 2002. The Government welcome the continued progress made by agencies to improving the economic regeneration, skills and competitiveness of the regions.

Company Auditors (Supervisory Bodies)

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has received the annual reports for

2001 from the recognised supervisory bodies for company auditors under Part II of the Companies Act 1989; and if she will make a statement. [73550]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have received the annual reports for the year 2001 from the five recognised supervisory bodies for company auditors: a combined report from the institutes of chartered accountants in England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and one each from the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants and the Association of Authorised Public Accountants. Copies of the reports have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Schedule 11 of the Companies Act 1989 sets out the requirements which a body must meet to be eligible for recognised supervisory body status. These include requirements to have adequate arrangements for monitoring and enforcing compliance with its rules relating to membership and eligibility (e.g. holding an appropriate qualification, being a fit and proper person, working to technical and ethical standards, maintaining competence), discipline and investigation of complaints. In these reports, the recognised bodies inform the Government about their activities in relation to these arrangements. We shall discuss the reports with the bodies shortly, and will do so in the light of the interim report of the co-ordinating group on audit and accounting issues.

These arrangements now also fall within the oversight remit of the Review Board. It is currently completing a study of the bodies' discipline and complaints arrangements and will start work shortly on a study of their systems for registration and monitoring of auditors.

Penrose Inquiry

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she expects the Penrose Inquiry to be published in 2002; and if she will make a statement. [72837]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 19 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 636W.

Directives (Trade Barriers)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of colouring matters which may be added to medicinal products is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66426]

Mr. Lammy: I have been asked to reply.

The UK representatives on the European Union Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of colouring matters which may be added to medicinal products are the chief executive of the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) in relation to medicines for human use, and the chief executive of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate in relation to veterinary medicines. We have not received notification of any committee meetings planned for the future.

The committee is a regulatory committee which assists the European Commission in exercising its powers of implementation and facilitates the adoption of draft measures in the field of permitted colours for medicinal products.

EU Committees (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee overseeing the conditions governing imports of agricultural products originating in third countries following the accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68563]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The ad hoc comitology committee set up to advise the European Commission on measures needed to control agricultural products originating in third countries affected by fallout from the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station has no date set for its next meeting. The United Kingdom is represented on the committee by an official from the Food Standards Agency who consults with all interested parties, including the Scottish Executive, prior to committee meetings. The Scottish Executive has never had a separate representative on the committee.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister for Women (1) what is the budget of the Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence; [59848]

(2) how many times the Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence has met in the last 12 months; and on what dates; [59846]

(3) how many letters from the public the Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence has received. [59849]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The Ministerial Group itself has not received any letters from the public, but the Home Office has received 20 such letters since 5 February, relating to domestic violence. As chair of the Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence, I have received nine further letters from other members of the group and Members of Parliament. Other members of the Ministerial Group may have received letters specific to their policy areas.

The Ministerial Group has met three times in the last seven months, on 10 January 202 (its inaugural meeting), 5 February 2002, and 12 June 2002.

The Ministerial Group does not have a specific budget as it utilises resources currently available within each Department to help tackle domestic violence.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

School Transport

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent on school transport per secondary pupil in each English local education authority in each of the last five years; and how many secondary pupils there were in each local authority. [68170]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

School Management

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the statement of the School Standards Minister of 15 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 67, lines 1–2, and the statement of the former School Standards Minister of 13 December 2001, *Official Report, Standing Committee G,* column 157, lines 59–61, if subsection (1) *(a)* of section 10 of the Education Bill allows governing bodies to form a company to manage or operate a school. [71732]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* As a matter of law, the conduct of a maintained school must be under the direction of a school's governing body. That duty is re-enacted in clause 20 of the current Education Bill. (References are to HL Bill 51 (Rev) as first printed for the Lords.) This statutory position is referred to in both lines 1 and 2 of column 67 of the *Official Report* for 15 July 2002 and in lines 58–59 of column 157 of the *Official Report* on Standing Committee G on 13 December 2001.

It would not therefore be possible for a company or any other body to "take over the running of the school", because the governing body cannot contract out the duty to conduct the school.

Nothing in the Bill means that governing bodies have greater powers to enter into contracts. By virtue of schedule 10 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, governing bodies already have the power to enter into contracts, which may include elements of the operational management of the school.

Clause 10 (1)(a) gives groups of schools the power to form a company to deliver services to other schools. Thus, clause 10(1)(a) means that a governing body may contract with a school company on the same basis as with other bodies. However, the conduct of the school must remain under the direction of the governing body.

Out-of-School Clubs

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what targets Ofsted has set for the inspection and registration after 2003 of out-of-school clubs; and when they will be published; [71694]

(2) how long on average Ofsted has taken to inspect and register an out-of-school club, broken down by region; [71693]

(3) how many out-of-school clubs Ofsted estimates had to be inspected and registered before March 2003 for its targets to be met. [71692]

Mr. Miliband: These are matters for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). The HM Chief Inspector for Schools, David Bell will write to the hon. Gentleman and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library.

Crèches

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what requirements there are for qualified staff to be in attendance at creche facilities operating for less than two hours a day in public places; [72165]

(2) whether staff and assistants working in creche facilities open to the general public and operating less than two hours per day are subject to the same checks as those working in creche facilities open to the general public and operating more than two hours per day; [72319]

(3) how many complaints her Department has received in the last 12 months about the quality of care provided in creche facilities available to the general public operating for less than two hours a day; [72166]

(4) what information a provider of creche facilities operating for less than two hours a day is required to supply to parents. [72164]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Crèches operating for two hours or less per day are not regulated in the same way as childcare facilities operating for longer periods. There are no particular requirements for staff to be checked by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), for information to be supplied to parents, or for qualified staff. However, people providing such facilities have a general duty of care for the children being looked after, and should therefore ensure that they employ people suitable for the job. Within the last twelve months, the Department for Education and Skills has received only one complaint about the quality of care in crèche facilities operating for less than two hours per day. We keep under regular review the provisions of the Children Act relating to the regulation of childcare.

Children

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether, in preparing a response to the UN General Assembly Special Assembly for Children held in May, she will report on the work of other Departments affecting children both in the UK and overseas. [72328]

John Denham: At the UN General Assembly Special Session, countries committed themselves to developing or strengthening national policies with the goals agreed in the Plan of Action set out in the final declaration. In the Government's over-arching strategy for children and young people, which will cover all departments and which will be published later this year, we will ensure that the commitments in the Plan of Action are reflected.

Schools (Administrative Staff)

Mr. Woodward: To [illegible] Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many administrative staff were working in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) St. Helens Metropolitan borough council area, (ii) Merseyside, (iv) the north-west and (v) England in (A) 1997, (B) 1998, (C) 1999, (D) 2000 and (E) 2001. [70187]

Mr. Miliband: *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools: Full-time equivalent[1] *of administrative staff*[2]
1997–2001

Position in January each year

	Total administrative staff[1,2]								
	Primary[3]					*Secondary*[3]			
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
St Helens LEA	55	57	59	68	67	70	66	65	69
Merseyside[4]	545	543	554	569	607	501	519	529	562
North West[5]	1,828	1,880	1,910	2,033	2,136	1,868	1,920	1,949	2,604
ENGLAND	19,211	19,565	19,985	21,180	22,258	17,592	18,084	18,686	19,424

[1] Includes both full-time and the full-time equivalent of part-time non-teaching staff.

[2] Includes secretaries and bursars.

[3] Includes middle schools as deemed.

[4] For 2000 and 2001 Merseyside is incorporated into North West region so these figures have been derived by a Knowsley, Liverpool, St. Helens, Sefton and Wirral LEAs.

[5] North West figures for 2000 and 2001 have been alterred to exclude Merseyside Metroplolitan County for consistency with previous years

Source:
Annual Schools' Census.

Behaviour Improvement Plans

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which LEAs have behaviour improvement plans funded by central Government; what the cost of each has been; and what criteria were adopted by Government for the selection of those authorities. [71816]

Stephen Twigg: The following 34 local education authorities (LEAs) were selected to submit plans to improve behaviour and attendance in particular schools under the Behaviour Improvement Programme strand of the Government's Street Crime initiative:

Barking and Dagenham
Birmingham
Bolton
Bradford
Brent
Bristol
Camden
Enfield
Greenwich
Hackney
Hammersmith and Fulham
Haringey
Hounslow
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Knowsley
Lambeth
Leeds
Lewisham
Liverpool
Manchester
Newham
Nottingham
Oldham
Reading
Rochdale
Salford
Sheffield
Slough
Southwark
Tower Hamlets
Waltham Forest
Westminster
Wolverhampton

All 34 plans have received initial approval and the LEAs now have access to up to £1.5 million in 2002–03 and around a further £1.25 million in 2003–04. Funding beyond 2003–04 will be determined following further consideration of the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review. The 34 LEAs were selected on the basis of crime figures and truancy data from among the 83 LEAs which fall into the ten police force areas which account for over 80 per cent. of street crime.

Teaching Vacancies

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teaching vacancies in Surrey are unfilled; and how many were unfilled 12 months ago. [72397]

Mr. Miliband: There were 104 vacancies for full-time teachers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in Surrey in January 2001. This is the most recent date for which these data are available.

There were 39 vacancies for full-time teachers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in Surrey in January 2000.

Teachers' Pensions

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the proportion of the rise in Government liabilities resulting from unfunded teacher pension schemes in England and Wales in the last five years owing to *(a)* wage inflation, *(b)* longevity, *(c)* extension of the rights of part-time workers and *(d)* other factors; and if she will make a statement. [67024]

Mr. Miliband: The Teachers' Pension Scheme is subject to regular actuarial reviews by the Government Actuary. A review of the position as at 31 March 2001 is underway and the report is due to be published at the end of the year. Actuarial reviews include full allowance for the effects on the scheme liabilities of such factors as price inflation, salary growth, membership changes and pensioner mortality. Intermediate valuations are produced to provide updated liability figures for the purposes of Resource Accounting, and are generally based on the assumptions adopted for the latest full review.

Information is not readily available in the form requested. The liabilities of the scheme were calculated to be £76 billion for the actuarial review as at 31 March 1996, and were estimated to be £98 billion for the Resource Accounts as at 31 March 2001. Changes in price inflation, real wage inflation and in the membership are the main factors underlying the higher liabilities. The increase in liabilities caused by the extension of the rights of part-time workers was not significant over the period.

Head Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of serving head teachers have participated in the leadership and management programme for new head teachers. [72824]

Mr. Miliband: 10,243 headteachers have registered since 1995 for the Leadership and Management Programme for New Headteachers (HEADLAMP), which represents 43 per cent. of serving headteachers.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of teachers have achieved the National Professional Qualification for Headship. [72823]

Mr. Miliband: 6,340 teachers have achieved the National Professional Qualification for Headship since 1997, which represents 1.4 per cent. of all full-time and part-time teachers in nursery, primary and secondary schools in the maintained sector in January 2002 (provisional). In addition, 4,500 teachers are currently working towards the qualification.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of serving head teachers have achieved the *(a)* Leadership Programme for Serving Head Teachers and *(b)* National Professional Qualification for Headship. [72822]

Mr. Miliband: 9,391 serving headteachers have participated in the Leadership and Management Programme for Serving Heads, which represents 39 per cent. of serving headteachers.

Serving headteachers are not eligible to undertake the National Professional Qualification for Headship. However, since its inception in 1997, 6,340 teachers have achieved the qualification and over 4,500 are currently working towards it.

Education (St Helens)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children received education *(a)* in pupil referral units and *(b)* at home in (i) St Helens, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the Northwest and (iv) England in each year since 1996. [71739]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The information requested is set out in the tables below.

Pupil Referral Units: Number (headcount) of Pupils[1]

Position at January in each year

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
St Helens	0	1	0	0	21	35
Merseyside	283	418	442	428	470	385
North West(excluding Merseyside)	177	247	378	274	360	1,033
England	6,872	7,530	7,740	8,263	8,479	9,289

[1] Excludes pupils who are also registered at a mainstream or special school.

Number of Pupils not in Schools[1]

Position at January in each year

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
St Helens	23	47	48	84	70	81
Merseyside	329	300	305	362	—	—
North West	1,521	1,564	1,849	2,100	2,616	2,061
England	10,553	12,295	13,594	14,005	15,670	16,307

[1] Includes pupils not in school, e.g. pupils taught at home. Traveller children, asylum seekers at FE colleges or with voluntary sector providers

— not applicable (Merseyside is incorporated into North West region).

We do not require Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to report separately on the numbers of children educated in the home by the LEA and this could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

We do not require LEAs to report on the numbers of children whose parents choose to home educate them and this figure also could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many vacant teaching positions there were *(a)* by subject and *(b)* as a percentage of all teaching positions in (i) St Helens, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the North West and (iv) England in (A) 1996, (B) 1997, (C) 1998, (D) 1999, (E) 2000 and (F) 2001. [70863]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the adult literacy rate was in *(a)* St Helens, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* the North West and *(d)* England in each year since 1996. [71288]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 23 July 2002]* The table below shows the estimated level of poor literacy skills in the areas concerned. The data are from a series of surveys undertaken for the Basic Skills Agency in 1996–97. There are no data available for the subsequent years, although we are now conducting a large survey of literacy, language and numeracy needs in England as part of the *Skills for Life* strategy to improve adult basic skills. This will provide a more current assessment of literacy need.

Area	Percentage of population aged 16–60 with poor literacy skills
St Helens	26
Merseyside	27
North West average	25
England average	24

Education Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupils in each local education authority took part in each of her Department's initiatives which have not yet been subject to nationwide roll-out. [71814]

Mr. Miliband: The following pilot/Pathfinder initiatives were in operation during the school year 2001–02. These will not necessarily roll-out nationally though, as a result of the Spending Review, Education Maintenance Allowances will be available throughout England from September 2004. Information on numbers of pupils taking part is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Pilot/Pathfinder	*Area*
Diversity Pathfinders To explore various avenues towards developing a truly diverse secondary system by creating the opportunity for LEAs to work with schools to develop their own distinctive ethos and excellence in order to raise standards throughout secondary education.	Middlesbrough; Hertfordshire; Portsmouth; Cornwall; Newham
Excellence in Cities Primary Pilot Extending the programme to primary schools in EiC areas.	Birmingham; Bradford; Camden; Coporation of London; Greenwich; hackney; Hammersmith and Fulham; Haringey; Islington; Knowsley; Lambeth; Leeds; Lewisham; Liverpool; Manchester; Newham; Rotherham; Salford; Sheffield; Southwark; Tower Hamlets; Waltham Forest; Wandsworth; Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea
National Mentoring Pilot Project To raise the achievement of secondary school pupils aged between 12–18 years in deprived areas, encouraging them to develop and move on to independent learning, and promoting the benefits of entering into higher education to those who may not otherwise consider it.	Birmingham; Oxfordshire; Hackney; Lambeth; Manchester; Nottingham; Brighton; Salford; Trafford; Portsmouth; Plymouth; Bradford; Lancashire; Gloucestershire; Newcastle; South Tyneside; Middlesbrough; Telford and Wrekin
Learning Mentors To help pupils remove barriers to learning.	Barking and Dagenham; Barnsley; Birmingham; Blackburn; Blackpool; Bradford; Brent; Bristol; Camden; Corporation of London; Doncaster; Ealing; Enfield; Gateshead; Greenwich; Hackney; Halton; Hammersmith and Fulham; Haringey; Hartlepool; Hounslow; Islington; Kensington and Chelsea; Kingston Upon Hull; Knowsley; Lambeth; Leeds Leicester City; Lewisham; Liverpool; Luton; Manchester; Middlesbrough, Newcastle Upon Tyne; Newham; North Tyneside; City of Nottingham; Oldham; Redcar and Cleveland; Rochdale; Rotherham; St Helens; Salford; Sandwell; Sefton; Sheffield; South Tyneside; Solihull; Southwark; Stockton on Tees; Stoke on Trent; Sunderland; Tower Hamlets; Waltham Forest; Wandsworth; Westminster; Wirral; Wolverhampton; Portsmouth; West Cumbria; Kent; Dewsbury and Batley; East Lancashire; Walsall; Croydon; Tameside; Huddersfield; West Lancashire; Coventry
Advanced Skills Teachers (AST) Groupworking Schemes Off-shoot of national AST project to ascertain benefit and good practice in using ASTs in groups rather than individually.	Birmingham; Essex; Gloucestershire; Kent; Leeds; Lincolnshire; Newham; York
School Partnership Pilots To develop models of partnership working between schools and with external partners to inform development of policy and tackle some current weak and failing schools where existing support is not securing sufficiently rapid progress.	Sheffield; Isles of Scilly; Sandwell; Walsall; Bolton; Lewisham; Birmingham; Swindon; Derby
Pupil Learning Credits To provide secondary schools with extra funding to enable them to provide additional learning opportunities for Key Stage 3 pupils whose social circumstances are exceptionally challenging, and then to assess the benefits of this to the pupils and the schools.	Camden; Croydon; Greenwich; Hackney; Hammersmith and Fulham; Haringey; Islington; Kensington and Chelsea; Lambeth; Lewisham; Newham; Southwark; Tower Hamlets; Waltham Forest; Wandsworth; Westminster; Knowsley; Lancashire; Liverpool; Manchester; Salford; Portsmouth; Kent; Birmingham; Walsall; Bradford; Kirklees; Leeds; Rotherham; Sheffield

Pilot/Pathfinder	*Area*
Peer Mentoring Resource Pack Trial To help schools run programmes where Y10/11 pupils mentor Y7 pupils to help them through the transition into secondary schooling.	Birmingham; Lancashire; Salford; Westminster
Schools Facing Extremely Challenging Circumstances To find new and innovative ways to raise attainment.	Liverpool; North East Lincolnshire; Sunderland; Hammersmith and Fulham; Birmingham; Kent; Calderdale; Barnet
Gifted and Talented Intensive programme to support the development of gifted and talented pupils.	Barking and Dagenham; Barnsley; Birmingham; Blackburn; Blackpool; Bradford; Brent; Bristol; Camden; Corporation of London; Doncaster; Ealing; Enfield; Gateshead; Greenwich; Hackney; Halton; Hammersmith and Fulham; Haringey; Hartlepool; Hounslow; Islington; Kensington and Chelsea; Kingston Upon Hull; Knowsley; Lambeth; Leeds Leicester City; Lewisham; Liverpool; Luton; Manchester; Middlesbrough, Newcastle Upon Tyne; Newham; North Tyneside; City of Nottingham; Oldham; Redcar and Cleveland; Rochdale; Rotherham; St Helens; Salford; Sandwell; Sefton; Sheffield; South Tyneside; Solihull; Southwark; Stockton on Tees; Stoke on Trent; Sunderland; Tower Hamlets; Waltham Forest; Wandsworth; Westminster; Wirral; Wolverhampton; Portsmouth; West Cumbria; Kent; Dewsbury and Batley; East Lancashire; Walsall; Croydon; Tameside; Huddersfield; West Lancashire; Coventry
Zoneparc Pilot Playground improvement and management scheme to increase activity levels of young people and tackle social exclusion	Bristol; Lambeth
Education Maintenance Allowance To improve participation, retention and attainment in post-compulsory education among 16–18 year olds	Cornwall; Knowsley; Leeds; Liverpool; Luton; Manchester; Middlesbrough; Northumberland; Southampton; Sheffield; Walsall; Wolverhampton; Nottingham; Oldham; Bolton; Coventry; Doncaster; Tameside; North Tyneside; Wakefield; Birmingham; Gateshead; Leicester; South Tyneside; Stoke on Trent; Wigan; Barking and Dagenham; Brent; Camden; Ealing; Fulham; Greenwich; Hackney; Halton; Hammersmith and Fulham; Waltham Forest; Hartlepool; Haringey; Islington; Kingston upon Hull; Lambeth; Lewisham; Newham; Salford; Sandwell; Southwark; Wandsworth; Tower Hamlets; Bradford; Barnsley; St Helens; Wirral; East Lancashire; Sunderland; Suffolk;; North East Lincolnshire; Worcestershire
	Barking and Dagenham; Barnsley; Birmingham; Blackburn; Blackpool; Bradford; Brent; Bristol; Camden; Corporation of London; Doncaster; Ealing; Enfield; Gateshead; Greenwich; Hackney; Halton; Hammersmith and Fulham; Haringey; Hartlepool; Hounslow; Islington; Kensington and Chelsea; Kingston Upon Hull; Knowsley; Lambeth; Leeds Leicester City; Lewisham; Liverpool; Luton; Manchester; Middlesbrough, Newcastle Upon Tyne; Newham; North Tyneside; City of Nottingham; Oldham; Redcar and Cleveland; Rochdale; Rotherham; St Helens; Salford; Sandwell; Sefton; Sheffield; South Tyneside; Solihull; Southwark; Stockton on Tees; Stoke on Trent; Sunderland; Tower Hamlets; Waltham Forest; Wandsworth; Westminster; Wirral; Wolverhampton; Portsmouth; West Cumbria; Kent; Dewsbury and Batley; East Lancashire; Walsall; Croydon; Tameside; Huddersfield; West Lancashire; Coventry

Grammar Schools

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on proposals for new grammar schools as part of her schools specialisation policy. [72888]

Mr. Miliband: Grammar schools are schools which were effectively wholly selective at the beginning of the 1997–98 school year. New grammar schools are not possible under current education legislation, and we have no intention of changing this.

School specialisation is concerned with a focus on curriculum subjects, not with selection for general academic ability.

Secondary Transfer Places

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action is being taken to assist those local authorities with a shortfall of secondary transfer places for September; and if she will make a statement. [73017]

Mr. Miliband: It is for local education authorities to ensure they have sufficient school places to meet demand. Where an authority can demonstrate it has a shortfall of places it may apply to the Department for capital funding to create additional provision. LEAs with a projected shortfall of places submitted their capital bids to fund an increase in provision this year in September 2001, and allocations were announced in December 2001.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the cost of the closure of *(a)* the Individual Learning Account programme, *(b)* the investigation by the ILA Compliance Unit and *(c)* referrals of ILA learning providers to the police. [70445]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The estimated cost to the Department to end June 2002 of: *(a)* closure of the Individual Learning Account (ILA) programme is £1,710,000; *(b)* investigation by the Department's ILA Compliance Unit is £570,000; and *(c)* referrals by the Department's Special Investigation Unit of ILA learning providers to the police is £190,000.

Foreign Languages

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made as to the number of schools that plan to make the teaching of a foreign language optional at Key Stage 4. [69229]

Stephen Twigg: Modern Foreign Languages remain a compulsory National Curriculum subject at key stage 4 and we expect schools to observe this.

The Green Paper *14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards* proposes that the existing arrangements under which all young people must study a modern foreign language at key stage 4, unless their schools have used the disapplication procedures, is too constraining. The Green Paper therefore proposes that the statutory obligation for young people at Key Stage 4 to study a language, be replaced by a new statutory entitlement that would require schools to make the subject available to any young person wishing to study it.

Consultation only closed on 31 May 2002 and we are reflecting carefully on the views expressed during consultation before reaching our decision. We have indicated in the Green Paper that any curriculum changes would be subject to further consultation before their introduction.

We have made no estimates at this stage of the effect of our proposals on the study of modern foreign languages at key stage 4.

Somerset College for Arts and Technology

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what levels of funding for further education will be given to Somerset College for Arts and Technology in *(a)* 2002–03, *(b)* 2003–04 and *(c)* 2004–05. [73254]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to the hon. Gentleman with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Learn Direct Plus

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people have enrolled on Learn Direct Plus in the constituency of Taunton since it began; how many courses are provided in Taunton constituency; how much funding has been provided for these courses; and if she will make a statement. [73255]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: 501 learners have enrolled on a **learndirect** course in the constituency of Taunton since the initiative was rolled out nationally in October 2000. Learners in Taunton can choose from the current portfolio of 692 **learndirect** courses, which can be accessed at a **learndirect** centre or at home, at work or other locations. We are unable to provide information on the amount of funding provided for courses in the Taunton constituency.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent advice she has issued to further education colleges in connection with the education of young people aged between 14 and 16 years, with particular reference to legal issues including enrolment and child protection. [71909]

Stephen Twigg: The Department, in conjunction with the Learning and Skills Council, has issued detailed draft guidance on a range of legal issues in relation to the new "Increased Flexibility for 14–16 Year Olds" programme, which will be delivered largely by Further Education Colleges. This guidance covers child protection, health and safety, supervision and a range of other matters. Local LSCs were encouraged to share the guidance with FECs on the programme. A published version is expected in the Autumn.

Per Capita Funding

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the per capita central Government funding was for *(a)* Surrey and *(b)* Durham. [72392]

Mr. Miliband: The following table shows for 2002–03 the overall level of recurrent funding per capita for pupils in Surrey and Durham. Other per capita funding for the other sectors of education are not collected by the Department.

	£
Durham	3,390
Surrey	3,340

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £10.
2. Funding consists of Education Standard Spending plus all schools-related revenue grants in DfES' departmental expenditure limit which are relevant to pupils aged 4 to 19.
3. Calculations are based on full-time equivalent pupils aged 4 to 19 in maintained schools.
4. The figures are in 2001–02 prices based on the GDP deflators published by the Treasury on 28 June.

Leadership Incentive Grant

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what criteria the recipients of leadership incentive grant will be chosen; and why the grant is only available to secondary schools. [72315]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Detailed criteria for the leadership incentive grant will be set out later in the year. The grant will be available to secondary schools in recognition of the particular challenges in their sector.

Schools Funding

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what extra funding, in addition to the education standard spending assessment, has been supplied to *(a)* schools and *(b)* local authorities in England as a result of successful bids since 1999 in each local authority. [71308]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally in the Department and could therefore only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Most additional education funding is allocated and paid to local education authorities through the Standards Fund and Special Grant. Since April 2001, Standards Fund grants have been distributed by formula not on the basis of bids. The Government expects LEAs to devolve Standards Fund grants to schools by a fair formula, in which case schools should not have to apply for grant. All Special Grants are allocated to LEAs via specified formula by which they must pass on grant on to their schools.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what contribution her Department made to determining the indices of deprivation to be used to allocate funds within the proposed new formula for the SSA for education. [71742]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to carry out a research project into additional educational needs or deprivation. The project was steered through the Education Funding Strategy Group, the Department's group of external stakeholders. The project used a survey to determine the cost and incidence of additional educational needs in 42 local education authorities, covering all types of LEA. Data from the survey has been used to inform the choice of indicators and the weights assigned to them in the formulae which underlie the exemplifications issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 8 July. A copy of the report on the PwC project will be placed in the library of the House when it has been finalised.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what assessment she made of alternatives to the former DTLR's Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 in determining funding for different levels of deprivation in the schools' formula budget; and for what reason the Index was not used; [71745]

(2) what assessment she made of alternatives to the former DTLR's Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 in determining funding for different levels of deprivation in the schools' formula budget; and for what reason the IMD was not used. [71746]

Mr. Miliband: The Department has considered deprivation indicators, including the Index of Multiple Deprivation, on a number of occasions over the past 15 months in its work with the Education Funding Strategy Group on the new education funding formula. In the education options in the consultation paper issued on 8 July, the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation has not been used: it is not suitable as a basis for reflecting deprivation in the distribution of funding for additional education needs, since it incorporates many measures of deprivation not relevant to the educational needs of children. The options set out in the 8 July consultation document include at LEA level a number of the indicators that are part of the IMD: children in families on income support; low birth weight; and English as an Additional Language.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Department for Education and Skills has formulated a sum for basic allocation within the new SSA formula for education for *(a)* under fives, *(b)* primary schools and *(c)* secondary schools, as envisaged in the consultation paper on reforming the Formula Grant System issued on 8 July. [71744]

Mr. Miliband: The sum to be allocated for basic funding within the new SSA formula will depend on decisions taken following consultation on the structure of the formula, and on the overall sums available within education standard spending following the Spending Review 2002.

Special Schools

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether money allocated to her Department as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review will be used to increase funding and resources for special schools. [71741]

Mr. Milliband *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce details of the full allocations between and within the various sectors of education later in the year. Individual special schools will continue to be funded by local authorities, but they will all benefit from an increase next year in direct funding through School Standards Grant and devolved formula capital.

Specialist Schools

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of *(a)* specialist schools and *(b)* applicants for that status offer music as their specialist subject. [71922]

Mr. Miliband: There are no specialist schools or applicants for specialist designation offering music as their specialism. However, 66 of the 685 specialist schools in operation as of September 2001 are Arts Colleges specialising in the performing arts, including music, dance and drama.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list *(a)* the total sums made available to training and enterprise councils and *(b)* the sums spent by TECs on (i) work-based training for young people, (ii) work-based training for adults and (iii) other Government-funded programmes, in each year from 1995–96 to 2000–01. [71169]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following table gives details of sums made available to TECs and actual spend between the years 1996–97 and 2000–01. Information for earlier years is not available.

Training and Enterprise Council Budget and Spend 1996–2001 for PQ71169

	(£000s) Spend	*Sums made available (Budget)*
2000–01		
Work Based Training Young People	810,592	859,237
Work Based Training Adults	260,448	279,314
Other Programmes	198,900	183,407
Total	1,269,940	1,321,958
1999–2000		
Work Based Training Young People	770,876	832,376
Work Based Training Adults	233,360	298,622
Other Programmes	215,929	222,078
Total	1,220,165	1,353,076
1998–99		
Work Based Training Young People	696,499	727,908
Work Based Training Adults	130,337	169,891
Other Programmes	206,675	218,993
Total	1,033,511	1,116,792
1997–98		
Work Based Training Young People	729,834	730,530
Work Based Training Adults	213,806	223,577
Other Programmes	201,279	213,470
Total	1,144,919	1,167,577
1996–97		
Work Based Training Young People	736,807	750,165
Work Based Training Adults	265,875	271,046
Other Programmes	153,537	154,882
Total	1,156,219	1,176,093

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list in respect of each training and enterprise council the number of staff *(a)* employed at the end of 1999–2000, *(b)* transferred to the Learning and Skills Council, *(c)* transferred to the Small Business Service, *(d)* transferred to Business Links, *(e)* transferred to other organisations and *(f)* made redundant by the TEC prior to 31 March 2001. [71173]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Please following table shows the number of staff employed by the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) for the period 1999–2000. These figures were taken from the TEC audited Statutory Accounts. As TECs were private limited companies engaged in a wide range of activities the Department was not in a position to monitor the actual destination of each individual employed by them.

However the Department can confirm that of the staff in post at March 25 2001, 3750 transferred with TUPE rights of employment to the LSC and just over 320 to the Employment service. A further 520 staff with transfer rights took voluntary severance or were made redundant for technical reasons.

Information relating to the numbers of staff transferring to other organisations or otherwise being made redundant is not available.

Staffing
Statutory Accounts 1999–2000

TECS	*Staff numbers*
Hampshire	195
Wight	85
Kent	237
Milton Keynes	127
Heart of England	105
Surrey	71
Sussex	159
Thames Valley	159
SOUTH EAST TOTAL	1,138
AZTEC	87
FOCUS	185
LeTEC	189
N London	156
NW London	102
SOLOTEC	177
W London	160
LONDON TOTAL	1,056
WESTEC	116
Prosper	307
Dorset	103
Gloucester	132
Somerset	138
Wiltshire	60
SOUTH WEST TOTAL	856
Birmingham	179
Cov/War	239
Dudley	97
HAWTEC	222
Sandwell	98
Shropshire	115
Staffordshire	152
Walsall	81
Wolverhampton	92
WEST MIDS TOTAL	1,275
Greater Nottingham	107
Leicester	114
Lincoln	183
Northamptonshire	95
North Derbyshire	79
North Nottingham	117
South Derbyshire	194
EAST MIDS TOTAL	889
Bedford	155
Cambs TEC	78
Essex	130
Greater Peterborough	120
Hertfordshire	219
Nor/Wav	112
Suffolk	70
EASTERN TOTAL	884
Barnsley/Doncaster	128
Bradford	98
Cardles/Kirkles	162
Humberside	200
Leeds	129
North Yorkshire	124
Rotherham	128
Sheffield	160
Wakefield	68
Y and H TOTAL	1,197
Bolton/Bury	157
Manchester	500
Wigan	151

Staffing
Statutory Accounts 1999–2000

TECS	*Staff numbers*
Oldham	99
Rochdale	75
S and E Cheshire	190
Stockport	134
Cumbria	213
ELTEC	130
LAWTEC	128
N and Mid Cheshire	93
CEWTEC	205
Mersey	309
St Helens	90
NORTH WEST TOTAL	2,474
C Durham	114
Northumberland	197
Tees Valley	154
Tyneside	221
Sunderland	147
NORTH EAST TOTAL	833
GRAND TOTAL	10,602

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the aggregate amounts for each year from 1995–96 to 2000–01 to which her Department gave consent to transfer by training and enterprise councils between budget heads, showing for each budget head the total amount transferred out and the heads to which it was transferred. [71171]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information is not available. Training and enterprise councils obtained approval from Government Offices to transfer between budget heads on an individual TEC basis. This information was not collated centrally.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance was given by her Department to training and enterprise councils on the virement of funds between the budgets allocated for work-based training for young people and adults and those for central TEC administration, for each of the years 1995–96 to 2000–01. [71170]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The guidance relating to the virement of funds between budgets allocated for work-based training for young people and adults was detailed and complex but in essence prior to 1999–2000 TECs were allowed to vire up to 10 per cent. of their surpluses from one "budget" (funding block) to another subject to them meeting certain minimum performance targets.

This guidance was revised in the 1999–2000 TEC Licence to formally restrict the levels of surpluses that could be generated and switched from one funding block to another to 7 per cent. in total.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list in respect of each training and enterprise council *(a)* her estimate of the aggregate of training and enterprise council surpluses attributable to public funds, *(b)* the amount paid over to public funds to date in respect of those surpluses, and *(c)* the action her Department is taking to recover outstanding amounts. [71174]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are not yet able to give a final account of the individual or aggregate amounts of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) surpluses attributable to public funds and we will not be able to do so until the Liquidators appointed to wind up the TEC companies (59 of the 72 TECs) have completed their work. In the case of the remaining TECs who are to continue trading, we will not be able to give the figures until we have finally resolved the amount of attributable reserves due back to us.

However the Department believes that by March 2003 they will have received back from the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) approximately £250 million worth of reserves. This amount includes £127 million in respect of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), £45 million in legacy funds for the Learning and Skills Council, £40 million in fixed assets transferred to a range of successor bodies or for use in the local community and £38 million for the National Transition Budget which is used to meet specific costs incurred in setting up the LSC, e.g., new IT system.

To date we have received £100 million for ILAs, £24 million for LSC legacy funds and 16m towards the National Transition Budget.

The return of funds has taken longer than initially expected due to the variety and complexity of issues which have had to be resolved, prior to TECs being able to appoint a liquidator or agree a clean break with the Department where the TEC have decided to continue. The Department are currently working closely with the relevant TECs and liquidators to ensure that outstanding issues are resolved and funds released as a matter of urgency. We have on occasions threatened the appointment of an administrative receiver where we have failed to secure the level of co-operation needed.

In return for releasing funds the Department is offering TEC Boards and or liquidators financial guarantees in the form of indemnities that ensure the funds will be repaid if they need them to meet genuine contractual commitments. In our experience all liquidators have been reluctant to release reserves until they have completed the wind-up, which in most cases is proving a complex and time-consuming process that can take over a year from appointment.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will list in respect of each training and enterprise council for 2000–01 the proportion of total expenditure on Government-funded programmes represented by central administration costs; and what assessment she has made of whether the sums spent on central administration represented value for public money; [71172]

(2) if she will list *(a)* the total sums made available by her Department or its predecessors to training and enterprise councils for their central administration costs and *(b)* the amounts actually spent by TECs on central administration for each year from 1995–96 to 2000–01. [71168]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information on central administration costs is not available. Training and enterprise councils were not provided with specific funds for their central administration costs. They received payments for programme and strategic budgets deemed to include an unspecified contribution towards administration costs. The amounts spent by TECs on administration and its disclosure were a matter for individual TECs and varied between them. Some TECs showed no administration costs within their statutory accounts under this heading, while most excluded the costs of staff involved in the direct delivery of their programmes. However, all TECs had to show staffing costs as a note within their accounts.

While this understates administration costs, as it does not cover expenditure on premises, information technology and other support systems, it is the best proxy for the information sought. I have therefore provided below figures for each of the financial years from 1995–96 to 2000–01 showing spend on staffing costs of each of the former Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) in England as stated in their consolidated annual statutory audited accounts for the full range of activity TECs undertook.

Any direct comparison of staff costs between TECs is misleading, both because there is no statutory definition of staff costs and also because the range of training and enterprise activities differed between TECs.

TEC/CCTE Administration Costs

TECS by Region	*1995–96 Staff costs* £	*1996–97 Staff costs* £	*1997–98 Staff costs* £	*1998–99 Staff costs* £	*1999–2000 Staff costs* £	*2000–01 Staff costs* £
NORTH EAST						
County Durham	2,311,019	2,381,375	2,418,663	2,445,110	2,264,783	2,190,271
Northumberland	2,883,378	2,902,466	3,095,325	3,242,676	3,470,126	3,333,138
Teesside	2,474,000	2,546,000	2,706,000	3,175,000	3,804,000	3,651,000
Tyneside	0	4,356,000	4,887,000	5,373,000	5,191.000	5,087,000
Sunderland	0	2,171,496	2.530,218	2,970,942	3,090,144	3,454,791
TOTAL	7,668,397	14,357,337	15,637,206	17,206,728	17,820,053	17,716,200
NORTH WEST						
Bolton/Bury	0	2,263,878	2,745,104	3,255,303	3,542,121	3,837,185
Manchester	1,856,463	6,177,225	8,495,725	11,080,599	12,635,740	13,101,439
Wigan	1,387,932	1,758,968	2,963,066	2,872,720	3,124,399	2,954,404
Oldham	0	0	1,811,362	2,146,895	2,288,594	2,283,321
Rochdale	0	0	1,193,879	1,499,157	1,675,210	1,970,153
SECTEC	0	3,891,142	4,072,153	4,537,011	4,068,952	4,313,025
Stockport	0	2,049,794	2,284,839	2,919,825	3,642,684	4,463,939
Cumbria	0	0	4,148,320	4,348,398	4,167,719	2,706,589
ELTEC	0	2,569,201	2,712,421	2,748,113	2,844,807	3,264,345
LAWTEC	0	3,091,784	3,312,162	3,934,181	3,395,214	3,984,551
NORMID	0	1,821,911	1,959,869	2,030,310	2,276,603	2,195,353
CEWTEC	0	2,174,555	3,718,651	4,096,319	4,441,424	4,368,431
Merseyside	3,634,498	4,694,248	5,003,540	5,981,867	6,924,000	7,048,000
St Helens	1,150,150	1,537,204	1,610,316	1,879,467	1,990,971	1,985,784
TOTAL	8,029,043	32,029,910	46,031,407	53,330,165	57,018,438	58,476,519
Y and H						
Barnsley/Doncaster	2,143,000	2,197,000	2,445,000	2,974,000	3,328,000	5,369,000
Bradford	1,789,517	2,059,238	2,102,648	2,272,563	2,267,865	2,253,228
Calderdale/Kirklees	1,715,654	2,483,786	3,303,476	3,654,117	3,863,677	3,872,012
Humberside	2,958,170	3,260,066	3,641,593	4,384,166	5,941,686	5,602,448
Leeds	1,914,944	2,298,615	2,771,812	3,049,722	3,263,066	3,911,480
North Yorks	0	1,831,000	2,009,000	2,418,000	2,871,000	2,840,000
Rotherham	0	2,117,437	2,479,131	2,842,753	3,034,383	3,187,066
Sheffield	0	2,670,000	3,160,000	4,215,000	3,704,000	3,950,000
Wakefield	0	1,302,102	1,759,642	1,456,005	1,476,719	1,883,145
TOTAL	10,521,285	20,219,244	23,672,302	27,266,326	29,750,396	32,868,379
EASTERN						
Bedfordshire	1,347,352	1,466,866	2,074,747	2,984,815	3,749,095	3,613,427
Cambridgeshire	913,069	913,733	1,009,261	1,632,060	2,231,354	2,313,959
Essex	2,317,688	2,528,000	2,619,000	2,832,000	4,154,000	3,764,000
Gtr Peterborough	0	1,771,605	2,253,241	2,830,365	2,881,068	2,823,756
Hertfordshire	0	3,118,000	3,266,000	4,875,000	5,744,000	6,035,000
Norfolk and Waveney	2,212,000	2,576,000	2,676,000	2,714,000	3,106,000	3,352,000
Suffolk	1,147,572	1,225,160	1,415,769	1,488,925	2,076,086	1,306,817
TOTAL	7,937,681	13,599,364	15,314,018	19,357,165	23,941,603	23,208,959
EAST MIDS						
Gtr Nottingham	1,196,000	1,243,000	1,442,000	1,738,000	2,313,000	3,011,000
Leicester	1,747,112	1,937,746	2,053,777	2,190,371	2,834,946	3,036,332
Lincolnshire	0	3,109,697	3,681,204	4,067,859	3,945,748	4,403,380
Northamptonshire	0	1,654,135	1,825,258	2,228,847	2,628,728	2,906,319
North Derbyshire	1,576,138	1,713,066	1,886,098	1,827,427	1,788,715	1,761,888
North Nottinghamshire	0	2,015,070	2,298,889	2,525,876	2,969,381	3,179,244
South Derbyshire	0	0	3,329,000	3,663,000	3,911,000	4,521,000
TOTAL	4,519,250	11,672,714	16,516,226	18,241,380	20,391,518	22,819,163

TEC/CCTE Administration Costs

TECS by Region	*1995–96* *Staff costs* £	*1996–97* *Staff costs* £	*1997–98* *Staff costs* £	*1998–99* *Staff costs* £	*1999–2000* *Staff costs* £	*2000–01* *Staff costs* £
WEST MIDS						
Birmingham	2,481,000	3,067,000	3,306,000	4,115,000	4,911,000	4,915,000
CENTEC	0	1,069,644	1,177,224	0	0	0
Cov/Warwick	0	3,821,050	4,453,813	4,725,901	5,061,723	5,355,204
Dudley	919,800	1,930,312	1,765,958	1,838,992	2,402,219	2,100,788
HAWTEC	0	264,995	3,169,812	3,991,952	5,258,626	4,829,276
Sandwell	0	1,519,404	2,077,656	2,406,903	2,587,877	2,267,000
Shropshire	1,108,286	1,714,043	1,897,373	2,000,996	2,055,106	1,663,543
Staffordshire	2,123,000	2,412,000	2,461,000	2,682,000	3,459,000	3,609,000
Walsall	1,152,790	1,322,744	1,580,134	1,727,060	2,197,035	2,027,310
Wolverhampton	417,000	1,700,000	2,022,000	2,203,000	2,156,000	2,516,000
TOTAL	8,201,876	18,821,192	23,910,970	25,691,804	30,088,586	29,283,121
SOUTH WEST						
WESTEC	2,094,000	2,328,000	2,425,000	2,017,000	2,342,000	2,617,000
Prosper	4,126,000	4,886,000	5,559,000	6,296,000	8,282,000	8,283,000
Dorset	0	1,359,210	1,518,023	1,939,118	2,198,014	2,672,488
Gloucester	1,385,007	1,646,505	1,939,644	2,879,008	3,172,585	3,757,699
Somerset	1,016,565	1,363,417	1,618,554	2,648,489	2,813,010	1,839,239
Wiltshire	1,285,468	1,486,814	1,492,318	1,501,086	1,571,918	1,899,769
TOTAL	9,907,040	13,069,946	14,552,539	17,280,701	20,379,527	21,069,195
LONDON						
Aztec	1,401,327	1,486,758	1,609,045	2,002,548	2,714,681	2,429,414
Centec	2,144,932	2,646,805				
Cilntec	1,653,706	0				
FOCUS	0	0	5,371,000	6,259,000	6,368,000	8,410,000
LETEC	2,463,241	3,640,819	4,521,474	4,898,407	5,617,403	5,890,489
North London	2,012,587	2,451,110	2,991,331	3,750,158	4,408,581	3,629,736
North West London	666,888	1,194,798	1,512,188	1,967,655	2,726,005	3,568,732
SOLOTEC	2,859,000	3,555,000	4,174,000	5,492,000	4,851,000	5,385,000
West London	0	3,548,546	5,684,669	5,583,113	5,244,201	5,556,025
TOTAL	13,201,681	18,523,836	25,863,707	29,952,881	31,929,871	34,869,396
SOUTH EAST						
Hampshire	0	2,613,000	3,474,000	4,399,000	4,867,000	5,492,000
Isle of Wight	582,378	618,585	733,424	1,241,925	1,582,489	1,575,765
Kent	1,999,858	2,832,777	3,624,774	4,138,710	6,315,951	6,255,099
Milton Keynes	0	2,760,094	2,940,610	3,022,377	3,302,090	2,810,683
Heart of England	1,616,454	1,855,421	2,146,037	2,354,176	2,483,181	2,747,806
Surrey	1,606,187	1,515,129	1,827,970	2,037,138	2,259,269	2,331,546
Sussex	2,534,000	3,246,000	3,619,000	3,952,000	4,229,000	5,018,000
Thames Valley	0	3,656,480	3,757,432	4,037,146	4,432,670	4,781,825
TOTAL	8,338,877	19,097,486	22,123,247	25,182,472	29,471,650	31,012,724
GRAND TOTAL	78,325,130	161,391,029	203,621,622	233,509,622	260,791,642	271,323,656

EU Committees (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when *(a)* the EU Socrates Committee, *(b)* the Erasmus and *(c)* the Comenius subcommittees are next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of them; and if she will make a statement. [66458]

Margaret Hodge: The EU Socrates Committee and sub-committees are scheduled to meet next as follows: Socrates Committee 7–8 November 2002; Higher Education sub-committee 23–24 October 2002; Schools sub-committee 4 November 2002. The UK is represented on the committees by officials from the Joint International Unit of the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Education and Skills, but members of the Scottish Executive and the representatives of the other Devolved Administrations are also "Alternate Members" of the Socrates Committee, in rotation. The Scottish Executive are consulted about the content of the meetings in advance, and make their views known, in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations. Representatives of the Scottish Executive, and of the other Devolved Administrations, are members of the Socrates Network Committee which oversees the administration and implementation of the programme in the UK.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the EU Tempus Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66462]

Margaret Hodge: The next meeting of the EU TEMPUS Committee is provisionally set for 13 December 2002. The UK has two seats on the Committee and is represented by officials from the Department for Education and Skills and from the Joint International Unit of the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions. Scottish Executive officials, as with officials from the other Devolved Administrations, are consulted and make their views known, in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations. We understand the Executive is content with this arrangement.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the EU Advisory Committee on vocational training is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66464]

Margaret Hodge: The next meeting of the EU Advisory Committee on vocational training (ACVT) is due to take place on 9 and 10 December 2002. Members of the Scottish Executive have not been and are not members of the committee. The ACVT was established by Council Decision No. 63/266/eec dated 2 April 1963 which laid down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy across the EU. Its purpose is to offer advice and submit opinions to the European Commission on vocational training policy which the Commission is obliged to take account of. Membership of the committee comprises Government officials and representatives from employers' organisations and trades unions. Member States are represented by one person from each group making a total of three per delegation. The representative of Government for the UK is an official from the Joint International Unit of the Department of Work and Pensions and the Department for Education and Skills, who routinely consults policy colleagues in the Scottish Executive, Northern Ireland Executive and the National Assembly for Wales on issues to be discussed by the Committee. These arrangements are in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations.

Anglo-Irish Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when and where Ministers in her Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72693]

Stephen Twigg: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 243W.

Politics (Young People)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the outcome was of the survey conducted by the Government's children's and young people's unit regarding young people's involvement in the political process; and if she will make a statement. [72388]

John Denham: The YVote?/YNot? project has produced recommendations and advice that would help to re-engage young people in democracy and voting. These are directed by the young people at three main groups: politicians; Government and the Electoral Commission; and the media. The Children and Young People's Unit will be working with the Electoral Commission and a wide range of young people's organisations to extend the debate on these findings.

We also plan to make the materials from the project available to teachers, youth workers and organisations working directly with young people. We shall be working with the All Party Group on Youth Affairs to explore how Honourable Members can be helped to improve their communication with young people. The report also identified the importance of information about the political process and this will be a key feature of citizenship education, which will be part of the National Curriculum for secondary schools from August 2002.

Deprived Communities

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional support is provided to schools in deprived communities; and if she will make a statement. [73008]

Mr. Miliband: Nationally, about 20 per cent. of Education Standard Spending is based on additional educational need (AEN). The additional support provided to a particular school with a high number of pupils from deprived backgrounds will depend on decisions made at local level through the Fair Funding formula operated by its local education authority (LEA).

Around 25 per cent. of the Standards Fund, or £800 million of grant in 2002–03, is allocated to LEAs using deprivation factors, normally the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. All schools will receive a devolved Standards Fund budget, based on a distribution agreed with their LEA, including any factors for deprivation.

The Standards Fund includes £255 million of targeted support in 2002–03 for deprived communities through grants for Excellence in Cities and Excellence Clusters. The Government is also providing £64 million to Education Action Zones, based in deprived areas, to run programmes to achieve pre-agreed targets and objectives in zone schools.

Public Inquiries

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on using 0870 telephone numbers for inquiries by the public to the Department and its agencies. [66201]

Stephen Twigg: The Department for Education and Skills and its Agencies use a variety of different call rates. We employ the use of national rate, Lo-call and free phone numbers according to our business need. We endeavour to ensure that the cost of calls is appropriate to target users and that all people calling these numbers are charged equally.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by her Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64624]

Stephen Twigg: The Department has introduced 47 statutory instruments since 1 January 2002, 31 instruments have been revoked and 16 amending instruments have been made in the same period. Information about the cost and saving of statutory instruments to public funds is not held centrally and would cost a disproportionate amount to establish. Similarly the cost and saving to businesses and individuals is not held centrally and is not available.

Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the statistics that are collected by her Department by English parliamentary constituency; and if she will make a statement. [67102]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The Department does not collect any statistics by English parliamentary constituency as such. Data to compile statistics are collected either from individual education or training institutions, or from local administrative bodies such as Local Education Authorities. In the former case statistics can generally be derived on a parliamentary constituency basis by aggregating data from the relevant education or training institutions. This is not carried out routinely, but is done when requested (for example in a Parliamentary Question), subject to considerations of proportionate cost.

I understand that the honourable Member has also received a *letter from* the National Statistician on this matter.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) for how long she retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website; [72265]

(2) whether it is her policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via her Department's website. [72294]

Estelle Morris: My Department aims to be as helpful as possible in responding to hon. Members' Questions. Where it is helpful to refer hon. Members to other documents as part of the substantive reply, this may be done by making hard copies of documents available in the Libraries of the House, or by reference to material available on the Department's website.

Minimum requirements for the type of document which should be published on Government websites are set out in guidance issued by the Office of the E-envoy, "Guidelines for UK Government Websites" (Illustrated Handbook for web management teams section 2.2 "What content should be on your website?" and section 2.3 "Cross-government requirements". In addition to setting out guidelines on documents for inclusion, the guidance also explicitly requires Departments to ensure that the content of the site as a whole is up to date and current, and where it is necessary to update content of individual documents, to show the latest date of amendment clearly on the document concerned. Section 1.2.7 deals with the issue of Records management and the OeE currently has a consultation paper on Archiving websites. The purpose of this draft annex to the illustrated handbook is to provide government website managers with a framework towards developing within their website management policy suitable procedures and systems to assist in the management, appraisal and preservation of electronic records. A copy of this draft is available online at http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/webguidelines.htm

A copy of the Guidelines for UK government websites is available at http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/webguidelines.htm

Broadband Internet Access

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of schools have broadband Internet access in *(a)* Tamworth, *(b)* Staffordshire and *(c)* England. [71567]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The information is not available in the form requested.

In April 2001, 97 per cent. of maintained primary, secondary and special schools in England were connected to the internet. An estimated 4 per cent. of these had access through a broadband connection.

Information for England is derived from a sample of schools, which is designed for National figures.

Information for England 2001 was published in Statistical Bulletin 09–01 "Survey of Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2001", which is available on my Department's web-site www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics and from the Library. Information for England 2002 will be published in a Statistical First Release later this year.

Education SSA

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local education authorities are in the lowest decile measured by their percentage change in education SSA since 1997; and what the change was in each case. [71815]

Mr. Miliband: The following table shows the fifteen authorities which have had the lowest percentage increase in education SSA between 1997–98 and 2002–03. The table does not include the new unitary authorities which have been created since 1997.

Local Education Authority	*Percentage increase since 1997–98*
	%
City of London	19.41
Middlesbrough	22.63
Isles of Scilly	24.28
Leicester	24.58
Sunderland	25.66
Liverpool	25.66
Knowsley	25.86
Wandsworth	25.88
Redcar and Cleveland	26.25
Newcastle upon Tyne	27.12
Gateshead	27.47
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	27.54
Salford	27.84
Manchester	28.05
Bradford	28.2

Tameside College

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the inquiry into the management of Tameside College has been completed; whether all those who complained were interviewed by the inquiry team; and how many claims for unfair dismissal by the college *(a)* are outstanding and *(b)* have been settled. [72186]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has received a formal complaint alleging breaches of corporate governance at Tameside College. An investigation into these allegations has been completed. The complainant was interviewed as part of the investigation. The report of the investigation is now being considered and decisions based on its findings will be made in the near future. The College has received one claim of unfair dismissal during the period relevant to the inquiry. This claim is outstanding but does not relate to any matter pertinent to the inquiry.

Strategic Training For Apparel And Textiles Programme

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to secure the continuation of the strategic training for apparel and textiles programme after June. [72206]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The programme is currently due to end in September. I have recently written to Patricia Hewitt suggesting that officials from my Department meet colleagues from DTI, the Learning and Skills Council, the Sector Skills Development Agency and others with an interest in the programme to discuss how we might work together to continue to support training in this important sector.

Computers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her Answer of 8th March, references 39110 and 39111, what the total cost was of the Computers Within Reach pilot scheme; how much funding remains; what evaluation has been made of the success of the scheme; and how this will inform future policy on the computers within reach concept. [43326]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Pursuant to the reply given by John Healey on 19 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 256W, the expenditure of £5.5 million on the Computers Within Reach Scheme referred to the 2001–02 financial year only. The total expenditure on the scheme over the last two financial years was £7.1 million.

PRIME MINISTER

Bushmeat

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Prime Minister if he intends to raise the issue of the unsustainable bushmeat trade at the world summit on sustainable development. [69914]

The Prime Minister: The conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and the illegal international trade in forest products will be raised at WSSD. The issue of unsustainable trade in bushmeat could be raised in this context.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Prime Minister if his working group on forestry in preparations for the world summit on sustainable development has examined mechanisms for tackling the unsustainable trade in bushmeat. [70309]

The Prime Minister: As part of the preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development the working group on forestry has been considering mechanisms for tackling the unsustainable use of natural resources, including wildlife, and has produced the paper "World Summit—Framework for Forestry Initiative".

The conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and the illegal international trade in forest products will be raised at WSSD. The issue of the unsustainable trade in bushmeat could be raised in this context.

12 Downing Street

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister what costs have been incurred in refurbishing 12 Downing Street since June 2001; and if he will make a statement. [64874]

The Prime Minister: For the financial year 2001–02 the Cabinet Office Resource Account is still undergoing final adjustments and awaiting audit. This will cover expenditure for Numbers 10,11 and 12 Downing Street. I will write to the hon. Member with details once the account is finalised, and I will place a copy in the Library.

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister what the total cost of refurbishment and repairs to No. 10 Downing street was in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [66881]

The Prime Minister: Maintaining, refurbishing and work associated with security across Number 10 Downing Street is part of a continuing programme of work. Number 10 Downing Street now as in the past is maintained to standards appropriate to its status as a Grade 1 listed building, in consultation with English Heritage and other experts as appropriate. The building also fulfils an important representational role.

Expenditure is recorded by financial years. Since 2 May 1997, the recorded expenditure by the Cabinet Office for projects covering Numbers 10 and 11 Downing Street is:

	£
1997–98	188,000
1998–99	348,000
1999–2000	662,000
2000–01	453,000

The expenditure is mainly attributable to security measures required, maintenance, converting rooms into office accommodation and the refurbishment and continuing upkeep of the State Rooms. Only a small proportion relates to work on the Prime Minister's personal accommodation.

Expenditure prior to 1997–98 is recorded in respect of the Numbers 10–12 Downing Street complex as a whole. On this basis, recorded expenditure is as follows:

	£
1995–96	504,700
1996–97	1,486,775

For the financial year 2001–02 the Cabinet Office Resource Account is still undergoing final adjustments and awaiting audit. This will cover expenditure for 10, 11 and 12 Downing Street. I will write to the hon. Member with details once the account is finalised, and I will place a copy in the Library.

Health and Safety Commission

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the review of the location in Government of the Health and Safety Commission. [69869]

The Prime Minister: Following the establishment of the Department for Transport as a department focussed solely on transport issues, I have decided that the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive will transfer to the Department for Work and Pensions. The Health and Safety Sponsorship Division, currently located within the Department for Transport, will also transfer to the Department for Work and Pensions. These changes will take effect from today 24 July 2002.

Anglo-Irish Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister on what dates he has held meetings with ministers in the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; where each meeting took place; which Irish Government departments were involved in each meeting; and which ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72691]

The Prime Minister: Since 1 June 2000, I have met the Taoiseach on the following occasions:

Date	*Location/Event*
7 June 2000	Dinner at No. 10
19 June	Meeting in Oporto
31 July	Working lunch at No. 10
6 September	UN Summit, New York
10 October	Talks at No. 10
12 October	Bilateral talks during Informal European Council, Biarritz
20 October	Asia/Europe Business Forum in Seoul
23 November	Bilateral talks on flight to EU/Balkans Summit in Zagreb
7 December	Nice European Council
31 January 2001	Dinner at No. 10
28 February	Dinner at No. 10
8 March	Meeting at Hillsborough
24 March	Stockholm European Council
14 June	Bilateral at EU/US Summit in Gothenburg
18 June	Meetings at No. 10
28 June	Working lunch at Hillsborough
4 July	Dinner at No. 10
9–11 July	Meetings at Chequers and then Weston Park
13–14 July	Meetings and Press Conference at Weston Park
27 July	Meeting in Sedgfield
19 September	Meeting at No. 10
30 November	Bilateral at British Irish Council, Dublin Castle
18 February 2002	Working lunch at No. 10
14 June	Bilateral at British Irish Council, Jersey
4 July	Meeting and press conference at Hillsborough

Official Visits

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 463W, when he will publish the detailed list of cabinet ministers' visits overseas and information on expenditure by all Ministers for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002. [72785]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) today.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister what assistance was received for *(a)* non-Governmental organisations, *(b)* overseas Governments and *(c)* other agencies in meeting the cost of departmental special advisers' official travel between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002. [72685]

The Prime Minister: All official travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers* and the *Civil Service Management Code*. The cost of official travel will normally be met by individual departments.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister what the total cost was to the Government of employing departmental and non-departmental special advisers between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002; and what percentage of this total was *(a)* salary and related expenses and *(b)* other costs. [72679]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Ellesmore Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) today.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost is of the paybill for special advisers in 2001–02; what the paybands are for 2002–03; and how many special advisers there are in each payband, broken down by department. [73410]

The Prime Minister: The paybands and pay ranges for special advisers for 2002–03 are as follows:

	£
Scheme Maximum	128,125
Pay Band 4	76,876 to 92,250
Pay Band 3 and Premium	57,401 to 89,175
Pay Band 2	45,101 to 58,240
Pay Band 1	34,851 to 45,760
Pay Band 0	Up to 34,850

At 22 July 2002, the number of special advisers in each payband by department is as follows:

Department	*0*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
No 10[1]	—	6	6	11	2
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister[2]	—	—	2	1	—
Chief Whip's Office	—	1	2	—	—
Culture, Media and Sport	—	—	—	1	—
Defence	—	—	1	—	—
Education and Skills	—	—	1	1	—
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	—	1	1	—	—
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	—	—	—	2	—
Health	—	—	—	2	—
Home Office[3]	—	—	4	—	—
International Development[4]	—	—	—	—	—
Leader of the House of Lords[5]	—	1	1	—	—
Lord Chancellor's Department	—	—	—	—	1
Northern Ireland Office	—	—	2	—	—
President of the Council	—	—	2	—	—
Scotland Office	—	1	1	—	—
Trade and Industry[6]	—	1	1	1	—
HM Treasury[7,8]	—	1	1	2	1
Transport[9]	—	—	1	—	—
Wales Office	—	1	—	—	—
Work and Pensions[10]	—	—	—	—	—
Total	—	13	26	21	4

The cost of special advisers in 2001–02 is £5.1 million.

[1] Plus two special advisers who are paid beyond Pay Band 4 but still within the scheme.

[2] Provision for three full-time posts but currently only 2.5 special advisers employed.

[3] Includes one special adviser who is part-time.

[4] One special adviser has been appointed but the job has not yet been evaluated.

[5] Includes one part-time special adviser who provides advice to the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

[6] Plus one adviser who is part-time and unpaid.

[7] Includes the Chief Economic Adviser to the Treasury.

[8] Plus the five members of the Council of Economic Advisers who are employed on special adviser terms (one in Band 4, three in Band 3 and one in Band 1—one is part-time).

[9] Plus one special adviser who has been appointed but the job has not yet been evaluated.

[10] One special adviser has been appointed but the job has not yet been evaluated.

Public Pronouncements

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* locations and *(c)* sources of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by his Chief of Staff, Director of Communications or other members of his office since March 2001; who in the Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the Departmental Head of Information. [72678]

The Prime Minister: All special advisers' contacts with the media, and speeches and presentations made by them are conducted in accordance with the requirements of the *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers.* All civil servants, including special advisers, are expected to keep departmental heads of information informed of contacts with the media. Details of such contacts are for internal purposes only.

Knighthoods

Peter Bradley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list, broken down by party, the hon. and right hon. Members that have been knighted in each year since 1979. [72942]

The Prime Minister: The information requested is being collated and I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Ministerial Meetings

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister how many formal and official meetings he has held with the First Minister of Scotland since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* subject and *(b)* date. [72722]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with the First Minister on a regular basis, both bilaterally and through the Joint Ministerial Committee, to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what dates and in what locations Ministers in his Department held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72687]

Mr. Murphy: I refer to the answer you received from my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe on 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 533W.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list *(a)* Government expenditure on ministerial overseas visits for the financial years 1996–97 to 2001–02 and *(b)* all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet ministers costing in excess of £500 between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002 including the cost, destination and purpose of each visit. [73406]

The Prime Minister: Expenditure on Ministerial overseas visits for the period requested is estimated as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1996–97	7.9
2 May 1997 to 31 March 1998	6.4
1998–99	4.9
1999–2000	4.6
2000–01	4.7
2001–02	5.6

The figure for 2001–02 reflects payments made so far for travel undertaken in this period; a few bills have yet to be submitted to departments for payment.

A list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The list provides details of the date, destination and purpose of all such visits and the cost of Ministers' travel and accommodation where appropriate.

Departmental Jobs

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister how many jobs under the remit of his offices excluding those under the departmental remit of his Cabinet Ministers, are located in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, excluding Greater London, *(c)* Greater London, *(d)* Wales, *(e)* Northern Ireland and *(f)* overseas, broken down by (i) whole-time equivalent jobs and (ii) the percentage per each individual body or organisation. [72726]

The Prime Minister: All jobs in my Office are located in London.

International Students

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has for the future of the Prime Minister's Initiative to attract more international students to the UK. [73195]

The Prime Minister: Through the British Council, we will continue to invest in marketing the benefits of UK education and training. Our aim is to meet the target of recruiting an extra 75,000 international students from outside the European Union by 2005, and we are currently on track to achieve this. We hope these students will gain advantage from the high quality and wide international recognition of their UK qualifications and remain friends of the UK, helping our trade and diplomacy. This initiative is a partnership with all education and training institutions across the UK and we welcome their continuing support.

Throckmorton

Mr. Luff: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an official visit to Throckmorton to study the effects of his Government's policies. [72922]

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the offices of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England. [73404]

The Prime Minister: The current Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England, Sir Michael Buckley, plans to retire later this year.

Her Majesty has been pleased to approve the appointment of Ann Abraham as Sir Michael's successor as Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England. Ann Abraham, who is currently the Legal Services Ombudsman, will take up appointment later this year.

I am grateful to Sir Michael for the dedication and commitment he has shown over the past five and a half years, and for the valuable contribution he has made to public life.

Information Commissioner

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Prime Minister who the new Information Commissioner will be. [73405]

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to announce that the Queen has approved the appointment of Mr. Richard Thomas as the new Information Commissioner, to succeed Mrs. Elizabeth France CBE later this year. Mr. Thomas is currently Director of Public Policy at the law firm Clifford Chance. He is expected to take up his duties as Commissioner on 30 November.

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Ms Munn: To ask the Prime Minister what changes there are to the leadership of the United Kingdom Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. [73407]

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) replaces the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who has been elected President of the Assembly, as leader of the Delegation. The right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) remains a Member of the Delegation.

WALES

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff have contributed to his Department's input to the Spending Review. [68689]

Mr. Murphy: The Spending Review involves a comprehensive assessment of the department's performance, priorities and resource requirements and a range of staff make a contribution.

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked in his Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72634]

Mr. Murphy: My Department came into existence in July 1999.

Information is not readily available for the whole period. However my Department currently has 4 agency staff out of a total of 48. Expenditure on agency staff amounted to £86,000 in 2000–01; £35,000 in 2001–02; and £17,000 in the first quarter of 2002–03.

The figure for 2000–01 equates to 4.8 per cent. of the paybill for that year; the spend in 2001–02 equates to 1.4 per cent. of the paybill.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72259]

Mr. Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Public Consultations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 8 June 2001, indicating the *(a)* length and *(b)* number of responses received in each case. [68701]

Mr. Murphy: Since 8 June 2001, my department has undertaken consultations on the following:

jointly with Department of Health, Draft mental health Bill;

jointly with Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Tenancies Regulatory Reform Order from March to June 2002;

draft NHS (Wales) Bill from May to July 200, available on line, with an e-mail address for respondents, and in print.

Both the Welsh Affairs Committee and the National Assembly for Wales considered and reported on the draft NHS (Wales) Bill, with a further 31 responses from other organisations

Departmental Reports

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how much the *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 departmental reports cost to produce; [63105]

(2) what the total production cost to the Wales Office was of the Departmental report in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001; [66681]

(3) what the total cost was of producing the Wales Office departmental report in 2002. [67652]

Mr. Murphy: The cost to the Wales Office of producing departmental reports for those years was:

1999	The Wales Office did not produce a departmental report in 1999;
2000	£2,576.25;
2001	£23,932.63; and
2002	£20,264.45.

The Wales Office 2000 report cost less than the other reports because it was shorter and very basic, compared with the later reports. It was done in black and white and the pages were simply folded and stapled whereas the Wales Office 2001 and 2002 reports were bigger, spine-bound, in colour and were altogether less simple in style.

Another factor affecting the cost is the subsidy paid by the Department to determine the cover price. Because Wales Office reports are bilingual they have twice as many pages as a comparable single language report. The subsidy the Department pays, therefore, enables it to keep down the cover price to something comparable with a single language report. There are other factors which affect the amount paid but these are a commercial matter for the Stationery Office.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the cost was of publishing his Department and its predecessor's annual report for each of the past five years. [70487]

Mr. Murphy: The cost to the Departments of producing Welsh Office and Wales Office departmental reports for those years was:

1998	£7,388.82;
1999	£9,828.91;
2000	£2,576.25;
2001	£23,932.63; and
2002	£20,264.45.

The Wales Office 2000 report cost less than the other reports to produce because it was shorter and very basic, compared with the later reports. It was done in black and white and the pages were simply folded and stapled whereas the Wales Office 2001 and 2002 and the Welsh Office 1998 and 1999 reports were bigger, spine-bound, in colour and were altogether less simple in style.

Another factor affecting the cost is the subsidy paid by the Department to determine the cover price. Because Wales Office and old Welsh Office reports are bilingual they have twice as many pages as a comparable single language report. The subsidy paid by the Department, therefore, enables the cover price to be kept to something comparable with a single language report. The Welsh Office cover prices were much higher than the Wales Office's (£11.50 and £14.00 compared with £4.70, £7.00 and £8.00) so a lower subsidy would have been paid. There are other factors affecting the amount paid but these are a commercial matter for The Stationery Office.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68726]

Mr. Murphy: All overseas travel by officials in my department is undertaken in accordance with the principles set in Chapter 8 of the *Civil Service Management Code*. Detailed information about individual trips is not held centrally, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Political Appointments

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many political appointments he has made in the Welsh Office since taking office. [64547]

Mr. Murphy: In accordance with the Ministerial Code, I have two Special Advisers. Since 1999 I have made 3 appointments to these posts.

In addition I have one Parliamentary Private Secretary, and since 1999 have appointed two Members of Parliament to this post.

Job Location

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72737]

Mr. Murphy: My department's structure currently contains 48 permanent posts, 9 of which are based in Cardiff and the remainder of which are based in central London. It has no NDPBs, agencies, or other related bodies.

Overseas Profile

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent steps he has taken to extend the profile of Wales abroad. [71772]

Mr. Murphy: I and my colleague the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales undertake a regular programme of activities with the aim of extending the profile of Wales abroad. This programme includes: visits to the European institutions; bilateral visits overseas; meetings with key national and regional politicians, both in the UK and abroad; attendance at international conferences and events; support for trade missions overseas; and meetings with UK based representatives of Wales' overseas partners.

In the past twelve months, our programme has included visits to Brussels, Strasbourg, Spain and the Czech Republic and other activities with partners from the USA, Ireland, Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands, Spain and Slovakia. Future meetings are planned with Danish and Japanese representatives.

Civil Courts

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Home Office concerning the Government's proposals for improvement of civil courts. [71771]

Mr. Murphy: I have regular discussions with colleagues about matters affecting Wales.

The Court Service Report "Modernising the Civil and Family Courts" is the responsibility of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor. This involves a major programme of investment, which will enable the Court Service to change radically the way that the courts across all jurisdictions work, and provide a significantly improved overall level of service to its customers. I understand that the National Assembly for Wales was consulted about the programme.

Monetary Union

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with Welsh Assembly Government colleagues concerning the impact of possible monetary union on Wales. [71768]

Mr. Murphy: I have regular discussions with the First Secretary and his Cabinet Colleagues on a range of issues affecting Wales including Monetary union.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the National Assembly for Wales concerning the backlog in processing the results of TB tests; and if he will make a statement. [68920]

Mr. Murphy: The interim programme of action to tackle TB in Wales announced on 29 May 2002 gives priority to tackling the backlog of overdue tests. The State Veterinary Service in Wales has already acted to minimise the spread of TB through the introduction of movement restrictions on herds in annual testing parishes with overdue 6 and 12-month check tests. Prioritisation has also been given to those herds with tuberculosis tests that are overdue. Significant progress has been made. In Wales the number of overdue tests has reduced from 5,135 at 30 November to 3,450 at 30 June 2002.

Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69326]

Mr. Murphy: IT services are provided to my department by the National Assembly for Wales under a Service Level Agreement. The system does not use open source software.

HEALTH

Correspondence

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 11 February from Councillor Carole Paternoster of Aylesbury Vale District Council about the provision of hospital beds in the Aylesbury area. [70861]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The Department has no record of receiving this correspondence. The Ministerial Correspondence Unit is seeking a copy of this correspondence.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will obtain for the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton a reply to the letter regarding Ms M. Allcock which the right hon. Member sent to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 27 May and which the Secretary of State fowarded to the Medicines Control Agency for reply. [72139]

Mr. Milburn: A reply was sent on 24 July.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 12 March, 11 April, 9 May, 6 June and 4 July 2002 relating to her constituent, Mr. Gordon Thorne of Hoddesdon. [68384]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* A reply was sent 24 July.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters from the hon. and learned member for Harborough regarding *(a)* St Luke's Hospital and the Coventry Road Hospital in Market Harborough, dated 7 February, *(b)* Mrs. C Foreman of Wigston, dated 10 January and *(c)* a constituent and Leicester City Social Services Department concerning allegations of child abuse dated 30 July 2001. [59883]

Jacqui Smith: Replies were sent to the hon. Member's letters on 24 June, 2 July and 24 July respectively.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 25 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Miss Irene Boyd. [70347]

Mr. Milburn: A reply was sent on 18 July.

Waiting Lists

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes have been made since May 2001 in the way waiting lists are compiled; and whether NHS trusts in England apply the same criteria. [56276]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan set waiting time targets for first outpatient appointments following general practitioner (GP) referral and for inpatient treatment. Waiting list data are collected from National Health Service trusts to monitor progress against these targets. NHS trusts are required to compile their waiting list returns according to criteria and guidance set out by the Department and the NHS information authority.

Further to recommendations made in the national audit office report "Inappropriate Adjustments to NHS Waiting Lists", guidance setting out the main rules for recording waiting list or waiting time information, and some related technical guidance prepared by the NHS information authority, will be sent to trust directors of information shortly. The NHS and social care bulletin number 21 issued on 18 July 2002 referred to this forthcoming guidance and also reminded chief executives of their duties of reasonableness to patients and honesty to the public when reporting waiting list information.

Premature Retirements

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amounts have been provided for in 2002–03 *(a)* primary care trust budgets and *(b)* strategic health authority budgets for the cost of premature retirements. [56290]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* No funding has been earmarked in allocations to health authorities and primary care trusts in 2002–03 to meet the costs of premature retirements. National Health Service organisations meet such costs from their general allocations.

Cardiology Operations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting for cardiology operations in *(a)* the quarter ending March 1997 and *(b)* the latest available quarter in each health authority in England. [61459]

Mr. Hutton: The table below shows the number of patients waiting for elective cardiology admission by Health Authority as at 31 March 1997 and 31 March 2002.

The total number of patients awaiting cardiology operations has increased by 5,662. In the same period, the number of cardiology episodes increased from 177,304 in 1996–97 to 255,998 in 2000–01.

Patients waiting for elective cardiology admission: Position at 31 March 1997 and 31 March 2002[1]: Health Authorites, England

Health Authority	*31 March 1997*	*31 March 2002[1]*
Avon HA	489	886
Barking and Havering HA	198	289
Barnet HA	153	.
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	.	389
Barnsley HA	64	51
Bedfordshire HA	219	423
Berkshire HA	182	372
Bexley and Greenwich HA	106	.
Birmingham HA	469	489
Bradford HA	157	107
Brent and Harrow HA	561	222
Bromley HA	214	.
Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich	.	366
Buckinghamshire HA	169	440
Bury and Rochdale HA	165	202
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	76	137
Cambridge and Huntingdon HA	301	.
Cambridgeshire HA	.	538
Camden and Islington HA	140	191
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	398	64

Patients waiting for elective cardiology admission: Position at 31 March 1997 and 31 March 2002[1]: Health Authorites, England

County Durham and Darlington HA	137	135
Coventry HA	171	157
Croydon HA	188	302
Doncaster HA	101	102
Dorset HA	479	319
Dudley HA	49	54
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	795	599
EandN Hertfordshire HA	196	.
East Kent HA	428	344
East Lancashire HA	280	448
East London and City HA	436	671
East Norfolk HA	348	.
East Riding and Hull HA	8	340
East Surrey HA	197	172
East Sussex Brighton and Hove HA	125	93
Enfield and Haringey HA	186	.
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	236	59
Gloucestershire HA	81	207
Herefordshire HA	.	16
Hertfordshire HA	.	763
Hillingdon HA	94	163
Isle of Wight HA	11	.
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	.	461
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	189	274
Kingston and Richmond HA	126	301
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	651	378
Leeds HA	357	203
Leicestershire HA	411	827
Lincolnshire HA	189	223
Liverpool HA	133	396
Manchester HA	432	452
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	260	572
Morecambe Bay HA	101	210
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	330	197
Norfolk HA	.	570
North and East Devon HA	8	19
North and Mid Hampshire HA	140	368
North Cheshire HA	72	190
North Cumbria HA	221	196
North Derbyshire HA	161	137
North Essex HA	317	717
North Nottinghamshire HA	62	123
North Staffordshire HA	222	88
North West Anglia HA	211	.
North West Lancashire HA	345	802
North Yorkshire HA	53	92
Northamptonshire HA	154	92
Northumberland HA	189	153
Nottingham HA	21	155
Oxfordshire HA	208	235
Portsmouth and SE Hampshire HA	151	.
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	284	413
Rotherham HA	94	39
Salford and Trafford HA	224	243
Sandwell HA	59	298
Sefton HA	51	126
Sheffield HA	230	308
Shropshire HA	46	65
Solihull HA	87	90
Somerset HA	119	166
South and West Devon HA	328	70
South Cheshire HA	184	271
South Essex HA	329	680
South Humber HA	25	48
South Lancashire HA	127	344
South Staffordshire HA	107	60
Southampton and SW Hampshire HA	387	618
Southern Derbyshire HA	32	60
St Helens and Knowsley HA	103	303
Stockport HA	141	123
Suffolk HA	367	542
Sunderland HA	205	143
Tees HA	184	139
Wakefield HA	238	44
Walsall HA	16	27
Warwickshire HA	187	161
West Hertfordshire HA	131	.
West Kent HA	338	337
West Pennine HA	222	238
West Surrey HA	227	141
West Sussex HA	209	332
Wigan and Bolton HA	286	322
Wiltshire HA	167	383
Wirral HA	127	248
Wolverhampton HA	35	40
Worcestershire HA	191	107

[1] This data is consistent with the Department's statistical press notice of 10 May 2002 about end March 2002 waiting list/times. However, some of the figures may change slightly when final details about the end March position at Royal United Hospitals, Bath become available.

Source:

Department of Health form QF01.

Note:

"." Denotes data not applicable due to non-existence of Health Authority at that time.

Derbyshire Primary Care Trusts

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the salary of the *(a)* Chair and *(b)* Chief Executive, and the total spending and capitation fee, of each of the Derbyshire primary care trusts; and if he will list the distance from target of the annual spending in each primary care trust area in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [67433]

Mr. Hutton: Chairs of primary care trusts (PCTs) receive an allowance. There are three levels of chair allowance:

band 1	£20,420
band 2	£18,154
band 3	£16,017

Table 1 shows the allowance band for the chairs of the primary care tusts in Derbyshire.

Table 1: Chair's allowance for PCTs in Derbyshire

Primary care trust	*Chair allowance*
Amber Valley	band 2
Central Derby	band 2
Chesterfield	band 2
Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire	band 3
Erewash	band 3
Greater Derby	band 2
High Peak and Dales	band 3
North East Derbyshire	band 2

Chief executive salaries are not collected centrally.

Of the 8 primary care trusts in Derbyshire, only Central Derby Primary Care Trust was operational in 2000–01. The total expenditure, or gross operating cost, of the primary care trust for that year was £70.08 million. Total expenditure figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are not yet available.

For each of the three years, the Department has made allocations to health authorities, and health authorities have subsequently made allocations to primary care groups and primary care trusts within their area.

Table 2 shows the allocation and distance from target in 2000–01 for the 9 previously existing primary care groups (PCGs) in Derbyshire. All of the primary care groups became part of primary care trusts in 2001.

Table 2: Allocation and distance from target 2000–01

PCG	2000–01 Allocation £000s	Distance from target £000s
Chesterfield PCG	75,979	−1,060
Derby Dales PCG	47,244	493
Derby West PCG	45,424	−2,286
East Derby PCG	57,898	−1,783
Erewash PCG	63,941	1,302
High Peak and Dales PCG	68,409	2,243
North Amber Valley PCG	39,671	−1,727
North East Derbyshire PCG	104,543	−2,273
South Amber Valley PCG	47,121	−156

Table 3 shows the allocation and distance from target for the primary care trusts in Derbyshire for each of the years 2000–01 to 2002–03.

Table 3: Allocation and distance from target 2000–01 to 2002–03, PCTs

	2000–01		2001–02		2002–03	
PCT	Allocation £000s	Distance from target £000s	Allocation £000s	Distance from target £000s (per cent.)	Allocation £000s	Distance from target £000s (per cent.)
Amber Valley PCT	n/a	n/a	84,531	−3,388 (−3.85)	93,848	−3,659 (−3.52)
Central Derby PCT	73,684	−1,801	88,138	−2,427 (−2.68)	94,592	−4,389 (−4.16)
Chesterfield PCT	n/a	n/a	82,599	417 (0.51)	92,842	402 (0.41)
Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire PCT	n/a	n/a	55,080	−1,451 (−2.57)	61,312	−1,793 (−2.66)
Erewash PCT	n/a	n/a	72,512	−189 (−0.26)	79,550	2,392 (2.90)
Greater Derby PCT	n/a	n/a	105,365	−463 (−0.44)	117,004	−2,171 (−1.71)
High Peak and Dales PCT	n/a	n/a	74,422	3,368 (4.74)	81,498	3,226 (3.85)
North East Derbyshire PCT	n/a	n/a	112,060	−2,225 (−1.95)	122,632	−1,020 (−0.77)

Domiciliary Oxygen Therapy Service

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his Department's review on the Domiciliary Oxygen Therapy service; and if he will make a statement. [69437]

Mr. Lammy: The review of the domiciliary oxygen service has not yet been concluded. We hope to be in a position shortly to say what steps we propose to take in the light of the work which has been done so far.

Branded Drugs

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of *(a)* the cost to the health service and *(b)* consequences for patients of the practice among pharmaceutical companies of withdrawing branded drugs from the market shortly before the expiry of their patents and replacing them with similar patented formulations; and if he will make a statement. [69539]

Mr. Lammy: The Department is aware of only two instances of companies withdrawing a branded drug from the market shortly before patent expiry. In both cases, the "replacement" products were no more expensive than those that were withdrawn, and there was every reason to expect that generics would be available when the patent on the withdrawn product expired. In both cases, therapeutic alternatives were available for patients.

Morning-After Pill

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what tests have been carried out on the morning-after pill prior to its authorisation for use; [69314]

(2) whether an audit of the effectiveness of the morning-after pill has been carried out. [69313]

Mr. Lammy: Levonorgestrel 0.75 mg (the morning-after pill) was authorised in the UK as a prescription only medicine in November 1999. This followed advice from the committee on safety of medicines (CSM) who were satisfied as to the evidence of quality, safety and efficacy of levonorgestrel 0.75 mg for emergency contraception. The evidence considered by CSM included two World Health Organisation (WHO) sponsored pivotal studies. One study involving approximately 2000 women in 14 countries including the UK, has been published in the Lancet (1998). The other, published in the journal Human Reproduction (1993), involved 880 women. Copies are available in the Library.

The WHO study published in the Lancet demonstrated that this method of emergency hormonal contraception prevented 86 per cent. of pregnancies when treatment was initiated within 72 hours of unprotected sex. The trial also showed that the efficacy is higher the sooner the product is taken after unprotected intercourse. If it is taken within 24 hours of unprotected sex the product is 95 per cent. effective, and this falls to about 56 per cent. if taken within 49 to 72 hours.

Food Labelling

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the labelling with the Union flag of food products processed in the United Kingdom but originating in other countries; and if he will make it his policy to restrict the use of the Union flag to food products originating within the UK. [69618]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency has issued guidance to enforcement authorities on interpretation of the law on country of origin labelling. The guidance makes it clear that the use of the Union flag, or any other indication of United Kingdom origin, on foods produced from ingredients sourced outside the UK may contravene legislation prohibiting misleading labelling. The agency is pressing for a statutory definition of the circumstances under which UK origin, or equivalent, claims can be made.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Food Standards Agency's Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition's sub-group on salt received copies of the references, studies, research and evidence listed in the submissions. [69979]

Ms Blears: All the evidence referred to in the submissions was made available to the salt subgroup.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence the Food Standards Agency's Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition will use in their review of the evidence on salt. [69978]

Ms Blears: Members of the salt subgroup requested a range of evidence in addition to that highlighted in submissions by stakeholders. This evidence is listed in the minutes of the meetings placed on the scientific advisory committee on nutrition website (www.sacn.gov.uk).

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Food Standards Agency's Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition expects to contact the interested parties who submitted evidence to its review on salt and inform them of the procedure involved in the assessment of evidence. [69981]

Ms Blears: Information on the procedure used by the salt subgroup to assess evidence is available to stakeholders through the minutes and papers of the meetings which have been placed on the scientific advisory committee on nutrition web site (www.sacn.gov.uk).

Abortion

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact an increase in induced medical abortions in the community will have on the hospital services of the NHS. [69760]

Ms Blears: Within the National Health Service, abortions have traditionally been carried out in gynaecology wards and day care units. A 1999 survey showed that women can wait up to four or five weeks for an abortion in some parts of the country. There is clear evidence that the earlier in pregnancy an abortion is performed the lower the risk of complications. We therefore want to ensure that women who have legal grounds can access an abortion within three weeks as recommended by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists evidence based clinical guideline *The Care of Women Seeking Induced Abortion.*

We plan to test, at a very limited number of sites on hospital premises, whether providing early medical abortions in a setting such as a family planning clinic can help to reduce waiting times. We will also monitor the impact on local hospital services, particularly whether greater use of medical abortion reduces waiting times for surgical abortion and whether staff and operating theatre time is released for other procedures.

Under-Age Pregnancy

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that plans to reduce under-age pregnancy protect children from sexual abuse and rape. [69757]

Ms Blears: One of the central aims of the teenage pregnancy strategy is to help young people develop the skills to make informed choices about sexual relationships, to resist pressure to have early sex and to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation.

This is being done through improving sex and relationship education and increasing young people's confidence in accessing professional advice and support. All guidance issued by the teenage pregnancy unit to professionals working with young people makes clear that it may be necessary to breach the usual confidentiality arrangements if there are serious child protection concerns, in order to engage further support for the young person.

The Government is currently engaged in a comprehensive review of sex offences legislation and is considering how it should be modernised and strengthened to ensure that it protects everyone, particularly children and vulnerable people, from sexual abuse and exploitation. We plan to publish our proposals for legislative reform in the Autumn.

Non-executive Directors

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many non-executive directors on the *(a)* Doncaster Royal Infirmary/Mexborough Montagu/Bassetlaw Hospitals Trust, *(b)* Barnsley PCT, *(c)* Barnsley District General Hospital Trust and *(d)* Doncaster West PCT live in the Barnsley East and Mexborough constituency. [70812]

Mr. Lammy: Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals National Health Service Trust, Barnsley Primary Care Trust and Doncaster West Primary Care Trust each have one non-executive board member who lives in the the Barnsley East and Mexborough constituency. None of the board members of Barnsley District General Hospital NHS Trust live in Barnsley East and Mexborough.

Waiting Times (Breast Cancer)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was in the *(a)* Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and *(b)* South East Hampshire Health Authority for treatment of breast cancer in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [70999]

Ms Blears: Average waiting times for treatment of breast cancer cannot be calculated from the data centrally collected.

Monitoring of the 1 month target from diagnosis to first definitive treatment for breast cancer began in January 2002. The first available data, therefore, is Quarter 4 of 2001–02, January–March 2002. The table below shows the performance against the 1 month target for Portsmouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust and Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust. These NHS trusts were hosted by the former Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority. The Publication of Quarter 1 2002–03 data will be in September 2002.

Performance against the 1 month target from diagnosis to treatment for breast cancer: Quarter 4 2001–02

NHS Trust	*Percentage of patients treated within 31 days*	*Total patients treated*	*Number of patients treated within 31 days*
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	98.5	67	66
Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust	100.0	31	31

Source:
Department of Health form QMCW.

Neurofibromatosis

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health trusts have consultants specialising in neurofibromatosis; and how many doctors are receiving training in this illness. [70727]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the services provided by local trusts, the skill mix of the staff they employ and the training they receive is not held centrally.

A range of doctors deal with this condition including consultants in ear, nose and throat, neurology, dermatology and clinical genetics. All doctors receive a general medical training but it is in their postgraduate years that consultants in the specialities mentioned above receive advanced training for conditions like neurofibromatosis.

Teenage Pregnancy

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the value of peer education projects as part of the Government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. [70718]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education regarding *(a)* the promotion and take up of peer education projects in schools, *(b)* action to promote the take up of peer education projects in schools and *(c)* the incorporation of peer education projects into the National Curriculum, as part of the Government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. [70719]

(3) what plans he has in place to increase funding for peer education projects as part of the Government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. [70720]

Ms Blears: Peer education is recognised as having the potential to contribute to the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy by complementing classroom based Sex and Relationships Education (SRE). This is reflected in key SRE guidance documents (DfES, 2000; Ofsted, 2002). The Teenage Pregnancy Unit is working closely with the Department for Education and Skills to disseminate effective peer education approaches more widely.

The available research evidence concludes that peer education can be effective in increasing young people's knowledge, can have positive impact on attitudes, intentions and self-esteem and, in some instances, can change behaviour. Young people like peer approaches; involvement in programmes raises the self-esteem of peer educators; and peer education projects give young people control over their own health.

The Teenage Pregnancy Unit is funding a limited evaluation of a peer education programme called "A PAUSE" developed by Exeter University. The evaluation includes investigating the transferability of the programme to deprived areas and the potential to develop the programme for those at an increased risk of teenage pregnancy. The evaluation is due to report in March 2003.

The Teenage Pregnancy Unit has recently published "Involving Young People in Peer Education: A Guide to Establishing Sex and Relationships Peer Education Projects". This document aims to support those setting up SRE peer education projects and encourage good practice. Copies will be sent to every secondary school at the start of the new school year. The document will also be disseminated to local teenage pregnancy co-ordinators, National Healthy Schools co-ordinators and Initial Teacher Training providers.

The Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship framework provides pupils with opportunities to engage in peer related projects. There are no plans to include peer education within the national curriculum. The Department for Education and Skills is developing its PSHE website for teachers to include examples of where peer education programmes are working well.

Local teenage pregnancy partnership boards draw on a range of funding sources, including the Teenage Pregnancy Local Implementation Grant, to support projects which contribute to the local teenage pregnancy strategy. £16 million is available through the Local Implementation Grant during the current financial year. The level of funding planned for future years has not yet been decided.

HIV/AIDS

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he *(a)* has had and *(b)* plans with the Ukrainian Government to offer advice on AIDS prevention and treatment schemes. [71045]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply. My Department works closely with other donors involved in supporting the Ukrainian Government's HIV/AIDS prevention activities. We have funded a study on tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS for the World Bank office in Ukraine, which has been used to support the design of a $92 million loan for TB/AIDS treatment and prevention. We have also funded a study by the United Nations Development Programme on the cost-effectiveness of HIV prevention, also in support of the Ukrainian Government's national HIV/AIDS programme.

guidance of the Afghan Transitional Administration (ATA), will be used to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis, support the return of refugees to Afghanistan, develop a comprehensive analysis of and approach to vulnerability in Afghanistan, and support the transition of competence, ownership and technical capacity to the ATA to meet the immediate needs of its own people.

In addition to the £60 million that my Department disbursed from September 2001 to March 2002 under our humanitarian programme, we pledged at the Tokyo conference in January 2002 to commit a further £200 million over the next five years. This amount is already being allocated and disbursed. We are fully committed to helping to meet the immediate priorities of the ATA and are encouraging other donors to do likewise by maximising their contributions and speeding up the disbursement of promised assistance.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent representations he has received on *(a)* drug resistant disease and *(b)* HIV/AIDS; [70884]

(2) what progress has been made towards the discovery of new drugs to fight drug-resistant HIV/AIDS. [70829]

Ms Blears: Since its widespread introduction in the mid-1990s, highly active antiretroviral therapy has improved the lifespan and quality of life for people with HIV and AIDS. This is reflected in the dramatic reduction in reported cases of AIDS and HIV-related deaths. There are concerns that this "treatment effect" is reaching a plateau and emerging drug resistance is an important limiting factor.

Two advisory non-departmental public bodies received presentations recently from the public health laboratory service's antiviral susceptibility reference unit—the expert advisory group on AIDS and the specialist advisory committee on antimicrobial resistance (SACAR). The presentations covered drug resistance in patients on treatment for HIV infection and in untreated individuals recently infected. SACAR, which advises Government on all issues relating to antimicrobial resistance, has prioritised antiviral resistance for its future work programme.

The pharmaceutical industry continues to have an active drug discovery programme for antiretroviral agents. New anti-HIV drugs are being developed, belonging both to the existing classes (reverse transcriptase inhibitors and protease inhibitors) but selected for their ability to work in the presence of resistant virus and novel classes such as fusion inhibitors and integrase inhibitors. Several promising new agents are undergoing clinical trials in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the programmes that the Government are involved with in regard to HIV/AIDS research *(a)* at present and *(b)* in 2003; and if he will make a statement on the nature of the Government's involvement. [70843]

Ms Blears: The Government is involved in HIV/AIDS research programmes through the Medical Research Council (MRC), which is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry, through the other research councils, through the Department for International Development, through the Department of Health and through its executive non-departmental public bodies.

The MRC has a wide portfolio of research into the causes and treatment of HIV/AIDS, ranging from basic immunological studies to clinical trials of drugs and vaccines. Examples of the latter include a new phase of the world's first clinical trial to test a vaccine for one of the most prevalent HIV strains affecting Africa, and an international co-operation to develop effective vaginal microbicides for prevention of HIV transmission. The Department for International Development is supporting both of these, and is also supporting two HIV/AIDS knowledge programmes.

The Department of Health contributes to MRC-managed research on HIV/AIDS, through its policy research programme, mainly for epidemiological studies. In addition, the Department's health technology assessment and its new and emerging applications of technology programmes support relevant research.

These programmes are ongoing and are not likely to be substantially different in 2003 than at present.

Fluoridation

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his officials last met the MRC with regard to further research into the health effects of water fluoridation. [63952]

Ms Blears: Departmental officials last met the Medical Research Council regarding fluoridation on 14 May.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive the MRC report with regard to further research into the health effects of water fluoridation. [63951]

Ms Blears: We expect to receive the report shortly.

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the question of 16 May from the hon. Member for Workington on fluoridation in West Cumbria. [69499]

Ms Blears: The Department has no record of receiving this correspondence. The Department's ministerial correspondence unit is seeking a copy of this correspondence.

Smallpox Vaccine

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether during the negotiations for the smallpox vaccine contract he was informed of which company was to manufacture the smallpox vaccine should Powderject be awarded the contract. [67541]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 454W.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether Powderject has guaranteed that the smallpox vaccine to be supplied by them will be free of BSE. [67539]

Mr. Hutton: The smallpox vaccine to be supplied by Powderject is not manufactured using bovine cell culture. If a manufacturer wished to produce smallpox vaccine using virus culture in bovine cells, the appropriate regulatory guidance on cell characterisation and storage would have to be followed.

European legislation demands that an application for marketing authorisation of a medicinal product in the European Union must include satisfactory demonstration of compliance with the European Note for Guidance on minimising the risk of transmitting animal spongiform encephalopathy agents via human and veterinary medicinal products.

Advisory Committee on Immunisation Practices

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Advisory Committee on Immunisation Practices in the United States. [70256]

Ms Blears: An official from the Department is a liaison member of the Advisory Committee on Immunisation Practices in the United States and attends some of their meetings.

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the application to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation of the open principles of Government. [70249]

Ms Blears: The working practices of the joint committee on vaccination and immunisation (JCVI) have been influenced by the office of science and technology (OST) code of practice for scientific committees. The committee members are aware of the recommendations of the OST code of practice. Lists of members and their declarations of interest, and minutes of meetings are posted on the website at www.doh.gov.uk/jcvi/index.htm members are recruited to the JCVI in line with guidelines laid down by the commissioner for public appointments.

Rubella Vaccine

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department had with Glaxo SmithKline about their decision to cease production of single rubella vaccine. [70292]

Ms Blears: Glaxo Smithkline informed officials in the Department that a decision had been taken by the company at a global level to stop production of single rubella vaccine. This information was unsolicited.

Pneumococcal Vaccination

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has conducted into the effects an over-65 age recommendation for pneumococcal vaccination would have on the health of people in Wyre Forest. [70223]

Ms Blears: The Department asked the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) an independent expert advisory group, to review all available data on the use of this vaccine and report back. The costs and benefits of changing this policy are currently being considered.

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many over-65 year olds have received the pneumococcal vaccination in Wyre Forest in the past five years. [70224]

Ms Blears: Information on age breakdown of those receiving pneumococcal vaccine is not available.

MMR Vaccines

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with management of Glaxo Smithkline about production of component vaccines of MMR. [71095]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* Glaxo Smithkline informed officials that a decision had been taken by the company at a global level to stop production of single rubella vaccine. This information was unsolicited.

School Nursing Service

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1114W, on the School Nursing Service, what steps he is taking to encourage primary care trusts to increase the number of school nurses. [71037]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* We recognise the importance of the school nursing contribution to improving the health of children and young people and have taken forward a three-year development programme to strengthen their role.

It is for primary care trusts (PCTs) to determine the school-nursing workforce they require to meet the health needs of the local population. However, lessons from the national development programme are being disseminated to help PCTs develop school nursing services as effectively as possible to improve school age health and deliver on priority areas such as nutrition, smoking cessation and teenage pregnancy.

Since 1997 we have increased the number of nurses working in the National Health Service by over 30,000. We intend to boost their numbers by a further 35,000 by 2008, increasing the available workforce from which school nurses can be drawn.

An extra £100,000 has recently been made available on top of the existing national campaigns to support recruitment; retention and return to practice in primary care including school nursing. Whilst we do not collect data on the numbers of nurses working in the school health service, training establishments show a year on year increase in the number of commissions for specialist school nurse training.

The children's national service framework (NSF) currently being developed will look at the role school nurses can play in delivering improved services to children, young people and their families. The NSF team is working closely with the children's care group workforce team to review the workforce implications of the NSF standards and ensure that workforce-related recommendations are achievable.

Patient Deregistrations

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recommendations of the University of Sheffield report on patient deregistrations from GP lists. [65725]

Mr. Hutton: The Sheffield University Report was published earlier this year and its recommendations are making a valuable contribution to our developing policy on patient choice, rights and responsibilities.

GPs

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs have benefited from the Golden Hello Scheme since November 2001. [47845]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service golden hello scheme was introduced in November 2001. All new general practitioners taking up their first post in the NHS from 1 April 2001 are eligible for the scheme.

To date, the Department has received over 1100 applications to the scheme. We will continue to monitor take up and keep the scheme under review.

General Practitioners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to *(a)* cut the workload of general practitioners and *(b)* increase their pay. [72043]

Mr. Hutton: New mechanisms that will enable general practitioners to vary their workload according to the income to which they aspire are set out in the new general medical services contract framework, which has been accepted by the profession. The Government is committed to investment in return for the delivery of higher quality, and a wider range, of primary services.

GP Golden Hello

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the NHS GP Golden Hello scheme. [62653]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service golden hello scheme was introduced in November 2001. All new general practitioners taking up their first post in the NHS from 1 April 2001 are eligible for the scheme.

To date, the Department has received over 1100 applications to the scheme. We will continue to monitor take up and keep the scheme under review.

Graduates

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the incentives available to encourage graduates to enter the National Health Service. [64335]

Mr. Hutton: The Government is implementing a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention of all staff, including graduates. These include improving terms and conditions, encouraging the National Health Service to become a better employer through the *Improving Working Lives and Positively Diverse* programmes and developing better career pathways further information on improving working lives is available at www.doh.gov.uk/iwl. This approach is working. Applications to nursing and medical training are increasing. A scheme for graduate entrants to medical school is developing well.

The NHS general management scheme has for the past two years been rated the second most popular scheme for graduates seeking a career in general management. The NHS finance scheme has this year been rated 8 in the finance sector. Whilst the starting salary offered to graduate trainees is slightly below the median for all graduate recruiters, the starting salary in 2002 will be £17,800 compared with a median of £19,000 across all sectors, the overall package offered to graduate trainees is worth around £30,000. This includes:

annual performance award of up to 6 per cent. of salary;

fully funded course of professional study, leading to a recognised qualification in finance or management;

personal development programme;

on-going development programme on completion of the scheme;

NHS pension scheme;

provision of laptop computer.

Doctors (Recuitment)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) of 2 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 298W, on doctors (recuitment), which developing countries have Government to Government agreements with the UK; and if he will make a statement on the policy; [71048]

(2) pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), of 2 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 298W, on doctors (recruitment), what action his Department will take against those *(a)* National Health Service employers and *(b)* recruitment agencies who are found to have targeted developing countries, which do not have a Government to Government agreement with the UK, for recruitment of health care personnel. [71047]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Code of Practice on international recruitment states that the National Health Service should not actively recruit in developing countries. International recruitment co-ordinators in the Workforce Development Confederations work with employers to ensure they comply to the entire Code of Practice.

The Department is currently compiling a list of recruitment agencies who comply to the Code of Practice and therefore do not actively recruit in developing countries. This list will be posted on the website for employers to use when entering into new recruitment contracts.

The only Government to Government agreement we have with a developing country to recruit doctors is with India. This agreement was reached following an approach by the Indian Government who were concerned with some of the actions of recruitment agencies who were operating in India.

Over-Medication

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the statement of the hon. Member for Salford, (Ms Blears) of 13 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 112W, on over-medication, when he will respond to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam. [71585]

Jacqui Smith: I replied to the hon. Member on 13 February 2002.

Health Services (Sussex and Worthing)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his latest calculations are for the GP : patient ratio in *(a)* Worthing and *(b)* each PCT in Sussex; [71088]

(2) what funds have been committed to improving access to primary care in Worthing since 1997; and what improvements have taken place. [71086]

(3) what monitoring is in place to make sure that funds earmarked for improving access to primary care in West Sussex are used for that purpose. [71152]

(4) what discussions he has had with the Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT about improving access to primary care in Worthing. [71087]

(5) What assessment he has made of routine appointment wait times at Worthing general practice surgeries. [71151]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Information on the ratios of general practitioners (GPs) to patients is held at primary care trust (PCT) level but I am advised by the PCTs that this varies around the Surrey and Sussex Health Authority area, from 1,782 patients per GP in Bexhill and Rother PCT to 2,050 in Crawley PCT. In Worthing I am informed that the ratio is 1,885. I recognise that local GPs are under pressure and this concern is shared by Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT, which has advised me that it is concerned about the level of access to GP services in some practices. The PCT is actively working to improve the situation though a number of actions including effective use of incentive schemes.

As part of the Department's commitment to improving access to primary care nationally, we have increased the PCT primary care access fund by £83.5 million to £168 million, with at least £48 million dedicated in 2002–03 to improving access in primary care and implementing advanced access. Significant funding has also been made available to enhance primary care services in Worthing. The former Worthing Primary Care Group invested £235,000 in 1999–2000 rising to £691,000 in 2001–02. The provision of additional funding has made it possible to improve access to a wide range of diagnostic and treatment services, as well as providing improved audit and clinical effectiveness. Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT monitors the use of all funds allocated to practices by practice and by use. The PCT will be included in the Audit Commission's national study to review use of all earmarked funds including primary care access monies.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had any meetings with representatives from Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT to discuss access issues. I visited Worthing in August 2001 to meet representatives from local GP practices and we discussed local issues in the course of that meeting.

Overseas Visitors

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many overseas visitors to the UK were treated by the NHS in each of the last three years for which figures are available; what the total cost was to the NHS; how many reimbursed the NHS and by how much; and how many failed to reimburse the NHS, and by how much. [70803]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* This information is not collected centrally.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what policies he has to increase access to NHS dentistry in Gloucestershire; and what offers he has made to private dentists to re-enter the NHS as part of this. [71265]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Access to National Health Service dentistry is an important issue for this Government and we have invested over £100 million in the last 18 months to modernise NHS dentistry.

We recognise that the provision of NHS dental care in Gloucestershire has been a challenge over the last few years. During 2001–02 Gloucestershire Health Authority received £1.35 million for their two personal dental service pilots, £247,100 from the modernisation fund and £16,500 from the dentistry action plan fund. The Gloucestershire personal dental service pilots are a growing service and more capacity will become available over the coming months.

The NHS enjoys very good working relationships with the whole dental community in Gloucestershire, both salaried and private dentists, with much collaborative planning continuing to take place to increase access to dentistry for Gloucestershire's population.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual expenditure by the NHS Litigation Authority on clinical negligence claims was in each year since 1995. [71561]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* According to the National Audit Office summarised accounts for the National Health Service (England) expenditure for claims and associated costs for clinical negligence for the latest years available is set out in the following table:

Year	*Expenditure £000s*
1996–97	74,411
1997–98	11,498
1998–99	309,855
1999–2000	490,672
2000–01	3,116,589

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors are used to calculate levels of clinical negligence insurance premiums paid by NHS trusts and primary care trusts to the NHS Litigation Authority. [71558]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The National Health Service Litigation Authority assesses each year, using actuarial analysis, the total pool of cash required to administer the clinical negligence scheme for trusts for the following financial year. This global pool is then translated into an individual contribution per member trust by calculating a weighted risk exposure for each trust and then allocating a charge accordingly.

In short the risk exposure is calculated by assessing annually the levels of key staff involved in delivering clinical care across major service delivery areas.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was paid by English *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* primary care trusts to the NHS Litigation Authority in the form of clinical negligence insurance premiums in each year since 1995. [71559]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Contributions to the clinical negligence scheme for trusts for each year were as follows:

Year	*NHS Trust £000s*	*PCT £000s*	*Total*
1996–97	7,963	—	7,963
1997–98	10,864	—	10,864
1998–99	15,214	—	15,214
1999–2000	32,115	—	32,115
2000–01	49,533	163	49,696
2001–02	39,583	1,549	41,177

The figures were taken from the National Health Service Litigation Authorities final accounts and represent the actual amounts billed, not necessarily the amounts that were physically paid and received.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the net present value of outstanding clinical negligence claims against the NHS in England was in each year since 1995. [71560]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* In the National Health Service summarised accounts (England), the National Audit Office includes figures for the provisions for clinical negligence in relation to all current claims and potentially successful claims (which may arise from incidents which have been incurred but not reported). The figures for this for each year were as follows:

Year	*Provision £000s*
1996–97	1.3 billion
1997–98	2.3 billion
1998–99	3.2 billion
1999–2000	3.9 billion
2000–01	4.4 billion

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how deficits in the NHS Litigation Authority budget for clinical negligence compensation are financed; and how surpluses are disposed of. [71556]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The NHS Litigation Authority does not account on an income and expenditure basis so does not have surpluses and deficits. It is controlled on its overall spending, which includes provisions for future liabilities that are met if and when they materialise, from cash financing agreed with Her Majesty's Treasury and voted by Parliament in estimates.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Government's White Paper on Clinical Negligence. [71562]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The chief medical officer (CMO) is producing a report for the Government on the options for reform of the system for dealing with clinical negligence. It is expected that this will be presented to Ministers in the course of the summer and will form the basis for published proposals later on this year. Neither Ministers nor CMO have yet to come to final conclusions.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and how much ex-gratia payments have been paid to NHS patients for NHS clinical negligence in the last *(a)* five, *(b)* 10 and *(c)* 20 years. [71078]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* National Health Service bodies make ex-gratia payments in a range of circumstances. Figures for these payments are reflected in individual NHS body's accounts, however, they are not collated centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he *(a)* has met and *(b)* plans to meet consultees to the White Paper on Clinical Negligence Reform. [71077]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* I have asked the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to lead a wide ranging review of options for reforming the way clinical negligence cases are handled. As part of this work, the CMO and the officials assisting him have met with representatives of several of the organisations that responded to our "Call for Ideas" on clinical negligence reforms. The CMO is now preparing a report with recommendations for reform, which I will be considering over the summer. Once the outcome of this work is published we will consider any further requests for meetings we may receive.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of hearing aids fitted under the NHS is represented by digital aids; and what proportion of hearing aids being fitted as current practice are digital. [71759]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of analogue aids fitted in the National Health Service is not collected centrally. We do however, know that services purchased 392,000 analogue aids from the NHS logistics authority in 2001–02. (These figures are exclusive of any purchases outside of NHS purchasing and supply agency contracts). By comparison, approximately 37,000 digital aids were purchased in 2001–02 by those involved in the modernising hearing aid services project that year with approx 28,000 being fitted as part of that project.

Health Funding

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the per capita health funding is in *(a)* Surrey and *(b)* Durham for the 2002–03 financial year. [71912]

Mr. Hutton: In the 2002–03 allocations, West Surrey Health Authority received £839 per weighted head of population (£745 per unweighted head) and County Durham Health Authority received £804 per weighted head (£884 per unweighted head).

Hospital Acquired Infections

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many older people whose discharge from hospital was delayed have acquired a healthcare-associated infection while waiting to be discharged in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [71863]

(2) how many emergency readmissions associated with health care acquired infections there were in each of the last six years; and if he will make a statement. [71864]

Jacqui Smith: The data requested are not routinely collected. However, we are committed to tackling healthcare associated infections and as part of implementing "Getting Ahead of the Curve", our strategy for combating infectious diseases, we are developing targeted action plans for healthcare associated infections and antimicrobial resistance.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital trusts closed *(a)* wards and *(b)* operating facilities in the last 12 months due to hospital acquired infections. [71090]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The data requested are not routinely collected. Tackling hospital acquired infection (HAI) underpins the priorities in the NHS Plan and a number of initiatives are underway to reduce HAI.

Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social workers there were per 1,000 population in *(a)* the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority, *(b)* Hampshire and *(c)* the South East in each year since 1996; and if he will make a statement. [72024]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of social workers per 1,000 population is not available by health authority, only by local authority. The table below shows the whole-time equivalent number of social work staff (including care managers) per 1,000 population as at 30 September in each year between 1996 and 2001 for Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and the south east region.

Social work staff[1] (whole-time equivalent) per 1,000 population	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001[2]*
Hampshire (old)	0.5	..	..	..	..	..
Hampshire (remaining)	..	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.5
Isle Of Wight Unitary Authority	0.6	0.7	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8
Portsmouth Unitary Authority	..	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.9
South East	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6

.. = not applicable due to local government reorganisation.

[1] Includes care managers.

[2] 2,000 population figures used as these are the latest available.

Sources:

Form SSDS001, annual return of local authority social services departments staff and Office for National Statistics population figures.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take measures to ensure that a higher proportion of patients with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease receive Reminyl; [71921]

(2) if he will take measures to increase the number of patients with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease receiving treatment; [71919]

(3) how many people within each health authority are suffering from mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease; how many and what percentage of these are being treated; and how many and what percentage of patients are receiving Reminyl. [71918]

Jacqui Smith: A 1998 medical research council cognitive function and ageing study found that about 600,000 people in the UK have dementia and that up to 60 per cent. of dementia cases are Alzheimer's. Information about the numbers of people within each health authority with Alzheimer's, and about the type of treatment they are receiving, is not routinely collected.

Reminyl and other anti-dementia drugs like Aricept and Exelon are available to people with Alzheimer's since NICE recommended their availability in January 2001.

The national service framework (NSF) for older people aims to promote good mental health in older people and to treat and support people with dementia including those with mild to moderate Alzheimer's. Implementation of the NSF will ensure that people with Alzheimer's disease will receive the care and treatment they need.

Care Costs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the sum to be transferred from local authority budgets to the NHS to cover the nursing contribution payments from 1 April 2003. [71196]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* We are still considering the amount that should be transferred from local authority budgets to the National Health Service to cover the nursing contribution payments in respect of local council supported clients from 1 April 2003. We expect to go out for consultation about that amount shortly.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the recently published report of the Rowntree Trust into the economics of the care home sector. [71679]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* My officials are considering the report by the Joseph Rowntree Trust. We welcome its contribution to the debate about the appropriate level of care home fees. We support any research that that helps councils to set fair and realistic fee levels.

The Government increased resources for social services by 20 per cent. in real terms between 1996–97 and 2002–3. This represents an average real terms increase of 3 per cent. per annum. In addition, funding will increase by 6 per cent. per year in real terms in each of the next three years. There is evidence that this extra investment is making a difference. Laing and Buisson, the authors of the Joseph Rowntree Trust report, reported last month that most councils have increased their care home fees by at least 3 per cent. in 2002–03 and that almost a third have agreed increases of at least 10 per cent. since last year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the final free nursing care contribution evaluation report was received by his Department. [71348]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 2 July, *Official Report 2002*, column 309W. A report has not been received by the Department and will not be received until later this year.

Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 449W, on carers, what steps his Department has taken to encourage general practitioners to detail in patient records whether a patient is also a carer. [71893]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The Department is funding a three-year project by Carers UK to disseminate good practice in National Health Service support for carers including identification of carers by general practitioners in patient records. In addition, the existence of the carers field in general practitioner (GP) computer systems was highlighted in the March edition of the Department's bulletin to GPs.

Care Homes (Questionnaire)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2002, on care homes ref. 68876, if he will place a copy of the questionnaire in the Library. [71648]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The national care standards commission (NCSC) is consulting service users and representative organisations as part of its inspection process.

The postcard questionnaire is one of the range of tools being used by the NCSC to gather information from service users on their perception of the care they receive. I have asked the commission to send a copy of this particular questionnaire to the hon. Member. Use of the cards to provide feedback to the Commission is, of course, entirely voluntary.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority *(a)* residential homes, *(b)* nursing homes and *(c)* dual registered homes have been voluntarily deregistered in each (i) local authority and (ii) region in each of the last five years. [45639]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The information centrally available on establishment closures will be placed in the Library. It is not possible to distinguish voluntary deregistrations from these statistics.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many single bed care homes there are in *(a)* England and *(b)* each local authority. [68445]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of care homes with only one bed is not collected centrally.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the availability of qualified staff before implementing Regulation 19(5)(b) in respect of care homes. [70315]

Jacqui Smith: Regulation 19(5)(b) requires that care home staff have qualifications suitable to the work they are to perform, and the skills and experience necessary for such work. The regulation does not specify the types and levels of qualifications which may be required, this depend on the type of care home and the needs of the residents. The regulations were extensively consulted on and the Department has no evidence to suggest that large numbers of care homes will be unable to meet this requirement.

To support training, a new fund—the training strategy implementation fund—was set up in April 2001. It is available to all social care employers—whether they are in the voluntary, private or statutory sectors. There was £2 million in this fund for 2001–02 and this has been used to support and embed induction standards in the social care field. The amount available within this fund has increased to £15 million for 2002–03. On 23 July this year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced that the national training strategy implementation fund will rise to £70 million by 2006.

Foster Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 18 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 540W, how much his Department has spent on recruitment campaigns to encourage people to become involved as foster carers since 1997. [72839]

Jacqui Smith: Since 1997 the Department has spent £2 million to fund a national foster carer campaign, which was launched in July 2000. The campaign focused on addressing the national shortage of foster carers in England.

Additionally, this Department is currently funding fostering network, a voluntary organisation through the section 64 general scheme grant. The three-year project called placement choice for children aims to work with local authorities on effective foster care recruitment. The three year project which began in 1999 has been funded for £90,000 per year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in the number of children being placed in foster care over the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [71737]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The table shows the number of looked after children in foster placements over the past 5 years.

Number of looked after children in foster placements at 31 March 1997–2001

England *Numbers*

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Total number of children looked after	51,200	53,300	55,500	58,100	58,900
Of which, total in foster placements	33,500	35,000	36,200	37,900	38,400

Excludes placements forming part of an agreed series of short term placements.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if he will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if he will make a statement. [70202]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The Department spent £27.872 million on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02.

Campaigns, which had an expenditure of over £250,000 during 2001–02, are listed as follows:

Child Immunisation

Flu Immunisation

National Health Service including nurse recruitment

NHS Direct

Sexwise/teenage pregnancy

Sexual Health

Social Work recruitment

Tobacco Education

TB Awareness

Drugs (Import Restrictions)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of drugs used in *(a)* the hospital service and *(b)* the community through the NHS are the subject of parallel importation from other European member states; what assessment he has made of the effect on the NHS of national quotas imposed by multinational drug companies to impede such activity; and if he will make a statement. [71729]

(2) what representations he has made to the European Commission in respect of the decision by Eli Lilly to impose a quota system in the supply of the drug Zyprexa in other European Union member states; [71730]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact on the price of the drug Zyprexa to the NHS of the restriction of imports of the drug from other European member countries. [71731]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Full information on the proportion of parallel imported medicines used by the National Health Service is not available but it is estimated that parallel imports into the United Kingdom are 13 per cent. of total sales. Parallel imported products represent approximately 11 per cent. of NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency pharmaceutical contracts for secondary care. No assessment has been made on the effect on the NHS of national quotas imposed by pharmaceutical companies.

The European Community Commission is already looking at quota policies to determine whether they are compatible with European Union competition law. We have neither received nor made representations in respect of the decision by Eli Lilly to impose a quota system in the supply of the drug Zyprexa in other EU member states.

The NHS reimbursement price of Zyprexa is unchanged.

Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoptions

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the United Kingdom Government will be in a position to ratify the Hague Convention on inter-country adoptions. [71487]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The Government remain fully committed to ratifying the Hague Convention. All countries within the United Kingdom are working hard to ensure that the UK as a whole will be able to ratify the Convention as soon as possible. The Department has already consulted on draft regulations for England and Wales, and we are currently working on final regulations, taking account of the consultation responses that we received. Once final regulations have been made and laid in each of the respective parliaments, notice will be given to The Hague that the UK wishes to ratify in accordance with Article 46 of the Convention. The Convention will come into force three months after formal notification has been given. We anticipate that this will be at the beginning of next year.

NHS Bank

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the management of the NHS Bank will be franchised to the private sector. [71873]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The future management arrangements for NHS Bank have yet to be determined.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the activities of the NHS Bank since 15 May. [71886]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The NHS Bank has been established and is operating in shadow form. This year the Bank is offering grants and loans to National Health Service organisations, with a direct link to helping NHS organisations to deliver the NHS Plan.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been lent by the NHS Bank since it commenced operation on 15 May. [71881]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The shadow NHS Bank has been established with an allocation of £100 million. The distribution between grants and loans has yet to be determined.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what interest rate will be charged on amounts borrowed from the NHS Bank. [71879]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002 2002]:* The future basis and terms for loans from the NHS Bank have yet to be determined.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the NHS Bank will be accountable to Parliament. [71877]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The NHS Bank will be accountable to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether trusts investing surplus cash with the NHS Bank will earn interest on new deposits. [71875]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The future basis and terms for any deposits with NHS Bank have yet to be determined.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set for the NHS Bank. [71882]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The shadow NHS Bank's initial remit is to manage the £100 million allocation it has been given.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the NHS Bank will be accountable to the Chancellor of the Exchequer through public service agreements. [71884]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* No. The NHS Bank will be accountable to the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much cash has been deposited with the NHS Bank by trusts. [71885]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* None.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the expected composition of the board of the NHS Bank. [71874]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The shadow NHS Bank is being overseen by four strategic health authority chief executives and the Department's director of finance and investment.

The future arrangements are under consideration.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Office for National Statistics on the accounting treatment of the borrowings of the NHS Bank. [71872]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* None.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health over what period repayments of money borrowed from the NHS Bank will be made. [71880]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The future basis and terms for any loans from the NHS Bank have yet to be determined.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the NHS Bank will have the authority to borrow from sources other than the Government. [71878]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The shadow NHS Bank does not currently have the power to borrow from non-Government sources.

The future arrangements are under consideration

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will determine the criteria to be met by successful applicants for loans from the NHS Bank; and what those criteria will be. [71876]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* An application to the shadow NHS Bank will only be permitted where:

(i) the application has been validated by the relevant director of health and social care;

(ii) the applicant can demonstrate that all other options including local support arrangements have been fully considered;

(iii) there is commitment by the strategic health authority to deliver performance targets in 2002–03;

(iv) the problem to be addressed is of a scale and nature that is fundamentally different from those faced by other health organisations;

(v) there is a clear, realistic and deliverable plan for resolution of the problem that has led to the need for support;

(vi) the relevant chief executive(s) within the health economy personally commit to and are willing to be held accountable for delivery against agreed milestones;

(vii) there is support for the plans from the respective National Health Service trust and primary care trusts boards and a clear endorsement by clinicians; and

(viii) the directorate of health social care and any person nominated by the shadow NHS Bank are given full open book access to the applicant organisation(s).

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is expected that the Government will deposit further sums at the NHS Bank. [71883]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July]:* The disposition of overall resources for 2003–04 onwards has yet to be determined.

Epilepsy

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans there are to increase the number of neurologists and paediatric neurologists with a specialism in epilepsy; [72765]

(2) how many neurologists and paediatric neurologists with a specialism in epilepsy there are in the UK. [72764]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) today.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to promote epilepsy specialist nurses. [72844]

Jacqui Smith: We set targets in the NHS Plan to increase the number of nurses working in the health service. Figures released earlier this year show that between September 1999 and September 2001 recruitment of nurses rose by 20,740. We set new targets in the 2002 budget to recruit 35,000 nurses by 2008 and this will become part of the continuing drive to recruit more health professionals for the National Health Service.

We recognise the important role that epilepsy nurse specialists play in the treatment and management of people with epilepsy. It is the responsibility of primary care trusts to determine the number of epilepsy nurse specialists required to support the development of epilepsy services within the overall increase in nursing capacity.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consideration the Government have given to the finding of the national audit of epilepsy-related death relating to deficiencies in the implementation of existing NICE guidelines; and what plans he has to ensure the implementation of the guideline due in 2004; [72763]

(2) what plans are in place to ensure that primary care trusts will act on the NICE recommendation that local NHS clinicians and organisations should establish or review policies of practices regarding the management of epilepsy. [72762]

Jacqui Smith: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published a summary report of the national sentinel audit of epilepsy related death in May 2002. The publication draws the attention of local National Health Service clinicians and organisations to the need to establish or review policies and practices regarding the management of epilepsy and epilepsy related deaths.

Additionally NICE is developing a clinical guideline for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy to help address widespread variations in clinical practice and contribute to the improvement of epilepsy services. The guideline is due to be completed in Summer 2004. It will be supported by a technology appraisal of the clinical and cost effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs in children and adults, to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access. The appraisal is due to be completed in Autumn 2003.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps are being taken to inform those with epilepsy of the risks of sudden unexpected death in epilepsy and ways of reducing risk; [72747]

(2) what plans he has to address the information and support needs for bereaved families affected by *(a)* SUDEP and *(b)* other epilepsy deaths; [72752]

(3) what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* planned to ensure that clinical assessments for epilepsy are performed to a satisfactory standard, including the accurate recording of seizure types, seizure triggers and seizure frequency; [72758]

(4) what assessment he has made of the information and training needs of *(a)* people with epilepsy and *(b)* their carers; [72759]

(5) what plans he has to address the finding in the epilepsy deaths report on the adequacy of post-mortem investigations; [72750]

(6) what plans the Government have for implementation and funding of the action plan to address epilepsy-related death; [72754]

(7) what plans he has to ensure that people with epilepsy receive six-monthly check-ups with their GP or an epilepsy specialist to review their medication; [72757]

(8) what further initiatives the Government will take to improve levels of epilepsy care across the country; [72749]

(9) what steps are being taken to set a national target for reduction of epilepsy deaths; [72753]

(10) what plans he has to increase the availability of information for health professionals surrounding the issue of drug management for epilepsy medication; [72756]

(11) what plans he has for the involvement of health professionals and the voluntary sector in the implementation of the Action Plan to address epilepsy-related death; [72761]

(12) what plans he has to improve public awareness of epilepsy; [72748]

(13) whether the Home Office is being consulted on the Action Plan to address the finding in the national audit of epilepsy-related death on the adequacy of post-mortem investigations; [72751]

(14) what plans he has to improve the awareness of GPs and health professionals of epilepsy and epilepsy-related death. [72760]

Jacqui Smith: In May 2002, we welcomed the publication of the government funded national sentinel audit of epilepsy-related death. The audit looked at investigations into epilepsy deaths, care provided prior to death and contact with bereaved families. We have given a commitment to consider in full the recommendations of the audit including the issues raised by the hon. Member and to develop an action plan later this year to address the key issues. It will need to take account of and feed into a range of other initiatives including the national service framework (NSF) for long term conditions, which will have a focus on neurological conditions such as epilepsy. We expect to meet with the epilepsy voluntary organisations shortly, and will consult with others as appropriate.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published a summary report of the audit. The publication draws the attention of local National Health Service clinicians and organisations to the need to establish or review policies and practices regarding the management of epilepsy and epilepsy related deaths.

The department is also undertaking a range of other initiatives to improve services for the care and management of people with epilepsy. For example, we have:

Asked NICE to develop a clinical guideline, due in summer 2004, for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy to help address widespread variations in clinical practice and contribute to the improvement of services. This will be supported by a technology appraisal, due autumn 2003, of the clinical and cost effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs in children and adults, to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access.

Announced that the NSF for long term conditions is expected to develop standards of care for specific neurological conditions, including epilepsy. The NSF is expected to be published in 2004. Implementation is expected to start from 2005.

Developed the expert patients programme, which aims to provide training in self-management skills for people with long term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase will include people with epilepsy.

Provided funding to the joint epilepsy council to develop a *National Statement of Good Practice for the Treatment and Care of People who have Epilepsy*, which was published in May 2002. The statement makes a series of recommendations for good quality epilepsy services. It is intended to facilitate commissioning and will be of use to NHS purchasers, providers and service users.

Provided funding to the national society for epilepsy for its living well project. The project aims to promote independent living by providing locally based short-term courses for people with epilepsy to develop self-help and self-management techniques.

Local health and social care organisations are responsible for planning and providing services for people with epilepsy, including the frequency of contact. The recently announced Budget settlements for the NHS, which represents an annual average increase of 7.5 per cent. above inflation over the five years 2003–04 to 2007–08, and personal social services, which represents an annual average increase of 6.0 per cent. above inflation over the three years 2003–04 to 2005–06, will provide the investment needed to support the services which best meet patients' and users' needs.

Health and Social Care Inspectorates

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much it will cost to set up and run the new merged Health and Social Care Inspectorates; and if he will make a statement. [72511]

Jacqui Smith: Estimates of the cost of establishing the new health inspectorate will be made in preparing the required legislation, which will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Homelessness

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1075W, on homeless people, what the reasons were for the delay in answering the Question. [70232]

Ms Blears: We place a high priority on our obligation to ensure that Members receive a timely, accurate and helpful response to their questions, and make every effort to ensure that the live load of questions still awaiting a reply is kept to a minimum at all times. In this instance, the cross-cutting nature of the question led to a regrettable delay in preparing a response, for which I apologise to the hon. Member.

Social Services

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the effects of the changes to the calculation of personal social services block formula grant in 1999–2000 on the performance of social services authorities. [67822]

Jacqui Smith: Personal social services (PSS) funding is distributed using information about the social care needs of each area, including demographic, physical and social characteristics. The changes to the PSS standard spending assessment formulae in 1999–2000 were made to better reflect those needs. All councils with social services responsibilities have benefited from the increased funding the Government has provided for social care, through the block formula grant, since we came to office. This increased funding has generally enabled councils to provide improved services for their clients.

Local Consultations

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information and guidance he issues to members of the public on becoming involved in local consultations on the provision of health care and social services; and what plans he has to develop this. [72191]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Currently, it is the legal responsibility of community health councils (working with their local National Health Service organisation/s) to ensure the public view is represented in decisions about local health care provision.

When the new system for patient and public involvement is established, the staff employed by new commission for patient and public involvement in health (CPPIH), based with primary care trust patients' forums will be locally responsible for promoting local consultations and involvement activity to involve local people in healthcare decision making with statutory organisations.

One of the ways the CPPIH may carry out its functions is by providing guidance for members of the public who would like to get involved. This will be a matter for the CPPIH.

Patients' Forums will also be established for every NHS trust and PCT, they too will provide a mechanism for local peoples' views to be heard. In addition community and voluntary organisations, working through the Local Compact, will be another pathway for local people to be involved and consulted in decisions about local healthcare.

Clinical Guidelines

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each UK region, the cost to the NHS of implementing each of the clinical guidelines set down by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in each year since 2000 for which figures are available. [72463]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* We do not hold this information centrally. The Final Appraisal Determinations published by the Institute do, however, now include estimates of the aggregate national cost of implementing its recommendations.

London Ambulance Service

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the introduction of stab and bullet-proof vests to London Ambulance Service staff will cost; and to what extent this will *(a)* come from the London Ambulance Service current budget and *(b)* be met by extra central Government funding. [71079]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The contract for the provision of body armour for crews in the London Ambulance Service is currently out to tender. This process is expected to be complete in October, when a definitive cost will be available. The cost will be met within existing budgets, as part of the London Ambulance Service's four-year improvement programme.

Ambulances

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the latest available figures for ambulance response times to category A calls, listed by ambulance trust, stating *(a)* what proportion of responses were achieved within eight minutes and *(b)* for those responses which took longer than eight minutes, how long it took for the ambulance to respond. [68278]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* The latest information about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response times is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2001–02". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0213.htm.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the accuracy of data collected on ambulance response times; [71178]

(2) what monitoring is undertaken to ensure the quality of ambulance response time statistics. [71179]

Mr. Lammy: The Department has no evidence that data on ambulance response times is inaccurate.

All ambulance services and their performance are subject to audit by those commissioning their services and by the Audit Commission.

NHS Pension Schemes

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the proportion of the rise in Government liabilities resulting from unfunded NHS pension schemes in England and Wales in the last five years due to *(a)* wage inflation, *(b)* longevity, *(c)* extension of the rights of part-time workers and *(d)* other factors; and if he will make a statement. [67021]

Mr. Hutton: The Government Actuary's Department has estimated the accrued liabilities of the National Health Service Pension Scheme for England and Wales at 31 March 2001 to be £75 billion and at 31 March 1994 to be £50 billion.

A breakdown of the rise in liabilities is not readily available in the form requested. However, the Government Actuary's Department believe that the most important factor in the increase was pay growth, followed by allowances made for increasing pensioner longevity and price inflation. The increase in liabilities caused by the extension of the rights of part-time workers is not thought to be as material as these other factors.

General Practice Surgeries

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of routine appointment wait times in *(a)* Twickenham and *(b)* the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames at general practice surgeries; and if he will make a statement. [72836]

Mr. Hutton: Reducing the routine wait times for appointments in primary care is a government priority. By the end of March 2004, all patients will be able to see a primary care professional within 24 hours and a general practitioner within 48 hours.

Results for the Q4 service and financial framework return (SaFFR) primary care access survey are shown below.

Percentage of practices with an appointment system offering an appointment within 2 working days to see a GP

Richmond Primary Care Trust	94
Teddington, Twickenham and Hamptons Primary Care Trust	100

Percentage of practices with an appointment system offering an appointment within 1 working days to see a PCP

Richmond PCT	93
Teddington, Twickenham and Hamptons PCT	75
England	59

Redwood Hospital

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in negotiations with BUPA to create a diagnostic and treatment centre at the Redwood Hospital. [72755]

Ms Blears: The National Health Service and BUPA have agreed commercial terms and are now going through a process of consultation with medical and other staff who will be affected by the diagnosis and treatment centre. An announcement will be made once this process has been completed and an agreement signed.

Consultation is essential not just in terms of good practice but to agree the medical manpower plan with consultants. This will not delay the opening of the centre.

Specialisms

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* neurologists, *(b)* paediatric neurologists and *(c)* nurses with a specialism there are in the UK. [72659]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's workforce censuses do not collect information on the number of neurologists, paediatric neurologists or nurses with a specialism in the treatment of epilepsy.

The numbers of doctors working in paediatric neurology is not collected centrally, it is a sub-specialty of neurology. As at 31 March 2002, the numbers of consultants working in neurology was 372. This is an increase of 34 per cent. since 1997.

We are investing in extra training places in neurology and have agreed an increase of up to fifteen specialist registrars in neurology for 2002–04. The Department's current workforce projections suggest that by 2004, there may be around an additional 80 trained specialists available to take up consultant posts in neurology, over a 2000 baseline of 326.

We continually review future requirements for trained specialists as part of the National Health Service's new multi-disciplinary workforce planning processes. These look at the requirements for doctors alongside other staff focusing on the potential for new ways of working and developing new roles.

The long term conditions care group workforce team covers the national service frameworks for diabetes, renal and long term conditions, including neurological conditions. The care group workforce team is working to address not only the need for increased numbers of staff but also for new ways of working, including skill mix, role extensions and multi-disciplinary working, based around patient needs. It has already fed in to national planning processes recommendations on the future supply of professionals and development of new ways of working.

Hospital Trust Boards

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what rules govern the appointment of vice-chairs for hospital trust boards. [71869]

Mr. Lammy: The rules are set out in regulations (13) and (14) of the National Health Service Trusts (Membership and Procedure) Regulations 1990 (SI No. 2024). Chairs and non-executives board members of trusts are appointed by the National Health Service appointments commission. However, vice chairs are appointed from amongst the non-executives by all the other directors of the trust.

Inpatient Waiting Times

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of patients waiting for inpatient treatment have been waiting over one year; [71911]

(2) which 10 health authorities have the highest percentage of patients waiting for more than one year for inpatient treament; and which health authorities have no patients waiting more than nine months for inpatient treatment; [71998]

(3) if he will list, in rank order of health authority, the proportion of patients waiting a year or more for in-patient treatment *(a)* at the latest available date and *(b)* 12 months ago. [72413]

Mr. Hutton: Two per cent. of patients were waiting over one year for elective admission at 31 March 2002. This is the latest available data on a health authority basis.

The table shows the equivalent figures at health authority level ranked in descending order for both March 2001 and March 2002. The table includes the ten health authorities that have the highest percentage of patients waiting more than one year for elective admission.

All health authorities have patients waiting more than nine months as at March 2002.

Percentage of patients waiting over 1 year for elective admission: Health Authorities England

Health Authority	*Percentage of patients waiting over 1 year* March 2001	March 2002
South and West Devon HA	6	5
Avon HA	7	5
East Kent HA	6	5
North Cheshire HA	9	5
East Surrey HA	10	5
Northamptonshi[illegible] HA	5	4
Bromley HA	5	4
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	8	4
West Sussex HA	10	4
Wiltshire HA	6	4
West Surrey HA	10	4
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	6	4
Stockport HA	3	4
Barking and Havering HA	5	4
East Sussex Brighton and Hove HA	6	4
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	9	4
Croydon HA	10	4
Barnet HA	4	4
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	6	3
Buckinghamshire HA	5	3
North and Mid Hampshire HA	5	3
Worcestershire HA	4	3
Bedfordshire HA	7	3
Norfolk HA	5	3
Hertfordshire HA	.	3
Salford and Trafford HA	6	3
Suffolk HA	4	3
Isle of Wight HA	6	3
Southampton and SW Hampshire HA	8	3
West Kent HA	7	3
Kingston and Richmond HA	5	3
Manchester HA	7	3
Somerset HA	2	3
East Riding and Hull HA	1	3
North Essex HA	6	2
East London and City HA	4	2
Berkshire HA	3	2
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	5	2
South Cheshire HA	4	2
Cambridgeshire HA	4	2
Hillingdon HA	5	2
East Lancashire HA	1	2
Liverpool HA	4	2
Brent and Harrow HA	5	2
St Helens and Knowsley HA	4	2
Wigan and Bolton HA	3	2
Camden and Islington HA	4	2
North West Lancashire HA	1	1
Sefton HA	5	1
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	2	1
Morecambe Bay HA	2	1
Coventry HA	1	1
Gloucestershire HA	1	1
Bury and Rochdale HA	2	1
South Essex HA	3	1
South Lancashire HA	4	1
Wirral HA	3	1
Oxfordshire HA	4	1
West Pennine HA	2	1
North and East Devon HA	6	1
Lincolnshire HA	4	1
Solihull HA	0	0
Sheffield HA	1	0
Warwickshire HA	1	0
Nottingham HA	1	0
North Nottinghamshire HA	1	0
North Derbyshire HA	0	0
South Humber HA	0	0
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	0	0
Shropshire HA	4	0
Leeds HA	1	0
Rotherham HA	0	0
Herefordshire HA	4	0
North Yorkshire HA	0	0
Southern Derbyshire HA	1	0
Barnsley HA	0	0
Dorset HA	0	0
South Staffordshire HA	5	0
Bradford HA	0	0
Leicestershire HA	2	0
North Staffordshire HA	5	0
Doncaster HA	0	0
Wakefield HA	2	0
Birmingham HA	1	0
North Cumbria HA	2	0

Percentage of patients waiting over 1 year for elective admission: Health Authorities England

Health Authority	*Percentage of patients waiting over 1 year* *March 2001*	 *March 2002*
Tees HA	0	0
County Durham and Darlington HA	0	0
Dudley HA	2	0
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	0	0
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	1	0
Northumberland HA	1	0
Sandwell HA	1	0
Sunderland HA	0	0
Walsall HA	1	0
Wolverhampton HA	1	0
Bexley and Greenwich HA	6	.
EandN Hertfordshire HA	6	.
Enfield and Haringey HA	7	.
Portsmouth and SE Hampshire HA	6	.
West Hertfordshire HA	7	.

Source:

Department of Health form QF01.

Note:

"." denotes not applicable.

Patient Environment Action Teams

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many visits have been made by patient environment action teams since their inception; which hospital trusts have been visited; and what improvements have been registered by hospital trusts visited by patient environment action teams. [71089]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Since publication of the NHS Plan, patient environment action teams (PEATs) teams have undertaken four rounds of assessment visits to acute National Health Service trusts. The first was made in Autumn 2000 to "spot check" the quality of the patient environment, validate the trusts' action plans, and identify what work still needed to be done to raise standards. Subsequent visits were made during Spring and Autumn 2001 and Spring 2002, to assess improvements made and to determine whether trusts had been successful in bringing standards up to a higher level.

PEAT visits have largely concentrated on the acute sector and assessments have taken place at all of the acute trusts; some of the larger mental health units have also been assessed. To date a total of 1,289 unannounced inspections have been carried out. Details of all the trusts' including examples of advancements in improvements made, can be found in "The NHS Plan—Clean Hospitals" report which can be located on the clean hospitals web site at www.cleanhospitals.com

The clean hospitals' programme has been a clear success and has had a significant impact on standards of cleanliness, decoration and supporting services. Patient areas, visitors' toilets, outpatients and accident and emergency units have been thoroughly cleaned and maintained. Many have been refurbished and redecorated. Trusts have increased resources devoted to maintaining standards of cleanliness—some have employed additional cleaning staff, others have increased the frequency with which their hospitals are cleaned. There are now no hospitals in England where cleaning standards are found to be less than acceptable.

Acute Wards

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the bed occupancy rate in acute wards in *(a)* England, *(b)* each region and *(c)* each NHS trust was in each of the last six years, including the most recent year for which figures are available. [70240]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the average occupancy rate for beds in acute wards in each National Health Service trust, NHS region and England from 1996–97 to 2000–01 is available from the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity—1996–97 is the first year information on occupied beds was collected.

Surrey and Sussex Health Authority

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken by the Surrey and Sussex Health Authority to avoid manipulation of the waiting lists at hospitals in its area. [70343]

Ms Blears: Surrey and Sussex Health Authority has introduced a number of procedures to review waiting list data on a weekly, monthly and quarterly basis; on both Trust and population basis.

The health authority will be working closely with all health organisations in its area to ensure they are fully supported in achieving performance targets.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what process is available to inform doctors and patients as to the state of the waiting lists for *(a)* neurophysiology and *(b)* MRI scanning in the Surrey and Sussex Health Authority area; [70342]

(2) what his Department's policy is on the Association of British Neurologists' recommendation that there should be more full-time neurologists per 100,000 of population in *(a)* the Surrey and Sussex Health Authority area and *(b)* the rest of England; [70340]

(3) how many full-time neurologists there are per 100,000 of population in *(a)* the Surrey and Sussex Health Authority area and *(b)* the rest of England; [70339]

(4) how many patients in *(a)* the Surrey and Sussex Health Authority area and *(b)* the rest of England have not had the treatment to address neurological conditions as recommended by their doctors. [70341]

Ms Blears: Information is not held centrally on the numbers of patients who have not had neurological treatment recommended by their doctors. Surrey and Sussex Health Authority has advised me that waiting times for non-urgent neurophysiology tests are longer at Hurstwood Park Neurological centre than the other service providers in London, although an urgent or priority request is dealt with on the same day or within 1–2 days depending on clinical priority. Waiting times for magnetic resonance imaging scans are also determined by the urgency of the case. Close links are maintained between local consultants and specialist service providers so information on waiting times is readily available, allowing patients to be kept informed of the expected waiting time for their treatment.

Information held centrally on the number of Neurologists per 100,000 population is as follows:

Hospital medical consultants, working full time within the neurology specialty

As at 30 September 2001 — *Numbers*

	numbers	Numbers per 100,000 population
England	230	0.5
of which		
Surrey and Sussex[1]	10	0.4

Source:
Department of Health 2001 medical and dental workforce census.

Note:
[1] Includes East Surrey HA, West Surrey HA, East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA, West Sussex HA.

The Department fully supports the need for an increase in the number of neurologists. Indeed, recommendations by the medical workforce review team are for the numbers of consultants in Neurology to grow by some 50 per cent. by 2010, from 326 in 2001 to 496 in 2010.

Workforce has been recognised as key to the successful delivery of the NHS Plan and the national service frameworks. New national workforce planning and development structures have been set up to help deliver a multidisciplinary and integrated health and social care workforce to support service improvement.

Failing Hospitals

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement regarding how the Government will assess whether a hospital is failing; [68999]

(2) if he will make a statement on how quickly the management changes in failing hospitals will occur; [68997]

(3) if he will make a statement regarding the Government's plan to change the management of failing hospitals, with specific reference to having a common pay scale; [68996]

(4) if he will make a statement on how extensive the management changes in failing hospitals will be. [68998]

Mr. Lammy: The performance of hospital trusts is publicly assessed through a star rating system based on an organisation's performance against a range of national targets and indicators. Clinical governance reviews by the Commission for Health Improvement are also used to determine the star ratings. The poorest performing hospital trusts receive no stars.

Following publication of National Health Service performance ratings in September 2001, all zero star NHS trusts were given three months to provide detailed action plans highlighting how performance would be improved. Support has been provided by the Department and the NHS Modernisation Agency.

Franchise arrangements for new senior management has been initiated in six trusts to ensure delivery of the sustainable improvement necessary. This has led to the appointment of five new chief executives, with the outcome of the process still pending in the sixth.

Trust chief executives are appointed and employed by NHS trust chairman and non-executives on behalf of the trust. The pay of the new chief executive is a matter for the trust and will be commensurate with the size and complexity of the management role.

Applications for future franchises will be invited from individuals and organisations from within and outside the NHS. These will last for a fixed time period. The franchises will include the replacement of the chief executive and could include other senior management roles if deemed necessary.

Special Hospitals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many places there were in the special hospitals at *(a)* Ashworth, *(b)* Broadmoor and *(c)* Rampton at the latest date for which figures are available. [68057]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* Service level agreements between the high security hospitals and the regional commissioners of their services provide for the following bed numbers for 2002–03:

Ashworth Hospital : 436 beds.

Broadmoor Hospital : 404 beds.

Rampton Hospital : 437 beds.

Hospital Safety

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers exist to enable NHS hospital staff to require co-operation from patients and visitors in complying with reasonable Health and Safety requests in order to protect the safety of people on NHS hospital sites. [61408]

Mr. Lammy: Health and Safety is a major issue for the National Health Service, and one that is taken very seriously. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1972 all employers, including NHS organisations, must ensure as far as is reasonably practicable, that people not employed by them but affected by their undertaking (such as patients and visitors) are not exposed to health and safety risks.

Whilst there is no legal requirement for people to co-operate, patients and visitors have a responsibility to behave in a manner that does not put others at risk, and to respond to staff's requests and hospital regulations for the protection of themselves and others. Where a patient or visitor is observed to be acting in an unsafe manner, measures to minimise the risk must be undertaken by the NHS trust.

Over the next few months primary care trusts will receive guidance on developing a new contract on rights and responsibilities at a local level. The contract will be negotiated through consultation with their communities, and will cover access to and appropriate use of both primary and secondary care services.

Intermediate Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from health care providers on the use of intermediate care money to *(a)* reopen previously closed wards and *(b)* rebrand existing care beds as intermediate care beds. [57183]

Jacqui Smith: I am not aware of any representations.

Some of the growth in intermediate care beds has been achieved by bringing dormant capacity back into use—in some cases by reopening closed wards—or by changing the service provided within care homes. Using spare capacity in this way ensures that services are provided to meet people's needs, and to avoid unnecessary admission to, or inappropriately to delay transfer from, acute beds.

Mental Health

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the percentage occupancy rate was of mental illness beds in *(a)* England and *(b)* each region in each of the last six years; [67712]

(2) what the average daily availability of beds in wards open 24 hours for mental illness was in *(a)* England and *(b)* each region in each of the last six years. [67711]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the average daily number of available and occupied mental health beds and percentage occupancy rate for England and National Health Service regions from 1996–97 to 2000–01 is set out in the table. These figures are also available available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity

Bed occupancy rates, mental illness sector, England and NHS Regions, 1996–97 to 2000–01

Year		Available beds	Occupied beds	Percentage occupancy
2000–01	England	34,214	29,918	87.4
2000–01	Northern and Yorkshire	4,887	4,163	85.2
2000–01	Trent	3,754	3,120	83.1
2000–01	West Midlands	3,191	2,744	86
2000–01	North West	4,499	3,903	86.7
2000–01	Eastern	3,471	3,040	87.6
2000–01	London	6,401	5,926	92.6
2000–01	South East	4,849	4,333	89.4
2000–01	South West	3,163	2,689	85
1999–2000	England	34,173	29,775	87.1
1999–2000	Northern and Yorkshire	4,985	4,235	85
1999–2000	Trent	3,592	3,068	85.4
1999–2000	West Midlands	3,181	2,648	83.2
1999–2000	North West	4,636	3,949	85.2
1999–2000	Eastern	3,461	3,074	88.8
1999–2000	London	6,155	5,768	93.7
1999–2000	South East	4,938	4,323	87.5
1999–2000	South West	3,225	2,710	84
1998–99	England	35,692	31,219	87.5
1998–99	Northern and Yorkshire	5,120	4,415	86.2
1998–99	Trent	3,697	3,155	85.3
1998–99	West Midlands	3,216	2,730	84.9
1998–99	North West	4,748	4,027	84.8
1998–99	Eastern	3,510	3,167	90.2
1998–99	London	7,008	6,459	92.2
1998–99	South East	5,014	4,411	88
1998–99	South West	3,378	2,856	84.5
1997–98	England	36,601	31,647	86.5
1997–98	Northern and Yorkshire	5,222	4,576	87.6
1997–98	Trent	3,780	3,257	86.2
1997–98	West Midlands	3,243	2,750	84.8
1997–98	North West	5,030	4,170	82.9
1997–98	Eastern	3,460	3,139	90.7
1997–98	London	7,300	6,399	87.7
1997–98	South East	5,160	4,495	87.1
1997–98	South West	3,406	2,863	84.1
1996–97	England	37,640	32,718	86.9
1996–97	Northern and Yorkshire	5,551	4,690	84.5
1996–97	Trent	3,820	3,329	87.2
1996–97	West Midlands	3,480	2,947	84.7
1996–97	North West	5,171	4,387	84.8
1996–97	Eastern	3,588	3,253	90.7
1996–97	London	7,186	6,539	91
1996–97	South East	5,250	4,482	85.4
1996–97	South West	3,594	3,091	86

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has a target for reducing the average period of untreated psychosis prior to a person receiving treatment. [67946]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The development of early intervention in psychosis teams as outlined in the NHS Plan is aimed at reducing the length of time that young people wait for appropriate treatment in first onset psychosis. Shorter periods of untreated psychosis are associated with a better outcome. By 2004 fifty early intervention teams will provide treatment and active support in the community to these young people and their families.

Pharmacists (Late Payments)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons payments to pharmacists are not covered by the Late Payment of Debt Act 1998. [72228]

Mr. Lammy: The Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 applies to contracts. We consider that payments by the prescription pricing authority to chemists are not made under a contract but under statutory arrangements, as set out in the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992 and the drug tariff.

Electronic Prescriptions

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to develop electronic prescriptions. [62352]

Mr. Lammy: *Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan* promised electronic transmission of prescriptions by 2004, and piloting is now underway to explore ways of linking computerised general practitioner practices to local community pharmacies using the *NHSnet.* Both will link to the prescription pricing authority.

Anaesthetic Machines

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all anaesthetic machines used in the NHS operate with *(a)* an oxygen analyser, *(b)* an anti-hypoxic guard and *(c)* both. [59871]

Mr. Lammy: The Medical Devices Agency (MDA) published SN2001(15) in May 2001 on "Anaesthetic Machines: Prevention of Hypoxic Gas Mixtures". This advised that all anaesthetic machines capable of delivering hypoxic gas mixtures must have a hypoxic guard fitted or use an oxygen analyser with audible alarms to warn of the delivery of hypoxic gas mixtures.

As a follow up to this safety notice, in October 2001, Sir Liam Donaldson, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), and Dr. David Jefferys, chief executive of MDA, wrote joint letters to chief executives of trusts and regional directors of public health requesting that they report back on how the actions recommended in the safety notice had been implemented.

We know that of 5,843 anaesthetic machines in National Health Service hospitals in England, 186 have neither an oxygen analyser or hypoxic guard. Of those 186, 47 have had their ability to deliver hypoxic mixtures disabled, meaning they can deliver only oxygen or air only. All other anaesthetic machines in use in the NHS in England, 5657, comply with the safety notice by having at least one or the other.

Many of the non-compliant machines have now been put out of service and new, compliant machines have already been ordered by many trusts. Assurances have been given by all trusts with non-compliant machines that these will be replaced or made compliant and regional directors of public health will ensure that this happens by 31 October 2002, reporting to the CMO and MDA.

We do not hold centrally details of the number of the number anaesthetic machines which have both the guard and the analyser as this information was not required in either the safety notice or CMO/MDA joint letter.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many anaesthetic machines are in use in NHS hospitals which are not fitted with *(a)* oxygen analysers and *(b)* hypoxic guards. [59418]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The Medical Devices Agency (MDA) published SN2001(15) in May 2001 on "Anaesthetic Machines: Prevention of Hypoxic Gas Mixtures". This advised that all anaesthetic machines capable of delivering hypoxic gas mixtures must have a hypoxic guard fitted or use an oxygen analyser with audible alarms to warn of the delivery of hypoxic gas mixtures.

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Cancer

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much time is required of *(a)* medical, *(b)* nursing and *(c)* management staff to develop a local cancer care plan. [60849]

Ms Blears: All cancer networks have developed strategic service delivery plans (SDPs) to deliver the NHS Cancer Plan and ensure seamless, high quality care for patients. Although network managers, in the main, take the lead in drawing SDPs together the input of doctors, nurses and other staff is crucial to the development of realistic SDPs. It is not possible to quantify the amount of time spent by managers and other staff in developing SDPs.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received regarding cancer rates at Burnham-on-Sea. [71552]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received four parliamentary questions concerning this matter.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has evaluated of cancer clusters in Burnham-on-Sea. [71239]

Ms Blears: The Department is aware of the recent survey by Green Audit of cancer in Burnham on Sea, however, it has not been provided with details of the results of the survey. Government is advised on cancer clusters near to nuclear installations by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) which was set up in 1985. This committee is carrying out a very large study of childhood cancer in Great Britain which includes all cases registered since the 1960s (some 33,000 cases). This study is expected to report in 2003 and will include areas around all nuclear installations in Great Britain including Burnham on Sea. The small area health statistics unit (SAHSU) is considering the feasibility of a study of all adult cancers in the areas around nuclear power stations in the United Kingdom.

Nuclear Power (Cancer Clusters)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has evaluated on the effects of civil nuclear power on cancer clusters in areas around nuclear plants. [71238]

Ms Blears: The Government is advised on these matters by the independent Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE). This committee has published six reports concerning claims of excess cancer in the areas surrounding a variety of nuclear installations. The committee has a large work programme and three further reports are in preparation. COMARE has not confirmed the claims that cancer levels are related to radioactive discharges.

Henoch Schonlein Purpura

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 124W, on henoch schonlein purpura, what criteria his Department uses to allocate funding in respect of combating henoch chonlein purpura among children. [72725]

Jacqui Smith: Henoch-Schonlein Purpura is most common among young children and may occur after an infection. Most children make a good recovery, with no specific treatment, but a few can develop serious complications. Whilst funding is not allocated specifically for combating Henoch-Schonlein Purpura, funding is allocated to health authorities and primary care trusts (PCT) on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each health authority's/PCT's share of available resources, to enable them to commission similar levels of health services for populations in similar need.

Asthma

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the estimated costs to the National Health Service of treating asthma in *(a)* hospital expenditure, *(b)* primary care expenditure and *(c)* pharmaceutical expenditure in each of the last five years; and what research his Department has carried out into the potential contribution of improved (i) heating, (ii) insulation and (iii) ventilation in reducing the incidence of asthma. [55598]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not have precise estimates of the cost of treating asthma. However respiratory disease accounted for approximately 0.5 per cent. of hospital expenditure, 1.4 per cent. of primary care expenditure and 0.3 per cent. of pharmaceutical expenditure respectively.

Also attached is a statistical table showing net ingredient cost and the estimated total expenditure of items dispensed in the community in England for the treatment of asthma from 1997 to 2001.

England

Year	*Net ingredient cost (£millions)*	*Total expenditure (£millions)*
1997	470	472
1998	502	497
1999	523	506
2000	532	519
2001	567	551

The Department ran a research programme on the health effects of indoor air pollutants that finished last year. Three of the projects in the research programme were:

Exposure to indoor air pollution and the risk of upper and lower respiratory disease in asthmatic children and their mothers. Dr. J Clough, University of Child Health, Southampton General Hospital at a cost of £165,175.

Consequences for health and effects of damp on the incidence of airborne microbial cell wall components in the home. Ms T Gladding, University of Luton at a cost of £125,000.

An epidemiological study of the impact of damp and other aspects of poor housing on adult health. Dr. S Stewart-Brown, Institute of Health Sciences, Oxford at a cost of £8,778.

Details of these projects can be found at http://www.doh.gov.uk/hef/airpol/airpolh.htm

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the co-ordinator for the prescription plus scheme for sufferers of MS will be in post. [71203]

(2) what data his Department plans to collect to monitor the progress of the prescription plus scheme. [71200]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Sheffield University's school of health and related research (ScHARR) has been appointed to co-ordinate monitoring under the risk-sharing scheme for drugs for multiple sclerosis announced in Health Service Circular 2002–04. ScHARR will shortly be approaching neurology centres about the data requirements of the scheme and the arrangements for their collection.

Stroke

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanism will be used to monitor progress against the milestones contained in Standard Five of the National Service Framework for Older People, for every general hospital treating stroke patients to have a plan to introduce a specialised stroke service by April 2002. [59351]

Jacqui Smith: The monitoring of this April milestone through the new health and social care directorates will be part of the service and financial framework return (SaFFR) process. This milestone will be monitored in the first quarter of the SaFFR which should be available at the end of July 2002.

Informal reports from regional offices indicate that the milestone should be met in all by a few cases. Any hospital identified by the strategic health authority in the monitoring process, as not having plans will be offered appropriate advice.

Childcare Staff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 148W, on childcare staff if he will provide a breakdown of whole time equivalent staff in child and family services by *(a)* grade, *(b)* job description and *(c)* salary band; and if he will estimate how many of these staff are frontline staff. [63877]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The annual return that local authority social services departments in England complete only provides data on the number of staff by job description. It does not give numbers of staff by grade or salary band. The numbers of staff by job description are shown in the attached table. All the staff shown in the attached table work in front line teams.

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
STAFF IN OPERATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS/NOT ESTABLISHMENT BASED			
Provision specifically for children's services			
Team leaders/managers	2,300	2,410	2,575
Assistant team managers/senior social workers	2,040	2,225	2,340
Care managers	350	285	345
Field social workers	9,925	9,890	9,675

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
Social services officers/social work assistants	1,755	1,980	2,245
Child protection, family placement, juvenile/youth justice workers	2,705	2,950	3,175
Community workers	455	480	530
Occupation therapists	90	105	105
Occupation therapist assistants, aids and other officers	275	360	310
Technical officers	45	95	60
Total of above	19,935	20,780	21,360
Guardians ad litem			
Total staff employed within GAL	170	195	20
DAY CARE PROVISION			
Family centres			
Officers in charge	335	335	325
Deputy officers in charge	300	305	295
Social workers based in family centres	355	340	240
Family centre workers, family aides and other staff	2,265	2,345	2,285
Other support services staff	565	585	570
Total of above	3,825	3,910	3,715
Staff in day nurseries			
Managers and officers in charge and nursery group leaders	195	185	140
Deputy officers in charge	230	315	245
Nursery officers, students and assistants	1,730	1,565	1,285
Other support officers staff	480	445	395
Total of above	2,635	2,510	2,060
Staff in playgroups			
Playgroup leaders and assistants	120	125	70
Other support officers staff	5	5	0
Total of above	125	135	70
Nursery centres where funded by social services			
Teachers (whether qualified or not)	10	0	0
Managers and officers in charge	25	10	10
Deputy officers in charge	25	15	10
Nursery officers, students and assistants	140	80	80
Other support officers staff	40	35	25
Total of above	240	145	130
CARE IN RESIDENTIAL ESTABLISHMENTS			
Staff of homes and hostels mainly for children with learning disabilities			
Managers and officers in charge	105	100	100
Deputy officers in charge	160	155	140
Other supervisory staff (e.e. senior care officers)	385	375	380
Care staff	1,210	1,160	1,165
Other support officers staff	270	285	260
Total of above	2,130	2,075	2,045
Staff of community homes for children looked after (including observation and assessment centres where mainly residential)			
Managers and officers in charge	595	595	595
Deputy officers in charge	690	645	640
Other supervisory staff (e.e. senior care officers)	1,550	1,395	1,540
Child care staff	4,765	4,775	4,660
Teaching staff	105	90	95
Other support officers staff	1,140	1,155	1,155
Total of above	8,850	8,655	8,685
SPECIALIST NEEDS ESTABLISHMENTS			
Mainly for children (includes observation and assessment centres not included above)			
Managers and officers in charge	90	75	60
Deputy officers in charge	65	60	60
Other supervisory staff (e.e. senior care officers)	255	200	150
Child care staff	775	720	600
Teaching staff	50	50	55
Other support officers staff	230	245	190
Total of above	1,465	1,340	1,110
Total staff involved with children and families	39,375	39,745	39,195

Notes:

All these figures represent the number of whole time equivalent (wte) staff. The actual numbers of staff employed by local councils are greater than the figures shown as some of the staff work part-time.

Figures are rounded to the nearest five wte staff.

Guardian's Ad Litem became part of the Children and Family Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) in April 2001.

Children in Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many *(a)* agency staff, *(b)* positions unfilled for (i) one month and (ii) three months and *(c)* staff in children in care settings there were in each quarter of each of the last three years. [61368]

Jacqui Smith: Pursuant to my reply on 17 June 2002, shown in the *Official Report*, column 148W: I regret that my reply was incorrect. It should have read:

We do not collect information on the numbers of agency staff who work in child care settings. Information about the number of child care positions unfilled is not collected on a regular basis. Ad-hoc surveys have been undertaken in the past which have determined the vacancy rates in child care posts in social services departments or in the private sector. The last survey undertaken in this area was for community homes for children looked after run by local authorities in England and Wales and it was undertaken in 1999. This survey stated that in England the overall full-time and part-time vacancy rates were both 10.3 per cent.

However, local authority social services departments in England complete an annual return giving information about the staff they employ as at 30 September. The data from this return gives the numbers of *whole time equivalent* staff employed in child and family services as follows:

1999	39,375
2000	39,745
2001	39,195

Notes:

The actual numbers of staff employed by local councils are greater than the above figures as some of these staff only work part-time.

The above figures do not take into account those central and strategic staff and certain other categories of staff who provide more generic services across a range of council responsibilities.

Commission for Health Improvement

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the salaries are of the Chief Executive of the Commission for Health Improvement and other senior executives; [72479]

(2) what has been the cost of the Commission for Health Improvement since its inception. [72477]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The cost of the commission for health improvement (CHI) between its inception on 1 November 1999 and 31 March 2002 is £39.4 million. This total includes a proportionate contribution from the National Assembly for Wales.

The breakdown of expenditure in each year is shown below:

Year	*Amount (£ million)*
November 1999–March 2000	2.3
April 2000–March 2001	11.4
April 2001–March 2002	25.656

The commission's accounts for the period 2001–02 are published with their annual report, copies of which are available in the Library.

Details of the salaries of the chief executive and directors are published as part of the commission for health improvement's annual accounts

The figures for the financial year 2001–02 are as follows:

	Remuneration for year ended 31/03/02 (£)
Chief executive	135,458
Director of policy and development	100,717
Director of nursing	93,788
Director of communications	75,893
Director of operations	84,833
Director of human resources	85,576
Director research and information	79,330
Medical director	115,468
Joint director of finance and information technology	104,232

Remuneration includes gross salary and any other allowances subject to UK taxation.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the implications are of the comprehensive spending review with regard to enhancing the patient environment; and if specific capital budgets will be set for this. [71858]

Mr. Lammy: The National Health Service is currently seeing the largest sustained increase in funding in its history. Decisions about the allocations of these funds will be announced in due course.

NHS Information

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department plans to change the amount of NHS information collected centrally. [71074]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The information collected by the Department from the National Health Service is subject to ongoing change and review. The aim is to ensure that the value of all centrally collected information fully justifies the burden and cost it places on those in the NHS who provide it. The changes made to NHS organisations in April 2002 define new responsibilities within the service and information requirements are to be reviewed accordingly.

Performance Targets

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 306W, on performance targets, what percentage of correspondence to his Department is answered within the 20 working days targets; and whether this target includes correspondence from hon. Members. [71068]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* In 2001 the Department responded to 60 per cent. of its Ministerial correspondence (including hon. Members) within its service first target of 20 working days.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in his Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68721]

Mr. Lammy: All overseas travel by officials in the Department is undertaken in accordance with the principles set in Chapter 8 of the *Civil Service Management Code,* and the detailed rules and guidance set out in the Department Code covering Travel and Subsistence and its Expenses Guide. The detailed information requested about individual trips is not held centrally, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions in the last 12 months the requirement to engage in a competitive tendering process has been waived by his Department due to national security obligations under paragraph 6(h) of the supply regulations. [62818]

Mr. Hutton: In the last 12 months the Department has on one occasion used the exemptions provided for in paragraph 6(h) of the Public Supply Contracts Regulations as grounds for not conforming to open competitive tendering.

This one occasion relates to the purchase of smallpox vaccine where the Department nonetheless held discussions with several potential suppliers prior to awarding a contract.

Departmental Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints his Department has received about its 2001 consultations by *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed means. [69832]

Mr. Lammy: The Department has not collected data about complaints received on consultations in any form.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has a designated consultation co-ordinator in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [69834]

Mr. Lammy: The Department of Health's designated consultation co-ordinator is Mr. P B Allanson.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [69833]

Mr. Lammy: All consultations issued during 2001 were available from the Department in printed form on request and many were available on the Department's website.

Remploy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) of 2 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 304W, on Remploy, what guidance his Department gives to primary care trusts to encourage them to purchase Remploy products. [71067]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Department does not give guidance to the National Health Service to encourage the purchase of products from Remploy.

The NHS complies with government policy on procurement determined by the Office of Government Commerce. Contracts for goods and services are awarded following strict Official Journal of the European Community procedures and on the basis of value for money. This means that all public procurement of goods and services for the NHS is based on value for money, having due regard to propriety and regularity. Value for money is defined as the optimum combination of whole-life cost and quality (or fitness for purpose) to meet the user's requirement.

Liam and Joel Blood

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will allow Liam and Joel Blood, constituents, to put their father's name on their birth certificates. [72772]

Ms Blears: It remains the Government's position that it will bring forward legislation to permit the name of the father to be put on the child's birth certificate where that child was conceived using the father's stored sperm after his death as soon as the Parliamentary timetable allows.

Kava

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to review the sale of kava. [64281]

Mr. Lammy: Following the emergence of safety concerns in Europe, the issue of liver toxicity in relation to the use of medicinal products containing the herbal ingredient kava-kava was reviewed by the committee on safety of medicines (CSM) in December 2001. The herbal sector voluntarily withdrew stocks of products containing Kava-kava while the safety concerns were under investigation. In the light of further data that has since become available the CSM has recently given a provisional opinion that the possible therapeutic benefits of medicinal products containing kava-kava can not be considered to outweigh the safety risks and that consideration should be given to appropriate regulatory action.

The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) is currently aware of 68 cases worldwide of liver problems suspected to be associated with kava-kava. These include cases of liver failure resulting in six liver transplants and three deaths. There have been three reports of liver toxicity in the United Kingdom suspected to be due to consumption of kava-kava.

Following the committee's advice, the MCA will be consulting on proposals to make an Order under Section 62 of the Medicines Act 1968, prohibiting the sale, supply or importation of unlicensed medicines containing kava-kava. Regulatory action is in progress in relation to licensed medicines containing kava-kava.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has also considered the CSM's assessment as kava-kava may be used as an ingredient in some foods. In parallel with the MCA, the FSA will consult on legislation banning food products containing kava-kava.

Pending the outcome of consultation and any regulatory action which may follow, the MCA and the FSA have indicated to the relevant sectors that they would welcome continuing support for the voluntary withdrawal of kava-kava products in the interests of public safety.

Alternative Medicine

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of alternative and complementary medical practitioners; what was discussed; and if he will make a statement. [69745]

Ms Blears: My noble Friend, Lord Hunt, and I met representatives from the European Herbal Practitioners Association and a wide range of other herbal interest groups on 10 July. The primary focus of that meeting was the proposed European Directive on traditional herbal medicinal products.

Cannabis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has taken a decision on referring cannabis to NICE for assessment once the clinical trials are completed; and if he will make a statement. [69790]

Mr. Lammy: We referred the use of cannabis derivatives for treatment of the symptoms of multiple sclerosis to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence on 20 May 2002. The precise timetabling of the appraisal is a matter for the Institute.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Nottingham North for answer on 23 May on strokes. [70047]

Jacqui Smith: I replied to the hon. Member today.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he sets as to the time for information to be placed in the Library in response to parliamentary answers to hon. Members. [71044]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Information is usually placed in the Library at the same time as responses are given to parliamentary questions.

Where information is not available at the time of answering, the material is placed in the Library as soon as it becomes available.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many oral questions he has transferred to other departments in each of the last 18 months. [65508]

Mr. Lammy: No oral questions from hon. Members have been transferred to other Departments.

Acrylamide

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance the Chief Medical Officer has issued to the public regarding the incidence of acrylamide in baked and fried food; and if he will make a statement. [66835]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is responsible for providing advice on this issue. It advised consumers on 24 April 2002 that there was no need to change their diet as a result of research published that day by the Swedish National Food Authority, which had found previously unexpected levels of acrylamide in a range of cooked and heat-processed foods. Further information on the levels of acrylamide in food and their significance to public health has since been published by FSA and others. The FSA has reiterated, in statements on 17 May and 27 June, that on the basis of current evidence people should eat a balanced diet including a variety of fruit and vegetables, and that as part of a balanced diet people should moderate their consumption of fried and fatty foods. The FSA has not advised people to stop eating any of the foods tested. The same advice has been issued by an expert consultation convened by the World Health Organisation and United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, and has been endorsed by the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Food. The FSA will publish further information on acrylamide in food as it becomes available, and will keep its public advice under review.

Encephalitis

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of encephalitis tick-borne infection were diagnosed in the UK in each year since 1997. [70345]

Ms Blears: No clinical cases of UK diagnosed tick-borne encephalitis have been reported to the public health laboratory service communicable disease surveillance centre between January 1997 and the end of June 2002.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Committee on the approximation of the laws, regulation and administrative provisions of the Member States concerning the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco products is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70602]

Ms Blears: Under European Union Directive 2001/37/EC on the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco products, provision is made for a committee to be set up to assist the European Commission in developing and updating the provisions of the Directive. The committee is currently in the process of being set up and its first meeting is anticipated to take place before the end of this year. The United Kingdom will be represented by one independent expert, who is not an official of either the UK Government or the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Committee on the Community action programme on injury prevention is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70598]

Ms Blears: This Committee last met on 18 December 2001, when it was formally disbanded, there are no plans for this committee to meet again.

The Department has lead responsibility for representing the United Kingdom at meetings of this committee. They consult the Devolved Administrations to ensure points made represent all parts of the United Kingdom including the Scottish Executive.

Following the successful outcome of the recent conciliation exercise, a new European Union public health programme will start in January 2003. This programme will build on the work of the current committee which will cease to function under the new programme.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Committee for the implementation of the Decision to set up a network for the epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70596]

Ms Blears: The next meeting is due to be held on 7/8 October. The director of the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health (SCIEH) attended for the UK surveillance unit on one occasion.

The Scottish Executive is represented by the Department.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on health monitoring in the framework of the action plan for public health is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70600]

Ms Blears: There are no plans for this committee to meet again.

The Department and the Office for National Statistics have had lead responsibility for representing the United Kingdom at meetings of this committee. They consult the devolved authorities to ensure points made represent all parts of the United Kingdom including the Scottish Executive.

Following the successful outcome of the recent conciliation exercise, a new European Union public health programme will start in January 2003. This programme will build on the work of the current committee which will cease to function under the new programme.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on health promotion, information, education and training is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70599]

Ms Blears: We understand there are no plans for this Committee to meet again. The Department has had lead responsibility for representing the United Kingdom at meetings of this Committee. The Devolved Administrations have been consulted to ensure points made represent all parts of the United Kingdom including the Scottish Executive.

Following the successful outcome of the recent conciliation exercise, a new EU Public Health programme will start in January 2003. This programme will build on the work of the Committee which will cease to function under the new programme.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme for the prevention of AIDS and certain other communicable diseases is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70597]

Ms Blears: The date of the next meeting has not been set. There are no Scottish executive members. The Scottish Executive is represented by the Department.

Nuclear Emergency Plan

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has commissioned into the practicality of distributing iodine tablets as part of a national nuclear emergency plan. [71465]

Mr. Hutton: The Government has established detailed plans for responding to major incidents involving radiation. Cross-departmental contingency plans are in place and regular exercises test national and local responses to a radiation or nuclear incident. Careful consideration has been given to the practicalities of distributing potassium iodate tablets to the population and arrangements for distributing these tablets have been tested in recent exercises.

RU-486

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what studies his Department has undertaken during each of the last 10 years into the safety of the abortion drug RU-486; and if he will make a statement; [70114]

(2) what the *(a)* contra-indications and *(b)* side effects are of the use of the abortion drug RU-486; and if he will make a statement. [70218]

Ms Blears: RU-486, now more commonly known as mifepristone (Mifegyne), is licensed for use in medical termination of pregnancy. Information on how to use mifepristone, as well as information on possible side effects, is provided in the product information for prescribers in the summary of product characteristics (SPC) and for patients in the patient information leaflet (PIL).

Warnings and contraindications for the use of mifepristone which are included in the SPC and PIL are as follows: allergy to mifepristone or any component of the product, suspected ectopic pregnancy, pregnancy not confirmed by ultrasound scan or biological tests, chronic adrenal failure, severe asthma not controlled by therapy and presence of a inter-uterine device in situ. In addition, special care should be given to patients with haemostatic disorders with hypocoagulability or with anaemia, and patients on long term therapy with corticosteroids since corticosteroid efficacy can be decreased by concomitant treatment with mifepristone. Mifepristone is not recommended for use in patients with hepatic or renal failure or in women over 35 years of age and who smoke more than ten cigarettes a day.

As with all medicines, mifepristone is not without side effects. Some of the side effects experienced by patients such as pain, uterine contractions or cramping and vaginal bleeding result from the termination of pregnancy. Side effects of the medication which may occur in some women include nausea, vomiting, stomach cramping, hypersensitivity reactions such as skin rashes and urticaria, headaches, malaise, hot flushes, dizziness, chills and fever.

The Medicines Control Agency, with advice from the independent scientific advisory Committee, the Committee on Safety of Medicines, is responsible for monitoring the safety of all marketed medicines.

The safety of a mifepristone was evaluated at the time of granting a marketing authorisation and continues to be monitored using information from clinical trials, post-marketing studies and from spontaneous adverse reaction reports. There have been a large number of studies and reviews of the safety of mifepristone published in the scientific literature in the last ten years.

Induced abortion is one of the most commonly performed gynaecological procedures in Great Britain. Abortion, both surgical and medical, is safer than carrying a pregnancy to term and complications are uncommon. All available evidence in terms of safety and efficacy of mifepristone was reviewed by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists when producing its evidence based clinical guideline "The Care of Women Seeking Induced Abortion (2000)" and is referenced. Medical abortion is one of the methods recommended in the guideline.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what he estimates will be the savings during each of the next five years to the National Health Service of using the abortion drug RU-486 instead of surgical abortion; and if he will make a statement; [70115]

(2) what was the total cost to the National Health Service in each of the last five years of providing the abortion drug RU-486. [70119]

Ms Blears: The information available relates to all medical abortions, of which about 95 per cent. are undertaken using RU-486.

The estimated cost to the National Health Service for NHS-funded medical abortions that took place on NHS premises is in the table below. This information is not available prior to 1998–99.

	Inpatient and day case activity	*Outpatient attendances*[1,2]
1998–99	£3.9m	Not available
1999–2000	£4.4m	Not available
2000–01	£5.2m	£1.8m

[1] A medical abortion, using RU486, is a two-stage process. The first stage, which is the administering of the drug RU486, often takes place in an outpatient clinic.

[2] The outpatient clinic component of the cost of medical abortions is not available prior to 2000–01.

Source:

National Schedule of Reference Costs.

The independent sector also undertakes some medical abortions, using RU486, under NHS contract. Costs to the NHS for these abortions are not collected centrally.

It is important that women should be offered a choice of recommended methods for relevant gestation bands, in accordance with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' evidence-based guideline *The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion* (2000). The Government has not set targets or made projections for the future uptake and costs of medical abortion. There is no significant difference in the overall costs between surgical and medical abortion.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that the abortion drug RU-486 will be administered in accordance with the Abortion Act 1967, as amended by section 37 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990; and if he will make a statement. [70116]

Ms Blears: Under Section 2(2) of the Abortion Act 1967, as amended, registered medical practitioners must notify the Chief Medical Officer of every completed termination of pregnancy they perform. The notification form contains detailed information relating to the procedure including the doctors who certified there were grounds under the Act, gestation, method used and place of termination. Every form is checked and monitored by Departmental officials to ensure that the abortion was performed within the provisions of the Act.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many abortions were carried out in each of the last 10 years using the abortion drug RU-486; [70117]

(2) what his proposed target levels in 2002–03 are for use of the abortion drug RU-486; and if he will make a statement. [70118]

Ms Blears: The number of abortions carried out in the last ten years using the abortion drug RU-486 for residents of England and Wales are shown in the table.

Year	*England*	*Wales*	*England and Wales*
1991	1022	42	1064
1992	1502	63	1565
1993	3719	224	3943
1994	5324	376	5700
1995	6983	685	7668
1996	8782	933	9715
1997	10345	956	11301
1998	12849	1064	13913
1999	14735	1284	16019
2000	17647	1844	19491

Source:

Statistics Division—Department of Health.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' evidence-based guideline *The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion* (2000) recommends that women should be offered a choice of recommended methods for relevant gestation bands. It is expected that as medical abortion becomes more widely available more women will choose this method. No targets have been set for the use of medical abortion.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the rate of incomplete abortions following the use of the abortion drug RU-486 is; and if he will make a statement. [70219]

Ms Blears: All methods of first trimester abortion carry a risk of failure to terminate the pregnancy, thus necessitating a further procedure. The evidence based clinical guideline *The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion (2000)* produced by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists states that the failure rate for medical abortions is around 6.0 per thousand.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what counselling is offered to a woman *(a)* contemplating, *(b)* during and *(c)* after an abortion using the abortion drug RU-486; and if he will make a statement. [70220]

Ms Blears: The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists's evidence-based guideline "The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion" (2000), which applies to both medical and surgical abortions, recognises the importance of women seeking abortion receiving accurate impartial information. Verbal advice must be supported by printed information which every woman considering abortion can understand and may take away and read before the procedure.

Clinicians caring for women requesting abortion should try to identify those patients who require more support in decision making than can be provided in the routine clinic setting. Facilities for additional support, including access to social services, should be available. Appropriate information and support should be available for those who consider, but do not proceed to, abortion.

Professionals should be equipped to provide women with the information they need in order to give genuinely informed consent:

that abortion is safer than continuing a pregnancy to term and that complications are uncommon;

description of the abortion methods that are available;

immediate complications;

complications in the early weeks following abortion.

During the procedure, staff are on hand to give support to women.

The guideline also considers the mental health implications of termination and concluded: "Only a small minority of women experience any long term, adverse psychological sequelae after abortion. Early distress, although common, is usually a continuation of symptoms present before the abortion. Conversely, long-lasting, negative effects on both mothers and their children are reported where abortion has been denied."

Referral for further counselling should be available for the small minority of women who experience long term post abortion distress.

Birth Statistics

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to include women's health issues relating to preganancy and birth in future funding priorities for research councils. [67065]

Jacqui Smith: Research into women's health issues relating to pregnancy and childbirth will be given appropriate priority during the process to develop the children's national service framework, in competition with the Secretary of State's other priorities. These will be discussed with the research councils.

NHS Maternity Units

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list NHS maternity units in descending order of the number of *(a)* live births and *(b)* stillbirths in 2001. [67459]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The National Statistician will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library.

HFCs

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review NHS Model Engineering Specification Rev 3 of November 1997 (MES C10 Refrigeration Plant General) to ensure that it conforms with the Government's policy on use of HFCs. [71354]

Mr. Lammy: The current version of model engineering specifications C10 refrigeration plant (general), although pre-dating European Community regulations on the supply and use of CFCs and HCFCs, identifies the phasing out of CFC and HCFC compounds and requires the use of HFC refrigerants in accordance with Government policy.

All National Health Service Estates model engineering specifications are subject to periodic review to take account of updates in standards and changes in clinical practice. Any necessary changes to model engineering specifications C10 will be made as part of the next review during 2003.

Dental Treatment

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial assistance is available to pensioners when paying for dental treatment; and if he will make a statement. [67139]

Mr. Lammy: Patients, including pensioners, who are likely to have difficulty in paying for dental treatment are entitled to financial help with the charges. Many pensioners will be able to afford to pay for treatment, but where they cannot they can apply for help under the low income scheme and may be entitled to free treatment, or partial help with the cost of treatment.

The Government believes that it is a better use of limited resources to base help with charges for National Health Service dentistry on the individual's ability to pay, so ensuring that help is focused on those who need it most. The Government meets over two thirds of the total cost of dentistry. Many patients including pensioners, receiving NHS dental treatment are either exempt from charges or can receive help through the low income scheme.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on pollution-related diseases in the framework of the action plan for public health is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57478]

Ms Blears: The European Union Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on pollution-related diseases was mandated under Article 5 of Decision No 1296/1999/EC of the European Parliament and Council. The Committee assists the Commission in taking forward the programme by providing opinions on the work programme and research proposals submitted for funding under the programme.

The Committee met twice in the last year, on 12 September 2001 and on 23 January 2002. One United Kingdom official from the Department attended the September 2001 meeting.

Costs to public funds were minimal, meetings usually last one day, the Commission pay the travel costs of nominated representatives, UK Departments are required to pay subsistence and UK travel costs.

Details about the Committee, the programme and funded projects can be found on Europa, the EU on-line website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/index—en.html

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EX, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Library on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent action, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Community action plan to combat cancer is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57481]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 4 July, *Official Report*, column 570W.

Drink Additives

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive guidance from the European Union Scientific Committee on Food on the upper safe levels for daily intake of *(a)* taurine and *(b)* glucuronolactone; and if he will make a statement. [68349]

Ms Blears: The European Union Scientific Committee on Food (SCF) concluded in their 1999 opinion on the safety of caffeine and other constituents of energy drinks that further studies would be required in order to be able to establish upper safe levels for daily intake of taurine and glucuronolactone. The SCF is currently reviewing new data on the ingredients of energy drinks and considering whether there is a need to review its 1999 opinion in light of this information. It is expected that this review will be completed before the end of the year, when the remit of the SCF expires.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive analysis of the research on the safety of high caffeine drinks from the EU Scientific Committee on Food; and if he will make a statement. [68314]

Ms Blears: New data on the safety of the ingredients of "energy drinks" has been submitted to the Scientific Committee on Food (SCF). The committee has been asked to consider if, in light of this new information, there is a need to revise their previous opinion expressed in 1999. It is expected that the SCF will report on their findings by the end of the year, when the remit of the committee expires.

Orphan Chemicals

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the likely changes in cost to the NHS of the creation of monopoly suppliers through the licensing of orphan chemicals following the implementation of UK legislation on the EU Directive on Orphan Chemicals. [67576]

Mr. Lammy: No assessment has been made of the cost to the National Health Service of medicines licensed under the European Orphan Drugs Regulations. Four drugs have been authorised to date and approximately 200 others have been designated and are in the pipeline for authorisation. Until the prices of these medicines and the number of patients requiring them are known it is difficult to quantify the cost. Where companies make excessive profits on branded medicines these are recovered under the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS) and statutory powers are available to deal with medicines not covered by that scheme.

EU Food Supplements Directive

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response the United Kingdom has made to the EU proposals to bring food supplements under the Medicines Directive. [57959]

Mr. Lammy: The European Commission published proposals for wide ranging amendments to the regulatory regime for human and veterinary medicines in December 2001. The proposed changes include a new definition of a medicinal product.

The Government recognises the need to ensure that the definition of a medicine is drafted in such a way that will allow new therapies to be appropriately regulated. However, the United Kingdom's view is that the extension of the scope of the medicines legislation, particularly when linked to the new definition, is unwarranted and unacceptable as it would capture many products, including certain food supplements, that are already covered by other sectoral legislation. The Government sees no justification for this proposal and will continue to resist it. This position is shared by most other Member States.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Statistics

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many offences there were and what the rate of incidence per 1,000 population was of *(a)* violence against the person, *(b)* sexual offences, *(c)* robbery, *(d)* burglary, *(e)* theft and handling stolen goods, *(f)* fraud and forgery, *(g)* criminal damage and *(h)* drug and other offences in *(i)* St Helens, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the North West and (iv) England in (A) 1997, (B) 1998, (C) 1999, (D) 2000 and (E) 2001; [71276]

Crime (Detection Rates)

(2) what the rate of detection was of *(a)* violence against the person, *(b)* sexual offences, *(c)* robbery, *(d)* burglary, *(e)* theft and handling stolen goods, *(f)* fraud and forgery, *(g)* criminal damage, *(h)* drug and other offences and *(i)* burglary of a dwelling in (1) St Helens, (2) Merseyside, (3) the North West and (4) England in (A) 1997, (B) 1998, (C) 1999, (D) 2000 and (E) 2001. [71277]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The available requested information is given in the tables. For the number of offences, the number of recorded crimes are given, from which the rates per population and detection rates are calculated.

It should be noted that there was a change of counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, and so numbers of recorded crimes and detection rates before and after that date are not directly comparable. Also, some forces will have introduced the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard ahead of its national implementation on 1 April 2002, and so this will be reflected in the England and North West Region figures. The counting rules for detections changed on 1 April 1999, so that numbers of detections before and after that date will not be directly comparable.

It should be noted that recorded crime is subject to changes in reporting and recording. For example, the number of common assaults in England and Wales recorded in the British Crime Survey, which measures victims' experience of crime, decreased by an estimated 24 per cent. from 1999 to 2001–02. However, common assaults recorded by the police in that area over that period increased by 23 per cent. Offences recorded by the police may therefore not necessarily be a reflection of the real level of offences, or trends for offences.

Recorded crimes by offence group—St Helens[1]

	1999–2000			2000–01			2001–02		
Offence Group	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*
Violence against the person	1,693	9.5	69	1,795	10.1	74	1,913	10.7	69
Sexual offences	109	0.6	68	153	0.9	79	125	0.7	
Robbery	171	1.0	21	168	0.9	27	214	1.2	36
Burglary in a dwelling			15			14			17

[1] Full details of the other offence groups were not collected in the time period requested.

Recorded crimes by offence group—Merseyside

	1997			1998–99			1999–2000			2000–01			2001–02		
Offence Group	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offence cleared up*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*
Violence against the person	8,083	5.7	69	12,208	8.6	74	14,639	10.4	69	15,855	11.3	71	16,030	11.4	64
Sexual offences	906	0.6	82	1,019	0.7	73	935	0.7	67	982	0.7	68	1,018	0.7	55
Robbery	2,141	1.5	25	2,484	1.8	23	2,663	1.9	18	2,405	1.7	21	3,155	2.3	19
Burglary	26,266	18.5	26	26,498	18.8	22	25,638	18.2	12	23,938	17.1	13	25,478	18.2	12
Burglary in dwelling			30	-		27			15			17			15
Theft and Handling	58,520	41.2	29	59,044	41.8	24	62,230	44.2	19	57,844	41.2	21	59,698	42.5	19
Fraud and Forgery	4,269	3.0	59	4,884	3.5	59	4,794	3.4	55	5,021	3.6	53	5,380	3.8	28
Criminal damage	23,677	16.7	15	27,465	19.4	12	30,822	21.9	11	30,593	21.8	12	33,899	24.2	10
Drug offences				5,620	4.0	95	4,838	3.4	99	4,421	3.2	97	4,390	3.1	95
Other offences	2,117	1.5	97	1,652	1.2	90	1,613	1.1	82	1,748	1.3	79	1,886	1.3	76
Total	125,979	88.7	31	14,0874	99.7	31	14,8172	105.1	26	14,2807	101.7	28	15,0934	107.6	24

Recorded crimes by offence group—North West Region

	1997			1998–99			1999–2000			2000–01			2001–02		
Offence Group	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*
Violence against the person	32,097	4.7	73	70,555	10.3	78	75,568	11.0	74	77,150	11.2	72	85,416	12.4	66
Sexual offences	4,425	0.6	82	4,865	0.7	77	4,550	0.7	70	4,663	0.7	65	5,070	0.7	58
Robbery	9,702	1.4	23	11,613	1.7	22	12,911	1.9	18	14,127	2.1	18	16,406	2.4	17
Burglary	150,235	21.8	18	14,8840	21.6	16	140,632	20.4	11	131,766	19.2	10	140,353	20.4	10
Burglary in dwelling			20			18			13			12			12
Theft and Handling	290,143	42.1	24	297,498	43.2	22	294,620	42.8	20	280,300	40.7	19	298,199	43.3	17
Fraud and Forgery	16,398	2.4	57	28,694	4.2	51	32,363	4.7	43	33,019	4.8	40	31,029	4.5	33
Criminal damage	137,796	20.0	13	135,878	19.7	16	150,369	21.8	14	155,192	22.6	13	177,127	25.7	12
Drug offences				19,267	2.8	99	16,106	2.3	99	15,070	2.2	98	14,775	2.1	97
Other offences	8,514	1.2	98	9,520	1.4	85	9,262	1.3	83	8,768	1.3	82	9,434	1.4	78
Total	649,310	94.2	25	726,730	105.6	30	736,381	106.9	26	720,055	104.7	25	777,809	112.8	23

Recorded crimes by offence group—England

	1997			1998–99			1999–2000			2000–01			2001–02		
	Offences recorded	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Percentage cleared up*
Violence against the person	233,441	4.8	78	470,689	9.6	70	543,,116	11.0	63	562,692	11.3	60	613,661	12.3	57
Sexual offences	31,291	0.6	76	34,356	0.7	67	36,043	0.7	57	35,605	0.7	51	39,674	0.8	48
Robbery	62,261	1.3	27	65,982	1.3	22	83,368	1.7	18	94,264	1.9	18	120345	2.4	16
Burglary	968,630	19.7	22	911,243	18.5	18	869,704	17.6	12	803,144	16.2	12	846,287	16.9	12
Burglary in dwelling			25			22			14			14			14
Theft and Handling	2,059,130	42.0	24	208,7864	42.4	21	2,124,893	42.9	17	2,056,337	41.3	17	2,177,042	43.5	16
Fraud and Forgery	128,641	2.6	48	267,497	5.4	35	322,884	6.5	29	308,875	6.2	28	307,165	6.1	27
Criminal damage	822,029	16.8	16	823,520	16.7	17	890,756	18.0	15	906800	18.2	14	1007567	20.2	13
Drug offences				126,196	2.6	97	113,346	2.3	96	105,107	2.1	95	111,895	2.2	94
Other offences	55,968	1.1	95	59748	1.2	77	61,590	1.2	73	59,566	1.2	71	61,681	1.2	70
Total	4,361,391	88.9	27	4,847,095	98.4	28	5,045,700	101.9	24	4932390	99.1	24	5,285,317	105.7	23

There was no separate drug offence category in 1997. Trafficking was included in "Other Offences".

Young Offender Institutions

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what actions have been undertaken to promote education on *(a)* human rights and *(b)* the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in young offender institutions. [72154]

Mr. Hilary Benn: All staff in the Prison Service are provided with information about the Human Rights Act 1998. Senior managers and key policy staff have undertaken training on the implications of the Act for their work and a range of information has been produced and distributed for both staff and prisoners. No formal training has been provided on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child but staff are kept informed regarding changes in policy or procedures which are implemented in order to meet our obligations under the Convention.

New Police Standards Unit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much it will cost to set up and run the New Police Standards Unit; and if he will make a statement. [72512]

Mr. John Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 108W.

Court/Prison Closures

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the closure of *(a)* courts and *(b)* prisons. [73222]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Decisions on the closure of magistrates' courts in England and Wales are for the individual magistrates' courts committees (MCCs) to determine in consultation with their paying authorities. An authority that is aggrieved by determination of an MCC has the right to appeal to the Lord Chancellor.

Decisions on the closure of county courts in England and Wales are for the Lord Chancellor. The Court Service is reviewing the existing network of courts under the Courts and Tribunals Modernisation Programme. Detailed plans are still being developed and will be subject to public consultation.

The Strategy for the court estate published in the report "Modernising the Civil and Family Courts", shows that only one county court at Shorditch, is currently earmarked for closure.

In respect of Crown Courts, public consultation on the proposed closure of the Knutsford Crown Court has ended and the Group Manager responsible for the court is currently considering the responses to the consultation process.

The Government has no plans to close prisons at present. However the closure of outdated prisons, as and when population pressures allow, does form part of the Government's long term strategy for modernising the prison estate.

Police Cells

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* adult male prisoners, *(b)* women prisoners and *(c)* juveniles were held in police cells in each of the last six weeks; and for how long in each case. [73217]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Her Majesty's Prison Service does not collect data on the individual status of prisoners held in police cells or how long they are held in police custody. The table shows the total number of prisoners, including adult males, females and juveniles held in police cells over the last six weeks.

Week Commencing in 2002	*Total Prisoners held in police accommodation*
10 June	325
17 June	509
24 June	542
1 July	813
8 July	1,034
15 July	749

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are being held in police cells; in what areas of the country they are held; and at what cost to the Prison Service. [73213]

Mr. Hilary Benn: There were 191 prisoners held in police accommodation on the night of 23 July 2002. With the exception of Wales, prisoners were held in all areas of the country.

Police forces that have been asked to accommodate prisoners, where Prison Service accommodation is exceptionally unavailable, will be able to claim the costs of that accommodation from the Prison Service. As yet, no police force has submitted invoices for this service, but any claims submitted should be in line with the costing guidance issued in 1997 which ensures that police forces charge on a consistent and auditable basis.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what regulations and standards govern the treatment of prisoners held in police cells. [73219]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The operational management of prisoners held in police accommodation is a matter for the Chief Constable of the forces concerned. While the police will do everything possible to care for the prisoners and to meet their basic needs it will not be possible to offer a prison regime. Every effort is made, however, to minimise the length of time that individual prisoners are held in police cells.

Youth Offenders (Drugs)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate, for each prison, youth offenders institution and other institutions for offenders, people on remand and ex-offenders *(a)* the way in which drug prescriptions are recorded and *(b)* the progress being made towards this work being dealt with using information technology. [72333]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Most Prison Service establishments manually record drug prescriptions as part of the Inmate Medical Record (IMR). Where prisons have in-house pharmacy services, drugs dispensed will usually be recorded both on a pharmacy computer system and manually on the IMR.

A pilot exercise is currently being undertaken in seven prisons to asses the operation of new clinical information systems to support prison health services. The pilots are focusing specifically on primary care provision, including electronic prescribing, and will be evaluated to inform decisions on the wider rollout of clinical information systems in prisons. We are also considering how best to update our information technology support for prison pharmacies.

Immigration

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many successful applications have been made since 1999 under the concession for over-age applications for entry clearance, following DNA testing; and if he will make a statement on the future of this concession. [72777]

Beverley Hughes: On 1 January 1991 a concession was introduced concerning over-age applicants for entry clearance, following DNA testing. It enabled those dependent children who had previously been refused entry to join their parents in the United Kingdom owing to doubts about their being related as claimed, to re-apply if a DNA test now confirmed the relationship. Amongst other requirements, they had also still to be dependent upon their parents and unmarried. By July 1991, some 550 cases relating to the concession had been considered of which 115 were conceded. However, in recent years use of the concession has been nil. Each year between five and 10 people who have already re-applied once and been refused, have applied again, but no applications have been granted under the concession.

Last year, some members made representations to my predecessor, urging that the concession be widened so as to allow people who had been refused as minors to re-apply. The Government had considerable sympathy with their views and with the people yet more who were wrongly refused before the introduction of DNA tests made such decisions much more reliable. However, this situation arose owing to technological advances and we have already attempted, by way of the present concession, to correct any previous injustices resulting from decisions which were taken in good faith on the available evidence at the time. It is now no longer possible to identify those people who may have been wrongly refused due to doubts about their relationship to a United Kingdom sponsor, as many records of earlier decisions have been destroyed.

Given that it is not possible to widen the concession, and given that the concession is not being used and has not been used for some time, we have decided that the concession should end. After 24 August 2002 no new applications under the concession will be considered. There remains within the immigration Rules provision for dependent relatives who find themselves in distressed circumstances to apply to join a sponsor in the United Kingdom. Any future applications will instead be considered under the existing immigration Rules governing dependent relatives.

Correctional Services Review

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the form will be of the independent review of the correctional services described in the White Paper, "Justice For All". [73633]

Mr. Hilary Benn: I shall shortly be announcing membership of the new Correctional Services Board which will include a number of independent non-executive members. These members will have a specific remit to oversee work on reviewing effectiveness and value for money in the delivery of correctional services so as to reduce re-offending, and on how we improve our ability to manage the prison population.

Brixton Prison

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce the outcome of the market testing of the management of HMP Brixton. [73628]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The market test for the management of Brixton did not attract bids from the private sector, partly because of its poor physical condition and location. The in house bid, while being impressive, was not affordable. Therefore, instead of operating under a Service Level Agreement, the prison will continue to be run under existing management arrangements. However, a performance baseline will be set with challenging improvement targets, and progress will be closely monitored.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements exist for asylum seekers to submit material in support of their claim. [73629]

Beverley Hughes: Under existing procedures, an applicant who is not issued with a Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) to complete prior to their asylum interview is allowed five days after their substantive asylum interview to make further representations before a decision is taken on their asylum claim.

Those asylum applicants issued with an SEF prior to any substantive interview do not benefit from this arrangement. This is because applicants issued with an SEF form are given 10 working days to submit the completed form to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. We think this gives applicants a reasonable period to set out their claim and time to seek legal representation if they wish for the submission of further supporting evidence.

We have decided that asylum applicants who go through the induction centre process will no longer benefit from the five day period to make further representations. The induction centre process is designed to familiarise an asylum applicant with the asylum procedures, providing the asylum seeker with detailed briefings on different aspects of the asylum process and to explain to applicants what their obligations are. All asylum applicants who go through the induction centre process are told that all information relevant to their claim must be available by the time they are substantively interviewed because decisions on claims will be made shortly after the interview. The interview itself will be scheduled to take place two weeks after the applicant has gone through the induction process. We consider that this two week period offers the applicant sufficient time to prepare for the interview and gather any supporting information he considers necessary.

This change is in keeping with our commitment to deliver fast asylum decisions, whilst at the same time ensuring that asylum seekers have a proper opportunity to establish their claims.

These arrangements do not apply to Oakington or any detained cases.

Road Traffic Penalties

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government's response to the consultation paper on road traffic penalties will be published. [73630]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government's response to the consultation paper on the review of road traffic penalties is published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Campsfield House

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the Campsfield House immigration removal centre. [73631]

Beverley Hughes: On 7 February, my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, announced that he had decided that the Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre would close by spring 2003. However, following the incident at The Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre in February and the consequent temporary reduction in Removal Centre capacity, I have decided to postpone the closure of Campsfield House until September 2004. This is in order to maintain Removal Centre capacity and thus support our commitment to increase the rate of removal of failed asylum seekers.

IND Complaints Committee

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on changes in the membership of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's independent Complaints Audit Committee. [73632]

Beverley Hughes: Ms Catherine Tuitt has been appointed as a new Member of the Complaints Audit Committee to replace Mercy Jeyasingham, whose three-year term of tenure ends in July 2002. Ms Tuitt has worked in a variety of positions, both in the private and public sector, ranging from legal consultancy and public affairs, to chairing council committees. A local elected councillor until recently, Ms Tuitt has considerable experience in facilitating service provision. She is presently an advocate for a voluntary community organisation providing support and advice to refugees and children of refugees.

Careless Driving

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers convicted of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs caused crashes which resulted in multiple deaths in each of the past 10 years. [70969]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of the breath tests carried out by police officers proved *(a)* over the legal drink-drive limit and *(b)* positive, but not over the legal drink-drive limit, broken down by police force, in each of the last 10 years; [70954]

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average penalty given to *(a)* drivers convicted of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs and *(b)* drivers convicted of multiple counts of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs in each of the past 10 years. [70971]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers charged with causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs were involved in crashes that resulted in multiple deaths in each of the past 10 years. [70968]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I will write to the hon. Member

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers were convicted of multiple counts of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs in each of the past 10 years. [70970]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers were *(a)* charged with and *(b)* convicted of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs in each of the past 10 years. [70967]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I will write to the hon. Member

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers convicted of multiple counts of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs *(a)* served the whole of their sentences and *(b)* had their sentence reduced, in each of the past 10 years. [70973]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers convicted of multiple counts of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs *(a)* were given concurrent sentences and *(b)* were given consecutive sentences, in each of the past 10 years. [70974]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I will write to the hon. Member

Breath Tests

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of the breath tests carried out by police officers proved *(a)* over the legal drink-drive limit and *(b)* positive, but not over the legal drink-drive limit, broken down by police force, in each of the last 10 years. [70954]

(2) how many breath tests were carried out by police officers, broken down by police force, in each of the last 10 years. [70953]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Since 1992 police forces have been required to supply centrally the total number of screening tests and the sum of positive and refused tests as given in the tables.

Table A: Percentage of positive or refused screening breath tests, by police force area, 1992–2000

Percentages

England and Wales Police force area	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*[1]	*1999*[1]	*2000*[1]
Avon and Somerset	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	17	19
Bedfordshire	13	15	11	14	17	19	16	27	22
Cambridgeshire	11	8	8	8	8	7	7	8	9
Cheshire	15	16	26	15	11	7	7	8	16
Cleveland	9	9	6	4	4	3	3	3	4
Cumbria	19	13	13	11	9	8	8	8	10
Derbyshire	14	10	8	7	6	5	5	4	3
Devon and Cornwall	38	36	32	29	22	11	14	18	20
Dorset	24	19	17	20	17	15	15	14	11
Durham	26	19	19	27	31	29	17	7	7
Essex	13	12	10	8	6	6	10	11	9
Gloucestershire	20	19	17	16	22	17	14	16	17
Greater Manchester	24	16	9	7	7	8	21	22	31
Hampshire	28	26	20	21	18	14	14	12	10
Hertfordshire	31	29	30	26	28	25	24	27	33
Humberside	18	19	20	17	14	17	18	15	13
Kent	12	12	13	17	18	15	11	11	9
Lancashire	33	27	23	16	12	13	9	10	10
Leicestershire	22	16	11	17	20	22	11	9	11
Lincolnshire	8	7	7	7	6	4	4	4	6
London, City of	15	19	19	16	16	16	14	17	23

Table A: Percentage of positive or refused screening breath tests, by police force area, 1992–2000

Percentages

England and Wales Police force area	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*[1]	*1999*[1]	*2000*[1]
Merseyside	49	28	16	16	17	17	13	12	17
Metropolitan	8	6	8	13	12	13	13	11	10
Norfolk	9	16	18	20	16	11	7	7	8
Northamptonshire	18	20	20	20	17	21	26	23	25
Northumbria	54	51	49	51	38	30	27	28	27
North Yorkshire	35	43	37	35	22	16	15	16	17
Nottinghamshire	32	40	40	43	29	25	27	29	28
South Yorkshire	29	22	21	18	16	14	13	12	11
Staffordshire	24	29	30	20	15	11	14	18	16
Suffolk	20	18	17	14	14	9	8	7	9
Surrey	17	19	19	16	15	13	11	14	13
Sussex	16	16	16	15	11	10	11	11	9
Thames Valley	12	10	11	12	14	17	15	16	17
Warwickshire	34	29	18	13	12	12	10	12	13
West Mercia	14	11	11	9	11	10	8	13	25
West Midlands	34	40	35	29	18	14	25	23	28
West Yorkshire	24	28	24	17	17	19	20	21	23
Wiltshire	15	16	17	15	21	17	15	15	15
Dyfed-Powys	17	16	17	15	14	9	12	10	11
Gwent	9	13	12	12	10	10	10	10	10
North Wales	11	11	10	12	12	12	10	10	11
South Wales	22	20	18	17	16	11	13	13	15
Total	16	15	14	13	13	12	13	12	13

[1] Since 1998 comparisons between the number of positive breath tests reported by each police force and the number of court proceedings for drink/driving related offences have indicated that there has been under-reporting in a number of forces. Appropriate adjustments have been made.

Table B: Number of screening breath tests, by police force area, 1992–2000

Percentages

England and Wales Police force area	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Avon and Somerset	5,400	4,000	3,800	6,700	15,100	16,000	19,700	19,200	15,800
Bedfordshire	6,000	4,900	8,200	6,100	6,400	6,000	5,300	2,900	3,300
Cambridgeshire	11,700	16,000	16,500	16,300	16,200	19,100	17,800	13,600	12,800
Cheshire	9,400	12,300	8,200	15,300	21,300	25,500	23,300	20,500	15,800
Cleveland	12,600	10,100	15,000	28,200	26,100	31,600	34,200	28,600	18,800
Cumbria	5,000	6,000	7,000	7,800	9,800	11,200	9,400	7,100	6,100
Derbyshire	9,100	14,700	17,000	20,500	28,600	34,500	35,700	49,200	52,000
Devon and Cornwall	6,900	5,600	5,600	6,800	9,100	15,200	15,700	14,700	13,000
Dorset	4,600	5,800	6,800	5,800	7,400	9,100	10,100	9,200	12,300
Durham	5,800	6,700	6,900	4,500	4,100	4,300	7,400	12,700	15,300
Essex	21,500	28,000	38,200	27,700	32,400	28,700	28,400	24,100	27,200
Gloucestershire	3,700	2,700	4,200	5,200	7,000	9,400	9,300	8,300	8,200
Greater Manchester	27,700	47,700	78,500	102,400	100,400	95,600	31,200	21,500	27,300
Hampshire	9,900	10,200	14,100	17,000	18,200	25,000	27,300	31,600	35,200
Hertfordshire	5,500	5,700	7,100	6,400	5,900	7,400	8,100	7,000	6,000
Humberside	8,000	6,500	6,800	8,900	7,500	6,500	8,300	8,100	9,400
Kent	20,200	17,200	17,000	9,200	8,100	9,100	27,500	32,700	32,200
Lancashire	6,100	6,500	8,600	15,900	26,100	21,300	20,300	19,100	15,500
Leicestershire	6,300	10,300	15,500	11,700	10,300	10,200	20,200	21,100	18,600
Lincolnshire	12,600	12,600	11,600	15,600	15,800	20,200	25,900	21,000	12,100
London, City of	2,200	2,800	4,400	3,300	4,500	3,600	3,300	1,700	1,100
Merseyside	5,300	10,700	16,000	15,300	15,900	14,800	18,700	18,600	12,800
Metropolitan	132,300	143,000	141,600	123,300	123,000	137,900	111,400	99,800	93,800
Norfolk	7,700	3,900	3,500	4,200	5,500	9,200	12,400	11,600	9,100
Northamptonshire	5,000	6,400	6,000	5,100	7,400	7,100	4,700	5,300	5,800
Northumbria	4,600	5,500	6,100	5,800	8,400	11,900	12,200	12,500	12,700

Table B: Number of screening breath tests, by police force area, 1992–2000

Percentages

England and Wales Police force area	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
North Yorkshire	4,300	3,900	4,500	4,800	7,800	10,500	9,900	8,100	6,700
Nottinghamshire	6,800	5,000	5,500	5,700	9,300	11,500	8,900	8,400	8,400
South Yorkshire	6,500	9,400	11,300	11,000	13,300	14,200	12,600	16,100	19,200
Staffordshire	6,800	4,600	5,300	6,300	9,700	13,800	15,400	10,100	7,700
Suffolk	5,900	6,300	5,900	7,500	8,200	12,300	15,600	15,100	9,200
Surrey	8,300	8,100	8,500	9,300	11,200	11,200	11,400	11,700	12,400
Sussex	10,900	15,800	16,000	15,900	24,300	26,100	17,400	17,900	20,800
Thames Valley	29,700	48,300	51,400	47,200	39,700	33,100	34,200	30,300	30,800
Warwickshire	2,300	2,700	6,100	8,200	9,200	8,700	8,700	8,600	7,100
West Mercia	17,500	18,500	18,400	19,900	18,100	18,300	19,100	12,300	8,900
West Midlands	13,700	15,400	14,800	9,100	19,500	22,600	24,100	21,300	16,200
West Yorkshire	14,500	10,600	11,800	15,800	19,500	23,300	22,900	18,800	18,300
Wiltshire	8,200	8,000	8,000	10,000	6,300	7,400	7,100	6,800	6,500
Dyfed-Powys	5,400	4,300	4,500	5,000	5,900	8,500	9,200	9,900	7,400
Gwent	6,800	6,000	5,600	4,900	9,300	12,200	11,200	10,600	10,100
North Wales	16,100	13,400	15,900	14,900	14,900	13,300	15,200	15,900	15,000
South Wales	12,400	13,400	10,400	12,200	14,900	23,100	24,900	20,700	17,800
Total	531,300	599,600	678,500	702,700	781,100	860,400	815,500	764,500	714,800

Source:
Home Office (RDS/CCJU) 19 July 2002.

Criminal Checks

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests have been received from *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* others for Criminal Reference Bureau checks on job applicants, what the (i) average and (ii) longest delay in response has been; and if he will make a statement. [69766]

Mr. Hilary Benn: As at 10 July, a total of 236,191 applications have been received by the Criminal Records Bureau for criminal record checks. Information relating to the number of applications received from local authorities and the delays in responding is not available in the format requested. I will write to my hon. Friend when the information becomes accessible.

Measures continue to be taken to overcome the early operating difficulties experienced by the Bureau, which have led to delays in responding to applications. The Criminal Records Bureau is determined to meet the high standards of service that it has made clear it will deliver to its customers, and expects to see increasing service improvements during the coming weeks.

Home Detention Curfew

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners since 1 January have been released on the home detention curfew scheme broken down by *(a)* homicide and attempted homicide, *(b)* other violence against the person, *(c)* drug offences, *(d)* assaults and *(e)* other offences; what the average sentence (i) received and (ii) served and the average period spent on the scheme was in respect of each offence; how many prisoners in each of the above categories have *(A)* breached the conditions of the curfew, *(B)* disappeared and been recaptured, *(C)* disappeared and remain unlawfully at large and *(D)* had their licences revoked with reasons; what the offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme were while on the scheme, including offences committed by prisoners who committed more than one offence; and what the offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme who committed a further offence while on the scheme that was similar in character to that for which they were originally convicted were, including offences committed by prisoners who committed more than one offence; and if he will make a statement. [69691]

Mr. Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member.

Age of Consent

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is intended to lower the age of consent, following the consultation "Setting the Boundaries; Reforming the Law on Sex Offences". [69755]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The independent review body on reforming the law on sex offences recommended that the age of consent should remain at 16.

Paedophile Sex Offenders

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of convicted paedophile sex offenders re-offended after release from prison in each of the last 10 years. [69976]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Re-offending rates are not normally measured as they rely on the self-reporting of offending by offenders. Such an approach can lead to questions over the reliability of data based on individuals' recollection and willingness to impart their offending behaviour to an official source.

However two year reconviction rates for persons discharged from prison after serving a sentence for a sexual offence are collected and published annually in Prison Statistics, copies of which are available in the Library.

Sex Offenders Register

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are registered on the Sex Offenders Register. [70281]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Sex Offenders Act 1997 requires offenders cautioned for, convicted of, or found not guilty by reason of insanity of an offence specified in Schedule One to the Act to provide certain details to the police. There is, however, no "register" of sex offenders, as such; nor are sex offenders subject to the requirements of the Act separately identified as such in criminal statistics.

Until recently, data on the number of sex offenders subject to the requirements of the Act was collated biannually on a national basis from the police national computer. However this arrangement has been overtaken following guidance issued by the Home Office in respect of the provisions in section 67 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. The guidance requires information about the number of sex offenders subject to the Act's requirements in each police area to be published on an annual basis starting in 2002. These local reports will be published over the next few weeks. A national report published on 22 July 2002 contained a consolidated total figure of 18,513 registered sex offenders in England and Wales as at 31 March 2002.

Information broken down by gender is not available.

Tobacco (Under-age Sales)

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many convictions relating to the sale of cigarettes and tobacco products from retail outlets to underage persons there were in the last five years in the UK; [70406]

(2) how many prosecutions relating to the sale of cigarettes and tobacco products from retail outlets to underage persons there were in the last five years in the UK. [70403]

Mr. John Denham: The information requested, relating to England and Wales for the years 1996 to 2000, is shown in the table.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively.

Defendants proceeded against and those found guilty at all courts of offences relating to the sale of cigarettes and tobacco products to underage persons England and Wales 1996 to 2000[1,2]

Offence description	*Statute*	*Year*	*Persons proceeded against*	*Persons found guilty*
Sale of tobacco etc. to persons under 16	Children and Young Persons Act 1933 Section 7 as amended by Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 Section 1.	1996	131	111
		1997	130	112
		1998	166	129
		1999	127	102
		2000	161	134
Sale of unpackaged cigarettes	Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 Section 1.	1996	6	6
		1997	2	2
		1998	3	2
		1999	3	3
		2000	1	1
Total		1996	137	117
		1997	132	114
		1998	169	131
		1999	130	105
		2000	162	135

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire Police were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates' courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Paedophiles (Name Changes)

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to prevent convicted paedophiles from changing their name by *(a)* deed poll and *(b)* other legal routes. [70037]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* It is a criminal offence for a sex offender required to register under Part I of the Sex Offender Act 1997 to change his name or address and not to notify the police of this change. The maximum penalty for failure to do this is five years' imprisonment.

Alcohol (Under-Age Sales)

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prosecutions relating to the sale of alcohol to underage persons *(a)* by retailers and *(b)* from licensed premises there were in the last five years in the UK. [70402]

(2) how many convictions relating to the sale of alcohol to underage persons *(a)* by retailers and *(b)* from licensed premises there were in the last five years in the UK. [70405]

Mr. John Denham: The available information, relating to England and Wales for the years 1996 to 2000, is shown in the table.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively.

Defendants proceeded against and those found guilty at all courts for offences relating to the sale of alcohol to underage persons England and Wales 1996 to 2000 [1,2]

Offence description	*Statute*	*Year*	*Persons proceeded against*	*Persons found guilty*
Selling etc., intoxicating liquor to Persons under 18 for consumption on the premises	Licensing Act, 1964, Section 169(1); Licensing (Occasional Permissions) Act 1983, Schedule (Sec. 3) para. 4(1).	1996	251	119
		1997	214	125
		1998	310	157
		1999	204	115
		2000	130	56
Person under 18 buying or consuming intoxicating liquor in licensed premises	Licensing Act, 1964, Section 169(2), Licensing (Occasional Permissions) Act 1983, Schedule (Sec. 3) para. 4(2).	1996	33	19
		1997	31	24
		1998	39	24
		1999	38	21
		2000	24	22
Wholesaler selling intoxicating liquor to a person under 18	Licensing Act 1964, Sec. 181A(1) as added by Licensing Act 1988, Sec17.	1996	–	–
		1997	1	1
		1998	1	1
		1999	1	–
		2000	2	1
Person under 18 buying or attempting to buy intoxicating liquor from wholesale premises	Licensing Act 1964, Sec. 181A(3) as added by Licensing Act 1988, Sec. 17.	1996	1	1
		1997	1	–
		1998	2	1
		1999	–	–
		2000	–	–

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[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire Police were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates' courts for the year 2000.

Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Crime (Avon and Somerset)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there has been in the levels of crime in each category in the Avon and Somerset Police Authority between 2000–01 and 2001–02. [69207]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* As the requested data relates to a police single police force area, details from the British Crime Survey, which estimates people's actual experience of crime, are not available.

Percentage changes between 2000–01 and 2001–02 for the numbers of offences in the major categories of recorded crimes by police force area have been published in Table 7.03 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Crime in England and Wales 2001–2002", which is available in the Library. The overall figures for Avon and Somerset are as follows:

Crimes Recorded by the Police
Avon and Somerset

Offence	*April 2000 to March 01*	*April 01 To March 02*	*Change*	*Percentage Change*
Violence against the person	15,376	17,686	2,310	15
Sexual offences	930	1,095	165	18
Robbery	2,765	4,889	2,124	77
Total violent crime	*19,071*	*23,670*	*4,599*	*24*
Burglary	25,805	32,865	7,060	27
Theft and handling	69,605	82,479	12,874	19
Fraud and forgery	9,211	10,094	883	10
Criminal damage	22,479	26,990	4,511	20
Drug offences	1,990	1,860	−130	−7
Other offences	1,093	1,033	−60	−5

Some police forces, such as Avon and Somerset, adopted the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in advance of the national implementation in April 2002. Changes in crime statistics in these forces will be strongly influenced by the changes in recording practice, and the impact will vary for different types of offences. Details of the impact of the recording changes are included in chapter three of the above bulletin.

Specialist Police Officers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many specialist police officers are expected to be trained in the use of baton guns by the end of 2002; and if he will make a statement. [71002]

Mr. John Denham: The information is not held centrally.

Policing (Sussex)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much of the street crime, counter-terrorism, policing and prisons package announced on 1 May will be available to Sussex Police; and for what purpose; [71093]

(2) how much of the additional funding for policing in the South East announced by his Department on 10 June will be made available for *(a)* Sussex Police and *(b)* improving security at Shoreham Airport. [71094]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The additional counter terrorist funding announced following the budget was additional and complementary to existing funding streams for ports security and counter terrorist operations. The sums allocated were the result of full consultation between individual forces, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Home Office. Sussex Police already receive funding through established routes for airport security within the police authority area. Shoreham Airport is policed by resources already in place.

In addition to extra funding for ports security and counter terrorist operations announced on 10 June, we also announced extra funding for 10 forces taking part in the Government's crackdown on street crime. These 10 forces account for 82 per cent. of robbery across the country. Sussex is not among these 10.

Criminal Justice

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what criteria the level of public confidence in the criminal justice system is to be measured under the 2002 Public Service Agreement for which he is reponsible; and, using the same criteria, what the level of public confidence was in each of the last five years. [71611]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Responses to six questions in the British Crime Survey (BCS) will be taken as indicating the state of public confidence in the criminal justice system. The relevant questions are whether the public is confident that the criminal justice system:

— respects the rights of the accused and treats them fairly;

— is effective in bringing people who commit crimes to justice;

— deals with cases promptly and efficiently;

— meets the needs of victims;

— is effective in reducing crime;

— is effecting in dealing with young people.

A target was set for the first time in SR2000 and we therefore do not have information before that period. Our first set of findings (31 January 2001) were:

— 69 per cent. of people are confident that the system respects the rights of the accused and treats them fairly (the confidence rates were 70 per cent. for white people, 52 per cent. for black people and 66 per cent. for Asians);

— 46 per cent. are confident that it is effective in bringing people who commit crimes to justice (46 per cent. white, 51 per cent. black and 55 per cent. Asian);

— 34 per cent. are confident it deals with cases promptly and efficiently (34 per cent. white, 38 per cent. black and 48 per cent. Asian);

— 26 per cent. are confident it meets the needs of victims (25 per cent. white, 37 per cent. black and 42 per cent. Asian).

New questions, which address crime reduction and tackling youth crime, were included in the most recent survey and findings will be published in the Autumn. Therefore, due to changes in the collation of the BCS, we do not have two sets of directly comparable data available.

Probation Service

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the 2002 pay settlement for the National Probation Service will be implemented. [71631]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The pay settlement for the National Probation Service is currently awaiting approval and an announcement is expected shortly.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many permanent posts have been frozen for budgetary reasons in the London probation area in 2002–03. [71630]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* There are 2,137 full time employees in the London Probation Area, 530 part-time employees, 89 on temporary contract and 80 agency staff. 69 new Trainee Probation Officers will be employed this financial year.

The London Probation Area is an amalgamation of the five former London Probation Boards. Against the previous establishment figures of the five Boards the amalgamated Area is holding vacancies of two hundred and forty-nine posts or approximately 10 per cent. of the old establishment figure.

The Area is presently working with the Unions and the National Probation Directorate to develop a workload measurement tool that will identify the staffing needs of the Area. It was understood early in the amalgamation process that there would be duplication of certain functions that would allow for reductions in staffing levels. The vacancies are being maintained until the workload measurement tool identifies the precise needs of the Area.

Home Detention Curfew Scheme

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many participants were in the home detention curfew scheme in *(a)* January, *(b)* February and *(c)* March. [70554]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The numbers of prisoners on Home Detention Curfew on the Friday of each week during January, February and March 2002 were as follows:

Date	*Caseload*
4 January	1,672
11 January	1,686
18 January	1,675
25 January	1,672
1 February	1,694
8 February	1,707
15 February	1,688
22 February	1,707
1 March	1,783
8 March	1,821
15 March	1,872
22 March	1,918
29 March	1,965

Drugs

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals were *(a)* cautioned and *(b)* arrested for (i) possession and (ii) supply of *(A)* heroin, *(B)* crack, *(C)* cocaine, *(D)* ecstasy and *(E)* cannabis by each police force in June. [71647]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Statistics on cautions and arrests for 2002 will be published by December 2003. Counts of arrests are only available centrally by broad offence group (in this case for the group "drug offences") and quarter.

Crime Reduction Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the population in each police authority's area benefit from each of his crime reduction initiatives which has not been subject to national roll-out. [71890]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* It is not possible to estimate, with accuracy the proportion of any specific population that will benefit from many crime reduction initiatives, but the population as a whole will have benefited from the reduction in crime achieved since 1997.

Asylum Removal

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what lessons have been learned by his Department from the Yarl's Wood fire incident; and how those have been incorporated into the site search and assessment criteria for asylum removals centres. [70944]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* We await the recommendations of the Home Office inquiry into the incident, which will also take into account those of the Bedfordshire County Council, the Bedfordshire Police and the Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Double Jeopardy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which crimes will be affected by the new double jeopardy proposal. [72446]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The proposal contained in the White Paper, Justice for All, published on 17 July 2002 would allow the Court of Appeal to quash an acquittal only where there is compelling new evidence of an acquitted defendant's guilt, and following the approval of the Director of Public Prosecutions for that defendant to be re-investigated and for an application subsequently to be submitted to the Court of Appeal.

This would apply to a limited range of very serious offences such as murder, rape, manslaughter and armed robbery. We will publish our detailed legislative proposals in due course.

Remanded Children

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children remanded to prison were subsequently *(a)* found not guilty by the courts and *(b)* not given a custodial sentence, broken down by age, in each year since 1995. [72049]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Information on remands is collected centrally for the Home Office, but it is not possible to reliably disaggregate the data by age to this level.

Heroin

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what method his Department uses to estimate the level of availability of heroin on the streets. [71397]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Heroin availability can be defined and measured in a variety of ways. The clandestine nature of drugs supply and consumption also mean that definitive figures on heroin availability are not possible. However, the Home Office has produced figures on the size of the United Kingdom (UK) heroin market.

The method for producing these figures draws on general population surveys, and on the urine testing and surveying of arrestees in police custody. These allow estimates to be produced on the total number of regular heroin users, frequency of heroin consumption and level of consumption. A figure can then be calculated for total amount of heroin consumed and therefore an overall estimate for the value of the UK heroin market.

A more detailed outline of the above method and the estimates produced can be found in "Sizing the UK Market for Illicit Drugs" (Home Office Research Development Statistics Occasional Paper No 74. 2001). A copy of this report has been placed in the Library and is available on www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/index.html.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of heroin-using offenders in *(a)* England, *(b)* Nottinghamshire and *(c)* Bassetlaw re-offended in the last 12 months. [71395]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information on the proportion of heroin-using offenders re-offending is not held at the detailed level requested.

Numbers of prisoners in England and Wales re-convicted, by offence for which originally convicted and offence on first reconviction, within two years of discharge from prison in 1997 are contained in Table 9.8 of "Prison statistics England and Wales 2000".

Details of level of illegal income by type of drug, and self reported crime by type of drug are reported in Chapters 7 and 8 of Home Office Research Study 205 "Drugs and crime: The results of the second developmental stage of the New England and Wales Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) programme". This study reports outcomes from pilot sites (including Nottingham) participating in the NEW-ADAM Programme.

Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

Child Prison Suicides

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child suicides in prisons there were, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* prison in each year since 1990. [72050]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The available information is set out in the tables. The number of self-inflicted deaths of young prisoners from 1990 to 2002 (to 17 July 2002) are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1: Self-Inflicted Deaths of Young Prisoners by Year: 1990–2002**

	15	*16*	*17*	*18*	*Total*
1990	0	2	1	4	7
1991	1	0	0	1	2
1992	0	1	0	2	3
1993	0	0	1	0	1
1994	0	0	2	3	5
1995	0	1	0	1	2
1996	0	0	1	4	5
1997	0	0	0	5	5
1998	0	0	3	6	9
1999	0	0	2	2	4
2000	0	0	3	3	6
2001	0	3	0	2	5
2002	0	1	0	0	1
	1	8	13	33	55

* Up to and including 17 July 2002

The Prison Service employs the term "self-inflicted death" (which includes all those deaths where it appears that the person may have acted specifically to take his/her own life) rather than suicide.

Table 2 shows the overall number of self-inflicted deaths of young prisoners in establishments during each of the last 13 years.

*Table 2: Self-Inflicted Deaths of Young Prisoners by Prison: 1990–2002**

Establishment	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*Totals*
Altcourse	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Aylesbury	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Brinsford	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	5
Brixton	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Cardiff	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Deerbolt	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Doncaster	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	4
Exeter	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Feltham	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	6
Glen Parva	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
Gloucester	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Hindley	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	8
Leeds	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Lewes	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Low Newton	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	5
Moorland	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Parc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Portland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Reading	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Stoke Heath	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Swansea	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Swinfen Hall	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Wetherby	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
Totals	7	2	3	1	5	2	5	5	9	4	6	5	1	55

*Up to and including 17 July 2002.

Children in Care (Offenders)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of *(a)* registered young offenders, *(b)* registered offenders, *(c)* young offenders resident in youth offender institutions, *(d)* offenders resident in adult prisons, *(e)* persons convicted of drug-related offences and *(f)* persons convicted of violent crimes are known to have a history of being in care. [72929]

Mr. Hilary Benn: No data are held centrally on the upbringing of persons in prisons in England and Wales. This means that it is not possible to provide specific answers to questions *(a)* to *(f)*. However, according to the Criminality Survey 2000, 31 per cent. of the sentenced male prison population (excluding sex offenders) had been taken into local authority care as a child.

In 1997, a survey was carried out by the Office for National Statistics, called "Psychiatric Morbidity Among Prisoners in England and Wales". A sample of around 1,200 male remand, 1,200 male sentenced and 800 female prisoners were interviewed. 33 per cent. of the males on remand and 26 per cent. of the males under sentence had been taken into local authority care as a child. 29 per cent.

of the females on remand and 25 per cent. of the females under sentence had also been taken into local authority care as a child.

According to the National Prison Survey 1991, when interviews were conducted with around 4,000 sentenced and remand prisoners (juveniles and immigration detainees were excluded): "26 per cent. said that they had at some point before the age of 16 been taken into local authority care. As many as 38 per cent. of prisoners under 21 reported that they had had such an experience".

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which statutory body has responsibility for the welfare of children in care who have been committed to a young offender institution or adult prison; and if he will make a statement. [73058]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Prison Service, on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Home Department, has responsibility for the day-to-day welfare needs of everyone who is committed to a young offender institution or adult prison, including those who are "looked after children".

Communications Data (Access)

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has made for consultation on the regulation of access to communications data. [72295]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* We are considering how best to carry out the consultation exercise on the regulation of access to communications data to ensure a wide-ranging and detailed debate of the issues raised and how to balance the individual's right to privacy with legitimate arrangements to safeguard national security and protect the public.

Correspondence

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the *letter from* the hon. Member for Woking dated 13 June regarding Dayekh reference D1056360. [69771]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to the hon. Friend on 24 July 2002.

Retail Crime

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much of the £15 million grant funding to help retailers tackle crime in deprived areas has been allocated; to whom it has been allocated and over what time period. [71221]

Mr. John Denham: The £15 million from the Capital Modernisation Fund for the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas initiative has been made available in annual instalments of £3 million in 2001–02, £6 million in 2002–03 and £6 million in 2003–04. Apart from a small amount set aside for administration and evaluation, all the money has been allocated to regional Crime Reduction Directors, as in the table.

Region	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*Total (£)*
Eastern	196,620	393,475	393,475	983,570
East Midlands	236,060	471,052	471,052	1,178,164
London	454,720	910,515	910,515	2,275,750
North East	248,530	496,244	496,244	1,241,018
North West	470,670	942,209	942,209	2,355,088
South East	246,500	493,580	493,580	1,233,660
South West	194,300	389,604	389,604	973,508
Wales	190,820	381,257	381,257	953,334
West Midlands	333,210	666,182	666,182	1,665,574
Yorkshire and Humber	327,410	655,882	655,882	1,639,174

For more details about the scheme, and the funding formula used, I would refer the hon. Member to the Written Answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) on 6 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 984W.

I placed in the Library at the same time a paper showing the allocation of funds to individual projects for 2001–02. I hope to announce shortly the projects we shall be funding in 2002–03.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make retail crime a best value indicator for police force performance. [54623]

Mr. John Denham: The Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for 2002–03 came into effect on 1 April 2002, following consultation with the Association of Police Authorities and the Association of Chief Police Officers. Following the Home Secretary's commitment in September last year to halve the number of indicators, there are currently 18 BVPIs as compared with 32 in 2001–02.

Whilst we have no plans to introduce an additional national performance indicator on retail crime, a police authority would be able to set a local performance indicator relating to retail crime should this be a particular problem locally.

Police (Compensation Claims)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of the public have been prosecuted this year for making fraudulent and malicious compensation claims against the police; and what range of penalties was imposed. [71104]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The information requested cannot be distinguished in the court statistics collected centrally from other offences of fraud.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in West Sussex, broken down by local authority area. [71099]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) were introduced from 1 April 1999. The data given in the table covers the period up to the end of December 2001 (latest available).

We are currently considering whether any further checks are needed to ensure the accuracy of the number of ASBOs reported.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many compensation claims, and at what financial cost, have been made against *(a)* Sussex Police and *(b)* the Metropolitan Police in each year since 1999. [71103]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Home Office does not collect this information centrally. Information is compiled by forces according to their own management needs and is not therefore directly comparable. Information provided by the forces is as follows:

(a) Sussex Constabulary

(i) Civil claims: public liability (wrongful arrest, false imprisonment and damage to property) and employer liability

	Civil Claims in Financial Years		
	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Claims closed	258	308	295
Dismissed	36	65	28
Not proceeded with	144	169	191
Settled	77	69	74
Judgement for claimant	1	5	2
Payments (£)	224,776	166,609	155,342

(ii) Employment Tribunals

	Claims in Calendar Years		
	1999	*2000*	*2001*
Claims received	9	6	6
Dismissed	2	2	1
Withdrawn	3	1	3
Settled	4	3	2
Judgement for claimant	0	0	0
Payments (£)	0	29,000	22,000

(b) Metropolitan Police Service

(i) Employer liability and damage to property

	Number of Claims	*Numbers of Claims*	*Amount Paid (£million)*
1999–2000	2,800	3,600	7.0
2000–01	2,700	3,150	7.0
2001–02	2,450	2,900	10.1

(incl. £5 million provision against future claims)

(ii) Civil actions and damages: the following tables relate to actions against the police by members of the public for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment etc.

	Civil Actions received in financial years		
	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Actions	164	190	157
Threatened actions	633	503	439

	Damages paid in financial years					
	1999–2000		*2000–01*		*2001–02*	
	No of Cases	*Cost (£k)*	*No of Cases*	*Cost (£k)*	*No of Cases*	*Cost (£k)*
Out of court settlements	413	3,703	220	2,318	129	1,261
Court awards	22	203	15	340	6	125

(iii) Employment Tribunals

£	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Claims Settled	386,970	531,764	129,574
Tribunal Awards	14,652	363,085	0
Totals	401,622	894,849	129,574

	Number of Cases with financial settlement		
Claims Settled	17	18	18
Tribunal Awards	2	2	0
Totals	19	20	18

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Maidenhead of 8 March on the number of functioning police stations. [71491]

Mr. John Denham: With apologies for the delay in responding I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 22 July 2002 *Official Report*, column 829W.

Policing (Bromley)

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police served in *(a)* the London Borough of Bromley and *(b)* the Orpington sector of Bromley; and what the establishment figure was in each year since 1996. [9997]

Mr. John Denham: The information in the table has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. Figures for the Orpington Sector of Bromley are not available.

The budgeted strength is not an establishment figure. Differences between actual and budgeted strength have a variety of causes. They may arise because patterns of recruitment to and wastage from the police service are different or because targets for strength at the end of the financial year reflect planned changes in strength, for example the allocation of officers recruited through the Crime Fighting Fund.

Year	*Budgeted Workforce Total in Bromley*	*Strength*
December 1996	479	471
December 1997	Not Available	464
December 1998	Not Available	443
December 1999	440	432
December 2000	440	412
January 2002	458	424

Departmental Policies (Northamptonshire)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to Northamptonshire, the effects on the town of Northampton of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [11282]

Mr. John Denham: The Home Office is working with individuals and communities to build a safe, just and tolerant society enhancing opportunities for all and in which rights and responsibilities go hand in hand and the protection and security of the public are maintained and enhanced. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report—2001–02, is available in the Library. Information on crime levels is contained in the publication: "Crime in England and Wales 2001–02", which can be found in the Library.

These statistics provide information specifically relating to Northampton and to Northamptonshire. A number of Home Office initiatives funded under the Crime Reduction Programme will have an impact on crime levels in Northamptonshire, including some with specific reference to Northampton, for example;

Reducing Burglary Initiative: Three schemes funded to the value of £178,390, including a £ 72,000 scheme in Northampton. Targeted Policing Initiative: A county-wide scheme for tackling vehicle crime using Automatic Number Plate Reading technology—£1,095,000.

Violence Against Women: a £225,706 domestic violence project in Northampton.

Close Circuit Television (CCTV): £383,285 on three CCTV schemes covering Northampton town centre, car parks and housing estates.

In addition, funding of £410,200 under the Communities Against Drugs Initiative and £80,608 under the Safer Communities Initiative has been made available to the Northampton Crime and Disorder reduction partnership. Northamptonshire partnerships have also received £51,500 under the Partnership Development Fund.

Further information on the Home Office and its policies is published on its website. (www.homeoffice.gov.uk).

Prisoners (CAB Advice)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on pilot schemes funded by the Community Legal Service to support Citizens Advice Bureau staff to advise prisoners on *(a)* welfare benefits and *(b)* debt management. [18852]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply. I apologise for the delay in replying this was due to an administrative error. As part of the ongoing development of the Community Legal Service, the Legal Services Commission is exploring projects to support advice to prisoners on legal matters. Specifically this includes work with the Kent Probation Project, based at the Tunbridge Wells area office for the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which is supporting the needs of prisoners in Kent. In addition all prisons in England and Wales have been supplied with a full set of Community Legal Service Legal Information Leaflets and an increasing number of prisons are formally applying to be quality marked as Community Legal Service Information Points.

Emergency Services (Radios)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice his Department issues to police authorities on the need to ensure interoperability of radio systems with other emergency services. [19702]

Mr. John Denham: Interoperability between emergency services is, at present, arranged locally by each force and the Home Office provides the radio channels necessary for communication between operational commanders at major incidents. Full interoperability is one of the potential operational benefits of Airwave, the new police radio communications service. The other emergency services have the option of either joining the Airwave service or arranging interoperability between their separate networks.

The Home Office is promoting agreement between the three emergency services on the level of interoperability necessary to ensure public safety.

Police Funding (Surrey)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there has been in funds allocated by his Department to Surrey Police in real terms since 1997. [23079]

Mr. John Denham: The information is set out in the table.

	Government Grant (cash) (1) £m	*(real) (3) £m*	*Real terms change per cent.*	*Additional Home Office funding (including special grant, capital, DNA and other payments) (4) £m*
1997–98	75.6	83.1		2.2
1998–99	67.7	72.5	−12.7	1.9
1999–00	74.7	78.1	7.7	1.7
2000–01	89.6	91.6	17.3	3.6
2001–02	87.6	87.6	–4.3	4.2
2002–03	87.0	84.9	1.2	(5)
(2)				1.2

1. Total Government Grant includes Home Office Police grant, Revenue Support Grant, National Non Domestic Rates, Crime Fighting Fund and Rural Policing Fund Grant. Surrey gained resources following changes in boundaries of the Metropolitan Police District in April 2000. Grant also includes provision to offset costs incurred in transitional arrangements: £7.0 million in 1999–2000, £5.5 million in 2000–01, £1.61 million in 2001–02 and £0.8 million for 2002–03.

2. The reduction in grant in 2002–03 reflects a shift from local to central financing of National Crime Squad (NCS) National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) from 1 April 2002. However, on a like-for-like basis, government grant in 2002–03 shows a 2.2 per cent. increase in cash terms or 1.2 per cent. increase in real terms compared to 2001–02. Actual cash figures with the like-for-like percentage change are included above.

3. Real terms figures are given at 2001–02 prices (GDP deflator)

4. The additional payments were specific to particular years, and have therefore been excluded from the year-on-year comparison.

5. Capital grant only.

In addition, under the Crime Reduction Programme over £3.7 million has been allocated since 1999 to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships for projects in Surrey.

Urban Regeneration

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are managed by his Department; how much each scheme has available to invest; what issues each scheme aims to tackle; and how much has been spent annually since 1997 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in Teesside, *(c)* in Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough Councils and, *(d)* in the Middlesbrough, South and East Cleveland constituency. [25474]

Mr. John Denham: The Home Office makes a contribution to urban regeneration through a number of schemes which reduce crime, tackle drugs and drug-related crime, encourage community development and support racial equality. Relevant information that is currently available includes:

Crime Reduction Programme

A range of schemes to reduce burglary, install Close Circuit Televisionn (CCTV), prevent violence against women etc. £350 million has been committed nationally to over 1,500 schemes since 1999. The requested local figures are:

Area Total	*No Schemes*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Teesside £2,031,345	22	£649.766	£1,063.313	£318,266
Redcar and Cleveland £733,500	7	£166,348	£458,152	£109,000
Middlesbrough £866,195	11	£185,299	£478,422	£209,266
Stockton £424,858	4	£298,119	£136,739	–
Middlesbrough South/Cleveland £606,200	5	£154.048	£395,152	£57,000

Communities Against Drugs

A programme to tackle drug related crime, drug supply and to strengthen communities. Nationally there is £50/£70/£100 million available in the three years 2001–04

	2001–02
	£
Total funding	50,000,000
Teesside	494,800
Redcar and Cleveland	121,600
Middlesbrough	210,300
Stockton	162,900

Security For Small Retailers In Deprived Areas

	2001–02
	£
Total funding	£2,900,00
North East Region	£248,530
Teesside	£112,000
Redcar and Cleveland	£28,000
Middlesborough	£50,000
Stockton	£34,000

Youth Inclusion Schemes

These are targeted at the young people most at risk of offending in the area of the scheme.

Area Total	*No Schemes*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Redcar and Cleveland £130,000	1	0	£65,000	£65,000
Middlesbrough £162,125	1	£25,125	£68,500	£68,500
Stockton £187,250	1	£50,250	£68,500	£68,500

Section 11 Grant

Enabled local authorities which had a significant number of minority ethnic origin resident in its area to employ additional staff.

£	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
England and Wales	84,690,663	87,578,663
Teesside	Not Available	424,03[illegible]
Middlesbrough	Not Available	275,464
Stockton-on-Tees	Not Available	118,783
Redcar and Cleveland	Not Available	29,783
County of Cleveland	427,996	439,123

Connecting Communities

There are four race equality support programmes:—
Community Networks—
Opportunity Schemes—
Towards More Representative Services—
Positive Images—

£	*2000–01*	*2001–02 (to date)*
All projects	£1,761,267	£2,577,627
Middlesbrough	£5,396	£7,944

Police numbers

Figures for police numbers and spending are available nationally and for the Cleveland Authority. They are not available for individual councils or parliamentary constituencies.

On 31 January this year there were 128,748 police officers in England and Wales, a record number and 4,578 more than in March 2000. Spending by the police has increased by £1.27 billion (+ 17.9 per cent.) since 1997 to £8.361 billion in 2002–03.

Between March 2000 and January 2002 police numbers in the Cleveland Police increased by 33 to 1,437. The increase in numbers has been made possible by the extra recruits allocated to the Cleveland Police under the Crime Fighting Fund over the three years to March 2003. Cleveland Police has been allocated a total of 74 Crime Fighting Fund recruits. 20 were recruited in 2000–01 and 36 were recruited in 2001–02. The force is expected to take on a further 18 Crime Fighting Fund recruits in 2002–03. Spending on policing by the Cleveland Police Authority has increased by 24 per cent. (+ £18.57 million) since 1997 and now totals £95.13 million for 2002–03.

Offence Statistics

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many offences were reported in the Metropolitan police force area between *(a)* April to November 2000 and *(b)* April to November 2001; [27644]

(2) how many street crimes there were in the Metropolitan Police Force area in *(a)* April to November 2000 and *(b)* April to November 2001. [27646]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Home Office recorded crime statistics for the whole years ending March 2001 and 2002 are given in the table. Rather than using the Metropolitan Police's category of "Street Crime", recorded robberies of personal property are given.

Metropolitan Police area—Number of recorded crimes

	Years ending March 2001	2002
Total recorded crime	994,233	1,057,360
Robbery of personal property	37,023	49,446

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will amend the regulations in order to improve the clarity of signs relating to the clamping of cars on private roads. [28873]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Currently there are no regulations governing signs relating to clamping on private roads. However, last year the Government introduced the Private Security Industry Act 2001. The Act specifies the creation of a Security Industry Authority. It is hoped that the authority, which will regulate the industry through licensing, will begin operations in 2003; it will have wheel-clamping as one of its priority areas.

In the meantime, those who believe their vehicles have been unfairly clamped can have cases against wheel clampers heard in civil courts.

Civil Disturbances (West Yorkshire)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the costs to West Yorkshire Police of dealing with civil disturbances in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement. [12532]

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the question of 31 October 2001, tabled by the hon. Member for Pudsey (Reference 12532). [29064]

Mr. John Denham: I apologise for not responding to my hon. Friend more promptly. The Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police (Graham Moore QPM) made representations on 24 October 2001 requesting a special grant to assist with the policing costs of the Bradford disturbances in July of last year. I also received a number of representations from hon. Members.

On 30 January I announced that the Home Secretary had approved a special grant of 2.2 million as a contribution to the additional cost of policing the Bradford disturbances. This grant covered 64 per cent. of the additional policing costs incurred by West Yorkshire Police. It was decided to treat all applications for assistance arising out of last year's summer riots with equal fairness. Similar special grants for around two thirds of additional policing costs were also paid to the Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Staffordshire forces.

The West Yorkshire Police Authority has also received 35 claims for compensation under the Riot (Damages) Act 1886 totalling £7.3 million. I understand that 12 claims totalling £46,419 have been settled and three further claims have been rejected. The largest claims are still under consideration by the Authority. It is open to the police authority to seek further grant support when the final impact on the force is known. Any application would be considered against the criteria for such matters.

Police (Havering)

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give funding for additional police officers in Havering to meet the demands of its late night entertainment centre. [29911]

Mr. John Denham: We made clear in the White Paper "Policing a New Century: A Blueprint for Reform" that we are concerned about the costs incurred in policing entertainment venues, particularly pubs and clubs. We restated the Government's position on charging in the Government's reply to the Home Affairs Select Committee's report into the Police Reform Bill. We are keen to explore how we might encourage and develop arrangements under which entertainment venues, including pubs, clubs and bars, make a contribution to the policing and public order costs generated by their activities. Complex issues need to be resolved in order to find a way forward.

Excluding the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF), police grant for the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) for 2002–03 is £1.676 billion.

Under the CFF recruitment initiative, the MPS has already been allocated an additional 2,044 recruits over and above the forces' previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003. The MPS/MPA (Metropolitan Police Authority) received £12 million from the CFF in 2000–01, £43.7 million was paid in 2001–02 and, on present forecasts of recruitment, is expected to qualify for full payment of £65.9 million in 2002–03.

The allocation of available resources to the London Boroughs is a matter for the Commissioner and the Metropolitan Police Authority.

Street Robbery

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries were caused by street robberies in the Metropolitan Police area in 2001; and at what estimated cost to public funds. [31019]

Mr. John Denham: Information is not available centrally in this form, and provision is a matter for the Commissioner for the Metropolis.

Latest published Home Office figures show that, according to current records (which are subject to possible change), the Metropolitan Police recorded seven homicides in 2000–01 where the circumstances involved robbery.

Police (Hillingdon)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the operating hours of each police station within the Hillingdon Division of the Metropolitan Police Service in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [31362]

Mr. John Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis is responsible for the day to day operational management of the force. I am, therefore, sending notice of this question to the Commissioner and to the Metropolitan Police Commander in Hillingdon so that the Commissioner may address the question that you have raised.

Football Matches (Policing)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to allow police to charge for policing outside football grounds on match days; and if he will make a statement. [34796]

Mr. John Denham: The Government remains concerned at the costs incurred in policing entertainment venues, including major events such as sporting and outdoor entertainments. We are keen to explore how we might encourage and develop arrangements under which entertainment venues make a contribution to the policing and public order costs generated by their activities. Complex issues need to be resolved in order to find a way forward. As we said in response to the Home Affairs Committee's Report into the Police Reform Bill, as part of the Government's ongoing work in this area, we will consult interested parties about Chapter 13 of Home Office Circular 34/2000, "Home Office guidance on football-related legislation". This chapter deals specifically with charging for policing football.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police officers have *(a)* left the profession and *(b)* been recruited in Coventry in each year since 1997; [36501]

(2) what the shortfall is in police officer numbers in Coventry; what measures are being taken to increase these numbers; and if he will make a statement. [36500]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The information in the tables has been provided by the Chief Constable of the West Midlands Police.

This Government is helping West Midlands Police to increase police numbers through the extra recruits being made available through the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF). West Midlands has been allocated 523 CFF recruits over three years to March 2003. The force recruited 222 CFF recruits in 2000–01 and expects to recruit 195 in 2001–02 and a further 106 in 2002–03. By 31 January 2002 West Midlands had 7,577 officers, a record number and 464 more than in March 1997. It is for the Chief Constable to determine the allocation of officers within the force area.

The City of Coventry has three territorial divisions. Table 1 provides information on the budgeted strength of each division and its actual strength. Differences between actual and budgeted strength have a variety of causes. They may arise because patterns of recruitment to and wastage from the police service are different or because targets for strength at the end of the financial year reflect planned changes in strength, for example the allocation of officers recruited through the Crime Fighting Fund.

Table 2 shows the numbers of officers who were recruited and posted to Coventry and who left the profession from the Coventry divisions, it also shows the number of officers who left on transfer to another police force.

(1) Number of officers in the Coventry Divisions

Division	*Budgeted strength*[1]	*Actual strength*[1,2]
M1 Division	300	282
M2 Division	276	264
M3 Division	287	272
TOTAL	863	818

[1] Figures are full-time equivalents.

[2] Strength is the position at 31 January.

(2) Number of officers joining and leaving Coventry Divisions

Year (12 months Ending 31 March)	*Number of officers recruited (including transfers from other forces)*	*Number leaving profession from Coventry divisions*[1]	*Number of officers transferring from Coventry to other forces*	*Total leavers*
1996–97	39	36	1	37
1997–98	56	26	6	32
1998–99	39	25	7	32
1999–2000	64	39	3	42
2000–01	67	37	12	49
2001–02 (to 20/02/02)	15	7	4	11
Total	280	170	33	203

[1] Retirement, ill health/deceased, not satisfactory, career break, other.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if he will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37978]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to Mr. Burns on 9 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 891W.

In addition, two official visits have been made by Special Advisers to the United States since 1997. One in August 2000 at a total cost of £2,117 and the other in August 2001 at a total cost of £2,900.

The advisor on international drug issues (who was employed on Special Adviser terms) has visited Belgium, Romania and the Czech Republic on official business at an average cost of £1,094 per trip.

Information for the period beyond March 2002 will be available in due course.

Police Complaints

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the complaints concerning the conduct of Deputy Commissioner Ian Blair by the

National Black Police Association and by members of the public have been referred to him in accordance with Regulation 7 (3A) Police (Conduct) (Senior Officers) Regulation 1999; and if the referral requirement is mandatory. [39360]

Mr. John Denham: No referral has been made. I am informed by the Metropolitan Police Authority that, following further representations from the National Black Police Association, the Metropolitan Police Authority are making further preliminary enquiries.

When a complaint is made about the conduct of the Deputy Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, referral to the Secretary of State is not mandatory if the authority is satisfied that the conduct complained of, even if proved, would not justify criminal or disciplinary proceedings. Where referral is not mandatory, the Metropolitan Police Authority may deal with the matter at its own discretion, subject to the Regulations.

The Regulations allow for the authority to conclude, after preliminary enquiries, that no proceedings under regulation 11 need to be taken, and once this conclusion is reached by the Authority, no investigating officer needs to be appointed and no referral under regulation 7(3A) need be made.

Crime and Disorder Partnerships

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crime and disorder partnerships have a named anti-social behaviour co-ordinators. [41383]

Mr. John Denham: 236 of the 376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have confirmed that they have a designated co-ordinator for action against anti-social behaviour. We are working to ensure that the remainder follow suit as quickly as possible. Section 92 (10) of the Police Reform Bill amends the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 so as to grant the Home Secretary the power to call for reports from Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships annually. This will enable Crime Reduction Directors to ensure that partnerships have appropriate strategies to deal with anti-social behaviour and that they are implemented effectively.

Policing (Cambridgeshire)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the Cambridgeshire Police Authority spend on the police and *(b)* the Government grant to the Cambridgeshire Police Authority in the years 1990–91 to 2001–02 and projected for the financial year 2002–03, adjusted for inflation at current values. [41749]

Mr. John Denham: The information is set out in the table.

	Net Expenditure in real terms (£000's)	*Government grant in real terms[1] (£000's)*
1990–91	59,070	N/A
1991–92	61,900	N/A
1992–93	63,864	N/A
1993–94	69,452	N/A
1994–95	70,559	N/A
1995–96	71,356	61,749
1996–97	73,723	63,698
1997–98	75,538	62,942
1998–99	78,603	64,923
1999–2000	78,439	65,711
2000–01	81,027	67,209
2001–02[2]	84,131	70,396
2002–03[2]	N/A	69,022

[1] Government grant includes Home Office Police grant, Department for Transport, London and the Regions (DTLR) national non domestic rates, revenue support grant, Crime Fighting Fund and rural policing grant. Before 1995–96 when most Police Authorities became independent local authorities, revenue support grant and national non domestic rates were paid as part of respective county council grant funding.

[2] The grant figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are not directly comparable, owing to changes from 2002–03 in the method of funding the National Crime Squad/National Criminal Intelligence Service. Based on the new arrangements, comparable expenditure and grant figures for 2001–02, in real terms, would have been £82,374,000 and £68,619,000.

Source for net expenditure: Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police Statistics (Estimates only for 2000–01 and 2001–02).

Real terms are at 2001–02 prices using GDP deflator at 28.6.02

Police Reform

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish a White Paper on Police reform; and if he will make a statement. [41924]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The white paper "Policing A New Century: A Blueprint for Reform" was published on 5 December 2001. My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, made a statement in the House.

Superintendent Ali Dizaei

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will order an investigation as to why telephone conversations between Superintendent Ali Dizaei, the legal advisor to the National Black Police Association and other officers and their lawyers were monitored and transcribed by officers investigating him. [42744]

Mr. John Denham: I have no plans at present to order an investigation. I would refer the hon. Friend to my letter to of 9 November 2001 to the hon. Member for Worthing West (Mr. Bottomley) which clarifies the position regarding the telephone calls that Superintendent Dizaei made in connection with his National Black Police Association business. A copy of this letter is in the Library.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to intervene in the operations of the Metropolitan Police; and if he will make a statement. [42630]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* Operational policy decisions are the responsibility of the chief officer of each police force. In the case of the Metropolitan Police, this is the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, Sir John Stevens.

Where under-performance in a force has been identified by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, the Police Reform Bill contains a power which will enable the Home Secretary to require that the relevant police authority instructs the chief office to provide an action plan setting out the remedial measures which he/she will take to correct that under-performance. We have no current plan to use this power with respect to the Metrpolitan Police Service (MPS).

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have resigned from the Metropolitan Police force in each of the last three years. [51148]

Mr. John Denham: The information has been provided by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. Also included is information on the number of officers recruited by the Metropolitan Police in those years. Information for 2001–02 is not yet available.

Year	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Resignations	337	365	435
All leavers (excluding transfers)	1,300	1,020	1,154
Recruitment	1,516	994	1,276

Mobile Phone Thefts

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mobile phone thefts there have been by *(a)* police authority area and *(b)* crime and disorder partnership area each year since 1997. [43029]

Mr. John Denham: The requested information is not collected centrally.

Estimates of the number of mobile phone thefts in England and Wales as a whole in 2000–01 vary widely, depending on the source of the data used to produce the estimate. A recent research study "Mobile Phone Theft" (by Victoria Harrington and Pat Mayhew, Home Office Research Study 235) contained a number of estimates. On the basis of figures from six police forces extrapolated to England and Wales, there were an estimated 330,000 offences recorded by the police in 2000–01, while the best estimate from analysis of data from three surveys indicates that there were some 710,000 phone thefts occurring annually at this time.

We are working with the police and the mobile phone industry to reduce mobile phone robbery, undertaking public awareness campaigns and joint tracking exercises. Our discussions with the operators have recently borne fruit. By the summer all five of the main operators will be able to bar stolen handsets by reference to the unique IMEI number which identifies the handset. All of the operators are also working together to develop a shared database of stolen phones, which will allow them to disable stolen phones if there is an attempt to use them on a different network. We believe that this is a very important step forward, as it should remove one of the major incentives for robbery.

Operators have also agreed to improve security as they invest in new systems. We are pressing the handset manufacturers for similar commitments. A start has been made, but more needs to be done before Britain's mobile phone system can lead the world in security. The mobile phone industry needs to show more interest in the security of phones they are selling to British consumers and, as the motor industry has done, do more to prevent their customers from becoming the victims of crime.

Police Officers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours were lost in each year since 1997 owing to illness of police officers in Wales. [44044]

Mr. John Denham: Information held centrally by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary records the number of days lost due to sickness. This is shown in the table.

	96–97	*97–98*	*98–99*	*99–2000*	*2000–01*
Number of police officer days in Wales lost due to sickness absence	79,343	87,191	90,357	89,811	97,037

The Home Office is currently developing the Occupational health status "Strategy for a Healthy Police Service", in consultation with the police service, which is intended to help bring about substantial reductions in police sickness and in sickness absence.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in the Wandsworth policing division on 1 April; and how many there were on 1 April *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2000. [50875]

Mr. John Denham: Information about strength in territorial divisions is not collected.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his definition is of a front line police officer. [43688]

Mr. John Denham: The only definition of an operational (frontline) officer which currently exists is that in the Report of the Working Group on the Classification of Police Service Personnel in September 1999 which was commissioned by the then Home Secretary (Mr. Straw). It describes such an officer as any officer, including covert officers, whose primary role (i.e., over 50 per cent. of the time) is directly to deliver the overarching aims of the police service.

This definition however is insufficient for the purposes of determining who should benefit under the special priority posts scheme which forms part of the package of reforms agreed in the Police Negotiating Board on 9 May.

Under the special priority posts scheme, forces will be able to target extra rewards on those working at the sharp end of public service, doing the most difficult and dangerous jobs. We are currently discussing with the Police Service how those to benefit should be identified.

It will be for chief officers and police authorities to draw up local schemes, taking account of national criteria and any guidance issued by the Home Secretary. They will also have to consult local staff associations.

Posts may qualify for the payments where they:

—carry a significantly higher level of responsibility than the norm for the rank;

—present particular difficulties in recruitment and retention; or

—have specially demanding working conditions or working environments.

Payments from the scheme will normally be not less than £500 and not more than £3,000 a year, although exceptionally payments of up to £5,000 may be made.

Criminal Records Bureau

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the complaint procedure in relation to the Criminal Records Bureau. [43762]

Mr. John Denham: We are committed to ensuring that the service offered by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) is of the highest standard. An applicant who believes that information in a Disclosure is inaccurate may make an application in writing to the CRB for a new one. If the Bureau is of the opinion that the information is inaccurate, a new Disclosure will be issued. For other complaints, in the first instance complainants should telephone the CRB contact centre or write to the CRB Customer Services Manager. If the applicant considers that a complaint has not been satisfactorily dealt with, the matter may be taken up with the CRB Operations Director or with the Chief Executive. The CRB has appointed a Complaint Mediator to resolve any complaint where a customer remains dissatisfied with the Chief Executive's reply.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Criminal Records Bureau will operate in relation to existing employees. [43758]

Mr. John Denham: Although the main thrust of the work of the Criminal Records Bureau is directed towards criminal record checks for new recruits, the Bureau will also receive applications from existing employees and volunteers.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take and what records he will use to monitor the work of the Criminal Records Bureau. [43800]

Mr. John Denham: The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) is an executive agency of the Home Office. The principal arrangements for monitoring and managing its work are as follows. Each year, the Bureau will continue to produce corporate and business plans, and an annual report and accounts, all of which will need to be approved at Ministerial level, and will then be published. The Bureau will also produce weekly and monthly operational performance reports for my information. The Bureau's work is overseen by an Advisory Board which meets frequently and reports directly to me. The Board is chaired by the Home Office Director of Crime and includes senior representatives from the Home Office, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Skills, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and the Local Government Association and at least one independent non-executive member. The Board has access to whatever records and information it sees fit to fulfil its role.

In addition, I regularly meet with the Chief Executive of the CRB personally and my officials are in regular contact with his staff about all aspects of the Bureau's work.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the list of bodies registered with the Criminal Records Bureau. [43759]

Mr. John Denham: Since most have not given their specific consent, it would not be appropriate to publish a list of all the bodies registered with the Criminal Records Bureau for the purpose of countersigning applications for Standard and Enhanced Disclosures. A list of those registered bodies that have consented to having their details made available for the purpose of countersigning applications on behalf of non-registered organisations is available from the Criminal Records Bureau on request and information is also available on the website www.disclosure.gov.uk.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on spent convictions in relation to the Criminal Records Bureau. [43761]

Mr. John Denham: The package of measures which is being implemented by the Criminal Records Bureau is structured on the basis of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. Of the three levels of Disclosure that the Bureau will issue, Basic Disclosures will contain details only of convictions that are not spent under the 1974 Act. Standard and Enhanced Disclosures will also include spent convictions, but will be issued only to applicants for positions that fall within the Exceptions Order under the 1974 Act.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Criminal Records Bureau will operate its disclosure service in relation to foreign nationals. [43760]

Mr. John Denham: A foreign national will be able to apply to the Criminal Records Bureau for information held on databases here. But the Bureau is not in a position directly to obtain information from other countries. In the case of a foreign national, or a British national who has lived overseas for a substantial period, the Bureau will offer guidance in due course to employers about the availability of criminal record checks in a range of foreign countries, to enable an enquiry to be made to the appropriate authority.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Criminal Records Bureau will liaise with *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Scotland. [43757]

Mr. John Denham: The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) will essentially provide the Disclosure Service, under Part V of the Police Act 1997, in England and Wales. In Scotland, the Scottish Criminal Record Office (SCRO) will provide a broadly equivalent service, called Disclosure Scotland. No conclusion has been reached as to how best to implement the Act in Northern Ireland. The objective is that both the CRB and the SCRO will seek to capture information across borders, so that someone who has resided in, say, both England and Scotland should need to apply only once. Officials in the different administrations keep in regular touch about the detailed arrangements.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of time from referral to answer by the Criminal Records Bureau was in the last 12 months. [67924]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Criminal Records Bureau began processing applications for Standard and Enhanced Disclosures on 11 March this year. A total of 286,770 applications have been received to date and the total number of Disclosures issued is 199,309. The service standards are to produce 90 per cent. of Enhanced Disclosures within three weeks and 95 per cent. of Standard Disclosures within one week. These service standards are not currently being met although the Bureau are typically processing correctly-completed applications within six weeks.

Measures are being taken to overcome the early operating difficulties experienced by the Bureau, which have led to delays in responding to applications. We are determined that the Bureau will be in a position as soon as possible to meet the high standards of service that it has made clear it will deliver to its customers.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints he has received concerning the operation of the Criminal Records Bureau. [67923]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Since 5 March this year, the Criminal Records Bureau has received a total of 3,806 complaints concerning its operational performance.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his latest estimate is of the cost of the Criminal Records Bureau over its first 10 years; how far this varies from the initial estimates of the cost; and what he estimates accounts for this difference. [67248]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* The most recent estimate for the Bureau's cost for the first 10 years of operation is £928 million. This compares to the original cost estimate of £939 million. The reduction in this figure is the result of more accurate budget forecasting, due to the experience gained since the Bureau's inception.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had to increase the Criminal Records Bureau's access to criminal records from other countries with regard to child protection. [69125]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Criminal Records Bureau plans a non-statutory service to provide UK employers with information about overseas criminal record checking services. The service is expected to be available by September 2002. Employers will then be able to ask prospective employees with overseas residence to obtain copies of relevant records to aid safer recruitment decisions for all types of position.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the performance of the Criminal Records Bureau; and what mechanisms exist to levy financial penalties for poor performance. [64235]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* *(a)* The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) reviews its service standards regularly and accepts that it is currently not meeting these service standards. The CRB is confident that over the coming few weeks it will improve its performance and start to achieve its published service standards.

The CRB has introduced a performance improvement plan and a number of short-term contingency measures to address this issue. The performance improvement plan includes:

— Rapid recruitment and training of additional staff to meet productivity forecasts;

— Additional resources to deal with the older applications;

— Extensions to working hours to increase output

— Revised procedures to deal with errors/omissions on applications forms. These remove such applications from mainstream processes thereby increasing the efficiency of processing both correctly completed applications and the exceptions;

— Call Centre staffing levels are being significantly increased to cope with demand;

— Incomplete or incorrectly completed application forms are being returned to the Registered Body for correction;

The CRB has also introduced the following short-term contingency measures:

— Outsourcing most of the backlog of applications to the data entry facility of Hays Plc in Chennai (Madras, India).

— The CRB will carry out and issue the results of a List 99 check, for all teachers, in advance of a full Disclosure check.

— The CRB has introduced a contingency plan to deliver a very limited number of manual criminal record checks.

— Customers are kept informed of all service developments through their monthly newsletter, *Registration Matters*.

— Letters have been issued to Lead Countersignatories about the situation.

(b) The contract contains a series of Service Levels, which, in turn have liquidated damage (financial remedies) regimes attached to them. In short, failure by the contractor to achieve contracted Service Level results in financial remedies being applied by the Agency. It is not possible to reveal the liquidated damage regimes attached as they are "commercial in confidence".

Mobile Phones

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mobile phones were stolen in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* the North West, *(c)* Lancashire and *(d)* Ribble Valley in each year since 1997. [44047]

Mr. John Denham: The requested information is not collected centrally.

Estimates of the number of mobile phone thefts in England and Wales as a whole in 2000–01 vary widely, depending on the source of the data used to produce the estimate. A recent research study "Mobile Phone Theft" (by Victoria Harrington and Pat Mayhew, Home Office Research Study 235) contained a number of estimates. On the basis of figures from six police forces extrapolated to England and Wales, there were an estimated 330,000 offences recorded by the police in 2000–01, while the best estimate from analysis of data from three surveys indicates that there were some 710,000 phone thefts occurring annually at this time.

We are working with the police and the mobile phone industry to reduce mobile phone robbery, undertaking public awareness campaigns and joint tracking exercises. Our discussions with the operators have recently borne fruit. By the summer all five of the main operators will be able to bar stolen handsets by reference to the unique IMEI number which identifies the handset. All of the operators are also working together to develop a shared database of stolen phones, which will allow them to disable stolen phones if there is an attempt to use them on a different network. We believe that this is a very important step forward, as it should remove one of the major incentives for robbery.

Operators have also agreed to improve security as they invest in new systems. We are pressing the handset manufacturers for similar commitments. A start has been made, but more needs to be done before Britain's mobile phone system can lead the world in security. The mobile phone industry needs to show more interest in the security of phones they are selling to British consumers and, as the motor industry has done, do more to prevent their customers from becoming the victims of crime.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will prohibit the sale of separate SIM cards for mobile phones. [56274]

Mr. John Denham: There are no plans to prohibit the sale of separate SIM cards for mobile phones.

Community Wardens

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the funding of community wardens in Chorley. [45871]

Mr. John Denham: There is no central Government funding for neighbourhood or street wardens' schemes in Chorley. As no applications were made from Chorley for funding under either the Neighbourhood Wardens' or Street Wardens' programme it was not possible for Government funding to be allocated.

Burglary

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the reduction in recorded burglary crime in households covered by burglary schemes will be met. [47407]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Following the latest spending review, our target for reducing burglary has been incorporated in a wider crime reduction Public Service Agreement (PSA) target:

> "Reduce crime and the fear of crime; improve performance overall, including by reducing the gap between the highest crime, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership areas and the best comparable areas; and reduce:
>
> vehicle crime by 30 per cent. from 1998–99 to 2004;
>
> domestic burglary by 25 per cent. from 1998–99 to 2005;
>
> robbery in the 10 Street Crime Initiative areas by 14 per cent. from 1999–00 to 2005;
>
> and maintain that level.

In the 12 months to March 2002, there was a reduction of 9.1 per cent. in the numbers of recorded burglaries compared to March 1999. The introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard appears to have had some impact on the recording of domestic burglary.

The British Crime Surveys show that between 1999 and 2001, the estimated number of domestic burglaries in England and Wales (including those not reported to or recorded by the police) fell from 1.284 million in 1999 to 0.991 million in 2001—a reduction of 23 per cent.

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what payments have been made to individuals following finding of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of his Department; and what plans he has to review powers to increase the level of awards that can be made in the last 12 months. [47978]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Over the last 12 months, no payments to individuals in cases where the Parliamentary Ombudsmen or the Prison Service Ombudsman has completed an investigation and issued a formal report have been recorded for the United Kingdom Passport Service the Forensic Science Service or the Prison Service.

The levels of awards made for maladministration are not subject to a tariff or statutory limit. All payments are based on the merits of individual cases.

Police Strength

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which *(a)* divisions (i) of the Metropolitan Police and (ii) elsewhere and *(b)* constabularies outside the Metropolitan Police numbers are lower than in 1997. [52337]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* Information on police numbers within the territorial divisions of the Metropolitan Police and other police forces is not collected. On 31 January 2002 12 forces had fewer police officers than in March 1997. They are:

Force	*Strength as at 31 January 2002*	*Decrease since March 1997*
Bedfordshire	1,077	–17
Cleveland	1,437	–22
City of London	740	–119
Cumbria	1,117	–27
Lincolnshire	1,190	–6
Merseyside	4,113	–117
Metropolitan Police[1]	25,878	–799
Nottinghamshire	2,313	–10
Staffordshire	2,109	–102
Sussex	2,878	–207
West Mercia	2,012	–28
West Yorkshire	4,899	–310

[1] Comparisons between 31 March 1997 and 31 January 2002 in the Metropolitan Police are affected by boundary changes with Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey in April 2000 when resources were transferred from the Metropolitan Police. Where police numbers are used in the police funding formula a reduction of 887 officers was applied.

[2] These figures have not yet been validated and published by the Home Office.

In March 2001 more than half of all the forces (24) had fewer officers than in March 1997. The Crime Fighting Fund has been a major contributory factor in improving the position.

Today there is a recorded number of police officers in England and Wales and we are on target to have more than 130,000 by April 2003.

Child Protection

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when guidelines will be issued for police authorities on child sex abuse cases; and if copies of the guidelines will be published. [51632]

Mr. John Denham: Much guidance relevant to this subject has already been issued by successive governments to the police and other agencies responsible for the protection of children. Inter-agency guidance on the management of complex child abuse investigations was published on 13 June. Copies have been placed in the Library and it is also available on the Home Office website.

Professor Michael Barber

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Professor Michael Barber will produce his report on ways to curb mugging; and if he will make a statement. [51213]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* My officials have been working with the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) on a variety of issues.

The PMDU has been working with my officials on street crime. The Street Crime Action Group has been convened by my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to tackle the problem. Announcements have already been made on video ID, fast tracking robbery through the court.

Criminal Justice Revenue (Expenditure)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his statement of 17 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 589, how much of the £100 million drawn down from the criminal justice revenue for addressing street crime, policing and counter-terrorism has been spent. [52440]

Mr. John Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the member for Milton Keynes South West (Dr. Phyllis Starkey) on 1 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 822W. Of the funds allocated to the Home Office from the Criminal Justice Reserve, £10.7 million has been spent to date.

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when and by what means the latest vacant position within Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary was advertised; how many applications there were for the post; what short-listing process was used; how many candidates were called to an interview; and if the guidelines for public appointments apply in appointments to HMIC. [53771]

Mr. John Denham: The Director General of the Policing and Crime Reduction Group (PCRG) wrote on 10 October 2001 to all chief constables and equivalent office holders in the United Kingdom inviting expressions of interest in two forthcoming vacancies for Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary posts. Four applications were received. A selection panel comprising the Director General of PCRG, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary and an independent member considered the applications and decided to invite all the applicants to interview.

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary are appointed by Her Majesty on the recommendation of the Home Secretary under section 54(1) of the Police Act 1996. They do not come within the jurisdiction of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Police Numbers

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were per 1,000 population in the London area in *(a)* March1997 and *(b)* September 2001. [27643]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 15 Junary 2002]:* The figures set out in the table are form the two forces that police Greater London, the Metropolitan Police Service and City of London Police.

Year	*Combined strength of Metropolitan Police and City of London Police*	*Police officers per 1,000 of population*
31 March 1997	27,536	3.61
30 September 2001	26,073	3.53[1]
31 January 2002[2]	26,618	3.61[1]

[1] Boundary changes on 1 April 2000 with Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey forces reduced the population of London by around 540,000.

[2] These figures have not yet been validated and published by the Home Office.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* police civilian staff are employed by the Metropolitan Police. [54199]

Mr. John Denham: I am told by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis (Sir John Stevens QPM) that on 31 January the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) had 25,878 full-time equivalent police officers which is 1,000 more than in March 2001. This is the largest increase in a single financial year in the Metropolitan Police for more than 20 years. In addition there were 10,240 civilian support staff, 93 more than in March 2001.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the ratio of police officers to notifiable offences in each English police force for each of the last 20 years; and if he will make a statement. [56228]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The requested details are given in the tables. There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which increased the total number of crimes counted in each police force area.

The number of crimes recorded by the police per Police Officer

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Avon and Somerset	23	23	25	27	32	34	33	33	41	50
Bedfordshire	33	33	35	36	40	41	40	40	51	52
Cambridgeshire	28	27	27	29	29	30	29	31	37	48
Cheshire	22	23	24	25	26	28	27	26	30	35
Cleveland	31	31	34	35	40	41	40	41	50	52
Cumbria	20	21	23	25	27	26	24	25	29	38
Derbyshire	27	27	28	27	27	26	24	27	34	43
Devon and Cornwall	22	22	23	25	26	27	26	27	32	38
Dorset	26	27	28	30	31	32	29	32	38	40
Durham	28	28	33	34	34	34	33	34	40	48
Essex*	24	25	25	26	28	28	26	28	34	38
Gloucestershire	21	21	22	25	26	30	29	30	36	48
Greater Manchester	35	36	40	43	47	47	42	42	48	54
Hampshire	27	27	29	30	32	32	30	31	38	45
Hertfordshire*	26	24	26	26	27	27	25	25	28	33
Humberside	32	31	33	39	42	45	44	46	52	59
Kent	23	23	25	26	26	27	27	28	35	46
Lancashire	24	24	25	26	29	30	31	28	34	38
Leicestershire	25	25	26	28	28	30	29	31	41	49
Lincolnshire	21	22	23	27	28	30	28	30	33	37
London, City of	8	8	9	9	10	10	8	9	9	9
Merseyside	31	31	34	34	37	36	31	29	30	32
Metropolitan Police*	27	25	27	27	29	27	26	27	29	33
Norfolk	28	28	27	30	32	32	32	33	40	46
Northamptonshire	31	31	33	35	37	38	35	36	43	51
Northumbria	41	41	45	49	49	51	46	52	58	64
North Yorkshire	22	21	23	27	26	28	25	26	34	37
Nottinghamshire	40	38	40	42	43	44	43	46	57	64
South Yorkshire	27	28	32	30	32	33	31	32	37	42
Staffordshire	22	23	24	25	27	27	27	27	33	39
Suffolk	21	22	23	24	27	27	25	27	32	33
Surrey*	18	18	19	19	20	20	20	21	26	30
Sussex	21	21	23	24	24	24	23	26	32	38
Thames Valley	30	30	32	33	36	34	31	34	40	50
Warwickshire	22	22	24	24	25	26	24	26	34	40
West Mercia	25	25	26	26	27	27	26	27	32	37
West Midlands	33	33	36	37	41	40	36	34	39	44
West Yorkshire	31	30	33	34	34	36	34	36	45	56
Wiltshire	24	24	26	27	27	26	24	25	30	34

* These forces were affected by the boundary changes which took place in April 2000

The number of crimes recorded by the police per Police Officer

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	57	57	55	51	53	48	49	50	50	50
Bedfordshire	54	50	46	45	46	43	42	47	52	48
Cambridgeshire	53	52	49	54	56	46	46	53	56	50
Cheshire	42	42	39	38	33	30	30	31	32	32
Cleveland	57	53	57	55	55	44	43	47	46	46
Cumbria	38	37	36	35	36	31	31	36	35	31
Derbyshire	52	50	47	46	45	41	42	48	48	45
Devon and Cornwall	40	42	38	36	36	33	31	38	39	35
Dorset	41	40	43	42	39	34	33	41	40	37
Durham	48	49	47	43	37	33	31	32	31	28
Essex*	40	39	36	34	35	30	31	33	37	37
Gloucestershire	52	53	52	48	47	42	42	44	46	43
Greater Manchester	56	52	49	47	47	44	45	53	55	53
Hampshire	48	45	43	41	41	36	35	37	40	39
Hertfordshire*	35	33	33	33	32	28	28	29	30	33
Humberside	64	69	67	63	62	59	61	66	63	58
Kent	52	51	49	50	47	38	37	40	39	39
Lancashire	41	42	40	39	39	37	36	36	34	36
Leicestershire	53	55	54	51	49	42	41	47	47	43
Lincolnshire	41	44	40	40	41	36	35	41	41	37
London, City of	8	7	6	6	6	6	6	9	11	12
Merseyside	32	30	29	33	33	30	30	33	36	35
Metropolitan Police*	33	33	31	30	31	30	30	36	41	40
Norfolk	47	45	39	37	39	37	37	41	43	40
Northamptonshire	51	50	49	49	50	46	46	58	55	49
Northumbria	65	60	57	54	46	38	36	39	38	35
North Yorkshire	39	42	47	49	43	38	37	41	42	40
Nottinghamshire	71	68	66	65	62	55	54	61	62	61

The number of crimes recorded by the police per Police Officer

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*
South Yorkshire	46	52	52	51	49	41	40	42	42	39
Staffordshire	45	45	42	41	42	41	39	41	46	49
Suffolk	37	35	33	32	33	30	30	34	38	39
Surrey*	31	31	28	26	26	24	24	26	26	31
Sussex	40	37	36	38	38	36	37	46	48	48
Thames Valley	52	52	48	46	47	43	41	47	51	51
Warwickshire	45	45	41	38	40	39	39	42	43	40
West Mercia	39	40	41	39	41	38	37	40	45	40
West Midlands	47	47	45	45	44	39	39	43	51	49
West Yorkshire	60	60	57	56	52	47	47	55	54	54
Wiltshire	35	33	30	29	29	29	28	33	34	33

*These forces were affected by the boundary changes which took place in April 2000

The figures in the table are calculated using the total of recorded crimes for the year in question (calendar up to 1997, and years ending March thereafter) and full-time equivalent numbers of police officers as at 31 March in that year (for years ending March, this is at the end of the year in question).

Hertfordshire Constabulary

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the strength of the Hertfordshire constabulary was on *(a)* 1 May 1997, *(b)* 1 April 2000, *(c)* 1 April 2001 and *(d)* the latest date for which figures are available. [54616]

Mr. John Denham: Information on police strength is normally collected twice a year (31 March and 30 September). The latest available strength figure collected by the Home Office is for 31 January 2002. Police numbers for Hertfordshire are set out in the table.

Hertfordshire Constabulary

Year (as at 31 March)	*Police Strength*
1997	1,759
2000	1,767
2001[1]	1,922
2002 (31 January)[2]	1,851

[1] Boundary changes with the Metropolitan Police contributed to the significant increase in police numbers between 2000 and 2001.

[2] These figures have not yet been validated and published by the Home Office.

Anti-crime Agencies

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the roles of *(a)* the Special Branch of Scotland Yard, *(b)* NCIS and *(c)* NCS in combating organised crime. [58359]

Mr. John Denham: Special Branch does not have a specific remit to tackle serious and organised crime.

The National Crime Intelligence Service (NCIS) has a United Kingdom-wide remit to develop intelligence to combat serious and organised crime, providing both tactical and strategic intelligence and expertise for law enforcement, government and other relevant agencies at a national and international level. It houses the UK Central Bureau for Interpol and the Europol National Unit.

The National Crime Squad's role in England and Wales is to conduct operations against serious and organised crime. NCS works closely with NCIS, other agencies including the National Investigation Service of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and police forces.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58722]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to Mr. Burns on 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 891W.

In addition, two official visits have been made by Special Advisers to the United States since 1997. One in August 2000 at a total cost of £2,117 and the other in August 2001 at a total cost of £2,900.

The advisor on international drug issues (who was employed on Special Adviser terms) has visited Belgium, Romania and the Czech Republic on official business at an average cost of £1,094 per trip.

Information for the period beyond March 2002 will be available in due course.

Funding (Luton, South)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Luton, South constituency since 1997. [58592]

Mr. John Denham: It is not possible to account for all funds directed to recipients in the Luton South constituency because funds are not allocated on the basis of Parliamentary Constituencies. However, I am pleased to publish the table showing the following grants made to organisations in Luton in the last years as shown. This demonstrates a substantiated investment in Luton by the Home Office.

Project	Year	Amount £
Community Projects		
"Luton Lives"—an Active Community demonstration project	1999–00	112,500
	2000–01	270,000
	2001–02	250,456
	2002–03	177,044 (to be paid)
"Active Dads" pilot project. Run by the Community Education Development Centre	1999–00	22,700
	2000–01	2,500
Summer Activities	2001–02	59,360
Section 11 grants*		
Luton Borough Council	1997–98	1,397,592
	1998–99	1,433,919
Stopley High School	1997–98	5,714
	1998–99	5,862
Luton Sixth Form College	1997–98	1,465,183
	1998–99	1,503,267
*Department For Education and Skills (DFES) took over responsibility for Section II from 99–2000		
Asylum Support Payments to Luton BC		
Adults and Families	1999–2000	1,825,718
	2000–01	4,459,838
	2001–02	4,182,727
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)	2000–01	217,412
	2001–02	210,079
Crime Reduction Programme		
Close Circuit Television projects		
Bury Park, Dunstable Road	1999–02	180,229
Leagrave Railway	1999–02	111,537
Luton Railway	1999–02	68,343
Luton National Health Service	1999–02	166,000
Hockwell Ring	1999–02	272,680
Luton Town Centre Car Park	1999–02	55,243
Luton Town Centre	1999–02	704,880
Reducing Burglary Initiative		
Luton Dallow Ward	1999–02	70,200
Four Wards, Biscot, High Town Lewsey and South Wards	1999–02	78,100
Small Retailers in deprived areas	1999–02	18,378
Safer Luton—Wards Dallow and Biscot	2001–02	208,800
	2002–03	208,800
Communities against drugs	2000–01	10,000
	2001–02	69,841
	2002–03	83,146
Partnership development fund		
Safer communities initiative		
University of Luton Research Projects		
Sex Victims Project	1997–00	74,338
Evaluation of Round 2 Targeted Policing: Drugs and Vice in the London Borough of Haringey	2001–02	85,810
Evaluation of Crime Reducation Programme (CRP) Tackling Crime and Disorder associated with Prostitution Initiative—Young People Group	2001–02	79,740
Drugs Projects		
Drug Action Team Development Funding: Luton Primary Care Trust	2001–02	45,497
Drug Prevention Advisory Service Grant: Luton Primary Care Trust	2001–02	8,500
Communities Against Drugs: Drug Action Team Grant	2001–02	31,497

Data Protection

Harry Cohen: (1) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the kinds of public authorities likely to be granted access to communications data; how frequently he estimates each kind of organisation will seek access to communications data; and if he will make a statement. [59258]

(2) if he will introduce an amendment to *(a)* the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and *(b)* the Code of Practice in relation to Communications Data to prohibit the subsequent onward disclosure of communications data to third parties which are not authorised directly by him to receive such data; and if he will make a statement. [59264]

(3) under the Interception of Communications Act 1985, how many times the Metropolitan Police Force sought access to communications data in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [59257]

Mr. John Denham: The Interception of Communications Act 1985 did not provide for access to communications data. The Metropolitan Police made approximately 127,000 separate requests for communication data under the Data Protection Act 1998 in the last year. The access to communications data provisions in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) have not yet been implemented.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, has withdrawn the order made under s.25(1) of RIPA adding a number of other public authorities to the access to communications provisions in the Act to allow for wider consultation before bringing forward new proposals.

Chapter II of Part I of RIPA deals with the acquisition of data. The subsequent use made of that data is regulated by the Data Protection Act 1998 and by the statutes governing the Intelligence agencies.

Community Policing

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what national standards exist on the local implementation and monitoring of community policing. [60634]

Mr. John Denham: The Government is committed to ensuring that policing services meet the needs of the local community. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Police Standards Unit monitor policing at a local as well as at force level. Police authorities are also required to publish information about their performance against a range of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs), including those that address community issues such as police visibility and public satisfaction with the standards of service they receive from their local force.

The Police Reform Act 2002 contains a number of radical measures which will increase and enhance the police service's visibility in the community, including the introduction of Community Support Officers.

Police Communications

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department has taken in light of the report by the Trade and Industry Committee on testing of the police communications radio system. [60529]

Mr. John Denham: Prior to the Trade and Industry Committee report on Mobile Phone Masts the Home Office had asked the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) to assess the health and safety aspects of the TETRA technology used by Airwave. The NRPB report concluded that it is unlikely that the unique features of TETRA pose a hazard to health. The Home Office has nonetheless set up a comprehensive research programme to ensure that any residual health and safety covers that has been revised by forces and users are addressed.

Offender Assessment System

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total costs have been of introducing the Offender Assessment System for the prison and probation service; what estimates he has made of the time required for prison and probation officers to carry out assessments under the OASYS; how his Department proposes to monitor the effectiveness of the OASYS; and if he will make a statement. [62267]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Offender Assessment System (OASys) has not been fully introduced into the Prison and Probation services. The National Probation Service has started implementation of paper-based Offender assessments, while the Prison Service is intending to roll out on a computer-based system from April 2003.

The combined development costs for OASys from 1999–2002 are approximately £883,000. The cost to the National Probation Service of implementing the paper-based system for the financial year was approximately £173,000.

It has been estimated that on average it will take, on paper, 210 minutes for a Probation Officer and, electronically, 315 minutes for a Prison Officer to complete an initial OASys assessment.

OASys effectiveness will be monitored through comprehensive Management Information Systems developed by each service and when OASys is bedded in, performance targets for both services will be defined and monitored. The OASys Central Research Unit will continue to carry out investigations into the validity and reliability of the OASys system as well as the effectiveness of interventions designed and implemented across the Services. In addition, independent evaluation will be carried out or managed by the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

Price Standards

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information the Standards Unit has requested from *(a)* police forces and *(b)* basic command units within police forces; and if he will make a statement. [61179]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Following discussions between the Home Office, including the Police Standards Unit (PSU), and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the police service have provided data on recorded crime and detections at force and Basic Command Unit (BCU) level on a monthly basis from 1 April this year. To serve as a basis for comparison of performance against previous periods and the monitoring of trends, the Police Standards Unit has also asked that forces submit backdated monthly data for 2000–01 and 2001–02.

PSU have also contributed to the work of the Home Office's Street Crime Action Team (SCAT). As part of their monitoring role, SCAT require weekly performance indication from BCUs in 10 urban forces on levels of robbery, snatch theft, car-jacking and criminal firearms offences.

PSU have of course been in contact with a wide range of forces and BCUs over the past year as part of its overall programme of work.

Prisons

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the key performance targets are for training in each prison, broken down by category; and to what extent those targets have been met in the last 12 months for which information is available. [62379]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Prisons agree an annual target for the average number of hours per week that prisoners should spend in purposeful activity. This includes activities aimed at reducing crime such as work, education and resettlement. Targets are not set separately for each component part of the measure.

The 2001–02 targets for each prison, with actual performance analysed by broad heading are given in the table. Figures are subject to rounding.

Prison name	*Target 2001–02*	*Average weekly hours 2001–02*	*Education*	*Work*	*Resettlement*	*Other*
Acklington	25	23.2	5.0	15.4	2.5	0.3
Albany	24	24.2	5.3	15.0	1.3	2.6
Altcourse	31.7	34.3	7.3	19.9	6.9	0.1
Ashfield	30	27.1	11.9	10.3	4.3	0.5
Ashwell	32	31.7	9.2	18.2	3.8	0.4
Askham Grange	39	41.1	6.6	15.0	6.7	12.8
Aylesbury	22	17.4	6.8	6.8	2.0	1.8
Bedford	21	19.8	3.9	14.8	0.9	0.2
Belmarsh	15	11.0	2.9	5.6	2.1	0.3
Birmingham	16	19.3	3.4	13.5	1.8	0.5
Blakenhurst	23	18.9	4.4	12.0	2.1	0.5
Blantyre House	40	49.0	9.9	10.2	9.2	19.7
Blundeston	26	25.8	8.0	14.6	2.1	1.1
Brinsford	22	27.5	10.9	11.6	3.6	1.3
Bristol	21	21.1	3.0	15.8	1.7	0.5
Brixton	16	16.6	1.9	11.3	2.1	1.3
Brockhill	22	18.2	6.8	8.8	1.7	0.9
Buckley Hall	35	30.3	9.2	16.6	1.8	2.5
Bullingdon	17	13.8	4.1	6.6	2.8	0.3
Bullwood Hall	25	27.2	12.1	12.4	2.0	0.7
Camp Hill	23	21.4	7.2	10.2	3.5	0.5
Canterbury	18.5	18.0	5.4	10.4	1.5	0.7
Cardiff	23	20.4	3.4	13.8	2.7	0.4
Castington	25	25.1	15.3	7.0	2.0	0.7
Channings Wood	32	33.5	6.1	13.5	13.3	0.4
Chelmsford	20	18.8	4.1	11.5	2.9	0.2
Coldingley	40	38.2	7.8	25.8	3.8	0.8
Cookham Wood	25	22.0	5.4	14.6	1.3	0.6
Dartmoor	22	21.6	4.8	13.1	2.1	1.6
Deerbolt	23	21.1	11.8	7.0	2.0	0.3
Doncaster	18	20.1	5.8	12.2	1.8	0.2
Dorchester	20	15.7	5.4	9.1	0.9	0.3
Dovegate	35	27.5	6.1	17.1	3.9	0.4
Dover	28	27.3	10.0	10.0	6.1	1.0
Downview	25	23.7	5.9	10.0	5.2	2.7
Drake Hall	35.7	35.8	6.4	21.5	7.2	0.7
Durham	19	20.3	4.5	12.3	3.2	0.3
East Sutton Park	39	42.0	6.9	24.4	3.6	6.9
Eastwood Park	18	19.4	4.3	13.0	1.1	0.9
Elmley	22	18.6	4.4	11.8	1.9	0.6
Erlestoke	28.5	27.9	8.4	14.9	3.8	0.6
Everthorpe	27	28.0	9.5	15.0	3.0	0.4
Exeter	21	22.9	4.6	16.2	1.7	0.3
Featherstone	24.5	24.2	5.6	16.8	1.4	0.4
Feltham	12.5	24.7	11.3	8.7	4.0	0.4
Ford	40	39.8	6.2	21.4	7.3	4.8
Forest Bank	25	21.7	6.0	12.5	2.5	0.8
Foston Hall	25.5	25.4	7.6	14.9	2.4	0.6
Frankland	22	20.9	6.7	11.8	2.0	0.4
Full Sutton	18.5	17.4	3.1	10.4	1.4	2.4
Garth	22	23.4	7.0	10.7	5.3	0.4
Gartree	30	30.5	8.3	17.3	4.3	0.6
Glen Parva	18.5	18.2	6.0	9.8	1.9	0.5
Gloucester	30	20.5	7.3	11.0	1.8	0.5

Prison name	*Target 2001–02*	*Average weekly hours 2001–02*	*Education*	*Work*	*Resettlement*	*Other*
Grendon	36	35.6	4.8	11.6	8.3	10.7
Guys Marsh	24	22.6	5.3	13.4	2.5	1.4
Haslar	18	15.2	5.9	7.2	0.7	1.4
Hatfield	36	37.1	14.2	14.8	5.3	2.9
Haverigg	33	31.1	8.9	20.3	1.2	0.6
Hewell Grange	42	42.6	10.7	26.0	5.0	0.9
High Down	17.5	15.9	4.7	7.6	2.1	1.4
Highpoint	22	18.9	5.0	11.4	1.8	0.7
Hindley	30	20.5	8.3	10.9	0.8	0.4
Hollesley Bay	34.5	36.5	14.7	14.7	3.3	3.7
Holloway	15	20.3	6.2	6.5	4.8	2.9
Holme House	17	15.5	4.9	7.7	2.5	0.2
Hull	22	20.5	6.3	11.3	2.2	0.7
Huntercombe	30	26.7	10.9	9.0	6.0	0.8
Kingston	24	24.3	6.4	16.2	1.1	0.6
Kirkham	43	43.4	7.6	29.5	4.9	1.2
Kirklevington	52	51.6	8.1	10.8	7.6	25.2
Lancaster	26	24.8	9.4	8.7	6.0	0.7
Lancaster Farms	24	22.6	12.2	5.5	3.8	1.0
Latchmere House	64	61.2	2.4	14.5	44.1	0.1
Leeds	20	18.7	4.1	10.6	1.7	2.3
Leicester	20	21.0	5.7	11.4	2.5	1.4
Lewes	19.5	18.6	4.7	11.8	1.6	0.4
Leyhill	39	37.8	8.2	19.0	7.1	3.3
Lincoln	24	18.6	3.4	13.9	1.1	0.2
Lindholme	28	27.7	6.5	13.9	4.2	3.0
Littlehey	25	23.1	6.9	13.9	2.0	0.2
Liverpool	25	17.7	3.5	12.9	1.1	0.2
Long Lartin	19	18.3	5.2	11.9	0.9	0.3
Low Newton	24.5	23.7	6.8	12.3	4.4	0.2
Lowdham Grange	24	27.2	2.3	22.1	1.0	1.8
Maidstone	26	21.0	5.7	13.2	1.5	0.4
Manchester	21	19.7	3.4	12.7	3.3	0.2
Moorland	26	25.0	10.9	11.3	2.4	0.3
Morton Hall	36	30.7	8.1	20.4	1.5	0.5
Mount	22	20.0	5.6	12.6	1.2	0.5
New Hall	24	22.9	6.5	13.0	2.2	1.1
North Sea Camp	42	42.2	8.1	25.8	3.7	4.5
Northallerton	18	22.1	10.9	7.9	1.9	1.3
Norwich	20	18.9	4.2	11.5	2.7	0.6
Nottingham	19.5	17.2	3.0	11.3	1.6	1.3
Onley	23	18.0	7.8	8.2	1.4	0.7
Parc	35	26.8	7.4	15.8	3.2	0.4
Parkhurst	21	19.1	5.0	12.0	1.6	0.3
Pentonville	19	15.0	2.2	10.7	1.1	1.0
Portland	24	24.5	9.2	7.9	6.9	0.5
Preston	21.5	21.1	5.5	13.3	1.7	0.5
Ranby	27	23.6	7.2	15.3	0.7	0.5
Reading	26	24.4	5.2	1.7	4.0	13.5
Risley	25	25.2	6.9	15.6	2.1	0.5
Rochester	22	23.0	4.4	9.5	6.8	2.3
Rye Hill	35	29.4	9.2	17.8	1.8	0.4
Send	30	31.4	5.9	13.8	11.0	0.7
Shepton Mallet	27	22.9	7.1	11.2	3.8	0.9
Shrewsbury	23	23.8	4.9	15.2	3.3	0.3
Stafford	30	26.4	8.2	15.5	1.7	0.9
Standford Hill	41	39.6	8.9	21.5	6.6	2.6
Stocken	25	23.2	7.1	13.9	1.6	0.6
Stoke Heath	29	25.8	10.4	11.1	2.9	1.3
Styal	25.5	24.9	7.5	13.2	1.9	2.1
Sudbury	41	41.5	8.8	24.0	5.5	3.2
Swaleside	25	24.3	7.1	13.3	2.4	1.5
Swansea	20	22.0	4.1	14.9	1.6	1.4
Swinfen Hall	29	28.0	12.0	11.2	3.6	1.2
Thorn Cross	42	43.9	17.9	14.4	6.9	4.7
Usk	36	37.9	15.1	18.4	3.6	0.7
Verne	28	28.4	8.1	18.8	1.5	0.0
Wakefield	20	18.2	5.4	10.7	1.6	0.4
Wandsworth	19	17.1	5.8	9.8	0.9	0.6
Wayland	24.5	20.8	8.6	9.9	1.4	1.0
Wealstun	33	32.6	11.9	15.3	4.5	0.8
Weare	20	18.8	7.6	9.0	1.8	0.3
Wellingborough	28	28.1	11.7	11.7	3.8	0.9

Prison name	*Target 2001–02*	*Average weekly hours 2001–02*	*Education*	*Work*	*Resettlement*	*Other*
Werrington	35	32.5	21.7	5.8	4.6	0.3
Wetherby	30	27.1	10.9	11.6	4.3	0.3
Whatton	30	30.6	8.7	19.3	2.1	0.5
Whitemoor	20	20.2	6.7	10.6	2.3	0.5
Winchester	19	19.0	3.7	12.3	2.4	0.5
Wolds	28	28.3	11.1	14.8	1.7	0.7
Woodhill	20	16.0	[illegible].0	6.4	3.0	0.6
Wormwood Scrubs	21	18.5	4.2	9.6	2.7	1.9
Wymott	28	27.7	4.9	8.5	2.4	1.1

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total annual budget was in each of the last five years, for the inspection of Her Majesty's prisons. [62368]

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inspections were carried out in each of Her Majesty's prisons in each of the last five years. [62290]

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed by or seconded to the Inspectorate of Her Majesty's prisons in each of the last five years. [illegible]289]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The number of staff employed by or seconded to HM Inspectorate of Prisons since 1997–98 is as follows:

1997–98	27
1998–99	24
1999–2000	24
2000–01	26
2001–02	26

Because of re-organisation within the Department it is not possible to dis-aggregate the budget for the inspectorate before 1999–00. The budget for that and succeeding years was:

	£
1999–2000	773,000
2000–01	896,000
2001–02	1,260,000

Details of prison inspections carried out between 1997–98 and 2001–02 per prison establishment are set out in the attached table. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, prisons are not normally inspected more than once a year.

Number of inspections taken place between 1997–98 and 2001–02

Establishment	*No. of inspections*	*Establishment*	*No. of inspections*
Acklington	1	Frankland	2
Albany	1	Full Sutton	0
Altcourse	1	Garth	2
Ashfield	1	Gartree	1
Ashwell	1	Glen Parva	4
Askham Grange	2	Gloucester	2
Aylesbury	1	Grendon/Springhill	1
Bedford	1	Guys Marsh	1
Belmarsh	2	Haslar	2
Birmingham	2	Hatfield	1
Blakenhurst	3	Haverigg	2
Blantyre House	1	Hewell Grange	2
Blundeston	2	Highdown	2
Brinsford	2	Highpoint	2
Bristol	2	Hindley	2

Number of inspections taken place between 1997–98 and 2001–02

Establishment	*No. of inspections*	*Establishment*	*No. of inspections*
Brixton	2	Hollesley Bay	2
Brockhill	4	Holloway	2
Bullingdon	0	Holme House	1
Bullwood Hall	2	Hull	0
Camp Hill	1	Huntercombe	2
Canterbury	2	Kingston	2
Cardiff	2	Kirkham	2
Castington	3	Kirklevington Grange	1
Channings Wood	1	Lancaster Castle	1
Chelmsford	3	Lancaster Farms	1
Coldingley	1	Latchmere House	1
Cookham Wood	2	Leeds	1
Dartmoor	2	Leicester	2
Deerbolt	1	Lewes	2
Doncaster	2	Leyhill	1
Dorchester	3	Lincoln	2
Dovegate	0	Lindholme	2
Dover	0	Littlehey	1
Downview	1	Liverpool	1
Drake Hall	1	Long Lartin	2
Durham	1	Lowdham Grange	1
East Sutton Park	1	Low Newton	2
Eastwood Park	3	Maidstone	1
Elmley	2	Manchester	2
Erlestoke	3	Moorland	1
Everthorpe	1	Morton Hall	0
Exeter	3	Mount (The)	1
Featherstone	2	New Hall	2
Feltham	4	Northallerton	2
Ford	2	North Sea Camp	1
Forest Bank	0	Norwich	1
Foston Hall	1	Nottingham	2
Onley	2	Swaleside	0
Parc	2	Swansea	2
Parkhurst	1	Swinfen Hall	2
Pentonville	2	Thorn Cross	1
Portland	3	Usk and Prescoed	2
Preston	2	Verne (The)	1
Ranby	1	Wakefield	1
Reading	2	Wandsworth	2
Risley	2	Wayland	2
Rochester	1	Wealstun	1
Rye Hill	0	Weare (The)	2
Send	2	Wellingborough	2
Shepton Mallet	1	Werrington	2
Shrewsbury	2	Wetherby	1
(Spring Hill)		Whatton	1
combined with		Whitemoor	1
Grendon	1	Winchester	2
Stafford	2	Wolds (The)	2
Standford Hill	1	Woodhill	2
Stocken	1	Wormwood Scrubs	3
Stoke Heath	3	Wymott	2
Styal	2		
Sudbury	2		

Freemasons

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to require freemasons working in the police and criminal justice system to register their membership publicly; and if he will make a statement. [62394]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Voluntary arrangements for the declaration of freemasonry membership have been established for the judiciary, the police, Prison Service and other parts of the criminal justice system. The Government has made no decisions about the format of and arrangements for public access to any registers.

Bigamy

Phil Sawford: (1) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of bigamy were dealt with in British courts in each of the past five years for which figures are available; and how many resulted in a conviction. [63858]

(2) how many people convicted of bigamy in British courts were sentenced to a term in prison in each of the past five years for which figures are available; and what was the average length of sentence. [63859]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The information requested, relating to England and Wales for the years 1996 to 2000, is given in the table.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Persons proceeded against, convicted, sentenced to imprisonment and average sentence length at all courts for offences of bigamy[1], England and Wales 1996 to 2000

			Sentenced to imprisonment	
Year	Proceeded against	Convicted	Total	Average sentence length (months)
1996	18	16	6	11.5
1997	22	16	4	4.7
1998	30	18	10	7.9
1999	40	28	14	5.6
2000[2]	17	12	4	5.0

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire Police were only able to supply a nine per cent. sample of data for magistrates' courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Estimates based on this sample have been included in the figures in the table.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* assaults and *(b)* other crimes with a racial motive were committed against Sikhs in the period 11 September to 31 December 2001 in England and Wales. [63609]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* Information on assaults and other crimes with a racial motive is not collected by ethnic group other than the categories of White, Black, Asian, other and unknown.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to answer of 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 611W, what the average delay was for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority in relation to *(a)* deciding claims, *(b)* review of such decisions and *(c)* hearings challenging such decisions in each of the previous four years. [64477]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority advise that, using as the start and finish points the date of receipt of the application for the relevant stage and the date that the decision was issued, the average elapsed times for the financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 were as follows:

	Elapsed Time in Days			
	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Claims assessment	245	254	244	259
Review	161	188	186	236
Appeal	178	223	295	387

Drug Users (Merseyside)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered drug users there were on Merseyside in each year since 1994. [64617]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The term registered drug addict was based on the Home Office collection of data between 1968 and 1997. Since 1997, the description problem drug users has been used for people who present to treatment services.

Nationally, the number of individuals in drug treatment has been estimated from the number of reports made to the regional drug misuse database, which records information on an individual for the first time that person visits an agency, and for the first re-visit in six months or more. These data, therefore, underestimate the total number of individuals receiving specialist drug treatment in any given year. The number of reports made to the Merseyside and Cheshire drug misuse database by Merseyside drug treatment agencies is shown in the table:

Number of individuals accessing Merseyside drug treatment services

Year	Number of people
1994	1,323
1995	1,110
1996	1,273
1997	1,298
1998	1,914
1999	1,906
2000	2,103

In 1996, an additional drug treatment monitoring database, which was prevalence-based, was established in Merseyside and Cheshire. The period prevalence database records information from drug treatment agencies on individuals seen by the agency within a year, regardless of how long they have been in contact with services. These figures give the numbers of individuals receiving structured treatment in-year. The numbers for Merseyside drug treatment agencies were as follows:

Year	Number of people
1997	5,238
1998	5,505
1999	5,241
2000	5,656

Sentencing (Foreign Nationals)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy regarding the serving of sentences imposed by British courts on foreign nationals in their own countries. [64377]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 27 June 2002]:* We have bilateral prisoner transfer agreements with 66 countries. Requests from prisoners who are nationals of these countries to serve their sentences in their own country are normally approved where they meet the criteria set out in the relevant agreement, namely: prisoners must normally be a nationals of the country concerned; have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment which is final and enforceable (i.e. no outstanding appeals against conviction or sentence); and have at least six months left to serve at the time the application is submitted. Decisions on individual applications require the consent of both jurisdictions. It is at present our policy normally to refuse requests if, as a consequence, the prisoner would be likely to receive a significant reduction in time to serve.

We are working to increase the number of countries with whom we have repatriation agreements and expect to have signed up to nine more agreements in the course of this year.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South of 20 May, reference number 58559, on Metropolitan Police officers; and if he will make a statement. [65746]

Mr. John Denham: With apologies for the delay in responding I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 22 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 829W.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South of 25 March, reference number 46442, on anti-social behaviour orders; and if he will make a statement. [65748]

Mr. John Denham: With apologies for the delay in responding I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 18 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 557W.

Corporate Killing

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to *(a)* complete the review of the law in relation to corporate killing and *(b)* introduce legislation on corporate killing. [66244]

Mr. Hilary Benn: *(a)* The Government's Proposals were published in a consultation document in May 2000. The consultation period ended in September 2000, and an interdepartmental group has examined the issues raised by the consultation and other unresolved areas. The group has now completed its work. We will be publishing a digest of responses to the consultation paper shortly.

(b) The Government is committed to introducing legislation to increase corporate liability for manslaughter, and will do so when parliamentary time allows.

Prison Service

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in each prison establishment are held *(a)* two to a single cell and *(b)* three to a double cell. [66237]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The table shows the number of prisoners in each prison establishment held two to a cell designed for one and total overcrowding at the end of May 2002. Data are provisional and subject to validation by prisons.

The Prison Service does not collect centrally the number of prisoners held three in a double cell. Prisons report the total overcrowding level, which includes prisoners held three to a cell for two and those overcrowded in dormitories and larger cells.

Prison name	*Two to a cell designed for one*	*Total Overcrowding*
Acklington	0	0
Albany	0	0
Altcourse	0	0
Ashfield	0	0
Ashwell	0	0
Askham Grange	0	0
Aylesbury	0	0
Bedford	184	184
Belmarsh	0	417
Birmingham	368	368
Blakenhurst	198	198
Blantyre House	0	0
Blundeston	40	134
Brinsford	36	36
Bristol	86	86
Brixton	232	232
Brockhill	0	0
Buckley Hall	0	0
Bullingdon	80	336
Bullwood Hall	0	0
Camp Hill	268	268
Canterbury	256	256
Cardiff	268	268
Castington	0	0
Channings Wood	46	46
Chelmsford	0	192
Coldingley	0	0
Cookham Wood	20	20
Dartmoor	42	42
Deerbolt	0	0
Doncaster	0	0
Dorchester	192	192
Dovegate	0	0
Dover	0	0
Downview	0	0
Drake Hall	0	0
Durham	362	362
East Sutton Park	0	0
Eastwood Park	60	60
Elmley	240	240
Erlestoke	12	12
Everthorpe	48	48
Exeter	0	366
Featherstone	0	0
Feltham	0	0
Ford	0	0
Forest Bank	0	0
Foston Hall	0	0
Frankland	0	0
Full Sutton	0	0
Garth	26	26
Gartree	0	0
Glen Parva	444	444

Prison name	*Two to a cell designed for one*	*Total Overcrowding*
Gloucester	192	192
Grendon	0	0
Guys Marsh	82	82
Haslar	0	0
Hatfield	0	0
Haverigg	20	20
Hewell Grange	0	0
High Down	0	177
Highpoint	48	224
Hindley	0	0
Hollesley Bay	0	0
Holloway	0	0
Holme House	168	168
Hull	324	355
Huntercombe	0	0
Kingston	0	0
Kirkham	0	0
Kirklevington	0	0
Lancaster	0	0
Lancaster Farms	48	48
Latchmere House	0	0
Leeds	964	964
Leicester	340	340
Lewes	98	100
Leyhill	0	0
Lincoln	316	316
Lindholme	0	0
Littlehey	56	56
Liverpool	506	506
Long Lartin	0	0
Low Newton	96	96
Lowdham Grange	0	0
Maidstone	0	0
Manchester	688	688
Moorland	50	50
Morton Hall	0	0
Mount	86	86
New Hall	60	60
North Sea Camp	0	0
Northallerton	152	152
Norwich	392	392
Nottingham	228	228
Onley	0	0
Parc	0	0
Parkhurst	0	0
Pentonville	506	506
Portland	0	0
Preston	588	592
Ranby	96	96
Reading	146	146
Risley	34	34
Rochester	0	0
Rye Hill	0	0
Send	0	0
Shepton Mallet	46	46
Shrewsbury	312	312
Stafford	0	0
Standford Hill	0	0
Stocken	26	52
Stoke Heath	80	80
Styal	18	18
Sudbury	0	0
Swaleside	24	24
Swansea	302	302
Swinfen Hall	0	0
Thorn Cross	0	0
Usk	166	166
Verne	58	58
Wakefield	0	0
Wandsworth	0	0
Wayland	72	72
Wealstun	0	0
Weare	0	0
Wellingborough	0	0
Werrington	0	0
Wetherby	0	0
Whatton	0	0
Whitemoor	0	0
Winchester	352	352
Wolds	0	0
Woodhill	164	164
Wormwood Scrubs	0	0
Wymott	0	0

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of *(a)* prisoners and *(b)* prison staff in each prison establishment in England and Wales are from minority ethnic groups.

[66235]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The population breakdown for each prison establishment in England and Wales for 31 May 2002, by minority ethnic group is given in the table:

Prison Name	*Total*	*White (per cent.)*	*Black (per cent.)*	*Asian (per cent.)*	*Chinese and Other (per cent.)*
Acklington	763	96	1	2	0
Albany	439	93	5	1	1
Altcourse	920	96	3	1	0
Ashfield	386	89	8	1	2
Ashwell	482	78	16	6	0
Askham Grange	134	76	18	2	3
Aylesbury	349	57	33	7	4
Bedford	447	76	13	8	3
Belmarsh	858	57	31	6	6
Birmingham	907	69	19	11	2
Blakenhurst	850	79	12	8	1
Blantyre House	120	75	20	4	1
Blundestone	419	52	41	3	3
Brinsford	465	70	20	10	0
Bristol	590	84	14	1	1
Brixton	760	44	42	5	9
Brockhill	154	80	12	5	3
Buckley Hall	162	79	17	1	3
Bullingdon	919	72	20	6	2
Bullwood Hall	172	68	24	1	7
Camp Hill	531	62	32	2	4

Prison Name	*Total*	*White (per cent.)*	*Black (per cent.)*	*Asian (per cent.)*	*Chinese and Other (per cent.)*
Canterbury	305	87	8	3	2
Cardiff	670	91	5	3	2
Castington	329	92	4	2	1
Channings Wood	617	93	5	1	1
Chelmsford	562	77	16	4	4
Coldingley	375	59	36	2	3
Cookham Wood	131	44	45	1	9
Dartmoor	609	88	8	2	1
Deerbolt	480	93	5	2	1
Doncaster	1,113	88	6	5	1
Dorchester	259	92	6	2	1
Dovegate	723	70	23	5	3
Dover(1)	88	67	5	25	4
Downview	261	44	50	2	4
Drake Hall	291	80	17	3	0
Durham	711	96	3	1	1
East Sutton Park	97	55	36	4	5
Eastwood Park	314	85	15	0	0
Elmley	949	82	12	4	2
Erlestoke	331	87	10	3	1
Everthorpe	375	88	6	6	1
Exeter	514	97	3	1	0
Featherstone	603	77	14	8	0
Feltham	592	43	43	7	8
Ford	513	76	13	7	4
Forest Bank	1,024	87	7	5	0
Foston Hall	218	83	15	0	2
Frankland	634	87	8	3	2
Full Sutton	598	81	13	4	2
Garth	659	84	10	6	1
Gartree	278	87	5	7	1
Glen Parva	801	81	14	4	1
Gloucester	321	92	5	3	0
Grendon/Spring Hill	453	83	10	6	2
Guys Marsh	518	83	14	3	0
Haslar	138	34	27	29	10
Hatfield	173	86	6	8	0
Haverigg	556	95	3	2	0
Hewell Grange	190	70	14	16	1
Highdown	732	61	32	5	2
Highpoint	891	62	31	2	5
Hindley	527	83	12	5	0
Hollesley Bay	411	78	16	4	3
Holloway	479	57	33	2	7
Holme House	998	95	3	2	0
Hull	643	95	3	2	1
Huntercombe	343	53	33	10	4
Kingston(Portsmouth)	182	86	9	3	2
Kirkham	509	90	3	7	0
Kirklevington	182	95	2	4	0
Lancaster	243	95	1	4	0
Lancaster Farms	460	90	5	3	1
Latchmere House	190	60	28	8	4
Leeds	1,262	84	6	10	0
Leicester	369	76	13	9	2
Lewes	536	85	11	3	1
Leyhill	432	91	5	4	0
Lincoln	551	96	3	2	0
Lindholme	686	81	7	9	3
Littlehey	645	79	14	5	2
Liverpool	1,461	90	7	3	1
Long Lartin	422	71	18	7	4
Low Newton	294	95	4	0	0
Lowdham Grange	519	70	20	7	4
Maidstone	444	70	20	4	6
Manchester	1,252	82	11	6	1
Moorland	769	81	11	7	1
Morton Hall	195	42	53	1	5
New Hall	369	90	7	1	2
North Sea Camp	225	84	6	10	0
Northallerton	232	91	4	4	0
Norwich	745	84	11	3	2
Nottingham	510	83	13	3	1

Prison Name	Total	White (per cent.)	Black (per cent.)	Asian (per cent.)	Chinese and Other (per cent.)
Onley	482	73	20	5	2
Parc	951	96	3	1	0
Parkhurst	511	65	26	5	4
Pentonville	1,157	43	39	8	9
Portland	427	62	29	6	3
Preston	619	92	2	5	0
Ranby	743	87	8	5	0
Reading	251	80	12	6	2
Risley	827	86	9	4	0
Rochester	158	58	20	10	12
Rye Hill	658	67	17	10	6
Send	217	40	52	2	6
Shepton Mallet	182	90	7	2	2
Shrewsbury	342	91	6	2	1
Stafford	636	78	16	6	0
Standford Hill	351	62	24	7	7
Stocken	579	81	10	7	1
Stoke Heath	646	87	9	3	1
Styal	442	85	12	1	2
Sudbury	515	79	9	11	1
Swaleside	772	63	26	6	5
Swansea	365	98	1	1	1
Swinfen Hall	311	71	20	9	0
The Mount	758	47	40	8	5
The Verne	587	51	39	2	9
The Weare	398	73	22	2	3
The Wolds	409	95	3	1	1
Thorn Cross	210	80	8	10	1
Usk/Prescoed	340	96	2	2	0
Wakefield	569	87	9	2	1
Wandsworth	1,460	55	31	3	11
Wayland	650	70	21	4	4
Wealstun	622	84	6	9	0
Wellingborough	523	79	15	4	1
Werrington	126	91	8	1	0
Wetherby	348	81	10	8	1
Whatton	273	96	3	1	0
Whitemoor	421	71	18	6	5
Winchester	638	81	14	2	2
Woodhill	743	77	14	6	3
Wormwood Scrubs	1,184	36	45	11	7
Wymott	803	92	3	4	1
Total Population	71,112	78	15	5	2
Total Population	71,112	78	15	5	2

[1] Percentages as at 31 March 2002, due to atypical figures for May 2002 whilst Dover changed from Male Young Offenders Institution to Male Immigration Removal Centre.

The prison service staff breakdown for each establishment in England and Wales for 31 May 2002 is in the table:

Prison Name	White	Minority Ethnic	Not Stated[1]	Non Respondents[2]	All Staff	Per cent. Minority Ethnic[3]
Acklington	358	9	20		387	2.3
Albany	267	3	5	1	276	1.1
Altcourse[4]	441	3	–	–	444	0.7
Ashfield[4]	239	8	–	–	247	3.2
Ashwell	208	5	28	1	242	2.1
Askham Grange	79	2			81	2.5
Aylesbury	272	23	39	2	336	6.8
Bedford	72	7	160		239	2.9
Belmarsh	791	83	17		891	9.3
Birmingham	382	54	54	2	492	[illegible]1.0
Blakenhurst	262	12	9		283	[illegible]2
Blantyre House	64	2	1	2	69	[illegible].9
Blundeston	268	9			277	[illegible]2
Brinsford	338	34	25	1	398	8.5
Bristol	500	14	12	1	527	2.7
Brixton	327	96	13	9	445	21.6
Brockhill	150	8	6	3	167	4.8

Prison Name	White	Minority Ethnic	Not Stated[1]	Non Respondents[2]	All Staff	Per cent. Minority Ethnic[3]
Buckley Hall	73	6	128		207	2.9
Bullingdon	277	17	110		404	4.2
Bullwood Hall	154	9	2	3	168	5.4
Camp Hill	269	2			271	0.7
Canterbury	188	4	1		193	2.1
Cardiff	396	8			404	2.0
Castington	328	3	22	1	354	0.8
Channings Wood	304	4	8	8	324	1.2
Chelmsford	289	13	30		332	3.9
Coldingley	196	6			202	3.0
Cookham Wood	87	2		1	90	2.2
Dartmoor	297	9	49	6	361	2.5
Deerbolt	281	2			283	0.7
Doncaster[4]	598	23	–	–	621	3.7
Dorchester	153	1	9		163	0.6
Dovegate[4]	389	19	–	–	408	4.7
Dover	178	6	11	2	197	3.0
Downview	156	7	3	2	168	4.2
Drake Hall	161	3	15	7	186	1.6
Durham	347	6	362		715	0.8
East Sutton Park	48	1	14		63	1.6
Eastwood Park	230	5			235	2.1
Elmley	440	13	3		456	2.9
Erlestoke	150	5	22	12	189	2.6
Everthorpe	240	2	1		243	0.8
Exeter	293	3	21	5	322	0.9
Featherstone	311	11	4		326	3.4
Feltham	464	104	92		660	15.8
Ford	173	4	1		178	2.2
Forest Bank(4)	348	10	–	–	358	2.8
Foston Hall	180	7			187	3.7
Frankland	734	13	46		793	1.6
Full Sutton	694	3	79	8	784	0.4
Garth	361	10	43	1	415	2.4
Gartree	225	7	30		262	2.7
Glen Parva	448	25	34		507	4.9
Gloucester	197	4	25	1	227	1.8
Grendon	259	16	21		296	5.4
Guys Marsh	193	9	61		263	3.4
Haslar	88	3	2		93	3.2
Hatfield	56	3	17		76	3.9
Haverigg	202	3	89		294	1.0
Hewell Grange	67		15	1	83	0.0
Highdown	450	53	27	2	532	10.0
Highpoint	363	7	1	1	372	1.9
Highpoint North	131	7			138	5.1
Hindley	392	10	54		456	2.2
Hollesley Bay	303	10	30	1	344	2.9
Holloway	245	134	81	6	466	28.8
Holme House	464	4	28		496	0.8
Hull	413	10	46	2	471	2.1
Huntercombe	232	15	6	2	255	5.9
Kingston	111	3	25		139	2.2
Kirkham	242		5	1	248	0.0
Kirklevington	88	1	5		94	1.1
Lancaster	149	3	8		160	1.9
Lancaster Farms	97	3	255		355	0.8
Latchmere House	74	5	1	3	83	6.0
Leeds	659	23	5		687	3.3
Leicester	221	14	7		242	5.8
Lewes	262	11	13		286	3.8
Leyhill	182	3	5		190	1.6
Lincoln	327	5	28		360	1.4
Lindholme	358	4	63		425	0.9
Littlehey	268	11	6	4	289	3.8
Liverpool	756	10	9		775	1.3
Long Lartin	650	17	1		668	2.5
Low Newton	232	1			233	0.4
Lowdham Grange[4]	278	10	–	–	288	3.6
Maidstone	256	15	76		347	4.3
Manchester	679	20	25	1	725	2.8
Moorland	450	11	18	6	485	2.3

Prison Name	*White*	*Minority Ethnic*	*Not Stated*[1]	*Non Respondents*[2]	*All Staff*	*Per cent. Minority Ethnic*[3]
Morton Hall	149	7	2		158	4.4
New Hall	301	3	13	5	322	0.9
North Sea Camp	91		2	7	100	0.0
Northallerton	140	1			141	0.7
Norwich	344	6	56	15	421	1.4
Nottingham	299	14	17		330	4.2
Onley	385	18	4		407	4.4
Parc[4]	410	5	–	–	415	1.2
Parkhurst	288	6	27	14	335	1.8
Pentonville	430	167	6	2	605	27.6
Portland	275	6	50	1	332	1.8
Preston	347	8	22	7	384	2.1
Ranby	376	7	8	10	401	1.7
Reading	155	7	31		193	3.6
Risley	457	9	54		520	1.7
Rochester	278	14	6		298	4.7
Rye Hill[4]	190	8	–	–	198	4.0
Send	116	3	7	1	127	2.4
Shepton Mallet	137	4	5		146	2.7
Shrewsbury	190	4	1	9	204	2.0
Stafford	292	6	21	9	328	1.8
Standford Hill	176	3	18	7	204	1.5
Stocken	226	8	34		268	3.0
Stoke Heath	396	11		13	420	2.6
Styal	307	22	2		331	6.6
Sudbury	168	7	13		188	3.7
Swaleside	321	24	46	1	392	6.1
Swansea	228	1			229	0.4
Swinfen Hall	205	5	25		235	2.1
The Mount	283	14	12	3	312	4.5
The Verne	266	2	17		285	0.7
Thorn Cross	213	5	3		221	2.3
Usk/Prescoed	189	5	5		199	2.5
Wakefield	532	14	95		641	2.2
Wandsworth	488	105	59	12	664	15.8
Wayland	272	3	35		310	1.0
Wealstun	135	1	171		307	0.3
The Weare	181	6	25		212	2.8
The Wolds(4)	158	2	–	–	160	1.5
Wellingborough	257	10	3	1	271	3.7
Werrington	165	2	5		172	1.2
Wetherby	231	8	28	2	269	3.0
Whatton	136	1	6		143	0.7
Whitemoor	721	20	19	14	774	2.6
Winchester	351	6	21		378	1.6
Woodhill	539	24	52	1	616	3.9
Wormwood Scrubs	422	120	9		551	21.8
Wymott	333	11	60		404	2.7
Total Prison Staff	39,421	1,946	3,682	243	45,292	4.3
Head Quarters	1,848	336	227	2	2,413	13.9

[1] Refers to staff who have requested that their ethnicity is not recorded.

[2] Refers to staff who have had no ethnicity data collected.

[3] Percentage of all staff including those with no ethnicity data recorded.

[4] Refers to staff employed at private establishments as at the 2 July 2002.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Prison Service has a public interest disclosure policy. [67053]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Prison Service routinely discloses material to the public via its Libraries in Headquarters and establishments, and the internet. The Prison Service complies with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and the Data Protection Act 1998, and is actively preparing for implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Prison Service keeps a certified record of allegations of assaults committed by staff. [67054]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Prison Service does not collate centrally a certified record of allegations of assaults committed by staff. However, the Prison Service Investigations Unit collate the number of investigations logged in respect of allegations of assaults committed by staff. Figures are also collated in respect of the number of allegations of assault that have resulted in formal disciplinary action being taken.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will bring forward legislation which would make the obtaining of DNA samples without consent an offence. [66872]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* The Human Genetics Commission's Report, "Inside Information—balancing interests in the use of personal genetic data" has recommended the creation of a new criminal offence of the non-consensual or deceitful obtaining or analysis of genetic information for non-medical purposes.

We are currently considering this proposal and will respond to the Human Genetics Commission's report in due course.

Telephone Taps

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to equalise the law of evidence on the admissability in criminal trials of telephone taps carried out *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad. [65477]

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to liaise with ministers from the European Community on harmonizing laws on admitting the results of telephone taps in evidence in criminal trials. [65479]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters between Member States of the European Union, signed by Justice and Home Affairs Ministers in May 2000, contains a number of detailed provisions relating to interception of communications.

The United Kingdom is currently considering how best to implement these provisions as part of bringing the Convention into force in United Kingdom Law.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make the products of United Kingdom telephone taps admissible in evidence in criminal trials. [65478]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Section 17 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) prohibits the evidentiary use of intercept product in legal proceedings in the United Kingdom.

This position, is kept under review.

STEPS Contract

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the maintenance charges are for the probation STEPS contract during normal working hours; what the call out charge is between 6 pm and 10 pm; what the charge is for a Saturday and a Sunday call out; what the charge is in relation to an office relocation; what assessment he has made of the value for money of the contract with Bull/Integris for these matters; and if he will make a statement. [66619]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* It is normal in contracts such as these for the information requested to be covered by commercial confidentiality clauses. However, recent press reports on this subject have been so inaccurate and misleading that both the supplier and the National Probation Directorate felt it appropriate to correct some specific points.

The Standard Technical Environment for the Probation Service (STEPS) contract provides the foundation for the development of Information Technology (IT) in the probation service. Earlier this year it became one of the first contracts to pass through the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) Gateway process, set up to scrutinise Government contracts for value and purpose.

The core support hours for the contract are Monday–Friday from 8am to 6pm. The "maintenance charges" to extend these hours to provide full service cover for a whole office between 6 and 10 pm on a weeknight would be £2,661. On a Saturday the cost to support the entire network of 15,000 desktops across England and Wales would be £8,704. On a Sunday, the same cost would be £11,600. To deliver this service the supplier has to provide people on call around the country, responding to incidents and resolving problems. These costs would only be paid should this work be needed. To date, in the lifetime of this contract, it has not been. The cost to move a workstation would be £192. By any standards this contract represents good value for money.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the financial position of Bull/Integris was taken into account before the Standard Technical Environment for the Probation Service contract was let on 1 January; and if he will make a statement. [66618]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* The National Probation Directorate commissioned the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) to assess the financial position of Groupe Bull and it's subsidiary Bull Information Systems (including the business division Integris) prior to the shortlisting of service providers for the STEPS contracts.

After shortlisting and prior to award of the STEPS contracts, the National Probation Directorate commissioned a firm of forensic accountants to evaluate the financial risks regarding the sale of Integris by Bull Information Systems to Steria.

On-going financial checks will be carried out on Integris (now renamed as Steria following the change of ownership) throughout the life of the STEPS contracts.

Criminal Records (Disclosure)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the outstanding disclosure applications from Wirral borough council social services department to the Criminal Records Bureau will be processed; how large the backlog is of applications awaiting processing; and what the most recent average figure is for how long the processing procedure takes. [66652]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Correctly completed applications are currently processed typically within six weeks; this time-scale applies to Wirral Borough Council Social Services. Around 70,000 Disclosure applications which have gone past the published delivery times (one week for standard Disclosures and three weeks for enhanced) remain to be completed.

Ex-Prisoners (Suicide)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people committed suicide in 2001 within one year of leaving prison in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [67008]

Mr. Hilary Benn: No information is held centrally on the suicide of prisoners after release from prison.

However, a recent research study found that during 1996 and 1997, 34 ex-prisoners died from self-inflicted injury whilst receiving statutory post-release supervision by the Probation Service. Data on the number of days between release and self-inflicted death was available for 32 cases: 28 prisoners died within one year of release.

Further details of this research are available in *Home Office Research Study 231* which can be found on the Home Office website. Adult prisoners serving custodial sentences of less than 12 months were excluded from this study because they do not receive statutory post-release supervision. Self-inflicted death includes all verdicts of suicide, death by misadventure, accidental deaths and open verdicts.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has made to the Howard League's recent report on suicide following prison release; and if he will make a statement. [67015]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Government welcomes this report for the attention it rightly gives to the issue of suicide prevention. The National Probation Service is using it to inform the work it is doing in this area, which includes commissioning more detailed research into deaths in approved premises and the preparation of interim guidance on the reporting of and prevention of deaths.

The National Probation Service is also working with the Prison Service to improve arrangements for the release of prisoners into approved premises. Consideration is also being given to how investigations into deaths in custody and in approved hostels may be strengthened.

Life Prisoners

Mr. Stinchcombe: (1) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners serving life sentences in England and Wales have had to wait *(a)* between three months and six months, *(b)* between six months and one year, *(c)* between one year and two years and *(d)* in excess of two years, for his Department to decide whether to accept a Parole Board recommendation of that prisoner's transfer to open conditions in each of the last five years. [67012]

(2) what procedures have been put in place to enable a prisoner serving a life sentence in England and Wales who has been removed from open conditions to put his case against such removal to the Parole Board prior to his next formal Parole Board review. [67014]

(3) how many prisoners serving life sentences in England and Wales have been returned to closed conditions for alleged misdemeanours occurring after a prior transfer to open conditions and/or release on licence, in each of the last five years; and what the nature of the alleged misdemeanour was in each such case. [67013]

(4) how many prisoners serving life sentences in England and Wales have had to wait *(a)* between three months and six months, *(b)* between six months and one year, *(c)* between one year and two years and *(d)* in excess of two years, for notification of the outcome of their Parole Board review in each of the last five years. [67010]

(5) what *(a)* the average time and *(b)* the longest time which his Department has taken to decide upon Parole Board recommendations in respect of prisoners serving life sentences in England and Wales was in each of the last five years. [67011]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The procedures for those life sentence prisoners removed from open conditions are set out in Chapter 4 of the "Lifer Manual (Prison Service Order 4700)". I have arranged for a copy of this to be placed in the Library.

Released life sentence prisoners are recalled to prison because they are deemed to present an unacceptable risk to public safety. In some cases this will involve criminal offences and other factors giving cause for concern of risk of harm either to specific individuals or the public at large. The numbers of lifers recalled in the past five years are as follows:

1 April 2001–31 March 2002	26
1 April 2000–31 March 2001	35
1 April 1999–31 March 2000	39
1 April 1998–31 March 1999	35
1 April 1997–31 March 1998	20

This represents around three per cent. of the total number of lifers under supervision in the community.

Her Majesty's Prison Service does not hold centrally information on the reasons for recall in each case. The other information requested is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost by examining the individual records of the prisoners concerned.

Probation Service

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of suicide and self-harm there were in Probation Service-approved hostels in 2001 in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [67009]

Mr. Hilary Benn: In 2001, 21 deaths of approved hostel residents were reported. Of these three were recorded as suicide, and a further 12 as a result of drug overdoses. Of the remaining six, five were from apparently natural causes and one resident died in a road traffic accident.

We do not keep a central record of incidents of self-harm in approved hostels.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were under post-release supervision by the Probation Service last year in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [66818]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The number of people under post-release supervision by the Probation Service in England and Wales was 28,800 at the end of December 2000, the latest date for which complete information is available.

Victims

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what systems are in place to inform victims about the release from hospital of a person who has committed serious offences whilst insane. [67152]

Mr. Hilary Benn: There is currently no system for informing victims about the release from hospital of a person who has committed serious offences whilst insane, as this information has been considered to be subject to medical confidentiality. However, the Government believes that victims of their offending should have the same rights to information as victims of any other serious offending. On 25 June we announced proposals to that effect in the consultation paper accompanying the Mental Health Bill.

Probation Services

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the extent of the funding shortfall for 2002–03 in probation services in *(a)* England, *(b)* the West Midlands and *(c)* London; what the implications of this are for provision of services in (i) Crown courts and (ii) magistrates' courts; and if he will make a statement. [68117]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Funding for probation services in 2002–03 has increased by five per cent. in England; 5.9 per cent. in West Midlands; and 4.3 per cent. in London over the allocations for the previous year. Some areas are experiencing funding pressures due to increased costs. Following risk assessments and prioritisation, courts may find that they are asked to accept that services may be delivered using different reporting arrangements, but there should be no adverse implications for the delivery of those services to courts.

Police

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan Police officers serving with its Firearms Branch are suspended because they have discharged a gun; and how long each officer has been suspended. [59448]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 25 May 2002]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that there are no Metropolitan Police officers within the SO19 Firearms Branch who are suspended from police duties as a result of firearms incidents. There are currently eight SO19 officers removed from operational firearms duties and on restricted duties pending the completion of investigations into incidents involving the discharge of a firearm.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish estimates of customer satisfaction for each English police authority in each of the years 1990–91 to 2001–02 in relation to *(a)* 999 calls response, *(b)* victims of violent crime, *(c)* victims of domestic burglary and *(d)* victims of theft; and if he will make a statement. [67107]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The information requested is only available from 1993 and is shown in the table. It covers nearly all police authority areas in England and Wales; gaps in information are shown.

HMIC Matrix of Indicators
N/A

			1993			*1994–95*		
Forces	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*
England and Wales	5,297,040	88	82	93	6,088,654	89	90	90
Avon and Somerset	88,235	94	88	94	159,800	91	79	90
Bedfordshire	43,200	94	79	94	51,192	94	83	93
Cambridgeshire	53,504	92	93	97	58,805	95	92	96
Cheshire	75,094	–	–	–	80,035	85	–	93
City of London	–	–	89	–	–	–	91	–
Cleveland	67,398	78	79	80	84,346	77	84	91
Cumbria	33,985	69	91	86	34,729	92	90	81
Derbyshire	49,457	92	96	96		88	90	96
Devon and Cornwall	102,391	91	82	93	121,798	86	83	93
Dorset	55,155	78	94	94	54,791	85	71	94
Durham	29,447	73	82	81	29,923	–	–	–
Dyfed-Powys	21,231	95	100	95	24,068	94	97	97
Essex	110,005	–	–	–	114,883	87	–	–
Gloucestershire	40,462	79	80	92	45,388	77	82	90
Greater Manchester	416,873	78	84	93	446,345	82	81	95
Gwent	32,191	94	–	93	35,360	86	–	79
Hampshire	162,082	–	–	–	170,560	86	–	97
Hertfordshire	67,610	84	80	88	77,071	80	94	92
Humberside	85,632	73	68	69	88,402	75	80	83
Kent	130,015	81	87	94	141,769	98	91	87
Lancashire	71,986	81	77	86	102,984	86	84	92

HMIC Matrix of Indicators
N/A

	1993				1994–95			
Forces	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*
Leicestershire	100,232	86	–	87	114,314	83	–	85
Lincolnshire	34,694	75	71	84	45,828	91	82	92
Merseyside	200,711	92	–	96	220,432	81	–	96
Metropolitan Police	1,347,207	92	86	92	1,538,385	92	92	91
Norfolk	37,143	98	86	93	48,984	97	85	95
North Wales	39,945	86	86	92	40,575	86	82	88
North Yorkshire	31,956	91	92	97	56,646	87	94	95
Northamptonshire	25,027	83	85	90	32,256	97	88	92
Northumbria	213,369	94	–	95	224,569	–	–	–
Nottinghamshire	119,489	92	92	97	115,695	87	81	90
South Wales	150,370	–	–	–	158,006	–	–	–
South Yorkshire	123,144	67	38	68	149,178	–	–	–
Staffordshire	58,935	91	93	95	65,266	90	84	92
Suffolk	27,521	–	–	–	30,253	93	85	92
Surrey	56,182	97	100	98	67,268	99	100	100
Sussex	94,251	88	87	96	138,265	88	96	97
Thames Valley	125,754	87	89	85	195,016	83	84	95
Warwickshire	43,468	–	–	–	48,870	85	90	92
West Mercia	80,894	90	76	92	98,539	90	77	89
West Midlands	358,009	81	–	85	412,211	87	80	96
West Yorkshire	267,786	84	92	94	323,081	83	71	85
Wiltshire	25,000	–	–	98	42,768	93	89	98

HMIC Matrix of Indicators
N/A

	1995–96				1996–97			
Forces	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*
England and Wales	6,881,163	87	84	92	7,302,078	87	83	92
Avon and Somerset	195,095	88	79	94	197,706	85	83	92
Bedfordshire	34,466	93	81	94	59,863	91	79	92
Cambridgeshire	73,923	89	74	84	79,332	88	74	84
Cheshire	90,243	80	–	86	94,953	85	91	89
City of London	–	–	100	90	–	–	73	98
Cleveland	87,253	80	79	87	89,061	94	90	95
Cumbria	37,047	82	96	82	37,749	94	92	92
Derbyshire	94,632	87	83	95	96,746	89	88	95
Devon and Cornwall	148,381	87	83	96	165,013	86	89	95
Dorset	71,700	84	91	94	71,362	81	79	92
Durham	31,424	85	87	88	46,178	–	–	–
Dyfed-Powys	25,208	93	74	97	25,374	90	91	98
Essex	121,934	85	90	98	129,165	83	92	98
Gloucestershire	46,678	76	82	94	62,790	75	80	90
Greater Manchester	500,820	83	91	96	501,093	82	85	95
Gwent	36,088	92	92	–	53,471	89	–	93
Hampshire	191,090	88	84	97	211,000	88	81	98
Hertfordshire	87,256	80	84	91	101,283	77	85	86
Humberside	87,653	76	71	78	100,097	75	72	82
Kent	161,149	97	85	97	170,908	98	86	98
Lancashire	156,349	90	87	89	132,194	90	87	90
Leicestershire	129,686	79	–	82	130,940	83	81	87
Lincolnshire	46,556	94	88	90	46,102	90	84	90
Merseyside	251,985	79	86	90	326,654	76	82	94
Metropolitan Police	1,681,620	93	83	92	1,772,871	92	86	92
Norfolk	56,261	97	83	94	63,684	94	90	94
North Wales	42,864	98	65	83	48,131	90	77	87
North Yorkshire	60,561	87	91	93	53,226	90	89	94
Northamptonshire	55,994	89	90	96	60,028	95	89	95
Northumbria	222,835	–	90	94	229,478	90	91	93
Nottinghamshire	129,831	81	77	88	147,739	91	78	88
South Wales	179,586	–	–	–	175,535	–	–	–

HMIC Matrix of Indicators
N/A

	1995–96				1996–97			
Forces	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*
South Yorkshire	153,276	68	50	76	177,278	78	79	87
Staffordshire	74,900	86	80	93	76,400	88	90	95
Suffolk	56,112	88	74	91	60,951	80	64	88
Surrey	74,763	79	83	89	80,201	90	86	91
Sussex	151,652	85	94	97	162,452	84	91	93
Thames Valley	221,119	79	82	93	228,508	76	77	92
Warwickshire	54,921	89	86	98	60,861	82	86	92
West Mercia	99,012	80	83	91	110,688	86	82	93
West Midlands	455,056	74	96	89	462,052	85	89	95
West Yorkshire	348,120	81	74	83	342,199	78	78	84
Wiltshire	56,064	95	84	96	60,762	81	70	89

HMIC Matrix of Indicators
N/A

	1997–98				1998–99			
Forces	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*
England and Wales	7,671,115	87	82	92	7,986,070	86	81	91
Avon and Somerset	198,390	81	75	85	205,350	75	73	87
Bedfordshire	56,870	84	76	90	78,666	88	83	86
Cambridgeshire	82,541	88	71	83	92,353	78	55	79
Cheshire	102,665	88	83	94	111,533	87	90	95
City of London	–	94	80	86	–	–	80	88
Cleveland	86,318	87	88	91	88,834	82	92	94
Cumbria	36,206	90	91	92	41,240	85	85	89
Derbyshire	103,413	89	85	96	109,407	79	80	90
Devon and Cornwall	175,942	86	73	88	169,634	88	75	90
Dorset	73,005	87	88	97	71,680	90	84	97
Durham	51,729	–	–	–	50,608	80	75	87
Dyfed-Powys	29,382	93	89	98	32,672	92	81	94
Essex	176,374	82	92	98	186,386	–	83	92
Gloucestershire	57,833	74	79	89	57,335	95	89	97
Greater Manchester	584,663	90	93	96	555,997	88	88	96
Gwent	57,143	–	80	–	64,013	82	–	89
Hampshire	225,355	86	82	97	231,052	86	74	97
Hertfordshire	107,675	74	79	84	119,380	93	90	95
Humberside	107,118	70	68	81	105,037	74	75	86
Kent	168,849	97	93	98	179,523	98	88	97
Lancashire	177,088	86	83	92	176,784	86	78	91
Leicestershire	127,316	86	76	93	128,015	81	79	94
Lincolnshire	48,247	93	78	89	53,097	95	86	94
Merseyside	246,646	74	79	90	259,166	80	78	91
Metropolitan Police	1,875,381	93	87	93	1,957,930	92	83	91
Norfolk	69,852	92	84	92	75,125	92	83	92
North Wales	71,690	82	89	90	75,046	83	88	91
North Yorkshire	43,423	–	–	–	51,979	–	–	–
Northamptonshire	69,581	95	89	97	77,543	91	91	91
Northumbria	227,129	83	86	91	231,750	85	86	92
Nottinghamshire	156,239	–	84	91	161,345	81	76	87
South Wales	196,599	–	–	–	210,412	83	83	90
South Yorkshire	180,197	87	83	89	194,592	85	82	89
Staffordshire	87,737	90	91	96	102,663	74	75	86
Suffolk	61,961	84	85	92	75,079	88	87	94
Surrey	82,399	85	82	90	90,001	82	81	91
Sussex	172,250	79	89	90	184,156	78	90	86
Thames Valley	240,002	78	81	93	251,131	80	79	91
Warwickshire	63,503	74	79	89	57,860	74	82	80
West Mercia	111,924	87	81	91	122,238	85	75	94
West Midlands	479,112	93	82	95	486,756	90	91	93
West Yorkshire	353,125	85	75	91	361,322	89	77	94
Wiltshire	48,243	80	72	89	51,380	82	75	93

HMIC Matrix of Indicators
N/A

	1999–2000				2000–01			
Forces	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 134 No. of 999 calls received*	*BVPI 23a per cent. Public satisfied 999 calls*	*BVPI 23b Victims of violence per cent. satisfied*	*BVPI 23c Victims burgdwell per cent. satisfied*
England and Wales	9,307,151	85	79	91	9,597,934	80	77	89
Avon and Somerset	242,832	80	70	86	247,089	74	70	89
Bedfordshire	74,464	83	68	82	96,448	78	67	81
Cambridgeshire	104,306	–	56	85	108,622	84	69	85
Cheshire	134,361	85	82	96	140,593	83	82	95
City of London	–	–	82	75		–	71	46
Cleveland	99,665	80	89	90	97,969	76	86	91
Cumbria	47,516	89	82	91	48,310	82	82	91
Derbyshire	126,060	77	78	89	133,524	72	68	87
Devon and Cornwall	206,823	88	68	86	224,879	83	65	75
Dorset	79,772	–	–	–	92,609	79	71	90
Durham	61,657	–	–	–	57,548	75	78	92
Dyfed-Powys	39,689	87	90	90	38,699	89	64	93
Essex	206,635	80	–	94	243,347	72	79	93
Gloucestershire	67,994	97	86	98	70,939	94	89	96
Greater Manchester	578,719	83	82	94	573,911	85	87	96
Gwent	73,226	–	72	89	62,867	–	–	–
Hampshire	269,027	78	82	95	341,999	77	84	93
Hertfordshire	132,878	86	81	100	164,191	83	82	86
Humberside	117,289	78	72	87	116,450	80	74	79
Kent	209,215	86	88	96	235,208	92	87	95
Lancashire	199,547	75	69	80	179,880	79	78	90
Leicestershire	147,905	81	88	94	153,115	76	85	86
Lincolnshire	66,665	88	87	92		75	67	82
Merseyside	292,549	74	74	85	311,183	65	72	85
Metropolitan Police	2,412,981	91	86	92	2,319,688	79	74	84
Norfolk	82,340	87	80	87	84,179	89	76	86
North Wales	91,610	85	83	93	95,442	86	84	93
North Yorkshire	75,513	82	67	78	72,120	83	53	98
Northamptonshire	84,243	87	88	90	92,769	76	79	88
Northumbria	245,139	90	88	89	256,646	76	82	81
Nottinghamshire	199,583	90	71	88	219,156	75	74	83
South Wales	252,018	–	–	–	238,890	81	88	95
South Yorkshire	218,692	83	73	87	225,552	84	81	91
Staffordshire	136,256	70	79	83	144,061	83	76	87
Suffolk	88,740	80	76	89	100,203	73	75	91
Surrey	102,628	79	78	87	134,192	84	71	88
Sussex	201,365	73	73	97	270,692	71	74	88
Thames Valley	285,747	77	79	91	312,420	74	75	91
Warwickshire	67,219	79	87	90	71,820	80	82	95
West Mercia	144,960	79	76	94	145,974	78	76	90
West Midlands	561,684	93	79	93	571,912	90	90	93
West Yorkshire	423,838	84	85	93	437,061	81	75	90
Wiltshire	53,801	82	74	86	65,777	83	65	87

Prison Transfers

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted offenders were transferred from prison to high security hospitals in each year since 1992. [68231]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Figures are available only for the years 1995 to 2000, and are given in the table:

2000	52
1999	44
1998	48
1997	34
1996	54
1995	47

Prison Visitors

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the National Association of Prison Visitors. [68220]

Mr. Hilary Benn: I have yet to meet the National Association of Prison Visitors, having been unable to attend their annual general meeting this year. I look forward to meeting them at a suitable point in the future.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison visitors there were in each of the past 10 years; and what plans he has to increase their number. [68219]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Statistics on the number of official prison visitors are not collated centrally. However, the contribution of such visitors is highly valued and it is an audited requirement for prisons to run prison visiting schemes, where there is demand. Moreover, the Prison Service continues to provide an annual grant to the National Association of Prison Visitors, and is actively assisting that organisation and others to increase and broaden the range of prison visitors.

Prisoners' Mental Health

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners receive *(a)* anti-psychotic medication and *(b)* atypical antipsychotics. [68218]

Mr. Hilary Benn: This information is not available in precisely the form requested. A survey of mental ill health in the prison population of England and Wales, undertaken in 1997 by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), showed that four per cent. of remanded and two per cent. of sentenced men were taking anti-psychotic medicine. The comparable figures for women were 14 per cent. and eight per cent. respectively.

The ONS did not collect information about which prisoners were being treated with atypical antipsychotics.

High Security Hospitals

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of convicted offenders in high security hospitals was in each year since 1992. [68217]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Figures in respect of transferred prisoners are available only for the years 1995 to 2000. They are shown in the table:

2000	235
1999	223
1998	214
1997	219
1996	233
1995	231

Figures for the total number of convicted offenders detained are not available. For restricted patients, who are all convicted offenders, the average figures are:

2000	1,170
1999	1,193
1998	1,188
1997	1,201
1996	1,221
1995	1,245
1994	1,132
1993	1,187
1992	1,218

Biological Standards Institute

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the *(a)* staffing structure, *(b)* works and *(c)* funding of the Biological Standards Institute in Northern Ireland. [68262]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The National Institute for Biological Standards and Control is based in England and is an Executive Non-departmental Public Body accountable to Ministers, being the Secretary of State for Health, The Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales and the Department of Health and Social Services, Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State assumes lead responsibility on behalf of the four United Kingdom health departments in dealing with the management issues of National Institute for Biological Standards and Control.

The functions of the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control are set out in Statutory Instrument 1976 No 917: to devise standards for the purity and potency of biological substances; to test biological substances; to prepare and distribute standards; to collaborate with the World Health Organisation, European Pharmacopoeia Commission and other international organisations; to carry out research.

Core funding from the Government for 2002–03 is £9.853 million. The Northern Ireland contribution to the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control in 2001–02 was £261,000.

Details of the staffing structure, the work and the funding of National Institute for Biological Standards and Control are in the public domain and can be found on the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control website at www.nibsc.ac.uk or in any of the published annual reports.

Criminal Justice Centres

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how criminal justice centres will assist in the processing of cases. [65337]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* Two innovative and integrated Criminal Justice Centres are being developed in Warwickshire. The Centres will speed up justice, give a better service to victims, witnesses and defendants and help in the local efforts to reduce crime and improve public safety by co-locating all of the county's criminal justice agencies.

Practitioners from the courts, Crown Prosecution Service, police, Probation Service and Youth Offending Teams will be working together with the National Health Service and voluntary organisations to create new partnership arrangements and modernise the existing single agency approaches. The Centres will deliver joined-up justice through improved business processes and Information Technology systems. This innovative approach will improve the quality and timeliness of prosecutions which should speed up the processing of cases.

Victims and witnesses will receive a better service through the new integrated Centres by receiving help and support at all stages of the justice process, especially while they are at court. Cases will be dealt with faster and more efficiently, so the stress of their involvement should also be reduced.

The project in Warwickshire is being reviewed as it progresses, so that the lessons learned can be applied quickly. This will allow us to examine the benefits of co-locating of all local criminal justice agencies and whether to extend this approach to other criminal justice system areas.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the re-offending rate of those leaving young offenders institutions was in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [68630]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* Re-offending rates are not normally measured as they rely on the self-reporting of offending by offenders.

The Home Office does however keep information on reconviction rates. In relation to those leaving Her Majesty's Prison Young Offender Institutions during 1997, before the youth justice reforms took effect, 76 per cent. of male young offenders and 58 per cent. of female young offenders were reconvicted within two years of release from custody during 1997.

Reconviction rates for those sentenced in July 2000, shortly after the new Detention and Training Order was introduced, are due in early 2003. Meanwhile, for those juveniles receiving non-custodial sentences in July 2000, we achieved a 14.6 per cent. reduction against the predicted reconviction rate was achieved.

Eden Strang

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what role his Department has played in the *(a)* release and *(b)* post-release arrangements of Eden Strang; and if he will make a statement. [67855]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* The Home Office played no role in the release arrangements for Mr. Strang. I regret that because of an unfortunate administrative error in the Home Office, authority for his detention as a restricted patient lapsed on 2 August 2000. Accordingly, his discharge was a matter for his hospital care team. Since his discharge, the Home Office has liaised closely with the local Multi Agency Public Protection Panel and established what the arrangements are for his safe care and supervision in the community. We have also learned of the concerns of the victims about his offence.

I take these concerns extremely seriously. It is not right that victims of such terrible events should have to learn from the media that the offender has been discharged. We have therefore published proposals in the Mental Health Bill to bring the rights of victims of mentally disordered offenders into line with those of the victims of violent or sexual offending in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

Helen Smith

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will order a new inquiry into the death of Helen Smith in Jeddah in May 1979. [68886]

Mr. Hilary Benn: An inquest was held into Helen Smith's death in 1982. Inquest proceedings can be reviewed by the courts and we are not aware of any grounds for the Government to take further action.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the target of handling 87,000 applications for criminal injuries compensation was not met in 2001–02. [68788]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The figure of 87,000 cases comprised 84,000 tariff scheme cases and 3,000 residual old scheme cases. The total was an early planning figure based on predictions that some 83,000 new applications would be received in that year, a figure that was eventually undershot by nearly 5,000.

The old scheme cases proved more complicated and difficult to resolve than had been anticipated, and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority had to devote greater staff effort to them. This, inevitably, affected output on tariff scheme cases.

Sajanji Jivaji Odedra

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Sajanji Jivaji Odedra and his special voucher application which have been referred from the Foreign Office to his Department. [69246]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my hon. Member on 24 July 2002.

London Probation Service

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies there are in the London Probation Service. [69429]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The London Probation Area vacancy rate in the context of the new structure is in the region of 130 posts, which covers staff of all grades and contract, out of a total staffing figure of 2,836.

The intention is to recruit 50 Trainee Probation Officers this year and offer 50 qualifying Trainee Probation Officers a permanent Probation Officer post in October.

Targets (Sentencing)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the targets for reducing the time from arrest to sentence will be settled. [68787]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* We are working on targets for reducing the time from arrest to sentence for all defendants and an announcement will be made in due course.

Pornography

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to use technology similar to that which the Government are introducing to stop tobacco advertising on the web to stop the advertising of pornographic material on the web. [69434]

Mr. Hilary Benn: There are no plans to use technology to stop tobacco advertising on the web. The Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill before Parliament at the moment will, if passed, make the advertising of tobacco products a criminal offence in most circumstances. The offence could be committed by advertising a tobacco product over the web, just as it could be committed in other circumstances, as the law applies equally online as offline. It is already a criminal offence to advertise pornographic material featuring children.

As regards material which may be legal but offensive to many people, the Government supports the development of tools, such as the rating and filtering system operated by the Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA), to encourage Internet users to regulate their own Internet experience or that of their children.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take powers to require *(a)* pornographic sites and *(b)* emails advertising pornography to be clearly identifiable as to their nature. [69436]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Government believes that a range of methods is required to provide parents and other Internet users with a way of exercising choice about what kind of material they and their children have access to.

Easy to use rating and filtering systems, such as that operated by the Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA), have an important role to play as does greater public awareness of simple measures which can be taken to protect personal information and help avoid unwanted e-mails (SPAM).

These issues are being considered by a Sub Group of the Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet which was established in March 2001 by my right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary (Mr. Straw). The Task Force is a partnership of: representatives from internet service and communication providers; the Internet Watch Foundation (which provides a hotline for the public to report child pornography); PC and software retailers and manufacturers; child welfare organisations; the main opposition parties; law enforcement agencies and academics. Among other things, the Task Force is looking at good practice models for providers of chat services, instant messaging and web services which will promote the use of clear and accessible safety advice and better signposting of content.

The problem of SPAM including those containing pornography is also being considered by the Sub-Group.

Child Abuse

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will share information with other countries about UK citizens who have been convicted of offences against children. [69126]

Mr. Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

If a person is convicted of a relevant sex offence against a child they become subject to the notification requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997.

New provisions in the Criminal Justice and Courts Services Act 2000 (including regulations made under the power contained therein) provide that if an offender subject to the notification requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 leaves the United Kingdom for eight days or longer, he must notify the police at least 24 hours prior to his departure: of his date of departure; the country to which he is travelling; the identity of the carrier he intends to use; his point of arrival in the country; details of his first night's accommodation; if he intends to return to the United Kingdom; and if so, the date of his return and point of arrival.

On such a notification, the police will assess the level of risk the offender poses and then make a decision over whether to pass on this information to the authorities of the destination country or not.

Prisons

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons are the *(a)* most expensive and *(b)* cheapest in terms of cost per prisoner; and what criteria govern the differential allocation of funds to these prisons. [73214]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Figures published in the Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts for 2001–02 show that Whitemoor (high security) prison had the highest cost per prisoner at £54,184 and Ford open prison the lowest, at £14,968.

Cost per prisoner figures shown in the annual report for private sector establishments include an element of capital repayment and the figures are not comparable with the public sector.

Criteria used to determine the allocation of funds include internal benchmarking of prisons of similar size and category and assessments of the grading of staff necessary to maintain a safe, decent and healthy environment and to deliver regimes effective in reducing crime. Full consideration is given to the security classification of prisons within the estate, costs being higher in high security prisons and lower in the open estate where the risk of escape and danger to the public is reduced.

Category B Prisons

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the provision of medical facilities within category B prisons; what the medical staffing complement is of each prison; how many fell below that for a substantial period in the last year for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [67195]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* All prisons, including those holding category B prisoners, are required to work with their local National Health Service (NHS) partners to identify the health needs of their local prison population and provide appropriate services to meet those needs.

Information about staffing levels is not held centrally in the form requested. The performance of health care centres is assessed on a quarterly basis, against a range of criteria, including the adequacy of staffing. The Prison Service is working with the NHS to ensure that minimum, safe staffing levels in prison health centres are maintained.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how many prisoner days prisoners in each category B prison were held in segregation pending transfer to a secure mental hospital in the last 12 months. [67197]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* Information is not collected centrally in the form requested. Prisoners who are awaiting transfer to secure National Health Service (NHS) hospitals are normally located in the prison healthcare centres. Where prisoners have to be placed in segregation, for control or other reasons, Prison Orders require that they be visited by a doctor or registered nurse, as a minimum requirement, at least once every three days, and visited more frequently where health needs dictate.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many disciplinary adjudications and rulings under Rule 45 were made in each category of prison in the last year for which information is available. [67196]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* The number of disciplinary adjudications in each category of prison in 2000 is given in the table. This includes adjudications which were not proved. Data on the number of rulings under Rule 45 in each category of prison is not available centrally.

All establishments			120,869
Males			
	All establishments		112,054
	Prisons		70,693
		Local Prisons	36,520
		Open Training Prisons	3,156
		Closed Training Prisons	31,017
	Young Offender Institutions		41,361
		Remand Centres	12,248
		Open Young Offender Institution	1,106
		Closed Young Offender Institution	15,874
		Juvenile Young Offender Institution	12,133
Female			
	All establishments		8,815
	Prisons		7,267
		Local Prisons	3,528
		Open Training Prisons	524
		Closed Training Prisons	3,215
	Young Offender Institution		1,548
		Open Young Offender Institution	109
		Closed Young Offender Institution	1,439

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category B prisoners have been released on licence *(a)* tagged and *(b)* untagged from each category B prison in the last year for which information is available. [62382]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The table gives a breakdown, by prison, of all category B prisoners released during the 12 months ending 31 May 2002 (i) on licence and not subject to electronic monitoring as a licence condition (ii) on licence and subject to electronic as a licence condition and (iii) on licence and subject to the Home Detention Curfew scheme.

Prison	*Total number of category B releases*	*On licence and subject to electronic monitoring as a licence condition*	*On licence and not subject to electronic monitoring as a licence condition*	*On licence and subject to the home detention curfew scheme*
	853	8	821	24
Acklington	1	–	1	–
Albany	48	1	47	–
Altcourse	2	–	2	–
Bedford	9	–	8	1
Belmarsh	21	–	20	1
Birmingham	17	–	17	–
Blakenhurst	3	–	3	–
Blundeston	4	–	4	–
Bristol	45	1	34	10
Brixton	8	–	7	1
Bullingdon	33	–	31	2
Camp Hill	2	–	2	–
Canterbury	3	–	3	–
Cardiff	8	–	8	–
Channings Wood	1	–	–	1
Chelmsford	8	–	8	–
Dartmoor	15	–	15	–
Doncaster	23	–	23	–
Dorchester	5	–	5	–
Dovegate	10	–	10	–
Durham	17	–	16	1
Elmley	11	1	10	–

Prison	Total number of category B releases	On licence and subject to electronic monitoring as a licence condition	On licence and not subject to electronic monitoring as a licence condition	On licence and subject to the home detention curfew scheme
Erlestoke	1	–	1	–
Exeter	9	1	8	–
Forest Bank	1	–	1	–
Frankland	43	–	43	–
Full Sutton	33	–	33	–
Garth	49	–	49	–
Gloucester	4	–	4	–
Grendon	6	–	6	–
Guys Marsh	1	–	1	–
Highdown	17	1	16	–
Highpoint	1	–	1	–
Holme House	23	–	23	–
Hull	9	–	9	–
Kingston	3	–	3	–
Leeds	8	–	8	–
Leicester	5	–	5	–
Lewes	3	–	3	–
Lincoln	6	1	5	–
Liverpool	7	–	7	–
Long Lartin	22	–	22	–
Lowden Grange	21	–	21	–
Maidstone	9	–	9	–
Manchester	23	1	21	1
Mount	2	–	2	–
Norwich	4	–	4	–
Nottingham	5	1	4	–
Parc	14	–	14	–
Parkhurst	28	–	27	1
Pentonville	11	–	10	1
Preston	5	–	5	
Risley	1	–	1	
Rye Hill	6	–	6	–
Shepton Mallet	1	–	1	–
Stafford	1	–	1	–
Swaleside	19	–	19	–
Swansea	2	–	2	–
Verne	1	–	1	–
Wakefield	20	–	20	–
Wandsworth	76	–	75	1
Wayland	1	–	1	–
Weare	2	–	1	1
Whitemoor	16	–	16	–
Winchester	13	–	12	1
Wolds	7	–	7	–
Woodhill	2	–	2	–
Wormwood Scrubs	16	–	15	1
Wymott	2	–	2	–

Prison Suicides

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison suicides among *(a)* men and *(b)* women there were in prisons in England and Wales in the last 12 months. [68449]

Mr. Hilary Benn: There have been 87 self-inflicted deaths among prisoners in England and Wales during the last 12 months to 8 July 2002. Further information is given in the table.

	Female Prisoners	Male Prisoners
Juveniles (aged 15–17)	0	3
Young offenders (aged 18–20)	1	7
Adults (aged 21 and over)	5	71
Total	6	81

Police Sick Leave

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Chief Constable of Cheshire on the level of sick leave in the force; and if he will make a statement. [36506]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Sickness absence rates in Cheshire Constabulary in 2000–01 were as follows:

	Average days sick leave per person
Police Officers	13.7
Support Staff	15.8

I am informed by the Chief Constable of Cheshire that the force has recently improved sickness absence management procedures and are now seeing an improvement in sickness absence for both police officers and support staff.

In 1997 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary published a report "Lost Time" about sickness absence in police forces. The Home Office has recently published "In Sickness and In Health: Reducing sickness absence in the police service', which reported the results of research into this subject. The reports made a number of recommendations to Chief Constables aimed at improving the management of sickness absence.

The Home Office is currently developing the Strategy for a Healthy Police Service, in consultation with the police service, which will help bring about substantial reductions in police sickness.

WORK AND PENSIONS

State Pension

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the level of the state pension since April 1998, in comparison with increases in *(a)* average earnings and *(b)* the retail price index. [71484]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Since April 1998, the rate of basic state retirement pension has increased from £64.70 to £75.50, an increase of 17 per cent.

If we had uprated the basic state retirement pension in the same period:

(a) by average earnings, the increase would have been 19 per cent.;

(b) by RPI, the increase would have been 10 per cent.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the value would be of the 25 pence age addition to the retirement pension if it had been increased in each year since its introduction in line with *(a)* prices and *(b)* average earnings. [70233]

Mr. McCartney: The 25p age addition would be worth:

(a) £2.19 per week had it been up-rated in line with prices; and

(b) £3.77 per week had it been up-rated in line with earnings,

since its introduction in 1971.

These values relate to the value of the age addition for 2002–03.

However, it should be noted that since 2000 all pensioners aged over 75 receive free TV licences, currently worth £112 per year and of pensioners aged 80 or over, the poorest single pensioners are £1,000 a year better off, and couples almost £1,400 better off in real terms when compared with the 1997 system.

Notes:

1. The Office of National Statistics' "RPI: Al Items Index Table (table RP02)" has been used to up-rate in line with prices.

2. The Office of National Statistics' "Average Earnings Index for the Whole Economy" has been used to up-rate in line with earnings.

State Pension Credit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the estimated administration costs are of the state pension credit in each of the next five full financial years; and what percentage this represents in each of the next five full financial years of the total estimated cost of the state pension credit. [69276]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The Pension Service will be responsible for delivering Pension Credit along with Retirement Pension and other benefits for pensioners. Ultimately benefits will be delivered in a coordinated way so that administration is delivered as part of a seamless process.

The costs to The Pension Service of delivering Pension Credit over the period covered by the Spending Review 2002 settlement (2003–04 to 2005–06) are estimated at £670 million.[1]

These are the costs of converting 1.8 million MIG cases and bringing on an additional 1 million Pension Credit cases. Steady state running costs will be set in future Spending Reviews.

Minimum Income Guarantee/Pension Credit programme expenditure will be £17.4 billion over the Spending Review period 2003–04 to 2005–06.[2,3,4,5]

Notes:

1. These include the estimate of staff costs for processing Pension Credit and for supporting functions within The Pension Service. As The Pension Service continues to develop a more integrated approach to benefit services these costs will be subject to change. They exclude one-off implementation costs such as changes to the Department's IT systems and any apportionment of Departmental overheads.

2. The Minimum Income Guarantee will be replaced by the Pension Credit from October 2003.

3. Programme expenditure beyond the year 2005–06 is not available.

4. Costs are given in nominal terms.

5. Programme costs relate to Pension Credit only and do not include any additional Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit expenditure resulting from the introduction of Pension Credit.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individual pensioners are represented by his target to pay pension credit to at least three million pensioner households by 2006. [71782]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The PSA target, as published in the Spending Review 2002, is for 3 million pensioner households to be in receipt of Pension Credit by 2006. It is not possible to estimate with confidence the number of individual pensioners who will receive Pension Credit by 2006.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of occupational pensions that are in independent trusteeship. [73133]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The information is not collected. Independent trustees can be appointed to pension schemes for a wide variety of reasons to on-going schemes and those where a sponsoring employer has become insolvent.

On 1 April 2002, we introduced regulations to help speed up the process of winding-up pension schemes and to increase the accountability of those involved in running schemes. Specifically, the measures include a requirement for; trustees to report to Opra within one month of their becoming aware that the scheme does not have an independent trustee; and the Insolvency Practitioner or Official Receiver to appoint an independent trustee within 3 months of becoming aware of the need for one.

Pension Payment

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1009W, on pension payment, *(a)* how many letters were sent out to people within four months of retirement age and *(b)* how many claim packages were filled out and returned as a result in each year since 1997. [66586]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested concerning the number of letters sent out to people within four months of pension age is detailed in the table. No statistics are kept of the number of claim forms that are filled out and returned as a result of the letters that are sent out four months in advance of pension age- claim forms can also be obtained via the Pension Service Website or from any of our Local Offices. Details of the number of claims to Retirement Pension that have been received in the relevant period(s) have been included in the table.

Period	*No of letters*	*No of claims Received*
01.04.97 to 31.03.98	571,970	602,696
01.04.98 to 31.03.99	568,264	628,804
01.04.99 to 31.03.00	563,395	621,967
01.04.00 to 31.03.01	581,416	506,298
01.04.01 to 31.03.02	655,308	556,626

Consultation

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to what extent he has conformed to Criterion 6 of Cabinet Office guidelines on written consultations in relation to his consultation on the pension statement; and if he will make a statement. [54230]

Mr. McCartney: We aim to follow Cabinet Office guidance on all written consultation where appropriate.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what public consultations have been commenced by his Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72068]

Mr. McCartney: The titles, start and end dates of public consultations commenced by Department for Work and Pensions since 1 April 2002 are listed in the table. They can all be found on www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2002/index.htm

Title of consultation	*Start Date*	*End Date*
Revised code of practice on for gathering of information as required in Social Security Fraud Act 2001	8 April 2002	20 April 2002
Consultation on Three Recommendations in the Myners' report—"Institutional Investment in the UK—a review"	4 February 2002	3 May 2002
Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (OPRA) quinquennial review	10 May 2002	2 August 2002
Measuring Child Poverty	18 April 2002	10 July 2002
The future of the residential allowance component of Income Support, Minimum Income Guarantee, Jobseeker's Allowance	22 May 2002	31 August 2002
Equality, Opportunity, and Independence for all (Race Relations Amendment Act)	30 May 2002	30 September 2002

Retirement Benefits

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps are taken by his Department to advise those contemplating moving abroad for retirement or extended absence of the implications of the entitlement to retirement benefits. [71182]

Mr. McCartney: Individuals who are considering moving abroad are responsible for considering the financial impact of such a move. They can seek information and advice on the implications on entitlement to retirement benefits in a number of DWP publications.

Leaflet NP46 "Retirement Pensions" (which is widely available in Social Security Offices and Post Offices) advises pensioners of the effect of going abroad on their retirement pension.

Besides giving general information, it also advises people who are thinking of moving abroad to get leaflet GL29 "Going abroad and social security benefits" from their Social Security Office. In addition, the Department's International Pensions Centre provides oral and written advice to people who intend to move abroad.

Information is also available on the DWP website—www.dwp.gov.uk/lifeevent

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost to his Department would have been in each of the last five years of unfreezing state pension for those retired abroad in countries without a full reciprocal social security agreement. [71183]

Mr. McCartney: Due to data limitations, we are unable to provide meaningful estimates prior to 1999. However, such information as we can provide is set out in the table below

Year	Additional cost of paying pensions at an unfrozen rate (£ million)
2000–01	280
2001–02	330
2002–03	370

Notes:

1. Costs are shown in cash terms, i.e. not adjusted for inflation.
2. Costs include all components of State Pensions.
3. Costs are rounded to the nearest £10 million.
4. To fully restore the state pension to what it would have been had it not been frozen will cost around £3 billion

Pension Service

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, (1) pursuant to the oral statement of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, *Official Report,* column 173W, on the Pension Service, whether the decision to carry out a home visit to a pensioner will be made by the pensioner; [72842]

(2) in what circumstances a pensioner requesting a home visit through the Pension Service would be denied one. [68988]

Mr. McCartney: By bringing together pension-related services customers of The Pension Service will be given a dedicated service in a way that is convenient for them.

Many pensioners already deal with us over the phone—over two-thirds of Retirement Pension claims are made via the Pensions Direct telephone service—and this will increasingly be the case. So we are developing 26 modern centres using the most up-to-date equipment to deal with queries accurately and efficiently.

These centres will be backed up by local services delivered in partnership with organisations very used to dealing with pensioners' needs, provided in locations accessible to pensioners. The local service will employ twice as many people undertaking similar activity in the old Benefits Agency.

Where a pensioner requires a home visit we expect to be able to provide one. Pensioners will have that option—but in reality the vast majority of queries will be dealt with swiftly and effectively without the need for a home visit. Indeed a simple call to a Pension Centre is likely to be the most effective and satisfactory way of dealing with customers' inquiries without the delay of appointments.

This is a period of change but it is change to create a better service. As the Pension Service is rolled out in each area existing pensioners will receive letters explaining those changes fully and giving them all necessary contact details.

Pensioners deserve a decent modern service tailored to their needs; The Pension Service will deliver it.

Pickering Report

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the cost to the Treasury of the proposals in the Pickering report to end *(a)* the compulsory indexation of occupational pensions and *(b)* the compulsory provision of survivor spouses benefits. [72998]

Mr. McCartney: We are currently carrying out analysis of the proposals in the Pickering report and we will respond to them in our autumn Green Paper.

Pensions Advice

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to ensure that trained staff are always available in Jobcentre Plus offices to deliver pensions advice in areas where there is no local pension service in place; and if he will make a statement. [67858]

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what opportunities there will be for pensioners to receive face-to-face advice on their particular case under the new Pensions Service and Jobcentre Plus schemes for *(a)* exceptional and *(b)* day-to-day cases. [72189]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions is currently creating an entirely new service focused on the needs of today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

By bringing together pension-related services customers of The Pension Service will be given a dedicated service in a way that is convenient for them.

Many pensioners already deal with us over the phone—over two-thirds of Retirement Pension claims are made via the Pensions Direct telephone service—and this will increasingly be the case. So we are developing 26 modern centres using the most up-to-date equipment to deal with queries accurately and efficiently.

These centres will be backed up by local services delivered in partnership with organisations very used to dealing with pensioners' needs, provided in locations accessible to pensioners. The local service will employ twice as many people undertaking similar activity in the old Benefits Agency.

The Pension Service is committed to providing the best for our customers and training holds the key to that. We will provide technical training to ensure that staff can do their job well and enhance their competencies in areas such as customer service. They will focus entirely on the needs of pensioners, ensuring an expert service which we believe our customers will want to use.

We do recognise that there will be occasions when customers with a pension query might visit a Jobcentre Plus office in their community, particularly whilst the new arrangements are being introduced. Jobcentre Plus staff will deal with pensioners visiting such offices courteously and efficiently. They will ensure that the customers are given appropriate contact details for the Pension Service where there will be trained staff who will be able to deal effectively with their query.

In the meantime, our customers can continue to access our services via the existing social security network until the new local arrangements apply.

This is a period of change but it is change to create a better service. As the new Pension Service is rolled out in each area existing pensioners will receive letters explaining those changes fully and giving them all necessary contact details.

Pensioners deserve a decent modern service tailored to their needs; The Pension Service will deliver it.

Pension Service Staff

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when Pension Service staff *(a)* based in local pension surgeries and *(b)* carrying out home visits will be able to access central Pension Service IT records; and what arrangements for accessing pensioner records and adding new details will be in place until then. [68987]

Mr. McCartney: It is planned that local service staff will be able to view a customer's details and record a narrative of ongoing action while on a home visit or conducting a surgery. We will bring in this functionality as soon as possible, but it will not be available for some time.

In the meantime local service staff will preview their cases at their base office where they will have access to the appropriate customer records.

They will not be able to input or amend any details of a customer's claim. The design intention has always been that all completed claim forms, information and verification details will be forwarded to the appropriate pension centre, which as "owner" of the claim, will be responsible for inputting information and amending existing records.

State Second Pension

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 24 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 677W, how much he expects to spend promoting the state second pension during the current financial year. [69937]

Mr. McCartney: For details of the costs of this activity for the last financial year I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave today to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Vincent Cable).

An estimate of the final spend of the State Second Pension publicity activity for the financial year 2002–03 is not currently available as final decisions on the campaign have yet to be made.

Jobcentre Plus/Pension Service

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff will be employed in *(a)* Jobcentre Plus and *(b)* the Pension Service whose primary responsibility is face-to-face contact with the public (i) this year and (ii) in each future year for which projections have been made. [71784]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Staffing in Jobcentre Plus is not broken down by this categorisation. On current assumptions, the local service for The Pension Service that we are starting to establish from October 2002 will require around 2,400 staff, once full national rollout is achieved.

Child Support

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the latest anticipated date is by which the computer system to support delivery of the new child support scheme will be completed and fully tested; and what the latest anticipated dates are for *(a)* new clients and *(b)* existing clients to be assessed under the new scheme; [72774]

(2) if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in introducing the new child support scheme. [72775]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State (Mr. Darling) 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 315–324.

Testing of the new IT system continues, but no firm date for completion of those tests has yet been agreed. Accordingly, no date for the commencement of the new scheme, either for new or existing clients has been set.

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the arrangements for the new child support scheme will come into effect. [73637]

Mr. Malcolm Wicks: The then Secretary of State's Statement to the House on 20 March 2002 made clear that this Government is not willing to take the risk of introducing the new child support scheme until we are confident that it will work properly.

Testing of the new IT system continues, but no firm date for completion of those tests has yet been agreed. Accordingly, no date for the commencement of the new scheme has been set.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will investigate the level of accuracy of Child Support Agency assessments. [69742]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Roy dated 23 July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask if the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will investigate the level of accuracy of Child Support Agency assessments.

The Agency makes great efforts to ensure the accuracy of child maintenance assessments. These include;

—requesting verification of all income declared by clients before the maintenance is calculated;

—training and coaching at all stages of a maintenance application through workshops and weekly meetings to establish common understanding and best practices;

—establishing checking teams to assess the accuracy of work being processed;

—checking the cash value accuracy of a percentage of assessments by a centrally based team, the Monitoring and Guidance Unit.

All this has contributed to the achievement in the last year of accuracy, to the nearest penny, on the last action taken on a case of 82.5 per cent. against a target of 78 per cent.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost has been to his Department of the child support reforms new rules implementation computer system; what delivery date was specified in the contract for this system; what *(a)* financial penalties to the contractor and *(b)* costs to his Department accrue as a consequence of the late delivery of this computer system; and if he will make a statement. [71557]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Oaten dated 23 July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask what the cost has been to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Department of the Child Support Reforms New Rules Implementation computer system; what delivery date was specified in the contract for this system; what *(a)* financial penalties to the contractor and *(b)* costs to his Department accrue as a consequence of the late delivery of this computer system; and if he will make a statement.

I am sorry that I cannot provide the costs of the new IT for the Child Support Agency as it is commercially confidential. I can say that the planned total cost of the project to implement Child Support Reform over the 10 year period of the business case was £651 million.

The planned delivery date for the new system that was specified in the contract was in line with the timetable for the implementation of the Child Support Reforms in April this year.

With regard to the financial penalties to the contractor, we will take stock of the position when testing is complete and we are able to recommend to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions a revised commencement date for the next phase of Child Support Reforms.

The cost of the delay to the implementation of the new child support scheme is highly dependent on the completion of testing to the new computer system. Until that testing is complete and a date for the new scheme announced, the total cost cannot be accurately stated.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) in how many cases a reduced benefit was given under section 46(5) of the Child Support Act 1991 in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02; [67235]

(2) in how many cases the Secretary of State decided that a parent with care withdrew an application for maintenance after claiming good cause for not co-operating with the Child Support Agency in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02; [67236]

(3) in how many cases the Secretary of State considered whether a parent with care was required to co-operate with the Child Support Agency in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02; [67238]

(4) in how many cases the Secretary of State decided a parent with care *(a)* had and *(b)* had not good cause for not co-operating with the Child Support Agency in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02; [67239]

(5) how many maintenance application forms were *(a)* issued and *(b)* received by the Child Support Agency in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02. [67240]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith.

Letter from Doug Smith to Ms Baird, dated 24 July 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You have asked five questions:

1. "In how many cases a reduced benefit was given under section 46 of the Child Support Act 1991 in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02";

We do not hold this information for years prior to 1997. For subsequent years the information you require is:

Year to 31st March:	
1998	74,280
1999	49,688
2000	26,352
2001	13,422
2002	8,169

Following the introduction in April 1998 of face-to-face interviews with parents with care claiming benefits, there has been a sharp rise in compliance and a corresponding fall in the number of reduced benefit directions issued. These interviews provide the opportunity to explain to parents with care the advantages of co-operating with the Agency as well as the good cause rules.

2. "How many maintenance application forms were (a) issued and (b) received by the Child Support Agency in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02".

We do not hold this information for years prior to 1997 and do not record the number of application forms issued. The following information represents the number of application forms received by the Agency in each year:

Year to 31st March:	
1998	436,376
1999	400,747
2000	369,226
2001	303,797
2002	365,414

3. "In how many cases the Secretary of State decided a parent with care (a) had and (b) had not "good cause" for not co-operating with the Child Support Agency in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02";

We do not hold the information for years prior to 1997. For subsequent years the information you require is:

Year to 31st March:	Had good cause	Did not have good cause
1998	30,952	108,193
1999	28,591	75,808
2000	25,234	38,049
2001	32,465	19,209
2002	17,511	11,271

4. "In how many cases the Secretary of State considered whether a parent with care was required to co-operate with the Child Support Agency in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02";

The number of cases considered is the total of the figures given in my previous answer:

Year to 31st March:	
1998	139,145
1999	104,399
2000	63,283
2001	51,674
2002	28,782

5. "In how many cases the Secretary of State decided that a parent with care withdrew an application for maintenance after claiming 'good cause' for not co-operating with the Child Support Agency in each year from 1993–94 to 2001–02";

I regret that this information is not available.

I am sorry not to be provide all the information requested but hope that what is available is helpful to you.

Lone Parents

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions of the lone parents subject to sanctions for non-attendance at compulsory personal adviser meetings, what was the average value of the sanction in terms of lost benefit; how long, on average, the sanctions were applied for; what was the longest period of sanction; how many lone parents subject to suspension had their sanctions reversed and under what circumstances; what analysis has been undertaken of the reasons for non-attendance at interview; and what evaluation has been undertaken on the effectiveness and impact of sanctions. [67550]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are giving lone parents more choices and more help than ever before to move off welfare and into work, in return for greater responsibility to consider the help that is on offer. On 30 April 2001 we introduced compulsory Personal Adviser (PA) meetings for lone parents across the country to ensure that they are aware of the help available. In cases where a lone parent is unable to attend a PA meeting, or the lone parent's circumstances mean that the meeting would not be appropriate, then the requirement to take part in the PA meeting can be deferred to a later date or waived completely.

When PA meetings were introduced they were compulsory for all lone parents making a new or repeat claim for Income Support whose youngest child was of school age. From April 2002 these meetings have been extended to all lone parents making new or repeat claims with a youngest child aged three years or over. In addition, since October 2001, any lone parent making a new or repeat claim for benefit at one of our integrated Jobcentre Plus offices is required to take part in a Work Focused Interview, regardless of the age of their youngest child.

Attendance at a PA meeting at the new/repeat claim stage is a condition of entitlement to benefit. If a lone parent chooses not to attend the meeting they will not receive any benefit. For the majority of lone parents who do attend, review meetings are held six months into their claim and then annually while they are still in receipt of Income Support.

At the same time as PA meetings were being introduced for new/repeat claims they also began to be rolled out to lone parents already in receipt of Income Support. During 2001–02 annual PA meetings became compulsory for lone parents in receipt of Income Support with a youngest child aged between 13 and 15 years old. From April 2002, the annual PA meetings were extended to include lone parents with a youngest child over the age of 9.

These lone parents are given up to three pre-notified appointments and if they fail, without good cause, to take part in the PA meeting they are subject to a benefit sanction. This sanction is equivalent to 20 per cent. of the Income Support personal allowance for a single person aged 25 or over (currently £10.74 per week). This sanction remains in force until the lone parent takes part in a PA meeting.

The number of lone parents having their benefit not awarded or sanctioned following non attendance at a PA meeting is in the table:

Lone Parent Personal Adviser Meetings (To June 2002)

	No. entering PA meeting Process	*No. of Adverse decisions made*	*No. of decisions overturned*
New/repeat claim	131,746	875	11
Existing claim	83,653	1,665	81
At review	N/A	191	4

Adverse decisions can be overturned if the lone parent demonstrates that they had good cause for not attending the meeting. Information on the individual circumstances of the lone parents is not collected centrally.

As the sanctions can be indefinite we are not currently able to give estimates for the average length of these sanctions or the total value of the sanction in terms of lost benefit. Qualitative and case study research into the reasons for non-attendance at PA meetings is planned to start later this year. We plan to publish the findings of the research in spring 2003.

Automated Credit Transfer

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he last met *(a)* the National Federation of Sub-postmasters and *(b)* Postwatch to discuss plans for the move to automated credit transfer from April 2003. [70016]

Malcolm Wicks: Department of Trade and Industry ministers and officials meet the NFSP. Department for Work and Pensions officials also meet the NFSP and Postwatch.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to ensure that recipients of benefits who do not choose to have benefits paid by automated credit transfer will retain the option of payment by order book. [73299]

Mr. McCartney: Paying benefits and pensions directly into accounts provides a safe, convenient, more modern and efficient way of making payments. The number of customers paid by this way increased by 800,000 in 2001.

We will start to move customers to payments into their accounts in 2003. In doing so, we will gradually phase out order books and girocheques.

The introduction of universal banking services means that there should only be a very small number of people who cannot genuinely obtain a suitable account, including accounts which can be used at post offices.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which advertising agency has won the contract to publicise automated credit transfer; and how much the contract is worth. [72425]

Malcolm Wicks: We have appointed Miles Calcraft Brigginshaw Duffy to work on development of the information campaign which will aim to give customers the factual information they need about the choices they have as we reform the way we pay benefits and pensions.

The advertising agency has been procured via the COI Communications framework contract. The advertising agency will receive commission based on the amount of work undertaken. As the campaign is currently being planned it is not possible to say how much the contract will be worth to the advertising agency.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which banks can receive benefit payments on behalf of their customers through automated credit transfer. [72424]

Malcolm Wicks: All the UK banks and building societies offer accounts which can receive payments through automated credit transfer.

Benefit Payment Methods

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what contingency plans are in place for April 2003 should the Universal Bank not be established on time. [70423]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 5 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 630W.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of people receive their *(a)* state pension, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* disability living allowance and *(d)* invalid care allowance via automated credit transfer and encashment of girocheques broken down by constituency. [70415]

Malcolm Wicks: Statistical information relating to the proportion of people that receive their benefit direct into their bank/building society, by girocheque and other methods of payment, broken down by constituency, has been placed in the library.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the generic features of each type of account into which benefits will be paid from 2003 onwards. [72426]

Malcolm Wicks: Benefits may be paid into a wide range of accounts, including standard current accounts, building society accounts, basic bank accounts and, from 2003, the card account at the Post Office. The Financial Services Authority publish a leaflet ("No bank account? Why it could pay you to have one") setting out the generic features of the different types of bank account. The most important differences between the different types of account are:

—Current accounts normally offer a cheque book and overdraft facilities;

—Basic bank accounts and, from 2003, the card account at the Post Office are operated using a plastic card and a PIN number and do not provide overdraft facilities;

—Basic and current accounts offer facilities to pay for goods and services in shops, to pay bills by Direct Debit and Standing Order, to accept payment in of wages and other credits, and to obtain cash in a variety of ways, including from cash machines and "Cashback" in some shops;

—Some current accounts already provide for payments in and cash withdrawals at post offices; from 2003 all the major banks will make their basic accounts accessible at post offices;'

—The card account at the Post Office, available from 2003, will only accept payment in of benefits and tax credits, and will only permit cash withdrawals at post offices.

The Department is currently planning an information campaign to give customers the factual information they need to make an informed choice about which type of account to use when we start to pay benefits and pensions into accounts from 2003.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many recipients of benefits in *(a)* Roxburgh and Berwickshire and *(b)* Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale there are, broken down by the method of payment. [70416]

Mr. Malcolm Wicks: The information has been placed in the Library.

Benefit Take-up (Scotland)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals in *(a)* Banff and Buchan and *(b)* Scotland were entitled to but did not claim (i) guardian's allowance, (ii) income support, (iii) disability living allowance, (iv) attendance allowance, (v) disablement benefit, (vi) reduced earnings allowance, (vii) retirement allowance, (viii) widow's pension, (ix) bereavement payment, (x) graduated retirement allowance, (xi) severe disablement allowance, (xii) invalid care allowance, (xiii) child benefit, (xiv) incapacity benefit, (xv) maternity allowance, (xvi) widow's payment and (xvii) widowed mother's payment in each year since 1997. [72841]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many individuals in Scotland were in receipt of *(a)* guardian's allowance, *(b)* income support, *(c)* child benefit, *(d)* working families tax credit, *(e)* disabled person's tax credit, *(f)* incapacity benefit, *(g)* maternity allowance, *(h)* widow's payment, *(i)* widowed mother's allowance, *(j)* widow's pensions, *(k)* bereavement payment, *(l)* graduated retirement allowance, *(m)* severe disablement allowance, *(n)* invalid care allowance, *(o)* disability living allowance, *(p)* attendance allowance, *(q)* disablement benefit, *(r)* reduced earnings allowance and *(s)* retirement allowance in each year since 1997; [72784]

(2) how many individuals in Banff and Buchan were in receipt of *(a)* child benefit, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* maternity allowance, *(d)* widow's payment, *(e)* widowed mother's allowance, *(f)* widow's pension, *(g)* bereavement payment, *(h)* retirement allowance, *(i)* guardian's allowance, *(j)* income support, *(k)* graduated retirement allowance, *(l)* severe disablement allowance, *(m)* invalid care allowance, *(n)* disability living allowance, *(o)* attendance allowance, *(p)* disablement benefit and *(q)* reduced earning's allowance in each year since 1997. [72821]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information has been placed in the Library. Tax credits are the responsibility of the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many individuals in Angus were entitled to but did not claim *(a)* child benefit, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* maternity allowance, *(d)* widow's payment, *(e)* widowed mother's allowance, *(f)* widow's pension, *(g)* disablement benefit, *(h)* reduced earning's allowance, *(i)* retirement allowance, *(j)* guardian's allowance, *(k)* income support, *(l)* child benefit, *(m)* bereavement benefit, *(n)* graduated retirement allowance, *(o)* severe disablement allowance, *(p)* invalid care allowance, *(q)* disability living allowance and *(r)* attendance allowance in each year since 1997; [72797]

(2) how many individuals in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* the UK were entitled to but did not claim (i) incapacity benefit, (ii) maternity allowance, (iii) widow's payment, (iv) widowed mother's allowance, (v) widow's pension, (vi) attendance allowance, (vii) disablement benefit, (viii) reduced earnings allowance, (ix) retirement allowance, (x) guardian's allowance, (xi) income support, (xii) bereavement payment, (xiii) graduated retirement allowance, (xiv) severe disablement allowance, (xv) invalid care allowance and (xvi) disability living allowance in each year since 1997. [72801]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested for the Angus constituency is not available.

Estimates of the number of families entitled to income related benefits but not claiming them in Great Britain are published in "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take-Up". Copies of this annual publication are in the Library.

Information on the other benefits listed is not available.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many individuals in the constituency of North Tayside were entitled to but did not claim *(a)* child benefit, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* maternity allowance, *(d)* widow's payment, *(e)* widowed mother's allowance and *(f)* widow's pension in each year since 1997; [72799]

(2) how many individuals in North Tayside were entitled to but did not claim *(a)* bereavement payment, *(b)* graduated retirement allowance, *(c)* severe disablement allowance, *(d)* invalid care allowance, *(e)* disability living allowance, *(f)* attendance allowance, *(g)* disablement benefit, *(h)* reduced earnings allowance, *(i)* retirement allowance, *(j)* guardian's allowance and *(k)* income support in each year since 1997. [72800]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals in the constituency of Moray were entitled to but did not claim *(a)* child benefit, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* maternity allowance, *(d)* widow's payment, *(e)* widowed mother's allowance, *(f)* widow's pension, *(g)* bereavement allowance, *(h)* graduated retirement allowance, *(i)* severe disablement allowance, *(j)* invalid care allowance, *(k)* disability living allowance, *(l)* attendance allowance, *(m)* disablement benefit, *(n)* reduced earnings allowance, *(o)* retirement allowance, *(p)* guardian's allowance and *(q)* income support in each year since 1997. [72798]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals in Perth were entitled to but did not claim *(a)* guardian's allowance, *(b)* income support, *(c)* child benefit, *(d)* incapacity benefit, *(e)* maternity allowance, *(f)* widow's payment, *(g)* widowed mother's allowance, *(h)* widow's pension, *(i)* bereavement payment, *(j)* graduated retirement allowance, *(k)* severe disablement allowance, *(l)* invalid care allowance, *(m)* disability living allowance, *(n)* attendance allowance, *(o)* disablement benefit, *(p)* reduced earnings allowance and *(q)* retirement allowance in each year since 1997. [72782]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

Benefit Linking Rules

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will take steps to ensure that the rules for those receiving benefits and undertaking voluntary work do not prevent them receiving their benefits; and if he will make a statement; [68754]

(2) if he will list the recent changes to the benefit linking rules; and how many people have taken advantage of these in *(a)* Glasgow, Pollok, *(b)* the City of Glasgow, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* the United Kingdom. [68809]

Malcolm Wicks: We encourage jobseekers to participate in voluntary work and recognise that it can play an important role in preparing people for paid employment. People of working age in receipt of benefit can now do unlimited voluntary work as long as the usual entitlement conditions are met, and we have recently extended the disregard of reimbursed expenses for people in receipt of income-related benefits to help those wishing to take up voluntary work. To encourage more unemployed people to participate in voluntary work, the Department's leaflets have been, or are in the process of being, revised to ensure that they contain positive messages on volunteering.

We are also removing other obstacles to work within the benefit system. For example, we have extended the Incapacity Benefit linking rules to 52 weeks, or 2 years for people receiving Disabled Person's Tax Credit, allowing disabled people to try out work safe in the knowledge that they can return to the same rate of benefit if the job doesn't work out. We estimate that 10,700[1] people in Great Britain have benefited from this change since October 1998 and, of those, 1,600[1] were in Scotland and around one hundred[1] in the City of Glasgow. No reliable data are available by parliamentary constituency.

In addition, linking rules for people receiving income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support were changed from 9 April 2001 to allow them to re-qualify for help with mortgage interest straight away if they reclaim benefit within 52 weeks of starting full-time employment. In Great Britain, we estimate that around one hundred people[2] in receipt of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance have benefited from this change. No reliable data are available by country, local authority area or parliamentary constituency. Data for those in receipt of Income Support benefiting from this measure are not held centrally.

1. Figures are drawn from 5 per cent. samples of the Incapacity Benefit computer system and are subject to a degree of sampling error. They exclude a small number of clerically held cases. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Figure is drawn from Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiries May 2001 to February 2002, and is subject to a high degree of sampling variation. It should therefore be treated as a guide to the number benefiting only. The figure has been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action is being taken to examine the records in the National Insurance record system to check whether they might relate to bogus identities; and how many records have been checked and over what time period. [69857]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The Department has access to the National Insurance recording system. However, it is owned and controlled by the Inland Revenue. The Department and the Inland Revenue already work closely and jointly address issues relating to National Insurance Numbers (NINOs) and identity fraud, through a number of working groups and inter-departmental bodies. Data matching already takes place between the Department and Inland Revenue.

Where the Inland Revenue's operational activity on individual cases suggests that there may be a problem with identity, these cases are sent to this Department's National Identity Fraud Unit for further action. Separate records are not kept of how many cases are referred in this way, or over what period.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 20 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 18, on benefit fraud, how many national insurance number applications have been *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful in each year since 1992. [64208]

Malcolm Wicks: An Enhanced NINO Process (ENP) for the allocation of NINOs was implemented nationally from April 2001. This has led to the tightening of all aspects of the processing of adult NINO applications.

Figures are not available for previous years but by the end of March 2002, 394, 044 applications had been received through the ENP of which 12,534 were refused and 2,141 were withdrawn.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many records on the National Insurance record system, relating to bogus identities, were notified to via his Department's National Identity Fraud Unit in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [69860]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The Department has access to the National Insurance recording system under an agreement with the Inland Revenue. The Departmental Central Index (DCI) interfaces with the National Insurance recording system, enabling information relating to personal details, such as names, addresses and dates of birth, to be shared. The two systems broadcast details to each other when either system is amended or updated.

The National Identity Fraud Unit mark on the DCI all accounts where it can be proven that the application for a National Insurance Number was made using false documentation as proof of identity.

It is not possible to provide a breakdown of figures for specific years, or to say how many referrals were from the National Insurance recording system. This is because the information is recorded by reason for the marking, rather than the source of referral. However, the following figures include cases referred from the National Insurance recording system. To date 1,042 accounts have been marked on the DCI as false identities, protecting these accounts from possible future abuse. 16,435 cases have been marked as immigration offenders and currently 6,917 suspect files are being monitored for any activity.

When an identity is taken over with or without the co-operation of the individual the National Identity Fraud Unit examine and forward to the relevant sections such cases for account rectification or further investigation. They also monitor these accounts for future suspect activity. 3,000 such cases are currently being monitored.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the *(a)* total annual value of fraudulent benefit claims estimated on the basis of benefit reviews and *(b)* estimated total value of fraudulent claims by people adopting a false identify in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [69309]

Malcolm Wicks: We set out our strategy for tackling fraud and error in March 1999. At that time we estimated that around £2 billion is lost annually through benefit fraud in Great Britain. This is a broad order estimate, derived from estimates from the continuously measured benefits (Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance), from National Benefit Reviews and from estimated levels of loss in the unmeasured benefits.

The latest estimate of the total annual value of fraud and error from the continuous benefit reviews is in "The Results of the Area Benefit Review and the Quality Support Team from April 2000 to March 2001: Fraud and Error in Claims for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance", a copy of which is in the Library.

The latest estimate of the annual total value of fraudulent claims by people adopting a false identity is in the Cabinet Office's "ID Fraud Study", published in July 2002. A copy is in the Library.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the level of *(a)* fraud, *(b)* suspected fraud and *(c)* error in (i) housing benefit and (ii) council tax benefit in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [73539]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is not available on the level of fraud and error in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit in each of the last 10 years.

The Housing Benefit Review (Main-stage report) from 1995 and the National Benefit Review 1997–98 provided very broad "snapshot" estimates of fraud and error in Housing Benefit. Copies of these reports are available in the Library. The size and nature of the samples in the estimates and differences in the methodology employed in the two reviews mean that it is not possible to compare their results with an acceptable level of statistical certainty.

We have now made a commitment to deliver a continuous, comprehensive measurement of programme loss for Housing Benefit. The Housing Benefit review, which is underway, will enable us to establish a baseline level of fraud and error.

We have recently announced a new target to aim for a 25 per cent. reduction in fraud and error in Housing Benefit by 2006.

We had a firm target to reduce the level of fraud and error in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance by 10 per cent. by March 2002. By March 2001 we had already achieved an 18 per cent. reduction. We have now announced an increase in our target for March 2004, from 25 per cent. to 33 per cent., and we maintain our longer-term commitment to a 50 per cent. reduction by March 2006.

To achieve this, we are preventing fraud happening as well as detecting and punishing fraud when it does occur.

Benefit Appeals (Scotland)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in which locations within Scotland appeals against refusal of benefits are held. [62388]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Neil Ward, Chief Executive of the Appeals Service. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Neil Ward to Mr. Weir dated 22 July 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your recent parliamentary questions, which asked which locations within Scotland appeals against refusals of benefits are held.

The Appeals Service arranges independent hearings for appeals on decisions on Social Security, Child Support, Vaccine Damage, Tax Credit, and Compensation Recovery. Within Scotland, appeals are heard at 24 locations, which are as follows:

Appeal Locations

Aberdeen	Ayr
Campbeltown	Dumbarton
Dumfries	Dundee
Dunfermline	Edinburgh
Elgin	Galashiels
Glasgow	Greenock
Hamilton	Inverness
Irvine	Kilmarnock
Kirkcaldy	Kirkwall
Lerwick	Oban
Stirling	Stornoway
Stranraer	Wick

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit fraud prosecutions there were in each of the last five years; and what proportion were successful. [71777]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* In each year since 1997, over 98 per cent. of prosecutions carried out by the Department and its agencies have resulted in convictions. Information on the number of prosecutions is in the table.

The prosecutions shown in the table of local authority investigations were successful prosecutions for housing benefit fraud. Local authorities are not required to inform the Department of prosecutions which are subsequently abandoned or result in an acquittal.

Fraud Investigations

Year	Prosecutions		Cautions and administrative penalties as an alternative to prosecution		Total
	DWP	Local Authorities	DWP	Local Authorities	
1997–98	11,700	700	–	—	12,400
1998–99	10,238	800	2,835	–	13,873
1999–2000	9,124	860	11,029	390	21,403
2000–01	11,403	1,100	15,555	550	28,608
2001–02	11,183	1,700	13,551	2,600	29,034

Notes:

1. Administrative penalties, as an alternative to prosecution, were introduced by the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act (1997) with effect from December 1998. Cautions were made available to local authorities as a sanction from the start of 2001–02.
2. Figures for financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 are taken from local authority management information returns. It is possible that there could be some double counting with DWP data if there were cases which involved a joint prosecution.
3. Management information data for financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 is not available for all local authorities. The total for Great Britain includes estimates for local authorities that have not responded. These estimates are based on historical and regional data. This type of estimate is standard practice in reporting totals where there have been non-respondents. The figures for financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 have been rounded to two significant figures.
4. Information for 2001–02 is from a count of prosecutions and sanctions completed by all local authorities; this data is collected from local authority subsidy returns. Subsidy data may differ from management information data (shown for financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01) at local authority level; however, analysis shows a high level of consistency between the two data sources at national level.

Benefits Information

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what mechanisms are in place to ensure that accessible information on benefits is sent out to those who need it in *(a)* large print, *(b)* braille and *(c)* audiotape. [70895]

Maria Eagle: The Department for Work and Pensions sends out information to customers on request and as part of specific campaigns. If any customer requests information relating to benefits the information can be supplied in braille and large print or on audio cassette (this includes Welsh versions of large print and audio cassette as desired). This does not include information of a technical nature which is produced for advisers, although we can make this available on request.

Maternity Grant

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many low-income families have received the maternity grant in each year since it was established; and how many families who would otherwise have been eligible have been refused the grant because they have not accepted information about child healthcare from a doctor, midwife or health visitor. [72418]

Maria Eagle: Sure Start Maternity Grants were introduced on 27 March 2000 and complement the Sure Start programme, which is helping many thousands of children from the most deprived areas to get the best start in life. Sure Start Maternity Grants are now worth up to five times as much as the Maternity Payments they replaced and provide more help to the neediest families.

The scheme means more than just a cash payment. To ensure that vulnerable people have at least one contact with a health professional during pregnancy or following childbirth, we introduced a new condition of entitlement which requires people to provide evidence of having received advice on either child or maternal health from a health professional. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the vast majority of those people refused a grant for failing to produce a certificate from a health professional subsequently successfully reclaimed.

The information is in the table.

Year	*Number of Sure Start Maternity Grant awards*	*Number refused because no certificate from health professional produced*[2]
2000–01	170,000	9,000
2001–02	201,000	8,000

Sources:

Annual Reports by the Secretary of State on the Social Fund 2000–01 and 2001–02; Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System.

Note:

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

[2] Figures include an unquantifiable number of cases where the person subsequently successfully reapplies for a grant.

Bereavement Benefits

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many bereavement payments were made to *(a)* widows and *(b)* widowers in 2001–02; and what the total cost was; [69195]

(2) what his estimate is of the take-up and cost of widowed fathers who have claimed the new widowed parents allowance over the last 12 months; [69199]

(3) what the estimated costs were in 2001–02 of the new system of bereavement benefits under the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999, broken down by gains or losses to *(a)* widowers, *(b)* widows and *(c)* those without dependent children. [69200]

Mr. Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of Bereavement Payments awarded in 2001–02 is not available. The estimated outturn of expenditure on bereavement benefits in 2001–02 was £1,100 million. Estimates of take-up of bereavement benefits and of the expenditure for widowed fathers are not available.

The available information on the estimated additional expenditure following the introduction of bereavement benefits is in the table. Widows in receipt of Widows Benefits prior to 9 April 2001 were not affected by the changes, consequently they continue to receive full benefit so long as they meet the conditions of entitlement. The estimate here takes account of the expected fall in the number of women so entitled.

Estimated additional expenditure following the introduction of Bereavement Benefits in 2001–02

	£
Bereavement Payments	
Widows	35
Widowers	35
Widowed Parents Allowance	
Widows	0[1]
Widowers	65
Bereavement Allowance	
Widows	–5[2]
Widowers	15

Source:

Based on data supplied by the Government Actuaries Department.

[1] There is no change for widows as the Widowed Parents Allowance simply replaces the old Widowed Mother's Allowance.

[2] Unlike the old widow's pension, the allowance is only paid for a year and does not attract an additional pension.

[3] Costs are given in millions of pounds and rounded to the nearest £5 million.

[4] Estimated costs do not take account of income-related benefits.

Non-Resident Parents

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on how many occasions in the last year for which figures are avalable the Child Support Agency contacted the Inland Revenue for assistance with tracking down non-resident parents. [71788]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Webb dated 23 July 2002

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You have asked on how many occasions in the last year for which figures are available the Child Support Agency contacted the Inland Revenue for assistance with tracking down non-resident parents.

In the year to 31 March 2002 the Child Support Agency issued 298,696 non-resident parent tracing enquiries to the Inland Revenue's Tax Information Distribution Office.

I hope this is helpful.

Child Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if it will be possible under the Social Security (Electronic Communication) (Child Benefit) Order 2002 for a father to claim and begin to receive child benefit without the mother of the children expressly giving her consent. [69260]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* Child benefit is awarded to a person who is responsible for a child. When a claim is received from a member of a couple, there is no legal requirement for the consent of the partner. However, the child benefit recipient also qualifies for Home Responsibilities Protection (HRP), which helps to protect the pension position of those who are unable to contribute towards a pension while bringing up children.

In most cases it is the mother who needs this protection, so when an electronic claim is being completed by a man who is married or lives with a partner, an on-screen prompt will remind him of the importance of considering the HRP position. The system will prevent him completing his claim further without a specific response to this prompt, which asks him to read the child benefit information notes about HRP, available on screen, and to make sure the right person is making the claim.

The declaration he is required to sign at the end of the claim also requires him to positively indicate that he has read and understood the notes about the Child Benefit/HRP link.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of gross rents in *(a)* the private rented, *(b)* local authority and *(c)* the housing association sectors is met by housing benefit. [69740]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Tenancy type	*Housing Benefit payments (HB)*[1] *as a percentage of the total value of the rental market*
Private landlord[2]	20
Local Authority / Council / New Town / Scottish Homes	55
Housing Association / Trust	55

Source:

Family Resources Survey 2000–2001

[1] The percentages are calculated from the total value of Housing Benefit payments divided by the total value of gross rents due. Gross rent is the total amount of rent which would be eligible for Housing Benefit paid by a household to the landlord.

[2] "Private Landlord" includes all landlords which do not fall into the other two categories.

[3] Gross rent does not include rent paid by one member of the household to another—it is the total rent paid by the household which is counted. For Housing Benefit, payments in respect of rent paid by any member of the household are included.

[4] Estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors to account for regional, Council Tax band and a number of demographic variables.

[5] Estimates are subject to sampling error and variability in non-response.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out the basis for his statement in paragraph 20 of the Government's Response to the Second report of the Work and Pensions Select Committee, on pension credit, that plans to improve the administration of housing benefit are well underway. [67806]

Malcolm Wicks: We have a comprehensive long-term strategy for reforming Housing Benefit (HB) and dealing with the legacy of neglect we have inherited. We are determined to work with local authorities to drive up standards of service, tackle fraud and error, reduce barriers to work and tackle social exclusion.

The Spending Review announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July includes the biggest investment in HB administration since the scheme began in 1988. Starting with £40 million next year, we are investing an extra £200 million over three years to help local authorities meet the performance standards in delivery of HB.

From April 2003 all local authorities currently complying with the Verification Framework will receive a 50 per cent. increase in their funding allocation for this work. In addition, any authority seeking to become compliant now or in the near future will also receive 50 per cent. more than they otherwise would have done.

In March last year we established a Help Team to work in partnership with local authorities to support them in improving the administration of HB. We are already seeing real improvements resulting from the Team's work.

In addition, we have set up a Help Fund to support local authorities by providing funding for locally-led initiatives to improve the administration of HB. For the financial year 2001–02, a total of £1,637,570 was awarded which benefited over 200 authorities.

We also want to help more authorities deliver a high standard of HB service by sharing good practice. We have now introduced a dedicated web-site for local authorities and have also distributed on CD a Housing Benefit manager's service improvement "toolkit".

In April this year we published for the first time performance standards for the full range of HB administration. These standards provide authorities with a definition of what they should be delivering.

We will continue to review local authorities core administration subsidy each year and we will fund the set-up and ongoing costs of implementing the changes needed to bring in the new tax credits and the pension credit.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps she takes to deal with councils which are not meeting their statutory obligations in delivering the housing benefit system; and if she will make a statement. [61096]

Malcolm Wicks: We have a comprehensive long-term strategy for reforming Housing Benefit (HB) and dealing with the legacy of neglect we have inherited. We are determined to work with local authorities to drive up standards of service, tackle fraud and error, reduce barriers to work and tackle social exclusion.

We have already made progress. Through a programme of inspection and active support, we have helped many local authorities to improve their administration. But where inspection shows that an authority's performance continues to fall below acceptable standards and gives cause for concern, we will not hesitate to direct the authority to take the necessary steps to improve.

In April this year we published for the first time performance standards for the full range of HB administration. These standards provide authorities with a definition of what they should be delivering.

The Spending Review announced by my Right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July includes the biggest investment in HB administration since the scheme began in 1988. Starting with £40 million next year, we are investing an extra £200 million over three years to help local authorities meet the performance standards in delivery of HB.

From April 2003 all local authorities currently complying with the Verification Framework will receive a 50 per cent. increase in their funding allocation for this work. In addition, any authority seeking to become compliant now or in the near future will also receive 50 per cent. more than they otherwise would have done.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of (*a*) the effectiveness of local authorities' administration of housing benefit and (*b*) the effects of poor administration of housing benefit on tenants; and if he will make a statement. [63913]

Malcolm Wicks: Housing Benefit has a key role to play in supporting our efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion and promote work for those who are able to. Many local authorities are doing a good job of administering benefit and some are delivering to a high standard. However, we accept that too many local authorities have backlogs of work and that consequently tenants are experiencing delays in the processing of their claims. We are determined to tackle these unacceptable variations in performance and the weaknesses in the current Housing Benefit scheme. That is why we have set out a comprehensive long-term strategy for reforming Housing Benefit and dealing with the legacy of neglect we inherited.

We have already made progress. Through a programme of inspection and active support, we have helped many local authorities to improve their administration. The result, in the better authorities, has been a fall in backlogs of cases, an improvement of turn-around times, tighter verification of claims, improved recovery of overpayments, and a strengthening of counter-fraud work.

In April this year we published for the first time performance standards for the full range of Housing Benefit administration. These standards provide authorities with a definition of what they should be delivering.

The Spending Review announced by my Right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July includes the biggest investment in Housing Benefit administration since the scheme began in 1998. Starting with £40 million next year, we are investing an extra £200 million over three years to help local authorities meet the performance standards in delivery of Housing Benefit.

Local authorities need to process Housing Benefit claims quickly to avoid any inconvenience to tenants. The measures we are putting in place are designed to encourage better performance and are making Housing Benefit easier to administer.

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Wigan MB are claiming housing benefit as a percentage of the total population there; and what the equivalent statistics are for (*a*) the North West Region and (*b*) England. [71896]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Housing Benefit recipients in Wigan, the North-West Region and England as a percentage of the total population aged 16 or over in each area: February 2002.

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council area	*Government Office Region of North West England*	*England*
8.1	9.4	7.9

Sources:

Housing Benefit Management Information System quarterly 100 per cent. count taken in February 2002;

Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates for 2000.

Notes:

1. The data refer to households claiming Housing Benefit which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one benefit household can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.
2. Figures exclude any Housing Benefit Extended Payment cases.
3. Figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people were in receipt of incapacity benefit in (*a*) June 1997, (*b*) February 1999, (*c*) June 2001 and (*d*) May 2002; [64330]

(2) what the total cost of incapacity benefit payments was, and how many claimants were in receipt of incapacity benefit payments, in each year since 1997, broken down into payments of (*a*) short-term incapacity benefit at the lower rate, (*b*) short-term incapacity benefit at the higher rate and (*c*) long-term incapacity benefit. [64334]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are committed to providing disabled people with the same employment opportunities as everyone else of working age. Our New Deal for Disabled People and Jobcentre Plus are helping more disabled people to get and keep jobs.

The available information is in the tables.

Number of people in receipt of Incapacity Benefit

	Thousands
31 May 1997	1,732.7
28 February 1999	1,557.1
31 May 2001	1,516.2
28 February 2002	1,496.9

Notes:

Figures are expressed in thousands, and rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:

Figures are based on 5 per cent. samples of the Incapacity Benefit computer system and exclude a small number of clerically held cases.

Incapacity Benefit recipients in each year since 1997

Thousands

	All IB	*IB Short Term (Lower)*	*IB Short Term (Higher)*	*IB Long Term*
28 February 1997	1,749.2	117.1	105.3	1,526.8
28 February 1998	1,671.2	109.4	103.0	1,458.7
28 February 1999	1,557.1	94.7	87.6	1,374.9
28 February 2000	1,504.3	90.9	88.5	1,324.9
28 February 2001	1,515.2	93.6	91.8	1,329.8
28 February 2002	1,496.9	84.1	92.6	1.320.3

Notes:

Figures are expressed in thousands, and rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:

Figures are based on 5 per cent. samples of the Incapacity Benefit computer system and exclude a small number of clerically held cases.

Incapacity Benefit expenditure in each year since 1997

£million

	Incapacity Benefit Expenditure			
	IB Short Term (Lower)	*IB Short Term (Higher)*	*IB Long Term*	*Earnings Related*[2]
1996–97 Outturn	313	296	5,792	1,260
1997–98 Outturn	318	317	5,716	1,062
1998–99 Outturn	283	305	5,744	920
1999–00 Outturn	272	274	5,492	753
2000–01 Outturn	264	311	5,331	695
2001–02 Estimated outturn	278	323	5.595	573

Sources:

Departmental Reports and Benefit Forecasting Model.

[1] Expenditure for 2001–02 reflects the latest benefit-by-benefit estimate of outturn for the year.

[2] The earnings-related additional pension component is paid in transitionally protected cases where a person was receiving Invalidity Benefit immediately before Incapacity Benefit was introduced in April 1995.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in receipt of incapacity benefit have been helped into permitted work through the Access to Work Scheme since its introduction. [73046]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is not routinely collected and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what changes have been introduced into the incapacity benefit medical testing regime in the last 12 months; and what future changes are proposed. [70835]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In May 2001 we strengthened the procedures for repeat Personal Capability Assessments (PCAs) to ensure that people receiving Incapacity Benefit have regular checks on their medical condition. Cases going through the PCA process are now marked for review at least every 3 or 5 years, or an earlier review if appropriate.

From June 2002, a telephone booking system has been operated by Medical Services for PCA examinations wherever possible. This should improve attendance at examinations and reduced customer waiting times at the examination centres.

From October 2002, we are bringing forward the start of the PCA process for new claims by up to 10 weeks in order to ensure decisions on continuing incapacity are made more promptly.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people leaving incapacity benefit in *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last year and *(c)* the last five years represented (i) transfers to other social security benefits, (ii) people moving from benefit into employment and (iii) people moving off benefit to unknown destinations. [64328]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Destinations of people leaving Incapacity Benefit

Thousands

		Period	
Destination	*1/6/01–30/11/01*	*1/12/00–30/11/01*	*1/12/96–30/11/01*
Retirement Pension[1]	19.3	41.2	173.8
To another benefit within 3 months[2]	70.8	148.0	949.8
To WPTC/DPTC within 3 months[3]	6.2	12.6	60.3
Unknown, including employment	264.8	525.2	2,957.6
Total	361.1	727.0	4,141.5

Source:

5 per cent. samples of DWP Information Centre administrative data.

Notes:

[1] Includes leavers within 3 months of state pension age.

[2] Figures are based on cases moving to Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance or Severe Disablement Allowance within 3 months of the termination of the claim to Incapacity Benefit.

[3] Figures are based on cases moving to Family Credit/Working Families Tax Credit or Disability Working Allowance/Disabled Person's Tax Credit within 3 months of the termination of the claim to Incapacity Benefit.

[4] Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred and expressed in thousands.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 688W, on incapacity benefit, what data his Department collate for each of the new jobcentre plus pathfinder areas on the number of new claims for incapacity benefit that have been made since the introduction of the scheme, and on the number of *(a)* waivers, *(b)* deferrals for work-focused interviews and *(c)* work-focused interviews that have taken place and the number of claimants that have (i) refused to attend an interview and (ii) been subjected to benefit sanctions. [66483]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive, Leigh Lewis. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Webb dated 23 July 2002.

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the information which we collate for each of the new Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder areas on the number of new claims for incapacity benefit broken down by the categories you set out. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency. Information in this respect is not collated for Incapacity Benefit claimants separately. We do collate information for claimants to both incapacity and disability benefits on numbers of new claims, waivers, deferrals and work focussed meetings.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many recipients of incapacity benefit are also in receipt of child benefit, broken down by local authority in Scotland. [69542]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information is not available in the format requested. Information is held on the number of Incapacity Benefit recipients who have child dependants, but this does not necessarily mean that they will also be in receipt of Child Benefit. In order to receive a Child Dependency Increase the person claiming Incapacity Benefit must be either entitled to Child Benefit for the child or treated as entitled to Child Benefit by virtue of their spouse or partner receiving it. We cannot, therefore, give accurate figures for the number of Incapacity Benefit recipients who also receive Child Benefit.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many incapacity benefit claimants there were in *(a)* St Helens, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* the North West and *(d)* England in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001. [71285]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The information is in the table.

Incapacity Benefit recipients

Thousands

	England	*North West*	*Merseyside (including St Helens)*	*St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council*
February 1997	1,853.8	423.3	114.0	14.3
February 1998	1,836.2	413.0	111.2	14.1
February 1999	1,790.8	394.6	106.7	13.4
February 2000	1,779.1	384.9	102.9	12.7
February 2001	1,835.0	393.4	104.3	12.9
February 2002	1,850.7	389.3	102.4	12.4

Source:

Figures are taken from 5 per cent. samples of the Incapacity Benefit computer system and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

Note:

Figures are expressed as thousands and are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many incapacity benefit recipients have had their benefit reduced since April 2001 because they were in receipt of payments from an occupational or personal pension scheme or permanent health insurance scheme; [70820]

(2) what percentage of, and how many, incapacity benefit recipients, who would otherwise have seen a reduction in benefit due to receipt of personal or occupational pension, were exempted because they were in receipt of disability living allowance higher rate care component since April 2001; [70821]

(3) how much total expenditure on incapacity benefit has been reduced as a result of the rules on offsetting of personal or occupational pensions introduced in April 2001. [70822]

Mr. Nick Brown: The available information on numbers of Incapacity Benefit recipients is in the table.

Incapacity Benefit (IB) awards where the person is also receiving payments from an occupational or personal pension scheme or permanent health insurance scheme

New awards of IB made from 6 April 2001 to 28 February 2002	*Number of awards (thousands)*
Number with IB reduced due to receipt of payment from an occupation or personal pension scheme or permanent health insurance scheme.	9.9
Number exempt from the rules due to receipt of Disability Living Allowance highest rate care component	4.8

Source:

Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample of the Incapacity Benefit computer system and will exclude a small number of clerically held cases.

Notes:

1. Figures are expressed in thousands and rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Only new and repeat claims received from 6 April 2001 were affected by the new rules on offsetting personal and occupational pension schemes and permanent health insurance schemes.
3. We are unable to separately identify those people subject to these rules but who are not affected because their income from a pension or health insurance scheme is below £85/week.

We estimate that the reduction in expenditure on Incapacity Benefit due to the rules on offsetting personal and occupational pensions has been £10 million over the period April 2001 to mid-February 2002.

Source: based on a 5 per cent. sample of the Incapacity Benefit computer system.

Note:

1. The estimate is rounded to the nearest £10m and excludes the impact of offsetting reductions in the income-related benefits.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have received a net increase in benefit income as a result of receiving non-contributory incapacity benefit instead of severe disablement allowance. [70826]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available.

After a year on benefit, young people who qualify for Incapacity Benefit under the youth provisions will be up to £28.10 a week better off than they would have been on Severe Disablement Allowance. The Department estimated that around 6,500 young people would gain from the new provisions in the first year.

Up to 28 February 2002 there have been 10,200[1] awards of non-contributory Incapacity Benefit.

1. *Source:* figure is taken from 5 per cent. samples of the Incapacity Benefit computer system and excludes a small number of cases held clerically.

Note: figure is rounded to the nearest hundred.

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to ensure that those on incapacity benefit who reach their 65 birthday and move on to retirement pension do not experience a benefit gap between the end of the benefit and the start of the pension. [72204]

Mr. McCartney: The principle of paying Retirement Pensions in whole weeks stems from the fact that the benefit week is traditionally paid in advance. Entitlement to Retirement Pension begins with the pay-day on or following the pensioner's 60 or 65 birthday. Changes in entitlement, for example a decrease because of a prolonged stay in hospital, also takes effect from the pay-day following the change of circumstances. The same rule applies with the termination of the award.

Incapacity Benefit is traditionally paid in arrears so in the transition between these benefits the claimant may experience a perceived gap in benefit. However, the claimant does not lose any payment days because payment of Retirement Pension will continue after the change in circumstances or the end of the claim for Retirement Pension until the next pay-day.

Incapacity Reviews

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many incapacity reviews were undertaken in each of the last five years; and what the average time was to complete these reviews in each year. [70836]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The medical assessment procedure involves several stages including gathering information from the person and their GP or other health care professional and arranging and carrying out examinations. The most recent study of a sample of cases found that on average the whole process took 11.4 weeks where entitlement was confirmed and 17.5 weeks where benefit was withdrawn. The available information on the number of medical examinations carried out is in the table.

Number of medical examinations

Year	*Number of medical examinations*
1999[1]	432,210
2000	372,934
2001	455,454

Source:

Figures are taken from IMPACT 100 per cent. counts.

Notes:

1. Figures for the number of medical examinations performed are not available until the beginning of April 1999. Therefore, figures for the period 1 January to 31 March 1999 have been estimated.

2. Figures include Severe Disablement Allowance.

Disability Benefits

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans his Department has to review the operation of the disability living allowance, in particular the methods for resolving contradictions between medical reports provided by GPs and departmentally approved doctors; [69278]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of applicants who have been refused disability living allowance on grounds of ability to work who have subsequently managed to gain employment in each of the last five years, [69280]

(3) how many people were *(a)* awarded and *(b)* refused (i) disability living allowance, (ii) attendance allowance and (iii) incapacity benefit on initial application in each of the last 10 years; [70076]

(4) how many people were awarded *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance and *(c)* incapacity benefit on (i) review of initial application and (ii) appeal of initial application in each of the last 10 years. [70077]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The role of the Departmental approved doctor differs from the more familiar role of the GP, whose primary function is to make a diagnosis and arrange treatment. The Departmental doctor is a medical analyst who has received special training and is therefore able to provide a fully explained opinion of the person's functional ability, within the framework of the relevant legislation. Such opinion, together with any other evidence considered necessary, enables the Department to make an informed decision as to whether a person satisfies the criteria for entitlement to the benefit.

The Department is aware of, and has taken account of, concerns expressed by GPs about difficulties in answering the functionally-based questions, such as how far someone can walk and whether they can prepare a main meal, currently contained in reports. Subject to satisfactory evaluation of trials we intend to introduce a new GP report, which asks for purely factual clinical information. The introduction of the new report will be accompanied by training for Decision Makers covering most appropriate sources of evidence, the interpretation of such evidence and how to resolve conflict in the evidence.

Disability Living Allowance can be paid to severely disabled people both in and out of work. Entitlement depends on the extent to which a person needs help with personal care, needs supervision or has difficulties with walking. There have therefore been no applicants who have been refused Disability Living Allowance on grounds of ability to work.

The available information is in the table.

Numbers of claims for Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, and Incapacity Benefit awarded and disallowed each year from 1992–93

	Disability Living[1] Allowance		*Attendance[1] Allowance*		*Incapacity Benefit[2]*	
Year	*Awarded*	*Disallowed*	*Awarded*	*Disallowed*	*Awarded 3*	*Disallowed[4]*
March 1992–February 1993	277,150	208,730	379,455	119,300		
March 1993–February 1994	212,735	213,440	323,495	132,785		
March 1994–February 1995	232,795	256,410	334,405	146,925		
March 1995–February 1996	247,890	255,280	331,405	134,570		
March 1996–February 1997	239,670	276,125	319,900	137,160	495,600	441,530
March 1997–February 1998	211,250	255,710	296,170	116,810	455,400	434,725
March 1998–February 1999	175,600	208,200	292,555	104,260	410,000	396,840
March 1999–February 2000	181,040	190,390	281,450	96,815	380,000	396,280
March 2000–February 2001	211,340	206,145	316,675	103,115	388,700	376,655
March 2001–February 2002	211,190	192,320	292,140	89,130	359,900	355,765

Notes:

[1] ASD Information Centre, 100 per cent. data rounded to nearest five.

[2] Incapacity Benefit was introduced in April 1995. Figures for Incapacity Benefit may include a small number of overseas cases.

[3] PSCS computer system, 5 per cent. data rounded to nearest hundred. Figures include awards of all types except "credits only" and some cases which are returned to the computer system with a new start date. They exclude a small number of clerically held cases and late notifications on to the system.

[4] PSCS computer system, 100 per cent. data rounded to nearest five. Figures include cases where the claimant has failed the contribution conditions but may be awarded "credits only". They exclude a small number of clerically held cases.

The available information is in the table. Following the introduction of the new system of decision making and appeals in October 1999, the number of appeals-received on Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA) cases increased significantly. The number of appeals upheld by tribunals also increased. Initial awards of Incapacity Benefit depend principally on submission of a medical certificate and satisfaction of the National Insurance contribution conditions, and there is no formal review process comparable with that for DLA and AA.

Numbers of awards of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance on review and appeal each year from 1992–93, and numbers of appeals involving Incapacity Benefit which were found in favour of the appellant

	Disability Living[1] Allowance		*Attendance[1] Allowance*		*Incapacity Benefit[2]*
Year	*Awards on review[3]*	*Awards on appeal*	*Awards on review[3]*	*Awards on appeal*	*Appeals found in favour of appellant*
March 1992–February 1993	*	*	*	*	*
March 1993–February 1994	40,700	6,200	*	*	*
March 1994–February 1995	40,000	10,200	*	*	*
March 1995–February 1996	41,300	11,800	*	*	*
March 1996–February 1997	39,200	13,200	33,400	2,700	*
March 1997–February 1998	37,700	13,100	24,700	2,700	*
March 1998–February 1999	27,000	15,400	17,100	3,200	*
March 1999–February 2000	24,500	15,900	14,500	2,400	*
March 2000–February 2001	16,600	25,900	10,500	5,200	15,555
March 2001–February 2002	10,400[4]	24,200[4]	6,400[4]	4,500[4]	14,520

Notes:

* Not available

[1] ASD Information Centre, five per cent. data rounded to nearest hundred.

[5] Generic Appeals Processing System (GAPS), 100 per cent. data rounded to nearest five. Figures refer to all types of appeal and are not available prior to 2000 as a change in the method of recording the type of appeal in GAPS, as part of the introduction of the new system of decision making and appeals, resulted in certain benefits being mapped incorrectly.

[6] Figures include awards following reconsiderations under the new system of decision making and appeals.

7. Latest available data to 30 November 2001.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) by how many adults have received the income support enhanced disability premium since April 2001. [70823]

(2) how many families have received the income support enhanced disability premium in respect of a disabled child since April 2001; [70824]

(3) what the overall expenditure has been on the enhanced disability premium in income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit since April 2001. [70825]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information on recipients of the Income Support enhanced disability and disabled child premia is in the table.

Thousands

Quarter	*People receiving the enhanced disability premium*	*People receiving the enhanced disabled child premium*
May 2001	119.5	31.2
August 2001	123.3	32.8
November 2001	126.6	34.1
February 2002	128.6	34.7

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries, May 2001 to February 2002.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred and expressed in thousands.
2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. Figures represent a snapshot of people receiving the relevant premium at the time the sample was taken and do not therefore show the cumulative number of recipients.

Since April 2001, expenditure on the enhanced disability and disabled child premia in Income Support is estimated to have been £100 million. Equivalent figures for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are not currently available.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries, May 2001 to February 2002.

Notes:

1. Estimate is derived from the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries.
2. Figure is rounded to the nearest £5 million.
3. Figure is based on a 5 per cent. sample and subject to a degree of sampling variation.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the purpose is of the six month period between a grant of higher rate disability living allowance and the commencement of payments; and if he will make a statement; [71649]

(2) if he will estimate the cost of abolishing the six month period between qualification and payment of higher rate disability living allowance in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement. [71650]

Maria Eagle: Disability Living Allowance is a contribution towards the extra costs incurred by people who have long-term severe disabilities. Disability Living Allowance is paid from the date from which it is awarded. There is no delay of six months or any other period and, hence, the circumstances cited by the hon. Member do not arise.

However, Disability Living Allowance cannot be awarded unless a severely disabled person has satisfied the conditions of entitlement for a period of at least three months and is likely to continue to satisfy them for a further period of at least six months. In some cases, therefore, people can be notified that they have been awarded Disability Living Allowance from a prospective date and the payment will start from that date. These qualifying rules establish that the severe disability and the extra costs arising from it are of a long-term nature and ensure that Disability Living Allowance is only awarded to people with long-term severe disabilities.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many disabled children aged *(a)* three and *(b)* four years have been awarded disability living allowance higher rate mobility components since April 2001, and how much this costs. [70819]

Maria Eagle: The latest available information, based on a five per cent sample taken on 28 February 2002, is that about 3,100 disabled children aged three and approximately 3,500 aged four are receiving higher-rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance. This represents a total annual expenditure of around £13.5 million.

Disabled Access

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assistance is available to those businesses who wish to make their premises more accessible to disabled customers. [67117]

Maria Eagle: There are legal requirements concerning accessibility for disabled customers under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and, for new buildings, in Building Regulations. However, we know that many businesses simply wish to make their premises accessible because they know that this is good for customers and good for their business.

There is significant technical and practical information available to help businesses who are planning to improve accessibility for disabled people. In particular, the Disability Rights Commission has published a Code of Practice on Rights of Access to Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises, which provides practical guidance on how to improve access.

Local authority Building Control Departments are able to provide advice on compliance with Building Regulations and further advice on improving accessibility may be obtained from organisations such as the National Register of Access Consultants and the Centre For Accessible Environments.

The Government works with these organisations to ensure that businesses have effective information on how to improve access for their disabled customers.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to encourage businesses to ensure that their premises are fully accessible for disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [67116]

Maria Eagle: We have run three publicity campaigns since 1999 to raise awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act, using posters, radio and press advertising. The latest campaign, "Open to Change" ran from January to March 2002. It was aimed specifically at service providers and illustrated the types of changes they can make to improve the delivery of their goods and services to disabled people.

The Government will also continue working through the Equality Direct helpline, the Disability Rights Commission, the Small Business Service and other organisations to ensure that effective information and advice is available to businesses.

Long-Term Sick and Disabled

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total spending on benefits for the long-term sick and disabled was in *(a)* 1990–91 and *(b)* 2000–01; and what change this represents in real terms. [69737]

Mr Nicholas Brown: We are committed to giving all people of working age the help and support they need to find jobs where they are able to do so, and providing security for those who are unable to work. Our New Deal for Disabled People and Jobcentre Plus are already helping more disabled people to get and keep jobs.

The information is in the table.

£millions

	1990–91	*2000–01*
Spending on Long Term Sick and Disabled people	7,052	19,261

This represents a growth in real terms of 7 per cent. per annum.

Source:

Departmental Reports 1995 and 2002.

Notes:

1. Real terms growth has been calculated using 2002–2003 prices.
2. Spending on those over working age has been excluded.

Disability (Employment)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will list the measures that have been introduced by this Government to make it easier for people with disabilities to gain employment; how many residents in *(a)* Glasgow, Pollok and *(b)* the City of Glasgow Council area have benefited from each of these proposals; how many people with disabilities in (i) Glasgow, Pollok and (ii) the City of Glasgow are seeking work; and if he will make a statement; [68804]

(2) what assessment he has made of the reasons disabled people are over-represented among the unemployed; and what steps he plans to take to address these issues. [69361]

Mr Nicholas Brown: Health problems are the most common barrier to work for people with disabilities, although research indicates that a broad range of non-medical factors such as availability of suitable work, confidence, level of skills, discrimination and financial considerations are also relevant.

We have introduced a range of measures to address these issues, making work possible and making work pay for people with disabilities. We have introduced the Disabled Person's Tax Credit and the National Minimum Wage. The New Deal for Disabled People and a range of specialist employment programmes such as Access To Work, WORKSTEP and Work Preparation are available to support disabled people who want to work.

In addition, most disabled people are able to make effective use of mainstream employment and training programmes. Integrated Jobcentre Plus offices offer all disabled people making new or repeat claims to benefit interviews with a personal adviser to ensure they are aware of the help and opportunities available to them. Specialist Disability Employment Advisers are available throughout Jobcentre plus to provide further support to people facing complex barriers to work.

We set up the Disability Rights Commission in April 2000. Its function is to work towards the elimination of discrimination and promote equality of opportunities for disabled people, promote good practice to employers and service providers, provide information and advice about the Disability Discrimination Act, and advise the Government on a range of policy issues within its remit.

We are also removing obstacles to work within the benefit system. For example, we have extended the Incapacity Benefit linking rules to 52 weeks, or 2 years for people receiving Disabled Persons Tax Credit, allowing disabled people to try out work safe in the knowledge that they can return to the same rate of benefit if the job doesn't work out. From April of this year, we have introduced the new permitted work rules to allow all people receiving incapacity benefits to try a small amount of work without the fear of losing their benefit entitlement.

The information requested is not available at constituency or local authority level.

Disability Rights Taskforce

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to implement the recommendations of the Disability Rights Taskforce to extend protection from discrimination to those people with HIV from the point of diagnosis. [72992]

Maria Eagle: We are already delivering on our commitments and have made clear that we will be bringing many of them into force in 2004 when we extend the current employment rights in the Disability Discrimination Act to employees in small firms, barristers, partners in business partnerships, the police and people in a range of other jobs. We are totally committed to comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people and will make further improvements to the DDA when legislative time allows including extending the definition of disability to people with HIV from the point of diagnosis.

Disabled People

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) *(a)* how and *(b)* when his Department will meet its commitments in the Government's response to the disability rights taskforce recommendations. [71754]

(2) *(a)* how and *(b)* when his Department will introduce a public sector duty to provide rights for disabled people similar to the duty introduced in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. [71755]

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how and when he intends to create comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people. [72224]

Maria Eagle: We are already delivering on our commitments and have made clear that we will be bringing many of them into force in 2004 when we extend the current employment rights in the Disability Discrimination Act to employees in small firms, barristers, partners in business partnerships, the police and people in a range of other jobs. We are committed to comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people and will make further improvements to the DDA when Parliamentary time allows including introducing a duty on the public sector to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will define more precisely the term "exceptional pressure" in Direction Four criteria for community care grant applications. [71212]

Malcolm Wicks: Guidance for decision makers on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's Social Fund Direction Four is in the Social Fund Guide, a copy of which is available in the Library. The guidance makes clear that the term "exceptional pressure" is designed to encompass a wide variety of special circumstances. However, the guidance does not attempt to give priority to different sets of circumstances or types of application because this would limit the decision maker's discretion and penalise or deter those applicants who have urgent need but whose circumstances do not fit into a pre-defined category.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to ensure that applicants for community care grants throughout the United Kingdom have equal access to these grants at all times; [71211]

(2) what plans the Government have to review the allocation of community care grants by the Benefits Agency when prioritising applicants. [72085]

Malcolm Wicks: The community care grant scheme is administered through 127 cash-limited District budgets. The discretionary nature of the scheme means that there will always be variation in the amounts awarded depending on location, because customers' characteristics, needs and priorities are not directly comparable across areas. Budget allocations are designed to anticipate as far as possible, the nature and extent of local demand in order to achieve consistency in decision making. The scheme is kept under close review during the year to monitor the extent to which this objective is met.

It is for each District to set the level of priority that can be met from their community care grant allocation. All Districts are required to give priority to high priority needs throughout the period of the allocation, working within the boundaries of the Secretary of State's directions and guidance.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to ensure that applicants for *(a)* community care grants and *(b)* budgeting loans will be provided with adequate information explaining their award or refusal. [71215]

Malcolm Wicks: Anyone who applies for a community care grant or a budgeting loan receives a written explanation about their decision, together with a telephone number for them to contact a decision maker if they require further explanation. In addition, budgeting loan decision notifications include a calculation sheet which sets out in clear stages how the final decision has been reached.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average community care grant was for *(a)* high and *(b)* medium priority awards in each year since 1997 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms. [53040]

Malcolm Wicks: We have increased the community care grant budget four times since 1997. The latest rise, of almost five per cent from £103 million in 2001–02 to £108 million for the current year, was above the level of inflation.

Information on grant expenditure by priority could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Unspent Budgets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list for each area-based initiative for which his Department is responsible the amount originally budgeted for in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, stating in each year what funds budgeted for were not spent and if they were carried forward. [71462]

Mr Nicholas Brown: Action Teams for Jobs is an area-based initiative in employment-deprived, disadvantaged areas. The budget for 2000–01 was £20 millions, of which £11 millions were spent and the remainder carried forward into 2001–02. The budget for 2001–02 was £57 millions, of which £52 millions were spent. The remainder will be carried forward to support the Department's programmes helping disadvantaged groups.

Employment Zones are pilots of an alternative way of delivering services to unemployed people aged 25 and over which are run in 15 areas where there are high concentrations of long-term unemployment. The budget for 2000–01 was £53 millions and for 2001–02 was £87 millions. There were no underspends in either year.

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average sum of money clawed back by the compensation recovery unit under the Social Security (Recovery of Payments) Act 1997 has been in each of the last four years. [69736]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Financial Year	*Average amount recovered*[1]
1998–99	£3,163.32
1999–2000	£3,527.26
2000–01	£2,918.13
2001–02	£3,132.71

Source:
Compensation Recovery Unit records

Notes:

[1] Figures relate to the average amount recovered in cases considered by the Compensation Recovery Unit where recovery is effected. They do not include cases where no recovery is appropriate.

[2] Amounts recovered can vary considerably depending on a number of factors including the nature of the illness or accident, the date of onset of the condition, the time taken to reach settlement, whether interim settlements are made, and the benefit in payment.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60915]

Mr Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. Since that time and up till the end of 2001–02 financial year a total of £16.96 million was spent on advertising media.

For the financial year 2002–03 campaign activity is being planned in a number of important areas such as Pensions Education and Payment Modernisation. The role of press, radio and TV advertising in these campaigns is still to be decided.

Post Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 695W, when the migration and marketing strategy for the Post Office Card Account will be developed; in what timescale it will be implemented; and if she will make a statement. [72607]

Mr McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions, Northern Ireland Social Security Agency, the Inland Revenue and the Post Office are currently developing a customer information campaign to inform customers about the changes to the way we pay benefits and tax credits from April 2003. The information campaign will provide information on banking options, including the card account at the Post Office.

Swipe Card Accounts

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether *(a)* the basic bank accounts and *(b)* the proposed Post Office swipe card accounts will provide interest to people whose accounts are in credit. [72423]

Malcolm Wicks: The terms and conditions of basic bank accounts are a matter for the individual banks. However, basic bank accounts do not generally pay interest. The card account at the Post Office will not offer interest. Other accounts are available for people who wish to earn interest on account balances.

Budgeting Loans

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to reform the management of budgeting loans; [71213]

(2) what plans he has to *(a)* improve the flexibility of and *(b)* reduce interest rates for repayment of budgeting loans. [71214]

Malcolm Wicks: The discretionary Social Fund provides interest-free loans giving flexible help for a wide variety of needs to the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society.

We have already substantially modernised and improved the administration of the budgeting loan scheme to make it simpler, less intrusive, more transparent and faster. We have also changed the way the loans budget is allocated to ensure greater consistency across all areas of the country.

The scheme already provides for anyone who finds the repayments terms offered unacceptable to opt for a lower size of loan and lower repayments. In addition, anyone who has difficulty maintaining repayments can ask for the repayment period to be extended so that weekly repayments are reduced to a more manageable level.

We will continue to keep all elements of the Social Fund under review to see whether further improvements can be made to its operation and to ensure that the Fund supports our wider welfare reforms.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the reasons underlying the proportion of allocated budgeting loans which are not received in full. [71210]

Malcolm Wicks: The discretionary Social Fund plays an important role in the welfare system by helping the poorest and most needy members of society meet the cost of occasional one-off essential items through community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans.

It would be unfair to allow the cash-limited loan budget to be monopolised by people continually topping-up their loans to the maximum at the expense of others. Therefore under the reforms we introduced in April 1999 the scheme limits access to further budgeting loans while previous loans are still being repaid.

We no longer allow further loans to people who have outstanding budgeting loan debt of more than half the maximum amount available to them. Once their existing debt drops to less than half they can reapply, although the amount of further loan available to them could still be affected by any outstanding debt.

Other reasons for reduced awards are because a person's debt has reached the maximum of £1,000, because their savings exceed the limits or because they would be unable to repay a higher amount.

Jobcentres

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what evaluation he has made of the number of jobs that will be lost as a result of the closure of rural jobcentres; how many rural jobcentres will be closed; how many new Jobcentre Plus facilities will be established in towns; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the closure of local jobcentres in rural areas on rural employment seekers and local businesses. [72746]

Mr Nicholas Brown: The integrated Jobcentre Plus offices, which we will be extending throughout Great Britain over the next few years, will open up more employment opportunities by offering a greatly improved, work focused service to all adults of working age who are not in work.

In some rural locations existing Jobcentres are likely to be replaced as part of this programme by alternative forms of service delivery. Our aim will be to maintain the service we offer through the use of telephone and internet based services and through the use of partner organisations. Detailed decisions, location by location, will be taken only after discussion with local authorities and other organisations.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the turnover of staff was in jobcentres in *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* the UK in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [69395]

Mr Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table.

	Turnover of staff in the Employment Service in Great Britain (leavers as a percentage of staff in post)[a]
1999–2000	[b]
2000–01	11.1
2001–02	10

Source:
Jobcentre Plus Personnel

Notes:

[a] Staff turnover figures cover all Employment Service staff, approximately 90 per cent. of whom work in jobcentres.

[b] Staff turnover figures for 1999–2000 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Staff turnover information for Somerset is not available.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list, by region, those jobcentres which will by the end of 2003 be *(a)* converted to jobcentre plus and *(b)* closed. [73442]

Mr Nicholas Brown: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive, Leigh Lewis. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Heath dated 24 July 2002:

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the conversion of Jobcentres to Jobcentre Plus offices. This falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Jobcentre Plus has brought together the working age parts of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. We began the process of bringing the work of Benefit Offices and Jobcentres together with the opening of 56 integrated Jobcentre Plus offices in 2001. We have also announced plans to open more integrated offices in 25 of our 90 Districts by the end of March 2003. I have arranged for a list of these Districts to be placed in the Library.

Plans are currently being developed for conversion work to take place later in 2003 and beyond. It is not therefore possible to provide an overall number of offices which may close over the roll out period.I hope this is helpful.

Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what dates Ministers in his Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; where each meeting took place; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72692]

Malcolm Wicks: Department for Work and Pensions Ministers meet Irish counterparts regularly e.g. in the margins of EU Councils and meetings.

My right hon. Friend, the former Secretary of State, and I met the then Minister of State at the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in Liege in July 2001 and Brussels in March 2002.

More recently, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, met the Minister for Labour Affairs at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in Kolding in July 2002.

Estates Strategy

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his Department's future estates strategy. [73443]

Mr. Andrew Smith: A decision has been made to expand, through negotiation, the existing PFI arrangements under the PRIME contract to include the ex-Employment Service buildings. If these negotiations with the current PFI service provider are not considered to be offering value for money, the Department will seek an alternative commercial solution. Work on an alternative commercial solution is being developed in parallel with the negotiations with the PRIME contract supplier.

Note: PRIME (Private Sector Resource Initiative for Management of the Estate) is a PFI contract let to Trillium (now Land Securities Trillium) in April 1998.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will implement a policy of paying attendance allowance from the date a claim is granted; and if he will make a statement; [72339]

(2) if he will estimate the cost of paying attendance allowance from the date a claim is granted; and if he will make a statement; [72340]

(3) for what purpose there is a six month delay between a decision to grant a claim for attendance allowance and the commencement of payments; and if he will make a statement; [72341]

Maria Eagle: Attendance Allowance is a contribution towards the extra costs incurred by people over the age of 65 who have long-term severe disabilities. Attendance allowance is paid from the date from which it is awarded. There is no delay of six months or any other period and, hence, the circumstances cited by the hon. Member do not arise.

However, Attendance Allowance cannot be awarded unless a severely disabled person has satisfied the conditions of entitlement for a period of at least six months. In some cases, therefore, people can be notified that they have been awarded Attendance Allowance from a prospective date, and that payment will start from that date. The six-month qualifying period establishes that the severe disability, and the extra costs arising from it, are of a long-term nature and ensures that Attendance Allowance is only awarded to people with long-term severe disabilities. We have no plans to change the qualifying period.

Social Fund

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans the Government have to amend the formula for determining the social fund budget. [72086]

Malcolm Wicks: There is no formula for determining the discretionary Social Fund budget. The size of the national social fund budget is reviewed annually, taking account of forecast loan recoveries for the year ahead. The national budgets for Community Care Grants, loans and the contingency reserve are also reviewed and determined annually.

The discretionary Social Fund budget for 2002–03 is £627 million and includes increases over the previous year of £1.4 million for the loans budget and an above-inflation cash boost of £5 million for the Community Care Grant budget. Since 1997, the Community Care Grant budget has gone up by £11 million, an increase of over 11 per cent.

During 2001–02 a record 2.3 million people were helped by the discretionary Social Fund.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total expenditure was in *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans from the Social Fund in each year from 1990; what the projected expenditure for the next three years is; and if he will make a statement. [73007]

Malcolm Wicks: The discretionary Social Fund budget for 2002–03 is £627 million and includes increases over the previous year of £1.4 million for the loans budget and an above-inflation cash boost of £5 million for the Community Care Grant budget. Since 1997, the Community Care Grant budget has gone up by £11 million, an increase of over 11 per cent.

Expenditure figures are given in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's Annual Reports on the Social Fund, copies of which are in the Library.

The national budgets for Community Care Grants, loans and the contingency reserve are reviewed and determined annually taking account of net expenditure and forecast loan recoveries for the year ahead. The planned net expenditure for each year up to and including 2005–06 is £138.2 million.

Anglo-Scottish Ministerial Meetings

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings his Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72718]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Ministers in the Department for work and Pensions regularly speak to the Scottish Executive on a number of occasions, to discuss a range of issues.

EU Committees (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 270W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Advisory Committee on employment; and if he will make a statement. [73169]

Malcolm Wicks: Each Member State has two nominated delegates to the Committee. For the UK these are from the Department for Work and Pensions and for Education and Skills. No member of the Scottish Executive has attended a meeting of the Employment Committee.

There is close contact between the lead Departments and relevant officials in Whitehall and the Devolved Administrations before Committee meetings and copies of briefing are sent to all interested parties, including the Devolved Administrations.

Contributions

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the Government's pension policy will be reviewed to take account of the overestimation of contributions; and if he will make a statement. [68994]

Mr. McCartney: We believe that the overall framework of pension policy is the right one. The Basic State Pension will remain the foundation of income in retirement: while Second pensions are being reformed to help more of tomorrow's pensioners build up better pensions. We have introduced Stakeholder Pensions which are a flexible, low charge product enabling many of those who could not previously do so, to save for their retirement. And, we have put in place the Pension Credit to make sure that it pays to have saved even modest amounts for retirement.

It is important that policy is informed by accurate statistics on pensions contributions. The review of statistics being led by the Office of National Statistics is intended to ensure that in developing our pensions policy we have access to the statistical information required.

Social Security Claimants

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will change the rules on payment of interest on mortgages for social security claimants, with special reference to pensioners, where the difference between the average local rate and the standard national rate is greater than two per cent. [69062]

Malcolm Wicks: We have no plans to change the current rules. Unlike most other benefit recipients, pensioners claiming Minimum Income Guarantee can get help with mortgage interest payments from the outset of their claims rather than having to serve a waiting period.

The standard interest rate was introduced in October 1995 and is based upon the weighted average of the basic rates charged by the major building societies. It was introduced as an administrative easement in a complex area of benefit calculation, which had been highlighted in critical reports by the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee. Any changes would re-introduce this complexity and go against our commitment to simplify benefit administration wherever possible.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if he will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if he will make a statement. [70215]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. Since that time and up to the end the 2001–02 financial year a total of £18.54 million was spent on advertising media and associated production and campaign materials costs.

Since June 2001 and up until the end of the 2001–02 financial year the following major campaigns costing over £250,000 have been run:

	£
New Deal for Disabled People	850,000

A national campaign to launch NDDP, covering press advertising in national and regional titles, supported by a helpline, website and publicity material.

	£
New Deal 50 Plus	500,000

A regional campaign to encourage more of the over-50s into work and to increase their awareness of the local help available.

	£
New Deal 25 Plus	500,000

A national campaign to inform the public about changes to the programme through radio advertising, a video and printed materials, supported by research.

	£
Age Positive	500,000

PR (including direct mail and partnerships with regional newspaper, sponsoring an award, exhibitions, research and promotional printed material) to raise employers' awareness of the business benefits of employing an age-diverse workforce.

	£
Work Incentives	450,000

Advertising campaign on local radio to raise awareness of the range of financial initiatives available to those moving from benefits into employment if they meet the qualifying criteria.

	£
Pension Education	7,188,000

A publicity campaign to encourage people to save for their retirement and understand the pension options available to them.

	£
State Second Pension	463,000

Development and implementation of publicity to inform carers about how new state pension rules could help them—linked to the overall pensions education campaign.

	£
Pensioners' Guide	729,000

Production and distribution of a guide on cross-government help and services for pensioners.

	£
Winter Fuel Payments	718,000

Information for people aged 60 plus and advisers about winter fuel payments and activity reminding them to claim and telling them how to claim for winter 2001 and relevant previous winters.

	£
Changes to rules on inherited SERPS	£459,000

Publicity about change to the rules on inheriting the State Earnings-Related Pensions Scheme.

	£
Targeting Fraud	9,000,000

A national advertising campaign on television, radio, press and posters to deter dishonest behaviour, reinforced by regional press advertising showing that benefit fraudsters are regularly caught and punished.

	£
Disability Discrimination Act Awareness	3,000,000

A national, regional and trade press advertising campaign to raise the public's awareness of the DDA and specifically to encourage service providers to ensure that disabled people have access to their services.

The Department issues many hundreds of publications to ensure people have information about the availability of its services, and are aware of their own rights and responsibilities. Identifying the costs for all those issued during this period would only be possible at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61020]

Mr. McCartney: Information relating to 2002–03 is not yet available. Information relating to 2001–02 is available in the Departmental Report published in May 2002 (Cm 5424).

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked within his Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72635]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was of publishing his Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70488]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions published its first Departmental Report in May 2002. The costs that fell directly to the Department for publishing the report were £94,940. These costs include, amongst others, the design and editing of the report and of placing it on the Department's internet and intranet. Some 2,000 copies of the report were produced distributed directly by the Department to the Work and Pensions Select Committee, key contacts within Government and other associated bodies and to senior staff.

Other costs of printing and publication are met directly by the publisher, The Stationery Office Limited (TSO), and do not fall to government.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason he has not replied to the letter to his predecessor dated 29 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Pat McGuinness. [72138]

Andrew Smith: I have not replied because the Right hon. Member wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and the issue concerned matters which are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

Faith Communities

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list projects involving faith communities which are supported by his Department. [71846]

Maria Eagle: The Department has a number of formally constituted projects that support the Government's Modernisation Agenda. A project can be defined as "a management environment set up to deliver a business product to meet a defined business case". However none of these projects specifically involve faith communities. There could well be local initiatives aimed at improving local liaison with faith communities but there is no central register of these informal, local arrangements.

One Stop Service

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his oral statement of 1 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 12, on one stop service, when he will write to the hon. Member for Wycombe. [69261]

Malcolm Wicks: I wrote to the hon. Member on 22 July 2002.

NI No. AX 81 12 29D

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what type of *(a)* pension and *(b)* benefit entitlement was paid to national insurance number AX 81 12 29D from 1 January 1980 to 11 May 1984. [72869]

Mr. McCartney: I'll write privately to the hon. Member about this matter.

Ministerial Visits

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many senior citizens groups he and his Ministers have visited since 7 June. [65044]

Mr. McCartney: I met the Greater London Pensioners' Association on 4 July 2002, the National Pensioners' Convention on 16 July 2002 and the T and G Retired Members Association on 22 July 2002.

Job Location

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72732]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table

Number of jobs that come under the remit of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

	Scotland			*(Exc Greater London)*		
	POSTS (A)	*WTE (B)*	*Percent (C)*	*POSTS (A)*	*WTE (B)*	*per cent. (C)*
Core Dept.	943	889.50	.64	18,722	17,356.90	12.74
Non Dept. Public Bodies	0	0		56	56.00	
Executive Agencies	13,808	12,853.22	9.40	88,028	79,997.05	59.91
Independent Stat Bodies	139	134.00	.1	677	630.00	.46

	Greater London POSTS (A)	Greater London WTE (B)	Greater London Percent (C)	Wales POSTS (A)	Wales WTE (B)	Wales Percent (C)
Core Dept.	2,778	2,644.97	1.89	461	425.6	.32
Non Dept. Public Bodies	0	0		0	0	
Executive Agencies	14,376	13,437.28	9.78	6,674	6,174.58	4.55
Independent Stat Bodies	144	132.8	.11	127	117.70	.1

Column (A) is the number of posts

Column (B) is the Whole Time Equivalent posts taking into account staff who work part time

Column (C) is the per cent. of posts in (A) against the total number of posts in the Department

Sanctions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the number and size of deductions which have been compulsorily made to benefits to help pay *(a)* fines, *(b)* council tax arrears, *(c)* child support arrears and *(d)* mortgage interest in each of the last 10 years, broken down by sex. [66728]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 04 July 2002]*: The available information is in the tables.

Number of deductions made to benefits to repay fines in Great Britain from 1992–93 to 2001–02.

Thousands

	Total All	Total Female	Total Male	Income Support (IS) All	Income Support (IS) Female	Income Support (IS) Male	Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA(IB)) All	Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA(IB)) Female	Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA(IB)) Male
1992–93	*0.2	*0.2	..	*0.2	*0.2	–	..	..	..
1993–94	4.2	1.6	2.7	4.2	1.6	2.7	..	..	..
1994–95	7.8	2.7	5.1	7.8	2.7	5.1	..	..	..
1995–96	10.6	4.1	6.5	10.6	4.1	6.5	..	..	..
1996–97	18.1	6.9	11.2	14.2	6.6	7.6	7.9	0.5	7.4
1997–98	21.2	8.5	12.7	13.5	8.0	5.5	7.7	*0.4	7.3
1998–99	18.7	8.0	10.6	12.5	7.4	5.0	6.2	0.6	5.6
1999–2000	17.6	7.7	9.9	12.5	7.3	5.1	5.2	*0.4	4.8
2000–01	16.9	7.4	9.5	12.4	6.9	5.5	4.4	*0.4	4.0
2001–02	17.4	8.3	9.1	13.6	7.9	5.7	3.8	*0.5	3.4

Average amount of deductions made to benefits to repay fines in Great Britain from 1992–93 to 2001–02.

£ per week

	Total All	Total Female	Total Male	IS All	IS Female	IS Male	JSA (IB) All	JSA (IB) Female	JSA (IB) Male
1992–93	*4.58	*4.58	..	*4.58	*4.58	–	..	..	..
1993–94	2.20	2.21	2.19	2.20	2.21	2.19	..	..	..
1994–95	2.30	2.29	2.31	2.30	2.29	2.31	..	..	..
1995–96	2.34	2.33	2.35	2.34	2.33	2.35	..	..	..
1996–97	2.39	2.39	2.40	2.39	2.39	2.39	2.40	2.40	2.40
1997–98	2.50	2.49	2.50	2.50	2.49	2.51	2.50	*2.50	2.50
1998–99	2.54	2.54	2.54	2.54	2.54	2.54	2.55	2.55	2.55
1999–2000	2.59	2.58	2.59	2.59	2.58	2.59	2.60	*2.60	2.60
2000–01	2.64	2.63	2.64	2.64	2.63	2.64	2.65	*2.65	2.65
2001–02	2.69	2.68	2.69	2.68	2.68	2.69	2.70	*2.70	2.70

Number of deductions made to benefits to repay council tax arrears in Great Britain from 1993–94 to 2001–02[10]*.*

Thousands

	Total All	Total Female	Total Male	IS All	IS Female	IS Male	JSA (IB) All	JSA (IB) Female	JSA (IB) Male
1993–94	7.0	3.1	4.0	7.0	3.1	4.0	..	..	..
1994–95	30.1	15.0	15.1	30.1	15.0	15.1	..	..	..
1995–96	91.6	48.1	43.5	91.6	48.1	43.5	..	..	..
1996–97	131.6	71.7	59.9	112.9	68.8	44.1	37.4	5.8	31.5
1997–98	148.2	87.6	60.7	114.8	82.1	32.7	33.5	5.5	27.9
1998–99	161.0	95.7	65.3	125.6	89.7	35.9	35.4	5.9	29.5
1999–2000	169.4	103.7	65.7	136.1	98.1	38.0	33.4	5.6	27.7
2000–01	192.4	121.5	70.9	160.9	115.7	45.1	31.5	5.7	25.8
2001–02	210.7	135.6	75.1	182.2	130.7	51.5	28.6	4.9	23.6

Average amount of deductions made to benefits to repay council tax arrears in Great Britain from 1993–94 to 2001–02[10].

£ per week

		Total			*IS*			*JSA (IB)*	
	All	*Female*	*Male*	*All*	*Female*	*Male*	*All*	*Female*	*Male*
1993–94	2.20	2.20	2.19	2.20	2.20	2.19	..	..	..
1994–95	2.29	2.29	2.29	2.29	2.29	2.29	..	..	..
1995–96	2.34	2.34	2.34	2.34	2.34	2.34	..	..	..
1996–97	2.38	2.38	2.38	2.38	2.38	2.38	2.39	2.40	2.39
1997–98	2.48	2.48	2.49	2.48	2.48	2.48	2.49	2.49	2.49
1998–99	2.54	2.55	2.54	2.54	2.55	2.53	2.55	2.55	2.55
1999–2000	2.60	2.59	2.61	2.60	2.59	2.61	2.60	2.60	2.60
2000–01	2.64	2.64	2.64	2.63	2.64	2.63	2.65	2.65	2.64
2001–02	2.69	2.68	2.70	2.69	2.68	2.71	2.70	2.70	2.70

Number of deductions made to benefits to repay mortgage interest in Great Britain from 1992–93 to 2001–02[11].

Thousands

		Total			*IS*			*JSA (IB)*	
	All	*Female*	*Male*	*All*	*Female*	*Male*	*All*	*Female*	*Male*
1992–93	44.0	20.2	23.8	44.0	20.2	23.8	..	..	..
1993–94	452.5	189.6	262.9	452.5	189.6	262.9	..	..	..
1994–95	437.4	197.9	239.5	437.4	197.9	239.5	..	..	..
1995–96	430.7	202.7	228.0	430.7	202.7	228.0	..	..	..
1996–97	398.0	194.4	203.6	353.3	186.9	166.4	89.5	15.1	74.3
1997–98	337.4	174.9	162.5	276.7	163.9	112.9	60.6	11.1	49.6
1998–99	308.2	161.0	147.2	260.1	151.7	108.4	48.1	9.3	38.8
1999–2000	280.7	147.2	133.5	240.6	139.2	101.5	40.1	8.0	32.1
2000–01	259.3	135.8	123.5	230.1	130.2	99.9	29.2	5.6	23.6
2001–02	242.2	127.8	114.4	221.3	123.8	97.5	20.9	4.0	17.0

Average amount of deductions made to benefits to repay mortgage interest in Great Britain from 1992–93 to 2001–02.

£ per week

		Total			*IS*			*JSA (IB)*	
	All	*Female*	*Male*	*All*	*Female*	*Male*	*All*	*Female*	*Male*
1992–93	45.56	44.36	46.58	45.56	44.36	46.58	..	..	..
1993–94	42.00	37.45	45.27	42.00	37.45	45.27	..	..	..
1994–95	39.19	36.33	41.55	39.19	36.33	41.55	..	..	..
1995–96	41.16	39.03	43.04	41.16	39.03	43.04	..	..	..
1996–97	35.87	34.76	36.92	35.19	34.63	35.83	41.19	37.92	41.85
1997–98	33.93	33.63	34.25	32.89	33.56	31.92	38.65	34.61	39.55
1998–99	38.00	37.74	38.27	37.23	37.77	36.46	42.17	37.27	43.34
1999–2000	31.10	30.77	31.46	30.35	30.73	29.82	35.64	31.51	36.66
2000–01	35.33	35.06	35.63	34.75	35.08	34.32	39.95	34.71	41.19
2001–02	32.86	32.50	33.25	32.34	32.50	32.14	38.26	32.45	39.63

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred and are expressed in thousands.

[2] Figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample up to and including February 1993, and a 5 per cent. sample thereafter. Numbers are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.

[3] Numbers and amounts marked "*" are based on very few sample cases and are therefore subject to a high degree of sampling variation. They should be considered a guide to the current situation only.

[4] "–" indicates figures are nil or negligible.

[5] ".." indicates figures are not applicable.

[6] JSA(IB) figures will include cases where there is an underlying entitlement to contribution-based JSA.

[7] IS figures for 1992–93 are based on May 1992 data and represent cases and average amounts in that enquiry week. IS Figures from 1993–94 are based on a four quarter average of caseloads and average amounts paid at the enquiry dates in May, August, November and February of each year. JSA(IB) figures are a four quarter average, with the exception of 1996–97 which is based on two quarters (November and February) following the introduction of JSA(IB) to replace IS for the unemployed in October 1996.

[8] The component IS/JSA(IB) totals for 1996–97 do not sum to the overall total, due to the method used to calculate the averages over two and four quarters. The overall total is however representative of the total caseload.

[9] Totals may not sum due to rounding.

[10] Data were only collected from 1994 onwards.

[11] The number of deductions for mortgage interest payments rose sharply between May 1992 and May 1993 following the introduction of mandatory deductions at the end of 1992.

[12] Council tax replaced Community Charge in 1993. Figures here relate solely to Council tax arrears from its introduction.

[13] Deductions for Council tax arrears are a last resort where other methods of payment have failed and where it is in the interest of the family in order to prevent the prosecution of the vulnerable for debt.

Sources:

Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry, May 1992.

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries, May 1993 to February 2002.

Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiries, November 1996 to February 2002.

Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many payments have been made under the vaccine damage payment scheme in each year since 1995. [72941]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table. Column 2 refers to payments made under the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979. Column 3 refers to extra-statutory payments made to past recipients of Vaccine Damage Payments to bring the real value of their original payment up to the current payment level of £100,000.

Financial Year	*Vaccine Damage Payments*	*Vaccine Damage Top up Payments*
1995–96	4	
1996–97	5	
1997–98	3	
1998–99	0	
1999–00	4	
2000–01	4	792
2001–02	3	103
2002–03 to date	1	1

Employment Zones

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the terms of reference are of the current evaluation of employment zones; when the evaluation will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [73541]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The terms of reference of the current evaluation of Employment Zones are to assess the contribution of Zones to helping long-term claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance aged 25 and over find and retain jobs.

The current evaluation will be completed with the publication in May 2003 of a cohort study comparing characteristics and outcomes of Zone participants with those of similar long-term unemployed people.

Our evaluation to date shows that Employment Zones are making a positive contribution in helping long-term unemployed people in deprived areas move off benefit and into work. The 15 Zones have already helped over 23,600 people into jobs. We have recently extended the current Zone contracts to March 2004 and we will also be testing the Employment Zone approach with other groups such as lone parents and people returning to the New Deals.

A qualitative study of Zone operations between winter 2000 and summer 2001 was published on 17 July 2002 (Working Age Evaluation Series, Number 124). A copy is available in the Library. The report highlights some encouraging findings about the Zones, recognising, for example, that they have a genuinely innovative delivery system and underlining the importance of the flexibility afforded to Personal Advisers in helping people move into jobs. We will study the report's findings closely and consider what lessons can be learnt from the Employment Zone approach.

ONE pilot

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 993W, on the ONE pilot, what feedback he has had from the introduction of the form by the north Nottinghamshire private and voluntary sector pilot; and if he will make a statement. [66484]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The use of a uniform Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit claim form by the North Nottinghamshire Private and Voluntary Sector pilot has not been formally evaluated. However, informal feedback suggests that the introduction of the form has achieved savings on printing costs for the local authorities concerned, and that staff can also complete and check the form more quickly, providing a more efficient service to customers.

Building on the experience of the ONE pilots, the Customer Management System, which we plan to introduce early next year, will result in a uniform, single claims process for customers. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit information will be gathered when a claim is made to either Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance or Incapacity Benefit, so that customers will need to provide information only once.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) whether it is his policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via his Department's website; [72279]

(2) for how long he retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website. [72290]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department publishes a wide range of documents in a printed and electronic format. Those that are of most significant interest are published on the Department's Internet site. [At present, all documents displayed on the Department's website are retained indefinitely].

Documents that are not published on the internet site are made available to the public in a printed format and are either available from the Department or the House of Commons Library. The House of Commons Library also publishes library material on the Internet.

Strategic Training in Apparel and Textiles

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his Department will extend the Strategic Training in Apparel and Textiles programme after June. [72207]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Strategic Training in Apparel and Textiles (STAT) programme, which was launched in April 2001, was developed as a specific response to a decline experienced in the textile industry. The programme was designed to improve the competitiveness of the industry by helping businesses with staff training and business planning. STAT received a fixed allocation of funding until June 2002, but due to an underspend in the early months, the programme has continued beyond this. There are no plans to extend it any further but the apparel, footwear and textiles sector now receives support through Skillfast-UK, one of five trailblazer Sector Skills Councils launched earlier this year. Skillfast-UK will ensure that people in the apparel and textiles sector continue to receive strategic training and support.

An interim assessment suggests that the project has achieved many of its goals, with over 1,800 jobs having been secured as a result of the initiative, and around 2,750 people gaining additional skills within the textile industry.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the EU Audit Board of the Administrative Commission on social security for migrant workers is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67742]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

This is a reserved matter and no-one from the Scottish Executive has attended or is a member.

Massey Ferguson

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he plans to take to assist those who become unemployed following the closure of the Massey Ferguson plant in Coventry to find new work. [70801]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Through the Rapid Response Service, we have already responded to the announcement of the job losses at Agco (Massey Ferguson) in Coventry, meeting key partners to discuss the assistance needed to help those facing redundancy.

Working with its partners, Jobcentre Plus will offer a tailored, co-ordinated package of support appropriate to the needs of the workers being affected by the redundancies. This will include information and advice on all aspects of job search, skills and training analysis to help identify individuals' transferable skills and any training needs. Early access to a range of Jobcentre Plus programmes, including the New Deals, will be offered and, where appropriate, re-training will be given. Funding will also be available to pay for one-off support to address individual barriers to re-employment linked to specific job offers.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will answer the written question from the hon. Member for Chichester, tabled on 22 May, on the official travel of departmental and non-departmental special advisers. [72681]

Maria Eagle: This question was not asked of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Consultation Document

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in what format his Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations. [69844]

Mr. McCartney: Replies to written consultations are published in a variety of formats. Where a Regulatory Reform Order is required, replies are submitted to Parliament as part of the scrutiny process. In other cases, results are published on the Department's website and are available in paper format.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 389**

SESSION 2001–2002

15th July—24th July 2002

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

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Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
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Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

15th July 2002–24th July 2002

A3
1248w

A12
1247w

A30
Repairs and maintenance (22.07.02) 788–91

A46
1246w

A140
966–7w

A303
(22.07.02) 740–3

A404(M)
143w, 736w

Abandoned vehicles
345w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Questions
Iraq, Armed conflict 979–80

Abortion
1385w
Drugs 1434–7w

Absent voting
574w, 700w

Acceptable behaviour contracts
South Yorkshire 557w

Access to Justice Act 1999
Questions
412–3w

Access to work programme
1566w

Accident and emergency departments
Solihull Hospital 209–10w, 660w
Standards 659–60w

Accidents
Chinook helicopters 1107w
Civil servants 335w
Helicopters 282
Nuclear power 783w
Railways 326w, 462w, 744–5w
Roads 739w, 741–3w, 965–7w, 1245w, 1251–3w
Shipping 8w
Transport 1242w

Accountancy
1338–9w
British Nuclear Fuels 1336–7w
Regulation 1328w
Small businesses 1332–3w
Standards 337w
Strategic Rail Authority 745–6w

Acquittals
503–4w

Acrylamide
Food 1431–2w

Acute beds
124w, 219w, 1416w
Kent 1102w

Adams, Mrs Irene
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 861

Additives
Animal feed 29w, 703w, 919w

Addresses to the Crown
Foot and mouth disease (22.07.02) 649

Administration of justice
528–9w, 1068w
Annual reports 403w
Standards 1459–60w, 1532w

Admissibility of evidence
Telephone tapping 1517w

Advertising
Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Arts Council of England 496w
Business links 778w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 474–6w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 459w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1578–9w
Inland Revenue 253w
National Savings Agency 1197w
Office for National Statistics 1197w
Scotland Office 382w

Advisory Committee on Business Appointments
see Business Appointments Advisory Committee

Advisory services
Business 777w
Pensions 1543–5w
Prisoners 1469–70w
Young people 204w

Advocacy
Crown Prosecution Service 619w

Advocate General for Scotland
Advertising 380w
Buildings 380–1w, 770w
Consultation papers 381w
Females 985w
Holiday leave 380w
Manpower 1233w
Members 1232–3w
New deal schemes 985w
Official hospitality 381–2w
Orders and regulations 380w
Overtime 770w
Pay 380w, 985w
Public expenditure 379w, 382w, 770w
Recruitment 1233w
Standards 503w
Training 379w
Visits abroad 1233w

Aerials
Planning permission 27w, 344w, (22.07.02) 756–9, 1003w

Afghanistan
Armed conflict 21w, 1110w
Army 492w
Asylum 590–1w, 899–900w
International assistance 258w, 1126–7w
Overseas aid 176–7w, 714–5w, 1127–8w
Peace keeping operations 21–2w, 276–7w, 494w, 753w, 1117w
Politics and government 966–8
Unmanned air vehicles 758w

Africa
AIDS 717–8w, 965–6
Arms trade 281–2
HIV infection 1131–2w
International assistance 833–4
Meat 387–8w, 481–2w, 920w
Peace keeping operations 763w, 1311w
Water 1125w

African Development Fund (Additional Subscriptions) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(15.07.02) 127

African Union
718w

After school clubs
Inspections 1341–2w

Age Discrimination (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 634

Aggregates levy
Scotland 1228w

Agricultural products
Developing countries 1126w
Imports 486w

Agriculture
see also Farmers and Farms
Education 648w
Non-domestic rates 315–6w
Pay 935w
Research 918–9w
Scotland 308–9w
Subsidies 134w, 300w, 312w, 488w, 621w, 1139w, 1143–4w
Sustainable development 75w, 300w
Trade 177w, 775w
Trade competitiveness 313–5w
USA 177w, 775w
Zimbabwe 586w

AIDS
Africa 717–8w, 965–6
Asylum 97w
Botswana 963–5
Developing countries 719w
Drug resistance 1389w
Research 1389–90w
Ukraine 1388–9w

***Ainsworth, Bob**, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Police, Merseyside (16.07.02) 266–8
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 478–86, 494, 498–501, 507–13, 515–6, 523–5
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1050–5, 1058–9
Questions
Airguns, Ownership 219w
Buildings, Home Office 397w
Cannabis, Crime 669–70w
Cannabis, Lambeth 222w
Crime, Alcoholic drinks 222–3w
Crime, Wandsworth 98w
Crime prevention, Young people 401–2w
Crimes of violence, Retail trade 682–3w
Driving under influence 1063w, 1448–54w
Drug treatment and testing orders 104w
Drugs, Children 88w
Drugs, Crime 87w, 104–5w, 396–7w, 666–70w, 1461–2w
Drugs, Misuse 87–8w, 559w, 1068–9w
Drugs, Nottinghamshire 1462–3w
Drugs, Portsmouth 836w
EC action, Home Office 632w
European Police Office, Powers 223–4w
Firearms 1069–70w
Firearms, Convictions 1056–8w
Internet, Security 394–5w
Members' interests, Home Office 394w
Prisoners, Repatriation 1044–5w
Proceeds of crime 223w
Recovered Assets Fund 1069w
Regulatory impact assessments, Home Office 396w
Road traffic offences 687–8w
Road traffic offences, Fixed penalties 843w
Road traffic offences, Private roads 688w
"Road Traffic Penalties Consultation Paper" 1448w
Speed limits 675–8w
Statistics, Home Office 397–8w
Warehouse parties, Southern region 401w
Xenotransplantation 228–9w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter
- *Questions*
- General practitioners 803–4w

Air conditioning
- 1154w
- 10 Downing Street 803w
- 11 Downing Street 803w
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1002w
- Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre 1002w

Air force
- Engineers 23–4w

Air pollution
- London Underground 478–9w

Air routes
- Gatwick Airport 1241w
- Heathrow Airport 961w
- Singapore 17–8w
- South East region 733w
- USA 17w, 146w

Air traffic control
- Manpower 572w

Aircraft carriers
- Deployment 284–5w
- Portsmouth 902–3w

Airguns
- Ownership 219w

Airlines
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office 177w

Airports
- Construction 733w, 824w
- Landing rights 1235w
- Ministerial statements (23.07.02) 847–68
- Scotland 983w
- South East region 1236w

Albania
- Environment protection 588–9w

Alcohol Services Bill 2001/02
- *Debates etc.*
- 2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Alcoholic drinks
- Crime 222–3w
- Misuse 641w
- Young people 284–5, 408w, 558–9w, 1455–8w

Alconbury airfield
- Planning permission 245w

***Alexander, Mr Douglas**, Minister of State, Cabinet Office*
- *Questions*
- Buildings, Cabinet Office 405w
- Central Office of Information, Annual reports 1164w
- Centre for Management and Policy Studies, Annual reports 725–6w
- Civil servants, Accidents 335w
- Civil servants, Pay 405w
- Civil servants, Pensions 728–30w
- Civil service, Annual reports 272w
- Civil service agencies 726w
- Computer software, Government departments 725w
- Computers, Cabinet Office 84w
- Deregulation Task Force 956w
- Electronic government 726–7w
- Emergencies, Planning 727w
- European Scrutiny Committee, Explanatory notes 1165–6w
- Government Car and Despatch Agency, Annual reports 971–2w
- Mandelkern Group 361w

***Alexander, Mr Douglas**—continued*
- Non-departmental public bodies, Public appointments 1164w
- Orders and regulations, Cabinet Office 404w
- Public participation, Cabinet Office 1164–5w
- Recycling, Cabinet Office 641w
- Regulation, Audit 641–2w
- Regulation, EC action 360–1w
- Regulation, Voluntary organisations 1165w
- Regulatory Accountability Panel 345w
- Regulatory impact assessments 972w
- Strategy Unit 641w

Allen, Mr Graham
- *Questions*
- Crime and disorder partnerships 89w, 680w
- Offender assessment system 1496w
- Parliamentary scrutiny 323w
- Police, Standards 1495w
- Prison Service, Disciplinary proceedings 1516w
- Prison Service, Disclosure of information 1515w
- Standing committees 325w
- Strokes, Medical treatments 1424w
- Written questions, Administrative delays 1431w

Allotments
- 46w

Almondbank
- Defence Aviation Repair Agency 163w

Alzheimer's disease
- Prescription drugs 1399–400w

Ambulance services
- Crimes of violence 608w
- Standards 1410–1w

Amendments and new clauses
- Rulings and statements (16.07.02) 177, (18.07.02) 480

Amess, Mr David
- *Debates etc.*
- Care homes (22.07.02) 783–8
- Endangered Species (Offences) Bill, 1R (22.07.02) 705
- *Questions*
- Asthma, Medical treatments 1423–4w

Ammunition
- Procurement 20w

Anaesthetics
- Medical equipment 1420–1w, 1423–4w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
- *Questions*
- Zimbabwe, Sanctions 831–3

Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
- *Questions*
- Health services, Wales 269–70
- Religious broadcasting, Licensing 1157w

Angola
- Asylum 719–20w
- Famine 447–8w, 585–6w
- Overseas aid 448w
- Peace negotiations 1310–1w

Animal breeding
- Tax allowances 255w

Animal experiments
- Organophosphates 313w
- Schools 54w

Animal feed
- 30w, 702–3w, 1149–50w
- Additives 29w, 703w, 919w
- Poultry 297w

Animal products
- EC external trade 300w

Animal Sanctuaries (Licensing) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
- *Debates etc.*
- 2R order read (19.07.02) 637

Animal welfare
- Expenditure 619–20w
- Livestock 921w
- Poultry 311w, 486w, 915w, 1154w

Anna Climbie Death Inquiry
- see Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry

Anniversaries
- Queen Elizabeth II 391–2w

Annuities
- 466w

Antiaircraft missiles
- Procurement 157w, 162w

Antiques
- Auctions 692–3w

Antisemitism
- 221–2w
- Middle East 181w, 765w

Antisocial behaviour orders
- 663–4w, 831w
- Hampshire 558w
- South Tyneside 830–2w
- South Yorkshire 557–8w
- West Sussex 1466–7w

Appeals Service
- Scotland 1557–8w

Apprentices
- Finance 990w

Apprenticeships
- see Modern apprenticeships

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
- *Debates etc.*
- Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 698
- Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 328
- Defence review (18.07.02) 468
- *Questions*
- Smoking 426–8w

Archaeology
- 656–7, 1160–2w

Area Child Protection Committees Bill 2001/02
- *Debates etc.*
- 2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Areas of outstanding natural beauty
- Wales 319w

Armed conflict
- 19–20
- Afghanistan 21w, 1110w
- Burundi 587w
- Central African Republic 1307w
- Civilians 749–50w
- Democratic Republic of Congo 1–2w, 585w
- Iraq 280–1, 975, 979–82
- Liberia 260–1w, 886w, 900w, 1306w
- Sudan 837–9
- Uganda 588w, 899w

Armed forces
- Bridgwater 760w
- Cadets 760w
- Cellular phones 276w
- Colombia 756w
- Cyprus 385–6w
- Deployment 762w, 901w
- Discharges 3–5, 22w

Armed forces—continued
  Ethnic groups 14–5
  Health services 749–50w
  Housing 5–6, 24w, 159–60w, 750–3w, 905–6w, 1107–9w
  Nepal 886w
  Pensions 1113w
  Personnel management 277–8w
  Psychiatry 754w
  Racial discrimination 14
  Recruitment 13–4, 1107w
  Religion 20–1w
  Sierra Leone 1308w
  Slovakia 275–6w
  Training 275–6w
  Wales 3–4
  Warminster 159w, 752w
  Wiltshire 160w

Armoured fighting vehicles
  913w

Arms trade
  436w, 491w, (22.07.02) 751–3, 1325w
  Africa 281–2
  Developing countries 1138w
  Export controls 77–8w, 384w, 435–6w, 611w, 780w, 1317–8w, 1330w
  India 1324–5w
  Iran 383w
  Israel 839–42
  Namibia 1327w
  Offset arrangements 489–90w
  Pakistan 1324–5w

Army
  Afghanistan 492w
  Deployment 19w
  Discharges 15
  Edinburgh 1115w
  Internet 755w
  Manpower 6, 19w
  Young people 277w

Army Personnel Centre
  Standards 1118–9w

Art works
  British Council 888w

Arthritis
  Surgery 214w

Artillery
  Radar 492–3w

Arts
  North East region 692w

Arts and Humanities Research Board
  992–3w

Arts Council of England
  Advertising 496w
  Expenditure 495–6w
  Planning 496w

Asbestos
  Water supply 476w

Asda
  Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 310w

Asia
  Christianity (17.07.02) 89–112wh

Asperger's syndrome
  Employment schemes 113–4w

Asthma
  Medical treatments 1423–4w

Asylum
  91–2w, 225w, 246–8w, 1323w
  Administrative delays 1042w
  Afghanistan 590–1w, 899–900w
  AIDS 97w
  Angola 719–20w

Asylum—continued
  Appeals 92–3w, 1290–1w
  Applications 90w, 393w, 552–3w, 860–1w, 1318w, 1447–8w
  Bicester 220w
  Children 90w, 550–2w
  China 884w
  Detainees 1043w
  Education 773w, 1045w
  Employment 1041–2w
  Greater London 90–1w, 549–50w
  HIV infection 1041w
  Housing 551–2w, 1063w
  Identity cards 548w
  Iraq 228w, 400–1w
  Maternity payments 1043w
  Throckmorton airfield 1373w
  Welfare milk 541–2w
  Zimbabwe 226w, 398–9w, 551w, 586w

Atherton, Ms Candy
    Debates etc.
  Airports (23.07.02) 864
    Questions
  Botswana, Ethnic groups 176w
  Botswana, Nature conservation 763w
  Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 136w
  Neurology, Manpower 1412–3w
  Transport, Rural areas 1264w
  Travel, Concessions 1264w

Atkins, Charlotte
    Questions
  Brixton Prison, Standards 1447w
  Dental health 189w

Atkinson, Mr David
    Questions
  Angola, Famine 585–6w
  NATO, Russia 18

Atkinson, Mr Peter
    Debates etc.
  Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 681
    Questions
  Members, Correspondence 477w, 631–2w
  Sub-Saharan Africa, Overseas aid 1125w

Attendance allowance
  1582w
  Scotland 112w

Auctions
  Antiques 692–3w

Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group
  170w, 1326–7w, 1337w
  Ministerial statements (24.07.02) 1003–17

Aujeszky's disease
  484w

Auld Review
  see Criminal Courts Review

Australia
  Overseas residence 1031w

Automated credit transfer
  Pensions 1551w
  Social security benefits 597–601w, 805–7w, 809–11w, 1029w, 1031–2w, 1550–2w, 1579w

Automatic train protection
  1243w

Aviation
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 384–5w
  Military bases 1114–5w, 1234–5w
  Scotland 970w
  Thailand 763–4w
  USA 1236w

Babies
  Food 418w

Baby care units
  120w

Bacon, Mr Richard
    Debates etc.
  Oral question time intervention (18.07.02) 410
    Questions
  Educational institutions, Computer software 651–2w

Badgers
  see Bovine tuberculosis

Bahrain
  835–6

Baird, Vera
    Debates etc.
  Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 302–3
  Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 500, 516–9
    Questions
  Burundi, Armed conflict 587w
  Burundi, Debts 586–7w
  Central Africa, International assistance 591w
  Child Support Agency, Standards 819w
  Combined heat and power, Saltburn 441w
  Contact orders 525w
  Democratic Republic of Congo, Armed conflict 585w
  Democratic Republic of Congo, International assistance 584–5w
  Jobcentre Plus, Welfare tax credits 271w
  Judges, Training 606–8w
  Maintenance, Children 1026w, 1547–9w
  Telephone tapping, Admissibility of evidence 1517w
  Trials, Rape 798–9w, 1280–8w

Baker, Norman
    Debates etc.
  Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 710, 715–8, 728
  Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), Rem stages (24.07.02) 1065, 1067–71
  Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 500, 508–9, 519–21
  Proceeds of Crime Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1053–4, 1057–8
  Written questions, Points of order (24.07.02) 1049
    Questions
  Animal feed, Additives 919w
  China, Sanctions 385–6w
  Criminal Records Bureau, Standards 1483–4w
  Environmentally sensitive areas 622w
  European Parliament elections 699w
  Government Communications Headquarters 389w
  Meat, Hygiene 429w
  Metropolitan Police, Sick leave 1049–50w
  Official gifts 1177–8w
  Panchen Lama 386w
  Police, Standards 856–7w, 1496–7w
  Police Standards Unit 106w
  Poultry, Animal feed 297w
  Privy Council 712–3w
  Royal family, Finance 1178w
  Sanctions 385w
  10 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 804w

Baldry, Tony
Debates etc.
Respite Care (Children) Bill, 1R (17.07.02) 307–10
Questions
Afghanistan, Politics and government 968
Africa, Peace keeping operations 763w, 1311w
Arms trade, Export controls 384w
Developing countries, Common agricultural policy 261w
Developing countries, Education 290–1w
Developing countries, Trade 261w, 763w
Sierra Leone, Peace negotiations 1310–1w
South Africa, HIV infection 291w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 258w

Balkans
Peace keeping operations 2w, 9–10

Ballistic missile defence
Type 45 destroyers 158–9w
USA 26w, 881w

Baltic states
Regional planning and development 589–90w

Bank for Reconstruction and Development of Europe
see European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Bank notes
470w

Bank services
68–9w
Financial Services Consumer Panel 270w
Post offices 438–9w, 523w, 597w, 815w, 945w, 953w

Bankruptcy
355–6w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 683
Questions
Heath, Edward, Public statues 1167w

Barclays Group Reorganisation Bill (HL) 2000/01
Debates etc.
3R order read (16.07.02) 137, (24.07.02) 963

Barker, Gregory
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 452
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 891, 904
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 252–4wh, 258wh
Questions
Arms trade, India 1324–5w
Army, Internet 755w
British Nuclear Fuels, Pay 783–4w
Cancer, Burnham on Sea 1422w
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 786w
Climate change levy, Nuclear power 957w
Commonwealth Development Corporation 449–51w, 574–84w, 722w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Debts 450w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Directors 450w, 581–2w, 584w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Pay 575–6w, 580–1w, 583w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Publicity 583w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Redundancy 576w

***Barker, Gregory**—continued*
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Sub-Saharan Africa 449w, 576–7w
Developing countries, Microfinance 293w
Electricity, Distribution 1329w
Electricity generation, Markets 1330w
Electricity generation, Prices 944w
Energy 943–4w
Energy, Competition 346w, 943w
Energy, Hacking 346w
Flood control 302–3w, 623–5w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 700–2w
Gibraltar, Spain 281w, 391–2w, 473–4w
Hacking, Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Hacking, Home Office 843w
Hawk aircraft, India 436w
Hedges and ditches 303–4w
Indonesia, Forests 591w
Iran, Nuclear fuels 389–90w
ITV Association 410w
Japan, Radioactive materials 389w
Kenya, Microfinance 293w
Lapwings, Conservation 302w
Magnox reactors 784w
Members, Correspondence 131w
Military bases, Cyprus 279w, 282w
Nuclear power 1330w
Nuclear power, Accidents 783w
Nuclear power, Publicity 345w
Nuclear power stations, Construction 346w
Nuclear power stations, Security 346w
Nuclear reactors 783–4w
Officer Training Corps 281–2w
Papua New Guinea, Forests 591w
Playgrounds, Wood 652–3w
Public libraries 1157–8w
Public relations, Ministry of Defence 285w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 391–2w
Radar, Wind power 761w
Radioactive wastes 784–5w
Radioactive wastes, Railways 785–6w
Radioactive wastes, Transport 345–6w, 784w, 786w
Renewable energy 787–8w
Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst 279–82w, 756w
Royal School of Artillery 278–9w, 755–6w
Sellafield, Radioactive wastes 782–3w
Small Enterprise Development Agency, Finance 292w
Southern Africa, Overseas aid 1124w
Terrorism, Energy supply 842–3w
Uganda, Microfinance 292–3w
Uranium, Mining 347w, 782w
USA, Ballistic missile defence 881w
Wind power, Planning permission 787w
Wood, Health hazards 425w
Work permits 107–8w, 395–6w
Work permits, Information technology 107w, 831w
Written questions, Dept for International Development 292w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Moorside Mining, Standing Order No 24 applications (15.07.02) 45
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 997–8
Regeneration, Clay Cross (22.07.02) 753–6
Questions
Business questions 425
Pensions, Self-employed 114–5w
Social security benefits, Widowed people 1559–60w
State retirement pensions 115–6w

Barnsley
Primary care trusts 1386w
Theatre 691w

Baron, Mr John
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 228
Questions
Army, Manpower 19w
Crime prevention, Wales 320w
EC aid 880w
Housing, South East region 980

Barrett, John
Questions
Central African Republic, Armed conflict 1307w
Central African Republic, Education 716–7w
Central African Republic, HIV infection 717w
Central African Republic, Politics and government 717w
Climate change 31–2w
Dental services, Fees and charges 662w
Developing countries, Drugs 336w, 593–4w, 1186w
Developing countries, HIV infection 592–3w, 895w
Development aid 73w
Energy supply 347–8w
Excise duties, Fuels 462w
Further education, Buildings 989w
Lesotho, Famine 717w
Mali, Elections 1306w
Mozambique, Food 42–3w, 587w
North Africa, Water 588w
Overseas aid 41–2w, 1185–6w
Post offices, Bank services 438–9w
Post offices, Closures 944w
Post offices, Social security benefits 438w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 717w
Sierra Leone, Peace negotiations 886w, 1308w
Somalia, International assistance 41w
Somalia, Livestock 41w, 1136w
Southern Africa, Famine 587w
Sub-Saharan Africa, Water 291–2w
Syrian Arab Republic, Overseas aid 43w
Welfare tax credits 1179–80w
Zimbabwe, Asylum 586w

Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 296
Questions
Oxygen, Medical equipment 1383w

Basle Concordat
Scotland 76w

Baton rounds
1459w

Battle, Mr John
Questions
Funeral payments 604–5w
Trade, Agriculture 775w

Bayley, Hugh
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 472
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 489
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 905, 912, 949
Stillman, Ian, Petitions (23.07.02) 953–4
Questions
Directors, Dept for International Development 1129w
Hospitals, Hygiene 203w
Housing 1216w
Housing, York 980–1
Sanctions, Zimbabwe 821w

BBC
694w
Digital broadcasting 1159w

BBC External Services
844–5, 1320–1w
Pay 390w

***Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret**, Secretary of State for Environment Food and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Ministerial statements (22.07.02) 669–88
Questions
Animal feed 30w, 702–3w, 1149–50w
Animal feed, Additives 29w, 703w
Asda, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 310w
Bovine tuberculosis 703w
EC Agriculture Council 309–10w
Livestock, Transport 922w
Livestock, Waste disposal 135w
Meat products, Contamination 204w
Pigmeat, Import controls 29–30w
Public expenditure, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 627–31w
"Royal Society Scientific Review of Infectious Diseases in Livestock" 140–1w
Rural Payments Agency, Standards 914–5w
Scrapie 30w
Sellafield, Radioactive wastes 133–4w, 931w
Sheep, Disease control 31w
Sheep meat 29w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1149w

Beef
Exports 1151–2w
France 309w, 934–5w, 1228w

Bees
Diseases 489w

Begg, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Endometriosis, Petitions (17.07.02) 388
Questions
Identity cards, Transsexualism 555–6w
Oil, Exploration 443–6w
Pensions 402–3
Trading Schemes Act 1996 439w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 542
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 171–2
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 179
Members, Points of order (24.07.02) 1018
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 249
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 257wh
Questions
Business questions 433
Community development, Northern Ireland 1202w
Foreign workers 440w
Foreign workers, Minimum wage 440w
Prisoners, Northern Ireland 1202w
Public sector, Pensions 255w
Smuggling, Northern Ireland 507–8w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 684–5
Questions
Absent voting 700w

***Beith, Rt Hon A J**—continued*
Annual reports, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 408–9w
Annual reports, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 709w
Annual reports, Dept for International Development 594w
Annual reports, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587w
Annual reports, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Annual reports, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 890w
Annual reports, Home Office 1078–9w
Annual reports, Lord Chancellor's Dept 797w
Annual reports, Northern Ireland Office 505w
Annual reports, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 999–1000w
Annual reports, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1376w
Annual reports, Scotland Office 769w
Annual reports, Treasury 1190w
Elections, Wales 699–700w
Electoral Commission 1123w
Electoral register 665–6
Electoral systems 996w
Electronic voting 664–6
European Parliament elections 699w
Hospices, Finance 200w
Local government services, Standards 974–5
Members, Correspondence 297w, 878w
Political parties, Finance 662–4, 996–7w
Standards, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 975
Voting rights, Young people 700w

Belarus
(23.07.02) 224–30wh

Belfast
Closed circuit television 506–7w

***Bell, Mr Stuart**, Second Church Estates Commissioner*
Questions
Bishops 663–4
Bishops, Housing 293w
Cathedrals, Repairs and maintenance 667–8
Churches, Planning permission 723–4w
Clergy, Conditions of employment 723w, 1164w
Clergy, Pensions 666
Clergy, Recruitment 662
Electronic commerce, Private sector 781w
Electronic commerce, Public private partnerships 960–1w
Hunting 723w
Taxation, Self-assessment 472–3w

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 700–1
Housing (18.07.02) 454
Lockerbie, Bombings (23.07.02) 958–9
Questions
Cancer, Research 144–5
Smallpox, Vaccination 1086–7w, 1390–1w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 1124w
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 829–30

***Benn, Hilary**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Home Office*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 196–201wh
Questions
Administration of justice 1068w

***Benn, Hilary**—continued*
Administration of justice, Standards 1459–60w, 1532w
Bigamy, Convictions 1503w
Brixton Prison, Standards 1447w
Care homes, Vetting 835w
Children, Protection 229–31w
Consultation papers, Home Office 837–40w
Corporate manslaughter 1505w
Correctional Services Board 1446–7w
Crime prevention, Annual reports 861–2w
Criminal Courts Review 1078w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, Administrative delays 1503–4w
Criminal injuries compensation scheme 1532w
Criminal proceedings 1530–1w
Criminal Records Bureau 1483w
Criminal Records Bureau, Administrative delays 1056w, 1453w, 1483w, 1518w
Criminal Records Bureau, Annual reports 554w
Criminal Records Bureau, Capita 827–8w
Criminal Records Bureau, Complaints 1483w
Criminal Records Bureau, Standards 1483–4w
Dangerous mental patients 1067–8w
Double jeopardy 1461–2w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, Education 849w, 1077w
Genetics, Identification of criminals 1517w
Home detention curfews 1453–4w, 1460–1w
Homicide, Habitual offenders 843w
Human trafficking 834w
Juries, Corruption 830w
Life imprisonment 832w, 1519–20w
Life imprisonment, Sexual offences 832w
Maladministration, Home Office 1486w
Mentally disturbed offenders 1527w, 1529w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Prisoners' release 1521w
National Association of Prison Visitors 1528w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Finance 1521–2w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Greater London 1460w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Information technology 845–6w, 1517–8w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Pay 1460w
Offences against children 1533–4w
Offences against children, Sports 1163w
Offender assessment system 1496w
Parole 836–7w
Police cautions 832w
Police custody 1444–5w
Police custody, Standards 1445w
Pornography, Internet 1532–3w
Pre-sentence reports 853w
Pre-sentence reports, Greater London 844w
Prison governors, Ethnic groups 835w
Prison governors, Females 834w
Prison Service, Annual reports 564w
Prison Service, Disciplinary proceedings 1516w
Prison Service, Disclosure of information 1515w
Prison Service, Environment protection 564w
Prison Service, Sick leave 1070–6w
Prison Service, Standards 1075–7w
Prison visitors 1528–9w
Prisoners 1506–8w
Prisoners, Ethnic groups 1508–16w

***Benn, Hilary**—continued*
Prisoners, Females 832–3w
Prisoners, Literacy 856w
Prisoners, Pay 1075w
Prisoners, Rehabilitation 854–5w
Prisoners, Repatriation 1504–5w
Prisoners, Self-mutilation 855w
Prisoners, Suicide 828–9w, 1463–4w, 1519w, 1537–8w
Prisoners' release 1535–8w
Prisons 837w
Prisons, Closures 1443–4w
Prisons, Disciplinary proceedings 1536w
Prisons, Drugs 828w
Prisons, Education 1498–502w
Prisons, Health services 1534w
Prisons, Inspections 1501–2w
Prisons, Mental health services 1097w, 1529w, 1534–5w
Prisons, Per capita costs 1534w
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, Standards 845w
Probation and aftercare 837w, 846–7w, 1520–1w
Probation and aftercare, Greater London 844–5w, 1077w, 1532w
Probation and aftercare, Suicide 1519–20w
Prostitution 1058–60w
Public participation, Home Office 841–2w
Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 403w
Segregation of prisoners 1075w
Sentencing 85w
Sexual offences 1454–6w
Smith, Helen 1531w
Strang, Eden 1531w
Telephone services, Home Office 848w
Telephone tapping, Admissibility of evidence 1517w
Vetting, Overseas residence 1483w
Vetting, Sports 847w
Wandsworth Prison 854w
Witnesses 93–4w
Young offender institutions, Drugs 1445–6w
Young offender institutions, Human rights 1443w
Young offenders 833w, 1462w
Young offenders, Children in care 1463–5w
Young offenders, Habitual offenders 1531w

Bennett, Andrew
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 447
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 723
Select committees (22.07.02) 731
Questions
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 304w
Fines, Greater Manchester 1300–2w
Inheritance tax 1194w
Tameside College 1367w

Bercow, Mr John
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 895–6, 906–8, 935, 945–9
Questions
Administration of justice 1068w
Administration of justice, Standards 1532w
Advertising, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Advertising, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 475–6w
Advertising, Dept for Work and Pensions 1578–9w
Advertising, Scotland Office 382w
Asylum, Appeals 92–3w
Asylum, Bicester 220w

***Bercow, Mr John**—continued*
Buildings, Advocate General for Scotland 380–1w, 770w
Buildings, Cabinet Office 405w
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 262w, 605–6w
Buildings, Dept of Health 206–7w
Buildings, Dept of Trade and Industry 790–1w
Buildings, Home Office 397w, 546w
Buildings, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Buildings, Scotland Office 383w, 768w
Buildings, Solicitor-General 289–90w
Burglary 1485–6w
Civil servants, Dept for Education and Skills 187w
Civil servants, Scotland Office 382w
Community development, Grants 226w
Community development, Standards 402w
Consultants, Dept for International Development 893–4w
Consultation papers, Advocate General for Scotland 381w
Consultation papers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 496–8w
Consultation papers, Dept for Education and Skills 60–4w
Consultation papers, Dept for International Development 40–1w
Consultation papers, Dept for Work and Pensions 1026–8w
Consultation papers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w
Consultation papers, President of the Council 5w
Consultation papers, Scotland Office 383w
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 131w
Correspondence, Scotland Office 1225w
Crime prevention, Young people 401–2w
Criminal injuries compensation scheme 1532w
Criminal investigation 1487w
Dangerous mental patients 1067–8w
Drug treatment and testing orders 104w
Drugs, Crime 104–5w
EC action, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 301–2w, 304–5w, 702w, 957w
EC action, Dept of Health 1084w, 1439–40w
EC action, Home Office 564–5w, 1044w
EC law, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1150–2w
EC law, Dept of Health 205–6w, 658–9w
EC law, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 323w
EC law, Scotland Office 382w
EC law, Solicitor-General 288w
Females, Advocate General for Scotland 985w
Females, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 134w
Females, Dept for Work and Pensions 521w
Females, Lord Chancellor's Dept 411w
Females, Ministry of Defence 283–4w
Females, Northern Ireland Office 509w
Females, Scotland Office 983w
Food Standards Agency, Scotland 1226w
Holiday leave, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Holiday leave, Scotland Office 382w
Holiday leave, Solicitor-General 288–9w
Knowledge for Development Challenge Fund 44w
Manpower, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Manpower, Scotland Office 1228w

***Bercow, Mr John**—continued*
Manpower, Solicitor-General 616w
Members, Advocate General for Scotland 1232–3w
Mentoring Fund 103w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scotland Office 500w
National income 404
New deal schemes, Advocate General for Scotland 985w
New deal schemes, Scotland Office 980w
Non-departmental public bodies, Scotland Office 501w, 767w
Occupational pensions 1541w
Offices, Scotland Office 980w
Official hospitality, Advocate General for Scotland 381–2w
Official hospitality, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Official hospitality, Home Office 545w
Official hospitality, Solicitor-General 614w
Operating costs, Scotland Office 1225w
Orders and regulations, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Orders and regulations, Cabinet Office 404w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Education and Skills 1364–5w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Work and Pensions 515–6w
Orders and regulations, Home Office 565w
Orders and regulations, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Orders and regulations, Scotland Office 382–3w
Orders and regulations, Solicitor-General 289w
Overseas aid 715–6w
Overtime, Advocate General for Scotland 770w
Overtime, Scotland Office 767w
Pay, Advocate General for Scotland 380w, 985w
Pay, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Pay, Scotland Office 382–3w, 980w
Pay, Solicitor-General 615–6w
Pay, Treasury 64–5w
Pre-sentence reports 853w
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, Standards 845w
Private finance initiative, Scotland Office 501w
Probation and aftercare 846–7w
Public expenditure, Advocate General for Scotland 379w, 382w, 770w
Public expenditure, Cabinet Office 340w
Public expenditure, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Public expenditure, Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Public expenditure, Dept for International Development 290w
Public expenditure, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 8w
Public expenditure, Dept for Work and Pensions 261–2w, 1586w
Public expenditure, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Public expenditure, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2w
Public expenditure, Home Office 546w
Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 749w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland Office 508w
Public expenditure, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374w
Public expenditure, President of the Council 5–6w

***Bercow, Mr John**—continued*
Public expenditure, Scotland Office 382–3w, 767w
Public expenditure, Solicitor-General 612–3w, 617w
Public private partnerships, Home Office 543–4w
Public relations, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 916w
Public relations, Home Office 1065w
Relocation services, Scotland Office 500w
Robbery 101–3w
Serious Fraud Office, Information technology 612w
Standards, Advocate General for Scotland 503w
Standards, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 323w
Standards, Scotland Office 501–2w
Standards, Solicitor-General 289w
Training, Advocate General for Scotland 379w
Training, Home Office 546w, 1057–8w
Training, Scotland Office 382w
Training, Solicitor-General 615–6w, 913–4w
Visits abroad, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Visits abroad, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Visits abroad, Dept for Education and Skills 773–4w
Visits abroad, Dept for International Development 43–4w
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 238w, 1271w
Visits abroad, Dept for Work and Pensions 1040w
Visits abroad, Dept of Health 1429w
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 762–3w
Visits abroad, Home Office 545–6w
Visits abroad, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526w
Visits abroad, Ministry of Defence 749w
Visits abroad, Northern Ireland Office 506w
Visits abroad, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1376–7w
Visits abroad, President of the Council 414w
Visits abroad, Scotland Office 983w
Visits abroad, Solicitor-General 615w
Visits abroad, Treasury 1180w
Voluntary organisations, Grants 226–7w
Written questions, Home Office 106w

Beresford, Sir Paul
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 859

Berry, Mr Roger
Questions
Communications Bill (Draft) 495w
Employment, Disabled 1576–7w
Hearing aids 215–6w
Telecommunications, Disability aids 405–7w

Best, Mr Harold
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 202–3wh
Questions
Cystic fibrosis, Prescriptions 200–1w
Cystic fibrosis, Screening 200w

Best value
1017w

Beta-interferon
Derbyshire 203w

***Beta-interferon**—continued*
Sutton 423w

Bicester
Asylum 220w

Bigamy
Convictions 1503w

Billing
Government departments 442–3w
Pharmacy 210w, 1420w

Birmingham
Elderly (22.07.02) 780–3

Bishops
663–4
Housing 293w

Blackman, Mrs Liz
Questions
Asylum, Appeals 1290–1w

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Questions
Africa, Arms trade 281–2
Agriculture, Sustainable development 75w
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 284–5
Asylum, Throckmorton airfield 1373w
Business Appointments Advisory Committee, Annual reports 567w
Care homes, Standards 982
Channel tunnel, Freight 323–4w
Civil servants, Codes of practice 803w
Civil servants, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1373w
Coastal areas 324w
Crime 278–80
Crime, Hertfordshire 282
Firearms, Manchester 285–6
Galileo project 803w
General practitioners 803–4w
Gibraltar, Spain 286
Government, Annual reports 803w
Health and Safety Commission 1369w
Helicopters, Accidents 282
Heroin, Misuse 972
Honours 1371w
Hospices, Children 981
Hospital beds 284
Housing, South East region 980
Housing, York 980–1
Industrial diseases, Compensation 280
Information Commissioner, Public appointments 1374w
Information officers, Prime Minister 805w
Iraq, Armed conflict 280–1, 975, 979–82
Local government services, Standards 974–5
Members, Correspondence 805w, 890w
Meyer, Catherine 803w
Ministerial policy advisors, Pay 1370–2w
Ministerial policy advisors, Prime Minister 890w, 1371w
Ministerial policy advisors, Visits abroad 1370w
Ministers, Visits abroad 1370w, 1372–3w
MMR vaccine, Greater London 285
New deal for communities 277–8
NHS, Finance 282–3
Northern Ireland government 283–4
Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, UK delegations 1374w
Overseas students 1373w
Paper, Prime Minister 802w
Parliamentary scrutiny 323w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, Public appointments 1374w
Pensions, Taxation 283
Pupil exclusions 978–9

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**—continued*
Recycling, Prime Minister 75w
Renewable energy 324w, 890–2w
Republic of Ireland, Prime Minister 1369w
Robbery 281
Scotland, Prime Minister 1372w
Shadow cabinet 971–2
Shipman, Harold 974
South East Asia, Disease control 281
Standards, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 975
Sure start programme 182w
10 Downing Street, Air conditioning 803w
10 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 804w, 1368–9w
Terrorism 972–4
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 975–7
12 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 1368w
Urban regeneration companies, Gloucester 281
Wildlife, Meat 1367–8w
Wimbledon Football Club 977–8
World Summit on Sustainable Development 804w

***Blears, Ms Hazel**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Health*
Questions
Abortion 1385w
Acrylamide, Food 1431–2w
Acute beds, Kent 1102w
AIDS, Drug resistance 1389w
AIDS, Research 1389–90w
Blood 657w
Bovine tuberculosis 124w
Breast cancer 1386–8w
Breast feeding 414–5w
Cancer 415–6w
Cancer, Burnham on Sea 1422w
Cancer, Health services 1422w
Cancer, Medical treatments 1100w
Cancer, Research 144–7, 1422w
Cancer, Surgery 422w
Cervical cancer, Screening 419–21w
CJD, Sheep meat 428–9w
Colon cancer, Medical treatments 212w
Community health services 191w
Complementary medicine 1431w
Contraceptives 864–6w
Dietary supplements, EC action 413–4w
Drugs, Misuse 404w
EC action, Dept of Health 1084w, 1340w, 1432–4w, 1439–40w, 1595w
Encephalitis 1432w
Endometriosis 423–4w
Fluoride, Drinking water 417–8w, 1390w
Fluoride, Food 418w
Fluoride, Toothpaste 417w
Food, Labelling 1384–5w
Food, Safety 430–1w, 1100w
Food Standards Agency 429w
German measles, Vaccination 423w, 1391–2w
Haemophilia, Drugs 421w
Health centres, Property transfer 218w
Health education, Disabled 423w
Health services, Cooperatives 655w
Health services, Kent 218–9w
Herbal medicine, EC law 150–2
HIV infection 212w
Hormone treatments, Children 422w
Hospices, Finance 200w
Hospices, Lancashire 200w
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, Annual reports 207–8w
In vitro fertilisation, Registration of births deaths and marriages 1430w
Influenza, Vaccination 428w, 1083w, 1391w

Blears, Ms Hazel—continued
Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, Disclosure of information 1391w
Lactose, Drugs 413w
Maternity services, Surrey 1097w
Meat, Hygiene 429w
Meat Hygiene Service, Annual reports 1082w
Meat products, Contamination 417w, 429w, 1154–5w
Medical equipment 122w
Medical treatments, Overseas visitors 424w, 1394w
Medicines Commission, Annual reports 1082w
Medicines Control Agency, Annual reports 1083w
Members, Correspondence 1390w, 1409w
National Institute for Biological Standards and Control 1529–30w
NHS Direct, Southampton 421w
NHS Leadership Centre, Manpower 1101w
Nurses, HIV infection 536–7w
Nurses, Schools 1392w
Obesity, Sports 432–4w
Pain, Medical treatments 423w
Poultry, Import controls 1155–6w
Poultry meat, Safety 429–31w
Primary health care, West Sussex 1394–5w
Queen Alexandra Hospital, Private finance initiative 217w
Radioactive fallout, Chernobyl 316w
Redwood Hospital 1412w
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 431–2w
RU486 1434–7w
Salt, Nutrition 1385w
Sheep meat 878w
Skin cancer 208–9w
Smoking 426–8w
Soft drinks, Caffeine 1440w
Soft drinks, Taurine 1440w
Surrey and Sussex Health Authority, Waiting lists 1416–7w
Teenage pregnancy 416–7w, 1386–8w
Vaccination 218w
Vaccination, USA 1391w
Welfare milk, Asylum 541–2w
Wood, Health hazards 425w
Written questions, Administrative delays 217w

Blizzard, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 621–2
Questions
Developing countries, Multinational companies 1134–5w
Developing countries, Overseas companies 720w
Disabled, Access 1008w
General practitioners, Recruitment 201w
Internet, President of the Council 453w
Overseas aid, Water supply 1134w
Radio, Commercial broadcasting 654
Roads, Tolls 736–7w
Vehicle Inspectorate 964w

Blood
657w

Bluestone, Karl
683w

***Blunkett, Rt Hon David**, Secretary of State for the Home Dept*
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings, Ministerial statements (17.07.02) 287–304

Blunkett, Rt Hon David—continued
Questions
Administration of justice, Annual reports 403w
Civil Contingencies Committee 108w
Consultation papers, Home Office 839–40w
Departmental expenditure limits, Home Office 1078w
Embassies, Israel 553w
Emergencies, Planning 1070w
EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council 1059–60w
Hacking, Home Office 843w
Industrial tribunals, Home Office 679w
Information officers, Home Office 850w
International Sikh Youth Federation 554w
Members, Correspondence 108w, 220–1w
Ministerial policy advisors, Home Office 1476w, 1492w
Public expenditure, Home Office 1078w
Republic of Ireland, Home Office 1055w
Ringfenced funding, Home Office 1055–6w
Telecommunications, Data protection 1465w
Terrorism 553–4w
Terrorism, Chemical and biological warfare 553w
Terrorism, Energy supply 842–3w

Blunt, Mr Crispin
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 703–4
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 178–80, 183, 189, 191–2, 195, 197, 203, 206–7, 209–12
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 234, 237, 256–8
Questions
Central Railway 746w
M25, Repairs and maintenance 328w
Surrey and Sussex Health Authority, Waiting lists 1416–7w

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

***Boateng, Rt Hon Paul**, Chief Secretary to the Treasury*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 890–8, 904
Questions
Airports, Construction 824w
Annual reports, Treasury 1190w
Child tax credit 1189–90w
Council tax 468w
Crown Estate Commissioners, Scotland 469w
Devolution, Liability 251w
Foreign investment in UK 412–3, 1176w
Government art collection 1180w
Government departments, Cost effectiveness 824w
Government departments, Publications 958–9w
Government departments, Standards 468w, 1193w
Health services, Finance 255–6w
Housing, Finance 463w
Inheritance tax 463w
National Audit Office, Standards 1187w
National income 1188w
Network Rail, Finance 820w, 1183w
NHS, Finance 464w
Pensions, Exservicemen 1200–1w
Private finance initiative 1176w
Productivity 463w
Public expenditure 465w, 468w, 1189w
Public expenditure, Devolution 69w, 958w

Boateng, Rt Hon Paul—continued
Public expenditure, Scotland 1177w, 1187w
Public expenditure, Scotland Office 1187w
Public finance 250w, 466w, 1190w
Public sector, Pay 727–8w
Public sector, Sick leave 820w
Public Sector Classification Committee 250w
Regional planning and development, Finance 63w
Scotland, Treasury 1171–3w
Standards, Treasury 1193w
Tax burden 1191w
Transport, Finance 1168–9w, 1176–7w

Body armour
London Ambulance Service 1410w

Bomb disposal
Land mines 162w

Bombings
Lockerbie 765–6w, 843–4, (23.07.02) 956–62

Borders region
Social security benefits 1552w

Borrow, Mr David
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 302
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 4

Boswell, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 561–2, 568, 584–9, 596
Questions
Further education 1352w
Hearing aids 1091–2w, 1398w
Manufacturing industries, Trade competitiveness 418
Pensions, Overseas residence 1541–3w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Manpower 473w

Botswana
AIDS 963–5
Ethnic groups 176w
Nature conservation 763w

Bottomley, Peter
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 702
Questions
Metropolitan Police, Complaints 1476–7w
Parole 836–7w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Debates etc.
Local government finance (22.07.02) 735–7
Questions
A3 1248w
Education, Surrey 1352w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 1413–5w
Local government finance 998w
Metropolitan Police, Criminal records 1050w
Right to buy scheme 1019w
Teachers, Surrey 1343–4w
Tourism 1158–9w
Town and Country Finance Issues Group 1002–3w
Unmanned air vehicles 970w
West Surrey Health Authority, Per capita costs 1398w

Bovine tuberculosis
124w, 703w
Compensation 932–3w

Bovine tuberculosis—continued
Disease control 131–3w, 136w, 931–3w, 1147w, 1378w

BOWMAN combat radio system
753w

Bradford
Civil disorder 1473–4w

Bradley, Rt Hon Keith
Questions
Children, Diseases 124w, 1422–3w

Bradley, Peter
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 453
Questions
Generic prescribing 1383w
Honours 1371w

***Bradshaw, Mr Ben**, Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Council and Leader of the House*
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 539, 543–5
Recess motions (22.07.02) 809–20

Brady, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 863–4
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 47, 65, 74–9, 88, 94–7, 100, 105–8, 110, 119–22, (24.07.02) 1026, 1033
Written questions, Points of order (23.07.02) 886, (24.07.02) 1018
Questions
Government departments, Standards 468w
Schools, Management 1341w
Specialist schools 363w

Brake, Tom
Questions
Air traffic control, Manpower 572w
Airports, Construction 733w, 824w
London Underground, Finance 1238w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 143w, 747w, 1237–8w
National Air Traffic Services, Insurance 571–2w
Network Rail 1245w
Police custody, Death 677–8w
Roads, Tolls 573w
Robbery, Greater London 1474w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre, Industrial health and safety 458–9w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 539–40
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 299
Defence review (18.07.02) 474
Questions
Medical treatments, EC countries 871w
Pensions 465w
Robbery 281

"Breaking the [illegible]"
403w

Breast cancer
1386–8w

Breast feeding
414–5w

Breed, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 678–9
Questions
Agriculture, Research 918–9w
Albania, Environment protection 588–9w
Aujeszky's disease 484w

Breed, Mr Colin—continued
Baltic states, Regional planning and development 589–90w
Bus services, Rural areas 15–6w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 916–7w
Doctors, Foreign workers 202–3w
Game, Farms 823–4w
Homelessness, Rural areas 46w
Know-How Fund, Environment protection 720w
Livestock, Markets 919–20w
Pet travel scheme 484w
Pigs, Diseases 305–6w
Police stations 562w
Romania, Regional planning and development 590w
Romania, Sustainable development 589w
Secondment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 32–4w
Tipping of waste 28–9w
VAT, Gun sports 821w

Brennan, Kevin
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 77
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 1000–1
Questions
Armed forces, Racial discrimination 14
Business questions 435–6
Cyprus, EC enlargement 883–4w
Developing countries, EC external trade 1125–6w
Elections, Wales 700w
Music 693w
Strategy Unit 641w
Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Standards 620–1w

Bridges
Greater London 8w
Railways 1244w
Repairs and maintenance 7–8w, 739w, 966w

Bridgwater
Armed forces 760w

British Airways
Security 970–1w

British Council
1320–1w
Art works 888w

British Forces Post Office
Standards 1119–20w

British nationality
636w
Children 552w

British Nuclear Fuels
see also Sellafield
Accountancy 1336–7w
Contracts 782w
Finance 782w, 1337w
Pay 783–4w

British overseas territories
175–6w, 391–2w, 765w, 1314w, 1318–9w
Financial services 1315–6w
National income 175–6w

British Petroleum
Colombia (22.07.02) 770–1

Brixton Prison
Standards 1447w

Broadband
Huntingdon 439w
Schools 1366w
Scotland 76w

Broadcasting Act 1990 (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 635

Bromley
Police 1468w

Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Debates etc.
Police Reform Bill (HL), Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1063
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 187–9wh
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders 663w, 831w
Council tax 468w
Crime and disorder partnerships 1477w
Microcredit Summit 899w
Nurseries 1342w
Police, Radio 1495–6w
Theft, Cellular phones 825–6w

***Brown, Rt Hon Gordon**, Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Ministerial statements (15.07.02) 21–44
Questions
Business 405–9
Economic and monetary union 470–1w
National income 403–5
Official gifts 1177–8w
Overseas aid 414–5
Public expenditure, Standards 824w
Royal family, Finance 1178w, 1182w
Standards, Dept of Health 409–11

***Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas**, Minister for Work, Department for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Work and Pensions 1578–9w
Employer Direct 1035w
Employment, Disabled 1575–6w
Employment zones 523–4w, 1593w
Incapacity benefit 515w, 1564–7w
Incapacity benefit, Child benefit 1567w
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 1566w, 1569w
Incapacity benefit, North West region 1567w
Incapacity benefit, Pensioners 1567–8w
Income support, Lone parents 1549–50w
Information technology, Dept for Work and Pensions 512–4w
Internet, Dept for Work and Pensions 1594w
Jobcentre Plus 1581w
Jobcentre Plus, Gosport 813w
Jobcentre Plus, Training 1035w
Jobcentre Plus, Welfare tax credits 271w
Jobcentres, Manpower 1580–1w
Jobcentres, New Forest 812w
Jobcentres, Rural areas 1580w
Lorry drivers, Training 265–6w
Massey Ferguson, Coventry 1595–6w
New deal schemes 597–8w
New deal schemes, Scotland 511–2w
Newspaper press, Dept for Work and Pensions 110w
ONE programme, Nottinghamshire 1593–4w
Post offices, Bank services 523w
Press, Dept for Work and Pensions 1037w
Public expenditure, Dept for Work and Pensions 261–2w
Regional planning and development, Dept for Work and Pensions 1578w

Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas—continued
Scotland, Dept for Work and Pensions 1583w
Serials, Dept for Work and Pensions 605w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1575w
Social security benefits, Disqualification 815–8w, 1024w
Social security benefits, Portsmouth 521–2w
Social security benefits, Publicity 116w
Standards, Dept for Work and Pensions 521w
Telephone services, Dept for Work and Pensions 518w
Training, Textiles 1594–5w
Unemployment, Young people 522–3w

Brown, Mr Russell
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 682
Lockerbie, Bombings (23.07.02) 957–8
Questions
Maintenance, Children 517w
Ukraine, Foreign relations 836–7

Browne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 182–8, 193–8, 201–9, 211–5

Browning, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
A30, Repairs and maintenance (22.07.02) 788–91
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 879
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 742, 807, 814, 819
Questions
Bus services 147w
Driving under influence 827w
Sexual offences 1455w

Bruce, Malcolm
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Flood control (16.07.02) 23wh, 36–9wh
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 459w
Driving instruction, Young people 307w
Flood control 621–2w
Green Ministers Committee 307–8w
Hearing aids 217w
London Underground, Air pollution 478–9w
Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations 2001 298w
Small School Support Fund 369–71w
Speeches, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 917w
Water abstraction 487–8w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 804w

Bryant, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Members' constituency work, Points of order (23.07.02) 885
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 3–4
Bishops 663–4
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Annual reports 139w
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Standards 139–40w
Community development, Wales 317w
Crime, Wales 274
NHS Direct 142–3

BSE
417w

Buck, Ms Karen
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 171
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 622–3
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 11–2wh, 15wh
Questions
Child benefit 262–3w
Children, Housing 1215w
Income support, Lone parents 1549–50w
Social rented housing 1210–1w

Buckingham
Financial services 1199–200w

Buckinghamshire
Local government finance (22.07.02) 761–5
Special constables 672w

Bucklow of Carlisle Committee
see Business Appointments Advisory Committee

Budget April 2002
Publications 253w

Building alterations
Capital allowances 242w
VAT 242w

Burden, Richard
Questions
Israel, Arms trade 841
Motor sports 652–3
Riot control weapons, Northern Ireland 507w

Burglary
1485–6w

Burgon, Colin
Questions
Medical Devices Agency, Annual reports 537–8w

Burnett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 298
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 375–6
Questions
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group 1326–7w
Exchange rates 413

Burnham, Andy
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 903
Questions
NHS, Finance 282–3
NHS Direct 143–4

Burnham on Sea
Cancer 1422w

Burnley
Housing (22.07.02) 737–40

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Aerials, Planning permission (22.07.02) 756–9
Housing (18.07.02) 459
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 777, 781
Questions
Business questions 430–1
Child Support Agency 600w
Herbal medicine, EC law 152
Information officers, Scotland Office 1226w
Medical treatments, Overseas visitors 1394w

Burns, Mr Simon—continued
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 129–30w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scotland Office 766w
Official hospitality, Scotland Office 1225–6w
Pet travel scheme, USA 935w
Visits abroad, Scotland Office 766–7w

Burnside, David
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 540–1
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 315
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 688
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 185
Ministerial statement intervention (24.07.02) 985
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 225–6, 232, (22.07.02) 791–3
Questions
Fireworks, Northern Ireland 506w
Terrorism 10

Burstow, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Child Abuse Deaths Bill, 1R (17.07.02) 306
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 876–7
Questions
Acute beds 124w
Asylum, Children 90w
Attendance allowance, Scotland 112w
Beta-interferon, Sutton 423w
Care homes, Closures 1401–2w
Care homes, Fees and charges 654w, 1400–1w
Care homes, Standards 124–5w, 1401w
Care homes, VAT 822–3w
Carers, Medical records 1401w
Carers, Social security benefits 111–2w
Children in care 123w, 1424–7w
Driving offences 566w
Foster care 662w, 1402–4w
Health services, USA 208w
Herbal medicine, Licensing 1430–1w
Home energy efficiency scheme 622–3w
Homelessness, Children in care 1003w
Hospital beds 867–8w, 1094–8w, 1418–9w
Hospitals, Admissions 206w
Hospitals, Infectious diseases 1398–9w
Influenza, Vaccination 428w
Local government finance 1203–4w
Local government finance, Greater London 1204w
Manpower, Ministry of Defence 282–3w
Members, Correspondence 1394w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Prisoners' release 1521w
Multiple sclerosis, Medical treatments 1424w
Neighbourhood nuisance, Sheltered housing 687w
Neurology 868w
NHS, Recruitment 874–5w
NHS trusts, Management 534–5w
Nurses, Foreign workers 419w
Personal care services 128w
Social services, Expenditure 1089w
Social services, Standard spending assessments 48w
Strang, Eden 1531w

Burt, Alistair
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 94–8wh
Questions
Asylum 91–2w

Burt, Alistair—continued
China, Family planning 1135–6w

Burundi
Armed conflict 587w
Debts 586–7w

Bus services
147–8w, 460–1w, 1257–9w
Greater London 9–10w, 1257–9w
Rural areas 15–6w, 743–4w
Somerset 1243w
Standards 743–4w, 1258w

Buses
Pollution control 1259–60w

Business
405–9
Advisory services 777w
Data protection 1326w
Questionnaires 1190–1w

Business Appointments Advisory Committee
Annual reports 567w

Business improvement districts
235–6w

Business links
778w
Advertising 778w

Business motions
(15.07.02) 126, 127, (16.07.02) 176, (18.07.02) 534–6, 539–45, (24.07.02) 1081–4

Business plans
National Audit Office 979–80w

Business statements
421–37

Butterfill, Mr John
Questions
Public expenditure 468w

Bypasses
Silverstone 1249–51w

C17 aircraft
759–60w

Cabinet Office
Buildings 405w
Computers 84w
Departmental responsibilities 1000w, 1002w
Orders and regulations 404w
Press 1014w
Public expenditure 340w
Public participation 1164–5w
Recycling 641w
Statistics 236w

Cable, Mr Vincent
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1009
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 880
Export Control Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1048
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 211–5wh, 221wh
Questions
Armed forces, Housing 5–6
Business, Advisory services 777w
Business links, Advertising 778w
Cervical cancer, Death rate 1197–8w
Computers, President of the Council 1168w
Consignia, Termination of employment 348w
Contracts, Scotland Office 501w
Developing countries, Poverty 969

Cable, Mr Vincent—continued
Disability aids 1092w
Driving, Cellular phones 1234w
Electronic government 726–7w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 1339w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, Education 849w, 1077w
Flood control 704–5w
General practitioners, Standards 1411–2w
Home detention curfews 1460–1w
House of Commons, Recycling 711w
Housing 1211w
Housing benefit, Greater London 1222–4w
Immigration 228w
Information officers, Dept for Education and Skills 988w
Information officers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1139w
Information officers, Dept for International Development 721w
Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961–2w
Information officers, Home Office 850w
Information officers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 799–800w
Information officers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 725w
Information officers, President of the Council 712w
Information officers, Prime Minister 805w
Information officers, Scotland Office 769w
Information officers, Treasury 822w
Investors in people, Small businesses 993–4w
Members, Correspondence 105w
Motor vehicles, Registration 11w
Pensions 403
Poland, EC enlargement 843
Police Standards Unit 1443w
Post offices, Bank services 815w
Post offices, Information services 172w
Postal services 171w
Postal services, Theft 774w
Press, Cabinet Office 1014w
Press, Dept for Work and Pensions 1037w
Prisoners, Rehabilitation 854–5w
Prisoners, Self-mutilation 855w
Probation and aftercare, Greater London 844–5w, 1077w, 1532w
Publicity, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 698w
Publicity, Dept for Education and Skills 771–3w
Publicity, Dept for International Development 721–2w
Publicity, Dept for Work and Pensions 1584–6w
Publicity, Dept of Health 1403w
Publicity, Dept of Trade and Industry 945w
Publicity, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 887w
Publicity, Home Office 1067w
Publicity, Lord Chancellor's Dept 800w
Publicity, Ministry of Defence 761w
Publicity, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Publicity, Scotland Office 769w
Publicity, Treasury 821w
Regulatory impact assessments, Dept for Work and Pensions 524–5w
Regulatory impact assessments, Dept of Trade and Industry 437w
Regulatory impact assessments, Home Office 396w
Regulatory impact assessments, Scotland Office 274w
Royal Military School of Music 761–2w
Small Business Service 1338w

Cable, Mr Vincent—continued
Small Business Service, Finance 1337w
Small businesses, Loan guarantee scheme 778w
Small businesses, Regulation 437–8w
Social Care Inspection Commission, Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission 1409w
Social security benefits 1036w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 805–7w, 809w, 1031–2w, 1579w
Stationery, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Wandsworth Prison 854w

***Caborn, Rt Hon Richard**, Minister of State for Sport, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Debates etc.
Museums and galleries, North East region (15.07.02) 132–6
Questions
English Sports Council, Finance 976–7w
English Sports Council, Manpower 979w
English Sports Council, Pay 975w, 979w
Horserace Totalisator Board 53w
Motor sports 652–3
National Lottery 165w, 973w
Playgrounds 530–1w
Sports, Children 53w
Sports, Chorley 699w
Sports, Clubs 660–1
Sports, Drugs 696w
Sports, Finance 164w, 975–6w, 978w
Sports, Health 975w
Sports, Schools 691w
Sports, Taunton 51w
Sports, Vetting 52–3w, 164w
Sports, Voluntary work 498w
Sports, Young people 658–9, 692w, 974–5w
Swimming pools, Leominster 691–2w
Tennis 695w
Wembley Stadium 498w

Cadets
Armed forces 760w

Caffeine
Soft drinks 1440w

Cairns, David
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 470
Questions
State retirement pensions 294w

Calton, Mrs Patsy
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 180–1, 207
Questions
Cancer 415w
Electoral Commission 1123w
Encephalitis 1432w
Local government finance 125w
National Institute for Biological Standards and Control 1529–30w
Northern Ireland government 509w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 1239w
Schools, Information technology 378w
Social services, Elderly 1098–9w

Cambridge
Greenbelt (17.07.02) 129–36wh

Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Finance 1477–8w

Cameras
Speed limits 687w

Cameron, Mr David
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 43–4, (23.07.02) 895
Social services, Oxfordshire (22.07.02) 795–9
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 764
Questions
National Lottery 651–2
Tourism, Oxfordshire 693w

Cameroon
Ethnic groups 1124w

Campbell, Mr Alan
Questions
Forensic Science Service, Annual reports 231–2w
Jobcentre Plus, Disabled 812w
Maintenance, Children 516w

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 878
Housing (18.07.02) 454
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 38
Questions
Asylum, Administrative delays 1042w
Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Finance 1477–8w
Higher education 184w
Police cautions 832w
Railways, Fares 568w

Campbell, Mr Gregory
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 181–2, 192–3, 201

Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 696–7
Ministerial statement intervention (18.07.02) 467
Questions
Arms trade, Export controls 77–8w, 435–6w
Arms trade, Israel 840–1
Ivory Coast, Elections 390w

Campsfield House Detention Centre
1448w

Canada
Pet travel scheme 935w

Cancer
415–6w
Burnham on Sea 1422w
Death rate 1178–9w
Health services 1422w
Medical treatments 1100w
Research 144–7, 1100w, 1422w
Surgery 422w

Cannabis
Clinical trials 1431w
Crime 669–70w
Driving under influence 403–4w
Lambeth 222w

Canvey Island
Floods 933–4w

Capita
Criminal Records Bureau 827–8w

Capital allowances
Building alterations 242w

Capital punishment
Iran 1312w

Carbaryl
936w

Carbon dioxide
Pollution control 39w, 786w

Care homes
198w, (22.07.02) 783–8, 1089–90w, 1402w
Closures 1401–2w
Fees and charges 202w, 654w, 1400–1w
Finance 872–3w
Qualifications 1402w
Scotland 198w
South West region 197w
Standard spending assessments 197–8w
Standards 124–5w, 199w, 982, 1401w
Surrey 121w
Training 1089w
VAT 822–3w
Vetting 835w, 873–4w
Wales 316w

Care Standards Act 2000
Questions
982

Carers
541w
Greater London 219w
Medical records 1401w
Social security benefits 111–2w

Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000
Questions
541w

Caribbean Development Bank (Further Payments) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(15.07.02) 127

Carlisle United Football Club
Petitions (23.07.02) 954

Carmarthenshire
Roads 965–6w

Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 489–90, 492, 499
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 100–1wh, 105wh
Questions
Property, Scotland Office 502w

Cars
967w, 1016w

Casale, Roger
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 304
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 600–1
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 896, 901, 948–9
Questions
Business questions 434–5
Defence, EC countries 23w
Exchange rates 413
Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Standards 296–7w
Wimbledon Football Club 977–8
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 830

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1012
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 49–57, 60, 63–5, 67, (24.07.02) 1023, 1025–32, 1034–5

Castle Point
Education (22.07.02) 821–8

***Castle Point**—continued*
Planning 1218w

Cathedrals
Repairs and maintenance 667–8

Caton, Mr Martin
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 27w
Community care grants 1577w
Fire prevention, Wales 320w
Further education, Pay 642w, 770–1w
NHS, Private finance initiative 1085–6w
Pensions 520–1w
Pensions, Taxation 602w
Social Fund 1579–80w, 1582–3w

Cawsey, Mr Ian
Questions
Annual reports, Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency 1202w
Life Sentence Review Commissioners, Annual reports 1202–3w
NHS Estate Management and Health Building Agency, Annual reports 217w
Police, Northern Ireland 1202w

Cayman Islands
Human rights 889w, 1314w

Cellular phone masts
see Aerials

Cellular phones
Armed forces 276w
Crime prevention 1485w
Driving 1234w
Theft 555w, 825–6w, 1479–80w, 1484–5w

Census
Public Record Office 800–2w, 1080w

Central Africa
International assistance 591w

Central African Republic
Armed conflict 1307w
Education 716–7w
HIV infection 717w
Politics and government 717w

Central Office of Information
Annual reports 1164w

Central Railway
746w

Central Science Laboratory
Annual reports 915w
Standards 489w

Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
Annual reports 139w
Standards 139–40w

Centre for Management and Policy Studies
Annual reports 725–6w

Cervical cancer
Death rate 1197–8w
Screening 419–21w

Challen, Mr Colin
Questions
Community Champions Fund, Morley 647w
Convention on the Future of Europe 845
Developing countries, Education 258–60w
Drugs, Crime 668–70w
Educational maintenance allowance, Morley 57w
Employment, Yorkshire and Humberside 67–8w, 637w
Housing benefit, Yorkshire and Humberside 1014–5w
Licensing laws 362w
Mature students, Morley 647w

Challen, Mr Colin—continued
Meat products, Contamination 1154–5w
Post offices, Disabled 349w
Students, Morley 57w
Taxpayers, Yorkshire and Humberside 256–8w
Teachers, Foreign workers 368w
Vocational education, Morley 648w
Working families tax credit, Leeds 252–3w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel tunnel
Freight 323–4w, 329w, 968w
Illegal immigrants 393w

Channel tunnel railway line
Scotland 982w

Chapman, Mr Ben
Questions
Asylum, Applications 1318w
Clergy, Conditions of employment 723w, 1164w
Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive 968w, 1277–8w
Postal services, Wirral 774w
Poverty 44w, 73–5w
Poverty, Children 254w
Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 403w
Unemployment, Wales 321w

Chapman, Sir Sydney
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 558–61, 593
Questions
Archaeology 657
Clergy, Pensions 666
MMR vaccine, Greater London 285

Charities
VAT 463w

Chaytor, Mr David
Questions
Excise duties, Fuels 467–8w
General certificate of secondary education, Standards 772w
Grammar schools 189w
Radioactive wastes, Russia 776–7w
Schools, Transport 1341w
Secondary education, Pupils 644w
Specialist schools 644w
Specialist schools, Admissions 363w

Chechnya
Human rights 881w

Cheltenham
Schools 988w

Chemical and biological warfare
Emergencies 748w
Terrorism 553w

Chernobyl
Radioactive fallout 316w

Cheshire Constabulary
Sick leave 1538–9w

Chewing gum
Litter 311–2w

Chidgey, Mr David
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 861
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (17.07.02) 113–6wh, 118wh
Questions
British overseas territories 175–6w, 1314w
Cayman Islands, Human rights 889w, 1314w

Child Abuse Deaths Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (17.07.02) 306

Child benefit
262–3w
Foreign students 263w
Incapacity benefit 1567w
Internet 295w

Child Benefit Centre
Telephone services 266w

Child minding
Manpower 994w

Child Support Agency
(16.07.02) 52–8wh, 600w
Computers 818–9w, 1545–7w
Standards 819w, 1546w

Child Support (Maintenance and Special Cases) Regulations 1992
Questions
267w

Child tax credit
1189–90w

Child Tax Credit Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

Childbirth
119w, 208w

Children
Abuse 122–3w, 1487w
Asylum 90w, 550–2w
British nationality 552w
Day care 60w, 127–8w, 183–4w, (17.07.02) 389–96, 987–8w, 1083w
Departmental coordination 1342w
Developing countries 1137–8w
Diseases 124w, 1422–3w
Drugs 88w
Hormone treatments 422w
Hospices 981
Housing 1215w
Kidnapping 411–2w
Maintenance 116w, 267w, 516–7w, 599–600w, 819–20w, 1026w, 1547–9w, 1560–1w
Mental health services 123w, 125–6w, 1098w
Poverty 254w, 462–3w, 1033w
Prostitution 1059w
Protection 229–31w
Sports 53w, 214w

Children Act 1989
Questions
658w, 1215w

Children in care
123w, 1424–7w
General certificate of secondary education 123w
Homelessness 1003w
Isle of Sheppey 123w
Social security benefits 813–4w
South West region 1100w
Young offenders 1463–5w

Children's tax credit
Mitcham 462w

Chile
Warships 760w

China
Asylum 884w
Family planning 1135–6w
Human rights 839
Overseas trade 610–1w
Sanctions 385–6w

Chinook helicopters
Accidents 1107w
Ministerial statements (22.07.02) 689–704

Chiropody
Recruitment 425w

Chope, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Arms trade (22.07.02) 751–3
Richmond Park, Petitions (15.07.02) 128
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 183wh, 185wh, 188–91wh
Questions
Administration of justice, Standards 1459–60w
Arms trade, Export controls 1330w
Children in care, South West region 1100w
Dogs 308w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 636w
Exports, Licensing 358–9w, 436–7w
Flags 82w
Government departments, Standards 1193w
Health centres, Property transfer 218w
Housing benefit, Dorset 268w
Industry, Profits 172w
London Underground, Industrial disputes 148w
London Underground, Standards 747w
Members, Correspondence 564w
Network Rail 144–5w
Network Rail, Finance 145w, 820w, 1245w
Network Rail, Public appointments 145w
Oil, Northern Ireland 1193w
Pensioners, Dorset 268–9w
Public finance 250w
Public Sector Classification Committee 250w
Public transport, Standards 963w
Railways, Standards 1256w
Road traffic, Urban areas 573w
Road traffic control, Standards 1255–6w
Roads, Accidents 1251–3w
Roads, Tolls 1255w
Standards, Treasury 1193w
State retirement pensions, Dorset 268w
Transport, Finance 735–6w, 1168–9w
Transport, Planning 1272w, 1276w
Transport, Standards 736w
Trials 1303w
Vaccination 218w

Chorley
Neighbourhood wardens 1485w
Sports 699w

Christchurch
Health centres 218w

Christianity
Asia (17.07.02) 89–112wh
Pakistan 386w

Chronic fatigue syndrome
210–1w
Complementary medicine 538w

Churches
Planning permission 723–4w

Circulars
NHS 212–3w

City academies
643–4w

Civil Contingencies Committee
108w

Civil disorder
Bradford 1473–4w

Civil proceedings
1279–80w

Civil servants
Accidents 335w
Codes of practice 803w
Dept for Education and Skills 187w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 178w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1373w
Pay 405w
Pensions 728–30w
Scotland Office 382w

Civil service
Annual reports 272w

Civil service agencies
726w

Civilians
Armed conflict 749–50w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Questions
Accountancy 1338–9w
Bahrain 835–6
Emergency services, Sick leave 1053w
Employment Tribunal System Taskforce 1338w
Financial Services Compensation Scheme 468–9w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 280
Industrial diseases, Home Office 547w
Regional development agencies, Annual reports 1338w
Retirement, Home Office 394w

Clappison, Mr James
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 606
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 616, 624
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 166–9wh, 173wh
Questions
Employment zones 523–4w
Hertfordshire Constabulary, Manpower 1491w
Incapacity benefit 515w, 1564–6w
Pensions, Taxation 295–6w
Post offices, Bank services 523w, 597w
Prescription drugs, Imports 1403–4w
Social security benefits, Abuse 595–6w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 597–8w, 1029w, 1550w
Working families tax credit 251–2w
Working families tax credit, Abuse 252w

Clark, Mrs Helen
Questions
Diesel engines, EC action 945–6w
Flood control, EC law 625–6w
Livestock, Animal welfare 921w
Mental health services, Ethnic groups 197w
Pollution, EC action 946–7w
Taxis, Peterborough 459–60w

***Clark, Dr Lynda**, Advocate General for Scotland*
Questions
Advertising, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Buildings, Advocate General for Scotland 380–1w, 770w
Consultation papers, Advocate General for Scotland 381w
Females, Advocate General for Scotland 985w
Holiday leave, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Manpower, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Members, Advocate General for Scotland 1232–3w

***Clark, Dr Lynda**—continued*
New deal schemes, Advocate General for Scotland 985w
Official hospitality, Advocate General for Scotland 381–2w
Orders and regulations, Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Overtime, Advocate General for Scotland 770w
Pay, Advocate General for Scotland 380w, 985w
Public expenditure, Advocate General for Scotland 379w, 382w, 770w
Recruitment, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Standards, Advocate General for Scotland 503w
Training, Advocate General for Scotland 379w
Visits abroad, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w

Clark, Paul
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 457
Questions
Councillors, Misconduct 999w

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 36

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 559–62, 564, 572–3, 596–7
Questions
Developing countries, Poverty 969–70
Overseas aid 415

Clarke, Mr Tony
Questions
Crime prevention, Northamptonshire 1469w
NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, Annual reports 875w
Regional planning and development 533–4w

Clay Cross
Regeneration (22.07.02) 753–6

Clergy
Conditions of employment 723w, 1164w
Pensions 666
Recruitment 662

Cleveland Constabulary
Inquiries 99–100w

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Orders and regulations, Points of order (18.07.02) 476–7, (22.07.02) 705
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 40
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Derelict land, Planning permission (24.07.02) 276–80wh, 283–4wh, 286wh
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 2wh, 4wh, 9wh, 17–9wh
Questions
Care homes, Standards 982
Fire Service College, Disciplinary proceedings 18w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 321w
Listed buildings, Internet 407–8w
Meat products, Contamination 417w
Orders and regulations, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 997w
Sheep premiums 481w
Suckler cow premiums 481w

Climate change
31–2w

Climate change levy
Nuclear power 957w

Clinical trials
Cannabis 1431w
Contraceptives 1383–4w

Closed circuit television
Belfast 506–7w

Clubs
Sports 660–1

Clwyd, Ann
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 176–7w
Afghanistan, Politics and government 967–8
Arms trade, Export controls 384w, 1317–8w
Arms trade, Iran 383w
Arms trade, Israel 839–40
Dental services, Wales 275–6
International Criminal Court 1105w

Coaker Mr Vernon
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 345w
Civil service, Annual reports 272w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 409w
Dementia 191–2w
Mentally incapacitated, Protection 563w
Noise, Pollution control 793–4w
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Annual reports 957w
Poverty 469w
Sports, Young people 658

Coal
Selby 165–8w

Coal Authority
Annual reports 950w

Coalfields Regeneration Trust
Finance 344w

Coastal areas
324w

"Code of Practice on Access to Government Information Monitoring Report 2001"
1288w

Cohen, Harry
Debates etc.
British Petroleum, Colombia (22.07.02) 770–1
Defence review (18.07.02) 469
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 43
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 208–10wh, 215wh, 223wh
Questions
Armed forces, Colombia 756w
Arms trade 1325w
Dance 495w
Data protection, Home Office 1495w
National childcare strategy, Greater London 54–6w
Schools, Governing bodies 378–9w
Sheikh, Ahmed Omar Saeed 764w
Social security benefits, Abuse 1036–8w

Coinage
68w

Colchester
Housing benefit 1015w
Military bases 905–6w, 1114w

Coleman, Mr Iain
Questions
Asylum 246–8w

***Coleman, Mr Iain**—continued*
Civil servants, Pay 405w
Council tax 45–6w, 244–5w
Council tax benefits 602w, 1037–8w
Free school meals 372–4w
Local government finance 239–40w
Mental patients 660–1w
NHS, Pay 542w
Pupils, Languages 375–8w
Teachers, Vacancies 57–60w

Collins, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 850–3
Questions
Contracts, Dept of Health 1429w
Livestock, Cumbria 477–8w
Ministerial policy advisors, Home Office 1476w
Photography, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w
12 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 1368w

Colman, Mr Tony
Questions
India, Females 260w
Liberia, Armed conflict 260–1w
Productivity 780w
Tennis 695w

Colombia
Armed forces 756w
British Petroleum (22.07.02) 770–1

Colon cancer
Medical treatments 212w

Combined heat and power
Greater Manchester 441w
Saltburn 441w

Commercial broadcasting
Radio 654–6

Commission for Health Care Audit and Inspection
see Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission

Commission for Health Improvement
210w
Pay 1427–8w

Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection
see Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission

Commission for Social Care Inspection
see Social Care Inspection Commission

Common agricultural policy
Developing countries 261w, 1129w
Reform 916–8w
Scotland 917w

Common fisheries policy
705w, 919w

Common land
915w

Commonwealth
Education 713–4w

Commonwealth Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Rep* and 3R (19.07.02) 603–9

Commonwealth Development Corporation
449–51w, 574–84w, 722w
Debts 450w
Directors 450w, 581–2w, 584w
Pay 575–6w, 580–1w, 583w
Publicity 583w
Redundancy 576w
Sub-Saharan Africa 449w, 576–7w

Commonwealth Games
Manchester 164w, 409w, (22.07.02) 743–5

Communications Bill (Draft)
Questions
407w, 495w, 654

Community care grants
1577–8w

Community Champions Fund
Morley 647w

Community councils
1233–4w

Community development
341–3w, 1471–2w
Dept for International Development 898w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1587–8w
Grants 226w
Northern Ireland 1202w
Northern Ireland Office 1202w
Standards 402w
Wales 317w

Community Development Venture Fund
1201w

Community health councils
1410w

Community health services
191w

Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Service
see National Probation Service for England and Wales

Commuters
Railways 569w

Companies
Disclosure of information 788–9w
Ilford 256w

Companies Act 1985
Questions
350–1w

Company law
168–9w

Competition
Energy 346w, 943w
Water supply 916w

Complaints Audit Committee
Annual reports 1043–4w
Public appointments 1448w

Complementary medicine
(17.07.02) 67–88wh, 1431w
Chronic fatigue syndrome 538w

Comptroller and Auditor General
see National Audit Office

Compulsory purchase
533w

Computer software
Educational institutions 651–2w
Government departments 725w
Inland Revenue 1183w

Computers
Cabinet Office 84w
Child Support Agency 818–9w, 1545–7w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 499w
Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 37w
Dept for International Development 893w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13w
Dept for Work and Pensions 294w
Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w
Legal Services Commission 1299–300w

***Computers**—continued*
Lord Chancellor's Dept 607w
Members 711w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 244w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1378w
President of the Council 413–4w, 1168w
Scotland Office 768w
Social Security Contributions Agency 295w
Treasury 66w

Computers within reach programme
1367w

Conditions of employment
Clergy 723w, 1164w
EC law 446–7w
General practitioners 1393w
Higher education (24.07.02) 1072–80
Police 1046w

Conduct
Judges 82w

Congo (Kinshasa)
see Democratic Republic of Congo

Connarty, Mr Michael
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 122–3wh
Questions
Broadband, Scotland 76w
Herbal medicine, EC law 151–2
Liquefied petroleum gas, Scotland 502w
Orphan drugs 1440w

Conservation
Energy 27–8w, 249–50w, 479w, 485w
Lapwings 302w

Consignia
Termination of employment 348w

Constituencies
Scotland 76–7w

Consultants
Dept for International Development 893–4w
Hospitals 137–9, 418–9w
Nurses 537w

Consultation papers
Advocate General for Scotland 381w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 410w, 496–8w, 697w, 971–4w, 1156–8w
Dept for Education and Skills 60–4w, 985–6w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 937–42w
Dept for International Development 40–1w, 591–2w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13–4w, 1266–7w
Dept for Work and Pensions 602–4w, 814w, 1026–8w, 1596w
Dept of Health 1429w
Dept of Trade and Industry 791–2w, 950–1w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 885–6w
Home Office 837–40w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 526–8w, 796–8w
Ministry of Defence 903w, 1106–7w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w
President of the Council 5w
Scotland Office 383w, 769w
Treasury 1181–2w

Consumer Credit Act 1974
Questions
169–70w

Consumers
Scotland 169–70w

Contact orders
82–3w, 525w
Voluntary organisations 525–6w

Contamination
Land 1147–8w
Meat products 204w, 417w, 429w, 1154–5w

Contraceptives
864–6w
Clinical trials 1383–4w

Contracting Out (Functions of Local Authorities: Income-Related Benefits) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(16.07.02) 259–60

Contracts
British Nuclear Fuels 782w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961w
Dept of Health 1429w
Highways Agency 1248–50w
Local government 1020w
Scotland Office 499–501w

Contributions Agency
see Social Security Contributions Agency

Control of Fireworks (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 638

Convention on the Future of Europe
3w, 845

Convictions
1056w
Bigamy 1503w
Domestic violence 849–50w
Firearms 1056–8w

Cook, Frank
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 298
Questions
South East Asia, Disease control 281

***Cook, Rt Hon Robin**, President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons*
Debates etc.
Select committees (22.07.02) 729–32
Questions
Business statements 421–37
Computers, President of the Council 413–4w, 1168w
Consultation papers, President of the Council 5w
Electronic government, Democracy 182–3w
Information officers, President of the Council 712w
Internet, President of the Council 453w
Members, Pensions 83–4w, 712w
Ministerial policy advisors, President of the Council 1168w
Privy Council 712–3w
Public expenditure, President of the Council 5–6w
Visits abroad, President of the Council 414w

***Cooper, Ms Yvette**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Chancellor's Dept*
Questions
Absent voting 574w
"Code of Practice on Access to Government Information Monitoring Report 2001" 1288w

***Cooper, Ms Yvette**—continued*
Computers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 607w
Data protection, Business 1326w
Data protection, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1303w
Elections, Expenditure 1080w
European Parliament elections, Gibraltar 1291w
European Parliamentary Elections Bill (HL) 2001/02 607–8w
Fines, Debit cards 607w
Fines, Defaulters 82w, 608w
Fines, Greater Manchester 1300–2w
Freedom of information, Codes of practice 797–8w, 1292–4w
Freedom of Information Act 2000, Government departments 272w
Judges, Conduct 82w
Judges, Housing 1303–5w
Judges, Training 606–8w
Limitation of actions 272w
Magistrates, Resignations 796w
Magistrates' courts, Closures 1305w
Magistrates' courts, Information technology 1288–90w
Magistrates' courts, Thames Valley 1081–2w, 1293w
Magistrates' courts committees 1293w
Members' interests, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278w
Referendums, Departmental responsibilities 1305w
Standards, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1293–9w
Trials 1303w
Trials, Administrative delays 81w
Trials, Rape 798–9w, 1280–8w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1299w

Cooperatives
Health services 212w, 655w

Coordinating Group on Audit and Accounting
see Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group

Copaxone
199w

Copyright
169w

Copyright Etc and Trade Marks (Offences and Enforcement) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Corbyn, Jeremy
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 456
Questions
Pesticides Safety Directorate, Annual reports 709w
Police, Housing 841–2w
Western Sahara 609w
Western Sahara, Peace negotiations 609w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 685–6
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 999
Questions
Business questions 429–30
Israel, Arms trade 840

Corporate hospitality
Treasury 1199w

Corporate manslaughter
1505w
Network Rail 327w

Corporate Responsibility Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 634

Correctional Services Board
1446–7w

Corruption
Juries 830w

Cotter, Brian
Questions
Business links 778w
Crime prevention, Retail trade 836w, 1465–6w
Pharmacy, Billing 210w, 1420w
Regulation, Audit 641–2w
Regulatory Accountability Panel 345w
Small businesses 172w
Special educational needs, Finance 1354w

Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership
1338w

Council housing
1205–10w
Double glazing 1220w

Council tax
45–6w, 244–5w, 468w
Greater London 1216–8w
North West region 1216–8w

Council tax benefits
602w, 1037–8w
Dorset 268w

Councillors
Disabled 271–2w
Misconduct 999w

Countryside
Access 137w

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
Questions
136–7w, 304w, 1153w, 1194w

Countryside stewardship scheme
707w

County Durham Health Authority
Per capita costs 1398w

Court Service
Wales 319w

Courts
Closures 1443–4w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Questions
Information technology, Dept for Work and Pensions 512–4w
Pensions, Public sector 416
Taxation 251w
Welfare milk, Asylum 541–2w

Coventry
Housing 1018w
Massey Ferguson 1595–6w
Police 1475–6w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Asylum 91w
Asylum, Greater London 90–1w
Crime, Wandsworth 98w
Criminal investigation 832w
Cyprus 178w, 180w
Cyprus, Armed forces 385–6w
Cyprus, EC enlargement 179–80w
Cyprus, Foreign relations 178–80w
Cyprus, Peace keeping operations 180w
Deportation 223w
Entry clearances 684w
Hannay of Chiswick, Lord 179w
Human trafficking 548w, 684–5w, 833–4w

***Cox, Mr Tom**—continued*
Human trafficking, Greater London 685w
Illegal immigrants, Romania 399–400w
Life imprisonment 832w
Life imprisonment, Sexual offences 832w
Metropolitan Police 1479w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 1488w
Police, Wandsworth 1480w
Prison governors, Ethnic groups 835w
Prison governors, Females 834w
Prisoners, Females 832–3w
Prisoners, Suicide 1537–8w
Proceeds of crime 223w
Prostitution 1058–60w
Prostitution, Children 1059w
Segregation of prisoners 1075w
Sexual offences 1455–6w
Turkey, Human rights 387w
Young offenders 833w

Cran, Mr James
Questions
Members, Correspondence 221w

Cranston, Ross
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 718–21, 724
Questions
Archaeology 1160–2w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, Administrative delays 1503–4w
"Disabled Person's Parking Badge Scheme Consultation Paper" 1245–6w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, EC enlargement 1132w
Historical Manuscripts Royal Commission 409w
Kidnapping, Children 411–2w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Finance 1521–2w
Overseas aid 464–5w

Crausby, Mr David
Debates etc.
Redundancy Payments Bill, 1R (23.07.02) 887–9
Questions
Conditions of employment, EC law 446–7w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 1550w

Creative partnerships initiative
698w

Credit cards
Fraud 679–80w

Credit unions
418–20

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease
Sheep meat 428–9w

Crime
86–8w, 95–7w, 278–80, 557w, 680–2w, 1441–3w
Alcoholic drinks 222–3w
Cannabis 669–70w
Drugs 87w, 104–5w, 396–7w, 666–70w, 1461–2w
Elderly 681–2w
Greater London 1472–3w
Hertfordshire 282
Somerset 1457–9w
Wales 273–5
Wandsworth 98w

Crime and disorder partnerships
89w, 680w, 1477w

Crime prevention
826–7w, 851–2w, 1461w
Annual reports 861–2w

***Crime prevention**—continued*
Cellular phones 1485w
Finance 794–5w, 858w
Northamptonshire 1469w
Retail trade 795–6w, 836w, 862–4w, 1465–6w
Standards 852–4w
Wales 320w
Young people 401–2w, 694w

Crimes of violence
Ambulance services 608w
Hospitals 536w
Retail trade 682–3w
Wales 321w

Criminal Courts Review
1078w

Criminal Evidence (Prohibition of Sale) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (16.07.02) 173
2R order read (19.07.02) 639

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
Administrative delays 1503–4w

Criminal injuries compensation scheme
1532w

Criminal investigation
832w, 1487w, 1491–2w

Criminal Justice and Courts Services Act 2000
Questions
1533–4w

"Criminal Justice White Paper"
1305w

Criminal proceedings
1530–1w
Ministerial statements (17.07.02) 287–304

Criminal records
Metropolitan Police 1050w

Criminal Records Bureau
(23.07.02) 179–201wh, 1481–3w
Administrative delays 1056w, 1453w, 1483w, 1518w
Annual reports 554w
Capita 827–8w
Complaints 1481w, 1483w
Standards 1481–4w

Crops
Genetically modified organisms 33–4w, 700–2w

Crossrail line
1241w

Crown Estate Commissioners
Scotland 274w, 469w

Crown Prosecution Service
Advocacy 619w
Annual reports 287w
Complaints 617–8w
Manpower 618–20w
Offices 525w

Cruise missiles
155w

Cryer, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 300–1
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 880

Cryer, John
Questions
Pensions 401–2
Postal workers, Vetting 349w
Sports, Young people 659

Cumbria
Livestock 477–8w

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Questions
Armed conflict, Civilians 749–50w
Buildings, Urban areas 1211w
Bus services 147–8w
Cancer 416w
Colon cancer, Medical treatments 212w
Council housing, Double glazing 1220w
EC Economic and Social Committee 1314–6w
HIV infection 212w
Housing, Coventry 1018w
Housing, Empty property 1017w
Housing, Low incomes 1017–8w
Magistrates' courts committees 1293w
Massey Ferguson, Coventry 1595–6w
Police, Coventry 1475–6w
Police, Recruitment 857–8w
Public footpaths, Safety 137w
Public transport 148w, 1261–2w
Rights of way, Access 136–7w
Roads, Construction 148w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 328w
Roads, Tolls 149w
Schools, Playing fields 989–90w
Wind power 787w

Cunningham, Tony
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 684
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 907–8
Questions
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 1582w
Members, Correspondence 338w, 1390w
Motor sports 652

Curriculum
Environment protection 480w
Languages 1351w

Curry, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 682
Housing (18.07.02) 456

Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire
Questions
Acquittals 503–4w
Apprentices, Finance 990w
Crown Prosecution Service, Complaints 617–8w
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 618–20w
Drugs, Misuse 1504w
Industry 111w
Juries, Corruption 830w
National training organisations, Finance 648–52w
Offences against children, Northumbria 859w
Regulatory impact assessments 972w
Witnesses 93–4w

Customs and Excise
Scotland 470w, 1171–2w
Southern region 70w

Cycling
Road signs and markings 965w
Safety 965w
Standards 1277w

Cyprus
178w, 180w
Armed forces 385–6w
EC enlargement 179–80w, 883–4w
Foreign relations 178–80w
Military bases 279w, 282w

Cyprus—continued
Peace keeping operations 180w

Cystic fibrosis
Prescriptions 200–1w
Screening 200w

Czech Republic
1w
Immigration officers 685–6w

Dairy farming
314w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1012
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 699
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 167
Lockerbie, Bombings (23.07.02) 956–7, 962
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 37
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 254–5wh
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 258w, 1126w
Archaeology 657
Immigration controls, France 229w
Indonesia, Forests 448–9w
Iraq, Armed conflict 981–2
Lockerbie, Bombings 843–4

Dance
495w

Dangerous mental patients
1067–8w

***Darling, Rt Hon Alistair**, Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc.
Airports, Ministerial statements (23.07.02) 847–68
Questions
Network Rail, Finance 568–9w
Railways, Accidents 462w
Railways, Fares 568w

Data protection
Business 1326w
Home Office 1495w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1303w
Medical records 688w, 864w
Telecommunications 1465w

Data Protection Act 1998
Questions
1303w, 1326w, 1495w

Data Protection (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Databases
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 565–6w
Land use 1010–2w

Davey, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 604, 608
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 611–21, 630
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 563, 572–3, 578, 580–2, 587–8, 590, 599–600
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 895–6, 911–9

Davey, Mr Edward—continued
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 7wh, 9wh, 15–7wh

Davey, Mrs Valerie
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 109
Trade, Petitions (16.07.02) 260–1
Questions
Coal, Selby 165–8w
Employment schemes, Asperger's syndrome 113–4w
International Criminal Court, USA 846
Mining, Pensions 171–2w

David, Mr Wayne
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Disadvantaged, Public participation (24.07.02) 290–3wh
Poverty (18.07.02) 147–50wh
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Reform 917w
Export Credits Guarantee Dept, Trading funds 779–80w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 317w
Manufacturing industries, Trade competitiveness 417–8
Winter fuel payments, European economic area 599w

Davidson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 317, 329–30
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 481, 490–2, 513, 521–2
Questions
Armed forces, Recruitment 1107w
Employment, Disabled 1575–6w
Football, World Cup 554w
Social security benefits 1028–9w
Social security benefits, Voluntary work 1554–5w
Unemployment, Young people 522–3w
USA, Agriculture 177w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 920–2
Questions
National income 404

Davies, Geraint
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 626–7
Patients Without Legal Capacity (Safeguards) Bill, 2R order read (19.07.02) 636
Questions
Business 406–7
Computer software, Government departments 725w
Fire services, Radio 245w, 343w
Iran, Drugs 4–5w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 206
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 216–25, 231–4, (24.07.02) 986–9

Dawson, Mr Hilton
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 883
Questions
Sudan, Armed conflict 838–9

Day care
Children 60w, 127–8w, 183–4w, (17.07.02) 389–96, 987–8w, 1083w
Devon 183–4w

Dean Hill
Defence Munitions 25w, 285–7w

Death
Drugs 404w
Multiple occupation 238w
Outdoor education 1269–70w
Police custody 677–8w, 1054w, 1103w
Princess Royal Barracks 7–9

Death rate
Cancer 1178–9w
Cervical cancer 1197–8w

Debit cards
Fines 607w

Debt Management Office
see UK Debt Management Office

Debts
Burundi 586–7w
Commonwealth Development Corporation 450w
Developing countries 464–5w, 971

Deductions
Social security benefits 1589–92w

Defaulters
Fines 82w, 608w

Defence
EC countries 23w
Expenditure 1–3
Finance 755w, 1111–2w
USA 1113w

Defence Aviation Repair Agency
Almondbank 163w
Standards 911–2w

Defence equipment
155w, 907w, 1112–3w
Procurement 153–5w, 158w, 161–2w, (17.07.02) 311–86, 490w, 904–6w

Defence Estates
Property transfer 18w

Defence Fire Service
15–7

Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency
Standards 1117–8w

Defence Housing Executive
Standards 159w, 908–9w

Defence Medical Services
753w

Defence Munitions
Dean Hill 25w, 285–7w
Gosport 286w
Operating costs 285w

Defence Procurement Agency
160–1w

Defence review
Ministerial statements (18.07.02) 460–75

Defence Storage and Distribution Agency
Standards 1120w

Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation
QinetiQ 1122–3w

Defence Transport and Movements Agency
Standards 1119w

Deferred divisions
Rulings and statements (18.07.02) 537–8, (19.07.02) 556, (24.07.02) 1044

Dementia
191–2w

Democracy
Electronic government 182–3w

Democratic Republic of Congo
Armed conflict 1–2w, 585w
International assistance 584–5w
Rwanda 883w

Demonstrations
Parliament Square 554w

***Denham, Rt Hon John**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 706–11, 725–8
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), Rem stages (24.07.02) 1066–70
Police Reform Bill (HL), Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1060, 1063–4
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 558–9w, 1455–8w
Antisocial behaviour orders 663–4w, 831w
Antisocial behaviour orders, Hampshire 558w
Antisocial behaviour orders, South Tyneside 830–2w
Antisocial behaviour orders, South Yorkshire 557–8w
Antisocial behaviour orders, West Sussex 1466–7w
Baton rounds 1459w
Bluestone, Karl 683w
Burglary 1485–6w
Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Finance 1477–8w
Cheshire Constabulary, Sick leave 1538–9w
Children, Abuse 1487w
Children, Departmental coordination 1342w
Civil disorder, Bradford 1473–4w
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries 99–100w
Community development 1471–2w
Convictions 1056w
Credit cards, Fraud 679–80w
Crime 86–8w, 95–7w, 557w, 680–2w, 1441–3w
Crime, Elderly 681–2w
Crime, Greater London 1472–3w
Crime, Somerset 1457–9w
Crime and disorder partnerships 89w, 680w, 1477w
Crime prevention 826–7w, 851–2w, 1461w
Crime prevention, Cellular phones 1485w
Crime prevention, Finance 794–5w, 858w
Crime prevention, Northamptonshire 1469w
Crime prevention, Retail trade 795–6w, 836w, 862–4w, 1465–6w
Crime prevention, Standards 852–4w
Crimes of violence, Retail trade 683w
Criminal investigation 832w, 1487w, 1491–2w
Criminal Records Bureau 1481–3w
Criminal Records Bureau, Complaints 1481w
Criminal Records Bureau, Standards 1481–2w
Data protection, Home Office 1495w
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Manpower 563w
Dizaei, Ali 1478w
Domestic violence, Convictions 849–50w
Driving offences 566w
Driving offences, Speed limits 105w, 827w
Driving under influence 827w

***Denham, Rt Hon John**—continued*
EC action, Home Office 564–5w
Emergencies, Chemical and biological warfare 748w
Emergency services, Radio 1470w
Emergency services, Sick leave 1053w
Ethnic groups 1503w
Firearms 94w
Football, World Cup 554w
Forensic science 109w
Forensic Science Service 1077w
Forensic Science Service, Annual reports 231–2w
Hampshire Police Authority 560w
Heathrow Airport, Theft 859w
Hertfordshire Constabulary, Manpower 1491w
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Public appointments 1487–8w
Immobilisation of vehicles, Regulation 1473w
Leicestershire Police 96w
Leicestershire Police Authority, Public appointments 560w
Luton, Home Office 1492–4w
Members, Correspondence 1065w, 1468w
Mentally incapacitated, Protection 563w
Metropolitan Police 671w, 824–5w, 1478–9w
Metropolitan Police, Complaints 1476–7w
Metropolitan Police, Criminal records 1050w
Metropolitan Police, Disciplinary proceedings 856w, 1054w
Metropolitan Police, Housing 671–2w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 1488w
Metropolitan Police, Sick leave 1049–50w
Metropolitan Police, Training 848–9w
Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence 1340w
Neighbourhood nuisance, Sheltered housing 687w
Neighbourhood wardens, Chorley 1485w
Offences against children, Northumbria 859w
Parliament Square, Demonstrations 554w
Perjury 678–9w
Police 95w, 670–1w, 1045–6w, 1480–1w
Police, Bromley 1468w
Police, Compensation 1466–8w
Police, Conditions of employment 1046w
Police, Coventry 1475–6w
Police, Diabetes 1061–2w
Police, Dismissal 95–6w
Police, Domestic violence 850w
Police, Emergency calls 100–2w
Police, Firearms 1047–50w
Police, Football 1475w
Police, Freemasonry 1502–3w
Police, Greater London 830w
Police, Havering 1474w
Police, Housing 841–2w
Police, Manpower 563w, 837w, 1486–92w
Police, North West region 850–1w
Police, Pay 836w, 849w, 859–60w
Police, Pensions 94–6w
Police, Portsmouth 561–3w
Police, Private finance initiative 560–2w
Police, Radio 98–9w, 1495–6w
Police, Recruitment 103–4w, 857–8w
Police, Reform 1478w
Police, Retirement 1046–7w
Police, Sick leave 1480w
Police, Standards 856–7w, 1495–7w, 1522–8w
Police, Training 559–60w
Police, Wandsworth 1480w
Police, Weapons 1522w
Police custody, Death 677–8w, 1054w

***Denham, Rt Hon John**—continued*
Police Reform Bill and Implementation Unit 561w
Police Standards Unit 105–6w, 1443w
Police stations 562w, 672–6w, 829–30w
Police stations, Greater London 1475w
Politics and government, Young people 188–9w, 1166w, 1363–4w
Prostitution, Children 1059w
Racial harassment 853–4w
Racial violence 665w
Rape 835w
Robbery 101–3w, 1487w
Robbery, Greater London 1474w
Security guards, Licensing 688w
Special constables, Buckinghamshire 672w
Special constables, Manpower 855–6w
Special constables, Recruitment 221w, 672w, 1054–5w
Speed limits, Cameras 687w
Surrey Police, Finance 1470–1w
Sussex Police, Early retirement 835w
Sussex Police, Finance 1459w
Theft, Cellular phones 555w, 825–6w, 1479–80w, 1484–5w
Tobacco, Young people 1456w
Vetting, Foreign workers 1482w
Vetting, Voluntary work 555w
West Mercia Constabulary, Finance 675w
West Midlands Police, Recruitment 1050–3w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1505w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 684w
Young offenders 664–6w
Young offenders, Lancashire 558w
Young people, Advisory services 204w

Dental health
189w

Dental services
189–90w
Fees and charges 662w
Gloucestershire 141–2, 1396w
Morecambe 190w
Pensioners 1438w
Wales 275–7

Departmental coordination
Children 1342w

Departmental expenditure limits
Home Office 1078w

Departmental responsibilities
Cabinet Office 1000w, 1002w
Dept for Transport 455–6w, 962w, 1261w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1081w
Referendums 1305w

Depleted uranium
see Uranium

Deployment
Aircraft carriers 284–5w
Armed forces 762w, 901w
Army 19w

Deportation
223w
Injuries 400w

Deprivation indicators
1215w

Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Annual reports 408–9w
Computers 499w
Consultation papers 410w, 496–8w, 697w, 971–4w, 1156–8w
EC action 359w, 498–9w, 633–4w
Internet 1158w
Public expenditure 407w
Public participation 974w
Publicity 698w

Dept for Culture Media and Sport—continued
- Scotland 1159–60w
- Visits abroad 407w
- Wood 407w

Dept for Education and Skills
- Civil servants 187w
- Computers 651w
- Consultation papers 60–4w, 985–6w
- EC action 773w, 1361–3w
- Energy 53w
- Information officers 988w
- Internet 1365–6w
- Orders and regulations 1364–5w
- Public expenditure 651w
- Publicity 771–3w
- Republic of Ireland 1363w
- Standards 651w
- Statistics 1365w
- Telephone services 1364w
- Visits abroad 773–4w

Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
- Advertising 474–6w
- Annual reports 709w
- Asda 310w
- Computers 37w
- Consultation papers 937–42w
- Correspondence 131w, 477w, 1141–2w
- EC action 35w, 69–70w, 79–80w, 301–2w, 304–5w, 486–7w, 702w, 922–9w, 952w, 957w
- EC law 1150–2w
- Females 134w
- Information officers 1139w
- Public expenditure 627–31w
- Public participation 1144–6w
- Public relations 916w
- Secondment 32–4w
- Speeches 917w
- Sponsorship 921w
- Standards 975

Dept for International Development
- Annual reports 594w
- Community development 898w
- Computers 893w
- Consultants 893–4w
- Consultation papers 40–1w, 591–2w
- Directors 1129w
- Information officers 721w
- Internet 900w
- Manpower 1133w
- Ministerial policy advisors 900w, 1132w
- Public expenditure 290w
- Public participation 1135w
- Publicity 721–2w
- Scotland 1138w
- Temporary employment 1132–3w
- Visits abroad 43–4w
- Written questions 292w

Dept for Transport
- Departmental responsibilities 455–6w, 962w, 1261w
- Ministers 142–3w
- Pay 962w
- Press releases 733w, 1270w

Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
- Advertising 459w
- Annual reports 999–1000w
- Buildings 333w
- Computers 13w
- Consultation papers 13–4w, 1266–7w
- Contracts 961w
- EC action 6–7w, 80–1w, 332w, 358w, 435w, 632w, 731–2w, 1272–5w, 1323–4w
- Empty property 453w

Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions—continued
- Equal opportunities 236w
- Gender impact assessment 236w
- Housing 732w
- Information officers 961–2w
- Internet 1265w
- Manpower 1262–3w
- Ministerial policy advisors 1263w
- Public expenditure 8w
- Public participation 1265–6w
- Republic of Ireland 1262w
- Scotland 1262w
- Speeches 962w
- Temporary employment 1264w
- Visits abroad 238w, 1271w
- Written questions 456w

Dept for Work and Pensions
- Advertising 1578–9w
- Annual reports 1035w, 1587w
- Buildings 262w, 605–6w, 1582w
- Community development 1587–8w
- Computers 294w
- Consultation papers 602–4w, 814w, 1026–8w, 1596w
- EC action 232–4w, 249w, 269–70w, 603–4w, 1583–4w
- Energy 1023–4w
- Equal pay 112w
- Females 521w
- Green Ministers Committee 811–2w
- Information technology 512–4w
- Internet 1594w
- Manpower 1588–90w
- Ministerial policy advisors 1596w
- Newspaper press 110w
- Orders and regulations 515–6w
- Press 1037w
- Public bodies 294w
- Public expenditure 261–2w, 1586w
- Public participation 1542w
- Publicity 1584–6w
- Recycling 1023w
- Regional planning and development 1578w
- Regulatory impact assessments 524–5w
- Republic of Ireland 1581–2w
- Scotland 1583w
- Serials 605w
- Standards 521w
- Statistics 1024w
- Telephone services 518w
- Temporary employment 1587w
- Visits abroad 1040w
- Written questions 113–4w

Dept of Health
- Buildings 206–7w
- Consultation papers 1429w
- Contracts 1429w
- Correspondence 1378–9w, 1428w
- EC action 379w, 432w, 1084w, 1339–40w, 1432–4w, 1439–40w, 1595w
- EC law 205–6w, 658–9w
- Empty property 663w
- Energy 663w
- Location 867w
- Oral questions 1431w
- Public participation 1094w
- Publicity 1403w
- Standards 409–11
- Visits abroad 1429w

Dept of Trade and Industry
- Annual reports 789w
- Buildings 790–1w
- Computers 781w
- Consultation papers 791–2w, 950–1w
- EC action 951–2w, 960w
- Energy 77–8w
- Hacking 781w
- Isle of Wight 1325w

Dept of Trade and Industry—continued
- Official hospitality 790w
- Pay 789w
- Public expenditure 789w
- Public participation 172–4w
- Publicity 945w
- Regional planning and development 792w
- Regulation 170w
- Regulatory impact assessments 437w
- Scotland 350w
- Secondment 790w
- Stationery 790w
- Telephone services 791w, 954–6w

Derbyshire
- Beta-interferon 203w
- Primary care trusts 1382–4w

Deregulation Task Force
- 956w

Derelict land
- 1019w
- Planning permission (24.07.02) 268–89wh

Dermatology
- Manpower 122w

Detainees
- Asylum 1043w

Developing countries
- see also Heavily indebted poor countries initiative
- Agricultural products 1126w
- AIDS 719w
- Arms trade 1138w
- Children 1137–8w
- Common agricultural policy 261w, 1129w
- Debts 464–5w, 971
- Disease control 719w
- Drugs 336w, 593–4w, 1186w
- EC external trade 884w, 1125–6w
- Education 258–60w, 290–1w, 895–6w, 1129–30w
- HIV infection 592–3w, 895w
- Human rights 720w
- Microfinance 293w
- Multinational companies 1134–5w
- Overseas companies 720w, 970–1
- Poverty 260w, 968–70
- Renewable energy 1130–1w
- Trade 261w, 763w
- Trade agreements 947w

Development aid
- 73w

Devolution
- Liability 251w
- Public expenditure 69w, 958w
- Wales 320w

Devon
- Day care 183–4w

Devon and Cornwall Constabulary
- Manpower 563w

Dhanda, Mr Parmjit
- *Questions*
  - Sure start programme 182w
  - Urban regeneration companies, Gloucester 281, 1016w

Diabetes
- 191w
- Police 1061–2w
- Screening 191w

Diagnostic treatment centres
- 1086w

Diesel engines
- EC action 945–6w

Dietary supplements
- EC action 413–4w, 1440–1w

Digital broadcasting
362w, 691w
BBC 1159w

Diplomatic service
384w, 889–90w, 1319w

Dir64/432/EC
131–2w

Dir86/635/EEC
337w

Dir99/31/EC
28–9w

Dir2000/35/EC
210w

Dir2000/53/EC
1332w

Dir2001/29/EC
169w

Dir2002/15/EC
710w

Director of Public Prosecutions
see Crown Prosecution Service

Directors
Commonwealth Development Corporation 450w, 581–2w, 584w
Dept for International Development 1129w

Directors Remuneration Report Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(15.07.02) 127

Disability aids
201w, 1092w
Social security benefits 1558w
Telecommunications 405–7w

Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Questions
263–4w, 1038–9w

Disability living allowance
1573–4w
Scotland 814–5w

Disabled
1038–9w
Access 1007–8w, 1574w
Councillors 271–2w
Employment 1575–7w
Health education 423w
Jobcentre Plus 812w
Post offices 349w
Social security benefits 1569–73w, 1575w
Village halls 263–4w
Young people 121–2w

"Disabled Person's Parking Badge Scheme Consultation Paper"
1245–6w

Disadvantaged
Pre-school education 188w
Public participation (24.07.02) 290–6wh
Transport 1214–5w

Disciplinary proceedings
Doctors 1091w
Fire Service College 18w
Health professions 1091w
Metropolitan Police 856w, 1054w
Prison Service 1516w
Prisons 1536w

Discipline
Schools 1343w

Discrimination
Employment 1032–3w

Disease control
Bovine tuberculosis 131–3w, 136w, 931–3w, 1147w, 1378w

Disease control—continued
Developing countries 719w
Foot and mouth disease 306w, 1153w
Sheep 31w
South East Asia 281

Diseases
Bees 489w
Children 124w, 1422–3w
Fish 35–6w
Pigs 305–6w

Dismissal
Police 95–6w

Dismore, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 603–5
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 610–4, 630
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 564–84, 587, 590, 595–6, 599
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 633, 635–6
Questions
Civil service agencies 726w
Criminal Records Bureau, Administrative delays 1453w
Foster care, Ethnic groups 119w
Middle East, Antisemitism 181w, 765w
NHS Pensions Agency, Standards 1083w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 181w
Social services, Finance 1409w
Social services, Standards 119w

Disqualification
Social security benefits 815–8w, 1024–6w

Distribution
Electricity 1329w

District councils
Standards 249w

Divorce (Religious Marriages) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Dizaei, Ali
1478w

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1015
Questions
Alconbury airfield, Planning permission 245w
Broadband, Huntingdon 439w
Housing, Construction 1018–9w
Local government, Standards 440w
NHS, Finance 464w
Parish councils, Codes of practice 1009w
Parish councils, Resignations 1009w

Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Questions
Criminal Records Bureau, Capita 827–8w
Licensing laws 498w

Doctors
Disciplinary proceedings 1091w
Foreign workers 202–3w, 1394w
Recruitment 202w, 1100–1w
Reserve forces 422w, 1111w

Doctors' list of patients
201w, 1392w

Dodds, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 184–5, 194

Dodds, Mr Nigel—continued
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 226, 238–9, (24.07.02) 995–6

Dogs
308w

Domestic Combined Heat and Power (Reduction in VAT) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (24.07.02) 1020

Domestic violence
Convictions 849–50w
Immigration rules 229w
Police 850w

Donaldson, Mr Jeffrey M
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 233, 242–5, (24.07.02) 998
Questions
Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption 1404w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H
Questions
Billing, Government departments 442–3w

Donors
Kidneys 657w
Organs 658w

Doran, Mr Frank
Questions
India, Terrorism 879w
Social security benefits, Applications 600w

Dorset
Council tax benefits 268w
Housing benefit 268w
Pensioners 268–9w
State retirement pensions 268w

Double glazing
Council housing 1220w

Double jeopardy
1461–2w

Double taxation
Lithuania 959w
South Africa 959w
USA 822w

Doughty, Sue
Debates etc.
Local Sustainability Bill, 1R (23.07.02) 886
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 205–8wh
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 259–62wh
Questions
Green Ministers Committee, Dept for Work and Pensions 811–2w
Green Ministers Committee, Home Office 547w
House of Commons, Recycling 50–1w, 324–5w
Local government, Private finance initiative 941–2w
Paper, Prime Minister 802w
Recycling, Cabinet Office 641w
Recycling, Dept for Work and Pensions 1023w
Recycling, Prime Minister 75w
Suicide, Females 152–4
Tipping of waste 28–9w, 315w
Tipping of waste, Planning permission 941w

Dowd, Jim
Questions
Road traffic 143w

***Dowd, Jim**—continued*
Road traffic, Greater London 1247–8w

Dredging
Wales 37–8w

Drew, Mr David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 89–94wh
Questions
Central Science Laboratory, Annual reports 915w
Common land 915w
Dental services, Gloucestershire 1396w
European Parliamentary Elections Bill (HL) 2001/02 607–8w
Euthanasia 1302w
Flood control 626–7w
Further education, Finance 645–6w
Health services, Cooperatives 212w, 655w
"Making Decisions Consultation Paper" 1082w
Mentally incapacitated 529w
Police, Pay 836w, 849w
Poultry, Animal welfare 915w
Rural Payments Agency, Standards 914–5w
Sudan, Armed conflict 837–8
Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Annual reports 916w
Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Annual reports 915–6w
Village halls 308w
Water supply, Competition 916w

Drinking water
Fluoride 417–8w, 1390w

Driver information systems
1253–4w

Driving
Cellular phones 1234w
Licensing 965w

Driving instruction
Young people 307w

Driving offences
566w
Petitions (16.07.02) 261
Speed limits 105w, 827w
Surrey 827w

Driving under influence
742–3w, 827w, 967w, 1063w, 1448–54w
Cannabis 403–4w

Drown, Ms Julia
Debates etc.
Imitation guns (22.07.02) 765–7
Rape (Consent) Bill, 1R (16.07.02) 174–6
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 772
Questions
Business questions 427–8
Firearms 94w
Firearms, Convictions 1056–8w
Local government, Pay 1194w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 208w
Trade agreements, Developing countries 947w

Drug resistance
AIDS 1389w

Drug seizures
87w
Scotland 1179w

Drug treatment and testing orders
104w

Drugs
Abortion 1434–7w
Children 88w

***Drugs**—continued*
Crime 87w, 104–5w, 396–7w, 666–70w, 1461–2w
Death 404w
Developing countries 336w, 593–4w, 1186w
Haemophilia 421w
Iran 4–5w
Lactose 413w
Merseyside 1504w
Misuse 87–8w, 202w, 404w, 559w, 1068–9w, 1504w
Multiple sclerosis 199w
Northern Ireland 508w
Nottinghamshire 1462–3w
Portsmouth 836w
Prisons 828w
Smuggling (22.07.02) 803–6
Sports 696w
Worcester 202w
Young offender institutions 1445–6w

Duchess of Kent Military Hospital
754w

Duke of York's Royal Military School
Standards 1117w

Duncan, Mr Alan
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 106–9wh, 112wh
Questions
Liberia, Armed conflict 1306w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces 1308w
Sierra Leone, Elections 1309w
Sierra Leone, Peace keeping operations 1309–10w
Sierra Leone, Peace negotiations 1308–10w
Sudan, Armed conflict 838
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 1307w

Duncan, Mr Peter
Questions
Care homes, Fees and charges 202w
Care homes, Scotland 198w
Energy, Conservation 27–8w
Medicine, Scotland 127w
Post offices, Scotland 774w
Smuggling 1173w
Social security benefits, Disability aids 1558w
State retirement pensions 1539w
Visits abroad, Scotland Office 1225w
Wind power 788w

Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (15.07.02) 33
Questions
Crime 278–80
Pensions, Taxation 283
Pupil exclusions 978–9
Terrorism 972–4

Dungavel Detention Centre
232w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 859
Questions
Police, Manpower 837w
Shipping, Accidents 8w

Durham County
Education 1352w
Mental health services 127w

Dyslexia
Hyperactivity 990w

***Eagle, Maria**, Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions*
Debates etc.
Children, Day care (17.07.02) 393–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Child Support Agency (16.07.02) 55–8wh
Pensioners, Income support (24.07.02) 310–4wh
Questions
Access to work programme 1566w
Attendance allowance 1582w
Attendance allowance, Scotland 112w
Carers, Social security benefits 111–2w
Community development, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587–8w
Disability living allowance 1573–4w
Disability living allowance, Scotland 814–5w
Disabled 1038–9w
Disabled, Access 1574w
Disabled, Village halls 263–4w
Employment, Disabled 1576–7w
Employment schemes, Aspergers syndrome 113–4w
Energy, Dept for Work and Pensions 1023–4w
Green Ministers Committee, Dept for Work and Pensions 811–2w
Incapacity benefit 1568–9w
Industry 111w
Jobcentre Plus, Disabled 812w
Maternity payments, Sure start programme 1559w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Work and Pensions 1596w
New deal schemes 111w
Recycling, Dept for Work and Pensions 1023w
Social security benefits, Appeals 114w, 1033–4w, 1557–8w
Social security benefits, Applications 600w
Social security benefits, Children in care 813–4w
Social security benefits, Disability aids 1558w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1569–72w
Social security benefits, Personal injury 1578w
Vaccination, Compensation 1593w
Written questions, Dept for Work and Pensions 113–4w

Early retirement
NHS 542w, 1380w
Sussex Police 835w

East Timor
1313w
Homicide 1319–20w

Eastern Europe
Iron and steel 1130w
Overseas aid 1128w
Regional planning and development 590w

Eastern region
Hospital beds 1094–8w
Regional planning and development 343w

EC action
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 359w, 498–9w, 633–4w
Dept for Education and Skills 773w, 1361–3w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 35w, 69–70w, 79–80w, 301–2w, 304–5w, 486–7w, 702w, 922–9w, 952w, 957w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 6–7w, 80–1w, 332w, 358w, 435w, 632w, 731–2w, 1272–5w, 1323–4w

EC action—continued
Dept for Work and Pensions 232–4w, 249w, 269–70w, 603–4w, 1583–4w
Dept of Health 379w, 432w, 1084w, 1339–40w, 1432–4w, 1439–40w, 1595w
Dept of Trade and Industry 951–2w, 960w
Diesel engines 945–6w
Dietary supplements 413–4w, 1440–1w
Electronic equipment (18.07.02) 537
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 359–60w
Genetically modified organisms 37w
Home Office 564–5w, 632w, 1044w, 1063–5w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278–9w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 633w
Pollution 946–7w
Public transport 454–5w
Regulation 360–1w
Temporary employment (15.07.02) 127
Transport 1272w
Treasury 339w, 471–2w, 636–7w, 747–8w, 1173–6w
Wood 710–1w
Zimbabwe 174w

EC Agriculture Council
309–10w

EC aid
880w

EC budget
(17.07.02) 310

EC countries
Defence 23w
Ferries 1233w
Medical treatments 201w, 538w, 871–2w
Rapid reaction forces 26w

EC defence policy
611w

EC Economic and Social Committee
1314–6w

EC enlargement
181w, 880w, 882w
Cyprus 179–80w, 883–4w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 1132w
Poland 842–3
Turkey 3w

EC environmental policy
355w
Procurement 354–5w

EC external trade
Animal products 300w
Developing countries 884w, 1125–6w

EC Finance Council
338–9w

EC grants and loans
Gibraltar 764–5w
Higher education 187w
Wales 318–21w

EC Health Council
1087–8w

EC institutions
386–7w
Manpower 1315w

EC law
Conditions of employment 446–7w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1150–2w
Dept of Health 205–6w, 658–9w
Flood control 625–6w
Herbal medicine 150–2
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 323w
Scotland Office 382w

EC law—continued
Solicitor-General 288w
Working hours (17.07.02) 121–8wh, 710w

EC presidency
Greece 881w

Ecclesbourne School
(22.07.02) 745–8

Economic and monetary union
470–1w 1198–9w
NHS 1198w
Wales 1378w

Economic policy
(17.07.02) 397–400

Economic situation
1199w
South West region 467w

Edinburgh
Army 1115w

Education
Agriculture 648w
Asylum 773w, 1045w
Castle Point (22.07.02) 821–8
Central African Republic 716–7w
Commonwealth 713–4w
Developing countries 258–60w, 290–1w, 895–6w, 1129–30w
Durham County 1352w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre 849w, 1077w
Finance 1366w
Medicine 657w
Ministerial statements (16.07.02) 155–73
Pilot schemes 1347–50w
Prisons 1498–502w
Stafford (22.07.02) 759–61
Standard spending assessments 1215w
Surrey 1352w

Education Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Programme motion* and Lords amendts (15.07.02) 46–126
Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1021–43
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080
Questions
1341w

Education of children at home
North West region 1346w

Educational institutions
Computer software 651–2w

Educational maintenance allowance
Morley 57w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Questions
Administration of justice, Annual reports 403w
Antisemitism 221–2w
Jobcentre Plus, Wales 321–2w
Overseas aid 464w
Territorial Army 20w

Efford, Clive
Questions
Asylum, Children 550–2w
Asylum, Greater London 549–50w
Carers, Greater London 219w
Community development 341–3w
Education, Asylum 773w
Foster care, Greater London 1221–2w
Health services, Greater London 873w
Hospital beds, Greater London 640w, 660w, 1221w
National Care Standards Commission, Finance 213–4w
Post offices, Urban areas 998w
Race relations 1060–1w

Efford, Clive—continued
Social services, Greater London 249w, 531–4w, 654–6w
Social workers, Greater London 655w
Teachers, Ethnic groups 364w
Teachers, Manpower 364w
Teachers, Retirement 364w
Tourists, Expenditure 497w

Eggs
920–1w

Elderly
Birmingham (22.07.02) 780–3
Crime 681–2w
Health services 128–9w
Ministerial statements (23.07.02) 869–84
Residential and nursing care see Institutional care
Social services 1098–9w
Staffordshire 190–1w

Elections
Expenditure 1080w
Ivory Coast 390w
Local government 83w, 244w
Macedonia 611w
Mali 1306w
Sierra Leone 1309w
Wales 699–700w, 724w
Zimbabwe 174w

Electoral Commission
1123w

Electoral register
665–6

Electoral systems
996w
Scotland 77w

Electricity
Distribution 1329w

Electricity generation
Markets 1330w
Prices 944w

Electronic commerce
Private sector 781w
Public private partnerships 960–1w

Electronic equipment
EC action (18.07.02) 537
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 235w
Waste disposal 482–3w, 1332w

Electronic government
726–7w
Democracy 182–3w

Electronic voting
664–6, 1016w
Finance 1016w

11 Downing Street
Air conditioning 803w
Repairs and maintenance 804w

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Questions
Electronic voting 665
Gibraltar, Spain 612w
Israel, Arms trade 840
Regional arts boards 692w
Regional development agencies, Finance 1213–4w
Sussex Police, Early retirement 835w

Embassies
1318w
Israel 553w
USA 145w

Emergencies
Chemical and biological warfare 748w
Planning 727w, 1070w

Emergency calls
Police 100–2w

Emergency services
Radio 1470w
Sick leave 1053w

Employee share ownership schemes
1183w

Employer Direct
1035w

Employers' liability
Insurance 250–1w

Employment
Asylum 1041–2w
Disabled 1575–7w
Discrimination 1032–3w
Females 793w
Glasgow 1575–6w
Mentally ill 123–4w, 126w, 196w
Yorkshire and Humberside 67–8w, 637w

Employment agencies
949w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 608–9w

Employment Relations Act 1999
Questions
440–1w, 777w, 1164w

Employment schemes
Asperger's syndrome 113–4w

Employment Tribunal System Taskforce
1338w

Employment tribunals
954w

Employment zones
523–4w, 1593w

Empty property
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 453w
Dept of Health 663w
Housing 1003–6w, 1017w

Encephalitis
1432w

Endangered Species (Illegal Trade) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Endangered Species (Offences) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (22.07.02) 705

Endometriosis
423–4w
Petitions (17.07.02) 388

Energy
(16.07.02) 59–66wh, 711w, 943–4w
Competition 346w, 943w
Conservation 27–8w, 249–50w, 479w, 485w
Dept for Education and Skills 53w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1023–4w
Dept of Health 663w
Dept of Trade and Industry 77–8w
Hacking 346w
Home Office 544w
NHS 211–2w

Energy supply
347–8w, 1335–6w
Terrorism 842–3w

Engineers
Air force 23–4w

Engines
Future large aircraft 492–3w

English Partnerships
1211–3w

English Sports Council
Finance 976–7w
Manpower 979w
Pay 975w, 979w

Ennis, Jeff
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders, South Yorkshire 557–8w
Arms trade, Export controls 611w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 350w
Mining, Pensions 775w
NHS Direct 144
Primary care trusts, Barnsley 1386w

Enterprise investment scheme
1184w

Entertainments
Public houses 649–50

Entry clearances
684w, 887w
Genetics 1446w
India 1532w
Indian subcontinent (22.07.02) 748–51, 1311–2w
Macedonia 402w
Zimbabwe 4w

Environment
Ministerial policy advisors 312w

Environment Agency
622w
Public appointments 1144w

Environment protection
Albania 588–9w
Curriculum 480w
Design 1333w
Export credit guarantees 779w
International cooperation 39–40w
Know-How Fund 720w
Prison Service 564w
QinetiQ 912–3w

Environmental Audit (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 638

Environmental Protection Act 1990
Questions
308w

Environmentally sensitive areas
622w

Epilepsy
1406–9w

Equal opportunities
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Home Office 555w
Scotland Office 768w

Equal pay
792–3w
Dept for Work and Pensions 112w
Home Office 546–7w

Equitable Life Independent Inquiry
636w, 1339w

Etherington, Bill
Questions
Fluoride, Drinking water 1390w

Ethiopia
Overseas aid 1126w

Ethnic groups
1503w
Armed forces 14–5
Botswana 176w
Cameroon 1124w

Ethnic groups—continued
Foster care 119w
Mental health services 197w
Prison governors 835w
Prison Service 1508–16w
Prisoners 1508–16w
Teachers 364w

EU Better Regulation Consultative Group
see Mandelkern Group

EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council
1059–60w

Euro
Overseas trade 1198w
Tourism 695w

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC enlargement 1132w

European Communities
see also EC and EU headings

European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 397–400

"European Community Finances White Paper"
822w

European economic area
Winter fuel payments 599w

European Energy and Transport Forum
731–2w, 1338w

European fighter aircraft
21w, 156–7w, 492w, 760w

European Parliament elections
699w
Gibraltar 1291w

European Parliamentary Elections Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R* and 3R* (15.07.02) 126
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080
Questions
607–8w

European Police Office
Powers 223–4w

European Scrutiny Committee
Explanatory notes 1165–6w

European technology acquisition programme
904w

Euthanasia
1301–3w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Questions
Crime, Wales 275
Drugs, Crime 666–7w
Health services, Wales 270
Hospital beds, Lancashire 204–5w
Police, North West region 850–1w
Police, Sick leave 1480w
Postal workers, Vacancies 350w
Public appointments, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1377w
Public Guardianship Office, Complaints 412w
Publications, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375–6w
Regional airports, Wales 272
Theft, Cellular phones 1484–5w
Working hours, Parents 171w
Young offenders, Lancashire 558w

Ewing, Annabelle
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 491, 496–8, 511, 520
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Pensioners, Income support (24.07.02) 309wh, 313wh
Questions
Agriculture, Scotland 308–9w
Airports, Scotland 983w
Army, Young people 277w
Aviation, Scotland 970w
Beef, France 309w, 1228w
Civil servants, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1373w
Common fisheries policy 919w
Crown Estate Commissioners, Scotland 274w, 469w
Customs and Excise, Scotland 470w, 1171–2w
Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Almondbank 163w
Disability living allowance, Scotland 814–5w
Drug seizures, Scotland 1179w
Dungavel Detention Centre 232w
Fisheries, Quotas 621w
Foreign workers 1062–3w
Hewlett-Packard, Redundancy 983w
Incapacity benefit, Child benefit 1567w
Liquefied petroleum gas, Scotland 1230–2w
Lockerbie, Bombings 765–6w
Maladministration, Home Office 1486w
Manpower, Dept for International Development 1133w
Manpower, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262–3w
Manpower, Dept for Work and Pensions 1588–90w
Manpower, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1322–4w
Manpower, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1377w
Manpower, Scotland Office 1229–30w
Manpower, Treasury 1172w
Older people consultative forums, Public appointments 1022w
Pension credit 1540w
Scotland, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1159–60w
Scotland, Dept for International Development 1138w
Scotland, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Scotland, Dept for Work and Pensions 1583w
Scotland, Dept of Trade and Industry 350w
Scotland, Prime Minister 1372w
Scotland, Scotland Office 1230w
Scotland, Treasury 1171–3w
Social Fund 270w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1569–72w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1554w
Unemployment, Scotland 983–4w
VAT, Fuels 1171w

Exchange rates
65w, 413–4, 1182–3w

Excise duties
Fuels 462w, 467–8w, 740–1w
Motor vehicles 10–1w, 334w

Exhaust emissions
479w

Explanatory notes
European Scrutiny Committee 1165–6w

Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002
Questions
506w

Export Control Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1045–9
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Export controls
Arms trade 77–8w, 384w, 435–6w, 611w, 780w, 1317–8w, 1330w
India 435w
Pakistan 435w

Export credit guarantees
(23.07.02) 202–23wh
Environment protection 779w

Export Credits Guarantee Dept
Trading funds 779–80w

Exports
Beef 1151–2w
India 358–9w
Licensing 358–9w, 436–7w
Sheep 921–2w

Exservicemen
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 160w, 909–12w
Pensions 1200–1w
Sleeping rough 753–4w

Eyesight
Police 103–4w

Fabricant, Michael
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (18.07.02) 422
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 707, 709, 711, 713, 715,721–3
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 891
Questions
Bishops 664
Cathedrals, Repairs and maintenance 667–8
Churches, Planning permission 723–4w
House of Commons, Internet 325–6w
House of Commons, Publications 1167w
Marines 17
Members, Computers 711w
Poland, EC enlargement 843
Sheep meat, Wales 277
Sports, Young people 658–9
VAT, Charities 463w

Fallon, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 922–6

Family planning
China 1135–6w

Family practitioner services
Petitions (15.07.02) 128

Famine
Angola 447–8w, 585–6w
Lesotho 717w
Southern Africa 587w

Fares
Railways 568w, 1242w

Farmers
see also Agriculture
Income 1147w

Farms
see also Agriculture
Game 823–4w

Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre
Education 849w, 1077w

Females
Advocate General for Scotland 985w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 134w
Dept for Work and Pensions 521w
Employment 793w
India 260w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 411w
Ministry of Defence 283–4w
Northern Ireland Office 509w
Prison governors 834w
Prisoners 832–3w
Scotland Office 983w
Suicide 152–4

Ferries
EC countries 1233w

Field, Rt Hon Frank
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 701
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 613, 618–23, 628–9
Questions
Criminal Records Bureau, Administrative delays 1518w
Fraud, Home Office 403w
Housing benefit, Abuse 266w
Income support 1024–5w
Social security benefits, Abuse 595w, 1555–6w
Social security benefits, Deductions 1589–92w
Social security benefits, Disqualification 815–8w, 1024w

Field, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 509
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 4–5wh, 13–5wh
Questions
Foreign trade 175w
Mental Health Bill (Draft) 191w
Secondment, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w

Finance Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Financial services
British overseas territories 1315–6w
Buckingham 1199–200w
Complaints 65w
Misrepresentation [illegible]–6w
VAT 824w

Financial Services Act 1986
Questions
350–1w

Financial Services Authority
1177w

Financial Services Compensation Scheme
468–9w

Financial Services Consumer Panel
Bank services 270w

Fines
Debit cards 607w
Defaulters 82w, 608w
Greater Manchester 1300–2w

Fire extinguishers
235w

Fire prevention
1211w
Wales 320w

Fire Service College
Disciplinary proceedings 18w

Fire services
Government assistance 1015–6w
Offshore industry 638w
Pay 1002w
Radio 245w, 343w

Firearms
94w, 1069–70w
Convictions 1056–8w
Manchester 285–6
Police 1047–50w

Firearms (Amendment) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (15.07.02) 46
2R order read (19.07.02) 639

Firearms (Replica Weapons) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 635

Fires
150–2w

Fireworks
Northern Ireland 506w

Firing ranges
Imber 24–5w, 162w
Shoeburyness 20w

Fish
Diseases 35–6w

Fisher, Mr Mark
Questions
Religious broadcasting, Licensing 1157w

Fisheries
132w, 967–8w
Compensation 1327w
Quotas 621w
Spain 621w

Fitzsimons, Lorna
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 294

Fixed penalties
Illegal immigrants 552w
Immigration controls 220w
Road traffic offences 843w

Fixed-Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(16.07.02) 259–60

Fixed-Term Parliaments Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Flags
82w
Proscribed organisations 505w

Fleet Air Arm
22–3w

Flight, Mr Howard
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 891
Questions
Business 408
Homicide, Habitual offenders 843w
Surgery, Private sector 202w

Flint, Caroline
Debates etc.
Children, Day care (17.07.02) 389–93
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 40–1

Flood control
(16.07.02) 22–44wh, 302–3w, 310–1w, 621–7w, 703–5w, 934w

Flood control—continued
EC law 625–6w

Floods
Canvey Island 933–4w

Flook, Mr Adrian
Questions
Bus services, Somerset 1243w
Learndirect centres, Taunton 1351–2w
Limitation of actions 272w
Railways, Taunton 1243w
Roads, Construction 1247w
Somerset College for Arts and Technology, Finance 1351w
Sports, Taunton 51w
Television, Licensing 1160w

Fluoride
Drinking water 417–8w, 1390w
Food 418w
Toothpaste 417w

Flynn, Paul
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Mortgages (16.07.02) 50–1wh
Questions
Agriculture, Subsidies 1139w
Business questions 432–3
Defence, Expenditure 1–2
Disability living allowance 1574w
Foot and mouth disease, Public footpaths 1139–40w
Incapacity benefit 1568–9w
Incapacity benefit, Pensioners 1567–8w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1571–3w
State retirement pensions 1539–40w

Follett, Barbara
Questions
Bank notes 470w
Double taxation, South Africa 959w
Double taxation, USA 822w
Economic and monetary union 470–1w
Energy, Conservation 249–50w
"European Community Finances White Paper" 822w
Financial Services Authority 1177w
Government departments, Publications 958–9w
Inland Revenue, Expenditure 253–4w
Office for National Statistics, Annual reports 821w
Public expenditure, Devolution 69w
Statistics Commission, Annual reports 336w
"Tax Benefit Reference Manual, 2002/03" 960w
Terrorism, Finance 959w
UK Debt Management Office, Annual reports 958w
VAT, Imports 336–7w

Food
Acrylamide 1431–2w
Babies 418w
Fluoride 418w
Genetically modified organisms 36–7w
Hospitals 200w
Imports 298w
Labelling 1384–5w
Mozambique 42–3w, 587w
Procurement 447w
Safety 430–1w, 1100w

Food Labelling Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Order for resuming adjourned 2R read (19.07.02) 635

Food Poverty (Eradication) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 631

Food Safety (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Food Standards Agency
429w
Scotland 1226w

Foot and mouth disease
301w
Addresses to the Crown (22.07.02) 649
Compensation 306w
Disease control 306w, 1153w
Ministerial statements (22.07.02) 669–88
Public footpaths 1139–40w
Tourism 693w
Wales 317w

Football
Police 1475w
World Cup 554w

Football Spectators Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 631

Forced labour
Import controls 776w

Forced marriage
658w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Airlines 177w
Annual reports 890w
Aviation 384–5w
Civil servants 178w
Computers 884w
Consultation papers 885–6w
EC action 359–60w
Employment agencies 608–9w
Government information services 5w
Internet 1319w
Manpower 1322–4w
Ministerial policy advisors 1321–2w
Photography 884w
Public expenditure 2w
Public participation 1321w
Publicity 887w
Republic of Ireland 1320w
Standards 2w
Temporary employment 1322w
Visits abroad 762–3w

Foreign investment in UK
412–3, 1176w
Wales 316–7w

Foreign relations
Cyprus 178–80w
Hong Kong 888w
Iran 845–6
Ukraine 836–7

Foreign students
Child benefit 263w

Foreign trade
175w

Foreign workers
440w, 1062–3w
Doctors 202–3w, 1394w
Minimum wage 440w
NHS 1101w
Nurses 419w
Teachers 368–9w, 645w
Vetting 1482w

Forensic science
109w

Forensic Science Agency of Northern Ireland
see Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency

Forensic Science Service
1077w
Annual reports 231–2w

Forestry Commission
Finance 627–31w

Forests
Indonesia 448–9w, 591w
Papua New Guinea 591w
Petitions (24.07.02) 1071

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 539–44
Business questions intervention (18.07.02) 429
Deferred divisions, Points of order (18.07.02) 536–7, (19.07.02) 555–6, (24.07.02) 1043–4
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 211
Members, Points of order (18.07.02) 533
Ministerial statement intervention (15.07.02) 41
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 632, 640
Recess motions (22.07.02) 806–9
Select committees (22.07.02) 730
Questions
Business statements 421–5
Members, Pensions 83–4w
Members' interests, Home Office 394w
Members' interests, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278w
Members' interests, Scotland Office 982w
Public appointments, Treasury 337–8w

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Debates etc.
Museums and galleries, North East region (15.07.02) 131–2

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 855–6
Housing (18.07.02) 445–6
Questions
A140 966–7w
Automatic train protection 1243w
Building alterations, Capital allowances 242w
Building alterations, VAT 242w
Buildings, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 333w
Cars 967w, 1016w
Channel tunnel, Freight 329w
Civil Contingencies Committee 108w
Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Finance 344w
Community Development Venture Fund 1201w
Consultation papers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 972w
Consultation papers, Dept for Education and Skills 985w
Consultation papers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 938–42w
Consultation papers, Dept for International Development 40w
Consultation papers, Dept for Work and Pensions 602–4w
Consultation papers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 885w
Consultation papers, Home Office 839–40w
Consultation papers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 796–8w
Consultation papers, Ministry of Defence 1106w
Consultation papers, Scotland Office 769w
Consultation papers, Treasury 1181–2w

Foster, Mr Don—continued
Crossrail line 1241w
Dental services 189–90w
Departmental responsibilities, Cabinet Office 1000w, 1002w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept for Transport 455–6w, 962w, 1261w
Elections, Expenditure 1080w
Electronic voting 1016w
Electronic voting, Finance 1016w
Emergencies, Chemical and biological warfare 748w
Empty property, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 453w
Empty property, Dept of Health 663w
Exhaust emissions 479w
Fire prevention 1211w
Fire services, Government assistance 1015–6w
Health and Safety Commission 326w
Highways Agency 333w
Highways Agency, Contracts 1248–50w
Housing 638w
Housing, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 732w
Housing, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Local Government Bill (Draft) 236w
Local transport plans 326–7w, 329–31w
Ministers, Dept for Transport 142–3w
Ministers, Redundancy pay 1218w, 1270w
Multiple occupation, Death 238w
New Opportunities Fund, Recreation spaces 243w
Office of the Rail Regulator 568w
Pay, Dept for Transport 962w
Planning, Urban areas 639w
Pollution control, Tax allowances 242w
Pre-school education, Disadvantaged 188w
Press releases, Dept for Transport 733w, 1270w
Press releases, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Private companies, Government assistance 69w
Public transport, EC action 454–5w
Railway stations, Safety 571w
Railways, Accidents 326w, 744–5w
Railways, Finance 327w
Railways, Franchises 744w
Railways, Freight 969w
Railways, Standards 1241w
Railways, Vandalism 745w, 1240w
Recreation spaces, Standards 242–3w
Regional planning and development, Dept for Work and Pensions 1578w
Regional planning and development, Dept of Trade and Industry 792w
Regional planning and development, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1204–6w
Road traffic, Forecasts 331–2w
Road traffic control 454w
Roads, Construction 456–9w, 573–4w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 329w, 332–3w, 454w, 738–9w
Roads, Safety 11–2w, 454w
Speeches, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 962w
Speed limits 328w, 1248w
Strategic Rail Authority 567–8w
Thailand, Aviation 763–4w
Transport, Accidents 1242w
Transport, Disadvantaged 1214–5w
Transport, Planning 573w, 1277w
Transport, Telephone services 327–8w
Transport, Urban areas 1271–2w
Transport Direct 733–5w
Transport for London, Finance 17w

Foster, Mr Don—continued
Transport Works Authorisation Branch 45–8w
Transport Works Authorisation Branch, Manpower 47w
Travel, Research 734w
Voting methods 1016w
Working hours, EC law 710w
Written questions, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 456w

Foster, Mr Michael Jabez, (Hastings and Rye)
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 455
Questions
"Code of Practice on Access to Government Information Monitoring Report 2001" 1288w
Pension credit, Hastings 1032w
Regulation, Voluntary organisations 1165w

Foster, Mr Michael John, (Worcester)
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Flood control (16.07.02) 30–2wh
Questions
Drugs, Misuse 202w
Poverty, Children 462–3w
"Royal Society Scientific Review of Infectious Diseases in Livestock" 140–1w

Foster care
117–8w, 662w, 1402–4w
Ethnic groups 119w
Greater London 1221–2w
Recruitment 541w, 1402w

Foulkes, Rt Hon George
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 685
Questions
Defence Fire Service 16–7

Fox, Dr Liam
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 872–4
Questions
Cancer 415w
General practitioners, Recruitment 1393w
Heart diseases, Surgery 1380–2w
Influenza, Vaccination 1083w
NHS, Public appointments 865–7w
Primary care trusts 148–50

"Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate"
1148–9w

France
Beef 309w, 934–5w, 1228w
Immigration controls 219–20w, 229w
Sheep meat 936–7w

Franchises
Railways 744w

Francis, Dr Hywel
Questions
Iron and steel, Wales 318w

Francois, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 319–20, 338, 349, 355–8, 364, 367–8, 385
Education, Castle Point (22.07.02) 826
Housing (18.07.02) 455
London Underground, Points of order (17.07.02) 306
Planning permission (22.07.02) 793–5
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 906
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 757, 798

Francois, Mr Mark—continued
Questions
Emergencies, Planning 727w
Foot and mouth disease, Wales 317w
Gibraltar, EC grants and loans 764–5w
Gibraltar, Spain 883w
Pensions 401

Fraud
Credit cards 679–80w
Home Office 403w
Insurance 555w

Free school meals
372–4w

Freedom of information
Codes of practice 797–8w, 1292–4w

Freedom of Information Act 2000
Questions
797–8w, 1167w
Government departments 272w

Freemasonry
Police 1502–3w

Freight
Channel tunnel 323–4w, 329w, 968w
Railways 570w, 968–9w
Roads 570w

Fuels
Excise duties 462w, 467–8w, 740–1w
Motor vehicles 1246–7w
Public transport 1177w
VAT 1171w

Funeral payments
604–5w

Further education
(17.07.02) 113–20wh, 1352w
Buildings 989w
Finance 645–6w, 771w, 986–9w
Pay 642w, 770–1w

Future large aircraft
Engines 492–3w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 861–2
Questions
BBC External Services, Pay 390w
Chiropody, Recruitment 425w
Road works, Utilities 333–4w

Galileo project
803w, 1107w, 1268–70w

Game
Farms 823–4w

Gapes, Mike
Questions
Arts and Humanities Research Board 992–3w
Bahrain 836
NATO, Russia 18–9

Gardiner, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 565–7, 569–72, 584, 591
Questions
Africa, Meat 387–8w
Asylum, Employment 1041–2w
Business 408–9
Environment protection, International cooperation 39–40w
Wembley Stadium 1159w
Wildlife, Meat 484–5w, 705–6w, 920w, 1140w, 1367–8w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 706w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 293
Questions
Members, Correspondence 1379w

Gas and Electricity Markets Authority
786w
Pay 354w

Gas supply
see Natural gas

Gatwick Airport
1234w
Air routes 1241w
Landing rights 1234–5w

Gender impact assessment
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Home Office 556w
Scotland Office 768w

General certificate of secondary education
Children in care 123w
Standards 772w

General Lighthouse Fund
1275–6w

General practitioners
803–4w
Conditions of employment 1393w
Finance 424w
Recruitment 201w, 1393w
Standards 1411–2w
Waiting lists 418–9w
West Sussex 1394–5w

General Service Medal
Suez 907–8w, 1104w

Generic prescribing
1383w

Genetically modified organisms
702w, 774–5w
Crops 33–4w, 700–2w
EC action 37w
Food 36–7w

Genetics
Entry clearances 1446w
Identification of criminals 1517w

George, Rt Hon Bruce
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 332, 340–6
Questions
Skin cancer 208–9w

German measles
Vaccination 423w, 1391–2w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 591–6
Questions
Employment, Disabled 1576w
Entry clearances, Genetics 1446w

Gibb, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 41
Questions
Acrylamide, Food 1431–2w
Asylum, Identity cards 548w
British Nuclear Fuels, Accountancy 1336–7w
British Nuclear Fuels, Finance 1337w
Driving, Licensing 965w
Fines, Defaulters 82w, 608w
Identity cards, Fees and charges 1194–5w
Immigration controls 98w

Gibb, Mr Nick—continued
National insurance 1194w
Network Rail, Finance 1183w
Primary education, Standards 367–8w
Programme for international student assessment 66–7w
Public finance 466w

Gibraltar
EC grants and loans 764–5w
European Parliament elections 1291w
Spain 1w, 281w, 286, 391–2w, 473–4w, 611–2w, 765w, 882–3w
Statistics 765w

Gibson, Dr Ian
Questions
Cervical cancer, Screening 419–21w
Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, Disclosure of information 1391w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 659w
Vaccination, USA 1391w

Gidley, Sandra
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 74wh, 76–81wh
Questions
Defence Munitions, Dean Hill 285–7w
Defence Munitions, Gosport 286w
Defence Munitions, Operating costs 285w
Equal opportunities, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Equal opportunities, Home Office 555w
Equal opportunities, Scotland Office 768w
Gender impact assessment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Gender impact assessment, Home Office 556w
Gender impact assessment, Scotland Office 768w
Mental health services, Hospital beds 141
NHS Direct, Recruitment 421w
NHS Direct, Southampton 421w
Statistics, Cabinet Office 236w
Statistics, Home Office 556–7w
Statistics, Scotland Office 768w
Temporary employment, Dept for International Development 1132–3w
Temporary employment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1264w
Temporary employment, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587w
Temporary employment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1322w
Temporary employment, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374–5w
Temporary employment, Scotland Office 1229w
Temporary employment, Treasury 1187w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 603
Local government finance, Buckinghamshire (22.07.02) 761–5
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 556, 579, 634, 637–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 70wh
Questions
Business questions 434
Community health councils 1410w
Dermatology, Manpower 122w
Financial services, Buckingham 1199–200w
Hospices, Children 981
Magistrates' courts, Thames Valley 1081–2w

***Gillan, Mrs Cheryl**—continued*
Special constables, Buckinghamshire 672w
Winter fuel payments 1034w

Gilroy, Linda
Debates etc.
Sentencing, Petitions (23.07.02) 954
Questions
Community health services 191w
Railways, Plymouth 569w

Glasgow
Employment 1575–6w

Global Environment Facility
39–40w

Gloucester
Urban regeneration companies 281, 1016w

Gloucestershire
Dental services 141–2, 1396w
Housing 639w

Glucuronolactone
Soft drinks 1440w

Goggins, Paul
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 860
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 937–41

Golden Jubilee 2002
see Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries

Goodman, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Islam (19.07.02) 642, 647
Ministerial statement intervention (15.07.02) 34
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 140wh, 146wh, 150–3wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 21w
Community development, Dept for International Development 898w
Community development, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587–8w
Community development, Northern Ireland Office 1202w
Members, Correspondence 1588w

Gosport
Defence Munitions 286w
Jobcentre Plus 813w

Governing bodies
Schools 378–9w

Government
Annual reports 803w

Government art collection
1180w

Government Car and Despatch Agency
Annual reports 971–2w

Government Communications Headquarters
389w

Government departments
Billing 442–3w
Computer software 725w
Cost effectiveness 824w
Freedom of Information Act 2000 272w
Publications 958–9w
Standards 468w, 1193w

Government information services
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 5w

Grammar schools
189w, 1349w

Gray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 313, 322–3, 365, 377–81
Ministers, Points of order (17.07.02) 305–6
Questions
Aircraft carriers, Deployment 284–5w
Armed forces, Deployment 901w
Army, Manpower 6
C17 aircraft 759–60w
Chinook helicopters, Accidents 1107w
Defence, Finance 755w
Future large aircraft, Engines 492–3w
Harrier aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 754–5w
HMS Albion 492w
HMS Fearless 275w, 493w
HMS Nottingham 758–9w
HMS Southampton 759w
Joint strike fighter aircraft 495w
Military aircraft 758w
Mine control measures vessels 762w
Special constables, Recruitment 221w, 672w, 1054–5w
Submarines 759w
Type 45 destroyers, Ballistic missile defence 158–9w
Warships, Chile 760w

Grayling, Chris
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 60–4, 67, 74, 81–5
Questions
Air routes, South East region 733w
Armed forces, Recruitment 13
British Airways, Security 970–1w
Budget April 2002, Publications 253w
Care homes, South West region 197w
Foot and mouth disease, Wales 317w
Network Rail 144w
Network Rail, Finance 12w, 17w, 1244–5w
Pensions 521w
Railtrack, Finance 144w
Rights of way, Access 708w
Special educational needs 188w
Strategic Rail Authority, Finance 12w
Surrey Police, Finance 1470–1w
Transport, EC action 1272w
Transport, Schools 13–5w, 647w

Great Western Trains
1242w

Great Yarmouth
Helicopters 282

Greater London
Asylum 90–1w, 549–50w
Bridges 8w
Bus services 9–10w, 1257–9w
Carers 219w
Council tax 1216–8w
Crime 1472–3w
Foster care 1221–2w
Health services 873w
Hospital beds 640w, 660w, 1221w
Housing benefit 1222–4w
Human trafficking 685w
Local government finance 1204w
MMR vaccine 285
Multiple occupation 343w
National childcare strategy 54–6w
National Probation Service for England and Wales 1460w
Planning (16.07.02) 1–21wh
Police 830w
Police stations 1475w
Pre-sentence reports 844w
Probation and aftercare 844–5w, 1077w, 1532w

***Greater London**—continued*
Prostitution 1059w
Public transport 1260–1w
Road traffic 1247–8w, 1255–6w
Road traffic control 1255w
Roads 8w, 145–6w
Robbery 1474w
Social services 249w, 531–4w, 654–6w
Social workers 655w
Traffic lights 742w
Transport 1271–2w

Greater Manchester
Combined heat and power 441w
Fines 1300–2w

Greece
EC presidency 881w

Green, Mr Damian
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 159–61
Housing (18.07.02) 448

Green, Matthew
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 617, 620
Questions
Shadow cabinet 971–2

Green Ministers Committee
307–8w
Dept for Work and Pensions 811–2w
Home Office 547w

Greenbelt
Cambridge (17.07.02) 129–36wh

Greenway, Mr John
Questions
English Sports Council, Finance 976–7w
English Sports Council, Manpower 979w
English Sports Council, Pay 975w, 979w
Pensions, Exservicemen 1200–1w
Sports, Finance 975–6w, 978w

Grenades
906w

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 707–8, 712–3, 715, 719–20, 723–5
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), Rem stages (24.07.02) 1065–6, 1068, 1070
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 483–4, 486–91, 494, 500, 505, 512, 517, 524, 528–30
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1052–3, 1055–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 194–5wh, 198–200wh
Questions
Convictions 1056w
Crime, Greater London 1472–3w
Drugs, Crime 1461w
Ethnic groups 1503w
Home detention curfews 1453–4w
Land, Ownership 1219–20w
Magistrates' courts, Thames Valley 1293w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 1488w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Greater London 1460w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Pay 1460w
Theft, Cellular phones 555w

Griffiths, Jane
Questions
Cameroon, Ethnic groups 1124w
Network Rail, Finance 568–9w

***Griffiths, Jane**—continued*
Railways, Accidents 462w

***Griffiths, Nigel**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Export Control Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1045–6, 1048–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 202wh, 208wh, 219–23wh
Questions
Arms trade 436w, 1325w
Arms trade, Export controls 77–8w, 435–6w, 780w, 1330w
Arms trade, India 1324–5w
Arms trade, Namibia 1327w
Billing, Government departments 442–3w
Business, Advisory services 777w
Business links, Advertising 778w
Community Development Venture Fund 1201w
Export controls, India 435w
Exports, Licensing 358–9w, 436–7w
Fisheries, Compensation 1327w
Hawk aircraft, India 436w
New businesses 1331w
New businesses, Rural areas 1330–1w
Public sector, Regulation 170w
Regulatory impact assessments, Dept of Trade and Industry 437w
Small Business Service 1338w
Small Business Service, Finance 1337w
Small businesses 172w, 1333–6w
Small businesses, Loan guarantee scheme 778w
Small businesses, Regulation 351–2w, 437–8w
Uranium 942–3w
Venture capital 779w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Questions
Africa, International assistance 833
Children, Departmental coordination 1342w
Children, Developing countries 1137–8w
Human rights 1320w
Iran, Capital punishment 1312w
Iran, Human rights 1313w
Overseas aid 414–5
Sierra Leone, Health services 1137w
Sierra Leone, Politics and government 1136–7w
Sports, Young people 692w
Teachers, Wales 320w
Young offender institutions, Drugs 1445–6w

Ground water
1145–7w

Group of Eight
Kananaskis Summit 896–7w

Guisborough
Market town initiative 315w

Gulf War
see Iraq–Kuwait conflict

Gulf War syndrome
Compensation 490–1w, 878w

Guillotine motions
see Timetabling of bills

Gummer, Rt Hon John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Flood control (16.07.02) 22–9wh, 40wh
Questions
District councils, Standards 249w
Embassies, USA 145w
Fines, Debit cards 607w

***Gummer, Rt Hon John**—continued*
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Databases 565–6w
Local government finance 240–1w, 998w
Meat, Smuggling 481–2w
Regional planning and development, Eastern region 343w
Roads, Greater London 145–6w
Salt, Nutrition 1385w
Sexual offences 1454–5w
10 Downing Street, Access 1251w
Transport, Planning 145w
Western Sahara, Sovereignty 180–1w
Wildlife, Meat 1140–1w

Gun sports
VAT 821w

Gurkhas
23w

Habitual offenders
Homicide 843w
Young offenders 1531w

Hacking
Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Energy 346w
Home Office 843w

Haemophilia
Drugs 421w

Hague, Rt Hon William
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 680
Questions
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1141–2w

Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption
1404w

***Hain, Rt Hon Peter**, Minister for Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Convention on the Future of Europe 3w, 845
Cyprus 178w, 180w
Cyprus, Armed forces 385–6w
Cyprus, EC enlargement 179–80w, 883–4w
Cyprus, Foreign relations 178–80w
Cyprus, Peace keeping operations 180w
Czech Republic 1w
Developing countries, EC external trade 884w
EC action, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 359w
EC aid 880w
EC Economic and Social Committee 1314–6w
EC enlargement 181w, 880w, 882w
EC institutions 386–7w
EC institutions, Manpower 1315w
Gibraltar, EC grants and loans 764–5w
Gibraltar, Spain 1w, 391–2w, 473–4w, 611–2w, 765w, 882–3w
Gibraltar, Statistics 765w
Greece, EC presidency 881w
Hannay of Chiswick, Lord 179w
Poland, EC enlargement 842–3
Poland, Iron and steel 390–1w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 391–2w
Republic of Ireland, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1320w
Treaty on European Union 1w
Turkey, EC enlargement 3w
Turkey, Human rights 387w
Turkey, Politics and government 764w
USA, Agriculture 177w

***Hain, Rt Hon Peter**—continued*
Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Annual reports 888–9w
Zimbabwe, EC action 174w

Hall, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 40
Questions
EC enlargement 882w

Hall, Patrick
Questions
Regional assemblies 1217w

Hamilton, David
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 999
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 121wh, 123–4wh
Questions
Employment, Discrimination 1032–3w
Internet, Security 394–5w

Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Questions
BBC External Services 844–5

Hammond, Mr Philip
Questions
Business 405–6
Care homes, Surrey 121w
Commission for Health Improvement 210w
VAT, Public sector 1168w

Hampshire
Antisocial behaviour orders 558w

Hampshire Police Authority
560w

Hancock, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 313, 315, 320, 327, 337
Defence review (18.07.02) 472
Questions
Aircraft carriers, Portsmouth 902–3w
Antisocial behaviour orders, Hampshire 558w
Armed forces, Housing 159–60w, 751–3w, 1107–9w
Armed forces, Training 275–6w
Armoured fighting vehicles 913w
Artillery, Radar 492–3w
Assets, Ministry of Defence 163w, 1109w
Baton rounds 1459w
BOWMAN combat radio system 753w
Breast cancer 1386–8w
Children, Abuse 1487w
Cruise missiles 155w
Defence equipment 155w
Defence equipment, Procurement 161–2w
Defence Housing Executive, Standards 159w
Drugs, Portsmouth 836w
European Energy and Transport Forum 1338w
Haemophilia, Drugs 421w
HMS Nottingham, Repairs and maintenance 276w
Judges, Conduct 82w
Lone parents, Income support 813w
Medicine, Education 657w
Mercenaries 748w
Metropolitan Police 671w
Metropolitan Police, Housing 671–2w
Metropolitan Police, Training 848–9w
Military bases, Portsmouth 756–7w
New deal schemes 597–8w
Nurses, Recruitment 543w
Police, Portsmouth 561–3w

Hancock, Mr Mike*—continued*
Princess Royal Barracks, Death 8
Prisoners, Pay 1075w
Prisoners, Suicide 1519w
Probation and aftercare 1520–1w
Probation and aftercare, Suicide 1519–20w
Queen Alexandra Hospital, Private finance initiative 425w, 1090–1w
RAF Brize Norton, Housing 163–4w
Schools 367w
Social security benefits, Portsmouth 521–2w
Social workers, South East region 1092w
Social workers, Southern region 1400w
Special constables, Manpower 855–6w
Weapons 25–6w
Written questions, Administrative delays 217w, 1505w

Hannay of Chiswick, Lord
179w

Harman, Rt Hon Harriet,
Solicitor-General
Questions
Acquittals 503–4w
Annual reports, Solicitor-General 615w
Buildings, Solicitor-General 289–90w
Crimes of violence, Ambulance services 608w
Crown Prosecution Service, Advocacy 619w
Crown Prosecution Service, Annual reports 287w
Crown Prosecution Service, Complaints 617–8w
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 618–20w
EC law, Solicitor-General 288w
Holiday leave, Solicitor-General 288–9w
Manpower, Solicitor-General 616w
Official hospitality, Solicitor-General 614w
Orders and regulations, Solicitor-General 289w
Pay, Solicitor-General 615–6w
Police custody, Death 1103w
Public expenditure, Solicitor-General 612–3w, 617w
Repairs and maintenance, Solicitor-General 287w
Sentencing, Appeals 287–8w
Serious Fraud Office, Annual reports 615w
Serious Fraud Office, Information technology 612w
Sick leave, Solicitor-General 288w
Standards, Solicitor-General 289w, 613–4w
Training, Solicitor-General 615–6w, 913–4w
Visits abroad, Solicitor-General 615w

Harold Shipman Tribunal of Inquiry
658w

Harrier aircraft
Repairs and maintenance 754–5w

Harris, Dr Evan
Questions
Acute beds 1416w
Ambulance services, Standards 1411w
Anaesthetics, Medical equipment 1420–1w
Dental services, Gloucestershire 142
Epilepsy 1406–9w
Health professions, Disciplinary proceedings 1091w
Members, Correspondence 1409w
Mentally ill, Hospital beds 1419–20w
Mentally ill, Prisoners 126w
NHS, Standards 203–4w
Primary care trusts, International cooperation 419w
Prisoners, Suicide 828w

Harris, Dr Evan*—continued*
Prisons, Mental health services 1097w
Psychiatry, Manpower 868–71w
Redwood Hospital 1412w
Surgery, Waiting lists 418w

Harris, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 618–9, 629
Members, Points of order (17.07.02) 305
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 255–6
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 562, 572, 583
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 487–9, 493–6, 515
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 899, 905–6, 913, 925, 941, 946
Questions
Asylum, Applications 1447–8w
Community councils 1233–4w
Productivity 463w
"Road Traffic Penalties Consultation Paper" 1448w

Harvey, Nick
Questions
Arts Council of England, Advertising 496w
Arts Council of England, Expenditure 495–6w
Arts Council of England, Planning 496w
BBC, Digital broadcasting 1159w
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Manpower 563w
General Lighthouse Fund 1275–6w
Light dues 18w, 634–6w
Lighthouses 1275–6w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 1220–1w
National Lottery 165w
Police, Training 559–60w
Radio, Commercial broadcasting 654–5
Soft drinks, Caffeine 1440w
Soft drinks, Taurine 1440w

Hastings
Pension credit 1032w

Havard, Mr Dai
Questions
Developing countries, Overseas companies 970–1

Havering
Police 1474w

Hawk aircraft
India 436w
Indonesia 3–4w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 482–3, 495, 506, 510–1, 513–6, 518–9, 529
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1058
Questions
Cannabis, Lambeth 222w
Princess Royal Barracks, Death 7–8

Hayes, Mr John
Questions
Czech Republic 1w
European Police Office, Powers 223–4w
Terrorism, Chemical and biological warfare 553w
Treaty on European Union 1w

Hayes Committee
see Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority

Hazardous substances
Waste disposal 512w, 483w

Headteachers
Qualifications 1345–6w
Training 1345w

Heald, Mr Oliver
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 69wh, 73wh, 79wh, 82–4wh, 86wh
Questions
Ambulance services, Standards 1410–1w
Blood 657w
Children, Abuse 122–3w
Health services, Elderly 128–9w
Hospitals, Nurseries 536–7w
Medical equipment 122w
Mental Health Bill (Draft) 661w
Mental health services 126–7w, 196w, 538–9w
Mental health services, Children 123w, 125–6w, 1098w
Mental health services, Expenditure 1098w
Mental health services, Finance 540w
Mental health services, Manpower 539w
Mental health services, Private finance initiative 877w
Mental health services, Vacancies 1097w
Mental health services, Waiting lists 1420w
Mental health services, Worcestershire 127w
Mentally ill, Employment 123–4w, 126w, 196w
NHS, Circulars 212–3w
NHS, Early retirement 542w, 1380w
NHS, Procurement 214–5w
Obesity, Sports 432–4w
Prescriptions, Information technology 213w
Prisoners, Suicide 828–9w
Sick leave, Solicitor-General 288w
Special hospitals 124w
Special hospitals, Hospital beds 1418w

Healey, John*, Economic Secretary, Treasury*
Questions
Climate change levy, Nuclear power 957w
Companies, Ilford 256w
Customs and Excise, Scotland 470w, 1171–2w
Customs and Excise, Southern region 70w
Debts, Developing countries 464–5w
Development aid 73w
Drug seizures, Scotland 1179w
Drugs, Developing countries 336w
EC action, Treasury 471–2w, 747–8w, 1173–5w
Economic situation, South West region 467w
Energy, Conservation 249–50w
Excise duties, Fuels 462w, 467–8w
Manufacturing industries, Trade competitiveness 417–8
Oil, Northern Ireland 1193w
Overseas aid 464–5w, 1185–6w
Overseas aid, Sports 473w
Poverty 73–5w, 469w
Public transport, Fuels 1177w
Recruitment, Treasury 1197w
Smuggling 1173w
VAT, Care homes 822–3w
VAT, Charities 463w
VAT, Financial services 824w
VAT, Fuels 1171w
VAT, Gun sports 821w

***Healey, John**—continued*
VAT, Imports 336–7w
VAT, Marks and Spencer 1191–2w
VAT, Museums and galleries 335w
VAT, Public sector 1168w
Written questions, Administrative delays 543w

Health
Sports 975w

Health (Air Travellers) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Order for resuming adjourned 2R read (19.07.02) 633

Health (Air Travellers) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 637

Health and Safety Commission
326w, 1369w

Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission
Social Care Inspection Commission 1409w

Health centres
Christchurch 218w
Property transfer 218w

Health education
Disabled 423w
Overseas aid 1128–9w

Health hazards
Wood 425w

Health professions
Disciplinary proceedings 1091w

Health Reform (Education and Public Involvement) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 634

Health Service Commissioner
Public appointments 1374w

Health services
Armed forces 749–50w
Cancer 1422w
Cooperatives 212w, 655w
Elderly 128–9w
Finance 255–6w
Greater London 873w
Kent 218–9w
Morecambe 656w
Overseas aid 1124–5w
Prisons 1534w
Sierra Leone 1137w
USA 208w
Wales 269–70

Hearing aids
215–7w, 1091–2w, 1398w
Taxation 1173w

Heart diseases
Surgery 1380–2w

Heath, Mr David
Debates etc.
A303 (22.07.02) 740–3
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 603, 605–6
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 561–7, 572, 597
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 774
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 162–6wh
Questions
Armed forces, Housing 24w
Jobcentre Plus 1581w
Public houses, Music 654

***Heath, Mr David**—continued*
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 830–1

Heath, Edward
Public statues 1167w

Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Deferred divisions, Points of order (18.07.02) 538

Heathrow Airport
146w, 1234w
Air routes 961w
Landing rights 1234–5w
Theft 859w

Heavily indebted poor countries initiative
715w, 1131w

Hedges and ditches
141–2w, 303–4w

Helicopters
Accidents 282
Great Yarmouth 282

Hendrick, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 721–2
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 900
Questions
Armed conflict 19–20
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group 1337w
Coal Authority, Annual reports 950w
Emergencies, Planning 1070w
Employment agencies 949w
Government Car and Despatch Agency, Annual reports 971–2w
Kashmir 177w
Manufacturing industries 947–9w
National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux 942w
Police, Firearms 1047–50w
Post offices, Information services 947w
Radio, Licensing 949–50w
Uranium 942–3w

Hendry, Mr Charles
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 184–7wh, 198wh
Questions
Criminal Records Bureau 1483w
Prisons, Drugs 828w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 1124w

Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders, South Tyneside 830–2w
Foster care 117–8w
Higher education, Admissions 53–4w
Maintenance, Children 599–600w, 1026w

***Heppell, Mr John**, Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 953
Recess motions (22.07.02) 820

Herbal medicine
EC law 150–2
Licensing 1430–1w

Hercules aircraft
1110w

Hermon, Lady
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 294
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 177–8, 180, 184, 186, 189–91, 197, 199–200, 210–1, 213–4

***Hermon, Lady**—continued*
Questions
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 975–6

Heroin
Misuse 972

Hertfordshire
Crime 282
Multiple occupation 343w

Hertfordshire Constabulary
Manpower 1491w

Hesford, Stephen
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 514–5
Questions
Crime 557w
Health services, Finance 255–6w

***Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia**, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group, Ministerial statements (24.07.02) 1003–17
Questions
Annual reports, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Buildings, Dept of Trade and Industry 790–1w
Business links 778w
Coal, Selby 165–8w
Companies, Disclosure of information 788–9w
Computers, Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Conditions of employment, EC law 446–7w
Consultation papers, Dept of Trade and Industry 791–2w, 950–1w
EC action, Dept of Trade and Industry 952w
Employment, Females 793w
Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry 77–8w
Equal pay 792–3w
Export credit guarantees, Environment protection 779w
Export Credits Guarantee Dept, Trading funds 779–80w
Genetically modified organisms 774–5w
Hacking, Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Import controls, Forced labour 776w
"Investing in Innovation" 943w
Iron and steel, USA 776w
Manufacturing industries 947–9w
Official hospitality, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Pay, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Productivity 780w
Public expenditure, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Public participation, Dept of Trade and Industry 172–4w
Publicity, Dept of Trade and Industry 945w
Regional development agencies, Expenditure 791w
Scotland, Dept of Trade and Industry 350w
Secondment, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Stationery, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Telephone services, Dept of Trade and Industry 791w, 954–6w
Trade, Agriculture 775w
Trade agreements, Developing countries 947w
Wood, EC action 710–1w

Hewlett-Packard
Redundancy 983w

Higher education
184w
Admissions 53–4w
Conditions of employment (24.07.02) 1072–80
EC grants and loans 187w
Finance 771w, 986–9w
Marketing 643w
Special educational needs 452w
Student numbers 184–7w

Highways Agency
333w
Contracts 1248–50w

Hill farming
313–4w, 918w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 875
Questions
Members, Correspondence 1588w

Historic buildings
Finance 695–6w

Historical Manuscripts Royal Commission
409w

History of Parliament Trust
Finance 49–50w

"History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1690–1715"
49–50w

HIV infection
212w
Africa 1131–2w
Asylum 1041w
Central African Republic 717w
Developing countries 592–3w, 895w
Nurses 537w
Overseas aid 894–6w
South Africa 291w

HM Customs and Excise
see Customs and Excise

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
Public appointments 1487–8w

HM Prison Service
see Prison Service

HMS Albion
492w, 905w

HMS Bridport
26w

HMS Fearless
275w, 493w, 760–1w

HMS Nottingham
276w, 758–9w
Repairs and maintenance 26w, 276w

HMS Southampton
759w

Hoban, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 78–9
Questions
NHS, Finance 201w
NHS, Recruitment 1393–4w
NHS Bank 1404–6w
Private Pension Legislation Review 1543w
Surgery 426w

***Hodge, Margaret**, Minister of State for Universities, Dept for Education and Skills*
Debates etc.
Higher education, Conditions of employment (24.07.02) 1076–80

***Hodge, Margaret**—continued*
Questions
Arts and Humanities Research Board 992–3w
Children, Day care 60w, 127–8w, 183–4w
Community Champions Fund, Morley 647w
EC action, Dept for Education and Skills 773w, 1361–3w
Education, Agriculture 648w
Educational maintenance allowance, Morley 57w
Further education, Buildings 989w
Further education, Finance 645–6w, 771w, 986–7w
Further education, Pay 642w, 770–1w
Higher education 184w
Higher education, Admissions 53–4w
Higher education, EC grants and loans 187w
Higher education, Marketing 643w
Higher education, Student numbers 184–7w
Mature students, Morley 647w
Medicine, Students 772w
National childcare strategy 128w
National childcare strategy, Greater London 54–6w
Pre-school education, Disadvantaged 188w
Socrates programme 56w
Student Loans Company 642w
Students, Morley 57w

Hoey, Miss Kate
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 998–9
Questions
City academies 643–4w
Firearms 1069–70w
South Bank Centre, Expenditure 696–7w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 703
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 294–5
Defence review (18.07.02) 473
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 683–4
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 478, 485–6, 488–9, 492–4, 498–9, 508, 510, 514, 518, 522–3
Questions
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 831

Holiday leave
Advocate General for Scotland 380w
Scotland Office 382w
Solicitor-General 288–9w

Holiday play schemes
Sports 693–4w

Holmes, Paul
Questions
Disability aids 201w
Social security benefits, Appeals 114w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 1354–5w, 1357–62w
Training and enterprise councils, Manpower 1355–7w

Home detention curfews
1453–4w, 1460–1w

Home Energy Conservation (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 638

Home energy efficiency scheme
622–3w

Home Office
Annual reports 1078–9w
Buildings 397w, 546w
Consultation papers 837–40w
Correspondence 396w
Data protection 1495w
Departmental expenditure limits 1078w
EC action 564–5w, 632w, 1044w, 1063–5w
Energy 544w
Equal opportunities 555w
Equal pay 546–7w
Fraud 403w
Gender impact assessment 556w
Green Ministers Committee 547w
Hacking 843w
Industrial diseases 547w
Industrial tribunals 679w
Information officers 850w
Luton 1492–4w
Maladministration 1486w
Members' interests 394w
Ministerial policy advisors 1476w, 1492w
Official hospitality 545w
Orders and regulations 565w
Public expenditure 546w, 1078w
Public participation 841–2w
Public private partnerships 543–4w
Public relations 543w, 1065w
Publicity 1067w
Regulatory impact assessments 396w
Repairs and maintenance 1065–7w
Republic of Ireland 1055w
Retirement 394w
Ringfenced funding 1055–6w
Statistics 397–8w, 556–7w
Telephone services 848w
Training 546w, 1057–8w
Visits abroad 545–6w
Written questions 106w, 686w

Home zones
1267w

Homelessness
239w, 341–2w
Children in care 1003w
Finance 997–8w
Rural areas 46w

Homicide
East Timor 1319–20w
Habitual offenders 843w

Hong Kong
Foreign relations 888w

Honours
1371w

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 698
Questions
EC Agriculture Council 309–10w
EC Finance Council 338–9w
EC Health Council 1087–8w

***Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Ministerial statements (22.07.02) 689–704
Defence review, Ministerial statements (18.07.02) 460–75
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 21w
Afghanistan, Army 492w
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 21–2w, 494w
Ballistic missile defence, USA 26w
Defence, EC countries 23w
Defence, Expenditure 1–3

***Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey**—continued*
Defence, USA 1113w
Defence equipment 907w
Gibraltar, Spain 281w
International Criminal Court 1105w
Marines 17–8
NATO, Russia 18–9
Nuclear weapons 1106w
Rapid reaction forces, EC countries 26w
Territorial Army 20w
Terrorism 9–12
Weapons 25–6w

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin
Questions
Public houses, Entertainments 650

Horam, Mr John
Questions
Mental health services, Physiotherapy 875–7w
Police, Bromley 1468w

Hormone treatments
Children 422w

Horse racing
165w

Horserace Totalisator Board
53w

Horticulture
Pay 936w

Hospices
Children 981
Finance 200w, (22.07.02) 777–80
Lancashire 200w

Hospital beds
284, 867–8w, 1092w, 1094–8w, 1418–9w
Eastern region 1094–8w
Greater London 640w, 660w, 1221w
Lancashire 204–5w
Mental health services 139–41
Mentally ill 1419–20w
Special hospitals 1418w

Hospital wards
535–6w

Hospitals
Admissions 206w
Consultants 137–9, 418–9w
Crimes of violence 536w
Food 200w
Hygiene 203w, 1415w
Industrial health and safety 1418w
Infectious diseases 1398–400w
Nurseries 536–7w
Public appointments 127w
Rural areas 535w
Sexual offences 536w
Somerset (23.07.02) 239–46wh
Standards 1417–8w
Waiting lists 321w, 1379–80w, 1413–5w
Wales 321w

House of Commons
Internet 325–6w
Manpower 1167w
Publications 1167w
Recycling 50–1w, 324–5w, 711w
Waste disposal 189w

House of Commons Journal
49w

Housing
238w, 638w, 1007w, 1211w, 1216w
Armed forces 5–6, 24w, 159–60w, 750–3w, 905–6w, 1107–9w
Asylum 551–2w, 1063w
Bishops 293w
Burnley (22.07.02) 737–40
Children 1215w

***Housing**—continued*
Construction 1018–9w
Coventry 1018w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 732w
Empty property 1003–6w, 1017w
Finance 463w
Gloucestershire 639w
Huntingdon 1018–9w
Judges 1303–5w
Kingston upon Hull (22.07.02) 733–5
Low incomes 1017–8w
Metropolitan Police 671–2w
Ministerial statements (18.07.02) 438–59
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Planning permission 1008–9w
Police 841–2w
Prices 466w
RAF Brize Norton 163–4w
RAF Halton 163–4w
Royal Centre for Defence Medicine 163w
South East region 465w, 980
York 980–1

Housing benefit
510–1w, 595w, 809w, 1022w, 1561–3w
Abuse 266w
Administrative delays 595w
Colchester 1015w
Dorset 268w
Greater London 1222–4w
North West region 1563–4w
Scotland 594w
Yorkshire and Humberside 1014–5w

Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 610–30

Housing Planning Local Government and the Regions Select Committee
see Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee

Housing (Wales) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 631

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 30–3, (23.07.02) 890, 898–905, 910
Questions
Employee share ownership schemes 1183w
Pensions 402
Standards, Dept of Health 411
VAT, Marks and Spencer 1191–2w

Howarth, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Export Control Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1047–8
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 926–31
Questions
National Lottery 650–1
VAT, Museums and galleries 335w

Howarth, Mr George
Questions
Wood 248–9w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 321–2, 329–40, 344, 359, 383–4
Questions
Galileo project 803w, 1107w, 1268–70w
Princess Royal Barracks, Death 8–9
SA80 rifle 757–8w

***Howells, Dr Kim**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 408w
Annual reports, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 408–9w
Archaeology 656–7, 1160–2w
Arts Council of England, Advertising 496w
Arts Council of England, Expenditure 495–6w
Arts Council of England, Planning 496w
BBC, Digital broadcasting 1159w
Communications Bill (Draft) 495w
Computers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 499w
Consultation papers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 410w, 496–8w, 697w, 971–4w, 1156–8w
Dance 495w
Digital broadcasting 362w
EC action, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 359w, 498–9w, 633–4w
Foot and mouth disease, Tourism 693w
Historic buildings, Finance 695–6w
Historical Manuscripts Royal Commission 409w
Internet, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1158w
ITV Association 410w
Licensing laws 362w, 498w
Listed buildings, Internet 407–8w
Museums and galleries, Science 1160w
Museums and galleries, West Midlands 657–8
National Foundation for Youth Music 1158w
New Opportunities Fund, Recreation spaces 243w
Office of Communications 406–7w
"Pride of Place" 697w
Public expenditure, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Public houses, Entertainments 649–50
Public houses, Music 653–4
Public libraries 1157–8w
Public participation, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 974w
Publicity, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 698w
Radio, Commercial broadcasting 654–6
Religious broadcasting, Licensing 410w, 697–8w, 1157w
S4C 698w
Scotland, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1159–60w
South Bank Centre, Expenditure 696–7w
Telecommunications, Disability aids 405–7w
Television, Licensing 661, 1160w
Theatre 497w
Theatre, Barnsley 691w
Tourism 1158–9w
Tourism, Euro 695w
Tourism, Oxfordshire 693w
Tourists, Expenditure 497w
Visits abroad, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Wood, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Debates etc.
Pensioners, Petitions (23.07.02) 954–5
Questions
Aviation, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 384–5w
Cancer, Research 146

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay—continued
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 306w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Airlines 177w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Civil servants 178w
Gibraltar, Spain 1w, 392w
Hospices, Lancashire 200w
Hospitals, Public appointments 127w
Iron and steel, USA 776w
Neighbourhood wardens, Chorley 1485w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 1413w
Sports, Chorley 699w
World Health Organisation, Taiwan 117w

HSBC Investment Banking Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
3R order read (16.07.02) 137, (23.07.02) 829

***Hughes, Beverley**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Questions
Annual reports, Home Office 1078–9w
Antisemitism 221–2w
Asylum 91–2w, 225w, 246–8w
Asylum, Administrative delays 1042w
Asylum, AIDS 97w
Asylum, Appeals 92–3w
Asylum, Applications 90w, 393w, 552–3w, 860–1w, 1447–8w
Asylum, Bicester 220w
Asylum, Children 90w, 550–2w
Asylum, Detainees 1043w
Asylum, Education 1045w
Asylum, Employment 1041–2w
Asylum, Greater London 90–1w, 549–50w
Asylum, HIV infection 1041w
Asylum, Housing 551–2w, 1063w
Asylum, Identity cards 548w
Asylum, Iraq 228w, 400–1w
Asylum, Maternity payments 1043w
Asylum, Zimbabwe 226w, 398–9w, 551w
British nationality, Children 552w
Buildings, Home Office 546w
Campsfield House Detention Centre 1448w
Community development, Grants 226w
Community development, Standards 402w
Complaints Audit Committee, Annual reports 1043–4w
Complaints Audit Committee, Public appointments 1448w
Deportation 223w
Deportation, Injuries 400w
Dungavel Detention Centre 232w
EC action, Home Office 1044w, 1063–5w
Energy, Home Office 544w
Entry clearances 684w
Entry clearances, Genetics 1446w
Entry clearances, India 1532w
Entry clearances, Macedonia 402w
Equal opportunities, Home Office 555w
Equal pay, Home Office 546–7w
Foreign workers 1062–3w
Fraud, Home Office 403w
Gender impact assessment, Home Office 556w
Green Ministers Committee, Home Office 547w
Human trafficking 548w, 684–5w, 833–4w
Human trafficking, Greater London 685w
Identity cards, Costs 544–5w
Identity cards, Transsexualism 555–6w
Illegal immigrants 88–9w
Illegal immigrants, Channel tunnel 393w
Illegal immigrants, Lorries 552w
Illegal immigrants, Romania 399–400w
Immigration 224–5w, 228w, 547–8w

Hughes, Beverley—continued
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 229w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Databases 565–6w
Immigration controls 98w
Immigration controls, Fixed penalties 220w
Immigration controls, France 219–20w, 229w
Immigration officers, Czech Republic 685–6w
Immigration rules, Domestic violence 229w
Industrial diseases, Home Office 547w
Islam, Ministers of religion 686–7w
Members, Correspondence 105w, 220–1w, 564w, 1069w, 1465w
Mentoring Fund 103w
National Asylum Support Service, Standards 1043w
Official hospitality, Home Office 545w
Orders and regulations, Home Office 565w
Passports 689–90w
Public expenditure, Home Office 546w
Public private partnerships, Home Office 543–4w
Public relations, Home Office 543w, 1065w
Publicity, Home Office 1067w
Race relations 1060–1w
Repairs and maintenance, Home Office 1065–7w
Retirement, Home Office 394w
Statistics, Home Office 556–7w
Training, Home Office 546w, 1057–8w
United Kingdom Passport Agency, Annual reports 553w
Vetting, Voluntary work 97w
Visits abroad, Home Office 545–6w
Voluntary organisations, Grants 226–7w
Work permits 96w, 107–8w, 395–6w
Work permits, Information technology 107w, 831w
Written questions, Home Office 106w, 686w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 89w, 392–3w, 1461w

Hughes, Mr Kevin Michael
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 865
Questions
Hospitals, Consultants 138–9

Hughes, Simon
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 291–2
Police Reform Bill (HL), Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1061–4
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 635
Questions
Armed forces, Ethnic groups 14–5
Asylum, Zimbabwe 398–9w, 551w
Clergy, Recruitment 662
Crime 86–8w
Crime prevention, Finance 858w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Information technology 1517–8w
Police custody 1444–5w
Police custody, Standards 1445w
Police stations 672–6w
Prisons, Closures 1443–4w
Prisons, Per capita costs 1534w
Religious broadcasting, Licensing 410w
Thameslink railway line 971w
Young offenders, Children in care 1463–5w
Zimbabwe, Entry clearances 4w

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority
Annual reports 207–8w

Human rights
1320w
Cayman Islands 889w, 1314w
Chechnya 881w
China 839
Developing countries 720w
Iran 1313w
Nepal 610w
Pakistan 386w
Rwanda 3w
Turkey 387w
Young offender institutions 1443w

Human Rights Act 1972
Questions
889w

Human Rights Act 1998
Questions
1314w

Human trafficking
548w, 684–5w, 833–4w
Greater London 685w

Humble, Mrs Joan
Questions
Mental health services, Hospital beds 140

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 217, 232, (24.07.02) 997
Questions
Alzheimer's disease, Prescription drugs 1399–400w
Child benefit, Foreign students 263w
Innogy 1325–6w
Maintenance, Children 267w
Mandelkern Group 361w
Police, Northern Ireland 508–9w, 1203w
Public sector, Regulation 170w
Regulation, EC action 360–1w
Small businesses, Regulation 351–2w
Takeovers 350–1w

Hunting
483w, 723w, 1150w

Huntingdon
Broadband 439w
Housing 1018–9w

Hurst, Mr Alan
Questions
Housing, Construction 1019w

***Hutton, Rt Hon John**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 84–8wh
Questions
Acute beds 219w, 1416w
Beta-interferon, Sutton 423w
Care homes, Fees and charges 1400–1w
Chiropody, Recruitment 425w
Contracts, Dept of Health 1429w
Copaxone 199w
Dental services, Gloucestershire 141–2
Dermatology, Manpower 122w
Diabetes 191w
Diagnostic treatment centres 1086w
Doctors, Foreign workers 202–3w, 1394w
Doctors, Recruitment 202w, 1100–1w
Doctors, Reserve forces 422w
Doctors' list of patients 201w, 1392w
EC action, Dept of Health 379w, 432w
EC Health Council 1087–8w
Epilepsy 1406w

***Hutton, Rt Hon John**—continued*
General practitioners, Conditions of employment 1393w
General practitioners, Finance 424w
General practitioners, Recruitment 201w, 1393w
General practitioners, Standards 1411–2w
General practitioners, Waiting lists 418–9w
Health professions, Disciplinary proceedings 1091w
Health services, Greater London 873w
Heart diseases, Surgery 1380–2w
Hospital wards 535–6w
Hospitals, Crimes of violence 536w
Hospitals, Nurseries 536–7w
Hospitals, Rural areas 535w
Hospitals, Sexual offences 536w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 1379–80w, 1413–5w
Junior doctors, Working hours 1102w
Medical treatments, EC countries 201w, 538w, 871–2w
Medical treatments, Radiation exposure 1434w
Medicine, Education 657w
Members, Correspondence 878w
Mental health services, Manpower 539w
Mental health services, Physiotherapy 875–6w
Mental health services, Private finance initiative 877w
Mental health services, Vacancies 1097–8w
Neurology, Manpower 1412–3w
NHS, Early retirement 542w, 1380w
NHS, Finance 201w, 424–5w
NHS, Foreign workers 1101w
NHS, Manpower 1093w
NHS, Nurseries 540w
NHS, Pay 542w
NHS, Pensions 1411w
NHS, Private finance initiative 872w, 1084–6w
NHS, Public appointments 865–7w
NHS, Recruitment 419w, 542w, 874–5w, 1393–4w
NHS, Standards 203–4w
NHS Direct, Recruitment 421w
NHS Estate Management and Health Building Agency, Annual reports 217w
NHS Pensions Agency, Annual reports 1083w
NHS Pensions Agency, Standards 1083w
NHS trusts, Management 534–5w
NHS trusts, Mergers 1087w
Nurses, Consultants 537w
Nurses, Foreign workers 419w
Nurses, HIV infection 537w
Nurses, Recruitment 542–3w
Nurses, Resignations 1092–3w
Primary care trusts 147–50
Primary care trusts, Derbyshire 1382–4w
Primary care trusts, International cooperation 419w
Psychiatry, Manpower 868–71w
Queen Alexandra Hospital, Private finance initiative 425w, 1090–1w
Smallpox, Vaccination 1086–7w, 1390–1w
Surgery 426w
Surgery, Private sector 202w
Surgery, Waiting lists 418w, 536w
Unni, Kolathuv 540w
West Surrey Health Authority, Per capita costs 1398w

Hydrofluorocarbons
Refrigeration 1438w

Hygiene
Hospitals 203w, 1415w
Meat 429w

Hyperactivity
Dyslexia 990w

Iddon, Dr Brian
Questions
Armed forces, Religion 20–1w
Consultation papers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 410w, 697w, 971–4w, 1156–8w
Consultation papers, Dept for Education and Skills 985–6w
Consultation papers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 937–8w
Consultation papers, Dept for International Development 591–2w
Consultation papers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1266–7w
Consultation papers, Dept for Work and Pensions 602–4w, 814w, 1027–8w, 1596w
Consultation papers, Dept of Health 1429w
Consultation papers, Dept of Trade and Industry 791–2w, 950–1w
Consultation papers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 885–6w
Consultation papers, Home Office 837–40w
Consultation papers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526–8w
Consultation papers, Ministry of Defence 903w, 1107w
Consultation papers, Treasury 1181w
Crime prevention, Annual reports 861–2w
Euthanasia 1301–3w
India, Overseas aid 1129w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Exservicemen 160w
Mentally incapacitated, Medical treatments 411w
Primary care trusts 148
Wilton Park, Standards 388–9w

Identification of criminals
Genetics 1517w

Identity cards
Asylum 548w
Costs 544–5w
Fees and charges 1194–5w
Transsexualism 555–6w

Ilford
Companies 256w

Illegal immigrants
88–9w
Channel tunnel 393w
Fixed penalties 552w
Lorries 552w
Romania 399–400w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 944–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 255–9wh
Questions
Primary care trusts 150
Theatre, Barnsley 691w

Imber
Firing ranges 24–5w, 162w

Imitation guns
(22.07.02) 765–7

Immigrants
Indian subcontinent 684w
Languages 684w

Immigration
224–5w, 228w, 547–8w

Immigration adjudicators
Manpower 411w

Immigration and Nationality Directorate
229w
Databases 565–6w

Immigration controls
98w
Fixed penalties 220w
France 219–20w, 229w

Immigration officers
Czech Republic 685–6w

Immigration rules
Domestic violence 229w

Immobilisation of vehicles
Regulation 1473w

Import controls
Forced labour 776w
Pigmeat 29–30w
Poultry 1155–6w

Imports
Agricultural products 486w
Food 298w
Meat 298–9w
Poultry meat 1152–3w
Prescription drugs 1403–4w
Sheep meat 136w
VAT 336–7w

Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government
1205w

In vitro fertilisation
Registration of births deaths and marriages 1430w

Incapacity benefit
515w, 1564–9w
Child benefit 1567w
Medical examinations 1566w, 1569w
North West region 1567w
Pensioners 1567–9w

Income support
1024–5w
Lone parents 511w, 813w, 1549–50w
Pensioners (24.07.02) 306–14wh

Income tax
1169–70w
Payments 251w

India
Arms trade 1324–5w
Entry clearances 1532w
Export controls 435w
Exports 358–9w
Females 260w
Hawk aircraft 436w
Overseas aid 1129w
Terrorism 879w

Indian subcontinent
Entry clearances (22.07.02) 748–51, 1311–2w
Immigrants 684w

Individual learning accounts
452–3w, 992w, 1351w

Indonesia
Forests 448–9w, 591w
Hawk aircraft 3–4w
Religion 609–10w

Industrial diseases
Compensation 280, 350w, 352w, 356w, 953–4w
Home Office 547w

Industrial disputes
1195w
London Underground 148w

Industrial health and safety
81w

Industrial health and safety*—continued*
  Hospitals 1418w
  Smoking 732w
  Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 458–9w

Industrial relations
  777w

Industrial tribunals
  Home Office 679w
  Scotland Office 1225w

Industry
  111w
  Profits 172w

Infectious diseases
  Hospitals 1398–400w

Inflation
  65w

Infliximab
  207w

Influenza
  Vaccination 428w, 1083w, 1391w

Information Commissioner
  Public appointments 1374w

Information officers
  Dept for Education and Skills 988w
  Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1139w
  Dept for International Development 721w
  Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961–2w
  Home Office 850w
  Lord Chancellor's Dept 799–800w
  Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 725w
  President of the Council 712w
  Prime Minister 805w
  Scotland Office 769w, 1226w
  Treasury 822w

Information services
  Post offices 172w, 947w

Information technology
  Dept for Work and Pensions 512–4w
  Magistrates' courts 1288–90w
  National Probation Service for England and Wales 845–6w, 1517–8w
  Prescriptions 213w, 1420w
  Schools 378w
  Serious Fraud Office 612w
  Work permits 107w, 831w

Ingram, Rt Hon Adam*, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence*
  Debates etc.
  Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 311–30, 333–5, 350, 370–1, 380
  Questions
  Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 276–7w, 753w
  Afghanistan, Unmanned air vehicles 758w
  Air force, Engineers 23–4w
  Armed conflict 19–20
  Armed forces, Cellular phones 276w
  Armed forces, Ethnic groups 14–5
  Armed forces, Personnel management 277–8w
  Armed forces, Racial discrimination 14
  Armed forces, Recruitment 13–4, 1107w
  Armed forces, Religion 20–1w
  Armed forces, Training 275–6w
  Army, Deployment 19w
  Army, Manpower 6, 19w
  Army, Young people 277w
  C17 aircraft 759–60w
  Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Almondbank 163w

Ingram, Rt Hon Adam*—continued*
  Defence Fire Service 15–7
  Defence Munitions, Dean Hill 25w, 285–7w
  Defence Munitions, Gosport 286w
  Defence Munitions, Operating costs 285w
  Firing ranges, Imber 24–5w, 162w
  Fleet Air Arm 22–3w
  Gurkhas 23w
  HMS Bridport 26w
  HMS Fearless 275w
  HMS Nottingham 276w, 758–9w
  HMS Nottingham, Repairs and maintenance 26w, 276w
  HMS Southampton 759w
  Military aircraft 758w
  Military bases, Colchester 1114w
  Military bases, Cyprus 279w, 282w
  Military exercises, Salisbury Plain 901w
  Mine control measures vessels 762w
  Officer Training Corps 281–2w
  Princess Royal Barracks, Death 7–9
  Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 1110w
  RAF St Athan 162w
  Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst 279–82w, 756w
  Royal School of Artillery 278–9w, 755–6w
  Submarines 759w

Inheritance tax
  463w, 1194w

Injuries
  Deportation 400w
  Public transport 6w

Inland Revenue
  1184–5w
  Administrative delays 1184w
  Advertising 253w
  Computer software 1183w
  Expenditure 253–4w

Inland waterways
  135w

Innogy
  1325–6w

Insurance
  Employers' liability 250–1w
  Fraud 555w
  National Air Traffic Services 571–2w
  Quarrying 174w
  Railways 1240w
  Terrorism 960w

Intelligence services
  4w

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
  see World Bank

International cooperation
  Environment protection 39–40w
  Primary care trusts 419w

International Criminal Court
  474w, 882w, 1105w
  USA 846

International Development Association
  899w

International Monetary Fund
  1139w

International Sikh Youth Federation
  554w

Internet
  Army 755w
  Child benefit 295w
  Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1158w
  Dept for Education and Skills 1365–6w
  Dept for International Development 900w

Internet*—continued*
  Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265w
  Dept for Work and Pensions 1594w
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1319w
  House of Commons 325–6w
  Listed buildings 407–8w
  Lord Chancellor's Dept 1279w
  Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1219w
  Pornography 1532–3w
  President of the Council 453w
  Security 394–5w
  Transport 1267w
  Treasury 1186w

"Investing in Innovation"
  943w

Investors in people
  Small businesses 993–4w

Iran
  Arms trade 383w
  Capital punishment 1312w
  Drugs 4–5w
  Foreign relations 845–6
  Human rights 1313w
  Nuclear fuels 389–90w

Iraq
  (22.07.02) 801–3
  Armed conflict 280–1, 975, 979–82
  Asylum 228w, 400–1w
  Kurds 388w
  Sanctions 887w

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
  Exservicemen 160w, 909–12w

Iron and steel
  Eastern Europe 1130w
  Poland 390–1w
  USA 776w
  Wales 318w

Irranca-Davies, Huw
  Questions
  Industrial diseases, Compensation 352w

Islam
  (19.07.02) 641–8
  Ministers of religion 686–7w

Isle of Sheppey
  Children in care 123w

Isle of Wight
  Dept of Trade and Industry 1325w

Israel
  Arms trade 839–42
  Embassies 553w

Israeli–Palestinian conflict
  see Middle East

ITV Association
  410w

Ivory Coast
  Elections 390w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
  Debates etc.
  Business motions (18.07.02) 543
  Defence review (18.07.02) 474
  Deferred divisions, Points of order (18.07.02) 538
  Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 686
  Questions
  Business questions 428
  European fighter aircraft 156–7w
  Police, Radio 98–9w

Jackson, Ms Glenda
  Debates etc.
  Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 880

***Jackson, Ms Glenda**—continued*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 10–3wh
Questions
Marines 17–8
Mental health services, Hospital beds 141

Jackson, Helen
Questions
Asylum, HIV infection 1041w
Asylum, Maternity payments 1043w

Jackson, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Higher education, Conditions of employment (24.07.02) 1072–6
Questions
Intelligence services 4w

***Jamieson, Mr David**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport*
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 588–90, 594–5, 601–2
Questions
A12 1247w
A46 1246w
A140 966–7w
A404(M) 143w, 736w
Advertising, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 459w
Air routes, Singapore 17–8w
Air routes, South East region 733w
Air routes, USA 17w, 146w
Air traffic control, Manpower 572w
Airports, Construction 733w
Airports, Landing rights 1235w
Airports, South East region 1236w
Automatic train protection 1243w
Aviation, Military bases 1234–5w
Aviation, Scotland 970w
Aviation, USA 1236w
British Airways, Security 970–1w
Buildings, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 333w
Bus services 147–8w, 460–1w, 1257–9w
Bus services, Greater London 9–10w, 1257–9w
Bus services, Rural areas 15–6w, 743–4w
Bus services, Somerset 1243w
Bus services, Standards 743–4w, 1258w
Buses, Pollution control 1259–60w
Bypasses, Silverstone 1249–51w
Cars 967w
Central Railway 746w
Channel tunnel, Freight 329w
Computers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13w
Consultation papers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13–4w, 1266–7w
Contracts, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961w
Crossrail line 1241w
Cycling, Safety 965w
Cycling, Standards 1277w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept for Transport 455–6w, 962w, 1261w
"Disabled Person's Parking Badge Scheme Consultation Paper" 1245–6w
Driver information systems 1253–4w
Driving, Cellular phones 1234w
Driving, Licensing 965w
Driving under influence 742–3w, 967w
Driving under influence, Cannabis 403–4w
EC action, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 6–7w, 80–1w, 332w, 358w, 435w, 632w, 731–2w, 1272–5w, 1323–4w

***Jamieson, Mr David**—continued*
Empty property, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 453w
European Energy and Transport Forum 731–2w
Ferries, EC countries 1233w
Fire services, Offshore industry 638w
Fisheries 967–8w
Fuels, Excise duties 740–1w
Galileo project 1268–70w
Gatwick Airport 1234w
Gatwick Airport, Air routes 1241w
Gatwick Airport, Landing rights 1234w
General Lighthouse Fund 1275–6w
Great Western Trains 1242w
Health and Safety Commission 326w
Heathrow Airport 146w, 1234w
Heathrow Airport, Air routes 961w
Heathrow Airport, Landing rights 1234–5w
Highways Agency 333w
Highways Agency, Contracts 1248–50w
Home zones 1267w
Housing, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 732w
Industrial health and safety 81w
Industrial health and safety, Smoking 732w
Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961–2w
Internet, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265w
Light dues 18w, 634–6w
Lighthouses 1275–6w
Local transport plans 326–7w, 329–31w
London Bridge Station 458w
London Underground, Finance 1237–8w
London Underground, Industrial disputes 148w
London Underground, Overcrowding 747w, 1238w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 143w, 747w, 1237–8w
London Underground, Standards 747w
M4 454w
M25, Repairs and maintenance 328w
Manpower, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262–3w
Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive 968w, 1277–8w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1263w
Ministers, Dept for Transport 142–3w
Ministers, Redundancy pay 1270w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 10–1w, 334w
Motor vehicles, Fuels 1246–7w
Motor vehicles, Registration 11w
National Air Traffic Services 146w
National Air Traffic Services, Insurance 571–2w
Network Rail 144–5w, 746w, 1245w
Network Rail, Corporate manslaughter 327w
Network Rail, Finance 12w, 17w, 145w, 1244–5w
Network Rail, Public appointments 145w
Office of the Rail Regulator 568w
Oil, Pollution 12–3w
Outdoor education, Death 1269–70w
Park and ride schemes 142w
Pay, Dept for Transport 962w
Petrol alternatives 963–5w, 1246w
Plant power 137–8w
Press releases, Dept for Transport 733w, 1270w
Private roads 344w
Private roads, Local government services 344–5w

***Jamieson, Mr David**—continued*
Public expenditure, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 8w
Public participation, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265–6w
Public transport 148w
Public transport, EC action 454–5w
Public transport, Greater London 1260–1w
Public transport, Standards 963w
Quarrying, Insurance 174w
Railtrack, Finance 142w, 144w, 1239w
Railway stations, Repairs and maintenance 143w
Railway stations, Safety 571w
Railway stations, Security 460w
Railways 461w
Railways, Accidents 326w, 744–5w
Railways, Bridges 1244w
Railways, Commuters 569w
Railways, Fares 1242w
Railways, Finance 327w, 570w
Railways, Franchises 744w
Railways, Freight 570w, 968w
Railways, Investment 969–70w
Railways, Overcrowding 1235–7w, 1256w
Railways, Passengers 460w, 570w, 572w, 1276–7w
Railways, Pennines 12w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 1239w, 1244w
Railways, Safety 334w
Railways, Speed limits 1244w
Railways, Standards 461w, 969w, 1241w, 1256w
Railways, Taunton 1243w
Railways, Twyford 744w
Railways, Vandalism 745w
Rapid transit systems 146w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Rescue services, Portland 11w
River Thames, Safety 334–5w
Road signs and markings, Cycling 965w
Road traffic 143w, 963w, 966w
Road traffic, Forecasts 331–2w
Road traffic, Greater London 1247–8w
Road traffic, Urban areas 573w, 1255w
Road traffic control 454w
Road traffic control, Greater London 1255w
Road traffic control, Lorries 1247w, 1253w
Road traffic control, Standards 1255–6w
Road works, Utilities 333–4w
Roads 740w
Roads, Accidents 739w, 741–2w, 965–6w, 1245w, 1251–3w
Roads, Construction 148w, 456–9w, 573–4w, 1247w
Roads, Greater London 8w
Roads, Leyton 12w
Roads, Noise 1254–5w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 7–8w, 328–9w, 332–3w, 454w, 737–41w, 966w, 1256w
Roads, Safety 11–2w, 454w
Roads, Tolls 149w, 573w, 736–7w, 1255w
Scotland, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Shipping, Accidents 8w
Shipping, Radioactive wastes 571w
Speeches, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 962w
Speed limits 328w, 1248w
Strategic Rail Authority 567–8w
Strategic Rail Authority, Accountancy 745–6w

***Jamieson, Mr David**—continued*
Strategic Rail Authority, Finance 12w, 746w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 147w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre, Industrial health and safety 458–9w
Taxis, Licensing 1260w
Taxis, Peterborough 459–60w
Taxis, Standards 1260w
Temporary employment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1264w
Traffic lights, Greater London 742w
Train operating companies, Finance 969w
Transport, Accidents 1242w
Transport, Disadvantaged 1214–5w
Transport, Finance 734–6w
Transport, Internet 1267w
Transport, Planning 573w, 968w, 1272w, 1276–7w
Transport, Radioactive wastes 1262w
Transport, Rural areas 1264w
Transport, Schools 13–5w
Transport, South East region 1265w
Transport, Standards 736w
Transport, Telephone services 327–8w
Transport, Urban areas 1271–2w
Transport Direct 733–5w
Transport for London, Finance 17w
Travel, Concessions 1264w
Travel, Research 734w
Unmanned air vehicles 970w
Urban bus challenge 8–10w
Vehicle Inspectorate 964w
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1271w
West coast railway line 6w, 969w
Wood 248–9w
Working hours, EC law 710w
Written questions, Administrative delays 456w, 1263w
Written questions, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 456w

Japan
Radioactive materials 389w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 693–5
Defence review (18.07.02) 464–6
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 276–7w, 753w
Armed forces, Cellular phones 276w
Armed forces, Health services 749–50w
Ballistic missile defence, USA 26w
Defence equipment, Procurement 153–5w, 906w
EC defence policy 611w
Grenades 906w
HMS Bridport 26w
HMS Nottingham, Repairs and maintenance 26w
Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 1109–10w
Terrorism 11–2

Jenkins, Mr Brian
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 22w
British Council, Art works 888w
Crime 97w
Crown Prosecution Service, Annual reports 287w
Deprivation indicators 1215w
Education, Standard spending assessments 1215w
Hong Kong, Foreign relations 888w
NHS, Private finance initiative 1084–5w

***Jenkins, Mr Brian**—continued*
Schools, Broadband 1366w
Schools, Finance 1353–4w
Wembley Stadium 498w
Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Annual reports 888–9w

Job creation
Manufacturing industries 633w

Jobcentre Plus
1581w
Disabled 812w
Gosport 813w
Manpower 1545w
Training 1035w
Wales 321–2w
Welfare tax credits 271w

Jobcentres
Manpower 1580–1w
New Forest 812w
Rural areas 1580w

Jobseeker's allowance
511w, 1024–5w

***Johnson, Alan**, Minister of State for Employment Relations and Regions, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy (16.07.02) 63–6wh
Package holidays, Standards (23.07.02) 234–8wh
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 124–8wh
Questions
Diesel engines, EC action 945–6w
Employment agencies 949w
Employment Relations Act 1999 440–1w
Employment Tribunal System Taskforce 1338w
Employment tribunals 954w
Foreign workers 440w
Foreign workers, Minimum wage 440w
Industrial relations 777w
Isle of Wight, Dept of Trade and Industry 1325w
Manufacturing industries 356–8w
Manufacturing industries, Job creation 633w
Occupational pensions 271w
Regional development agencies, Annual reports 1338w
Regional development agencies, Planning 952–3w
Regional planning and development, Dept of Trade and Industry 792w
Regulation, Dept of Trade and Industry 170w
Vacant land, Property development 353w
Working hours, Parents 171w

Johnson, Mr Boris
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 495, 501, 517, 525
Questions
Religious broadcasting, Licensing 697–8w

***Johnson, Miss Melanie**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Accountancy 1338–9w
Accountancy, Regulation 1328w
Accountancy, Standards 337w
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group 170w, 1326–7w, 1337w
Bankruptcy 355–6w
Company law 168–9w
Consumers, Scotland 169–70w
Copyright 169w

***Johnson, Miss Melanie**—continued*
EC action, Dept of Trade and Industry 951–2w, 960w
Horse racing 165w
Industry, Profits 172w
Innogy 1325–6w
Local government, Standards 440w
Local press, Ownership 439w
National Association of Citizens' advice bureaux 942w
Small businesses, Accountancy 1332–3w
Takeovers 350–1w
Telephones, Concessions 530w
Trading Schemes Act 1996 439w
WorldCom 1327w

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation
Disclosure of information 1391w

Joint strike fighter aircraft
495w

Jones, Helen M
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 166
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 284–5
Annual reports, Solicitor-General 615w
Cheshire Constabulary, Sick leave 1538–9w
Serious Fraud Office, Annual reports 615w

Jones, Mr Jon Owen
Questions
Asylum, Iraq 228w, 400–1w
Illegal immigrants 88–9w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 880w
Police, Wales 273

Jones, Mr Kevan
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 316–7, 331, 333, 337, 374–6
Museums and galleries, North East region (15.07.02) 129–31
Questions
Arts, North East region 692w
Defence, EC countries 23w
Defence, Expenditure 3
Greece, EC presidency 881w

Jones, Dr Lynne
Questions
Computers within reach programme 1367w
Developing countries, Poverty 260w
Embassies, Israel 553w
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 1566w, 1569w
National Asylum Support Service, Standards 1043w
Occupational pensions 271w
Pensions 1542w
Roads, Accidents 1245w
Transsexualism 1079–80w, 1306w

Jones, Mr Martyn David
Questions
New deal schemes, Wales 322w

Jones, Mr Nigel
Questions
Schools, Cheltenham 988w

***Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa**, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Antiques, Auctions 692–3w
Arts, North East region 692w
BBC 694w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 409w
Creative partnerships initiative 698w
Crime prevention, Young people 694w
Digital broadcasting 691w

***Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa**—continued*
Members, Correspondence 699w
Music 693w
National Lottery 650–2, 973w
Playing fields 1162w
Regional arts boards 692w
Sports, Finance 1162–3w
Sports, Holiday play schemes 693–4w
Wembley Stadium 1159w

Joyce, Mr Eric
Questions
Debts, Developing countries 465w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Armed conflict 1–2w
Minimum wage, Scotland 1228w
Unemployment, Scotland 1232w

Judges
Conduct 82w
Housing 1303–5w
Training 606–8w

Junior doctors
Working hours 1102w

Juries
Corruption 830w

Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Programme motion* and Lords amendts (16.07.02) 176–215
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Kananaskis Summit
Group of Eight 896–7w

Kashmir
177w, 1311w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Questions
Members, Correspondence 108w, 220–1w, 294w, 639–40w, 805w, 890w, 1379w, 1587w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 835
Written questions, Administrative delays 543w

***Keeble, Ms Sally**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for International Development*
Questions
Angola, Famine 447–8w
Angola, Overseas aid 448w
Botswana, AIDS 963–5
Indonesia, Forests 448–9w
Small Enterprise Development Agency, Finance 292w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1123–4w
Written questions, Dept for International Development 292w

Keen, Alan
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 863
Questions
River Thames, Safety 334–5w

Keen, Ann
Questions
Theatre 497w

Keetch, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 314, 322
Defence review (18.07.02) 467
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 1110w
Afghanistan, Unmanned air vehicles 758w
Armed forces, Pensions 1113w
Defence, Expenditure 2–3

***Keetch, Mr Paul**—continued*
Defence equipment, Procurement 158w, 490w, 904–5w
European technology acquisition programme 904w
Hercules aircraft 1110w
Military aircraft 494w, 1103–4w
Police, Wales 273
SA80 rifle 1110–1w
Transplant surgery 216–8w
Unmanned air vehicles 157–8w, 494w

***Kelly, Ruth**, Financial Secretary, Treasury*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 949–53
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Mortgages (16.07.02) 47–51wh
Questions
Annuities 466w
Bank notes 470w
Bank services 68–9w
British nationality 636w
Business, Questionnaires 1190–1w
Cancer, Death rate 1178–9w
Cervical cancer, Death rate 1197–8w
Child tax credit 1190w
Coinage 68w
Computers, Treasury 66w
Consultation papers, Treasury 1181–2w
Corporate hospitality, Treasury 1199w
Credit unions 418–20
EC action, Treasury 339w, 636–7w, 1175–6w
Economic and monetary union 1198–9w
Economic and monetary union, NHS 1198w
Economic situation 1199w
Employment, Yorkshire and Humberside 67–8w, 637w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 636w, 1339w
Euro, Overseas trade 1198w
"European Community Finances White Paper" 822w
Exchange rates 65w, 1182–3w
Financial services, Buckingham 1199–200w
Financial services, Complaints 65w
Financial services, Misrepresentation 335–6w
Financial Services Authority 1177w
Financial Services Compensation Scheme 468–9w
Housing, Prices 466w
Housing, South East region 465w
Identity cards, Fees and charges 1194–5w
Industrial disputes 1195w
Inflation 65w
Information officers, Treasury 822w
Inheritance tax 1194w
Insurance, Employers' liability 250–1w
Insurance, Terrorism 960w
International Monetary Fund 1139w
Internet, Treasury 1186w
Local government, Pay 1194w
Manpower, Treasury 1172w
Maternity services 1438w
Members, Correspondence 338w
Ministerial policy advisors, Treasury 1195w
Mortgages, Complaints 360w
National income 1188w
National insurance 1194w
National Savings Agency, Advertising 1197w
Occupational pensions 469w
Office for National Statistics, Annual reports 821w

***Kelly, Ruth**—continued*
Office for National Statistics, Codes of practice 66w, 1170w
Pay, Treasury 64–5w, 1192w
Pensions 401–3, 465w
Pensions, Public sector 416
Pensions, Taxation 602w, 1200w
Private companies, Government assistance 69w
Private Pension Legislation Review 601w
Programme for international student assessment 66–7w
Public appointments, Treasury 337–8w, 1195–6w
Public finance 821w
Public participation, Treasury 1182w
Public Works Loan Board 1193–4w
Publicity, Treasury 821w
Republic of Ireland, Treasury 1188w
Sanctions, Zimbabwe 821w
Solicitors, Treasury 1199w
Statistics Commission, Annual reports 336w, 1170w
Stocks and shares 64w, 68w, 1199w
Tax credit 467w
Teenage pregnancy 70–4w, 1196–7w
Temporary employment, Treasury 1187w
Terrorism, Finance 959w
UK Debt Management Office, Annual reports 958w
UK membership of EC 469w
Unemployment, Scotland 1232w
Visits abroad, Treasury 1180w, 1188w
Welfare tax credits 254–5w

Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
Questions
Iraq, Armed conflict 280–1

***Kennedy, Jane**, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 258–9
Questions
Annual reports, Northern Ireland Office 505w
Closed circuit television, Belfast 506–7w
Community development, Northern Ireland Office 1202w
Crown Prosecution Service, Offices 525w
Drugs, Northern Ireland 508w
Females, Northern Ireland Office 509w
Fireworks, Northern Ireland 506w
Northern Ireland government 509w
Police, Northern Ireland 508–9w, 1202–3w
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Annual reports 957w
Prisoners, Northern Ireland 1202w
Proscribed organisations, Flags 505w
Proscribed organisations, Northern Ireland 505–6w, 1201w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland Office 508w
Riot control weapons, Northern Ireland 507w
Smuggling, Northern Ireland 507–8w
Telephone services, Northern Ireland Office 1201w
Visits abroad, Northern Ireland Office 506w

Kent
Acute beds 1102w
Health services 218–9w

Kenya
Microfinance 293w
Politics and government 764w

Key, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 703
Defence review (18.07.02) 473
Export Control Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1046–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 215–9wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Politics and government 967
Armed forces, Housing 6
Arms trade, Export controls 780w
Defence Munitions, Dean Hill 25w
Energy, Conservation 485w
Genetically modified organisms 702w, 774–5w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 33–4w
Members, Correspondence 661w
Mental health services, Hospital beds 140
Military exercises, Salisbury Plain 901w
RAF Chilmark 1105–6w
Sudan, International assistance 882w

Khabra, Mr Piara S
Questions
Meat Hygiene Service, Annual reports 1082w

Kidnapping
Children 411–2w

Kidney, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education, Stafford (22.07.02) 759–61
Questions
Administration of justice 528–9w
Countryside stewardship scheme 707w
Housing benefit 1563w
Inland waterways 135w
Law Society, Complaints 412–3w
Medicines Commission, Annual reports 1082w
Organic food 707w
Plastics, Waste disposal 707w
Sports, Holiday play schemes 693–4w

Kidney patients
Lancashire 1088w
Royal Preston Hospital 1088w

Kidneys
Donors 657w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter
Questions
Iraq, Armed conflict 975

King, Andy
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 866
Questions
Nadia, Naira 386w
Pakistan, Christianity 386w
Pakistan, Human rights 386w

King, Ms Oona
Questions
Indonesia, Religion 609–10w

Kingston upon Hull
Housing (22.07.02) 733–5

Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 300
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 165
Lockerbie, Bombings (23.07.02) 957
Questions
German measles, Vaccination 423w, 1391w

Kirklees
Social security benefits 1030w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 138–9wh, 157–62wh, 166wh, 172–3wh
Questions
Bank services 68–9w
Business questions 431
Community care grants 1578w
Financial Services Consumer Panel, Bank services 270w
Heath, Edward, Public statues 1167w
History of Parliament Trust, Finance 49–50w
House of Commons, Internet 325–6w
House of Commons, Manpower 1167w
House of Commons, Publications 1167w
House of Commons, Waste disposal 189w
House of Commons Journal 49w
Housing benefit 595w, 1022w
Low flying 284w
RAF Police, Low flying 283–4w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 809–11w, 1551w
Social security benefits, Borders region 1552w

Knight, Rt Hon Greg
Questions
Economic and monetary union 1198w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 1257w
Roads, Tolls 1256w

Knight, Jim
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 318, 328–9, 340, 356–7, 359, 367, 376–7
Questions
British Forces Post Office, Standards 1120w
Defence Fire Service 16
Defence Storage and Distribution Agency, Standards 1120w
Defence Transport and Movements Agency, Standards 1119w
Duke of York's Royal Military School, Standards 1117w
Magistrates' courts, Information technology 1288–90w
RAF Personnel Management Agency, Standards 1116w
RAF Training Group, Standards 1120–2w

Know-How Fund
Environment protection 720w

Knowledge for Development Challenge Fund
44w

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Questions
Community development 1471–2w
Electronic equipment, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 235w
Market town initiative, Guisborough 315w

Kurds
Iraq 388w

Labelling
Food 1384–5w

Lactose
Drugs 413w

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 301
Questions
Cancer, Medical treatments 1100w
China, Human rights 839

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Questions
Basle Concordat, Scotland 76w
Constituencies, Scotland 76–7w
Electoral systems, Scotland 77w
Meat, Smuggling 1232w
Neurofibromatosis 1387w

Lamb, Norman
Questions
Arms trade 436w
Arms trade, Export controls 780w
Disabled, Village halls 263–4w
Members, Correspondence 1091w
Train operating companies, Finance 969w

Lambeth
Cannabis 222w

Laming Inquiry
see Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry

***Lammy, David**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Hospitals, Somerset (23.07.02) 243–6wh
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Standards 659–60w
Ambulance services, Standards 1410–1w
Anaesthetics, Medical equipment 1420–1w, 1423–4w
Beta-interferon, Derbyshire 203w
Buildings, Dept of Health 206–7w
Cannabis, Clinical trials 1431w
Chronic fatigue syndrome 210–1w
Commission for Health Improvement 210w
Commission for Health Improvement, Pay 1427–8w
Community health councils 1410w
Consultation papers, Dept of Health 1429w
Contraceptives, Clinical trials 1383–4w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 1378–9w, 1428w
Cystic fibrosis, Prescriptions 200–1w
Dental health 189w
Dental services 189–90w
Dental services, Fees and charges 662w
Dental services, Gloucestershire 1396w
Dental services, Pensioners 1438w
Diabetes, Screening 191w
Dietary supplements, EC action 1440–1w
Drugs, Misuse 202w
EC action, Dept of Health 1339–40w
EC law, Dept of Health 205–6w, 658–9w
Empty property, Dept of Health 663w
Energy, Dept of Health 663w
Generic prescribing 1383w
Health services, Cooperatives 212w
Health services, USA 208w
Herbal medicine, Licensing 1430–1w
Hospitals, Food 200w
Hospitals, Hygiene 203w, 1415w
Hospitals, Industrial health and safety 1418w
Hospitals, Infectious diseases 1399–400w
Hospitals, Public appointments 127w
Hospitals, Standards 1417–8w
Hydrofluorocarbons, Refrigeration 1438w
Infliximab 207w
Kidneys, Donors 657w
Location, Dept of Health 867w
London Ambulance Service, Body armour 1410w
Medical Devices Agency, Annual reports 537–8w
Medical records, Data protection 688w
Members, Correspondence 1379w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 129–30w

***Lammy, David**—continued*
Multiple sclerosis, Medical treatments 1424w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 208w, 1410w
NHS, Circulars 212–3w
NHS, Energy 211–2w
NHS, Finance 1428w
NHS, Information 1428w
NHS, Negligence 1396–8w
NHS, Procurement 214–5w
NHS, Standards 211w
NHS Direct 142–4
NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, Annual reports 875w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 1413w
Oral questions, Dept of Health 1431w
Organs, Donors 658w
Orphan drugs 1440w
Oxygen, Medical equipment 1383w
Pharmacy, Billing 210w, 1420w
Prescription drugs, Imports 1403–4w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 121w, 659w
Prescriptions, Information technology 213w, 1420w
Primary care trusts, Barnsley 1386w
Public participation, Dept of Health 1094w
Publicity, Dept of Health 1403w
Remploy, Primary care trusts 1429–30w
Sexual offences 864w
Solihull Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 209–10w, 660w
Transplant surgery 216–8w
Visits abroad, Dept of Health 1429w
World Health Organisation, Taiwan 117w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1431w

Lancashire
Hospices 200w
Hospital beds 204–5w
Kidney patients 1088w
Young offenders 558w

Land
Contamination 1147–8w
Ownership 1219–20w

Land mines
Bomb disposal 162w
Serbia 895w

Land use
Databases 1010–2w

Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002
Questions
28w

Landing rights
Airports 1235w
Gatwick Airport 1234–5w
Heathrow Airport 1234–5w

Languages
Curriculum 1351w
Immigrants 684w
Pupils 375–8w

Lansley, Mr Andrew
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 181–3wh
Flood control (16.07.02) 32–4wh
Greenbelt, Cambridge (17.07.02) 133–4wh

Lapwings
Conservation 302w

Law Commission
1081w

Law Society
Complaints 412–3w

Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Debates etc.
Textiles, Wales (18.07.02) 550
Questions
Court Service, Wales 319w
Double taxation, Lithuania 959w
Equal pay 792–3w
Insurance, Terrorism 960w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority 781–2w

Laws, Mr David
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1016
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 311, 321, 347–52, 382–3
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 914–5
Questions
Armed forces, Recruitment 13–4
Beef, Exports 1151–2w
Crime 680–2w
Crime, Somerset 1457–9w
Crime prevention, Standards 852–4w
Crown Prosecution Service, Advocacy 619w
Defence Procurement Agency 160–1w
Drugs, Children 88w
Drugs, Misuse 559w, 1068–9w
Energy, Conservation 479w
Fish, Diseases 35–6w
Food, Safety 1100w
Food Standards Agency 429w
Gulf War syndrome, Compensation 490–1w
Higher education, Student numbers 184–7w
HMS Nottingham 276w
Literacy, Primary education 369w
Members, Correspondence 1065w
Mental patients 538w
Navy, Procurement 161w
Parliament Square, Demonstrations 554w
Police, Emergency calls 100–2w
Police, Freemasonry 1502–3w
Police, Manpower 1488–92w
Police, Standards 1522–8w
Pre-school education 994w
Prisoners, Literacy 856w
Public sector, Sick leave 820w
Pupil exclusions 183w
Rapid reaction forces, EC countries 26w
Sleeping rough 243w
Standards, Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Standards, Dept for Work and Pensions 521w
Standards, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2w
Statistics, Dept for Education and Skills 1365w
Statistics, Dept for Work and Pensions 1024w
Statistics, Home Office 397–8w
10 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 1368–9w

Laxton, Mr Bob
Questions
New deal for communities 277–8

Lazarowicz, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1014
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 497, 518, 523
Questions
Child Benefit Centre, Telephone services 266w
Civil servants, Accidents 335w

***Lazarowicz, Mr Mark**—continued*
Debts, Developing countries 464w
Ferries, EC countries 1233w
Overseas students 1373w
Veterinary medicine, Research 1135w

Learndirect centres
Taunton 1351–2w

Lee on Solent
Rescue services 11w

Leeds
Road traffic 736–7w
Working families tax credit 252–3w

Legal Services Commission
Computers 1299–300w

Leicestershire Police
96w

Leicestershire Police Authority
Public appointments 560w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 702
Questions
Abortion 1385w
Medical records, Data protection 688w
National Audit Office, Business plans 979–80w
Sexual offences 864w, 1454w
Teenage pregnancy 1386w

Leominster
Swimming pools 691–2w

Lepper, Mr David
Questions
Chronic fatigue syndrome 210–1w
Corporate manslaughter 1505w
Freedom of Information Act 2000, Government departments 272w
Legal Services Commission, Computers 1299–300w
Social security benefits, Disqualification 1025–6w

***Leslie, Mr Christopher**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Questions
Air conditioning, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1002w
Best value 1017w
Computers, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 244w
Council tax 45–6w, 244–5w
Council tax, North West region 1216–8w
Departmental responsibilities, Cabinet Office 1000w, 1002w
Disabled, Access 1007–8w
Electronic equipment, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 235w
Electronic voting 1016w
Electronic voting, Finance 1016w
English Partnerships 1211–3w
Fire prevention 1211w
Fire Service College, Disciplinary proceedings 18w
Fire services, Government assistance 1015–6w
Fire services, Pay 1002w
Fire services, Radio 245w, 343w
Housing, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Housing, Planning permission 1009w
Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government 1205w
Internet, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1219w
Local government, Elections 83w

***Leslie, Mr Christopher**—continued*
Local government, Standards 241w
Local government finance 45w, 239–40w, 1203–4w
Local government finance, Greater London 1204w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1219w
Ministers, Redundancy pay 1218w
Orders and regulations, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 997w
Parish councils, Codes of practice 1009w
Parish councils, Resignations 1009w
Press, Cabinet Office 1014w
Press releases, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Public expenditure, Cabinet Office 340w
Regional planning and development, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1204–6w
Social services, Greater London 249w
Social services, Standard spending assessments 48w
Standard spending assessments 1000–1w
Voting methods 1016w

Lesotho
Famine 717w

Letwin, Rt Hon Oliver
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 289–90
Questions
Immobilisation of vehicles, Regulation 1473w
Police Reform Bill and Implementation Unit 561w
Police Standards Unit 105–6w
Prisoners, Repatriation 1504–5w
Robbery 1487w
Shellfish, Licensing 310w

***Lewis, Mr Ivan**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Education and Skills*
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 109, (24.07.02) 1027
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (17.07.02) 116–20wh
Questions
Apprentices, Finance 990w
Computers, Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Computers within reach programme 1367w
Dyslexia, Hyperactivity 990w
Educational institutions, Computer software 651–2w
Grammar schools 189w
Immigrants, Languages 684w
Individual learning accounts 452–3w, 992w, 1351w
Investors in people, Small businesses 993–4w
Learndirect centres, Taunton 1351–2w
Literacy, North West region 1346–7w
Modern apprenticeships 991–2w
National training organisations, Finance 648–52w
Playgrounds, Wood 652–3w
Pupil referral units, North West region 1346w
Schools, Broadband 1366w
Schools, Playing fields 989–90w
Schools, Transport 647w
Sixth form colleges, Finance 987w
Somerset College for Arts and Technology, Finance 1351w
Tameside College 1367w
Training, Textiles 1367w

***Lewis, Mr Ivan**—continued*
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 1354–5w, 1357–62w
Training and enterprise councils, Manpower 1355–7w
Vocational education, Morley 648w

Lewis, Dr Julian
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 704
Criminal Evidence (Prohibition of Sale) (No 2) Bill, 1R (16.07.02) 173
Defence review (18.07.02) 472–3
Prime Minister (Office Role and Functions) (No 2) Bill, 1R (16.07.02) 173
Private Members' bills, Points of order (18.07.02) 477, (19.07.02) 632, 634, 639
Questions
Africa, AIDS 965
Agriculture, Subsidies 300w
Agriculture, Sustainable development 300w
Crime, Wales 274
Devolution, Wales 320w
Fleet Air Arm 22–3w
Food, Hospitals 200w
Food, Imports 298w
Food, Labelling 1384–5w
Meat, Imports 298–9w
Milk 480w
Milk Marque 480w
Planning, Inquiries 243–4w
Political parties, Finance 663
Recruitment, Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Recruitment, Scotland Office 1226w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 834–5
Terrorism 10

Leyton
Roads 12w

Liability
Devolution 251w

Liberia
Armed conflict 260–1w, 886w, 900w, 1306w
Overseas aid 715w

Libraries
see Public libraries

Licensing laws
362w, 498w

***Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Questions
Advertising, Scotland Office 382w
Aggregates levy, Scotland 1228w
Airports, Scotland 983w
Annual reports, Scotland Office 769w
Basle Concordat, Scotland 76w
Beef, France 1228w
Broadband, Scotland 76w
Buildings, Scotland Office 383w, 768w
Channel tunnel railway line, Scotland 982w
Civil servants, Scotland Office 382w
Computers, Scotland Office 768w
Constituencies, Scotland 76–7w
Consultation papers, Scotland Office 383w, 769w
Contracts, Scotland Office 499–501w
Correspondence, Scotland Office 980–1w, 1225w
Crown Estate Commissioners, Scotland 274w
EC law, Scotland Office 382w
Electoral systems, Scotland 77w
Equal opportunities, Scotland Office 768w
Females, Scotland Office 983w

***Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen**—continued*
Food Standards Agency, Scotland 1226w
Gender impact assessment, Scotland Office 768w
Grants, Scotland Office 767w
Hewlett-Packard, Redundancy 983w
Holiday leave, Scotland Office 382w
Industrial tribunals, Scotland Office 1225w
Information officers, Scotland Office 769w, 1226w
Liquefied petroleum gas, Scotland 502w, 1230–2w
Lockerbie, Bombings 765–6w
Manpower, Scotland Office 1228–30w
Meat, Smuggling 1232w
Members' interests, Scotland Office 982w
Minimum wage, Scotland 1228w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scotland Office 273w, 500w, 766w, 1229w
New deal schemes, Scotland Office 980w
Newspaper press, Scotland Office 1227w
Non-departmental public bodies, Scotland Office 501w, 767w
North Sea oil, Scotland 984w
Offices, Scotland Office 980w
Official hospitality, Scotland Office 1225–6w
Operating costs, Scotland Office 1225w
Orders and regulations, Scotland Office 382–3w
Overtime, Scotland Office 767w
Pay, Scotland Office 382–3w, 980w
Press releases, Scotland Office 981w
Private finance initiative, Scotland Office 501w
Property, Scotland Office 502w
Public expenditure, Scotland 984w
Public expenditure, Scotland Office 382–3w, 767w, 984w
Publicity, Scotland Office 769w
Recruitment, Scotland Office 1226w
Regional assistance 502w
Regulatory impact assessments, Scotland Office 274w
Relocation services, Scotland Office 500w
Republic of Ireland, Scotland Office 984w
Scotland, Scotland Office 1230w
Serials, Scotland Office 1226–7w
Standards, Scotland Office 76w, 501–2w
Statistics, Scotland Office 768w
Taxation, Offshore workers 1229w
Telephone services, Scotland Office 768w
Temporary employment, Scotland Office 1229w
Training, Scotland Office 382w
Unemployment, Scotland 983–4w
Visits abroad, Scotland Office 766–7w, 983w, 1225w
Wales, Scotland Office 982w
Written questions, Scotland Office 1228w

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 367–8, 371–4
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Hospitals, Somerset (23.07.02) 239–43wh
Questions
Agriculture, Subsidies 1143–4w
Ammunition, Procurement 20w
Annuities 466w
Armed forces, Cadets 760w
Cancer, Burnham on Sea 1422w
Cancer, Research 1422w
Education, Agriculture 648w
Environment protection, Curriculum 480w
Hospitals, Rural areas 535w
Jobcentres, Manpower 1580–1w
Local government, Elections 83w
Military exercises, Quantocks 905w
National Air Traffic Services 146w

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian*—continued*
NHS, Recruitment 419w
Pupil exclusions, Somerset 645w
Pupils, Personal records 375w
Railway stations, Repairs and maintenance 143w
Regional airports, Wales 270–1
Regional development agencies, Expenditure 791w
Sports, Schools 691w
Village halls, Construction 708–9w
Warehouse parties, Southern region 401w

Lidington, Mr David
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 673–6
Questions
Animal feed 30w, 702–3w, 1149–50w
Animal feed, Additives 29w, 703w
Asda, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 310w
Bovine tuberculosis 124w, 703w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Sheep meat 428–9w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 1378–9w
Hunting 1150w
Livestock, Transport 922w
Livestock, Waste disposal 135w
Meat products, Contamination 204w, 429w
Pigmeat, Import controls 29–30w
Poultry, Import controls 1155–6w
Public Record Office, Census 800–2w, 1080w
Scrapie 30w
Sheep, Disease control 31w
Sheep meat 29w, 878w

Life imprisonment
832w, 1519–20w
Sexual offences 832w

Life Sentence Review Commissioners
Annual reports 1202–3w

Light dues
18w, 634–6w

Lighthouses
1275–6w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 295–6
Questions
Asylum, Applications 552–3w
Multiple occupation, Greater London 343w
Social security benefits, Abuse 1556w
Stocks and shares 64w
Tax evasion, Personation 256w

Limitation of actions
272w

Linton, Martin
Questions
Political parties, Finance 662–4
Social security benefits, Mortgages 1584w

Liquefied petroleum gas
Scotland 502w, 1230–2w

Listed buildings
Internet 407–8w

Literacy
North West region 1346–7w
Primary education 369w
Prisoners 856w

Lithuania
Double taxation 959w

Litter
Chewing gum 311–2w

Litter and Fouling of Land By Dogs (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 638

Livestock
Animal welfare 921w
Cumbria 477–8w
Markets 919–20w
Somalia 41w, 1136w
Transport 134–5w, 922w, 1142–3w
Waste disposal 135w

Llandovery
Military exercises 906–7w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 172
Questions
Asylum, Administrative delays 1042w
Firearms, Manchester 285–6
Health and Safety Commission 1369w
Kenya, Politics and government 764w
Mental health services, Hospital beds 139–40
Middle East, Peace negotiations 879–80w
Railways, Safety 334w
Xenotransplantation 228–9w

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 167
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 883
Questions
Africa, Arms trade 281–2
Crime, Wales 275
EC grants and loans, Wales 318–9w
Israel, Arms trade 841–2
National Assembly for Wales, Planning 322–3w
Public expenditure, Home Office 1078w
Wales, Scotland Office 982w

Loan guarantee scheme
Small businesses 778w

Local authorities
Disclosure of information 999w

Local government
Contracts 1020w
Elections 83w, 244w
Pay 1194w
Private finance initiative 941–2w
Standards 241w, 440w

Local Government Act 2000
Questions
999w

Local Government Bill (Draft)
Questions
236w

Local government finance
44–5w, 125w, (15.07.02) 127, 239–41w, (16.07.02) 259–60, (22.07.02) 735–7, (23.07.02) 889, 998w, (24.07.02) 1020, 1203–4w
Buckinghamshire (22.07.02) 761–5
Greater London 1204w
Wokingham 1204w

Local government services
Private roads 344–5w
Standards 974–5

Local press
Ownership 439w

Local Sustainability Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (23.07.02) 886

Local transport plans
326–7w, 329–31w

Location
Dept of Health 867w

Lockerbie
Bombings 765–6w, 843–4, (23.07.02) 956–62

London
see Greater London

London Ambulance Service
Body armour 1410w

London Bridge Station
458w

London City Racecourse
640w

London Underground
Air pollution 478–9w
Finance 1237–8w
Industrial disputes 148w
Overcrowding 747w, 1238w
Public private partnerships 143w, 747w, 1237–8w
Standards 747w, 1238–40w

Lone parents
Income support 511w, 813w, 1549–50w
Portsmouth 813w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Annual reports 797w
Computers 607w
Consultation papers 526–8w, 796–8w
Data protection 1303w
Departmental responsibilities 1081w
EC action 1278–9w
Females 411w
Information officers 799–800w
Internet 1279w
Members' interests 1278w
Public participation 1291w
Publicity 800w
Republic of Ireland 1292w
Standards 1293–9w
Telephone services 82w
Visits abroad 526w

Lorries
Illegal immigrants 552w
Road traffic control 1247w, 1253w

Lorry drivers
Training 265–6w

Loughton, Tim
Questions
Anaesthetics, Medical equipment 1423–4w
Antisocial behaviour orders, West Sussex 1466–7w
Archaeology 656–7
Asbestos, Water supply 476w
Cancer, Death rate 1178–9w
Care homes, Vetting 835w
Carers 541w
Children, Day care 987–8w
Commission for Health Improvement, Pay 1427–8w
Contracts, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 1428w
Credit cards, Fraud 679–80w
Crimes of violence, Ambulance services 608w
Doctors, Foreign workers 1394w
Doctors, Recruitment 1100–1w
Economic and monetary union, NHS 1198w
Foster care, Recruitment 541w, 1402w
German measles, Vaccination 1392w
Hospitals, Crimes of violence 536w
Hospitals, Hygiene 1415w
Hospitals, Infectious diseases 1399–400w

***Loughton, Tim**—continued*
Immigration officers, Czech Republic 685–6w
London Ambulance Service, Body armour 1410w
Medical treatments, EC countries 538w
Medicine, Students 772w
Motor vehicles, Fuels 1246–7w
NHS, Foreign workers 1101w
NHS, Information 1428w
NHS, Negligence 529–30w, 1398w
NHS, Nurseries 540w
NHS, Recruitment 542w
NHS Direct 144
NHS Leadership Centre, Manpower 1101w
Nurses, Consultants 537w
Nurses, Resignations 1092–3w
Nurses, Schools 1392w
Petrol alternatives 951w, 963–5w
Police 1480–1w
Police, Compensation 1466–8w
Primary health care, West Sussex 1394–5w
Remploy, Primary care trusts 1429–30w
Social workers, Training 541w
Sussex Police, Finance 1459w
Travelling people, Trespass 639w
Ukraine, AIDS 1388–9w
Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry 541w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1431w

Love, Mr Andrew
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 1–7wh
Questions
Electoral register 665–6
Employment zones 1593w
Flood control 310–1w, 704w
International Development Association 899w
Local authorities, Disclosure of information 999w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 880w
New deal for communities 1021w
Pensions, Taxation 1200w
Railways, Bridges 1244w
Road traffic offences 687–8w
Rwanda, Human rights 3w
Schools, Finance 1364w
Secondary education, Pupils 1350w
Social Fund 1583w
Social security benefits, Abuse 1556–7w
Terrorism 553–4w
Turkey, EC enlargement 3w

Low flying
284w
RAF Police 283–4w

Low incomes
Housing 1017–8w

Lucas, Ian
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 493, 496, 520
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1056–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Mortgages (16.07.02) 45–7wh
Questions
Africa, Water 1125w
Allotments 46w
Campsfield House Detention Centre 1448w
Complaints Audit Committee, Public appointments 1448w
Correctional Services Board 1446–7w
Crime prevention, Cellular phones 1485w
History of Parliament Trust, Finance 49–50w
House of Commons Journal 49w

***Lucas, Ian**—continued*
Lactose, Drugs 413w
Schools, Finance 1353w
Smith, Helen 1531w
VAT, Financial services 824w

Luff, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 687
Questions
Asylum, Housing 551–2w, 1063w
Asylum, Throckmorton airfield 1373w
Defence Estates, Property transfer 18w
Developing countries, Agricultural products 1126w
Emergency services, Radio 1470w
Multiple sclerosis, Drugs 199w
West Mercia Constabulary, Finance 675w

Luke, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 1002
Questions
Child Support Agency, Computers 1546w
Foreign investment in UK 412
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1131w

Luton
Home Office 1492–4w

M4
454w

M25
Repairs and maintenance 328w

McCabe, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Members, Points of order (19.07.02) 557
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 561, 574, 583, 587
Questions
Compulsory purchase 533w
Iran, Foreign relations 845–6
Ministers, Visits abroad 1372–3w

McCafferty, Ms Chris
Questions
Botswana, AIDS 964
Export credit guarantees, Environment protection 779w
Shipman, Harold 974

***McCartney, Rt Hon Ian**, Minister for Pensions, Department for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Annual reports, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587w
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 262w
Computers, Dept for Work and Pensions 294w
Consultation papers, Dept for Work and Pensions 1596w
Employment, Discrimination 1032–3w
Equal pay, Dept for Work and Pensions 112w
Females, Dept for Work and Pensions 521w
Jobcentre Plus, Manpower 1545w
Manpower, Dept for Work and Pensions 1588–90w
Members, Correspondence 1588w
Occupational pensions 518w, 520w, 1541w
Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, Annual reports 510w
Older people consultative forums, Public appointments 1022w

***McCartney, Rt Hon Ian**—continued*
Orders and regulations, Dept for Work and Pensions 515–6w
Pension credit 510w, 1540w
Pension credit, Hastings 1032w
Pensioners 1588w
Pensioners, Dorset 268–9w
Pensioners, Incapacity benefit 1569w
Pensioners, Social security benefits 295w
Pensions 518–21w, 1035w, 1040w, 1542w, 1584w
Pensions, Advisory services 1543–5w
Pensions, Overseas residence 1031w, 1541–3w
Pensions, Self-employed 114–5w
Private Pension Legislation Review 1543w
Public bodies, Dept for Work and Pensions 294w
Public expenditure, Dept for Work and Pensions 1586w
Public participation, Dept for Work and Pensions 1542w
Publicity, Dept for Work and Pensions 1584–6w
Regulatory impact assessments, Dept for Work and Pensions 524–5w
Social security benefits 112–3w, 1036w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 1550w, 1579w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Computers 295w
State retirement pensions 114–6w, 294w, 518w, 1039w, 1539–42w
State retirement pensions, Dorset 268w
State second pension, Publicity 1545w
Statistics, Dept for Work and Pensions 1024w
Temporary employment, Dept for Work and Pensions 1587w
Transsexualism 1306w
Visits abroad, Dept for Work and Pensions 1040w
Winter fuel payments 1034w
Winter fuel payments, European economic area 599w

McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Questions
Public houses, Entertainments 649–50
Social Fund 510w
Working families tax credit, Mitcham 462w

McDonnell, John
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 856–7
Questions
Breast feeding 414–5w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Information technology 845–6w
Planning 45w

MacDougall, Mr John
Questions
Terrorism 9–10

Macedonia
886w
Elections 611w
Entry clearances 402w

McFall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 35–6, (23.07.02) 905–11
Questions
National income 404–5

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 178, 190–1

McGrady, Mr Eddie—continued
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 245–8, (24.07.02) 994–5
Questions
Northern Ireland government 283–4
Sellafield, Radioactive wastes 133–4w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 976–7

***McGuire, Mrs Anne**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scotland Office*
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07:02) 496–7, 504–7, 528–9
Questions
Medicine, Scotland 127w

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 1126–7w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty, Wales 319w
Channel tunnel, Freight 323–4w, 968w
EC enlargement 181w
EC institutions 386–7w
EC institutions, Manpower 1315w
Employment, Females 793w
European fighter aircraft 21w, 760w
European Scrutiny Committee, Explanatory notes 1165–6w
Foreign investment in UK 412, 1176w
Horse racing 165w
Horserace Totalisator Board 53w
Illegal immigrants, Channel tunnel 393w
Illegal immigrants, Lorries 552w
Immigration controls, Fixed penalties 220w
Members, Correspondence 1142w
Motor sports 653
NHS Direct 143
Office of Communications 406–7w
Planning 1008w
Railways, Freight 968w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 482–3w
Tax allowances, Animal breeding 255w
Tax credit 467w

McIsaac, Shona
Questions
Information Commissioner, Public appointments 1374w

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 297–8
Housing (18.07.02) 451–2
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 1000

McKechin, Ann
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Reform 918w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda 883w
Kashmir 1311w
National Lottery 973w
Overseas aid 1136w
Post offices, Bank services 945w
Post offices, Closures 944–5w
West coast railway line 969w

McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Questions
Pesticides Safety Directorate, Standards 138–9w

Mackinlay, Andrew
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (23.07.02) 851

Mackinlay, Andrew—continued
Oral question time intervention (15.07.02) 5
Questions
British overseas territories 765w, 1318–9w
British overseas territories, National income 175–6w
Gibraltar, European Parliament elections 1291w
Gibraltar, Statistics 765w
NATO, Russia 19
Railways, Insurance 1240w
Ukraine, Foreign relations 837
Unni, Kolathuv 540w

Maclean, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 632–3

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Ecclesbourne School (22.07.02) 745–8
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 173
Questions
Electronic voting 665
Medical treatments, EC countries 201w
Members, Correspondence 298w
Primary care trusts, Derbyshire 1382–4w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Driving offences, Petitions (16.07.02) 261
Housing, Kingston upon Hull (22.07.02) 733–5
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 193, 200–1, 203
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 236, 250–3, (24.07.02) 992
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service, Offices 525w
Diplomatic service 889–90w
Employment agencies, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 608–9w
Forensic science 109w
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Public appointments 1487–8w
Local government, Standards 241w
Metropolitan Police, Sick leave 1050w
Prisoners, Suicide 1463–4w
RU486 1434–7w
Young offenders 1462w

***McNulty, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Derelict land, Planning permission (24.07.02) 280–9wh
Greenbelt, Cambridge (17.07.02) 134–6wh
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 19–21wh
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 344w, 1003w
Alconbury airfield, Planning permission 245w
Allotments 46w
Building alterations, Capital allowances 242w
Building alterations, VAT 242w
Buildings, Urban areas 1211w
Cars 1016w
Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Finance 344w
Community development 341–3w
Council housing 1205–10w
Council housing, Double glazing 1220w
Deprivation indicators 1215w
Derelict land 1019w
Dredging, Wales 37–8w

McNulty, Mr Tony—continued
EC action, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 633w
Equal opportunities, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Flood control 934w
Gender impact assessment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Hedges and ditches 141–2w
Homelessness 239w, 341–2w
Homelessness, Children in care 1003w
Homelessness, Finance 997–8w
Homelessness, Rural areas 46w
Housing 238w, 638w, 1007w, 1211w, 1216w
Housing, Construction 1018–9w
Housing, Coventry 1018w
Housing, Empty property 1003–6w, 1017w
Housing, Gloucestershire 639w
Housing, Low incomes 1017–8w
Housing, Planning permission 1008–9w
Land, Ownership 1219–20w
Land use, Databases 1010–2w
Local government, Private finance initiative 941–2w
London City Racecourse 640w
Members, Correspondence 639–40w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 241w, 1220–1w
Multiple occupation, Death 238w
New deal for communities 1021w
New towns 1218w
Ordnance Survey 1012–4w
Ordnance Survey, Standards 245–6w
Planning 45w, 639w, 1008w
Planning, Castle Point 1218w
Planning, Inquiries 243–4w
Planning, Urban areas 639w
Planning permission, Administrative delays 1007–8w
Playing fields 1217w
Pollution control, Tax allowances 242w
Post offices, Urban areas 998w
Recreation spaces, Standards 242–3w
Regional development agencies, Finance 1213–4w
Regional planning and development 237–8w
Regional planning and development, Finance 1020–1w
Right to buy scheme 48w
Sleeping rough 243w
Social rented housing 1210–1w
Statistics, Cabinet Office 236w
Telecommunications Working Group 47–8w, 1009w
Thameslink railway line 971w
Tipping of waste 315w
Tipping of waste, Planning permission 941w
Transport Works Authorisation Branch 45–8w
Transport Works Authorisation Branch, Manpower 47w
Travelling people, Trespass 639w
Urban regeneration companies, Gloucester 1016w

***MacShane, Mr Denis**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 109–12wh
Questions
Africa, International assistance 833–4
Africa, Meat 387–8w
Africa, Peace keeping operations 763w, 1311w

***MacShane, Mr Denis**—continued*
Annual reports, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 890w
Asylum, Applications 1318w
Balkans, Peace keeping operations 2w
BBC External Services 844–5, 1320–1w
BBC External Services, Pay 390w
Botswana, Ethnic groups 176w
Botswana, Nature conservation 763w
British Council, Art works 888w
Central African Republic, Armed conflict 1307w
China, Asylum 884w
China, Human rights 839
China, Overseas trade 610–1w
China, Sanctions 385–6w
Computers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w
Consultation papers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 885–6w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Armed conflict 1–2w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda 883w
Developing countries, Trade 763w
EC action, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 359–60w
Embassies 1318w
Employment agencies, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 608–9w
Foreign trade 175w
Hong Kong, Foreign relations 888w
Human rights 1320w
International Criminal Court 474w, 882w
International Criminal Court, USA 846
Internet, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1319w
Iran, Drugs 4–5w
Iraq, Sanctions 887w
Ivory Coast, Elections 390w
Japan, Radioactive materials 389w
Kenya, Politics and government 764w
Liberia, Armed conflict 1306w
Macedonia 886w
Macedonia, Elections 611w
Mali, Elections 1306w
Manpower, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1322–4w
Panchen Lama 386w
Photography, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w
Public expenditure, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2w
Public participation, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321w
Publicity, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 887w
Rwanda, Human rights 3w
Sanctions 385w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces 1308w
Sierra Leone, Elections 1309w
Sierra Leone, Peace keeping operations 1309–10w
Sierra Leone, Peace negotiations 886w, 1308–11w
Standards, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2w
Sudan, Armed conflict 837–9
Sudan, International assistance 882w
Sudan, UN Convention Against Torture 609w
United Nations, Peace keeping operations 881w
Wilton Park, Standards 388–9w
Zimbabwe 882w, 1307w
Zimbabwe, Elections 174w
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 1307w

Mactaggart, Fiona
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 298–9

***Mactaggart, Fiona**—continued*
Questions
Absent voting 700w
Agriculture, Subsidies 134w
Creative partnerships initiative 698w
Rape 835w

McWalter, Mr Tony
Questions
Business questions 431–2

McWilliam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Select committees (22.07.02) 730
Questions
Research and development tax credit 1170–1w
Standing committees 325w

Magistrates
Resignations 796w

Magistrates' courts
1378w
Closures 1305w
Information technology 1288–90w
Thames Valley 1081–2w, 1293w

Magistrates' courts committees
1293w

Magnox reactors
784w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 210–1wh, 216wh, 222wh
Questions
Driving under influence 742–3w, 967w, 1063w, 1448–54w
Iraq, Sanctions 887w
Road traffic offences, Fixed penalties 843w
Terrorism 10

Maintenance
Children 116w, 267w, 516–7w, 599–600w, 819–20w, 1026w, 1547–9w, 1560–1w
Overseas residence 267w

"Making Decisions Consultation Paper"
1082w

Maladministration
Home Office 1486w

Malawi
Overseas aid 588w, 1138w

Mali
Elections 1306w

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Questions
Asylum 92w
Deportation, Injuries 400w
Immigration adjudicators, Manpower 411w
Members, Correspondence 131w, 1465w
Yarl's Wood Detention Centre 89w, 392–3w, 684w
Young offenders, Habitual offenders 1531w

Mallaber, Judy
Questions
Business questions 431
Training, Textiles 1367w, 1594–5w

Manchester
Commonwealth Games 164w, 409w, (22.07.02) 743–5
Firearms 285–6

Manchester Airport
(24.07.02) 297–305wh

Manchester City Council
340w

Mandelkern Group
361w

Mann, John
Questions
Drugs, Crime 1462w
Drugs, Nottinghamshire 1462–3w
Heroin, Misuse 972
In vitro fertilisation, Registration of births deaths and marriages 1430w
Prescriptions, Information technology 1420w
Recovered Assets Fund 1069w
Welbeck College 7

Manufacturing industries
356–8w, 947–9w
Job creation 633w
Trade competitiveness 417–8
Wales 318w

Maples, Mr John
Questions
Police, Pensions 94–6w

Marines
17–8

Market town initiative
Guisborough 315w

Marketing
Higher education 643w
Petrol 786w

Markets
Electricity generation 1330w
Livestock 919–20w

Marks and Spencer
VAT 1191–2w

Marris, Rob
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 76–7, 80–2, 84, 107, 110
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 490, 511, 513
Questions
Electronic government, Democracy 182–3w

Marsden, Mr Gordon
Questions
Care homes, Standard spending assessments 197–8w
Eastern Europe, Overseas aid 1128w
Sentencing, Appeals 287–8w

Marsden, Mr Paul
Questions
Cancer, Surgery 422w
Chronic fatigue syndrome, Complementary medicine 538w
Crime, Elderly 681–2w
Doctors' list of patients 1392w
General practitioners, Waiting lists 418–9w
Overseas aid, HIV infection 894–6w
Pay, Treasury 1192w
Prisoners, Advisory services 1469–70w
Public bodies, Dept for Work and Pensions 294w
Surgery, Waiting lists 536w

Marshall, Mr David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 122wh
Questions
Aviation, USA 1236w
Driving offences, Speed limits 105w

Marshall-Andrews, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 857–8
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 293–4

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Carlisle United Football Club, Petitions (23.07.02) 954
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 679
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 1117w
Animal welfare, Expenditure 619–20w
Environment Agency 622w
Forensic Science Service 1077w
Prison Service, Standards 1075–7w
Rabies 135w
West coast railway line 6w

Massey Ferguson
Coventry 1595–6w

Maternity benefits
264–5w

Maternity payments
Asylum 1043w
Sure start programme 1559w

Maternity services
1438w
Standards 1097w
Surrey 1097w

Mates, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 478–9, 481

Mature students
Morley 647w

Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 857

May, Mrs Theresa
Debates etc.
London Underground, Points of order (17.07.02) 305
Questions
A404(M) 143w, 736w
Bus services 460–1w, 1257–9w
Bus services, Greater London 9–10w, 1257–9w
Bus services, Rural areas 743–4w
Bus services, Standards 743–4w, 1258w
Cycling, Standards 1277w
Driver information systems 1253–4w
Electoral systems 996w
Fires 150–2w
Fuels, Excise duties 740–1w
Heathrow Airport, Air routes 961w
Home zones 1267w
London Bridge Station 458w
London Underground, Finance 1237–8w
London Underground, Overcrowding 747w, 1238w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 747w
M4 454w
Members, Correspondence 1468w
Network Rail 746w
Network Rail, Corporate manslaughter 327w
Park and ride schemes 142w
Police stations 829–30w
Public transport, Greater London 1260–1w
Railtrack, Finance 142w
Railway stations, Security 460w
Railways 461w
Railways, Commuters 569w
Railways, Fares 1242w
Railways, Finance 570w
Railways, Freight 570w
Railways, Overcrowding 1235–7w, 1256w

May, Mrs Theresa—continued
Railways, Passengers 460w, 570w, 572w, 1276–7w
Railways, Standards 461w, 969w
Railways, Twyford 744w
Rapid transit systems 146w
Regional planning and development 238w
Road traffic 963w, 966w
Road traffic, Urban areas 1255w
Road traffic control, Greater London 1255w
Road traffic control, Lorries 1247w, 1253w
Roads 740w
Roads, Accidents 739w, 741–2w, 1253w
Roads, Greater London 8w
Roads, Leyton 12w
Roads, Noise 1254–5w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 7–8w, 737–41w, 966w, 1256w
Strategic Rail Authority, Accountancy 745–6w
Strategic Rail Authority, Finance 746w
Teachers, Training 57w
Transport, Finance 734w
Transport, Internet 1267w
Transport, Planning 968w
Transport, South East region 1265w
Urban bus challenge 8–10w
Written questions, Administrative delays 456w

***Meacher, Rt Hon Michael**, Minister of State for the Environment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 345w
Asbestos, Water supply 476w
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 39w
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Annual reports 139w
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Standards 139–40w
Climate change 31–2w
Dogs 308w
EC action, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 35w, 69–70w, 79–80w, 702w
Energy, Conservation 27–8w, 479w, 485w
Environment, Ministerial policy advisors 312w
Environment Agency 622w
Environment protection, Curriculum 480w
Exhaust emissions 479w
"Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate" 1148–9w
Genetically modified organisms 702w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 33–4w, 700–2w
Genetically modified organisms, EC action 37w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 36–7w
Ground water 1145–7w
Hazardous substances, Waste disposal 312w, 483w
Home energy efficiency scheme 622–3w
Land, Contamination 1147–8w
Lapwings, Conservation 302w
Litter, Chewing gum 311–2w
London Underground, Air pollution 478–9w
Noise, Pollution control 793–4w
Plastics, Waste disposal 707w
Radioactive wastes, Pollution control 914w
Recycling 36w
Recycling, Standards 35–6w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 482–3w
Tipping of waste 28–9w, 481w

Meacher, Rt Hon Michael—continued
Water abstraction 487–8w
Water supply, Competition 916w
Wildlife, Meat 484–5w, 705–6w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 706w

Meat
Africa 387–8w, 481–2w, 920w
Hygiene 429w
Imports 298–9w
Scotland 1232w
Smuggling 299w, 481–2w, 1232w
Wildlife 387–8w, 484–5w, 705–6w, 920w, 1140–1w, 1367–8w

Meat Hygiene Service
Annual reports 1082w

Meat products
Contamination 204w, 417w, 429w, 1154–5w

Medical Devices Agency
Annual reports 537–8w

Medical equipment
122w
Anaesthetics 1420–1w, 1423–4w
Oxygen 1383w

Medical examinations
Incapacity benefit 1566w, 1569w

Medical records
Carers 1401w
Data protection 688w, 864w

Medical treatments
Asthma 1423–4w
Cancer 1100w
Colon cancer 212w
EC countries 201w, 538w, 871–2w
Mentally incapacitated 411w
Multiple sclerosis 1424w
Overseas visitors 424w, 1394w
Pain 423w
Radiation exposure 1434w
Strokes 1424w

Medicine
Education 657w
Scotland 127w
Students 772w

Medicines Commission
Annual reports 1082w

Medicines Control Agency
Annual reports 1083w

Members
Advocate General for Scotland 1232–3w
Computers 711w
Correspondence 105w, 108w, 131–2w, 220–1w, 294w, 297–8w, 338w, 477w, 564w, 631–2w, 639–40w, 661w, 699w, 805w, 817–8w, 878w, 890w, 1065w, 1069w, 1091w, 1142w, 1379w, 1390w, 1394w, 1409w, 1465w, 1468w, 1587–8w
Pensions 83–4w, 712w
Rulings and statements (24.07.02) 1018

Members' constituency work
Rulings and statements (23.07.02) 885

Members' interests
Home Office 394w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278w
Scotland Office 982w

Meningitis
Vaccination 428w

Mental Health Act 1983
Questions
660–1w

Mental Health Bill (Draft)
Questions
191w, 197w, 322w, 661w

Mental health services
126–7w, 196w, 538–9w
Children 123w, 125–6w, 1098w
Durham County 127w
Ethnic groups 197w
Expenditure 1098w
Finance 540w
Hospital beds 139–41
Manpower 539w
Physiotherapy 875–7w
Primary care trusts 192–6w
Prisons 1097w, 1529w, 1534–5w
Private finance initiative 877w
Vacancies 1097–8w
Waiting lists 197w, 1420w
Wales 322w
Worcestershire 127w

Mental patients
538w, 660–1w

Mentally disturbed offenders
1527w, 1529w
Prisoners' release 1521w

Mentally ill
Employment 123–4w, 126w, 196w
Hospital beds 1419–20w
Prisoners 126w

Mentally incapacitated
529w
Medical treatments 411w
Protection 563w

Mentoring Fund
103w

Mercenaries
748w

Mercer, Patrick
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 474
Iraq (22.07.02) 801–3
Questions
Afghanistan, Army 492w
Antiaircraft missiles, Procurement 157w, 162w
European fighter aircraft 156w, 492w
Nimrod aircraft 491–2w
Skill force scheme 156w
Submarines, Nuclear reactors 490w

Merchant Shipping (Safety of Navigation) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(22.07.02) 820

Mergers
NHS trusts 1087w

Merron, Ms Gillian
Questions
Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Standards 911–2w
Defence Housing Executive, Standards 908–9w
General Service Medal, Suez 907–8w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Exservicemen 909–12w
Law Commission 1081w
QinetiQ 911–2w
Radioactive wastes, Pollution control 914w
Teenage pregnancy 1387–8w

Merseyside
Drugs 1504w
Police (16.07.02) 262–8

Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive
968w, 1277–8w

Metropolitan Police
671w, 824–5w, 1478–9w
Complaints 1476–7w
Criminal records 1050w
Disciplinary proceedings 856w, 1054w
Housing 671–2w
Manpower 1488w
Sick leave 1049–50w
Special constables 221w
Training 848–9w

Meyer, Catherine
803w, 887w

***Michael, Rt Hon Alun**, Minister of State, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 264–7wh
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 27w
Common land 915w
Computers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 37w
Countryside, Access 137w
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 304w, 1153w
Driving instruction, Young people 307w
Environment Agency, Public appointments 1144w
Foot and mouth disease, Public footpaths 1139–40w
Green Ministers Committee 307–8w
Hill farming 313–4w
Hunting 483w, 1150w
Market town initiative, Guisborough 315w
New Forest, National parks 707–8w
Public footpaths, Safety 137w
Rights of way, Access 136–7w, 708w
Rural areas, New businesses 929–30w
Rural development plans 39w
Village halls 308w
Village halls, Construction 708–9w
Water sports 934w

Microcredit Summit
899w

Microfinance
Developing countries 293w
Kenya 293w
Uganda 292–3w

Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust
Waiting lists 129–30w

Middle East
Antisemitism 181w, 765w
Peace negotiations 879–80w

***Milburn, Rt Hon Alan**, Secretary of State for Health*
Debates etc.
Elderly, Ministerial statements (23.07.02) 869–84
Questions
Harold Shipman Tribunal of Inquiry 658w
Hospitals, Consultants 137–9
Members, Correspondence 1379w
NHS Bank 1404–6w

***Miliband, Mr David**, Minister of State for Schools, Dept for Education and Skills*
Debates etc.
Education, Castle Point (22.07.02) 825–8
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 47–9, 59, 64–8, 72–4, 87–9, 92–4, 100–5, 112–4, 117–9, 122, (24.07.02) 1021–6, 1030, 1033–6
Questions
After school clubs, Inspections 1341–2w

***Miliband, Mr David**—continued*
City academies 643–4w
Education, Finance 1366w
Education, Pilot schemes 1347–50w
Education, Standard spending assessments 1215w
Education, Surrey 1352w
Free school meals 372–4w
Grammar schools 1349w
Headteachers, Qualifications 1345–6w
Headteachers, Training 1345w
Primary education, Literacy 369w
Primary education, Standards 367–8w
Pupil exclusions, Somerset 645w
Pupils, Languages 375–8w
Pupils, Personal records 374–5w
Schools 367w
Schools, Admissions 56w
Schools, Finance 1353–4w, 1364w
Schools, Governing bodies 378–9w
Schools, Information technology 378w
Schools, Management 1341w
Schools, North West region 1343–4w
Schools, Transport 363w, 1341w
Secondary education, Pupils 644w, 1350w
Small School Support Fund 369–71w
Special educational needs 1354w
Special educational needs, Finance 1354w
Specialist schools 363w, 644w
Specialist schools, Admissions 363w
Statistics, Dept for Education and Skills 1365w
Teachers, Ethnic groups 364w
Teachers, Foreign workers 368–9w, 645w
Teachers, Manpower 364w
Teachers, North West region 1345–6w
Teachers, Pensions 1344w
Teachers, Recruitment 372w
Teachers, Retirement 364w
Teachers, Surrey 1343–4w
Teachers, Training 57w, 364–7w, 1352–3w
Teachers, Vacancies 57–60w

Military aircraft
see also Low flying
494w, 758w, 1103–4w

Military bases
Aviation 1114–5w, 1234–5w
Colchester 905–6w, 1114w
Cyprus 279w, 282w
Portsmouth 756–7w
West Sussex 164w

Military exercises
Llandovery 906–7w
Quantocks 905w
Salisbury Plain 901w

Milk
480w

Milk Marque
480w

Millennium Exhibition
Property transfer 241w, 1220–1w

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 302
Questions
Ministerial policy advisors, Pay 1370–2w

Mine control measures vessels
762w

Minimum wage
Foreign workers 440w
Scotland 1228w

Mining
Pensions 171–2w, 441–2w, 775w
Uranium 347w, 782w

Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence
1340w

Ministerial policy advisors
Dept for International Development 900w, 1132w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1263w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1596w
Environment 312w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321–2w
Home Office 1476w, 1492w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 340w, 1219w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w
Pay 1370–2w
President of the Council 1168w
Prime Minister 890w, 1371w
Scotland Office 273w, 500w, 766w, 1229w
Treasury 1195w
Visits abroad 1370w

Ministerial statements
Airports (23.07.02) 847–68
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1003–17
Chinook helicopters (22.07.02) 689–704
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 287–304
Defence review (18.07.02) 460–75
Education (16.07.02) 155–73
Elderly (23.07.02) 869–84
Foot and mouth disease (22.07.02) 669–88
Housing (18.07.02) 438–59
Northern Ireland government (24.07.02) 983–1002
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 21–44

Ministers
Dept for Transport 142–3w
Redundancy pay 1218w, 1270w
Visits abroad 1370w, 1372–3w

Ministers of religion
Islam 686–7w

Ministry of Defence
Assets 163w, 1109w
Consultation papers 903w, 1106–7w
Females 283–4w
Manpower 282–3w
Public expenditure 749w, 1109–10w
Public relations 285w
Publicity 761w
Republic of Ireland 762w, 1113w
Television 283w
Visits abroad 749w
Waste management 907w

Misconduct
Councillors 999w

Misrepresentation
Financial services 335–6w

Misuse
Alcoholic drinks 641w
Drugs 87–8w, 202w, 404w, 559w, 1068–9w, 1504w
Heroin 972

Mitcham
Children's tax credit 462w
Working families tax credit 462w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Elderly, Birmingham (22.07.02) 780–3
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 881
Questions
Business questions 436–7
Territorial Army 20w
Zimbabwe 882w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Questions
Accountancy, Regulation 1328w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 241w
WorldCom 1327w

Mittal, Lakshmi
290w

Mixed oxide fuel
157w

MMR vaccine
Greater London 285

Mobile phone masts
see Aerials

Mobile phones
see Cellular phones

Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R (22.07.02) 706–28
Rem stages (24.07.02) 1065–71
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080

Modern apprenticeships
991–2w

Moffatt, Laura
Questions
Central Office of Information, Annual reports 1164w
Police custody, Death 1103w
Primary care trusts 147

Mole, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 82–3, 96–7, 102
Questions
Digital broadcasting 691w

***Moonie, Dr Lewis**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Ministry of Defence*
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 334, 348, 363, 380–6
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 1110w
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 1117w
Aircraft carriers, Deployment 284–5w
Aircraft carriers, Portsmouth 902–3w
Ammunition, Procurement 20w
Antiaircraft missiles, Procurement 157w, 162w
Armed conflict, Civilians 749–50w
Armed forces, Cadets 760w
Armed forces, Colombia 756w
Armed forces, Deployment 762w, 901w
Armed forces, Discharges 3–5, 22w
Armed forces, Health services 749–50w
Armed forces, Housing 5–6, 24w, 159–60w, 750–3w, 905–6w, 1107–9w
Armed forces, Pensions 1113w
Armed forces, Psychiatry 754w
Armoured fighting vehicles 913w
Arms trade 491w
Arms trade, Offset arrangements 489–90w
Army, Discharges 15
Army, Edinburgh 1115w
Army, Internet 755w
Army Personnel Centre, Standards 1118–9w
Artillery, Radar 492–3w
Assets, Ministry of Defence 163w, 1109w
BOWMAN combat radio system 753w
British Forces Post Office, Standards 1119–20w
Chinook helicopters, Accidents 1107w

***Moonie, Dr Lewis**—continued*
Consultation papers, Ministry of Defence 903w, 1106–7w
Cruise missiles 155w
Defence, Finance 755w, 1111–2w
Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Standards 911–2w
Defence equipment 155w, 1112–3w
Defence equipment, Procurement 153–5w, 158w, 161–2w, 490w, 904–6w
Defence Estates, Property transfer 18w
Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency, Standards 1117–8w
Defence Housing Executive, Standards 159w, 908–9w
Defence Medical Services 753w
Defence Procurement Agency 160–1w
Defence Storage and Distribution Agency, Standards 1120w
Defence Transport and Movements Agency, Standards 1119w
Duchess of Kent Military Hospital 754w
Duke of York's Royal Military School, Standards 1117w
European fighter aircraft 21w, 156–7w, 492w, 760w
European technology acquisition programme 904w
Exservicemen, Sleeping rough 753–4w
Females, Ministry of Defence 283–4w
Firing ranges, Shoeburyness 20w
Future large aircraft, Engines 492–3w
Galileo project 1107w
General Service Medal, Suez 907–8w, 1104w
Grenades 906w
Gulf War syndrome, Compensation 490–1w, 878w
Harrier aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 754–5w
Hercules aircraft 1110w
HMS Albion 492w, 905w
HMS Fearless 493w, 760–1w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Exservicemen 160w, 909–12w
Joint strike fighter aircraft 495w
Land mines, Bomb disposal 162w
Low flying 284w
Manpower, Ministry of Defence 282–3w
Mercenaries 748w
Military aircraft 494w, 1103–4w
Military bases, Aviation 1114–5w
Military bases, Portsmouth 756–7w
Military bases, West Sussex 164w
Military exercises, Llandovery 906–7w
Military exercises, Quantocks 905w
Mixed oxide fuel 157w
Navy, Procurement 161w
Nimrod aircraft 491–2w
Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 749w, 1109–10w
Public relations, Ministry of Defence 285w
Publicity, Ministry of Defence 761w
QinetiQ 911–2w
QinetiQ, Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation 1122–3w
QinetiQ, Environment protection 912–3w
Queen Alexandra Hospital, Private finance initiative 902w
Queen Victoria School, Standards 1122w
Radar, Wind power 761w
RAF Brize Norton, Housing 163–4w
RAF Chilmark 1105–6w
RAF Personnel Management Agency, Standards 1116w
RAF Police, Low flying 283–4w
RAF Training Group, Standards 1120–2w
Republic of Ireland, Ministry of Defence 762w, 1113w
Reserve forces, Doctors 1111w

Moonie, Dr Lewis—continued
Royal Centre for Defence Medicine, Housing 163w
Royal Military School of Music 761–2w
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 901–2w
SA80 rifle 757–8w, 1110–1w
Skill force scheme 156w
Submarines, Nuclear reactors 490w
Television, Ministry of Defence 283w
Territorial Army 20w
Type 45 destroyers, Ballistic missile defence 158–9w
Unmanned air vehicles 157–8w, 494w
Visits abroad, Ministry of Defence 749w
War graves, Wrecks 1115w
War pensions 493w
Warship Support Agency, Standards 1115–6w
Warships, Chile 760w
Warships, Procurement 19w
Waste management, Ministry of Defence 907w
Welbeck College 7

Moore, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1015
Questions
Angola, Famine 447–8w
Angola, Overseas aid 448w
International Criminal Court 474w
United Nations, Peace keeping operations 881w

Moorside Mining
Standing Order No 24 applications (15.07.02) 45

Moran, Margaret
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 862
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 296–7
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 42
Questions
Bluestone, Karl 683w
Forced marriage 658w
Luton, Home Office 1492–4w
Police, Domestic violence 850w

Morecambe
Dental services 190w
Health services 656w
Speech therapy 656w

Morgan, Julie
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Disadvantaged, Public participation (24.07.02) 293–4wh
Questions
Asylum, Education 1045w
Business questions 429
Prisoners, Repatriation 1044–5w

Morley
Community Champions Fund 647w
Educational maintenance allowance 57w
Mature students 647w
Students 57w
Vocational education 648w

***Morley, Mr Elliot**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Flood control (16.07.02) 26–9wh, 40–4wh
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 474–6w
Agricultural products, Imports 486w
Agriculture, Pay 935w
Agriculture, Research 918–9w
Agriculture, Scotland 308–9w

Morley, Mr Elliot—continued
Agriculture, Subsidies 134w, 300w, 312w, 488w, 621w, 1139w, 1143–4w
Agriculture, Sustainable development 300w
Agriculture, Trade competitiveness 313–5w
Animal feed, Additives 919w
Animal products, EC external trade 300w
Animal welfare, Expenditure 619–20w
Annual reports, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 709w
Aujeszky's disease 484w
Beef, Exports 1151–2w
Beef, France 309w, 934–5w
Bees, Diseases 489w
Bovine tuberculosis, Compensation 932–3w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 131–3w, 136w, 931–3w, 1147w
Carbaryl 936w
Central Science Laboratory, Annual reports 915w
Central Science Laboratory, Standards 489w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 916–8w
Common agricultural policy, Scotland 917w
Common fisheries policy 705w, 919w
Consultation papers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 937–42w
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 131w, 477w, 1141–2w
Countryside stewardship scheme 707w
Dairy farming 314w
EC action, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 301–2w, 304–5w, 486–7w, 922–9w, 952w, 957w
EC law, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1150–2w
Eggs 920–1w
Environmentally sensitive areas 622w
Farmers, Income 1147w
Females, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 134w
Fish, Diseases 35–6w
Fisheries 132w
Fisheries, Quotas 621w
Flood control 302–3w, 310–1w, 621–7w, 703–5w
Flood control, EC law 625–6w
Floods, Canvey Island 933–4w
Food, Imports 298w
Food, Procurement 447w
Foot and mouth disease 301w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 306w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 306w, 1153w
Hedges and ditches 303–4w
Horticulture, Pay 936w
Information officers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1139w
Inland waterways 135w
Livestock, Animal welfare 921w
Livestock, Cumbria 477–8w
Livestock, Markets 919–20w
Livestock, Transport 134–5w, 1142–3w
Meat, Imports 298–9w
Meat, Smuggling 299w, 481–2w
Members, Correspondence 131–2w, 297–8w, 477w, 631–2w, 1142w
Milk 480w
Milk Marque 480w
Organic food 707w
Organophosphates, Animal experiments 313w
Pesticides 709–10w

Morley, Mr Elliot—continued
Pesticides Safety Directorate, Annual reports 709w
Pesticides Safety Directorate, Standards 138–9w
Pet travel scheme 484w
Pet travel scheme, USA 935w
Pigs, Diseases 305–6w
Plant Health Inspectorate 301w
Plant power, Scotland 483–4w
Poultry, Animal feed 297w
Poultry, Animal welfare 311w, 486w, 915w, 1154w
Poultry meat, Imports 1152–3w
Public participation, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1144–6w
Public relations, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 916w
Rabies 135w
Scottish White Fish Producers Association 1153w
Secondment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 32–4w
Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations 2001 298w
Set-aside schemes 488–9w
Sheep, Exports 921–2w
Sheep meat, France 936–7w
Sheep meat, Imports 136w
Sheep premiums 481w
Shellfish, Licensing 310w
Slaughterhouses 930–1w
Speeches, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 917w
Sponsorship, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 921w
State Veterinary Service, Manpower 921w
Suckler cow premiums 481w
Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Annual reports 916w
Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Standards 620–1w
Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Annual reports 915–6w
Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Standards 296–7w
Wellcome Trust, Finance 930w
Wildlife, Meat 920w, 1140–1w

***Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle**, Secretary of State for Education and Skills*
Debates etc.
Education, Ministerial statements (16.07.02) 155–73
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 59
Questions
Child minding, Manpower 994w
Children, Day care 987–8w, 1083w
Consultation papers, Dept for Education and Skills 60–4w, 985–6w
Higher education, Finance 988–9w
Internet, Dept for Education and Skills 1365–6w
Nurseries 1342w
Pre-school education 994w
Pre-school education, Fees and charges 993–4w
Pre-school education, Special educational needs 995–6w
Public expenditure, Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Schools, Cheltenham 988w

Mortgages
(16.07.02) 45–51wh
Complaints 360w
Social security benefits 1584w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Air routes, Singapore 17–8w
Air routes, USA 17w, 146w
Heathrow Airport 146w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 147w
Theft, Cellular phones 1479–80w

Motor sports
652–3

Motor vehicles
Excise duties 10–1w, 334w
Fuels 1246–7w
Registration 11w

Motor Vehicles (Prohibition on Use of Hand-Held Mobile Telephones) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 631

Mountford, Kali
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Reform 917w
Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, Annual reports 510w

Mozambique
Food 42–3w, 587w

Mudie, Mr George
Questions
Business 407

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 292
Questions
Hospitals, Consultants 137–8
House of Commons, Waste disposal 189w
Local press, Ownership 439w
NHS, Standards 211w
Police, Football 1475w
Racial harassment 853–4w

Multinational companies
Developing countries 1134–5w

Multiple occupation
Death 238w
Greater London 343w
Hertfordshire 343w

Multiple sclerosis
Drugs 199w
Medical treatments 1424w
Respite care 199w

Munn, Meg
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 882
Questions
Africa, International assistance 834
Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, UK delegations 1374w
Public expenditure, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 627–31w

***Murphy, Rt Hon Paul**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Questions
Annual reports, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1376w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty, Wales 319w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 1378w
Buildings, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Care homes, Wales 316w
Computers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1378w
Consultation papers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w

Murphy, Rt Hon Paul—continued
Court Service, Wales 319w
Crime prevention, Wales 320w
Crimes of violence, Wales 321w
Dental services, Wales 275–7
Devolution, Wales 320w
EC grants and loans, Wales 318–21w
EC law, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 323w
Economic and monetary union, Wales 1378w
Elections, Wales 724w
Fire prevention, Wales 320w
Foot and mouth disease, Wales 317w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 316–7w
Health services, Wales 269–70
Information officers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 725w
Iron and steel, Wales 318w
Jobcentre Plus, Wales 321–2w
Magistrates' courts 1378w
Manpower, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1377w
Manufacturing industries, Wales 318w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w
National Assembly for Wales, Planning 322–3w
Orders and regulations, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Public appointments, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1377w
Public expenditure, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374w
Publications, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375–6w
Publicity, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Publicity, Wales 1377w
Regional airports, Wales 270–2
Republic of Ireland, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1372w
Small businesses, Wales 319w
Standards, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 323w
Telephone services, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 322w
Temporary employment, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374–5w
Unemployment, Wales 321w
Visits abroad, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1376–7w

Murrison, Dr Andrew
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 5
Armed forces, Housing 159–60w, 750–2w
Business 405–6
Cancer, Research 146
Diplomatic service 384w, 1319w
Doctors, Reserve forces 422w, 1111w
General practitioners, Recruitment 1393w
Magistrates' courts, Closures 1305w
Medical treatments, EC countries 871–2w
Mentally disturbed offenders 1527w, 1529w
National Association of Prison Visitors 1528w
NHS, Energy 211–2w
Police custody, Death 1054w
Postal services 353w
"Pride of Place" 697w
Prison visitors 1528–9w
Prisons, Mental health services 1529w
Renewable energy 352w
Serbia, Land mines 895w
Trials, Administrative delays 81w

Museums and galleries
North East region (15.07.02) 129–36
Science 1160w

Museums and galleries—continued
VAT 335w
West Midlands 657–8

Museums Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Music
693w
Public houses 653–4

Nadia, Naira
386w

Namibia
Arms trade 1327w

National Air Traffic Services
146w
Insurance 571–2w

National Assembly for Wales
Planning 322–3w

National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux
942w

National Association of Prison Visitors
1528w

National Asylum Support Service
Standards 1043w

National Audit Office
Business plans 979–80w
Standards 1187w

National Care Standards Commission
Finance 213–4w

National childcare strategy
128w
Greater London 54–6w

National Foundation for Youth Music
1158w

National income
403–5, 1188w
British overseas territories 175–6w

National Institute for Biological Standards and Control
1529–30w

National Institute for Clinical Excellence
208w, 1410w

National insurance
1194w

National Insurance Contributions Unit
see Social Security Contributions Agency

National Land Information Service
151–3w

National Lottery
165w, 650–2, 973w

National Meat Hygiene Service
see Meat Hygiene Service

National parks
New Forest 707–8w

National Probation Service for England and Wales
Finance 1521–2w
Greater London 1460w
Information technology 845–6w, 1517–8w
Pay 1460w

National Savings Agency
Advertising 1197w

National Statistics
see Office for National Statistics

National training organisations
Finance 648–52w

NATO
Russia 18–9

Natural gas
1328–9w

Nature conservation
Botswana 763w

Navy
Procurement 161w

Naysmith, Dr Douglas
Questions
Developing countries, EC external trade 884w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 1131w
Mental health services, Primary care trusts 192–6w
Mental health services, Waiting lists 197w
Museums and galleries, Science 1160w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 121w

Negligence
NHS 529–30w, 1396–8w

Neighbourhood nuisance
Sheltered housing 687w

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
277–8

Neighbourhood wardens
Chorley 1485w

Nepal
Armed forces 886w
Human rights 610w

Network Rail
144–5w, 746w, 1245w
Corporate manslaughter 327w
Finance 12w, 17w, 145w, 568–9w, 820w, 1183w, 1244–5w
Public appointments 145w

Neurofibromatosis
1387w

Neurology
868w
Manpower 1412–3w

New businesses
1331w
Rural areas 929–30w, 1330–1w

New deal for communities
277–8, 1021w

New deal schemes
111w, 597–8w
Advocate General for Scotland 985w
Scotland 511–2w
Scotland Office 980w
Wales 322w

New Forest
Jobcentres 812w
National parks 707–8w

New Opportunities Fund
Recreation spaces 243w

New Roads and Street Works Act 1991
Questions
333–4w

New Scotland Yard
see Metropolitan Police

New towns
1218w

Newspaper press
Dept for Work and Pensions 110w
Scotland Office 1227w

NHS
Circulars 212–3w
Early retirement 542w, 1380w

NHS—continued
Economic and monetary union 1198w
Energy 211–2w
Finance 201w, 282–3, 424–5w, 464w, 1428w
Foreign workers 1101w
Information 1428w
Manpower 1093w
Negligence 529–30w, 1396–8w
Nurseries 540w
Pay 542w
Pensions 1411w
Private finance initiative 872w, 1084–6w
Procurement 214–5w
Public appointments 865–7w
Recruitment 419w, 542w, 874–5w, 1393–4w
Standards 203–4w, 211w

NHS Bank
1404–6w

NHS Direct
142–4
Recruitment 421w
Southampton 421w

NHS Estate Management and Health Building Agency
Annual reports 217w

NHS Leadership Centre
Manpower 1101w

NHS Pensions Agency
Annual reports 1083w
Standards 1083w

NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency
Annual reports 875w

NHS trusts
Management 534–5w
Mergers 1087w
Public appointments 1413w

Nimrod aircraft
491–2w

Noise
Pollution control 793–4w
Roads 1254–5w

Non-departmental public bodies
Public appointments 1164w
Scotland Office 501w, 767w

Non-domestic rates
Agriculture 315–6w

Norman, Mr Archie
Questions
Telecommunications Working Group 47–8w, 1009w

North Africa
Water 588w

North East region
Arts 692w
Museums and galleries (15.07.02) 129–36

North Sea oil
Scotland 984w

North West region
Council tax 1216–8w
Education of children at home 1346w
Housing benefit 1563–4w
Incapacity benefit 1567w
Literacy 1346–7w
Police 850–1w
Pupil referral units 1346w
Schools 1343–4w
Social security benefits 269w
Teachers 1345–6w

Northamptonshire
Crime prevention 1469w

Northern Ireland
Community development 1202w
Drugs 508w
Fireworks 506w
Oil 1193w
Police 508–9w, 1202–3w
Prisoners 1202w
Proscribed organisations 505–6w, 1201w
Riot control weapons 507w
Smuggling 507–8w
Terrorism 975–7

Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency
Annual reports 1202w

Northern Ireland government
283–4, 509w, (22.07.02) 768–9, 791–3
Ministerial statements (24.07.02) 983–1002
Opposition days (16.07.02) 216–59

Northern Ireland Office
Annual reports 505w
Community development 1202w
Females 509w
Public expenditure 508w
Telephone services 1201w
Visits abroad 506w

Northumbria
Offences against children 859w

Nottinghamshire
Drugs 1462–3w
ONE programme 1593–4w

Nuclear fuels
Iran 389–90w

Nuclear power
943w, 1330w
Accidents 783w
Climate change levy 957w
Publicity 345w

Nuclear power stations
Construction 346w
Security 346w, 785w, 862w

Nuclear reactors
783–4w
Submarines 490w

Nuclear weapons
1106w

Numeracy
Primary education 369w

Nurseries
1342w
Hospitals 536–7w
NHS 540w

Nurses
Consultants 537w
Foreign workers 419w
HIV infection 537w
Recruitment 542–3w
Resignations 1092–3w
Schools 1392w

Nutrition
Salt 1385w

Oaten, Mr Mark
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Derelict land, Planning permission (24.07.02) 268–74wh, 282wh, 285–6wh
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 1003w
Chechnya, Human rights 881w
Child Support Agency, Computers 1546–7w
Disability aids 1092w
Hampshire Police Authority 560w
Junior doctors, Working hours 1102w

***Oaten, Mr Mark**—continued*
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 1410w
NHS, Negligence 1396–8w
Right to buy scheme 48w

Obesity
Sports 432–4w

***O'Brien, Mr Mike**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 606–9
Lockerbie, Bombings (23.07.02) 959–62
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Belarus (23.07.02) 228–30wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 176–7w
Arms trade, Export controls 384w, 611w, 1317–8w
Asylum 1323w
Aviation, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 384–5w
Bahrain 835–6
British overseas territories 175–6w, 765w, 1314w, 1318–9w
British overseas territories, Financial services 1315–6w
British overseas territories, National income 175–6w
Cayman Islands, Human rights 889w, 1314w
Chechnya, Human rights 881w
Criminal investigation 1491–2w
Diplomatic service 384w, 889–90w, 1319w
East Timor 1313w
East Timor, Homicide 1319–20w
Entry clearances 887w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Airlines 177w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Civil servants 178w
Indian subcontinent, Entry clearances 1311–2w
Indonesia, Hawk aircraft 3–4w
Indonesia, Religion 609–10w
Iran, Arms trade 383w
Iran, Capital punishment 1312w
Iran, Foreign relations 845–6
Iran, Human rights 1313w
Iran, Nuclear fuels 389–90w
Iraq, Kurds 388w
Kashmir 177w, 1311w
Lockerbie, Bombings 843–4
Meyer, Catherine 887w
Middle East, Antisemitism 181w, 765w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 879–80w
Nadia, Naira 386w
Nepal, Armed forces 886w
Nepal, Human rights 610w
Pakistan, Christianity 386w
Pakistan, Human rights 386w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 181w
Sheikh, Ahmed Omar Saeed 764w
Temporary employment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1322w
Terrorism, Finance 387w
Thailand, Aviation 763–4w
Trinidad and Tobago, Politics and government 5w
Ukraine, Foreign relations 836–7
USA, Ballistic missile defence 881w
USA, Terrorism 1317w
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 762–3w
Weapons 1317w
Western Sahara 609w
Western Sahara, Peace negotiations 609w
Western Sahara, Sovereignty 180–1w
Zimbabwe, Entry clearances 4w

O'Brien, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 168
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 55, 58–60
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 640
Questions
Police, Wales 272–3
Standards, Dept of Health 409

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 38–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 247–9wh, 257wh, 259wh
Questions
Armed forces, Recruitment 13
Cancer, Research 145–6
Doctors' list of patients 201w
Gurkhas 23w
Maintenance, Children 819–20w
Television, Licensing 661

Occupational pensions
271w, 469w, 518w, 520w, 1541w

Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority
Annual reports 510w

Offences against children
1533–4w
Northumbria 859w
Sports 1163w

Offender assessment system
1496w

Office for Civil Nuclear Security
Annual reports 353w
Training 353w, 1337–8w

Office for National Statistics
Advertising 1197w
Annual reports 821w
Codes of practice 66w, 1170w

Office of Communications
406–7w

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Air conditioning 1002w
Annual reports 999–1000w
Civil servants 1373w
Computers 244w
EC action 633w
Electronic equipment 235w
Housing 640w
Internet 1219w
Manpower 237w
Ministerial policy advisors 340w, 1219w
Orders and regulations 997w
Press releases 640w
Regional planning and development 1204–6w

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee
(22.07.02) 732

Office of the Rail Regulator
567–8w

Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
Annual reports 1376w
Buildings 724w
Computers 1378w
Consultation papers 1375w
EC law 323w
Information officers 725w
Manpower 1377w
Ministerial policy advisors 1375w
Orders and regulations 724w
Public appointments 1377w

***Office of the Secretary of State for Wales**—continued*
Public expenditure 1374w
Publications 1375–6w
Publicity 724w
Republic of Ireland 1372w
Standards 323w
Telephone services 322w
Temporary employment 1374–5w
Visits abroad 1376–7w

Officer Training Corps
281–2w

Offices
Crown Prosecution Service 525w
Scotland Office 980w

Official gifts
1177–8w

Official hospitality
Advocate General for Scotland 381–2w
Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Home Office 545w
Scotland Office 1225–6w
Solicitor-General 614w

Official residences
Finance 1182w

Offset arrangements
Arms trade 489–90w

Offshore industry
Fire services 638w

Offshore workers
Taxation 1185w, 1229w

Oil
Exploration 443–6w
Northern Ireland 1193w
Pollution 12–3w

Older people consultative forums
Public appointments 1022w

ONE programme
Nottinghamshire 1593–4w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1010
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 699–700

"Operation Lancet"
99–100w

Opik, Lembit
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 222, 234–40, (24.07.02) 992–3
Questions
Closed circuit television, Belfast 506–7w
Inland Revenue, Computer software 1183w
Proscribed organisations, Flags 505w
Proscribed organisations, Northern Ireland 505–6w, 1201w
Regional airports, Wales 271–2

Opposition days
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 216–59

Oral questions
Dept of Health 1431w

Ordnance Survey
1012–4w
Standards 245–6w

Organ, Diana
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 686

Organ Donation (Presumed Consent and Safeguards) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 637

Organic food
707w

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UK delegations 1374w

Organophosphates
Animal experiments 313w

Organs
Donors 658w

Orphan drugs
1440w

Osborne, Mr George
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1016
Business motions (18.07.02) 541
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 297
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 95, 97
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 42, (23.07.02) 893–4
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manchester Airport (24.07.02) 297–302wh, 305wh
Questions
Antiques, Auctions 692–3w
Government, Annual reports 803w
Referendums, Departmental responsibilities 1305w
Road signs and markings, Cycling 965w

Osborne, Sandra
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 864–5
Questions
Telecommunications, Data protection 1465w

Ottaway, Richard
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 7–10wh
Questions
Overseas aid, Health education 1128–9w
Pre-sentence reports, Greater London 844w
Traffic lights, Greater London 742w

Outdoor education
Death 1269–70w

Overcrowding
London Underground 747w, 1238w
Railways 1235–7w, 1256w

Overseas aid
41–2w, 414–5, 464–5w, 715–6w, 1136w, 1185–6w
Afghanistan 176–7w, 714–5w, 1127–8w
Angola 448w
Eastern Europe 1128w
Ethiopia 1126w
Health education 1128–9w
Health services 1124–5w
HIV infection 894–6w
India 1129w
Liberia 715w
Malawi 588w, 1138w
Sierra Leone 717w
Southern Africa 1124w
Sports 473w
Sub-Saharan Africa 1125w
Syrian Arab Republic 43w
Tanzania 44w
Water supply 1134w
Zimbabwe 897w, 1124w

Overseas companies
Developing countries 720w, 970–1

Overseas investment
Switzerland 958w

Overseas residence
Australia 1031w
Maintenance 267w
Pensions 1031w, 1541–3w
Taxation 1173w
Vetting 1483w

Overseas students
1373w

Overseas trade
China 610–1w
Euro 1198w

Overseas visitors
Medical treatments 424w, 1394w

Overtime
Advocate General for Scotland 770w
Scotland Office 767w

Owen, Albert
Questions
Business Appointments Advisory Committee, Annual reports 567w
"Investing in Innovation" 943w

Oxfordshire
Social services (22.07.02) 795–9
Tourism 693w

Oxygen
Medical equipment 1383w

Package holidays
Standards (23.07.02) 231–8wh

Packaging
Waste disposal (24.07.02) 247–67wh

Page, Mr Richard
Questions
Agricultural products, Imports 486w
Eggs 920–1w
Members, Correspondence 221w
Poultry, Animal welfare 311w, 486w

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 884
Housing (18.07.02) 449
Police Reform Bill (HL), Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1060–1, 1064
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Greenbelt, Cambridge (17.07.02) 129–33wh, 136wh
Questions
Metropolitan Police 824–5w, 1478–9w

Pain
Medical treatments 423w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Lords amendts (16.07.02) 192
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 219–20, 253–5

Pakistan
Arms trade 1324–5w
Christianity 386w
Export controls 435w
Human rights 386w

Palmer, Dr Nick
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 247–8
Questions
Army, Deployment 19w
Tourism, Euro 695w

Panchen Lama
386w

Panel for Regulatory Accountability
see Regulatory Accountability Panel

Paper
Prime Minister 802w

Papua New Guinea
Forests 591w

Parents
Working hours 171w

Parish councils
Codes of practice 1009w
Resignations 1009w

Park and ride schemes
142w

Parliament Square
Demonstrations 554w

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
Public appointments 1374w

Parliamentary Pensions (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(16.07.02) 260

Parliamentary procedure
Rulings and statements (18.07.02) 477

Parliamentary scrutiny
323w

Parole
836–7w

Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(16.07.02) 259–60

Passengers
Railways 460w, 570w, 572w, 1276–7w

Passport Agency
see United Kingdom Passport Agency

Passports
689–90w

Paterson, Mr Owen
Questions
Police, Pay 859–60w

Patients Without Legal Capacity (Safeguards) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Peace keeping operations
Afghanistan 21–2w, 276–7w, 494w, 753w, 1117w
Africa 763w, 1311w
Balkans 2w, 9–10
Cyprus 180w
Sierra Leone 1309–10w
United Nations 881w

Peace negotiations
Angola 1310–1w
Middle East 879–80w
Sierra Leone 886w, 1308–11w
Western Sahara 609w

Pennines
Railways 12w

Penrose Inquiry
see Equitable Life Independent Inquiry

Pension credit
510w, 1540w
Hastings 1032w

Pension Service
Manpower 1545w

Pensioners
- 1588w
- Dental services 1438w
- Dorset 268–9w
- Incapacity benefit 1567–9w
- Income support (24.07.02) 306–14wh
- Petitions (23.07.02) 954–5
- Social security benefits 295w
- Taunton 1160w
- Wakefield 661

Pensions
- 401–3, 465w, 518–21w, 1035w, 1040w, 1542w, 1584w
- Advisory services 1543–5w
- Armed forces 1113w
- Automated credit transfer 1551w
- Civil servants 728–30w
- Clergy 666
- Exservicemen 1200–1w
- Members 83–4w, 712w
- Mining 171–2w, 441–2w, 775w
- NHS 1411w
- Overseas residence 1031w, 1541–3w
- Police 94–6w
- Public sector 255w, 416
- Self-employed 114–5w
- Taxation 283, 295–6w, 602w, 1200w
- Teachers 1344w

Pensions Annuities (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
- *Debates etc.*
- Order for further consideration read (19.07.02) 631

Pensions Simplification Review
- see Private Pension Legislation Review

Perham, Linda
- *Questions*
- Afghanistan, Politics and government 966–7
- Companies, Disclosure of information 788–9w
- Companies, Ilford 256w
- Company law 168–9w
- London City Racecourse 640w
- Maintenance, Children 1026w
- Nuclear weapons 1106w
- Politics and government, Young people 788–9w

Perjury
- 678–9w

Personal care services
- 128w

Personal income
- 1186w

Personal injury
- Social security benefits 1578w

Personal records
- Pupils 374–5w

Personation
- Tax evasion 256w

Personnel management
- Armed forces 277–8w

Pesticides
- 709–10w

Pesticides Safety Directorate
- Annual reports 709w
- Standards 138–9w

Pet travel scheme
- 484w
- Canada 935w
- USA 935w

Peterborough
- Taxis 459–60w

Petitions
- Carlisle United Football Club (23.07.02) 954
- Driving offences (16.07.02) 261
- Endometriosis (17.07.02) 388
- Family practitioner services (15.07.02) 128
- Forests (24.07.02) 1071
- Pensioners (23.07.02) 954–5
- Richmond Park (15.07.02) 128
- Road traffic (16.07.02) 260
- Sentencing (23.07.02) 954
- Stillman, Ian (23.07.02) 953–4
- Totternhoe (19.07.02) 555
- Trade (16.07.02) 260–1

Petrol
- Marketing 786w

Petrol alternatives
- 951w, 963–5w, 1246w

Pharmacy
- Billing 210w, 1420w

Photography
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w

Photovoltaics
- 952w

Physiotherapy
- Mental health services 875–7w

Pickering Review
- see Private Pension Legislation Review

Picking, Anne
- *Sittings in Westminster Hall*
- Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 121–2wh

Pickles, Mr Eric
- *Debates etc.*
- Airports (23.07.02) 862
- Housing (18.07.02) 442–4
- *Questions*
- Business improvement districts 235–6w
- Fire extinguishers 235w
- Housing benefit, Administrative delays 595w
- Local government, Elections 244w
- Manpower, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 237w
- Members, Correspondence 1142w
- Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 340w
- Regional planning and development 237w

Pickthall, Mr Colin
- *Debates etc.*
- Education, Finance (16.07.02) 170
- *Questions*
- Accident and emergency departments, Standards 659–60w
- Asylum, Detainees 1043w
- Hedges and ditches 141–2w
- NHS, Finance 424–5w
- Transsexualism 1079w
- Yarl's Wood Detention Centre 1461w

Pigmeat
- Import controls 29–30w

Pigs
- Diseases 305–6w

Pike, Mr Peter L
- *Debates etc.*
- Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 879
- Housing, Burnley (22.07.02) 737–40
- Housing, Points of order (18.07.02) 476
- Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 779
- *Questions*
- Africa, AIDS 965–6
- Commonwealth, Education 713–4w
- Kidney patients, Lancashire 1088w

Pike, Mr Peter L—continued
- Kidneys, Donors 657w
- Litter, Chewing gum 311–2w
- Medicines Control Agency, Annual reports 1083w
- Organs, Donors 658w
- Royal Preston Hospital, Kidney patients 1088w
- Social security benefits, North West region 269w
- Sports, Voluntary work 498w

Pilot schemes
- Education 1347–50w

Planning
- 45w, 639w, 1008w
- Arts Council of England 496w
- Castle Point 1218w
- Emergencies 727w, 1070w
- Greater London (16.07.02) 1–21wh
- Inquiries 243–4w
- National Assembly for Wales 322–3w
- Regional development agencies 952–3w
- Transport 145w, 573w, 968w, 1272w, 1276–7w
- Urban areas 639w

Planning permission
- (22.07.02) 793–5
- Administrative delays 1007–8w
- Aerials 27w, 344w, (22.07.02) 756–9, 1003w
- Alconbury airfield 245w
- Churches 723–4w
- Derelict land (24.07.02) 268–89wh
- Housing 1008–9w
- Tipping of waste 941w
- Wind power 787w

Plant Health Inspectorate
- 301w

Plant power
- 137–8w
- Scotland 483–4w

Plaskitt, Mr James
- *Debates etc.*
- Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1011
- *Questions*
- Central Science Laboratory, Standards 489w
- Criminal proceedings 1530–1w
- Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, Public appointments 1374w
- Standards, Dept of Health 409–10

Plastics
- Waste disposal 707w

Playgrounds
- 530–1w
- Wood 652–3w

Playing fields
- 1162w, 1217w
- Schools 989–90w

Plutonium
- 942–3w

Plymouth
- Railways 569w

Poland
- 1w
- EC enlargement 842–3
- Iron and steel 390–1w

Police
- 95w, 670–1w, 1045–6w, 1480–1w
- Bromley 1468w
- Compensation 1466–8w
- Conditions of employment 1046w

Police—continued
Coventry 1475–6w
Diabetes 1061–2w
Dismissal 95–6w
Domestic violence 850w
Emergency calls 100–2w
Eyesight 103–4w
Firearms 1047–50w
Football 1475w
Freemasonry 1502–3w
Greater London 830w
Havering 1474w
Housing 841–2w
Manpower 563w, 837w, 1486–92w
Merseyside (16.07.02) 262–8
North West region 850–1w
Northern Ireland 508–9w, 1202–3w
Pay 836w, 849w, 859–60w
Pensions 94–6w
Portsmouth 561–3w
Private finance initiative 560–2w
Radio 98–9w, 1495–6w
Recruitment 103–4w, 857–8w
Reform 1478w
Retirement 1046–7w
Sick leave 1480w
Standards 856–7w, 1495–7w, 1522–8w
Training 559–60w
Wales 272–3, 1480w
Wandsworth 1480w
Weapons 1522w

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
Questions
856w

Police cautions
832w

Police custody
1444–5w
Death 677–8w, 1054w, 1103w
Standards 1445w

Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
Annual reports 957w

Police Reform Bill and Implementation Unit
561w

Police Reform Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
Programme motion* and Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1059–64
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080
Questions
827w

Police Standards Unit
105–6w, 1443w

Police stations
562w, 672–6w, 829–30w
Greater London 1475w

Political parties
Finance 662–4, (22.07.02) 773–7, 996–7w

Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000
Questions
1123w

Political refugees
see Asylum

Politics and government
Afghanistan 966–8
Central African Republic 717w
Kenya 764w
Sierra Leone 1136–7w
Trinidad and Tobago 5w
Turkey 764w
Young people 188–9w, 1166w, 1363–4w

Pollution
EC action 946–7w
Oil 12–3w

Pollution control
Buses 1259–60w
Carbon dioxide 39w, 786w
Noise 793–4w
Radioactive wastes 914w
Tax allowances 242w
Taxis 1259–60w

Pond, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 454
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 568, 574–5, 577–8, 583, 589, 598
Questions
Civil servants, Pensions 728–30w
English Partnerships 1211–3w

Pornography
Internet 1532–3w

Portland
Rescue services 11w

Portsmouth
Aircraft carriers 902–3w
Drugs 836w
Lone parents 813w
Military bases 756–7w
Police 561–3w
Social security benefits 521–2w

Post offices
Bank services 438–9w, 523w, 597w, 815w, 945w, 953w
Closures 944–5w
Disabled 349w
Information services 172w, 947w
Scotland 774w
Social security benefits 438w, 600–1w
Urban areas 998w

Postal services
171w, 353w
Fees and charges 348w, 445–6w
Government assistance 349w
Reform 170–1w
Theft 774w
Wirral 774w

Postal workers
Vacancies 350w
Vetting 349w

Potassium iodate
1434w

Poultry
Animal feed 297w
Animal welfare 311w, 486w, 915w, 1154w
Import controls 1155–6w

Poultry meat
Imports 1152–3w
Safety 429–31w

Pound, Mr Stephen
Questions
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries 99–100w
Warships, Procurement 19w

Poverty
44w, 73–5w, (18.07.02) 137–77wh, 254w, 469w
Children 254w, 462–3w, 1033w
Developing countries 260w, 968–70

Powers
European Police Office 223–4w

Pregnancy
1437–8w

Prentice, Ms Bridget
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 168–9

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Questions
Bishops, Housing 293w
Botswana, AIDS 963–4
Business questions 428
Cannabis, Clinical trials 1431w
Heathrow Airport, Theft 859w
Housing, South East region 465w
Hunting 483w, 723w
Immigrants, Languages 684w
Income tax, Payments 251w
Islam, Ministers of religion 686–7w
Police 1045–6w
Police, Conditions of employment 1046w
State Veterinary Service, Manpower 921w

Pre-school education
994w
Disadvantaged 188w
Fees and charges 993–4w
Special educational needs 995–6w

***Prescott, Rt Hon John**, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Local Government and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Housing, Ministerial statements (18.07.02) 438–59
Questions
Compulsory purchase 533w
Manchester City Council 340w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 1220w
Regional planning and development 533–4w
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 238w

Prescription drugs
Alzheimer's disease 1399–400w
Imports 1403–4w

Prescriptions
Cystic fibrosis 200–1w
Fees and charges 121w, 659w
Information technology 213w, 1420w

Prescriptions (Chronic Diseases) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 635

Pre-sentence reports
853w
Greater London 844w

President of the Council
Computers 413–4w, 1168w
Consultation papers 5w
Information officers 712w
Internet 453w
Ministerial policy advisors 1168w
Public expenditure 5–6w
Visits abroad 414w

Press
Cabinet Office 1014w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1037w

Press releases
Dept for Transport 733w, 1270w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 640w
Scotland Office 981w

Price, Adam
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1012–3
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 88–9

***Price, Adam**—continued*
Questions
Devolution, Liability 251w
Eastern Europe, Iron and steel 1130w
Economic and monetary union, Wales 1378w
Elections, Wales 724w
Health services, Wales 269
Hospital beds 1092w
Insurance, Employers' liability 250–1w
Livestock, Transport 1142–3w
Magistrates' courts 1378w
Military exercises, Llandovery 906–7w
Mining, Pensions 441–2w
Mittal, Lakshmi 290w
Poland, Iron and steel 390–1w
Publicity, Wales 1377w
Roads, Accidents 965–6w
Wildlife, Meat 1141w

"Pride of Place"
697w

***Primarolo, Rt Hon Dawn**, Paymaster General*
Questions
Budget April 2002, Publications 253w
Double taxation, Lithuania 959w
Double taxation, South Africa 959w
Double taxation, USA 822w
Drugs, Developing countries 1186w
EC Finance Council 338–9w
Employee share ownership schemes 1183w
Enterprise investment scheme 1184w
Exchange rates 413–4
Game, Farms 823–4w
Income tax, Payments 251w
Inheritance tax 463w
Inland Revenue 1184–5w
Inland Revenue, Administrative delays 1184w
Inland Revenue, Advertising 253w
Inland Revenue, Computer software 1183w
Inland Revenue, Expenditure 253–4w
Overseas investment, Switzerland 958w
Pay 1169–70w
Pensions, Taxation 295–6w
Personal income 1186w
Poverty 254w
Poverty, Children 254w, 462–3w
Public sector, Pensions 255w
Research and development tax credit 1170–1w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Manpower 473w
Tax allowances, Animal breeding 255w
"Tax Benefit Reference Manual, 2002/03" 960w
Tax burden, Small businesses 467w
Tax evasion, Personation 256w
Taxation 251w
Taxation, Hearing aids 1173w
Taxation, Offshore workers 1185w
Taxation, Overseas residence 1173w
Taxation, Self-assessment 472–3w, 1183w
Taxpayers, Yorkshire and Humberside 256–8w
Welfare tax credits 1179–80w
Welfare tax credits, Publicity 339–40w
Withholding tax 256w
Working families tax credit 251–2w, 1189w
Working families tax credit, Abuse 252w
Working families tax credit, Leeds 252–3w
Working families tax credit, Mitcham 462w
Working families tax credit, Regulatory impact assessments 253w

Primary care trusts
147–50
Barnsley 1386w

***Primary care trusts**—continued*
Derbyshire 1382–4w
International cooperation 419w
Mental health services 192–6w
Remploy 1429–30w

Primary education
Literacy 369w
Numeracy 369w
Standards 367–8w

Primary health care
West Sussex 1394–5w

Prime Minister
Information officers 805w
Ministerial policy advisors 890w, 1371w
Paper 802w
Recycling 75w
Republic of Ireland 1369w
Scotland 1372w

Prime Minister (Office Role and Functions) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 631

Prime Minister (Office Role and Functions) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (16.07.02) 173

Princess Royal Barracks
Death 7–9

Prisk, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 860
Questions
Crime, Hertfordshire 282
Developing countries, Education 895–6w
Fleet Air Arm 22–3w
Small businesses, Wales 319w
Tax burden, Small businesses 467w

Prison governors
Ethnic groups 835w
Females 834w

Prison Service
Annual reports 564w
Disciplinary proceedings 1516w
Disclosure of information 1515w
Environment protection 564w
Ethnic groups 1508–16w
Sick leave 1053w, 1070–6w
Standards 1075–7w

Prison visitors
1528–9w

Prisoners
2w, 1506–8w
Advisory services 1469–70w
Ethnic groups 1508–16w
Females 832–3w
Literacy 856w
Mentally ill 126w
Northern Ireland 1202w
Pay 1075w
Rehabilitation 854–5w
Repatriation 1044–5w, 1504–5w
Self-mutilation 855w
Suicide 828–9w, 1463–4w, 1519w, 1537–8w

Prisoners' release
1535–8w
Mentally disturbed offenders 1521w

Prisons
837w
Closures 1443–4w
Disciplinary proceedings 1536w
Drugs 828w
Education 1498–502w
Health services 1534w

***Prisons**—continued*
Inspections 1501–2w
Mental health services 1097w, 1529w, 1534–5w
Per capita costs 1534w

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman
Standards 845w

Private companies
Government assistance 69w

Private education
644w

Private finance initiative
1176w
Local government 941–2w
Mental health services 877w
NHS 872w, 1084–6w
Police 560–2w
Queen Alexandra Hospital 217w, 425w, 902w, 1090–1w
Scotland Office 501w

Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 558–602

Private Members' bills
Rulings and statements (19.07.02) 556

Private Pension Legislation Review
601w, 1543w

Private roads
344w
Local government services 344–5w
Road traffic offences 688w

Private sector
Electronic commerce 781w
Surgery 202w
VAT 1168w

Privy Council
712–3w

Probation and aftercare
837w, 846–7w, 1520–1w
Greater London 844–5w, 1077w, 1532w
Suicide 1519–20w

Proceeds of crime
223w

Proceeds of Crime Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Money res, programme motion* and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 478–533
Lords amendts (24.07.02) 1050–9
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080
Questions
434

Procurement
Ammunition 20w
Antiaircraft missiles 157w, 162w
Defence equipment 153–5w, 158w, 161–2w, (17.07.02) 311–86, 490w, 904–6w
EC environmental policy 354–5w
Food 447w
Navy 161w
NHS 214–5w
Warships 19w

Productivity
463w, 780w

Programme for international student assessment
66–7w

Programme motions
see Timetabling of bills

Property
Scotland Office 502w

Property development
Vacant land 353w

Proscribed organisations
Flags 505w
Northern Ireland 505–6w, 1201w

Prosser, Mr Gwyn
Questions
Sheep, Exports 921–2w

Prostitution
1058–60w
Children 1059w
Greater London 1059w

Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 (Designation of Vessels and Controlled Sites) Order 2002
Questions
1115w

Psychiatry
Armed forces 754w
Manpower 868–71w

Public appointments
Complaints Audit Committee 1448w
Environment Agency 1144w
Health Service Commissioner 1374w
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary 1487–8w
Hospitals 1[illegible]7w
Information Commissioner 1374w
Leicestershire Police Authority 560w
Network Rail 145w
NHS 865–7w
NHS trusts 1413w
Non-departmental public bodies 1164w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1377w
Older people consultative forums 1022w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 1374w
Treasury 337–8w, 1195–6w

Public bodies
Dept for Work and Pensions 294w

Public expenditure
465w, 468w, (23.07.02) 890–953, 1189w
Advocate General for Scotland 379w, 382w, 770w
Cabinet Office 340w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 627–31w
Dept for International Development 290w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 8w
Dept for Work and Pensions 261–2w, 1586w
Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Devolution 69w, 958w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2w
Home Office 546w, 1078w
Ministerial statements (15.07.02) 21–44
Ministry of Defence 749w, 1109–10w
Northern Ireland Office 508w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374w
President of the Council 5–6w
Scotland 984w, 1177w, 1187w
Scotland Office 382–3w, 767w, 984w, 1187w
Solicitor-General 612–3w, 617w
Standards 824w

Public finance
250w, 466w, 821w, 1190w

Public footpaths
Foot and mouth disease 1139–40w
Safety 137w

Public Guardianship Office
Annual reports 1081w
Complaints 412w

Public houses
Entertainments 649–50
Music 653–4

Public libraries
1157–8w

Public participation
Cabinet Office 1164–5w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 974w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1144–6w
Dept for International Development 1135w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265–6w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1542w
Dept of Health 1094w
Dept of Trade and Industry 172–4w
Disadvantaged (24.07.02) 290–6wh
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321w
Home Office 841–2w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1291w
Treasury 1182w

Public private partnerships
Electronic commerce 960–1w
Home Office 543–4w
London Underground 143w, 747w, 1237–8w

Public Record Office
Census 800–2w, 1080w

Public relations
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 916w
Home Office 543w, 1065w
Ministry of Defence 285w

Public Sector Classification Committee
250w

Public statues
Heath, Edward 1167w

Public transport
148w, 1261–2w
EC action 454–5w
Fuels 1177w
Greater London 1260–1w
Injuries 6w
Standards 963w

Public Works Loan Board
1193–4w

Publicity
Commonwealth Development Corporation 583w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 698w
Dept for Education and Skills 771–3w
Dept for International Development 721–2w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1584–6w
Dept of Health 1403w
Dept of Trade and Industry 945w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 887w
Home Office 1067w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 800w
Ministry of Defence 761w
Nuclear power 345w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 724w
Scotland Office 769w
Social security benefits 116w
State second pension 1545w
Treasury 821w
Wales 1377w
Welfare tax credits 339–40w

Pugh, Dr John
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 296

***Pugh, Dr John**—continued*
Police, Merseyside (16.07.02) 262–6

Pupil exclusions
183w, 978–9
Somerset 645w

Pupil referral units
North West region 1346w

Pupils
Languages 375–8w
Personal records 374–5w
Secondary education 644w, 1350w

Purchase, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 765

Purnell, James
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 78, 83
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 881–2
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 44, (23.07.02) 898, 901–2, 907, 915, 919
Questions
Greece, EC presidency 881w
Harold Shipman Tribunal of Inquiry 658w
Railways, Pennines 12w
Standards, Dept of Health 410–1

QinetiQ
911–2w
Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation 1122–3w
Environment protection 912–3w

Qualifications
Care homes 1402w
Headteachers 1345–6w

Quantocks
Military exercises 905w

Quarrying
Insurance 174w

Queen Alexandra Hospital
Private finance initiative 217w, 425w, 902w, 1090–1w

Queen Elizabeth II
Anniversaries 391–2w

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
Air conditioning 1002w

Queen Victoria School
Standards 1122w

Questionnaires
Business 1190–1w

Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 680–1
Museums and galleries, North East region (15.07.02) 129–30
Questions
Airguns, Ownership 219w
EC enlargement 880w

Quinn, Lawrie
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 688
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 621, 628
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 560, 567–9, 576, 580
Questions
Children, Protection 229–31w
Higher education, Special educational needs 452w

Quinn, Lawrie—continued
Public Guardianship Office, Annual reports 1081w
Public houses, Music 653–4
Railtrack, Finance 1239w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 835

Quotas
Fisheries 621w

Rabies
135w

Race relations
1060–1w

Racial discrimination
Armed forces 14

Racial harassment
853–4w

Racial violence
665w

Radar
Artillery 492–3w
Wind power 761w

Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001
Questions
1262w

Radiation exposure
Medical treatments 1434w

Radio
Commercial broadcasting 654–6
Emergency services 1470w
Fire services 245w, 343w
Licensing 949–50w
Police 98–9w, 1495–6w

Radioactive fallout
Chernobyl 316w

Radioactive materials
Japan 389w

Radioactive wastes
784–5w
Pollution control 914w
Railways 785–6w
Russia 776–7w
Sellafield 133–4w, 782–3w, 931w
Shipping 169w, 571w
Transport 345–6w, 784w, 786w, 1262w

RAF Brize Norton
Housing 163–4w

RAF Chilmark
1105–6w

RAF Halton
Housing 163–4w

RAF Personnel Management Agency
Standards 1116w

RAF Police
Low flying 283–4w

RAF St Athan
162w

RAF Training Group
Standards 1120–2w

Rail Regulator
see Office of the Rail Regulator

Railtrack
Finance 142w, 144w, 1239w, 1245w

Railway stations
Repairs and maintenance 143w
Safety 571w
Security 460w

Railway track
1244w

Railways
461w
Accidents 326w, 462w, 744–5w
Bridges 1244w
Commuters 569w
Fares 568w, 1242w
Finance 327w, 570w, 1240w
Franchises 744w
Freight 570w, 968–9w
Insurance 1240w
Investment 969–70w
Overcrowding 1235–7w, 1256w
Passengers 460w, 570w, 572w, 1276–7w
Pennines 12w
Plymouth 569w
Radioactive wastes 785–6w
Repairs and maintenance 1239–41w, 1244w
Safety 334w
Speed limits 1244w
Standards 461w, 969w, 1241w, 1256w
Taunton 1243w
Twyford 744w
Vandalism 745w, 1240w

Railways Interoperability (High-Speed) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(22.07.02) 820

Rammell, Mr Bill
Questions
Housing, Finance 463w
Millennium Exhibition, Property transfer 1220w

Randall, Mr John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 182wh
Questions
Diagnostic treatment centres 1086w
Entry clearances, Macedonia 402w
Macedonia 886w
Macedonia, Elections 611w
Police stations, Greater London 1475w
Telephone services, Dept for Education and Skills 1364w
Telephone services, Dept for Work and Pensions 518w
Telephone services, Dept of Trade and Industry 791w, 954–6w
Telephone services, Home Office 848w
Telephone services, Lord Chancellor's Dept 82w
Telephone services, Northern Ireland Office 1201w
Telephone services, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 322w
Telephone services, Scotland Office 768w

Rape
835w
Trials 798–9w, 1280–8w

Rape (Consent) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (16.07.02) 174–6
2R order read (19.07.02) 640

Rapid reaction forces
EC countries 26w

Rapid transit systems
146w

Rapson, Syd
Questions
Armed forces, Personnel management 277–8w
NHS Pensions Agency, Annual reports 1083w

***Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick**, Minister for Local Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Questions
Agriculture, Non-domestic rates 315–6w
Annual reports, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 999–1000w
Business improvement districts 235–6w
Community councils 1233–4w
Councillors, Disabled 271–2w
Councillors, Misconduct 999w
District councils, Standards 249w
Fire extinguishers 235w
Fires 150–2w
Local authorities, Disclosure of information 999w
Local government, Contracts 1020w
Local government, Elections 244w
Local Government Bill (Draft) 236w
Local government finance 44–5w, 240–1w, 998w
Local government finance, Wokingham 1204w
Manpower, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 237w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 340w
Multiple occupation, Greater London 343w
National Land Information Service 151–3w
Regional assemblies 1217w
Regional planning and development, Eastern region 343w
Right to buy scheme 1019w
Town and Country Finance Issues Group 1002–3w

Recess motions
(22.07.02) 733–820

Recovered Assets Fund
1069w

Recreation spaces
New Opportunities Fund 243w
Standards 242–3w

Recruitment
Advocate General for Scotland 1233w
Armed forces 13–4, 1107w
Chiropody 425w
Clergy 662
Doctors 202w, 1100–1w
Foster care 541w, 1402w
General practitioners 201w, 1393w
NHS 419w, 542w, 874–5w, 1393–4w
NHS Direct 421w
Nurses 542–3w
Police 103–4w, 857–8w
Scotland Office 1226w
Special constables 221w, 672w, 1054–5w
Teachers 372w
Treasury 1197w
West Midlands Police 1050–3w

Recycling
36w
Cabinet Office 641w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1023w
House of Commons 50–1w, 324–5w, 711w
Prime Minister 75w
Standards 35–6w

Redundancy
Commonwealth Development Corporation 576w
Hewlett-Packard 983w

Redundancy pay
Ministers 1218w, 1270w

Redundancy Payments Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (23.07.02) 887–9

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 166
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 86–7, 113, 119–20, 122
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 892
Questions
Business questions 435
Economic and monetary union 1198–9w
Economic situation 1199w
Exchange rates 413–4
Export controls, India 435w
Grammar schools 1349w
Hospitals, Consultants 138
Local government finance, Wokingham 1204w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 1237w
Network Rail 1245w
Public transport, Injuries 6w
Railtrack, Finance 1239w
Railway track 1244w
Railways, Finance 1240w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 1239–41w
Roads, Construction 1254w
Rolling stock 1244w
Stocks and shares 1199w

Redwood Hospital
1412w

Reed, Mr Andy
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 297
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 98–100wh
Questions
British Forces Post Office, Standards 1119–20w
Defence Storage and Distribution Agency, Standards 1120w
Defence Transport and Movements Agency, Standards 1119w
Developing countries, Poverty 968–9
RAF Training Group, Standards 1120–2w
Sports, Clubs 661

Referendums
Departmental responsibilities 1305w

Refrigeration
Hydrofluorocarbons 1438w

Refrigerators
Waste disposal 482–3w

Refugees
see Asylum

Regeneration
Clay Cross (22.07.02) 753–6

Regional airports
Wales 270–2

Regional arts boards
692w

Regional assemblies
1217w

Regional assistance
502w

Regional development agencies
1020–1w
Annual reports 1338w
Expenditure 791w
Finance 1213–4w
Planning 952–3w

Regional planning and development
237–8w, 533–4w
Baltic states 589–90w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1578w
Dept of Trade and Industry 792w

Regional planning and development—*continued*
Eastern Europe 590w
Eastern region 343w
Finance 63w, 1020–1w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1204–6w
Romania 590w

Registration of births deaths and marriages
In vitro fertilisation 1430w

Regulation of Child Care Providers Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
Questions
1495w

Regulatory Accountability Panel
345w

Regulatory impact assessments
972w
Dept for Work and Pensions 524–5w
Dept of Trade and Industry 437w
Home Office 396w
Scotland Office 274w
Working families tax credit 253w

Rehabilitation
Prisoners 854–5w

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
Questions
403w

***Reid, Rt Hon Dr John**, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 225–34
Northern Ireland government, Ministerial statements (24.07.02) 983–1002
Questions
Annual reports, Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency 1202w
Community development, Northern Ireland 1202w
Life Sentence Review Commissioners, Annual reports 1202–3w

Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 633

Religion
Armed forces 20–1w
Indonesia 609–10w

Religious broadcasting
Licensing 410w, 697–8w, 1157w

Religious Discrimination and Remedies Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 634

Relocation services
Scotland Office 500w

Remploy
Primary care trusts 1429–30w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education, Points of order (24.07.02) 1019–20
Winter fuel payments (22.07.02) 799–801
Questions
Higher education, Finance 988–9w

Renewable energy
169w, 324w, 352–4w, 358w, 787–8w, 890–2w
Developing countries 1130–1w

Repatriation
Prisoners 1044–5w, 1504–5w

Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(15.07.02) 127

Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(18.07.02) 537

Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(15.07.02) 127

Republic of Ireland
Dept for Education and Skills 1363w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1581–2w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1320w
Home Office 1055w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1292w
Ministry of Defence 762w, 1113w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1372w
Prime Minister 1369w
Scotland Office 984w
Treasury 1188w

Rescue services
Lee on Solent 11w
Portland 11w

Research and development tax credit
1170–1w

Reserve forces
Doctors 422w, 1111w

Resignations
Magistrates 796w
Nurses 1092–3w
Parish councils 1009w

Respite care
Multiple sclerosis 199w

Respite Care (Children) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (17.07.02) 307–10

Retail trade
Crime prevention 795–6w, 836w, 862–4w, 1465–6w
Crimes of violence 682–3w

Retirement
Home Office 394w
Police 1046–7w
Teachers 364w

Richmond Park
Petitions (15.07.02) 128

Right to buy scheme
48w, 1019w

Right To Self-Employment Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 633

Rights of way
Access 136–7w, 708w

Ringfenced funding
Home Office 1055–6w

Riot control weapons
Northern Ireland 507w

River Thames
Safety 334–5w

Road Safety and Speed Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 633

Road signs and markings
Cycling 965w

Road traffic
143w, 963w, 966w
Forecasts 331–2w
Greater London 1247–8w, 1255–6w
Leeds 736–7w
Petitions (16.07.02) 260
Urban areas 573w, 1255w

Road traffic control
454w
Greater London 1255w
Lorries 1247w, 1253w
Standards 1255–6w

Road traffic offences
687–8w
Fixed penalties 843w
Private roads 688w

"Road Traffic Penalties Consultation Paper"
1448w

Road works
Utilities 333–4w

Roads
740w
Accidents 739w, 741–3w, 965–7w, 1245w, 1251–3w
Carmarthenshire 965–6w
Construction 148w, 456–9w, 573–4w, 1247w, 1254w
Freight 570w
Greater London 8w, 145–6w
Leyton 12w
Noise 1254–5w
Repairs and maintenance 7–8w, 328–9w, 332–3w, 454w, 737–41w, 966w, 1254–7w
Safety 11–5w, 454w, 647w
Scotland 1253w
South West region 1247w
Tolls 149w, 573w, 736–7w, 1255–6w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Questions
Criminal Records Bureau, Administrative delays 1056w

Robbery
101–3w, 281, 1487w
Greater London 1474w

Robertson, Angus
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 701
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 494w
Armed forces, Training 276w
Arms trade, Offset arrangements 489–90w
Asylum 1323w
China, Asylum 884w
Defence Fire Service 15–6
EC action, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 359w, 498–9w, 633–4w
EC action, Dept for Education and Skills 773w, 1361–3w
EC action, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 35w, 69–70w, 79–80w, 486–7w, 922–9w, 952w
EC action, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 6–7w, 80–1w, 332w, 358w, 435w, 632w, 731–2w, 1272–5w, 1323–4w

Robertson, Angus—continued
EC action, Dept for Work and Pensions 232–4w, 249w, 269–70w, 603–4w, 1583–4w
EC action, Dept of Health 379w, 432w, 1339–40w, 1432–4w, 1595w
EC action, Dept of Trade and Industry 951–2w, 960w
EC action, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 359–60w
EC action, Home Office 632w, 1063–5w
EC action, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278–9w
EC action, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 633w
EC action, Treasury 339w, 471–2w, 636–7w, 747–8w, 1173–6w
European Energy and Transport Forum 731–2w
Government information services, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 5w
Housing benefit, Scotland 594w
Iraq, Kurds 388w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1553w
Social Security Fraud Act 2001 811w
Turkey, Politics and government 764w
USA, Terrorism 1317w

Robertson, Hugh
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 325
Defence review (18.07.02) 475
Questions
Acute beds, Kent 1102w
Agriculture, Pay 935w
Asylum, Applications 393w
Carbaryl 936w
Health services, Kent 218–9w
Horticulture, Pay 936w

Robertson, John
Debates etc.
Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill (HL), 2R (22.07.02) 713–5, 728
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Pensioners, Income support (24.07.02) 306–11wh
Questions
International Criminal Court 882w
Warships, Procurement 19w

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Questions
Agriculture, Non-domestic rates 315–6w
Councillors, Disabled 271–2w
Dental services, Gloucestershire 141–2
Dental services, Pensioners 1438w
Ethiopia, Overseas aid 1126w
Housing, Gloucestershire 639w
Overseas investment, Switzerland 958w
Police, Reform 1478w

Robinson, Mrs Iris
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (22.07.02) 768–9

Robinson, Mr Peter D
Questions
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 977

***Roche, Mrs Barbara**, Minister of State and Deputy Minister for Women, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Disadvantaged, Public participation (24.07.02) 294–6wh

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
House of Commons, Recycling 50–1w, 324–5w, 711w
Members, Correspondence 220w, 1379w

Rolling stock
1244w

Romania
Illegal immigrants 399–400w
Regional planning and development 590w
Sustainable development 589w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Questions
Social security benefits, Abuse 1030w

Rosindell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Family practitioner services, Petitions (15.07.02) 128
Questions
Gibraltar, Spain 286, 765w, 883w
HMS Albion 905w
HMS Fearless 760–1w
Postal services, Reform 170–1w

Roy, Mr Frank
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Package holidays, Standards (23.07.02) 231–4wh
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 408w
British nationality, Children 552w
Child Support Agency, Standards 1546w
Coinage 68w
Complementary medicine 1431w
Housing benefit 1561w
Import controls, Forced labour 776w
Income support, Lone parents 511w
Jobseeker's allowance 511w
Pre-school education, Fees and charges 993–4w
Social security benefits, Abuse 1029–30w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1575w
Social security benefits, Personal injury 1578w
Social security benefits, Take-up 596w
Working families tax credit 252w

Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch NHS Trust
Steroid drugs 423w

Royal Centre for Defence Medicine
Housing 163w

Royal charters
Urban areas 799w

Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts
see Historical Manuscripts Royal Commission

Royal family
Finance 1178w, 1182w

Royal Military Academy
Sandhurst 279–82w, 756w

Royal Military School of Music
761–2w

Royal Naval Hospital Haslar
431–2w, (22.07.02) 771–3, 901–2w

Royal Preston Hospital
Kidney patients 1088w

Royal School of Artillery
278–9w, 755–6w

"Royal Society Scientific Review of Infectious Diseases in Livestock"
140–1w

RU486
1434–7w

Ruane, Chris
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 316–7w
Racial violence 665w
Regional airports, Wales 272
Regional planning and development, Finance 63w
Young offenders 664–6w

Ruddock, Joan
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 458
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 1127w
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 21–2w
Armed forces, Deployment 762w

Ruffley, Mr David
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1011
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 931–7
Questions
Animal products, EC external trade 300w
Foot and mouth disease 301w
Meat, Smuggling 299w
Plant Health Inspectorate 301w

Rural areas
Bus services 15–6w, 743–4w
Homelessness 46w
Hospitals 535w
Jobcentres 1580w
New businesses 929–30w, 1330–1w
Transport 1264w

Rural development plans
39w

Rural Payments Agency
Standards 914–5w

Russell, Bob
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 170
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 786
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 191–4wh, 198wh
Questions
A12 1247w
Armed forces, Housing 905–6w
Children, Sports 214w
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 1153w
General Service Medal, Suez 1104w
Housing benefit, Colchester 1015w
Jobcentre Plus, Training 1035w
Military bases, Colchester 1114w
Offences against children 1533–4w
Offences against children, Sports 1163w
Sixth form colleges, Finance 987w
Sports, Children 53w
Sports, Schools 691w
Sports, Vetting 52–3w, 164w
Vetting, Overseas residence 1483w
Vetting, Sports 847w
Vetting, Voluntary work 97w, 555w

Russell, Ms Christine
Questions
Combined heat and power, Greater Manchester 441w
Israel, Arms trade 842
Middle East, Peace negotiations 879w

Russia
NATO 18–9
Radioactive wastes 776–7w

Rwanda
Democratic Republic of Congo 883w
Human rights 3w

S4C
698w

SA80 rifle
757–8w, 1110–1w

Salisbury Plain
Military exercises 901w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 43, (23.07.02) 894, 907, 924, 932, 941–4
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 474–5w
Aggregates levy, Scotland 1228w
Defence, Finance 1111–2w
Energy supply 1335–6w
Fisheries 967–8w
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority 786w
Inland Revenue 1184–5w
Inland Revenue, Administrative delays 1184w
National income 1188w
North Sea oil, Scotland 984w
Public expenditure 1189w
Public expenditure, Devolution 958w
Public expenditure, Scotland 984w, 1177w, 1187w
Public expenditure, Scotland Office 984w, 1187w
Public Works Loan Board 1193–4w
Regional assistance 502w
Scottish White Fish Producers Association 1153w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1552w
Taxation, Offshore workers 1185w, 1229w
Transport, Finance 1176–7w

Salt
Nutrition 1385w

Saltburn
Combined heat and power 441w

Salter, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 450–1
Questions
Dizaei, Ali 1478w

Sanctions
385w
China 385–6w
Iraq 887w
Zimbabwe 821w, 829–33, 1307w

Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Derelict land, Planning permission (24.07.02) 271wh, 275–8wh, 281wh, 288wh
Questions
Coastal areas 324w
Diabetes 191w
Housing 238w
Local government finance 45w
Standard spending assessments 1000–1w

Sandhurst
Royal Military Academy 279–82w, 756w

Saudi Arabia
Terrorism 181w, 834–5

Sausages
204w, 429w, 1154–5w

Savidge, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 471

Savidge, Mr Malcolm*—continued*
Questions
Crime prevention, Young people 694w
Developing countries, Education 1129–30w
Terrorism 10–1

Sawford, Phil
Questions
Bigamy, Convictions 1503w
Employer Direct 1035w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 715w
Hormone treatments, Children 422w
Lorry drivers, Training 265–6w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1015–6
Parliamentary questions, Points of order (24.07.02) 1019
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 631, 639–40
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Flood control (16.07.02) 39–41wh
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 262–5wh
Questions
Air conditioning 1154w
Air conditioning, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1002w
Air conditioning, 10 Downing Street 803w
Hazardous substances, Waste disposal 312w, 483w
Hydrofluorocarbons, Refrigeration 1438w
Sponsorship, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 921w

Schedule 7 to the Terrorism Act 2000 (Information) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(16.07.02) 259–60

Schools
367w
Admissions 56w
Animal experiments 54w
Broadband 1366w
Cheltenham 988w
Discipline 1343w
Finance 1353–4w, 1364w
Governing bodies 378–9w
Information technology 378w
Management 1341w
North West region 1343–4w
Nurses 1392w
Playing fields 989–90w
Sports 691w
Transport 13–5w, 363w, 647w, 1341w

Science
Museums and galleries 1160w

Scotland
Aggregates levy 1228w
Agriculture 308–9w
Airports 983w
Appeals Service 1557–8w
Attendance allowance 112w
Aviation 970w
Basle Concordat 76w
Broadband 76w
Care homes 198w
Channel tunnel railway line 982w
Common agricultural policy 917w
Constituencies 76–7w
Consumers 169–70w
Crown Estate Commissioners 274w, 469w
Customs and Excise 470w, 1171–2w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1159–60w
Dept for International Development 1138w

Scotland—continued
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1583w
Dept of Trade and Industry 350w
Disability living allowance 814–5w
Drug seizures 1179w
Electoral systems 77w
Food Standards Agency 1226w
Housing benefit 594w
Liquefied petroleum gas 502w, 1230–2w
Meat 1232w
Medicine 127w
Minimum wage 1228w
New deal schemes 511–2w
North Sea oil 984w
Plant power 483–4w
Post offices 774w
Prime Minister 1372w
Public expenditure 984w, 1177w, 1187w
Roads 1253w
Scotland Office 1230w
Social security benefits 1552–5w
Treasury 1171–3w
Unemployment 522–3w, 983–4w, 1232w

Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities) (Adaptation of Functions etc) (Amendment) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

Scotland Office
Advertising 382w
Annual reports 769w
Buildings 383w, 768w
Civil servants 382w
Computers 768w
Consultation papers 383w, 769w
Contracts 499–501w
Correspondence 980–1w, 1225w
EC law 382w
Equal opportunities 768w
Females 983w
Gender impact assessment 768w
Grants 767w
Holiday leave 382w
Industrial tribunals 1225w
Information officers 769w, 1226w
Manpower 1228–30w
Members' interests 982w
Ministerial policy advisors 273w, 500w, 766w, 1229w
New deal schemes 980w
Newspaper press 1227w
Non-departmental public bodies 501w, 767w
Offices 980w
Official hospitality 1225–6w
Operating costs 1225w
Orders and regulations 382–3w
Overtime 767w
Pay 382–3w, 980w
Press releases 981w
Private finance initiative 501w
Property 502w
Public expenditure 382–3w, 767w, 984w, 1187w
Publicity 769w
Recruitment 1226w
Regulatory impact assessments 274w
Relocation services 500w
Republic of Ireland 984w
Scotland 1230w
Serials 1226–7w
Standards 76w, 501–2w
Statistics 768w
Telephone services 768w
Temporary employment 1229w
Training 382w
Visits abroad 766–7w, 983w, 1225w

Scotland Office—continued
Wales 982w
Written questions 1228w

Scotland Yard
see Metropolitan Police

Scottish White Fish Producers Association
1153w

Scrapie
30w

Secondary education
Pupils 644w, 1350w

Secondment
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 32–4w
Dept of Trade and Industry 790w

Security
British Airways 970–1w
Internet 394–5w
Nuclear power stations 346w, 785w, 862w
Railway stations 460w

Security guards
Licensing 688w

Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations 2001
Questions
298w

Segregation of prisoners
1075w

Selby
Coal 165–8w

Select committees
(22.07.02) 729–32

Self-assessment
Taxation 472–3w, 1183w

Self-employed
Pensions 114–5w

Self-mutilation
Prisoners 855w

Sellafield
Radioactive wastes 133–4w, 782–3w, 931w

Selous, Andrew
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 867
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 301
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 628
Road traffic, Petitions (16.07.02) 260
Totternhoe, Petitions (19.07.02) 555
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Child Support Agency (16.07.02) 52–5wh
Poverty (18.07.02) 143–7wh, 173wh
Questions
Africa, International assistance 833–4
Public expenditure 465w
Rescue services, Portland 11w
Ringfenced funding, Home Office 1055–6w

Sentencing
85w
Appeals 287–8w
Petitions (23.07.02) 954

Serbia
Land mines 895w

Serials
Dept for Work and Pensions 605w
Scotland Office 1226–7w

Serious Fraud Office
Annual reports 615w
Information technology 612w

Set-aside schemes
488–9w

Sex Offenders Act 1997
Questions
1455w, 1533–4w

Sexual offences
864w, 1454–6w
Hospitals 536w
Life imprisonment 832w

Shadow cabinet
971–2

Shaw, Mr Jonathan
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Packaging, Waste disposal (24.07.02) 249–52wh
Questions
After school clubs, Inspections 1341–2w
Business questions 430
Dyslexia, Hyperactivity 990w
Special educational needs, Teachers 646w
Student Loans Company 642w

Sheep
Disease control 31w
Exports 921–2w

Sheep meat
29w, 878w
CJD 428–9w
France 936–7w
Imports 136w
Wales 277

Sheep premiums
481w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Questions
Africa, HIV infection 1131–2w
Airports, South East region 1236w
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group 1327w
British nationality 636w
Buses, Pollution control 1259–60w
Business 407–8
Cycling, Safety 965w
Design, Environment protection 1333w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 1332w
Embassies 1318w
Energy 711w
Enterprise investment scheme 1184w
Firing ranges, Imber 24–5w, 162w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 1153w
General practitioners, Conditions of employment 1393w
House of Commons, Manpower 1167w
Housing, Planning permission 1008–9w
Land use, Databases 1010–2w
Modern apprenticeships 991–2w
New businesses 1331w
New businesses, Rural areas 1330–1w
Petrol alternatives 963–4w, 1246w
Photovoltaics 952w
Public transport, Fuels 1177w
Rural areas, New businesses 929–30w
Small businesses, Accountancy 1332–3w
Sports, Young people 974w
Taxis, Licensing 1260w
Taxis, Standards 1260w
Tipping of waste 481w
Waste management, Ministry of Defence 907w
Weapons 1317w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1123–4w

Sheikh, Ahmed Omar Saeed
764w

Shellfish
Licensing 310w

Sheltered housing
Neighbourhood nuisance 687w

Sheridan, Mr Jim
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 121–4wh

Shipley, Ms Debra
Questions
British Nuclear Fuels, Contracts 782w
British Nuclear Fuels, Finance 782w
Contact orders 82–3w
Contact orders, Voluntary organisations 525–6w
Criminal Records Bureau 1481–3w
Criminal Records Bureau, Complaints 1481w
Criminal Records Bureau, Standards 1481–2w
Derelict land 1019w
NHS, Finance 1428w
Nuclear power stations, Security 862w
Police, Private finance initiative 560–2w
Regional development agencies, Planning 952–3w
Regional planning and development, Finance 1020–1w
Vacant land, Property development 353w
Vetting, Foreign workers 1482w
Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry 119–20w

Shipman, Harold
974

Shipping
Accidents 8w
Radioactive wastes 169w, 571w

Shoeburyness
Firing ranges 20w

Shops Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

***Short, Rt Hon Clare**, Secretary of State for International Development*
Questions
Afghanistan, Asylum 590–1w, 899–900w
Afghanistan, International assistance 258w, 1126–7w
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 714–5w, 1127–8w
Afghanistan, Politics and government 966–8
Africa, AIDS 717–8w, 965–6
Africa, HIV infection 1131–2w
Africa, Water 1125w
African Union 718w
Albania, Environment protection 588–9w
Angola, Asylum 719–20w
Angola, Famine 585–6w
Annual reports, Dept for International Development 594w
Baltic states, Regional planning and development 589–90w
Burundi, Armed conflict 587w
Burundi, Debts 586–7w
Cameroon, Ethnic groups 1124w
Central Africa, International assistance 591w
Central African Republic, Education 716–7w
Central African Republic, HIV infection 717w
Central African Republic, Politics and government 717w
China, Family planning 1135–6w
Commonwealth, Education 713–4w

Short, Rt Hon Clare—continued
Commonwealth Development Corporation 449–51w, 574–84w, 722w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Debts 450w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Directors 450w, 581–2w, 584w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Pay 575–6w, 580–1w, 583w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Publicity 583w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Redundancy 576w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Sub-Saharan Africa 449w, 576–7w
Community development, Dept for International Development 898w
Computers, Dept for International Development 893w
Consultants, Dept for International Development 893–4w
Consultation papers, Dept for International Development 40–1w, 591–2w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Armed conflict 585w
Democratic Republic of Congo, International assistance 584–5w
Developing countries, Agricultural products 1126w
Developing countries, AIDS 719w
Developing countries, Arms trade 1138w
Developing countries, Children 1137–8w
Developing countries, Common agricultural policy 261w, 1129w
Developing countries, Debts 971
Developing countries, Disease control 719w
Developing countries, Drugs 593–4w
Developing countries, EC external trade 1125–6w
Developing countries, Education 258–60w, 290–1w, 895–6w, 1129–30w
Developing countries, HIV infection 592–3w, 895w
Developing countries, Human rights 720w
Developing countries, Microfinance 293w
Developing countries, Multinational companies 1134–5w
Developing countries, Overseas companies 720w, 970–1
Developing countries, Poverty 260w, 968–70
Developing countries, Renewable energy 1130–1w
Developing countries, Trade 261w
Directors, Dept for International Development 1129w
Eastern Europe, Iron and steel 1130w
Eastern Europe, Overseas aid 1128w
Environment protection, International cooperation 39–40w
Ethiopia, Overseas aid 1126w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, EC enlargement 1132w
Group of Eight, Kananaskis Summit 896–7w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 715w, 1131w
India, Females 260w
India, Overseas aid 1129w
Indonesia, Forests 591w
Information officers, Dept for International Development 721w
International assistance 1133–4w
International Development Association 899w
Internet, Dept for International Development 900w
Kenya, Microfinance 293w

Short, Rt Hon Clare—continued
Know-How Fund, Environment protection 720w
Knowledge for Development Challenge Fund 44w
Lesotho, Famine 717w
Liberia, Armed conflict 260–1w
Liberia, Overseas aid 715w
Malawi, Overseas aid 588w, 1138w
Manpower, Dept for International Development 1133w
Microcredit Summit 899w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 900w, 1132w
Mittal, Lakshmi 290w
Mozambique, Food 42–3w, 587w
North Africa, Water 588w
Overseas aid 41–2w, 715–6w, 1136w
Overseas aid, Health education 1128–9w
Overseas aid, Health services 1124–5w
Overseas aid, HIV infection 894–6w
Overseas aid, Water supply 1134w
Papua New Guinea, Forests 591w
Poverty 44w
Public expenditure, Dept for International Development 290w
Public participation, Dept for International Development 1135w
Publicity, Dept for International Development 721–2w
Romania, Regional planning and development 590w
Romania, Sustainable development 589w
Scotland, Dept for International Development 1138w
Serbia, Land mines 895w
Sierra Leone, Health services 1137w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 717w
Sierra Leone, Politics and government 1136–7w
Somalia, International assistance 41w
Somalia, Livestock 41w, 1136w
South Africa, HIV infection 291w
Southern Africa, Famine 587w
Southern Africa, Overseas aid 1124w
Sub-Saharan Africa, Overseas aid 1125w
Sub-Saharan Africa, Water 291–2w
Syrian Arab Republic, Overseas aid 43w
Tanzania, Overseas aid 44w
Temporary employment, Dept for International Development 1132–3w
Uganda, Armed conflict 588w, 899w
Uganda, Microfinance 292–3w
Ukraine, AIDS 1388–9w
Veterinary medicine, Research 1135w
Visits abroad, Dept for International Development 43–4w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 258w, 1131w
Zimbabwe, Agriculture 586w
Zimbabwe, Asylum 586w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 897w, 1124w

Sick leave
Cheshire Constabulary 1538–9w
Emergency services 1053w
Metropolitan Police 1049–50w
Police 1480w
Prison Service 1053w, 1070–6w
Public sector 820w
Solicitor-General 288w

Sierra Leone
Armed forces 1308w
Elections 1309w
Health services 1137w
Overseas aid 717w
Peace keeping operations 1309–10w
Peace negotiations 886w, 1308–11w
Politics and government 1136–7w

Silverstone
Bypasses 1249–51w

Simmonds, Mr Mark
Questions
Crimes of violence, Wales 321w
Manufacturing industries, Trade competitiveness 417
Schools, Admissions 56w

Simplifying Pensions Legislation Review
see Private Pension Legislation Review

Simpson, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Domestic Combined Heat and Power (Reduction in VAT) Bill, 1R (24.07.02) 1020
Questions
Dietary supplements, EC action 413–4w, 1440–1w
Transport, Radioactive wastes 1262w

Simpson, Mr Keith
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 344w
Food, Safety 430–1w
Poultry meat, Imports 1152–3w
Poultry meat, Safety 429–31w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 1244w
Railways, Speed limits 1244w

Singapore
Air routes 17–8w

Single parents
see Lone parents

Sixth form colleges
Finance 987w

"Sixth Report on Euro Preparations"
470–1w

Skill force scheme
156w

Skin cancer
208–9w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Questions
Pensions 403

Slaughterhouses
930–1w

Sleeping rough
243w
Exservicemen 753–4w

Slovakia
Armed forces 275–6w

Small Business Service
1338w
Finance 1337w

Small businesses
172w, 1333–6w
Accountancy 1332–3w
Investors in people 993–4w
Loan guarantee scheme 778w
Regulation 351–2w, 437–8w
Tax burden 467w
Wales 319w

Small Enterprise Development Agency
Finance 292w

Small School Support Fund
369–71w

Smallpox
Vaccination 1086–7w, 1390–1w

***Smith, Rt Hon Andrew**, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Annual reports, Dept for Work and Pensions 1035w
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 1582w
Financial Services Consumer Panel, Bank services 270w
Members, Correspondence 294w, 1587w

Smith, Geraldine
Questions
Dental services, Morecambe 190w
Health services, Morecambe 656w
Speech therapy, Morecambe 656w

Smith, Helen
1531w

***Smith, Jacqui**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Questions
Acute beds 124w
Alzheimer's disease, Prescription drugs 1399–400w
Arthritis, Surgery 214w
Asthma, Medical treatments 1423–4w
Baby care units 120w
Care homes 198w, 1089–90w, 1402w
Care homes, Closures 1401–2w
Care homes, Fees and charges 202w, 654w, 1400–1w
Care homes, Finance 872–3w
Care homes, Qualifications 1402w
Care homes, Scotland 198w
Care homes, South West region 197w
Care homes, Standard spending assessments 197–8w
Care homes, Standards 124–5w, 199w, 1401w
Care homes, Surrey 121w
Care homes, Training 1089w
Care homes, Vetting 873–4w
Carers 541w
Carers, Greater London 219w
Carers, Medical records 1401w
Childbirth 119w, 208w
Children, Abuse 122–3w
Children, Diseases 124w, 1422–3w
Children, Housing 1215w
Children, Sports 214w
Children in care 123w, 1424–7w
Children in care, General certificate of secondary education 123w
Children in care, Isle of Sheppey 123w
Children in care, South West region 1100w
Chronic fatigue syndrome, Complementary medicine 538w
Cystic fibrosis, Screening 200w
Dementia 191–2w
Dental services, Morecambe 190w
Disability aids 201w, 1092w
Disabled, Young people 121–2w
Drugs, Misuse 1504w
Elderly, Staffordshire 190–1w
Epilepsy 1406–9w
Forced marriage 658w
Foster care 117–8w, 662w, 1402–4w
Foster care, Ethnic groups 119w
Foster care, Greater London 1221–2w
Foster care, Recruitment 541w, 1402w
Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption 1404w
Health services, Elderly 128–9w
Health services, Morecambe 656w
Hearing aids 215–7w, 1091–2w, 1398w
Hospital beds 867–8w, 1092w, 1094–8w, 1418–9w
Hospital beds, Greater London 640w, 660w, 1221w

***Smith, Jacqui**—continued*
Hospital beds, Lancashire 204–5w
Hospitals, Admissions 206w
Hospitals, Infectious diseases 1398–9w
Kidney patients, Lancashire 1088w
Local government finance 125w
Maternity services, Standards 1097w
Members, Correspondence 661w, 1091w, 1379w, 1394w
Mental Health Bill (Draft) 191w, 661w
Mental health services 126–7w, 196w, 538–9w
Mental health services, Children 123w, 125–6w, 1098w
Mental health services, Ethnic groups 197w
Mental health services, Expenditure 1098w
Mental health services, Finance 540w
Mental health services, Hospital beds 139–41
Mental health services, Physiotherapy 876–7w
Mental health services, Primary care trusts 192–6w
Mental health services, Waiting lists 197w, 1420w
Mental health services, Worcestershire 127w
Mental patients 538w, 660–1w
Mentally ill, Employment 123–4w, 126w, 196w
Mentally ill, Hospital beds 1419–20w
Mentally ill, Prisoners 126w
Multiple sclerosis, Drugs 199w
Multiple sclerosis, Respite care 199w
National Care Standards Commission, Finance 213–4w
Neurofibromatosis 1387w
Neurology 868w
Personal care services 128w
Pregnancy 1437–8w
Royal Preston Hospital, Kidney patients 1088w
Social Care Inspection Commission, Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission 1409w
Social services, Elderly 1098–9w
Social services, Expenditure 1089w
Social services, Finance 1409w
Social services, Greater London 531–4w, 654–6w
Social services, Standards 119w
Social workers, Greater London 655w
Social workers, South East region 1092w
Social workers, Southern region 1400w
Social workers, Training 541w
Social workers, Vacancies 1094w
Special hospitals 124w
Special hospitals, Hospital beds 1418w
Speech therapy, Morecambe 656w
Strokes, Medical treatments 1424w
Suicide, Females 152–4
Victoria Climbie Death Inquiry 119–20w, 541w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1431w

Smith, Mr John
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 867
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 314, 334, 363–71, 378
Defence review (18.07.02) 468
Questions
Business questions 433–4
Manufacturing industries, Wales 318w
RAF St Athan 162w
Regional airports, Wales 271

Smith, Llew
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 312
Questions
Cancer 415w
Dental services, Wales 276–7
Environment, Ministerial policy advisors 312w
Gulf War syndrome, Compensation 491w
Mixed oxide fuel 157w
Office for Civil Nuclear Security, Annual reports 353w
Office for Civil Nuclear Security, Training 353w, 1337–8w
QinetiQ, Environment protection 912–3w
Radioactive fallout, Chernobyl 316w
Renewable energy 890–2w
S4C 698w

Smith Inquiry
see Harold Shipman Tribunal of Inquiry

Smoking
426–8w
Industrial health and safety 732w

Smuggling
1173w
Drugs (22.07.02) 803–6
Meat 299w, 481–2w, 1232w
Northern Ireland 507–8w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 542
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 882
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 251, (24.07.02) 1001
Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 481, 498
Questions
Credit unions 419–20
Drugs, Northern Ireland 508w
Gulf War syndrome, Compensation 878w
Herbal medicine, EC law 151
International Criminal Court, USA 846
Terrorism, Finance 387w

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 469–70
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 38
Questions
Copaxone 199w
Military bases, West Sussex 164w
Primary care trusts 147–8
Regulation, Dept of Trade and Industry 170w

Social Care Inspection Commission
Health Care Audit and Inspection Commission 1409w

Social Fund
270w, 510w, 596–7w, 1579–80w, 1582–3w
Annual reports 1034w

Social rented housing
1210–1w

Social security benefits
112–3w, 1028–9w, 1036w
Abuse 595–6w, 807–9w, 1029–31w, 1036–8w, 1555–8w
Administrative delays 596w
Appeals 114w, 1033–4w, 1557–8w
Applications 600w
Automated credit transfer 597–601w, 805–7w, 809–11w, 1029w, 1031–2w, 1550–2w, 1579w
Borders region 1552w
Carers 111–2w
Children in care 813–4w

Social security benefits—continued
Deductions 1589–92w
Disability aids 1558w
Disabled 1569–73w, 1575w
Disqualification 815–8w, 1024–6w
Kirklees 1030w
Mortgages 1584w
North West region 269w
Pensioners 295w
Personal injury 1578w
Portsmouth 521–2w
Post offices 438w, 600–1w
Publicity 116w
Scotland 1552–5w
Take-up 596w
Voluntary work 1554–5w
Wales 1553w
Widowed people 1559–60w

Social Security Contributions Agency
Computers 295w
Manpower 473w

Social Security Fraud Act 2001
Questions
811w

Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997
Questions
1578w

Social services
Elderly 1098–9w
Expenditure 1089w
Finance 1409w
Greater London 249w, 531–4w, 654–6w
Oxfordshire (22.07.02) 795–9
Standard spending assessments 48w
Standards 119w

Social workers
Greater London 655w
South East region 1092w
Southern region 1400w
Training 541w
Vacancies 1094w

Socrates programme
56w

Soft drinks
Caffeine 1440w
Glucuronolactone 1440w
Taurine 1440w

Solar power
788w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 868
Questions
Trinidad and Tobago, Politics and government 5w

Solicitor-General
Annual reports 615w
Buildings 289–90w
EC law 288w
Holiday leave 288–9w
Manpower 616w
Official hospitality 614w
Orders and regulations 289w
Pay 615–6w
Public expenditure 612–3w, 617w
Repairs and maintenance 287w
Sick leave 288w
Standards 289w, 613–4w
Training 615–6w, 913–4w
Visits abroad 615w

Solicitors
Regulation 1279–80w
Treasury 1199w

Solihull Hospital
Accident and emergency departments 209–10w, 660w

Somalia
International assistance 41w
Livestock 41w, 1136w

Somerset
Bus services 1243w
Crime 1457–9w
Hospitals (23.07.02) 239–46wh
Pupil exclusions 645w

Somerset College for Arts and Technology
Finance 1351w

South Africa
Double taxation 959w
HIV infection 291w

South Bank Centre
Expenditure 696–7w

South East Asia
Disease control 281

South East region
Air routes 733w
Airports 1236w
Housing 465w, 980
Social workers 1092w
Transport 1265w

South Tyneside
Antisocial behaviour orders 830–2w

South West region
Care homes 197w
Children in care 1100w
Economic situation 467w
Roads 1247w

South Yorkshire
Acceptable behaviour contracts 557w
Antisocial behaviour orders 557–8w

Southampton
NHS Direct 421w

Southern Africa
Famine 587w
Overseas aid 1124w

Southern region
Customs and Excise 70w
Social workers 1400w
Warehouse parties 401w

Southworth, Ms Helen
Questions
Hospitals, Industrial health and safety 1418w

Sovereignty
Western Sahara 180–1w

Spain
Fisheries 621w
Gibraltar 1w, 281w, 286, 391–2w, 473–4w, 611–2w, 765w, 882–3w

Speaker and deputies
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (15.07.02) 47, 72, 92, 102, 117, (16.07.02) 177, 187, 189, 196, 199, 204, 208, 213, (18.07.02) 480, 484, 504–5, 507, 528–9, (19.07.02) 558, 594–5, 610, 630, (24.07.02) 1045, 1050, 1060
Conduct of proceedings (15.07.02) 30–1, 35, 37, 44, 72, 84, 99, (16.07.02) 160, 190–1, 230, 234, (17.07.02) 276, 278, 286, 294, 329, 332, (18.07.02) 411, 426, 443, 451, 472, 491, 497, 528, 530, 533, 545, 550, (19.07.02) 565–6, 571, 582, 613, 618, 623, 630, (22.07.02) 650, 660, 666, 681, 688, 765, 776, (23.07.02) 851,

Speaker and deputies—continued
856, 868, 881, 884, 891, 897, 919–20, (24.07.02) 964, 968–9, 983, 985, 990, 993, 1000, 1053
Deferred divisions (17.07.02) 351–2, (24.07.02) 1043
Disallowed questions (22.07.02) 656, (24.07.02) 972
Orders and regulations motions (15.07.02) 127, (16.07.02) 259, (17.07.02) 387, (22.07.02) 820
Points of order (17.07.02) 305–6, (18.07.02) 476–7, 530, 533–4, 536, (19.07.02) 556–7, 579, 631–40, (22.07.02) 705, (23.07.02) 886, 891, (24.07.02) 1018–20, 1044, 1049
Private Members' bill orders (19.07.02) 631–40
Royal Assent (24.07.02) 1080
Rulings and statements, Amendments and new clauses (16.07.02) 177, (18.07.02) 480
Rulings and statements, Deferred divisions (18.07.02) 537–8, (19.07.02) 556, (24.07.02) 1044
Rulings and statements, Members (24.07.02) 1018
Rulings and statements, Members' constituency work (23.07.02) 885
Rulings and statements, Parliamentary procedure (18.07.02) 477
Rulings and statements, Private Members' bills (19.07.02) 556
Rulings and statements, Twelve minutes rule (16.07.02) 225
Select Committee motions (22.07.02) 729, 732
Standing Order No 24 applications, Moorside Mining (15.07.02) 45–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Conduct of proceedings (16.07.02) 29wh, 39wh, (17.07.02) 76wh, 82wh, 88wh, 112wh, 121wh, (18.07.02) 162wh, (23.07.02) 182wh, 187wh, 189wh, 201wh, 207wh, 223wh, (24.07.02) 255wh, 259wh, 267wh, 277wh, 305wh
Rulings and statements, Speeches (24.07.02) 274–5wh

Special constables
Buckinghamshire 672w
Manpower 855–6w
Metropolitan Police 221w
Recruitment 221w, 672w, 1054–5w

Special educational needs
188w, 1354w
Finance 1354w
Higher education 452w
Pre-school education 995–6w
Teachers 646w

Special hospitals
124w
Hospital beds 1418w

Specialist schools
363w, 644w
Admissions 363w

Speech therapy
Morecambe 656w

Speed limits
328w, 675–8w, 1248w
Cameras 687w
Driving offences 105w, 827w
Railways 1244w

***Spellar, Rt Hon John**, Minister for Transport, Department for Transport*
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (23.07.02) 855
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Manchester Airport (24.07.02) 302–5wh
Questions
A3 1248w
Channel tunnel, Freight 968w
Embassies, USA 145w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 1237w
London Underground, Standards 1238–40w
Network Rail 1245w
Public transport 1261–2w
Public transport, Injuries 6w
Railtrack, Finance 1239w
Railway track 1244w
Railways, Finance 1240w
Railways, Freight 969w
Railways, Insurance 1240w
Railways, Plymouth 569w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 1239–41w
Railways, Vandalism 1240w
Roads, Construction 1254w
Roads, Greater London 145–6w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 1257w
Roads, Tolls 1256w
Rolling stock 1244w
10 Downing Street, Access 1251w
Transport, EC action 1272w
Transport, Planning 145w

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 866
Questions
Afghanistan, Asylum 590–1w, 899–900w
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 714–5w
African Union 718w
Angola, Asylum 719–20w
Botswana, AIDS 964–5
Developing countries, AIDS 719w
Developing countries, Disease control 719w
Developing countries, Human rights 720w
Domestic violence, Convictions 849–50w
Liberia, Armed conflict 900w
Liberia, Overseas aid 715w
Malawi, Overseas aid 1138w
Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence 1340w
Prisoners 2w
Tanzania, Overseas aid 44w

Spicer, Sir Michael
Questions
A46 1246w
Army, Manpower 6

Spink, Bob
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 540–1, 544
Business questions intervention (18.07.02) 429
Commonwealth Bill, 3R (19.07.02) 605
Education, Castle Point (22.07.02) 821–5
Hospices, Finance (22.07.02) 777–80
House of Commons, Points of order (19.07.02) 556–7
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 573–6, 581–2, 598–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 102–4wh, 108wh
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 74wh, 80–2wh
Flood control (16.07.02) 22wh, 36wh
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 558–9w
Baby care units 120w

Spink, Bob—continued
Business questions 432
Council housing 1205–10w
Crime prevention, Finance 794–5w
Crime prevention, Retail trade 795–6w, 862–4w, 1466w
Crimes of violence, Retail trade 682–3w
Electronic voting 664–6
Floods, Canvey Island 933–4w
Gibraltar, Spain 882–3w
Housing benefit 1562–3w
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, Annual reports 207–8w
Members, Computers 711w
Nurses, HIV infection 537w
Pension credit 510w
Planning, Castle Point 1218w
Prisons, Inspections 1501–2w
Sports, Clubs 660–1
Teachers, Training 364–7w
UK membership of EC 469w
Urban areas, Royal charters 799w

Sponsorship
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 921w

Sport England
see English Sports Council

Sports
Children 53w, 214w
Chorley 699w
Clubs 660–1
Drugs 696w
Finance 164w, 975–6w, 978w, 1162–3w
Health 975w
Holiday play schemes 693–4w
Obesity 432–4w
Offences against children 1163w
Overseas aid 473w
Schools 691w
Taunton 51w
Vetting 52–3w, 164w, 847w
Voluntary work 498w
Young people 658–9, 692w, 974–5w

Spring, Mr Richard
Questions
Africa, International assistance 834
Zimbabwe, EC action 174w

Squire, Ms Rachel
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 352–5
Questions
Criminal Records Bureau, Annual reports 554w
Pensioners, Incapacity benefit 1569w
Prison Service, Annual reports 564w
Prison Service, Environment protection 564w
Taxation, Hearing aids 1173w
United Kingdom Passport Agency, Annual reports 552–3w

Stafford
Education (22.07.02) 759–61

Staffordshire
Elderly 190–1w

Standard spending assessments
1000–1w
Care homes 197–8w
Education 1215w
Social services 48w

Standing Committee on Regional Affairs
(15.07.02) 46

Standing committees
325w

Standing Order No 24 applications
Moorside Mining (15.07.02) 45

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Questions
BBC External Services 1320–1w
Gibraltar, Spain 611–2w

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Questions
Access to work programme 1566w
Annual reports, Dept for Work and Pensions 1035w
Local government, Contracts 1020w
Members, Correspondence 477w
Security guards, Licensing 688w

State retirement pensions
114–6w, 294w, 518w, 1039w, 1539–42w
Dorset 268w

State second pension
Publicity 1545w

State Veterinary Service
Manpower 921w

"Statement on the Community Budget 2002"
822w

Stationery
Dept of Trade and Industry 790w

Statistics
Cabinet Office 236w
Dept for Education and Skills 1365w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1024w
Gibraltar 765w
Home Office 397–8w, 556–7w
Scotland Office 768w

Statistics Commission
Annual reports 336w, 1170w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Elderly, Social services (23.07.02) 878
Housing (18.07.02) 456
Questions
Bees, Diseases 489w
Data protection, Business 1326w
Deregulation Task Force 956w
Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government 1205w
Individual learning accounts 452–3w, 992w, 1351w
Jobcentres, Rural areas 1580w
Maintenance, Children 516–7w
Maintenance, Overseas residence 267w
Members, Correspondence 699w, 1091w, 1142w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 334w
Occupational pensions 469w, 518w, 520w
Pensions 518–9w
Police, Recruitment 103–4w
Poultry, Animal welfare 1154w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1299w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 167
Questions
Local government finance 240w

Steroid drugs
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch NHS Trust 423w

Stevenson, Mr George
Questions
Local government finance 44–5w

Stewart, Mr David
Questions
Airports, Landing rights 1235w

***Stewart, Mr David**—continued*
Aviation, Military bases 1114–5w, 1234–5w
Diabetes, Screening 191w
Fire services, Offshore industry 638w
Gatwick Airport 1234w
Gatwick Airport, Air routes 1241w
Gatwick Airport, Landing rights 1234w
Genetics, Identification of criminals 1517w
Heathrow Airport 1234w
Heathrow Airport, Landing rights 1234–5w
Post offices, Bank services 953w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 601w
Social security benefits, Post offices 600–1w

Stewart, Ian
Questions
Vaccination, Compensation 1593w

Stillman, Ian
Petitions (23.07.02) 953–4

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 203–5wh
Questions
Drugs, Crime 87w, 396–7w, 667–8w
Drugs, Misuse 87–8w, 404w
Homelessness, Finance 997[illegible]
Judges, Housing 1303–5w
Life imprisonment 1519–20w
Prisoners 1506–8w
Prisoners, Ethnic groups 1508–16w

Stoate, Dr Howard
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 452
Questions
National Land Information Service 151–3w

Stocks and shares
64w, 68w, 1199w

Strang, Eden
1531w

"Strategic Defence Review a New Chapter White Paper"
(18.07.02) 460–75

Strategic Rail Authority
567–8w
Accountancy 745–6w
Finance 12w, 746w

Strategy Unit
641w

***Straw, Rt Hon Jack**, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*
Questions
EC defence policy 611w
Government Communications Headquarters 389w
Government information services, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 5w
India, Terrorism 879w
Intelligence services 4w
Israel, Arms trade 839–42
Liberia, Armed conflict 900w
Ministerial policy advisors, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321–2w
Prisoners 2w
Saudi Arabia, Terrorism 834–5
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 829–33

Stringer, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Games, Manchester (22.07.02) 743–5

***Stringer, Mr Graham**—continued*
Questions
Complaints Audit Committee, Annual reports 1043–4w
Criminal Courts Review 1078w

Strokes
Medical treatments 1424w

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Questions
Convention on the Future of Europe 3w
Maintenance, Children 819w
Poland, EC enlargement 843

Student Loans Company
642w

Student numbers
Higher education 1[illegible]–7w

Students
Medicine 772w
Morley 57w

Stunell, Mr Andrew
Questions
Business questions 425–7
Energy, Dept for Education and Skills 53w
Energy, Dept for Work and Pensions 1023–4w
Energy, Dept of Health 663w
Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry 77–8w
Energy, Home Office 544w

Submarines
759w
Nuclear reactors 490w

Sub-Saharan Africa
Commonwealth Development Corporation 449w, 576–7w
Overseas aid 1125w
Water 291–2w

Suckler cow premiums
481w

Sudan
Armed conflict 837–9
International assistance 882w
UN Convention Against Torture 609w

Suez
General Service Medal 907–8w, 1104w

Suicide
Females 152–4
Prisoners 828–9w, 1463–4w, 1519w, 1537–8w
Probation and aftercare 1519–20w

Sure start programme
182w
Maternity payments 1559w

Surgery
426w
Arthritis 214w
Cancer 422w
Heart diseases 1380–2w
Private sector 202w
Waiting lists 418w, 536w

Surrey
Care homes 121w
Driving offences 827w
Education 1352w
Maternity services 1097w
Teachers 1343–4w

Surrey and Sussex Health Authority
Waiting lists 1416–7w

Surrey Police
Finance 1470–1w

Sussex Police
Early retirement 835w
Finance 1459w

Sustainable development
Agriculture 75w, 300w
Romania 589w

Sutton
Beta-interferon 423w

Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre
147w
Industrial health and safety 458–9w

Swayne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (18.07.02) 426
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 361–3
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 637–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Criminal Records Bureau (23.07.02) 179–84wh, 189wh
Flood control (16.07.02) 35–6wh
Questions
Arthritis, Surgery 214w
Attendance allowance 1582w
Care homes 1089–90w
Care homes, Qualifications 1402w
Care homes, Training 1089w
Care homes, Vetting 873–4w
Developing countries, Debts 971
Disability living allowance 1573w
Jobcentres, New Forest 812w
Medical treatments, Radiation exposure 1434w
National income 403–4
New Forest, National parks 707–8w
Oil, Pollution 12–3w
Pain, Medical treatments 423w
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 829–30

Swimming pools
Leominster 691–2w

Swine fever
301w

Swire, Mr Hugo
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 235, 248–50
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 1127–8w
BBC 694w
Departmental expenditure limits, Home Office 1078w
Government art collection 1180w
Multiple sclerosis, Respite care 199w

Switzerland
Overseas investment 958w

Syms, Mr Robert
Questions
Crime prevention 851–2w
Fluoride, Drinking water 417–8w
Fluoride, Food 418w
Fluoride, Toothpaste 417w
Public expenditure, Home Office 1078w

Syrian Arab Republic
Overseas aid 43w

Taiwan
World Health Organisation 117w

Takeovers
350–1w

Tameside College
1367w

Tami, Mark
Debates etc.
Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 358–61

Tami, Mark—continued
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 1455–8w
Antisocial behaviour orders 664w
Crime, Wales 273–4
Flood control 934w
Playgrounds 530–1w
Police 670–1w
Private roads 344w
Private roads, Local government services 344–5w
Road traffic offences, Private roads 688w
Speed limits 675–8w
Speed limits, Cameras 687w
Tobacco, Young people 1456w

Tanzania
Overseas aid 44w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 37
Questions
Business 407

Taunton
Learndirect centres 1351–2w
Pensioners 1160w
Railways 1243w
Sports 51w

Taurine
Soft drinks 1440w

Tax allowances
Animal breeding 255w
Pollution control 242w

"Tax Benefit Reference Manual, 2002/03"
960w

Tax burden
1191w
Small businesses 467w

Tax credit
467w

Tax Credits (Definition and Calculation of Income) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determination of Rates) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

Tax evasion
Personation 256w

Taxation
251w
Hearing aids 1173w
Offshore workers 1185w, 1229w
Overseas residence 1173w
Pensions 283, 295–6w, 602w, 1200w
Self-assessment 472–3w, 1183w

Taxis
Licensing 1260w
Peterborough 459–60w
Pollution control 1259–60w
Standards 1260w

Taxpayers
Yorkshire and Humberside 256–8w

Taylor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 960–1
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1013
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 299–300
Education, Finance (16.07.02) 165
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 915, 939
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 767, 778

Taylor, Mr David—continued
Questions
EC grants and loans, Wales 320–1w
National Foundation for Youth Music 1158w
Recycling 36w
Recycling, Standards 35–6w
Special educational needs 1354w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 458

Taylor, Mr John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Derelict land, Planning permission (24.07.02) 272wh, 274wh
Questions
Inheritance tax 463w
Solihull Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 209–10w, 660w
West Midlands Police, Recruitment 1050–3w

Taylor, Matthew
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 34–5
Questions
British overseas territories, Financial services 1315–6w
Bypasses, Silverstone 1249–51w
Data protection, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1303w
Defence, USA 1113w
Government departments, Cost effectiveness 824w
Inflation 65w
National Savings Agency, Advertising 1197w
NHS, Pensions 1411w
Office for National Statistics, Codes of practice 66w
Public appointments, Treasury 1195–6w
Public expenditure, Standards 824w
Public finance 821w, 1190w
Recruitment, Treasury 1197w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Education and Skills 1363w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1262w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Work and Pensions 1581–2w
Republic of Ireland, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1320w
Republic of Ireland, Home Office 1055w
Republic of Ireland, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1292w
Republic of Ireland, Ministry of Defence 762w, 1113w
Republic of Ireland, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1372w
Republic of Ireland, Prime Minister 1369w
Republic of Ireland, Scotland Office 984w
Republic of Ireland, Treasury 1188w
Standards, Dept of Health 410
Tax burden 1191w
Taxation, Overseas residence 1173w
Teachers, Pensions 1344w
Welfare tax credits 254–5w

Taylor, Dr Richard
Questions
Acute beds 219w
Influenza, Vaccination 1391w
Sports, Health 975w
Sports, Young people 975w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 864

Taylor, Sir Teddy—continued
Questions
Asylum, Applications 90w
Defence Fire Service 16
Firing ranges, Shoeburyness 20w
Housing, Prices 466w
Immigration controls, France 219–20w
National Lottery 650
Voting rights, Young people 700w

Teachers
Ethnic groups 364w
Foreign workers 368–9w, 645w
Manpower 364w
North West region 1345–6w
Pensions 1344w
Recruitment 372w
Retirement 364w
Special educational needs 646w
Surrey 1343–4w
Training 57w, 364–7w, 1352–3w
Vacancies 57–60w
Wales 320w

Teenage pregnancy
70–4w, 416–7w, 1196–7w, 1386–8w

Telecommunications
Data protection 1465w
Disability aids 405–7w

Telecommunications masts
see Aerials

Telecommunications Transmitters (Restrictions on Planning Applications) (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 637

Telecommunications Working Group
47–8w, 1009w

Telephone services
Child Benefit Centre 266w
Dept for Education and Skills 1364w
Dept for Work and Pensions 518w
Dept of Trade and Industry 791w, 954–6w
Home Office 848w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 82w
Northern Ireland Office 1201w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 322w
Scotland Office 768w
Transport 327–8w

Telephone tapping
Admissibility of evidence 1517w

Telephones
Concessions 530w

Television
Licensing 661, 1160w
Ministry of Defence 283w

Temporary employment
Dept for International Development 1132–3w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1264w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1587w
EC action (15.07.02) 127
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1322w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1374–5w
Scotland Office 1229w
Treasury 1187w

10 Downing Street
Access 1251w
Air conditioning 803w
Repairs and maintenance 804w, 1368–9w

Tennis
695w

Termination of employment
Consignia 348w

Territorial Army
20w

Terrorism
9–12, 553–4w, 972–4
Chemical and biological warfare 553w
Energy supply 842–3w
Finance 387w, 959w
India 879w
Insurance 960w
Northern Ireland 975–7
Saudi Arabia 181w, 834–5
USA 1317w

Terrorism Act 2000 (Cessation of Effect of Section 76) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 310

Textiles
Training 1367w, 1594–5w
Wales (18.07.02) 546–54

Thailand
Aviation 763–4w

Thames Valley
Magistrates' courts 1081–2w, 1293w

Thameslink railway line
971w

The Tote
see Horserace Totalisator Board

Theatre
497w
Barnsley 691w

Theft
Cellular phones 555w, 825–6w, 1479–80w, 1484–5w
Heathrow Airport 859w
Postal services 774w

***Thomas, Gareth**, (Clwyd West)*
Debates etc.
Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 303
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 560, 575, 577

***Thomas, Mr Gareth**, (Harrow West)*
Debates etc.
Islam (19.07.02) 641–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Planning, Greater London (16.07.02) 14wh
Questions
Army, Edinburgh 1115w
Army Personnel Centre, Standards 1118–9w
Asylum, Applications 860–1w
Centre for Management and Policy Studies, Annual reports 725–6w
Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency, Standards 1117–8w
Environment Agency, Public appointments 1144w
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, Pay 354w
Historic buildings, Finance 695–6w
Industrial health and safety 81w
Infliximab 207w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 10–1w
Playing fields 1162w
QinetiQ, Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation 1122–3w
Queen Victoria School, Standards 1122w
Renewable energy 324w, 353–4w
Sports, Clubs 660
Sports, Finance 1162–3w
War graves, Wrecks 1115w

Thomas, Mr Gareth—continued
Warship Support Agency, Standards 1115–6w
Water sports 934w

Thomas, Simon
Debates etc.
Textiles, Wales (18.07.02) 546–50
Written questions, Points of order (24.07.02) 1019
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 21–2w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 132–3w, 1378w
Dental services, Wales 276
Developing countries, Renewable energy 1130–1w
Dredging, Wales 37–8w
Elections, Wales 699w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 306w
Indonesia, Hawk aircraft 3–4w
Oral questions, Dept of Health 1431w
Pensions 1040w
Pensions, Advisory services 1544–5w
Water supply, Wales 317w

Throckmorton airfield
Asylum 1373w

Thurso, John
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 865

Timetabling of bills
(15.07.02) 46–126, (16.07.02) 176–215, (18.07.02) 478–533, (24.07.02) 1059–64

***Timms, Mr Stephen**, Minister of State, E-Commerce and Competitiveness, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Broadband, Huntingdon 439w
Consignia, Termination of employment 348w
Electronic commerce, Private sector 781w
Electronic commerce, Public private partnerships 960–1w
Post offices, Bank services 438–9w, 815w, 945w, 953w
Post offices, Closures 944–5w
Post offices, Disabled 349w
Post offices, Information services 172w, 947w
Post offices, Scotland 774w
Post offices, Social security benefits 438w
Postal services 171w, 353w
Postal services, Fees and charges 348w, 445–6w
Postal services, Government assistance 349w
Postal services, Reform 170–1w
Postal services, Theft 774w
Postal services, Wirral 774w
Postal workers, Vacancies 350w
Postal workers, Vetting 349w
Radio, Licensing 949–50w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Debates etc.
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries (22.07.02) 687
Questions
Agriculture, Subsidies 312w, 488w
Agriculture, Sustainable development 75w
Countryside, Access 137w
Euro, Overseas trade 1198w
Rural development plans 39w
Social security benefits, Appeals 1033–4w

Tipping of waste
28–9w, 315w, 481w

Tipping of waste—continued
Planning permission 941w

Tobacco
Young people 1456w

Todd, Mr Mark
Questions
Beta-interferon, Derbyshire 203w
Flood control 303w, 703–4w
Herbal medicine, EC law 151
London Underground, Standards 1238–40w

Tolls
Roads 149w, 573w, 736–7w, 1255–6w

Tonge, Dr Jenny
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 867–8
Richmond Park, Petitions (15.07.02) 128
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asia, Christianity (17.07.02) 104–6wh
Export credit guarantees (23.07.02) 209wh, 213wh, 216wh, 218–20wh
Questions
Africa, AIDS 966
Developing countries, Arms trade 1138w
Developing countries, Common agricultural policy 1129w
Developing countries, Education 1130w
Endometriosis 423–4w
Group of Eight, Kananaskis Summit 896–7w
Hospitals, Consultants 139
International Monetary Fund 1139w
Nepal, Armed forces 886w
Nepal, Human rights 610w
Sudan, UN Convention Against Torture 609w
Uganda, Armed conflict 588w, 899w
Visits abroad, Treasury 1188w

Toothpaste
Fluoride 417w

Totternhoe
Petitions (19.07.02) 555

***Touhig, Mr Don**, Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales*
Debates etc.
Textiles, Wales (18.07.02) 551–4
Questions
Community development, Wales 317w
Crime, Wales 273–5
Hospitals, Waiting lists 321w
Mental health services, Wales 322w
New deal schemes, Wales 322w
Police, Wales 272–3
Sheep meat, Wales 277
Teachers, Wales 320w
Water supply, Wales 317w

Tourism
1158–9w
Euro 695w
Foot and mouth disease 693w
Oxfordshire 693w

Tourists
Expenditure 497w

Town and Country Finance Issues Group
1002–3w

Trade
Agriculture 177w, 775w
Developing countries 261w, 763w
Petitions (16.07.02) 260–1

Trade agreements
Developing countries 947w

Trade competitiveness
Agriculture 313–5w

Trade competitiveness—continued
Manufacturing industries 417–8

Trading funds
Export Credits Guarantee Dept 779–80w

Trading Schemes Act 1996
Questions
439w

Traffic areas
964w

Traffic lights
Greater London 742w

Train operating companies
Finance 969w

Training
Advocate General for Scotland 379w
Armed forces 275–6w
Care homes 1089w
Headteachers 1345w
Home Office 546w, 1057–8w
Jobcentre Plus 1035w
Judges 606–8w
Lorry drivers 265–6w
Metropolitan Police 848–9w
Office for Civil Nuclear Security 353w, 1337–8w
Police 559–60w
Scotland Office 382w
Social workers 541w
Solicitor-General 615–6w, 913–4w
Teachers 57w, 364–7w, 1352–3w
Textiles 1367w, 1594–5w

Training and enterprise councils
Finance 1354–5w, 1357–62w
Manpower 1355–7w

Training Group Defence Agency
see RAF Training Group

Transplant surgery
216–8w

Transport
Accidents 1242w
Disadvantaged 1214–5w
EC action 1272w
Finance 734–6w, 1168–9w, 1176–7w
Greater London 1271–2w
Internet 1267w
Livestock 134–5w, 922w, 1142–3w
Planning 145w, 573w, 968w, 1272w, 1276–7w
Radioactive wastes 345–6w, 784w, 786w, 1262w
Rural areas 1264w
Schools 13–5w, 363w, 647w, 1341w
South East region 1265w
Standards 736w
Telephone services 327–8w
Urban areas 1271–2w

Transport Direct
733–5w

Transport for London
Finance 17w

Transport Select Committee
(22.07.02) 732

Transport Works Authorisation Branch
45–8w
Manpower 47w

Transsexualism
1079–80w, 1306w
Identity cards 555–6w

Travel
Concessions 1264w
Research 734w

Travel Concessions (Young Persons) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Traveller Law Reform Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 638

Travelling people
Trespass 639w

Treason Felony Act of Settlement and Parliamentary Oath Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 634

Treasure (Designation) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

Treasure trove
(17.07.02) 387–8

Treasury
Annual reports 1190w
Computers 66w
Consultation papers 1181–2w
Corporate hospitality 1199w
EC action 339w, 471–2w, 636–7w, 747–8w, 1173–6w
Information officers 822w
Internet 1186w
Manpower 1172w
Ministerial policy advisors 1195w
Pay 64–5w, 1192w
Public appointments 337–8w, 1195–6w
Public participation 1182w
Publicity 821w
Recruitment 1197w
Republic of Ireland 1188w
Scotland 1171–3w
Solicitors 1199w
Standards 1193w
Temporary employment 1187w
Visits abroad 1180w, 1188w

Treaty on European Union
1w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Complementary medicine (17.07.02) 67–76wh, 83wh

Trend, Mr Michael
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Belarus (23.07.02) 224–8wh
Questions
Business questions 428–9
Civil servants, Codes of practice 803w

Trespass
Travelling people 639w

Trespassers on Land (Liability For Damage and Eviction) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 633

Trials
1303w
Administrative delays 81w
Rape 798–9w, 1280–8w

Tribunal of Inquiry into Matters Arising from the Deaths of Patients of Harold Shipman
see Harold Shipman Tribunal of Inquiry

Trimble, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 216–7, (24.07.02) 990–1
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 39

Trinidad and Tobago
Politics and government 5w

Truswell, Mr Paul
Questions
Civil disorder, Bradford 1473–4w

Turkey
180w
EC enlargement 3w
Human rights 387w
Politics and government 764w

Turner, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.07.02) 540
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 65, 82, 85–6, 95, 97–9, 103, 111–2, (24.07.02) 1029
Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 238
Smuggling, Drugs (22.07.02) 803–6
Questions
Absent voting 574w
Asylum, AIDS 97w
Cancer, Health services 1422w
Care homes 1402w
Child Support Agency, Computers 1545–6w
Consultation papers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13–4w
Contraceptives 864–6w
Crime 95–6w
Crime prevention 1461w
Customs and Excise, Southern region 70w
Education, Finance 1366w
Education, Pilot schemes 1347–50w
Exchange rates 65w, 1182–3w
Foot and mouth disease, Tourism 693w
Grants, Scotland Office 767w
Higher education, EC grants and loans 187w
Homelessness 239w
Housing 1007w
Housing, Empty property 1003–6w
Industrial tribunals, Home Office 679w
Industrial tribunals, Scotland Office 1225w
Internet, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1158w
Internet, Dept for Education and Skills 1365–6w
Internet, Dept for International Development 900w
Internet, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265w
Internet, Dept for Work and Pensions 1594w
Internet, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1319w
Internet, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1279w
Internet, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1219w
Internet, Treasury 1186w
Isle of Wight, Dept of Trade and Industry 1325w
Location, Dept of Health 867w
Medical treatments, Overseas visitors 424w
Members, Correspondence 131w
Mental health services, Vacancies 1098w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scotland Office 500w
Pesticides 709–10w
Planning permission, Administrative delays 1007–8w
Police 95w
Police, Dismissal 95–6w
Police, Manpower 563w, 1486–7w
Police, Retirement 1046–7w
Prison Service, Sick leave 1070–6w
Prisoners' release 1535–8w
Prisons, Disciplinary proceedings 1536w
Prisons, Education 1498–502w

Turner, Mr Andrew—continued
Prisons, Health services 1534w
Prisons, Mental health services 1534–5w
Probation and aftercare 837w
Public participation, Cabinet Office 1164–5w
Public participation, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 974w
Public participation, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1144–6w
Public participation, Dept for International Development 1135w
Public participation, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1265–6w
Public participation, Dept for Work and Pensions 1542w
Public participation, Dept of Health 1094w
Public participation, Dept of Trade and Industry 172–4w
Public participation, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321w
Public participation, Home Office 841–2w
Public participation, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1291w
Public participation, Treasury 1182w
Schools, Discipline 1343w
Socrates programme 56w
Teachers, Training 1352–3w
Teenage pregnancy 70–4w, 416–7w
Withholding tax 256w
Written questions, Home Office 686w
Written questions, Scotland Office 1228w

Turner, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Housing, Points of order (18.07.02) 476
Questions
Council tax, North West region 1216–8w
Housing benefit, North West region 1563–4w
Pay 1169–70w

12 Downing Street
Repairs and maintenance 1368w

Twelve minutes rule
Rulings and statements (16.07.02) 225

***Twigg, Mr Stephen**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Skills*
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 98
Questions
Civil servants, Dept for Education and Skills 187w
Education, Asylum 773w
Energy, Dept for Education and Skills 53w
Further education 1352w
General certificate of secondary education, Standards 772w
Higher education, Special educational needs 452w
Information officers, Dept for Education and Skills 988w
Languages, Curriculum 1351w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Education and Skills 1364–5w
Publicity, Dept for Education and Skills 771–3w
Pupil exclusions 183w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Education and Skills 1363w
Schools, Animal experiments 54w
Schools, Discipline 1343w
Special educational needs 188w
Special educational needs, Teachers 646w
Standards, Dept for Education and Skills 651w

Twigg, Mr Stephen—continued
Telephone services, Dept for Education and Skills 1364w
Visits abroad, Dept for Education and Skills 773–4w

Twyford
Railways 744w

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Political parties, Finance (22.07.02) 773–7
Select committees (22.07.02) 730–1
Summer adjournment debate intervention (22.07.02) 788
Questions
Organophosphates, Animal experiments 313w

Tynan, Mr Bill
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy (16.07.02) 59–63wh
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 122–3wh
Questions
Equal pay, Dept for Work and Pensions 112w
Equal pay, Home Office 546–7w
Foreign investment in UK 412–3
Overseas aid, Health services 1124–5w
Taxation, Hearing aids 1173w

Type 45 destroyers
Ballistic missile defence 158–9w

Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1013–4
Questions
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 900w, 1132w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1263w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Work and Pensions 1596w
Ministerial policy advisors, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1321–2w
Ministerial policy advisors, Home Office 1492w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 1219w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1375w
Ministerial policy advisors, Pay 1370w
Ministerial policy advisors, President of the Council 1168w
Ministerial policy advisors, Prime Minister 890w, 1371w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scotland Office 273w, 1229w
Ministerial policy advisors, Treasury 1195w
Ministerial policy advisors, Visits abroad 1370w
Ministers, Visits abroad 1370w
Private finance initiative 1176w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1263w

Uganda
Armed conflict 588w, 899w
Microfinance 292–3w

UK Debt Management Office
Annual reports 958w

UK membership of EC
469w

Ukraine
AIDS 1388–9w
Foreign relations 836–7

UN Convention Against Torture
Sudan 609w

Unemployment
Scotland 522–3w, 983–4w, 1232w
Wales 321w
Young people 522–3w

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
781–2w

United Kingdom Passport Agency
Annual reports 553w

United Nations
Peace keeping operations 881w

Universities
see Higher education

Unmanned air vehicles
157–8w, 494w, 970w
Afghanistan 758w

Unni, Kolathuv
540w

Uranium
942–3w
Mining 347w, 782w

Urban areas
Buildings 1211w
Planning 639w
Post offices 998w
Road traffic 573w, 1255w
Royal charters 799w
Transport 1271–2w

Urban bus challenge
8–10w

Urban Regeneration Agency
see English Partnerships

Urban regeneration companies
Gloucester 281, 1016w

USA
Agriculture 177w, 775w
Air routes 17w, 146w
Aviation 1236w
Ballistic missile defence 26w, 881w
Defence 1113w
Double taxation 822w
Embassies 145w
Health services 208w
International Criminal Court 846
Iron and steel 776w
Pet travel scheme 935w
Terrorism 1317w
Vaccination 1391w

Utilities
Road works 333–4w

Vacant land
1019w
Property development 353w

Vaccination
218w
Compensation 1593w
German measles 423w, 1391–2w
Influenza 428w, 1083w, 1391w
Meningitis 428w
Smallpox 1086–7w, 1390–1w
USA 1391w

Vaccination of Children (Parental Choice) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 635

Vandalism
Railways 745w, 1240w

VAT
Building alterations 242w
Care homes 822–3w

VAT—continued
Charities 463w
Financial services 824w
Fuels 1171w
Gun sports 821w
Imports 336–7w
Marks and Spencer 1191–2w
Museums and galleries 335w
Private sector 1168w
Public sector 1168w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Indian subcontinent, Entry clearances (22.07.02) 748–51
Questions
Corporate hospitality, Treasury 1199w
Criminal Records Bureau, Administrative delays 1483w
Criminal Records Bureau, Complaints 1483w
Entry clearances 887w
Entry clearances, India 1532w
EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council 1059–60w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 229w
Indian subcontinent, Entry clearances 1311–2w
International Sikh Youth Federation 554w
Leicestershire Police 96w
Leicestershire Police Authority, Public appointments 560w
Magistrates, Resignations 796w
Manchester City Council 340w
Members, Correspondence 1069w
Meyer, Catherine 803w, 887w
New deal schemes 111w
Pensioners 1588w
Prisons 837w
Solicitors, Treasury 1199w
Work permits 96w

Vehicle Inspectorate
964w

Vehicular Access Across Common and Other Land (England) Regulations 2002
Questions
708w

Venture capital
779w

Veterinary Laboratories Agency
Annual reports 916w
Finance 930w
Standards 620–1w

Veterinary medicine
Research 1135w

Veterinary Medicines Directorate
Annual reports 915–6w
Standards 296–7w

Vetting
Care homes 835w, 873–4w
Foreign workers 1482w
Overseas residence 1483w
Postal workers 349w
Sports 52–3w, 164w, 847w
Voluntary work 97w, 555w

Victoria Climble Death Inquiry
119–20w, 541w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 471
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar (22.07.02) 771–3
Questions
Defence, Expenditure 3
Jobcentre Plus, Gosport 813w

Viggers, Mr Peter—continued
Queen Alexandra Hospital, Private finance initiative 217w, 902w
Royal Centre for Defence Medicine, Housing 163w
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 431–2w, 901–2w

Village halls
308w
Construction 708–9w
Disabled 263–4w

Vocational education
Morley 648w

Voluntary organisations
Contact orders 525–6w
Grants 226–7w
Regulation 1165w

Voluntary work
Social security benefits 1554–5w
Sports 498w
Vetting 97w, 555w

Voting methods
1016w

Voting rights
Young people 700w

Wakefield
Pensioners 661

Wales
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 319w
Armed forces 3–4
Care homes 316w
Community development 317w
Court Service 319w
Crime 273–5
Crime prevention 320w
Crimes of violence 321w
Dental services 275–7
Devolution 320w
Dredging 37–8w
EC grants and loans 318–21w
Economic and monetary union 1378w
Elections 699–700w, 724w
Fire prevention 320w
Foot and mouth disease 317w
Foreign investment in UK 316–7w
Health services 269–70
Hospitals 321w
Iron and steel 318w
Jobcentre Plus 321–2w
Manufacturing industries 318w
Mental health services 322w
New deal schemes 322w
Police 272–3, 1480w
Publicity 1377w
Regional airports 270–2
Scotland Office 982w
Sheep meat 277
Small businesses 319w
Social security benefits 1553w
Teachers 320w
Textiles (18.07.02) 546–54
Unemployment 321w
Water supply 317w
Young offenders 558w

Wales Office
see Office of the Secretary of State for Wales

Walley, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Forests, Petitions (24.07.02) 1071
Questions
Childbirth 119w, 208w
EC environmental policy 355w
EC environmental policy, Procurement 354–5w
Elderly, Staffordshire 190–1w

Walley, Ms Joan—continued
"Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate" 1148–9w
Ground water 1145–7w
Housing 238w
Industrial health and safety, Smoking 732w
Land, Contamination 1147–8w
Museums and galleries, West Midlands 657–8
Petrol, Marketing 786w
Pregnancy 1437–8w
Repairs and maintenance, Home Office 1065–7w
Repairs and maintenance, Solicitor-General 287w
Specialist schools 363w
Telephones, Concessions 530w
War pensions 493w
Wood, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
Wood, EC action 710–1w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1149w

Wandsworth
Crime 98w
Police 1480w

Wandsworth Prison
854w

War graves
Wrecks 1115w

War pensions
493w

Ward, Ms Claire
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 567, 571–4, 581–3
Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 639–40
Questions
Playing fields 1217w

Warehouse parties
Southern region 401w

Warminster
Armed forces 159w, 752w

Warship Support Agency
Standards 1115–6w

Warships
Chile 760w
Procurement 19w

Waste Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 632

Waste disposal
Electronic equipment 482–3w, 1332w
Hazardous substances 312w, 483w
House of Commons 189w
Livestock 135w
Packaging (24.07.02) 247–67wh
Plastics 707w
Refrigerators 482–3w

Waste management
Ministry of Defence 907w

Waste (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.07.02) 636

Water
Africa 1125w
North Africa 588w
Sub-Saharan Africa 291–2w

Water abstraction
487–8w

Water sports
934w

Water supply
Asbestos 476w
Competition 916w
Overseas aid 1134w
Wales 317w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Questions
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group 170w
Bankruptcy 355–6w
Digital broadcasting 362w
Hospital beds 284
Manufacturing industries, Job creation 633w
Mortgages, Complaints 360w
Postal services, Government assistance 349w

Watkinson, Angela
Questions
Air force, Engineers 23–4w
Best value 1017w
Police, Havering 1474w

Watts, Mr Dave
Questions
China, Overseas trade 610–1w
General practitioners, Finance 424w
Solicitors, Regulation 1279–80w

Weapons
25–6w, 1317w
Police 1522w

Webb, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 625–6, 627–30
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 562, 564, 570
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 914
Questions
Child benefit, Internet 295w
Child Support Agency, Computers 818–9w
Children, Poverty 1033w
Children in care, Social security benefits 813–4w
Housing benefit 510–1w, 809w, 1561–2w
Immigration rules, Domestic violence 229w
Incapacity benefit 1565–7w
Jobcentre Plus, Manpower 1545w
Maintenance, Children 116w, 1560–1w
Maternity benefits 264–5w
Members, Correspondence 132w
Members, Pensions 712w
ONE programme, Nottinghamshire 1593–4w
Overseas aid, Sports 473w
Pension credit 1540w
Pensions, Advisory services 1543–5w
Social Fund 596–7w
Social security benefits 112–3w
Social security benefits, Abuse 807–9w, 1030–1w, 1558w
Social security benefits, Administrative delays 596w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 806w, 809w
State retirement pensions 518w, 1541–2w

Weir, Mr Michael
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 141wh, 153–7wh, 174wh
Working hours, EC law (17.07.02) 123wh, 126wh

Weir, Mr Michael—continued
Questions
Agriculture, Subsidies 621w
Arms trade 491w
Arms trade, Namibia 1327w
Beef, France 934–5w
Business questions 436
Channel tunnel railway line, Scotland 982w
Child Support Agency, Computers 819w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 918w
Common agricultural policy, Scotland 917w
Consumers, Scotland 169–70w
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 477w
Correspondence, Home Office 396w
Correspondence, Scotland Office 980–1w
Disabled, Access 1574w
Financial services, Misrepresentation 335–6w
Hill farming 313–4w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 356w, 953–4w
New deal schemes, Scotland 511–2w
NHS, Private finance initiative 872w
Overseas aid 415
Pornography, Internet 1532–3w
Postal services, Fees and charges 348w, 445–6w
Radioactive wastes, Shipping 169w
Sellafield, Radioactive wastes 931w
Set-aside schemes 488–9w
Sheep meat, France 936–7w
Sheep meat, Imports 136w
Shipping, Radioactive wastes 571w
Slaughterhouses 930–1w
Social security benefits, Appeals 1557–8w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1553w
Transport, Schools 15w

Welbeck College
7

Welfare milk
Asylum 541–2w

Welfare tax credits
254–5w, 1179–80w
Jobcentre Plus 271w
Publicity 339–40w

Wellcome Trust
Finance 930w

Welsh National Assembly
see National Assembly for Wales

Wembley Stadium
498w, 1159w

West coast railway line
6w, 969w

West Mercia Constabulary
Finance 675w

West Midlands
Museums and galleries 657–8

West Midlands Police
Recruitment 1050–3w

West Surrey Health Authority
Per capita costs 1398w

West Sussex
Antisocial behaviour orders 1466–7w
General practitioners 1394–5w
Military bases 164w
Primary health care 1394–5w

Western Sahara
609w
Peace negotiations 609w
Sovereignty 180–1w

Westminster Foundation for Democracy
Annual reports 888–9w

White, Brian
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 448
Questions
Computers, Cabinet Office 84w
Computers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 499w
Computers, Dept for Education and Skills 651w
Computers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 37w
Computers, Dept for International Development 893w
Computers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 13w
Computers, Dept for Work and Pensions 294w
Computers, Dept of Trade and Industry 781w
Computers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 884w
Computers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 607w
Computers, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 244w
Computers, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1378w
Computers, President of the Council 413–4w
Computers, Scotland Office 768w
Computers, Treasury 66w
Contraceptives, Clinical trials 1383–4w
Financial services, Complaints 65w
Higher education, Marketing 643w
Homelessness 341–2w
Land mines, Bomb disposal 162w
Ordnance Survey, Standards 245–6w
Schools, Transport 363w

***Whitehead, Dr Alan**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions*
Questions
Housing, Planning permission 1009w
Ordnance Survey 1012–4w
Plant power 137–8w
Poland, EC enlargement 842

Whittingdale, Mr John
Questions
Business, Questionnaires 1190–1w
Fisheries, Compensation 1327w

***Wicks, Malcolm**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Work and Pensions*
Debates etc.
Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill, Rep adjourned (19.07.02) 618, 624–7, 629
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Poverty (18.07.02) 137–43wh, 169–78wh
Questions
Buildings, Dept for Work and Pensions 605–6w
Child benefit 262–3w
Child benefit, Foreign students 263w
Child benefit, Internet 295w
Child Benefit Centre, Telephone services 266w
Child Support Agency 600w
Child Support Agency, Computers 818–9w, 1545–7w
Child Support Agency, Standards 819w, 1546w
Children, Poverty 1033w
Community care grants 1577–8w
Consultation papers, Dept for Work and Pensions 602–4w, 814w, 1026–8w
Council tax benefits 602w, 1037–8w

***Wicks, Malcolm**—continued*
EC action, Dept for Work and Pensions 232–4w, 249w, 269–70w, 603–4w, 1583–4w
Funeral payments 604–5w
Housing benefit 510–1w, 595w, 809w, 1022w, 1561–3w
Housing benefit, Abuse 266w
Housing benefit, Administrative delays 595w
Housing benefit, Colchester 1015w
Housing benefit, Dorset 268w
Housing benefit, Greater London 1222–4w
Housing benefit, North West region 1563–4w
Housing benefit, Scotland 594w
Housing benefit, Yorkshire and Humberside 1014–5w
Income support 1024–5w
Income support, Lone parents 511w, 813w
Jobseeker's allowance 511w
Maintenance, Children 116w, 267w, 516–7w, 599–600w, 819–20w, 1026w, 1547–9w, 1560–1w
Maintenance, Overseas residence 267w
Maternity benefits 264–5w
Members, Correspondence 817–8w, 1588w
Post offices, Bank services 597w
Republic of Ireland, Dept for Work and Pensions 1581–2w
Social Fund 270w, 510w, 596–7w, 1579–80w, 1582–3w
Social Fund, Annual reports 1034w
Social security benefits 1028–9w
Social security benefits, Abuse 595–6w, 807–9w, 1029–31w, 1036–8w, 1555–8w
Social security benefits, Administrative delays 596w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 597–601w, 805–7w, 809–11w, 1029w, 1031–2w, 1550–2w, 1579w
Social security benefits, Borders region 1552w
Social security benefits, Deductions 1589–92w
Social security benefits, Disabled 1571–3w
Social security benefits, Disqualification 1025–6w
Social security benefits, Mortgages 1584w
Social security benefits, North West region 269w
Social security benefits, Post offices 600–1w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1552–4w
Social security benefits, Take-up 596w
Social security benefits, Voluntary work 1554–5w
Social security benefits, Widowed people 1559–60w
Social Security Fraud Act 2001 811w

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann
Questions
Hospitals, Waiting lists 1379–80w

Widowed people
Social security benefits 1559–60w

Wiggin, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 577–9
Questions
Accountancy, Standards 337w
Agriculture, Trade competitiveness 313–5w
AIDS, Africa 717–8w
AIDS, Drug resistance 1389w
AIDS, Research 1389–90w
Asylum 225w
Balkans, Peace keeping operations 2w

***Wiggin, Mr Bill**—continued*
Bovine tuberculosis, Compensation 932–3w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 131–2w, 931–3w, 1147w
Care homes 198w
Care homes, Finance 872–3w
Care homes, Standards 199w
Care homes, Wales 316w
Dairy farming 314w
Disabled 1038–9w
Disabled, Access 1007w
Double jeopardy 1461–2w
Employment Relations Act 1999 440–1w
Farmers, Income 1147w
Fire services, Pay 1002w
Food, Procurement 447w
Freedom of information, Codes of practice 797–8w, 1292–4w
Genetically modified organisms, EC action 37w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 36–7w
Great Western Trains 1242w
Hospital wards 535–6w
Hospitals, Sexual offences 536w
Hospitals, Standards 1417–8w
Identity cards, Costs 544–5w
Immigration 224–5w, 547–8w
International assistance 1133–4w
Manufacturing industries 356–8w
Members, Correspondence 131w
National Audit Office, Standards 1187w
Non-departmental public bodies, Public appointments 1164w
Office for National Statistics, Codes of practice 1170w
Pensions 1035w, 1584w
Planning 639w
Police, Diabetes 1061–2w
Political parties, Finance 996–7w
Politics and government, Young people 1166w, 1363–4w
Post offices, Disabled 349w
Poverty 254w
Private Pension Legislation Review 601w
Public sector, Pay 727–8w
Pupils, Personal records 374–5w
Railways, Investment 969–70w
Royal family, Finance 1182w
Small businesses 1333–6w
Sports, Finance 164w
Statistics Commission, Annual reports 1170w
Stocks and shares 68w
Swimming pools, Leominster 691–2w
Taxation, Self-assessment 1183w
Venture capital 779w
Wellcome Trust, Finance 930w
Zimbabwe 1307w
Zimbabwe, Agriculture 586w
Zimbabwe, Asylum 226w
Zimbabwe, Elections 174w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 897w

Wild Game Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995
Questions
429w

Wildlife
Meat 387–8w, 484–5w, 705–6w, 920w, 1140–1w, 1367–8w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Airports (23.07.02) 858
Chinook helicopters, Accidents (22.07.02) 699
Questions
Armed forces, Discharges 4–5
Cancer, Research 146–7

Willetts, Mr David
  Questions
  Child tax credit 1189–90w
  Inland Revenue, Advertising 253w
  Maternity payments, Sure start programme 1559w
  Pensioners, Social security benefits 295w
  Pensions, Overseas residence 1031w
  Personal income 1186w
  Social Fund, Annual reports 1034w
  Social security benefits, Abuse 1555w
  Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 598–600w, 1550–2w, 1579w
  Social security benefits, Publicity 116w
  Social Security Contributions Agency, Computers 295w
  State retirement pensions 114w, 1039w
  State second pension, Publicity 1545w
  Welfare tax credits, Publicity 339–40w
  Working families tax credit 1189w
  Working families tax credit, Regulatory impact assessments 253w
  Written questions, Dept for Work and Pensions 113–4w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
  Questions
  Health services, Wales 270
  National Audit Office, Business plans 979–80w

Williams, Mrs Betty
  Questions
  Armed forces, Discharges 22w

Williams, Hywel
  Questions
  Employment tribunals 954w
  Industrial disputes 1195w
  Industrial relations 777w
  Mental health services, Wales 322w

Williams, Mr Roger
  Questions
  Army, Discharges 15
  Doctors, Recruitment 202w
  Quarrying, Insurance 174w

Willis, Mr Phil
  Debates etc.
  Education, Finance (16.07.02) 162–3
  Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 48, 57–61, 65, 67, 72, 74, 78–81, 97–8, 101, 108–11, 121–2, (24.07.02) 1022, 1024, 1032–3
  Questions
  Children in care, General certificate of secondary education 123w
  Further education, Finance 771w, 986–7w
  Headteachers, Qualifications 1345–6w
  Headteachers, Training 1345w
  Languages, Curriculum 1351w
  Schools, Animal experiments 54w
  Teachers, Foreign workers 368w
  Teachers, Recruitment 372w

***Wills, Mr Michael**, Minister for Information Technology and Criminal Justice, Home Office*
  Debates etc.
  Islam (19.07.02) 645–8
  Questions
  Correspondence, Home Office 396w

Wilshire, Mr David
  Debates etc.
  Defence equipment, Procurement (17.07.02) 326
  Firearms Amendment (No 2) Bill, 1R (15.07.02) 46
  Lords amendments, Points of order (19.07.02) 557

***Wilshire, Mr David**—continued*
  Ministers, Points of order (18.07.02) 533–4
  Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill, Rep and 3R (19.07.02) 589
  Private Members' bills, Points of order (19.07.02) 639
  Proceeds of Crime Bill, Money res and Lords amendts (18.07.02) 530
  Questions
  Driving offences, Speed limits 827w
  Maternity services 1438w
  Maternity services, Standards 1097w
  Maternity services, Surrey 1097w
  Police, Weapons 1522w

***Wilson, Mr Brian**, Minister of State for Industry and Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry*
  Questions
  Air conditioning 1154w
  British Nuclear Fuels, Accountancy 1336–7w
  British Nuclear Fuels, Contracts 782w
  British Nuclear Fuels, Finance 782w, 1337w
  British Nuclear Fuels, Pay 783–4w
  Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 786w
  Coal Authority, Annual reports 950w
  Combined heat and power, Greater Manchester 441w
  Combined heat and power, Saltburn 441w
  Design, Environment protection 1333w
  Diesel engines, EC action 946w
  EC environmental policy 355w
  EC environmental policy, Procurement 354–5w
  Electricity, Distribution 1329w
  Electricity generation, Markets 1330w
  Electricity generation, Prices 944w
  Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 1332w
  Energy 711w, 943–4w
  Energy, Competition 346w, 943w
  Energy, Hacking 346w
  Energy supply 347–8w, 1335–6w
  European Energy and Transport Forum 1338w
  Gas and Electricity Markets Authority 786w
  Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, Pay 354w
  Industrial diseases, Compensation 350w, 352w, 356w, 953–4w
  Magnox reactors 784w
  Mining, Pensions 171–2w, 441–2w, 775w
  Natural gas 1328–9w
  Nuclear power 1330w
  Nuclear power, Accidents 783w
  Nuclear power, Publicity 345w
  Nuclear power stations, Construction 346w
  Nuclear power stations, Security 346w, 862w
  Nuclear reactors 783–4w
  Office for Civil Nuclear Security, Annual reports 353w
  Office for Civil Nuclear Security, Training 353w, 1337–8w
  Oil, Exploration 443–6w
  Petrol, Marketing 786w
  Petrol alternatives 951w
  Photovoltaics 952w
  Pollution, EC action 946–7w
  Radioactive wastes 784–5w
  Radioactive wastes, Railways 785–6w
  Radioactive wastes, Russia 776–7w
  Radioactive wastes, Sellafield 782–3w
  Radioactive wastes, Shipping 169w
  Radioactive wastes, Transport 345–6w, 784w, 786w

***Wilson, Mr Brian**—continued*
  Renewable energy 169w, 352–4w, 358w, 787–8w
  United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority 781–2w
  Uranium, Mining 347w, 782w
  Wind power 787–8w
  Wind power, Planning permission 787w

Wilton Park
  Standards 388–9w

Wiltshire
  Armed forces 160w

Wimbledon Football Club
  977–8

Wind power
  787–8w
  Planning permission 787w
  Radar 761w

Winnick, David
  Debates etc.
  Criminal proceedings (17.07.02) 295
  Northern Ireland government (16.07.02) 220, 240–2, (24.07.02) 996–7
  Questions
  Members, Correspondence 817–8w
  Political parties, Finance 663
  Terrorism 12

Winter fuel payments
  (22.07.02) 799–801, 1034w
  European economic area 599w

Winterton, Ann
  Debates etc.
  Education, Finance (16.07.02) 169
  Questions
  Common fisheries policy 705w
  Fisheries 132w
  Natural gas 1328–9w

Winterton, Sir Nicholas
  Debates etc.
  Deferred divisions, Points of order (18.07.02) 538
  Questions
  Herbal medicine, EC law 150–1
  Livestock, Transport 134–5w
  Pensions, Public sector 416

***Winterton, Ms Rosie**, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept*
  Questions
  Administration of justice 528–9w
  Annual reports, Lord Chancellor's Dept 797w
  Asylum, Appeals 1290–1w
  Consultation papers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526–8w, 796–8w
  Contact orders 82–3w, 525w
  Contact orders, Voluntary organisations 525–6w
  Departmental responsibilities, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1081w
  EC action, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1278–9w
  Euthanasia 1301–3w
  Females, Lord Chancellor's Dept 411w
  Flags 82w
  Immigration adjudicators, Manpower 411w
  Information officers, Lord Chancellor's Dept 799–800w
  Internet, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1279w
  Kidnapping, Children 411–2w
  Law Commission 1081w
  Law Society, Complaints 412–3w
  Legal Services Commission, Computers 1299–300w
  "Making Decisions Consultation Paper" 1082w

Winterton, Ms Rosie—continued
Mentally incapacitated 529w
Mentally incapacitated, Medical treatments 411w
NHS, Negligence 529–30w
Prisoners, Advisory services 1469–70w
Public Guardianship Office, Annual reports 1081w
Public Guardianship Office, Complaints 412w
Public participation, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1291w
Public Record Office, Census 800–2w, 1080w
Publicity, Lord Chancellor's Dept 800w
Republic of Ireland, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1292w
Solicitors, Regulation 1279–80w
Telephone services, Lord Chancellor's Dept 82w
Transsexualism 1079–80w
Urban areas, Royal charters 799w
Visits abroad, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526w

Wirral
Postal services 774w

Wishart, Pete
Debates etc.
Defence review (18.07.02) 473–4
Select committees (22.07.02) 732
Questions
Contracts, Scotland Office 499–500w
Plant power, Scotland 483–4w
Press releases, Scotland Office 981w
Public relations, Home Office 543w
Social security benefits, Scotland 1553w

Withholding tax
256w

Witnesses
93–4w

Wokingham
Local government finance 1204w

Women
see Females

Wood
248–9w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 407w
EC action 710–1w
Health hazards 425w
Playgrounds 652–3w

Wood, Mr Mike
Questions
Malawi, Overseas aid 588w

Woodward, Mr Shaun
Questions
Crime 1441–3w
Incapacity benefit, North West region 1567w
Literacy, North West region 1346–7w
NHS, Manpower 1093w
Pupil referral units, North West region 1346w
Schools, North West region 1343–4w
Social workers, Vacancies 1094w
Teachers, Foreign workers 369w, 645w
Teachers, North West region 1345–6w
Teenage pregnancy 1196–7w
Young offender institutions, Human rights 1443w

Worcester
Drugs 202w

Worcestershire
Mental health services 127w

Work permits
96w, 107–8w, 395–6w
Information technology 107w, 831w

Working Age Agency
see Jobcentre Plus

Working families tax credit
251–2w, 1189w
Abuse 252w
Leeds 252–3w
Mitcham 462w
Regulatory impact assessments 253w

Working hours
EC law (17.07.02) 121–8wh, 710w
Junior doctors 1102w
Parents 171w

Working tax credit
1189–90w

Working Tax Credit (Entitlement and Maximum Rate) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(17.07.02) 387–8

World Bank
1139w

World Cup
Football 554w

World Health Organisation
Taiwan 117w

World Summit on Sustainable Development
258w, 706w, 804w, 1123–4w, 1131w, 1149w

WorldCom
1327w

Wray, Mr James
Questions
Armed forces, Psychiatry 754w
Cancer 416w
Cannabis, Crime 669–70w
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 39w
Children, Day care 127–8w, 1083w
Defence equipment 907w, 1112–3w
Defence Medical Services 753w
Disabled, Young people 121–2w
Driving under influence, Cannabis 403–4w
Duchess of Kent Military Hospital 754w
East Timor 1313w
East Timor, Homicide 1319–20w
Exservicemen, Sleeping rough 753–4w
Health education, Disabled 423w
Inheritance tax 463w
National childcare strategy 128w
Passports 689–90w
Police, Greater London 830w
Renewable energy 169w, 358w
Sentencing 85w
Young people, Advisory services 204w

Wrecks
War graves 1115w

Wright, Mr Anthony D
Questions
Helicopters, Accidents 282
National Lottery 973w

Wright, David
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Lords amendts (15.07.02) 87
Housing (18.07.02) 449
Public expenditure (23.07.02) 899, 908, 912, 918, 949
Questions
Credit unions 418–9
Crime prevention 826–7w

Wright, David—continued
Departmental responsibilities, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1081w
Museums and galleries, West Midlands 657
New towns 1218w
NHS trusts, Mergers 1087w

Wright, Tony
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (15.07.02) 41–2
Questions
Standards, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1293–9w
Standards, Scotland Office 76w
Standards, Solicitor-General 613–4w

Written questions
Administrative delays 217w, 456w, 543w, 1263w, 1299w, 1431w, 1505w
Dept for International Development 292w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 456w
Dept for Work and Pensions 113–4w
Home Office 106w, 686w
Scotland Office 1228w

Wyatt, Derek
Questions
Children in care, Isle of Sheppey 123w
Copyright 169w
Outdoor education, Death 1269–70w
Pre-school education, Special educational needs 995–6w
Radio, Commercial broadcasting 655
Sports, Drugs 696w

Xenotransplantation
228–9w

Yarls Wood Detention Centre
89w, 392–3w, 684w, 1461w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Audit and Accounting Coordinating Group (24.07.02) 1005–7
Questions
Crime, Alcoholic drinks 222–3w
Metropolitan Police, Disciplinary proceedings 856w, 1054w
Newspaper press, Dept for Work and Pensions 110w
Newspaper press, Scotland Office 1227w
Perjury 678–9w
Radio, Commercial broadcasting 655–6
Serials, Dept for Work and Pensions 605w
Serials, Scotland Office 1226–7w
Sports, Young people 659
Television, Ministry of Defence 283w

York
Housing 980–1

Yorkshire and Humberside
Employment 67–8w, 637w
Housing benefit 1014–5w
Taxpayers 256–8w

Young, Sir George
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 450

Young offender institutions
Drugs 1445–6w
Human rights 1443w

Young offenders
664–6w, 833w, 1462w
Children in care 1463–5w
Habitual offenders 1531w
Lancashire 558w
Wales 558w

Young people
Advisory services 204w

Young people—continued
Alcoholic drinks 284–5, 408w, 558–9w, 1455–8w

Army 277w

Crime prevention 401–2w, 694w

Disabled 121–2w
Driving instruction 307w
Politics and government 188–9w, 1166w, 1363–4w
Sports 658–9, 692w, 974–5w

Young people—continued
Tobacco 1456w

Unemployment 522–3w

Voting rights 700w

Younger-Ross, Richard
Debates etc.
Housing (18.07.02) 453
Questions
Child minding, Manpower 994w
Children, Day care 60w, 183–4w

Younger-Ross, Richard—continued
Economic situation, South West region 467w

Zimbabwe
882w, 1307w
Agriculture 586w
Asylum 226w, 398–9w, 551w, 586w
EC action 174w
Elections 174w
Entry clearances 4w
Overseas aid 897w, 1124w
Sanctions 821w, 829–33, 1307w